

Query response a-6758 of 27 May 2009

Iraq: Information on the testing of biological weapons on humans, including Iranian POWs and Iraqi prisoners (possibly in Abu Ghraib)

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Non-English language information is comprehensively summarised in English. Original language quotations are provided for reference.

Testing of biological weapons on humans

In an interview with CNN in January 1998, chief U.N. weapons inspector Richard Butler mentioned that U.N. inspectors had searched for documents about "the possible use of biological agents on prisoners" in Iraq but when they looked for the documents covering the years 1994-1995, nothing was found:

"Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz on Wednesday denied that his country has used humans as subjects for testing biological weapons. "This is one of the lies being used as a pretext for intruding into the headquarters and branches of the Iraqi security agencies," Aziz said at a news conference. Richard Butler, the chief U.N. weapons inspector, told CNN he was surprised that Iraq had been raising this issue in public. Speaking in an interview with CNN, he confirmed that U.N. inspectors had searched for documents about "the possible use of biological agents on prisoners, on live human testing." But he said that, when they looked for the documents covering the years 1994-1995, nothing was found." (CNN, 14 January 1998)

A more detailed article on this issue can be found in the New York Times (NYT) from 16 January 1998:

"Reports of photographic evidence supposedly showing that Iraq tested chemical and biological toxins on prison inmates are inconclusive, United Nations officials familiar with the investigation said today. More intriguing, some diplomats and other officials said, is Iraq's admission in a letter to the Security Council that a senior American investigator,

William Scott Ritter Jr., was looking this week for more solid evidence of such experiments when Iraqi officials blocked him from visiting two sites in his search for evidence of testing on humans. The sites, a prison and a security police compound, were only two of several dozen destinations scheduled by the inspectors.

One piece of evidence, a photograph cited in one television news report, was probably taken well before any such testing occurred, officials said. Charles Duelfer, deputy chairman of the United Nations Special Commission to disarm Iraq, said the photograph, which shows a man with a lesion on his left arm, had been mischaracterized. "We don't know what that means," Mr. Duelfer said. "We certainly cannot draw the conclusion that it's human testing."

The photograph was retrieved more than two years ago by United Nations disarmament inspectors from a foot locker found on a farm in Iraq that concealed a larger cache of documents relating to biological warfare. The farm belonged to Hussein Kamel, son-in-law of President Saddam Hussein and a Government minister responsible for Iraq's weapons programs. When he fled to Jordan in August 1995, other Iraqi officials escorted the inspectors to Mr. Kamel's farm and blamed him for hiding the documents.

Officials today were similarly unimpressed with a videotape that showed experiments being performed on dogs. The videotape surfaced two years ago, they said, and Iraq had subsequently acknowledged its existence. But in a move that caught almost everyone off guard, Nizar Hamdoon, Iraq's representative to the United Nations, sent a letter of complaint to the Security Council on Tuesday, in effect confirming what Mr. Ritter was looking for -- and then authorized its circulation as a United Nations document. Mr. Hamdoon's letter said that Mr. Ritter had informed Iraqi officials that he intended to inspect "a sensitive security service" installation and the Abu Ghraib prison, among other sites. "He claimed that in the summer of 1995, between June and August, a number of prisoners had been sent from this site to Abu Ghraib prison and from there to a secret location where tests of chemical and biological agents had been performed on them," the letter said. Mr. Hamdoon quoted Mr. Ritter as contending that equipment of Polish origin had been imported into Iraq "in an undeclared manner" for a pesticide plant that could be converted to produce chemical agents. Mr. Hamdoon called the accusation "groundless" and a pretext to justify inspecting a site run by Iraq's intelligence service. Until Mr. Hamdoon sent his letter, Richard Butler, the commission chairman, had resolved not to disclose what was privileged information from a member state, but the Iraqis did it for him." (NYT, 16 January 1998)

In their book on the United Nations and Iraq published in 2003, Jean E. Krasno and James S. Sutterlin give more background information on the above-mentioned 1998 UN weapons inspections. They mention reports about tests of biological weapons (BW) on prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison in 1994 and conclude that Iraq had been testing biological agents on human beings:

