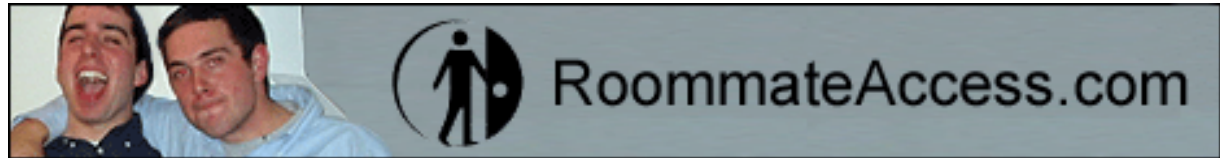


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/dailyglobe2/107/nation/Pressure_to_find_weapons_mounts-.shtml WASHINGTON - A month after the outbreak of war, arms control specialists and former United Nations weapons inspectors are increasingly critical of the Bush administration for its failure to substantiate prewar claims of a hidden weapons arsenal, the principal argument for going to war against Saddam Hussein. 1 A Pressure to find weapons mounts
4/17/2003 By Bryan Bender, Globe Correspondent > "> '); //-->



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Pressure to find weapons mounts

By Bryan Bender, Globe Correspondent, 4/17/2003

WASHINGTON - A month after the outbreak of war, arms control specialists and former United Nations weapons inspectors are increasingly critical of the Bush administration for its failure to substantiate prewar claims of a hidden weapons arsenal, the principal argument for going to war against Saddam Hussein.

President Bush and other top US officials repeatedly asserted that a significant stockpile of Iraqi chemical and biological weapons remained unaccounted for, including hundreds of tons of chemical agent production materials, 15,000 artillery rockets that could deliver nerve agents, and 30,000 liters of the biological agent anthrax.

Several thousand soldiers in Iraq are now dedicated to the US search, being run by the Defense Department. But so far the mission has been plagued by numerous false readings of suspected chemical and biological materials.

Washington's credibility is being eroded further, according to arms specialists, by the continued refusal to include international participation in the search.

Some analysts say the Bush administration could build support for a lengthy, exhaustive search by immediately bringing in either the United Nations weapons inspectors who left Iraq before the war or other international specialists. The UN Security Council next week will discuss the possible resumption of its inspections in Iraq.

"It's important to be as transparent as possible," said Lee Feinstein, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. "I believe they will find weapons of mass destruction, and I think it's going to be important to get the international community involved."

Adding international expertise could also address criticism that the US military's weapons hunt has appeared cumbersome.

"They are not demonstrating much capability," said David Albright, a former UN weapons inspector who is now president of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington. "It has been run somewhat incompetently. They have to bring the professionals in. They said the UN inspectors were bumbling idiots and can't find anything. Now these guys are looking like bumbling idiots that can't find anything."

However, the United States has not indicated any willingness to accept UN help in the search. Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Richard B. Myers said Tuesday that "right now our searches are done under military control, and it's not appropriate to add anyone to that equation."

Other analysts say the failure to find weapons so far suggests there may be few to find.

"There will be less than we have been led to believe," predicted Robert Einhorn, who was the assistant secretary of state for nonproliferation in the Clinton administration. "There is a good chance that Iraq disposed of some weapons. There was no real security need to keep some of the junk they had stored up."

If US military forces are unable to locate a "smoking gun," the specialists say, it will raise new questions about whether the UN weapons inspectors could have successfully contained the threat posed by the Hussein regime, without the need for an invasion. The inspectors returned to Iraq in November after a four-year absence, but left again in early March after the United States and Britain said Iraq had failed to meet its obligation to disarm.

"The case was made that there were a lot of weapons," said Albright, the former inspector. "To make its case, the Bush administration has to find a lot - not 20 chemical shells here, or a couple of drums there. If Iraq destroyed any incriminating evidence, people will say that the inspectors could have contained Iraq."

Administration officials maintain that the search is still in its early stages and point out that at least a dozen suspected weapons sites have been identified and that most are still being investigated.

But some analysts say the slow progress of the search suggests that the US intelligence community widely misjudged the Iraqi weapons program.

"The fact that we haven't found any yet seems to indicate that there were fewer weapons than the administration feared," said Joseph Cirincione, a weapons specialist at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "It would be very difficult to hide a large, ongoing biological or chemical weapons production program [making] hundreds of tons of agents. Janitors who worked in these plants should be

able to give us information."

Defending its approach, the Pentagon says it remains convinced that it will find outlawed weapons in Iraq, but it has lowered expectations on what might be found and how soon.

US officials hope the recent capture of two top Iraqi scientists - Jaffar Dhia Jaffar, described as the father of Iraq's nuclear weapons program, and Lieutenant General Amer al-Saadi, Hussein's top science adviser - will provide key insights into the Iraqi weapons program. A raid yesterday on the Baghdad home of Rihab Taha, known as "Dr. Germ" for her role in Iraq's biological weapons program, could provide more leads in the search.

"I have every confidence we're going to find them, but I don't think it's unusual that we haven't found them yet," said Myers, the Joint Chiefs chairman. He said Iraq had many years to learn to hide evidence of its weapons of mass destruction program. "It really hasn't been the top priority up until now."

Moving away from previous assertions that a large arsenal exists in the country, senior officials are now emphasizing the need to find a paper trail and testimony that points to the Hussein regime's capability and intent to develop chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons, as opposed to a readily usable stockpile of weapons.

"We have seen chemical protection-related things in a number of areas, chemical defense-related items. We certainly have encountered a number of delivery systems that have been captured or destroyed," said Brigadier General Vincent Brooks, Central Command's deputy operations chief. "The real heavy-duty work of being able to get into sites and getting detailed access to people who have knowledge... that's ongoing. And we're really just in the earliest stages of that."

Pentagon spokeswoman Victoria Clarke has sought repeatedly to "manage expectations," in her words, saying that the search process could take up to a year to complete.

This story ran on page A1 of the Boston Globe on 4/17/2003.

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