

What Rumsfeld Knows About Iraqi Bioweapons

by Edward Spannaus

Numerous Administration officials, including President George Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, have recently asserted that Iraq has not accounted for large quantities of anthrax, botulinum toxin, and other biological and chemical agents.

At the Jan. 27 White House press briefing, *EIR*'s White House correspondent asked spokesman Ari Fleischer, "If Saddam Hussein indeed does have chemical or biological weapons, isn't it the case that we helped him get these weapons with the policies we had in supporting Saddam Hussein against Iran?" The Iran-Iraq War lasted from 1980-88.

Fleischer denied it, adding: "I think that unless you have a specific allegation or a specific company that you'd like to bring to my attention, the answer is no. If you have a specific, I'd like to evaluate it." Under continued questioning from *EIR*, including those specifics, and another reporter, Fleischer continued to deny that the United States had provided materials or technologies to Saddam Hussein that could have been used to produce chemical or biological weapons, claiming that he doesn't think anyone can provide specifics "in the case of Americans." Last October, Rumsfeld issued similar professions of ignorance.

What the U.S. Shipped

In fact, it is abundantly well documented that U.S. laboratories provided a large variety of biological agents consisting of viral and bacteriological samples to Iraq. Materials provided to the U.S. Senate by the former Director of the Centers for Disease Control, David Satcher, and which were re-entered in the *Congressional Record* on Sept. 20, 2002 by Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.V.), list numerous such shipments.

For example, pursuant to a license from the U.S. Commerce Department, American Type Culture Collection (ATCC) of Manassas, Virginia, shipped 24 types of biological materials to Iraq on May 2, 1986, which included four different batches of *bacillus anthracis* (the anthrax bacteria), and six different batches of *clostridium botulinum* (a bacterial source of botulinum toxin). On Aug. 31, 1987, ATCC lawfully shipped three batches of *bacillus anthracis* to Iraq.

These are just a few of more than 70 shipments of biological cultures lawfully sent to Iraq during the 1980s by ATCC, which could have been and were used to produce biological weapons. These included many varieties of viruses, bacteria, fungi, and protozoa.

According to a study by the Monterey Institute of International Studies, in addition to the licensed ATCC shipments, the Centers for Disease Controls itself sent more than 80 biological agents to Iraq between 1984 and 1989, including botulinum toxoid, dengue virus, and the West Nile antigen and antibody.

The government of Iraq has not denied that it produced biological weapons, but it points out (for example in its Oct. 2, 2002 reply to British Prime Minister Tony Blair's White Paper), that these biological agents could no longer be effective, because of limited shelf life—which is confirmed by other specialists. For instance, the Iraqi report stated, the botulinum protein converts to a non-toxic substance after three years, even under ideal storage conditions.

Rumsfeld's Role

When the U.S. government and U.S. laboratories shipped such agents to Iraq in the 1980s, Iraq had legitimate uses for them, since at that point Iraq was a very technologically advanced country with active agricultural and public health research programs. But it was also the policy of the Reagan and the first Bush Administrations, from 1982 up until the eve of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in the Summer of 1990, to supply Iraq with military equipment and many "dual-use" materials, including chemical and biological agents, which were used in Iraq's programs for the development of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. It was the intention and expectation of top circles in the United States and Britain that such weapons would be used against Iran.

It is by now well known, that Donald Rumsfeld went to Baghdad at least twice in 1983-84 to clear the way for resumption of diplomatic ties and expanded U.S. military assistance. Already by 1983-84, Iraq had begun to develop chemical weapons in response to Iranian "human wave" infantry attacks, and—as U.S. military studies have noted—they were used as part of an integrated battle plan, not as indiscriminate "weapons of mass destruction"—whatever that term means.

In the early and mid-1980s, some Reagan Administration officials were alarmed that Iraq might be overrun by Iran, and others in the United States and Britain simply wanted the Iranians and Iraqis to kill as many of the other side's soldiers and people as possible. In either case, there were few if any complaints about so-called "weapons of mass destruction" when they were being used to kill Iranians; and moreover, the United States aided Iraq's nuclear program as late as 1989, when three Iraqi scientists were invited to participate in a U.S. government-sponsored conference on nuclear-weapons detonation. And in October 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed a directive mandating closer U.S. ties with Iraq.

So, when Bush Administration officials claim to have evidence of Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction, one almost expects the next words out of their mouths to be: "And we've got the receipts."