

The Lies that Led to the Iraq War and the Persistent Myth of ‘Intelligence Failure’

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Global Research, September 10, 2012

[Foreign Policy Journal.com](#) 8 September
2012

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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The George Washington University National Security Archive recently published a newly released [CIA document](#) from January 2006 titled “Misreading Intentions: Iraq’s Reaction to Inspection Created Picture of Deception”. The document, the Archive [notes](#), “blames ‘analyst liabilities’ such as neglecting to examine Iraq’s deceptive behavior ‘through an Iraqi prism,’ for the failure to correctly assess the country’s virtually non-existent WMD capabilities.” Foreign Policy magazine [describes it](#) as a “remarkable CIA mea culpa”. But nothing could be further from the truth. Far from acknowledging the CIA’s true role, the document does not present any kind of serious analysis, but only politicized statements rehashing well-worn official claims designed to further the myth that there was an “intelligence failure” leading up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March of 2003.

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Secretary of State Colin Powell presents the Bush administration’s case for war on Iraq at the U.N. Security Council on February 5, 2003

There was no such “intelligence failure”. On the contrary, there was an extremely *successful* disinformation campaign coordinated by the CIA in furtherance of the government’s policy of seeking regime change in Iraq. The language of the document itself reveals a persistent dishonesty. It speaks of “deepened suspicions” that Iraq “had ongoing WMD programs” and “suspicions that Iraq continued to hide WMD.” Needless to say, however, the Iraq war was not sold to the public on the grounds that government officials and intelligence agencies had “suspicions” that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMD). It was sold to the public with declarations that it was a known fact that Iraq had ongoing programs and stockpiles of WMD. The tacit acknowledgment that the actual evidence only supported “suspicions” that this was so by itself is proof of that the narrative of an “intelligence failure” is a fiction.

The report relies heavily upon the 1995 defection of Saddam Hussein’s son-in-law, Hussein Kamal (respectively spelled “Saddam Husayn” and “Husayn Kamil” in the document), arguing that the information he revealed bolstered suspicions that Iraq was concealing ongoing WMD programs and continued to possess stockpiles of WMD. It argues further that the regime’s behavior indicated he was hiding such weapons. Kamal, who returned to Iraq and was killed there in 1996, was the same individual Vice President Dick Cheney referred to in selling the administration’s case for war on August 26, 2002, when he said that “we now know that Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. Among other

sources, we've gotten this from the firsthand testimony of defectors—including Saddam's own son-in-law, who was subsequently murdered at Saddam's direction." But the fact is that Cheney was lying, and the CIA's persistent adherence to essentially the same false narrative renders ridiculous the suggestion that this document is some kind of "mea culpa".

The document states, "Analysts interpreted Iraq's intransigence and ongoing deceptive practices as indicators of continued WMD programs or an intent to preserve WMD capabilities, reinforcing intelligence we were receiving at the time that Saddam Husayn continued to pursue WMD." Yet the examples it lists of Iraq's "intransigence" and deception do *not* support the CIA's earlier judgments that Iraq had ongoing programs and WMD stockpiles. "In April 1991, for example," the document says, "Iraq declared that it had neither a nuclear weapons program nor an enrichment program. Inspections in June and September 1991 proved that Iraq had lied on both counts, had explored multiple enrichment paths, and had a well-developed nuclear weapons program." This is true. However, the document makes no mention of the fact that it was public knowledge that Iraq's nuclear program was subsequently completely dismantled. As former Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Mohammed ElBaradei, pointed out, the Agency had "destroyed, removed or rendered harmless all Iraqi facilities and equipment component of Iraq's nuclear programme" by 1992. The IAEA reported in 1998 that it was "confident that we had not missed any significant component of Iraq's nuclear programme".

The document states that in "March 1992, Iraq decided to declare the unilateral destruction of certain prohibited items to the Security Council, while continuing to conceal its biological warfare (BW) program and important aspects of the nuclear, chemical, and missile programs". As worded, this implies that Iraq in 1992 was continuing these programs. This is disingenuous, because in fact Iraq was at that time trying to conceal *past* programs that it had *ended* following the 1991 Gulf War. Iraq did not continue these programs, but dismantled them and unilaterally destroyed its WMD in order to hide the fact that it had had such programs *in the past*. As the document acknowledges in its "Key Findings" section, "in 1991, Iraq secretly destroyed or dismantled most undeclared items and records". Yet the very next paragraph contradictorily and disingenuously states, "We now judge that the 1995 defection of Saddam's son-in-law Husayn Kamil—a critical figure in Iraq's WMD and denial and deception (D&D) activities—promoted Iraq to change strategic direction and cease efforts to retain WMD programs." This again implies that Iraq had ongoing WMD programs at least until 1995, which is *false*, as the CIA knew perfectly well at the time this report was written.

