

Iraq is not the only country in the region with weapons of mass destruction (WMD)

WMD in the Middle East

The first use of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East was by British forces in 1917, at a time when Britain occupied territory that was later to become Iraq. Chemical weapons were used in the process of welding the Kurdish north, the Shia south and the Sunni tribes around Baghdad, into an invented Iraqi 'kingdom' to control the region's oil. Winston Churchill, then Colonial Secretary, found "turbulent tribes" of Arabs were fighting this imperialism with some success and encouraged the use of chemical weapons. There was some opposition to this in Whitehall but Churchill wrote: "I do not understand this squeamishness about the use of gas. I am strongly in favour of using poison gas against uncivilised tribes."¹

Today, a snapshot of suspected WMD programmes in the Middle East, whose development was aided by Western governments and corporations, reveals a disturbing picture.

SYRIA: Syria has one of the largest chemical weapons stockpiles in the Middle East, with a ready supply of scud missiles, to be used as delivery systems. According to the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, Syria began developing an offensive chemical warfare program in the early 1970s "as a result of a perceived Israeli threat", and now probably has a biological weapons programme. CIA Director, William Webster, testified in 1989 that: "*West European firms were instrumental in supplying the required precursor chemicals and equipment. Without the provision of these key elements, Damascus would not have been able to produce chemical weapons.*"² ([click here](#))

IRAN: Many analysts think Iran is closer to producing a nuclear weapon than Iraq, and the U.S. government claims it may have up to several thousand tons of weaponised chemical agents ([click here](#)). Iran denies these allegations and regularly calls for a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East.

EGYPT: Egypt is widely believed to have used chemical weapons in Yemen in the 1960s, and is still thought to maintain chemical weapons capability. Egypt is not believed to be pursuing new WMD systems at this time, and actively supports a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free-Zone in the Middle East³. ([click here](#))

ISRAEL: Israel has the oldest and largest nuclear weapons programme in the Middle East. Its official position is ambiguous: it claims it "will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the region" and the established nuclear weapons states have been happy with this. However, analysts agree that it has built between 100 and 400 nuclear weapons during a programme that started in the 1950s, a sophisticated arsenal and bigger than Britain's.⁴ ([click here](#)) Israel has not signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty or any other arms control treaty and refuses UN inspections of its nuclear facilities.

Israel has missiles with a range of at least 3,500km, and the only anti-ballistic missile system in the world. Its delivery systems include three nuclear submarines that can be armed with nuclear tipped cruise missiles.⁵ Israel is thought to have considerable chemical and biological weapons programmes, but information about them is scarce. Israel has allegedly used chemical and biological weapons in the past.⁶

IRAQ: As of 1990, Iraq had an advanced nuclear weapons programme and large chemical and biological warfare stockpiles, obtained with help from [many companies](#) in many countries and with the explicit knowledge of the U.S. and other western governments. Much of its WMD capacity was identified and destroyed by UN inspectors after the 1991 Gulf War (including 40,000 chemical weapons and 30 missiles designed to deliver them). Iraq claims all its WMD stocks and facilities were destroyed. There are questions, however, over how many of its chemical and biological elements remain, although the

¹ Geoff Simons, [IRAQ: FROM SUMER TO SUDAN](#). London: St. Martins Press, 1994, pages 179-181

² http://www.nti.org/e_research/e1_syria_cwabstracts.html

³ http://www.nti.org/e_research/e1_egypt_1.html

⁴ <http://www.wagingpeace.org/articles/02.03/0331steinbachisraeli.htm>

⁵ <http://www.dolphin.org.il/press/#FAS>

⁶ http://www.indexonline.org/news/20030301_103_sammonds.shtml

majority of the international community does not think it is in possession of nuclear weapons or has the capability to build them. Current weapons inspections have revealed no trace of nuclear, chemical or biological agents in any site visited⁷ or any evidence that Iraq has attempted to re-start its nuclear programme.⁸

WMD in the Rest of the World

The race for weapons of mass destruction is not isolated to the Middle East. India and Pakistan shocked the world when they publicly announced their nuclear weapons testing programmes through the detonation of small yield (five to twenty-five thousands tons of TNT equivalent) nuclear bombs. The West responded by imposing economic and technical sanctions but these were mostly lifted in order to ensure their support for the conflict in Afghanistan. India and Pakistan have now become accepted members of the international community and their illegal nuclear weapons programmes are largely being ignored.

It is not hard to imagine why North Korea, for example, now appears poised to follow suit. The five permanent members of the Security Council – the U.S., U.K., France, Russia and China - have the largest arsenals of nuclear weapons of all: over 35,000 of them. They are all working to keep these arsenals and on improving and, if necessary, increasing them. All nations must immediately ban nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction to avoid heading for a global nuclear, or other WMD, free-for-all.

Why the Double Standards?

The U.S., U.K. and most of Western Europe helped arm Saddam Hussein with WMD, conventional weapons and delivery vehicles. A 1992 U.S. Senate committee report revealed that the U.S. had exported chemical, biological, nuclear, and missile-system equipment to Iraq, including anthrax, exported by the U.S. Center for Disease Control. According to the report, this was done with the full knowledge of the Reagan Administration, whose envoy, Donald Rumsfeld, visited Saddam Hussein in 1984 to reopen U.S.-Iraq relations after declassifying Iraq from the status of a terrorist-supporting state.

150 western companies, including 24 from the U.S., have supplied Iraq with equipment and know-how for its WMD programmes since 1975. Iraq supplied this information in its report to the UN in December 2002, but the U.S. vetted the material due to its 'sensitive' nature prior to distributing it to the non-permanent members of the Security Council.⁹ A full version of the report was leaked to the press.

Even after Iraq's horrendous 1988 attacks on Halabja, which killed at least 5,000 Kurdish civilians in Iraq, and which the U.S. and U.K. governments repeatedly cite as a reason to get rid of Saddam Hussein, western officials bent over backwards to play down the truth, and significance of, these attacks. They initially blamed Iran for the atrocity and "[i]n December 1988, Dow Chemical sold \$1.5 million of pesticides to Iraq, despite U.S. government concerns that they could be used as chemical warfare agents. An Export-Import Bank official reported in a memorandum that he could find "no reason" to stop the sale, despite evidence that the pesticides were "highly toxic" to humans and would cause death "from asphyxiation."¹⁰

It is clear these double standards are being applied because it was in the strategic interest of the U.S. and other governments to support Saddam Hussein when he was waging war with his and their arch-enemy, Iran. Now that Iraq is no longer a strategic ally, it must be disarmed at all costs, using whatever arguments the public can be convinced to believe.

Greenpeace shares the belief that Iraq must be disarmed of any weapons of mass destruction it may possess, but believes that all other countries must be subject to the same rules. The tools for a peaceful, non-violent transition to a world free of weapons of mass destruction exist within the UN treaty system, and Greenpeace calls on all countries to support and further develop these mechanisms in good faith.

⁷ Hans Blix, speaking to the NY Times, 31 January

⁸ Mohammed el Baradei, 31 January

⁹ <http://news.independent.co.uk/world/politics/story.jsp?story=362566>

¹⁰ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A52241-2002Dec29.html>