"During Richard Butler's tenure as Executive Chairman, acting on information from Iraqi defectors, UNSCOM launched inspection 227 (January 12–16, 1998) to the Abu Ghraib

prison where it had been reported that in 1994, BW were being tested on human beings who were inmates of the facility. Senior UNSCOM biologist, Dr. Gabrielle Kraatz-Wadsack, led the inspection to the prison administration building to inspect the records. She discovered that the only year for which all the records were missing was 1994, the very year of the reported testing. Obviously, the records had been removed and perhaps only shortly before her arrival because the Iraqis immediately shut down her inspection that day and ended the entire UNSCOM 227 mission. Clearly, Iraq had been testing biological agents on human beings as well as animals but was thwarting UNSCOM efforts to uncover proof. The alarming aspect of this new evidence was not only that it involved human testing but that it was done years after the end of the Gulf War when Iraq was supposed to have been disarmed of WMD." (Krasno/Sutterlin, 2003, p. 64)

On 2 October 2003, David Kay, head of the Iraq Survey Group (ISG), gave his statements before the US Congress on the Interim Progress Report on the ISG's investigation into Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programmes. One of the discoveries by ISG was "a prison laboratory complex, possibly used in human testing of BW (biological weapons) agents":

"We have discovered dozens of WMD-related program activities and significant amounts of equipment that Iraq concealed from the United Nations during the inspections that began in late 2002. The discovery of these deliberate concealment efforts have come about both through the admissions of Iraqi scientists and officials concerning information they deliberately withheld and through physical evidence of equipment and activities that ISG has discovered that should have been declared to the U.N. Let me just give you a few examples of these concealment efforts, some of which I will elaborate on later:

-- A clandestine network of laboratories and safe houses within the Iraqi Intelligence Service that contained equipment subject to U.N. monitoring and suitable for continuing CBW [chemical-biological weapons] research.

-- A prison laboratory complex, possibly used in human testing of BW [biological weapons] agents, that Iraqi officials working to prepare for U.N. inspections were explicitly ordered not to declare to the U.N." (Kay, 2 October 2003)

In his statements before the US Congress, Kay also mentions reports since 1996 about human testing activities using chemical and biological substances:

"Additional information is beginning to corroborate reporting since 1996 about human testing activities using chemical and biological substances, but progress in this area is slow given the concern of knowledgeable Iraqi personnel about their being prosecuted for crimes against humanity." (Kay, 2 October 2003)

The final report containing the findings of the ISG on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction was published by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in September 2004. The following passages of Volume 3 on Biological Warfare of this report refer to experiments and testing on human beings, among them prisoners, in relation to biological weapons:

"Under the aegis of the intelligence service, a secretive team developed assassination instruments using poisons or toxins for the Iraqi state. A small group of scientists, doctors

and technicians conducted secret experiments on human beings, resulting in their deaths. The aim was probably the development of poisons, including ricin and aflatoxin to eliminate or debilitate the Regime's opponents. It appears that testing on humans continued until the mid 1990s. There is no evidence to link these tests with the development of BW agents for military use." (CIA, 30 September 2004)

"Debriefings since April 2003 of sources formerly involved with BW efforts indicate that Iraq at least continued research on aflatoxin throughout the 1990s. In 1994, a DGS [Directorate of General Security] forensics laboratory produced 150 ml of aflatoxin for testing on humans, according to a mid-level scientist who formerly worked in the BW program and visited the site." (CIA, 30 September 2004)

"The evidence surrounding Iraq's investigation of ricin for BW purposes is unclear, and thus ISG can offer no definitive conclusion. It is clear that Baghdad had weaponized ricin in at least a limited fashion prior to the first Gulf war. There is at least some evidence of post-war IIS involvement in ricin research and possible human testing, but ISG developed no definitive information with which to confirm reports of post-war production." (CIA, 30 September 2004)

"ISG has found a number of small IIS [Iraqi Intelligence Service] laboratories, some containing biological equipment. There are reports that aflatoxin and ricin work has been conducted by the IIS into the 1990s and that human experimentation occurred. Given the historical connections of the IIS with Iraq's BW program, it is a concern that the nature, purpose and those involved at these small IIS laboratories have not been identified by ISG. This is an unresolved issue that will be further investigated." (CIA, 30 September 2004)

