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## Action Alert

### Missing From ABC's WMD "Scoop"

Star defector Hussein Kamel said weapons were destroyed

2/17/06

(NOTE: Please see the [Activism Update](#) regarding this alert.)

On February 15, **ABC** investigative reporter Brian Ross delivered an exclusive report on **World News Tonight** and **Nightline** that purported to be a bombshell. **ABC** had obtained tape-recorded conversations from mid-1995 that seemed to show that **Iraq** had been concealing its weapons of mass destruction program. The tapes, according to Ross, "will only serve to fuel the continuing debate about Saddam's true intentions and whether he, in fact, did hide weapons of mass destruction." But **ABC** viewers were left in the dark about information that would undermine the tape's most important revelations.

**ABC** emphasized the excerpts of a conversation between Saddam Hussein and his weapons chief (and son-in-law) Hussein Kamel that seem to bolster the idea that Iraq was hiding weapons from inspectors. As Ross reported on **Nightline**, "Saddam's son-in-law briefs Saddam on the Iraqi campaign of deceit aimed at fooling UN inspectors." Kamel is then heard telling Saddam Hussein, in **ABC**'s translation: "We did not reveal all that we have. Not the type of weapons. Not the volume of the materials we imported. Not the volume of the production we told them about. Not the volume of news. None of this was correct."

**ABC** provides little context for the exchange, but suggests that these admissions might provide new insight into the **Bush** administration's decision to **invade** Iraq a decade later. In fact, what Kamel revealed about the extent of Iraq's weapons programs has been known for some time, and portions of his account were an integral part of the White House's case for war.

Kamel defected from Iraq in 1995, and talked at great length with U.N. weapons inspectors and the CIA about Iraq's unconventional weapons programs. He revealed at that time that Iraq's chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programs had been more advanced than the Saddam Hussein regime had admitted to the inspectors. Kamel publicly revealed the concealment of WMD-related activities in an interview with **CNN** (9/21/95): "The order was to hide much of it from the start, and we hid a lot of that information. These were not individual acts of concealment, but were as a result of direct orders from the top." So the fact that Saddam Hussein was attempting to deceive the weapons inspectors, as in **ABC**'s tape, is hardly news more than 10 years later.

But **ABC**'s story does not include what was arguably Kamel's more important revelation, which was that Iraq had destroyed its stocks of usable unconventional weapons. "Iraq does not possess any weapons of mass destruction," he told **CNN** in 1995. He told the same story to U.N. and U.S. officials, saying that by

destroying the weapons in the summer of 1991, Saddam Hussein hoped to conceal how far Iraq had gotten in developing weapons, with the intent of restarting these programs after the inspection regime was ended.

Hussein Kamel was lured back to Iraq in 1996, where he was almost immediately killed by Saddam Hussein's forces. But when the Bush administration began gearing up for war with Iraq in 2002, it found that selective citation of Kamel's testimony could be very helpful in making its case. Vice President Dick Cheney asserted in an August 2002 speech (8/26/02) that the Iraqi regime had been "very busy enhancing its capabilities in the field of chemical and biological agents," and continued "to pursue the nuclear program they began many years ago." To back this up these claims, Cheney added, "We've gotten this from the firsthand testimony of defectors, including Saddam's own son-in-law"—a reference to Kamel.

In a **Chicago Tribune** op-ed (9/10/02), former head of the U.N. weapons inspection team Scott Ritter pointed out that Cheney had left out a critical part of Kamel's story:

Throughout his interview with UNSCOM, a U.N. special commission, Hussein Kamel reiterated his main point—that nothing was left. "All chemical weapons were destroyed," he said. "I ordered destruction of all chemical weapons. All weapons—biological, chemical, missile, nuclear—were destroyed."

Nevertheless, the administration continued to selectively use Kamel's disclosures to bolster its case that Iraq had hidden stockpiles of banned weapons. "It took years for Iraq to finally admit that it had produced four tons of the deadly nerve agent, VX," then-Secretary of State Colin Powell said in his February 5, 2003 speech to the U.N. "The admission only came out after inspectors collected documentation as a result of the defection of Hussein Kamel, Saddam Hussein's late son-in-law." Powell did not note that Kamel had also reported that this nerve gas, along with all other such weapons, had been destroyed years earlier (**Extra!**, 5-6/03).

Shortly before the invasion of Iraq began, **Newsweek** (3/3/03) obtained the transcript of Kamel's 1995 debriefing by officials from UNSCOM, the U.N. inspections team, as well as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). It published Kamel's key statement from that transcript: "All weapons—biological, chemical, missile, nuclear—were destroyed." **Newsweek** reported that Kamel told the same story to the CIA, but his account had been "**hushed up**." Shortly thereafter, the complete transcript of Kamel's discussions with inspectors was made public by Cambridge University's Glen Rangwala.

As FAIR noted shortly after the **Newsweek** report (FAIR Media Advisory, 2/27/03), this crucial information went largely unreported in the mainstream media. Three years later, that is still the case. Instead of this critical context—which frankly undermines the importance of the network's "exclusive"—**ABC** opted for political speculation. The network's report quotes Rep. Pete Hoekstra (R-Mich.): "From reading some of the transcripts, you would think that it's pretty likely that there were WMD that were hidden or that were moved out of the country." By omitting countervailing information, **ABC** is in effect **bolstering such ill-informed claims**.

**Nightline** anchor Terry Moran asserted that the tapes **ABC** aired made an important contribution to our understanding of the Iraq controversy: "Without question, these tapes will shed new light on the debate over the war and on Saddam's future." If **ABC**'s report is any indication, that debate will continue to ignore inconvenient facts about what was really known before the war about Iraq's weapons.

**ACTION:** Contact **ABC** and ask why its reports citing an Iraqi official to bolster the idea that Iraq had

WMDs failed to mention that the same official told weapons inspectors that Iraq's weapons stockpiles were destroyed in 1991.

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