

SCIENTIST WHO DESTROYED IRAQ'S CHEMICAL WEAPONS THE LAST TO BE FREED

In a little noticed piece (best as I can tell, only NYPost picked it up in the US), AFP reports that the last Iraqi WMD scientist still held in prison, Mahmud Faraj Bilal Al Samarrai, is set to be released.

“The judicial authorities have decided to free Mahmud Faraj Bilal al Samarrai,” he said.

That’s welcome news for Bilal al Samarrai, I’m sure. But here’s the detail that ought to interest American taxpayers even more:

In a letter to the CIA in 2006, made public by his lawyer, the former head of research and development at the military industries ministry recalled that he had given himself up to the CIA on March 2, 2003.

[snip]

Samarrai said his immediate superior, General Faez Abdullah Shahin, was never jailed and Saddam scientific adviser General Hammudi al Saadi was freed in 2005, as was deputy premier and military industries minister Abdel Tawab Mullah Hawaish.

The AFP provides the evidence of the bombshell there, but doesn’t make it explicit. This guy “gave himself up” to the CIA on March 2, 2003, more that two weeks before the war started.

Which is all the more troubling paired with the Iraq Survey Group report, which makes clear Bilal al Samarrai (whom they refer to as Bilal)

is the guy who destroyed undeclared chemical weapons in response to IAEA inspections in 1991.

Following a particularly invasive IAEA inspection in late-June 1991, Saddam ordered Dr. Mahmud Faraj Bilal, former deputy of the CW program, to destroy all hidden CW and BW materials, according to an interview with Bilal after OIF

[snip]

A senior Iraqi scientist who directed the destruction of chemical and biological munitions contends that the decision to destroy the hidden materials was made at the end of June 1991. David Kay's inspection and the ensuing controversy prompted Iraqi concerns about renewed war with the United States, according to Dr. Mahmud Firaj Bilal. Amir Rashid contacted Dr. Bilal and ordered that all hidden chemical and biological munitions be destroyed within 48 hours. When Bilal responded that this was impossible, Rashid directed that Bilal use the resources of the Iraqi Air Force and the surface-to-surface missile force to accomplish the task. Dr. Bilal gathered his colleagues from Al Muthanna State Establishment, went to the locations of the stored munitions, and began the destruction.

[snip]

ISG interviewed Dr. Mahmud Firaj Bilal, the Iraqi scientist who supervised the destruction of Iraq's undeclared chemical munitions, along with a number of Iraqi higher officials who were knowledgeable of the weapons destruction. Although other sources have corroborated parts of Dr. Bilal's account, ISG's understanding of Iraq's chemical and biological warfare agent unilateral destruction is heavily dependent on Dr. Bilal's information,

which is a weakness in our analysis. Nevertheless, as with Iraq's long range missiles, we obtained a reasonably coherent account of the disposition of the CW munitions, though we were not able physically to verify the story. The UN has, however, verified some of it.

- *Iraq likely destroyed all 20 concealed CW Al Husayn missile warheads in the summer of 1991, according to Dr. Bilal based on UN-sponsored excavations. All were "binary" GB/GF nerve agent warheads filled with a mixture of isopropanol and cyclohexanol and MPF.*
- *Al Muthanna had dispersed approximately 1024 CW R-400 bombs along various Iraqi airbases. Iraq did not declare some of these to the UN and unilaterally destroyed them in situ. The UN holds these as accounted for, although they were unaware that a small percentage of them were used on the Shia in March 1991 according to multiple sources.*
- *Iraq disposed of 1.5*

tons of spoiled bulk VX nerve agent at the Al Muthanna State Establishment dumpsite.

▪ *Dr. Bilal also stated that Iraq destroyed the following chemical agent precursors:*

▪ *157 tons of the VX precursor phosphorus pentasulfide (P₂S₅) destroyed by mixing it with soil at Saqlawiyah, northwest of Fallujah. UNSCOM-sponsored excavations accounted for about this amount.*

▪ *55 tons of the VX precursor choline destroyed at Qasr al-'ashiq near Samarra'.*

▪ *10 tons of the mustard precursor thiodiglycol destroyed by burning at Saqlawiyah. This precursor was never declared to the UN and had*

been stored in the city of Samarra'. When the rest of the unilateral destruction took place, no one remembered this stock until a month after the rest of the chemical destruction. This realization triggered its destruction.

- Al Muthanna State Establishment gave cyclohexanol, isopropanol, and isopropylamine to various industries for use as solvents.
- Iraq also destroyed a quantity of empty aerial bombs intended for CW use and empty 122-mm CW rockets.
- Bilal insisted that Iraq's CW "Full, Final, and Complete Declaration" is completely accurate regarding the unilateral destruction

of CW munitions.

Meanwhile, at least one of Bilal al Samarraï's colleagues who got set free years ago told the ISG a different story. Hawaish, for example, told the ISG that Saddam had retained his mustard gas.

In a 7 August 2003 debriefing, [Abd al-Tuwab] Huwaysh said that as of early 2003, all 550 mustard rounds were kept by the SRG at Suwayrah, probably the former location of the II RG Corps Headquarters, just north of the Shaykh-Mazar ammunition depot.

Hawaish got set free while the US still ran Iraq, Bilal al Samarri did not.

So more than 9 years after the fact, we learn that the Iraqi scientist who oversaw the destruction of Saddam's CW stock in 1991 gave himself up to the CIA more than two weeks before the war began.

And they've been hiding that fact for all these years by keeping him holed up in prison long after his colleagues—who provided less troubling news to the Americans—got set free.