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CIA's final report: No WMD found in Iraq

Recommends freeing detainees held for weapons knowledge



Arko Datta / Reuters file

A U.S. soldier of the 3rd Brigade, 66th Regiment, of the 4th Infantry Division guards an underground ammunition storage bunker near Tikrit, Iraq, on Sept. 1, 2003. U.S. forces found ample supplies of conventional weapons such as these, but no weapons of mass destruction.

The Associated Press

Updated: 9:24 p.m. ET April 25, 2005

WASHINGTON - In his final word, the CIA's top weapons inspector in Iraq said Monday that the hunt for weapons of mass destruction has "gone as far as feasible" and has found nothing, closing an investigation into the purported programs of Saddam Hussein that were used to justify the 2003 invasion.

“After more than 18 months, the WMD investigation and debriefing of the WMD-related detainees has been exhausted,” wrote Charles Duelfer, head of the Iraq Survey Group, in an addendum to the final report he issued last fall.

“As matters now stand, the WMD investigation has gone as far as feasible.”

In 92 pages posted online Monday evening, Duelfer provides a final look at an investigation that occupied over 1,000 military and civilian translators, weapons specialists and other experts at its peak. His latest addenda conclude a roughly 1,500-page report released last fall.

On Monday, Duelfer said there is no purpose in keeping many of the detainees who are in custody because of their knowledge on Iraq's weapons, although he did not provide any details about the current number. A U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the ultimate decision on their release will be made by the Iraqi authorities.

Warnings about Saddam's experts

The survey group also provided warnings.

The addenda conclude that Saddam's programs created a pool of experts now available to develop and produce weapons and many will be seeking work. While most will probably turn to the “benign civil sector,” the danger remains that “hostile foreign governments, terrorists or insurgents may seek Iraqi expertise.”

“Because a single individual can advance certain WMD activities, it remains an important concern,” one addendum said.

Another addendum also noted that military forces in Iraq may continue to find small numbers of degraded chemical weapons — most likely misplaced or improperly destroyed before the 1991 Gulf War. In an insurgent's hands, “the use of a single even ineffectual chemical weapon would likely cause more terror than deadlier conventional explosives,” another addendum said.

And still another said the survey group found some potential nuclear-related equipment was “missing from heavily damaged and looted sites.” Yet, because of the deteriorating security situation in Iraq, the survey group was unable to determine what happened to the equipment, which also had alternate civilian uses.

“Some of it probably has been sold for its scrap value. Other pieces might have been disassembled” and converted into motors or condensers, an addendum said. “Still others could have been taken intact to preserve their function.”

Small team still in place

Leaving the door to the investigation open just a crack, the U.S. official said a small team still operates under the U.S.-led multinational force in Iraq, although the survey group officially disbanded earlier this month. Those staying on continue to examine documents and follow up on any reports of weapons of mass destruction.

In a statement accompanying the final installment, Duelfer said a surprise discovery would most likely be in the biological weapons area because clues, such as the size of the facilities used to develop them, would be comparatively small.

Among unanswered questions, Duelfer said a group formed to investigate whether WMD-related material was shipped out of Iraq before the invasion wasn't able to reach firm conclusions because the security situation limited and later halted their work. Investigators were focusing on transfers from Iraq to Syria.

No information gleaned from questioning Iraqis supported the possibility, one addendum said. The Iraq Survey Group believes “it was unlikely that an official transfer of WMD material from Iraq to Syria took place. However, ISG was unable to rule out unofficial movement of limited WMD-related materials.”

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