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World - AFP

CIA admits lack of specifics on Iraqi weapons before invasion

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WASHINGTON, (AFP) - The US Central Intelligence Agency ([news - web sites](#)) has acknowledged it "lacked specific information" about alleged Iraqi weapons of mass destruction when it compiled an intelligence estimate last year that served to justify the US-led invasion of Iraq ([news - web sites](#)).



[AFP/File Photo](#)

But it said that and other uncertainties surrounding the case had been fully presented to President George W. Bush ([news - web sites](#)) and other US policymakers in the October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate, a document often referred to by members of the Bush administration as a basis of their claim that Iraq had an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction.

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US Secretary of State Colin Powell ([news - web sites](#)) told the UN Security Council last February that Saddam Hussein ([news - web sites](#)) and his regime were "concealing their efforts to produce more weapons of mass destruction" and that their weapons programs "are a real and present danger to the region and to the world."

However, an explanation issued over the weekend by veteran CIA ([news - web sites](#)) analyst Stuart Cohen, who was in charge of putting together the 2002 intelligence estimate and currently serves

as vice chairman of the National Intelligence Council, made clear the case against Iraq, as presented by the CIA behind closed doors, was much less clear-cut and more nuanced.

 Full Coverage

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"Any reader would have had to read only as far as the second paragraph of the Key Judgments to know that as we said: 'We lacked specific information on many key aspects of Iraq's WMD program,'" Cohen wrote in an article posted on the agency's Web site.

The document still concluded that Iraq had chemical and biological weapons as well as missiles with ranges in excess of the 150-kilometer (93-mile) limit imposed by the UN Security Council. It also said that Baghdad did not have nuclear weapons.

Cohen said he still stood by those judgments. But he insisted the estimate he produced had "uncertainties" that "were highlighted in the Key Judgments and throughout the main text."




Moreover, specialists from three US government agencies -- the State and Energy Departments and the Air Force -- vocally disagreed with at least some of the findings, according to the CIA analyst, who denied that these expressions of dissent had been somehow suppressed or buried in footnotes.

"All agencies were fully exposed to these alternative views, and the heads of those organizations blessed the wording and placement of their alternative views," Cohen insisted.

The veteran CIA analyst stressed that all major conclusions about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction had been drawn on the basis of information "overwhelmingly" gleaned from a combination of human intelligence, satellite imagery and communications intercepts.

But made clear that in the murky world of intelligence, hard and unequivocal evidence was often hard to come by.

"There is a reason that the October 2002 review of Iraq's WMD programs is called a National Intelligence Estimate and not a National Intelligence factbook," Cohen argued. "On almost any issue of the day that we face, hard evidence will only take intelligence professionals so far."

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