



About Those Iraqi Weapons . . .

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"A year after the war began, Americans are questioning why the administration went to war in Iraq when Iraq was not an imminent threat, when it had no nuclear weapons, no persuasive links to al Qaeda, no connection to the terrorist attacks of September 11, and no stockpiles of chemical or biological weapons."

--Edward M. Kennedy, April 5, 2004

"There were no weapons of mass destruction."

--Howard Dean, April 4, 2004

Senator Kennedy and Governor Dean speak as Democrats. They speak as opponents of the war in Iraq. But on the issue of Saddam Hussein's weapons capabilities--the tyrant's development, possession, and threatened use of chemical, biological, and nuclear arms--they also speak as standard-bearers of the conventional wisdom. Over the last several months, ever since David Kay stepped down as head of the Iraq Survey Group and told us that "we were almost all wrong" about Saddam's arsenal, what was once a universally accepted truth (Saddam had weapons of

mass destruction) became an apparently self-evident fiction (Saddam had no such weapons). It seems the whole world now agrees that Saddam rid his country of weapons stockpiles shortly after the first Gulf War ended in 1991. With respect to weapons of mass destruction (WMD), at least, there was really nothing to worry about.

But what if that judgment, too, is wrong? Just as wrong, in fact, as was the assumption that Iraqi WMD would be found quickly and easily? Senator John Kerry, interestingly, has been cautious. As recently as April 27 he commented, "Who knows if a month from now, three months from now, you find some weapons? You may."

The truth is Kennedy is right, at least in one regard: There are many questions that deserve answers. Here are a few we would like to pose--both to those who, like Kennedy and Dean, are so certain Saddam was weaponless in March 2003, and also to the Bush administration, which has been virtually mute, and has not explained what it has found and what it now believes to have been the truth about Iraqi WMD.

*** Where did the sarin come from?** Last week the Pentagon reported that two U.S. servicemen were hospitalized in Baghdad for exposure to nerve agents. The soldiers were part of an American convoy that came across an unmarked 155 millimeter shell lying on the side of a Baghdad street. When the soldiers attempted to disarm the makeshift bomb, it exploded, spilling out part of its poisonous contents. The shell later tested positive for sarin, the poison developed by the Nazis and used by Saddam against the Kurds in Halabjah in 1988.

The shell in question appears to have been made prior to the first Gulf War. The terrorists who planted the bomb

may not have known it contained the deadly poison. But the claim always was that Saddam had not fully relinquished or done away with his pre-Gulf War arsenal. And if the terrorists didn't know the bomb contained sarin, because the casing had no distinctive markings, doesn't that suggest an effort at deception? Doesn't it also suggest that there could have been--and could be--many more of these shells around? The New York Times wasn't worried: "No one can be certain" whether the bomb "did really contain sarin," it editorialized. Besides, "finding some residual weapons that had escaped a large-scale destruction program would be no great surprise--and if the chemicals had degraded, no major threat." But it now seems the bomb did contain sarin. And we do not know that there are only a few such "residual" weapons. Do we?

*** How did Jordanian terrorists apparently obtain chemical weapons?** Last month the Jordanians thwarted a terrorist attack in Amman. A terrorist cell linked to Abu Musab al Zarqawi--previously connected to Saddam--planned to explode trucks carrying 20 tons of poison chemicals outside the headquarters of the Jordanian intelligence service. The Jordanian authorities said the blast could have killed up to 80,000 people and wounded around 160,000. Where did the chemicals come from?

Who is killing Iraqi weapons scientists? In closed testimony to members of Congress earlier this year, David Kay reported that Saddam Hussein's top scientists have been targeted for assassination. Terrorists and Baathists have killed nine prominent scientists since April 9, 2003. All those killed had worked in one way or another on Baathist weapons programs. All had been questioned by the Iraq Survey Group.

* **What has Charles Duelfer discovered?** Until January 2004 David Kay led the Iraq Survey Group, the 1,400-member team of scientists charged with discovering easily hidden weapons in a country of 27 million people that's roughly the size of California. In his testimony before Congress, Kay said he believed Saddam had destroyed his weapons stockpiles prior to the American invasion in March 2003. Hans Blix, the former head of the U.N. inspection team, agrees. This helped establish the conventional wisdom that Iraqi weapon stocks would never be found because they never existed.

But the Iraq Survey Group did not end with David Kay's departure. In fact it is still plugging along, now under the leadership of Charles Duelfer, who told Congress in March that "the picture is much more complicated than I anticipated going in." And that it's too soon to reach "full judgments with confidence." Because "we have yet to identify the most critical people in any programmatic effort." What's more, "Many people have yet to be found or questioned, and many of those we have found are not giving us complete answers."

Duelfer has other problems. His team has "recovered millions of documents," but millions were also destroyed in the

chaos that engulfed Baghdad following liberation. Also, the documents are "often mixed up." Which means research is "extremely difficult." And Duelfer is understaffed. He especially lacks Arabic speakers. Hence only a "tiny fraction" of the recovered files have been translated. Duelfer is reported to be much less confident than Kay that Saddam had done away with his WMD.

The Bush administration can answer, or can begin to answer, all these questions. But having professed such certainty about Saddam's weapons of mass destruction before the war, the administration now seems intimidated by the new conventional wisdom that Saddam had done away with his WMD. Yet we do know that Saddam had weapons after the Gulf War in 1991, and of course United Nations inspectors spent much of the next six years destroying some of them, despite repeated efforts at concealment and deception by Saddam. The inspectors never were able to account for all of Saddam's weapons. So the question is, what happened to them? No one has adequately answered that question. Not Kay. Not Blix. Not Howard Dean or Ted Kennedy. Not the Bush administration. Maybe we just got one answer: Some of those weapons are still there in Iraq, and they're being used against our troops.

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