

## Carnegie Analysis

### Follow the Threat Assessments

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Senior administration officials say they based their escalating warnings of the imminent danger posed by Iraqi weapons on official intelligence assessments. In many cases, the statements went far beyond the classified estimates now available. In other cases, such as Secretary Powell's presentation to the United Nations, they tracked closely with the CIA reports to Congress. These reports themselves, however, underwent a dramatic transformation from 2001 to 2002 after reporting essentially the same data for many years. There is little new evidence in the reports to account for this change. So what triggered the new, alarmist tone in 2002?

Every six months the intelligence community submits a report to Congress on the acquisition of technology relating to weapons of mass destruction. These reports outline the activities of foreign countries regarding weapons of mass destruction programs.

#### Nuclear Program

The assessments of the Iraqi nuclear program remained fairly consistent from 1998 through 2001, followed by a dramatic jump in 2002. From 1998 to 2001, Iraq's nuclear program was addressed in one paragraph, if at all. Until 2000, the intelligence agencies were concerned that Iraq continued to hide nuclear-related documents, and probably some equipment, but made no claim that Iraq was trying to reconstitute the program. In the first half of 2000, the report noted explicitly "we do not have any direct evidence that Iraq has used the period since Desert Fox [December 1998] to reconstitute its WMD programs," though analysts suspected that this might be underway. The nuclear program merited only two sentences, noting, "Iraq has probably continued low-level, theoretical R&D." The report for the last half of 2000 began to talk about a "reconstituted nuclear weapons program" and cited rallying calls from Saddam to the "Nuclear Mujahidin." In the first half of 2001, came the first mention that "Baghdad *may be* attempting to acquiring materials that could aid in reconstituting its nuclear weapons program" (emphasis added). The first report after September 11, however, changed this judgement to a definitive "*is* attempting to acquire materials" (emphasis added).

The January-June 2002 report, however, raised alarm at unprecedented levels rhetorically, though it provided little new evidence of increased capability. This report, which moved the nuclear program from the last program mentioned to the front of the assessment, devoted six long paragraphs to the nuclear weapons, mostly detailed narrative of Iraq's nuclear history and the IAEA inspections and dismantlement process. This report introduced the allegation of Iraqi efforts to procure tens of thousands of aluminum tubes and noted that all intelligence experts agreed that these tubes could be used for a centrifuge enrichment program, though "some believe that these tubes are probably intended for conventional weapons programs." The Director General of the IAEA, Dr. ElBaradei later refuted this lone piece of new evidence in his March 7, 2003 presentation to the Security Council.

The 2002 intelligence report also definitively concluded: "Iraq is working to reconstitute its nuclear program." The tone of the report presented previously known activities in a new light, indicating a heightened threat. The report noted "expanding international trade provided growing access to nuclear-related technology and materials," "foreign nuclear expertise," "an increase in dual-use procurement activity in recent years," and "numerous meetings between Saddam and nuclear scientists over the past two years." Connecting these dots in a new way, the report concluded with a stark warning: Iraq could develop a nuclear device, with indigenously-produced fissile material, by the last half of the decade and, with foreign-procured fissile material, within one year.

#### Missile Program

The assessment of Iraq's missile program underwent a similar jump. Seven new paragraphs painted a picture of dramatic developments in Iraq's capabilities. The 2002 report cited new construction at missile

sites and included extensive discussion of "a ballistic missile capability that exceeds the 150 kilometer range limitation" imposed by the United Nations, but failed to note that the ranges, while a violation, were only 30 kilometers over the allowed range and, instead, linked them by implication to a discussion of the 1991 Gulf War Scuds of 650 km-range and pre-1991 efforts to develop 3,000 km-range missiles.

### **Biological Program**

The intelligence reports to Congress depicted Iraq's biological weapons program with a fairly steady rise in concern that also jumped sharply in 2002. Until 2000, each report provided the disclaimer that no "direct evidence" existed that demonstrated Iraq's reconstitution of its WMD programs. Concern remained that Iraq's disclosures with regard to its biological weapons program left many questions unanswered. Given its knowledge base and industrial infrastructure, Iraq could rapidly produce a significant amount of biological agents, "if the decision [was] made to do so." In 2001, the intelligence community expressed its concern that Iraq might be producing biological weapons agents and, in the latter half of the year, that mobile or covert facilities, could be enhancing this capability. In 2002, the report definitively concluded: "We are concerned that Iraq *is* again producing BW agents," (emphasis added) but offered no additional evidence of an improved capability or intent to produce these agents.

### **Chemical Program**

The only program that remained essentially unchanged in the 2002 reports was the chemical weapons program. Though repeating previous assessments that "Iraq has increased its capability to pursue chemical warfare program" by rebuilding key portions of its civilian chemical production infrastructure, the report did not claim that such weapons were in production, as officials would later claim.

### **Key Questions**

Knight-Ridder reporters Warren Strobel and Jonathan Landay wrote July 3 that a new internal CIA study (not yet made public) on the agency's assessments during this period concluded that while the central findings that Iraq was likely pursuing WMD programs were sound, "the status and locations of those weapons programs were 'harder to conclude.'" Their investigative report notes "Bush, Vice President Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and other top officials rarely, if ever, mentioned uncertainties about the state of Hussein's weapons program or the quality of U.S. intelligence when making the case last year and this year for the invasion of Iraq."

Former CIA Deputy Director Richard Kerr, who directed the study, told Knight-Ridder that "the strongest indications" of Iraq's continuing interest in these weapons programs "came from earlier data, before the UN inspectors left" and that many of the CIA's conclusions were "based on knowledge acquired [before] then but salted with new information." So why did the CIA reports change so dramatically in 2002?

Absent a congressional investigation, it is impossible to know. Was it just the psychological impact of the September 11 attacks that made previous Iraqi activity now seem more ominous? Did Vice President Cheney's visits to the CIA influence analysts to change their views? Was a new team put in charge of assessments in 2002? Did the CIA adopt a new methodology in 2002 that skewed their results? Did Vice President Cheney's advisor "Scooter" Libby who directed the Cox Commission investigation into alleged Chinese nuclear espionage advise the analysts as to their conclusions and style? Or did Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence Steve Cambone bring the methodology he created for the 1998 Rumsfeld Commission on the ballistic missile threat to bear on the new Iraq assessments?

Only a thorough congressional investigation can answer these questions and ensure that future assessments are as accurate and balanced as possible.