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The progress report by David Kay, the top CIA official in the Iraq Survey Group (ISG), is the first official account of what the Coalition has found in over six months of searching for evidence of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. A military unit, the 75th Exploitation Task Force, was pulled out at the start of June, to make way for the ISG's "intelligence-led" approach. Neither body has managed to verify the vast majority of the direct allegations made by British and U.S. governments in the prelude to the conflict.

The ISG reports that no official orders or plans could be found to back up the allegation that a nuclear programme remained active after 1991. Aluminium tubes have not been used for the enrichment of uranium, in contrast to Secretary of State Colin Powell lengthy exposition to the Security Council. No suspicious activities or residues have been found at the seven sites within Iraq that were described within the Prime Minister's dossier from September 2002. The ISG even casts serious doubt on the President Bush's much trumpeted claim that US forces had found three mobile biological laboratories after the war: "technical limitations" would prevent the trailers from being ideally suited to biological weapons production, they record. In other words, they were for something else.

There have certainly been no signs of imported uranium, or even battlefield munitions ready to fire within 45 minutes. Most significantly, Jack Straw's claim to Parliament on the eve of conflict that "we know that this man [Saddam Hussein] has got ... chemical weapons, biological weapons, viruses, bacilli and ... 10,000 litres of anthrax" has yet to find a single piece of supportive evidence.

Those who staked their career on the existence in Iraq of at least chemical and biological weapons *programmes* have latched onto three claims in the progress report.

Firstly, there is the allegation that a biologist had a "collection of reference strains" at his home, and this included "a vial of live *C. botulinum* Okra B. from which a biological agent can be produced". Jack Straw claimed the morning after the report's release that this agent was "15,000 times more toxic than the nerve agent VX". That is incorrect: botulinum type A is one of the most poisonous substances known, and was developed in weaponised form by Iraq prior to 1991. However, type B - the form found at the biologist's home - is less lethal. Even so, it would require an extensive process of fermentation, the growing of the bug, the extraction of the toxin and the weaponisation of the toxin before it could cause harm. That process would take weeks, if not longer. The ISG reported no sign of any of these activities. Botulinum type B could also be used for making an antidote to common botulinum poisoning. Indeed, that is one of the reasons why many countries and military laboratories around the world keep reference strains of *C. botulinum* Okra B. The UK keeps such substances, for example, and calls them "seed banks".

A large part of the ISG report is taken up with assertions that Iraq had been acquiring designs and undertaking research programmes for missiles with a range that exceeded the UN limit of 150km. The evidence here is more detailed than in the rest of the report. However, it does not demonstrate that Iraq was violating the terms of any UN

Security Council Resolution. The prohibition on Iraq acquiring technology relating to chemical, biological or nuclear weapons was absolute: no agents, no subsystems, and no research or support facilities. By contrast, Iraq was simply prohibited from actually having longer range missiles, together with "major parts, and repair and production facilities". The ISG does not purport to show that Iraq had any such missiles, parts or facilities, but just the knowledge to produce them in future. Indeed, it would have been entirely lawful for Iraq to develop such systems and missiles if the restrictions implemented in 1991 were lifted, whilst it would never have been legitimate for it to re-develop weapons of mass destruction. All the ISG have demonstrated is that Iraq was preparing for the UN to declare it in compliance with its disarmament obligations.

Thirdly, one sentence within the report has been much quoted: Iraq had "a clandestine network of laboratories and safe houses within the Iraqi intelligence service that contained equipment subject to UN monitoring and suitable for continuing CBW research." Note what that sentence does not say: these facilities were suitable for chemical and biological weapons research (as almost any modern laboratory would be), not that they had engaged in such research. The reference to UN monitoring is also quite spurious: under the terms of UN resolutions, all of Iraq's chemical and biological facilities -- not only those suspected of producing weapons -- are subject to monitoring. So in fact, all this sentence tells us is that Iraq had modern laboratories.

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David Kay has staked his professional and his business reputation over the past ten years at least on the case that Iraq was a serious and current threat. He was a frequent pundit on US television shows, making the case for regime change in blunt language. He called Kofi Annan's attempt to broker an effective inspections process in 1998 "worse than useless", claimed in 2002 that Iraq was pursuing its weapons of mass destruction in order to bring about the elimination of the state of Israel, and he said before entering Iraq that the Coalition would find not just a "smoking gun", but a "smoking arsenal."

Until October last year, Kay was the Vice-President of a major San Diego-based defence contractor, Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), coordinating its homeland security and counterterrorism initiatives. It was whilst he held this role that he claimed that Iraq could launch terrorist attacks on the US mainland. SAIC was in the headlines earlier this year when it was revealed that the US government had contracted it three years ago to produce mobile biological vans, complete with all its parts, for training purposes. SAIC's Corporate Vice President until February was Christopher Ryan Henry, now Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.

SAIC's spokesman acknowledged earlier this year that the company is deeply involved in the current war in Iraq. This includes its role in leading a \$650 million contract for services and support for the US army. Among other activities, SAIC runs the US-funded radio station in Umm Qasr, "Voice of the New Iraq", and employs a council that provides senior advisors to the US occupation authorities in Baghdad. It is not known if Kay retains financial interests in SAIC.

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