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DAVID MANNING

IRAQ WMD: UPDATE FROM THE ISG

1. On 14 July I was briefed on the latest views from the Iraqi Survey Group (ISG) by Martin Howard, Deputy Chief of Defence Intelligence. Martin was in Baghdad at the end of last week and spoke directly with David Kay.

The Work of the ISG

2. The ISG is now fully operational and actively pursuing investigations. Its focus is on interviewing senior High Value Targets and lower ranking scientists and others and following up the resulting leads. They have also recovered a large amount of written material, paper and electronic, hand written and typed, which is being translated and analysed.

Prohibited Missile Systems

3. As you know, the most significant and complete story concerns the plans and designs for prohibited missile systems. A draft assessment has been prepared for the JIC to consider on 16 July (this may now be slightly delayed). This concludes, on the basis of interviews with senior officials and engineers involved with Iraq's ballistic missile programme, that:

- claims that Iraq produced designs of prohibited missile systems between 2000 and 2002 are credible and supported by an initial examination of the extensive technical data provided. The missiles were designed to reach ranges between 500-600km and 900-1000km;
- the designs produced, and the four to five year timeframe envisaged to reach full production, appear technically credible. It is not clear however, why further development of the designs was halted;
- claims that Iraq sought to conceal the design work for these prohibited missile systems are credible, and are supported by other intelligence. There was a clear intent to preserve the designs for possible future use. It is equally clear that at least two senior officials managed to deceive UNMOVIC inspectors during their interviews with them;
- despite their apparent co-operation in providing information on prohibited missile designs, some of those interviewed are not being entirely open on issues which they may believe could carry more serious implications for them. These include the issue of chemical and biological warheads and the purpose of missile infrastructure such as the al-Rafah test stand. These areas need further investigation.

4. The ISG also have a document, recovered from the NMD archive (the organisation responsible for implementing Iraq's concealment policy), that possibly relates to the movement of SCUD components and warheads in 2001. Further comment awaits detailed assessment of the document.

Biological Weapons Programme

5. The ISG are giving the highest priority to seeking evidence of BW programmes. At present the relevant finds are suspect trailers and vials of possible biological agents, apparently preserved on the orders of Rihab Taha. Technical analysis of the trailers has effectively been completed. It is clear that they could, with minor modification, produce biological agent. They could, as currently configured, also produce hydrogen (but much less efficiently than other Iraqi trailer designs for hydrogen production which the ISG have acquired). Without further evidence from documents or people, it is impossible to reach a definite conclusion on the role of the trailers. But they remain highly suspicious.

6. Vials containing samples of biological material were found in the home of a scientist, who said that he had been ordered to keep them safe and secret. Tests carried out so far have given positive results for clostridium botulinum and gas gangrene. Final confirmation of these and other tests are awaited in the next few days. Further work will follow to establish how easily these samples could have been grown into a suitable quantity for use on the battlefield.

7. A notebook covering the period from January to March 2003 has been found recording discussions about the concealment and destruction of anthrax. It is not yet clear whether this refers to concealing evidence of past destruction or something more recent. The provenance of the document has also to be established.

Comment

8. The evidence revealed so far is pointing towards the maintenance of a capability to restart BW production but not (until more is found on the trailers) continuing production.

9. David Kay aims to have a biological "package" ready for September to cover: the existence of a biological weapons programme; concealment; research and development; the retention of seed stock and mobile production. As of now, not all the component parts for this package are in place.

Chemical Weapons

10. Little has been found so far. A former head of chemical weapons research and development has claimed to know about the concealment of chemical weapons but the information provided so far has not checked out.

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Nuclear Weapons

12. The discovery of concealed centrifuge parts, and documentation from the pre-1991 programme has already been made public. The parts themselves have been removed to the US for further analysis. Their owner has said that Iraq intended to revive its nuclear programme when it was safe to do so.

Concealment

13. The interviews with senior ballistic missile officials, the comments by the nuclear scientist and the discovery of the vials containing biological material all demonstrate that Iraq had a clear policy of concealment. This included both physical and oral deception, as a number of the missile officials were also interviewed by UNMOVIC. Further to this, the ISG have a document from February 2003 detailing concealment procedures, which they recovered from the recently discovered archive of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC).

Presentation

14. Now there is no longer to be a statement by the Prime Minister in the immediate future, the JIC sub-committee of Iraq discussed the option of briefing Jane Corbin on the plans for prohibited missiles, and making available an Iraqi witness for interview. We agreed as long as secured an embargo on publication before September, when Corbin's Panorama programme is scheduled to be aired. We will need to ensure we co-ordinate this action with the US.


JOHN SCARLETT

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