

# THE IRAQ SURVEY GROUP LEADS ITS WITNESS, SADDAM HUSSEIN

After David Kay determined that there were no WMDs in Iraq, Charles Duelfer was brought in to create the appearance of a *casus belli* by focusing on Iraq's ongoing intent to develop WMDs and on the Oil for Food scandal. Ultimately, Duelfer achieved the former goal with this claim.

*Saddam wanted to recreate Iraq's WMD capability—which was essentially destroyed in 1991—after sanctions were removed and Iraq's economy stabilized, but probably with a different mix of capabilities to that which previously existed. Saddam aspired to develop a nuclear capability—in an incremental fashion, irrespective of international pressure and the resulting economic risks—but he intended to focus on ballistic missile and tactical chemical warfare (CW) capabilities.*

▪ *Iran was the pre-eminent motivator of this policy. All senior level Iraqi officials considered Iran to be Iraq's principal enemy in the region. The wish to balance Israel and acquire status and influence in the Arab world were also considerations, but secondary.*

- ***Iraq Survey Group (ISG) judges that events in the 1980s and early 1990s shaped Saddam's belief in the value of WMD. In Saddam's view, WMD helped to save the Regime multiple times. He believed that during the Iran-Iraq war chemical weapons had halted Iranian ground offensives and that ballistic missile attacks on Tehran had broken its political will. Similarly, during Desert Storm, Saddam believed WMD had deterred Coalition Forces from pressing their attack beyond the goal of freeing Kuwait. WMD had even played a role in crushing the Shi'a revolt in the south following the 1991 cease-fire.***
- ***The former Regime had no formal written strategy or plan for the revival of WMD after sanctions. Neither was there an identifiable group of WMD policy makers or planners separate from***

*Saddam. Instead, his lieutenants understood WMD revival was his goal from their long association with Saddam and his infrequent, but firm, verbal comments and directions to them.*

For that reason, it was critically important to Duelfer to get Saddam to personally admit his intention to develop WMD after sanctions. Here's how Duelfer described that "admission" in his book.

It was the second week in June when [Saddam's FBI interrogator George] Piro came to me, beaming. Something was up, because Piro generally was more measured. He related a thoughtful discussion on WMD by Saddam. In the discussion, Saddam clearly stated that it would be his goal to reconstitute his WMD, especially nuclear, to reassert Iraq's place in the region and because it was necessary to match the military capabilities of Iraq's neighbors.

This was the clearest statement of his intentions we could have asked for. It was consistent with much of the physical and financial evidence we had collected. It was consistent with the opinions of many of the key ministers. In Saddam's government, however, there was no tangible exposition of planning or intentions on security issues the way they exist in the West. What counted was what Saddam thought. After months of dialogue and the investment of his own physical and psychological energy, Piro had become close enough for Saddam to share his views on this pivotal subject. This was success. (408)

Mission accomplished! But with the NSA FOIA documents, we see what this success really looked like.

Hussein recognized that Iran continued to develop its weapons capabilities, to include its WMD, while Iraq had lost its weapons capabilities due to the UN inspections and sanctions. Hussein was asked how Iraq would have dealt with the threat from Iran once the UN sanctions were lifted. Hussein replied Iraq would have sought a security agreement with the United States to protect it from threats in the region. Hussein felt such an agreement would not only have benefitted Iraq, but its neighbors, such as Saudi Arabia. SSA Piro agreed that such an agreement would have assisted Iraq immensely. SSA Piro noted due to the history between the two countries, it would have taken some time before the United States would have entered into such an agreement with Iraq.

Further, SSA Piro advised Hussein that paragraph 14 of UN Resolution 687 states that the disarming of Iraq was part of a total disarmament of the entire region, however, that portion of the resolution was not enforceable. The threat from Iran would have loomed over Iraq, especially as Iran continued to advance its weapons capabilities. SSA Piro commented that under those circumstances, it would appear that Iraq would have needed to reconstitute its own weapons program in response. Hussein replied that Iraq would have done what was necessary and agreed that Iraq's technical and scientific abilities exceeded others in the region.

Duelfer declared !mission accomplished! because, just weeks before custody of Saddam was handed over to the Iraqis, Piro got Saddam to admit that he might need to reconstitute his WMD

programs.

But look at the actual content of this admission. Saddam's first response to a question about the ongoing regional threat from Iran was an appeal to a security agreement with the US. But then Piro argued that the US would be unlikely to enter into such an agreement, pointed out a fundamental dissymmetry in the UN's resolutions mandating Iraqi disarmament, and then posited that "it would appear that Iraq would have needed to reconstitute its own weapons program." In response, Saddam said Iraq "would have done what was necessary."

And that, for Duelfer, amounted to the necessary admission from Saddam. Saddam's FBI interrogator all but said there were no means to ensure Iraq's security save by reconstituting its WMD programs, to which Saddam replied he'd do what was necessary. And from that, Duelfer invented a *casus belli* ex post facto.

(Duelfer later describes the \$2,500 pistol Piro bought with the award the CIA gave him for this little "success.")

The exchange is important not just because it confirms what we always suspected—that the Administration's efforts to legitimate its war in the absence of WMD were a political stunt. But also because Piro put Saddam in precisely the place the US put Iran in 2003, when Iran was trying to ensure security without nukes. That is, even as we acknowledge that no one in the Middle East can feel secure (not least because of Israel's nukes), we're unwilling to create conditions that would ensure security without those nukes.

Because, of course, if they did that it'd eliminate their reason for war.