

Mobile Biological Weapons Facilities "Winnebagos of Death"

In the October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) presented to the Senate Intelligence Committee, the Intelligence Community (IC) stated that, "Baghdad has transportable facilities for producing bacterial and toxin BW agents and may have other [mobile](#) units for researching and filling agent into munitions or containers, according to multiple sources. Iraq has pursued mobile BW production options, largely to protect its BW capability from detection, according to a credible source." The NIE stated that Iraq had seven mobile facilities, with the first constructed as early as 1997. With these units all producing at capacity, the NIE concluded that it would take Iraq approximately 14 to 26 weeks to produce the amount of BW UNSCOM assessed was actually produced prior to the Gulf War.

Reports of such facilities originated in 2000 from an Iraqi chemical engineer known as Curveball. From January 2000 to September 2001, the Defense Intelligence Agency's (DIA) Human Intelligence disseminated almost 112 reports from Curveball regarding mobile BW facilities in Iraq. These reports did not come directly from Curveball, however, but were transferred through a "foreign liaison." U.S. Intelligence only once met with Curveball, in May 2000, and later expressed concerns, which were not mentioned in the October 2002 NIE. Among those were that Curveball might be an alcoholic and that he spoke English (the foreign liaison had stated that [meeting](#) with Curveball was impossible because he did not speak English). Although there were other sources corroborating Curveball's reporting, Curveball's reports were the centerpiece of the IC's assessment of Iraq's BW program.

Three other reports confirmed IC estimates of mobile biological facilities. Another asylum seeker (hereinafter "the second source") reporting through Defense HUMINT channels provided one report in June 2001 that Iraq had transportable facilities for the production of BW. This second source recanted in October 2003, however, and the recantation was reflected in a Defense HUMINT report in which the source flatly contradicted his June 2001 statements about transportable facilities. Another source, associated with the Iraqi National Congress (INC) (hereinafter "the INC source"), was brought to the attention of DIA by Washington-based representatives of the INC. Like Curveball, his reporting was handled by Defense HUMINT. He provided one report that Iraq had decided in 1996 to establish mobile laboratories for BW agents to evade inspectors. In May 2002, DIA issued a "fabrication notice" which said that the [information](#) the INC source provided was "assessed as unreliable and, in some instances, pure fabrication." Even with this notice, this source was included both in the October 2002 NIE and in Secretary Powell's speech to the UN in February 2003. There was a fourth source cited, but the details regarding the report were classified.

On 05 February 2003, [Secretary of State](#) Colin Powell in [his remarks to the United Nations Security Council](#), stated that the reported mobile production facilities were "one of the most worrisome things that emerges from the thick intelligence file we have on [Iraq](#)'s biological weapons." Like the intelligence estimates made before the speech, the reports of mobile BW facilities was the cornerstone of his BW case against Iraq.

Members of a mobile exploitation team examined a suspected mobile biological weapons facility (trailer 1) that was recovered by U.S. Forces in Irbil (northern Iraq) in late April 2003. A second, similar trailer (trailer 2) was later identified and recovered in May 2003 from a site adjacent to the Al Kindi research facility at Mosul. The trailers resembled the mobile laboratories described by Secretary of State Colin Powell. A team of military experts conducted a preliminary technical field investigation of trailer 1 soon after its capture. They assessed the trailer to be part of a possible Iraqi mobile BW weapon production system, with its equipment being capable of supporting a limited biological batch production process. A second examination was undertaken by a team of scientific experts, after Al Kindi personnel suggested the trailers were for hydrogen production. Their report concluded, "The trailers have equipment and components possibly compatible with biological agent production and/or chemical processes that might include hydrogen production."

Other reports have suggested that the suspected trailers were used for weather balloons, much like the AN/TMQ-42 Hydrogen Generator of the U.S. Army. Weather balloons were frequently used by Iraqi artillery batteries to determine the trajectory of rockets by collecting atmospheric measurements.

According to a story by the Los Angeles Times published on June 21, 2003, an intelligence official was quoted as saying that the trailers did not carry the necessary autoclaves and other equipment necessary for the sterilization of laboratory equipment that is necessary to cultivate pathogens for biological weapon production. Moreover, the official said, "the canvas tarps covering the sides of sides of the trucks appear to be pulled away to let excess heat and gas escape during the production of hydrogen. The tarps would allow in far too much road dust and other contamination if the equipment inside were meant to produce biowarfare agents."

In addition, there were no traces of biological agents found in the trailers. The London Observer, on June 15, 2003, citing British intelligence sources, reported that it was "likely that the units were designed to be used for hydrogen production to fill artillery balloons, part of a system originally sold to Saddam by Britain in 1987."

The Iraqi Survey Group, in its final report, reported that though it could not disprove the existence of Iraqi transportable fermentation systems that could have been used for BW, but it had not uncovered any evidence to suggest that there such systems did exist. The two mobile trailers that recovered near Irbil and Mosul in 2003 were examined by the ISG team and determined to be unlikely for BW for the following reasons:

- There was a critical absence of instrumentation for process monitoring and control of the process.
- The positioning of the inlets and outlets on the reactor would make even the most basic functions (such as filling completely, emptying completely, and purging completely the vessel) either impractical or impossible to perform.
- The lack of the ports required to introduce reagents would exacerbate this problem. These aspects of the design alone would render fermentation almost impossible to control.

- The low-pressure air [storage system](#) capacity would be inadequate to provide the volume of compressed air required to operate the fermentation process over a complete aerobic production cycle. In addition, it would not be practical to charge and use the existing compressed gas storage with nitrogen or carbon dioxide for anaerobic fermentation. Similarly, the collection system for effluent gas would be wholly inadequate to deal with the volume of effluent gas produced during a complete production cycle.
- Harvesting any product would be difficult and dangerous.

ISG judged that the facilities were instead intended for use as hydrogen generators for Republican Guard artillery units for use with radio-sonde balloons. Although the equipment was poorly constructed, it would be consistent with the hydrogen generation process detailed in [documents](#) from the Al Kindi Company. Moreover, reports and other documents provided by high-ranking officials from Al Kindi, detailing milestones in the manufacture and testing of the trailers, are consistent with the reporting on their stage of construction. For more details on ISG's judgements of the discovered trailers, see the [Annex in its 2004 Report](#).

On April 12, 2006, The Washington Post reported that a separate team of British and American experts had been sent to Baghdad by the Defense Intelligence Agency in May 2003 to investigate these trailers. The team's report, titled "Final Technical Engineering Exploitation Report on Iraqi Suspected Biological Weapons-Associated Trailers", was filed on May 27, 2003, two days before President Bush's statement regarding their presence in Iraq as evidence of Saddam Hussein WMD program. This claims came despite the team's report which concluded that the trailers had nothing to do with biological weapons but were almost certainly intended for the development of hydrogen for weather balloons. The Washington Post article also reported that this evidence was shelved away and ignored, with US Government officials continuing to claim that there was evidence that the trailers had posed a biological warfare threat. David Kay, the ISG's first leader, was quoted as saying that he had not known of the separate research group's presence in Iraq or of its findings until near the end of time of [service](#) as the ISG leader, or late 2003.