Even more importantly, that the programs had been dismantled and the weapons destroyed is in fact *precisely* what Hussein Kamal actually told U.N. inspectors when he defected in 1995. The newly released document in fact points out, "He said that Saddam destroyed all WMD in secret" in 1991. Yet apart from that single buried admission, the document is full of statements implying that weapons programs continued. For example, it states that "Iraqi officials did not admit to weaponized BW agent after the defection of Husayn Kamil", but fails to clarify that this was an admission of *past* and not *ongoing* activity. The document acknowledges that Kamal's defection was "the key turning point in Iraq's decision to cooperate more with inspections", but then adds that his debriefing with U.N. inspectors "strengthened the West's perception of Iraq as a successful and efficient deceiver." Following Kamal's defection, the document states, "the West", meaning the U.S., judged that Iraq "was determined to retain WMD capabilities." In other words, the U.S. continued to claim that Iraq had ongoing WMD programs and stockpiles, and supposedly based that

assessment on Kamal's information, *even though Kamal in fact had confirmed that Iraq's WMD had been destroyed and its programs dismantled in 1991.*

The document similarly states, "We now judge that the Iraqis feared that Kamil ... would reveal additional undisclosed information. Iraq decided that further widespread deception and attempts to hold onto extensive WMD programs while under UN sanctions was untenable and changed strategic direction by adopting a policy of disclosure and improved cooperation." The wording here that Iraq was attempting in 1995 "to hold onto" such programs does not merely imply a falsehood, but is an outright lie. Once again, the CIA was perfectly well aware that until 1995, Iraq was attempting to conceal the existence of its *past* WMD programs, which it was *not* attempting "to hold onto" but had dismantled in 1991. This kind of dishonest use of language to suggest Iraq continued to have ongoing WMD programs, even while contradictorily acknowledging elsewhere in the report that this was not true, is illustrative not of a willingness by the CIA to come clean, but to continue to obfuscate the truth and to persist in the false narrative of "intelligence failure". The CIA in the document even tries to spin its acknowledgment that Iraq's programs were dismantled and its WMD destroyed in 1991 by saying that this unilateral action left Iraq "unable to provide convincing proof when it later tried to demonstrate compliance"—thus shifting the burden onto Iraq to prove that it *didn't* have WMD and attempting to obfuscate the fact that U.S. government officials repeatedly *lied* by claiming that the intelligence community had *proof* that Iraq *did* have WMD.

In October 1991, Iraq admitted to the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) that its Al Atheer site had been built in order to conduct research into enriching uranium to build a nuclear weapon. On August 22, 1995, when Hussein Kamal was asked about the work that went on there, and whether it was continuing somewhere else, he replied, "yes, but not now, before the Gulf War." That is to say, there were other sites involved in Iraq's nuclear weapons program, but this program was ended by 1991. He also pointed out that the work done on enrichment "were only studies." He noted that Iraq already "had highly enriched uranium from France but it was under the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] safeguards." Iraq thus had worked on building its own centrifuges to enrich uranium, "but had never reached a point close to testing."

The CIA document nevertheless states that Kamal's defection "exposed the previously unknown 1991 crash program to develop nuclear weapons." The program referred to would have entailed using enriched uranium from Iraq's French-built reactor and enriching additional uranium obtained from Russia to weapons-grade in order to produce material for a bomb. The remarkable dishonesty of this statement is on full display when one compares it with the fact that, when this "crash program" was brought up in his UNSCOM debriefing, Kamal's actual response was, "no, not true." He acknowledged that "the decision was already there to use French uranium, but they were not ready with centrifuges." In other words, the "crash program" was nothing more than a hypothetical contingency plan involving a scenario in which Iraq would make a final desperate effort to produce a nuclear weapon by kicking out U.N. and IAEA inspectors and enriching its own uranium to weapons-grade—a capability Iraq *did not* possess.

With regard to Iraq's biological weapons programs, Kamal was asked during his debriefing, "[W]ere weapons and agents destroyed?" He answered, "[N]othing remained." He added that the U.N. inspectors "have [an] important role in Iraq with this. You should not underestimate yourself. You are very effective in Iraq." The unilateral destruction of WMD, Kamal said, "was done before you came in." On the issue of chemical weapons, the

discussion turned to Iraq's development of VX nerve agent during the Iran-Iraq war. After the war, Kamal told his U.N. debriefers, "the factory was turned into civilian production." He added, "Iran also had mustard and sarin and they used mustard [gas] in small quantities. Some of the chemical components came for the US to Iraq"—that the U.S. supplied precursors for Iraq's WMD is well known. Kamal continued, "[W]e changed the factory into pesticide production. Part of the establishment started to produce medicine." He also said, "We gave instructions not to produce chemical weapons.... All chemical weapons were destroyed. I ordered destruction of all chemical weapons. All weapons—biological, chemical, missile, nuclear were destroyed." (He subsequently clarified, "in the nuclear area, there were no weapons"—he had meant that the nuclear program was dismantled.)

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