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Breaking News 6/13/03

Second intelligence report: "No Reliable Information" Iraqis Stockpiling Chemical Weapons

by David E. Kaplan and Mark Mazzetti

In October 2002, a classified National Intelligence Estimate prepared jointly by U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that Iraq possessed chemical and biological weapons. But one month later, the Defense Intelligence Agency issued a report stating that there was "no reliable information" showing that Iraq was actually producing or stockpiling chemical weapons, *U.S. News* has learned.

The DIA's classified November assessment mirrors a September analysis that the agency made on the same subject. That report was first disclosed by the magazine early this month, fueling a controversy about whether President Bush and top aides overstated the threat posed by Iraq in making the case for war. Administration officials deny manipulating intelligence on Iraq's weapons programs and say they are confident that the Defense Department eventually will find weapons of mass terror.

The newly-disclosed DIA report, classified "secret," is entitled, "Iraq's Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Weapon and Missile Program: Progress, Prospects, and Potential Vulnerabilities." Its existence raises more questions about the quality of U.S. intelligence before the March invasion. In one section about Iraq's chemical weapons capabilities, the report says: "No reliable information indicates whether Iraq is producing and stockpiling chemical weapons or where the country has or will establish its chemical agent production facility." The report cites suspicious weapons transfers and improvements on Iraq's "dual-use" chemical infrastructure. Nonetheless, says a DIA spokesman, "there was no single piece of irrefutable data that said [Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein] definitely has it."

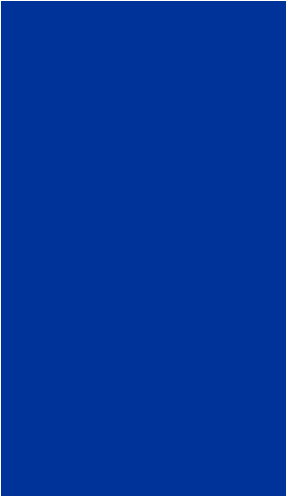
In recent days, President Bush has tempered his rhetoric about Iraq's terror weapons capabilities. "I am absolutely convinced, with time, we'll find out that they did have a weapons program," he told reporters this week. This departs from language used by his senior advisors before the war. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld perhaps was the most expansive: "There's no debate in the world as to whether they have those weapons. There's no debate in the world as to whether they're continuing to develop and acquire them. There's no debate in the world as to whether or not he's used them. There's no debate in the world as to whether or not he's consistently threatening his neighbors with them. We all know that. A trained ape knows that."

Yet, the DIA reports indicate that Rumsfeld's own analysts were more cautious in their conclusions about the threat posed by Iraq. "The DIA can be more conservative in their assessments, because they have a greater detachment from the policy makers than CIA does," says Patrick Lang, who worked as a top Iraq analyst for both agencies. The administration's handling of its intelligence dossier on Iraq, before the war, is under scrutiny by congressional committees. Those inquiries could lead to public hearings.

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