"According to a former mid-level BW scientist, Iraq conducted tests on prisoners using aflatoxin in 1994 at an undeclared clandestine facility. A former member of the NMD [National Monitoring Directorate] indicated he visited the facility in 1997 or 1998 to survey the equipment for possible declaration to the UN; he was told on-site that none of the equipment or activities there would be declared. ISG also has evidence that, possibly as recently as 1994, an IIS [Iraqi Intelligence Service] chemist who immigrated to Iraq from Egypt, Dr. Muhammad 'Abd-al-Mun'im Al Azmirli (now deceased), experimented on prisoners with ricin resulting in their deaths." (CIA, 30 September 2004)

Tests on Iranian Prisoners of War

An article released by Associated Press in January 1998 refers to a Sunday Times report according to which Iraq had tested anthrax on Iranian prisoners of war in the 1980s:

"Iranian prisoners of war died in agony when Iraq tested the deadly biological agent anthrax on them during the 1980s, The Sunday Times in London reported. According to the newspaper, U.N. weapons inspectors, Iraqi dissidents and Israeli intelligence said the tests began during Iraq's eight-year war with Iran. The Sunday Times quoted Israeli military intelligence sources as saying that on one occasion, 10 Iranian prisoners of war were taken to an area near Iraq's border with Saudi Arabia, where they were lashed to

posts and "left helpless as an anthrax bomb was exploded by remote control 15 yards away." Phone calls by The Associated Press to the Iraqi Embassy in London were not answered Sunday. Iraq repeatedly has said it has not conducted chemical and biological weapons tests on humans. But it has acknowledged using animals in such tests before the United Nations ordered the weapons destroyed as a condition for ending the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

U.N. weapons inspectors believe anthrax was one of the main toxins developed as part of Iraq's biological warfare program. The inspectors have accused Saddam's government of hiding the means to manufacture chemical and biological agents. Neither inspectors in New York nor Bahrain were available for comment on the report Sunday. The Sunday Times quoted Iraqi sources as saying some of the human research was conducted at an underground facility near Salman Pak, southwest of Baghdad.

In one experiment, the newspaper said 15 Kurdish prisoners were tied up in a field while shells containing camel pox, a mild virus, were dropped from a light aircraft. "The results were slower, but the test was judged a success; the prisoners fell ill within a week," the newspaper said." (Associated Press, 18 January 1998)

In January 2003, the Arabic News Website Al-Bawaba reports about the female scientist Dr. Rihab Taha, the head of Iraq's germ warfare programme, who was also called "Dr. Germ". According to the article, Dr. Taha had tested biological weapons on Iranian prisoners of war:

"The first round of UN weapons inspectors to Iraq in the 1990s recovered video tapes of Taha's tests on animals but the images of dying creatures in glass boxes were so disgusting that they have never been released. However, there is evidence Dr. Germ tested her biological weapons on human beings as well. According to Western intelligence sources, Taha watched closely behind a thick glass screen as her lethal moulds, bacteria and viruses were tested on Iranian prisoners of war strapped to beds in an underground testing facility at Al Hakam. In yet another test, 12 Iranian prisoners were tied to posts at an open-air test site near Iraq's border with the Saudi Kingdom, as shells loaded with anthrax were blown up a few yards away. The prisoners were given helmets to protect them from shrapnel so the full effect of the bacteria could be properly monitored. Each died from the disease a few days later. Furthermore, the first UN inspectors suspect Dr. Germ deliberately exposed Iraqi prison populations to certain diseases to gauge their effect as weapons of war. Among the diseases the prisoners were reportedly exposed to were haemorrhagic conjunctivitis, which temporarily blinds the victim and makes their eyes bleed, Crimean Congo Fever, and Camel Pox, a disease that slowly kills the sufferer from blood loss through open skin lesions. These experiments may have never come to light if it were not for the defection of General Hussein Kamal, son-in-law of Saddam Hussein and a weapons of mass destruction expert. In 1995, Kamal defected from Iraq to Jordan where he told the world about Dr. Germ, thus making him the first to expose Taha's work and the killer diseases that Iraq holds in reserve." (Al-Bawaba, 14 January 2003)

Among the sources consulted by ACCORD within time constraints no further information could be found on the subject of tests of biological weapons on Iranian prisoners of war.

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