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Inspectors have covered CIA's sites of 'concern'

BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP) — In almost two months of surprise visits across Iraq, U.N. arms monitors have inspected 13 sites identified by U.S. and British intelligence agencies as major "facilities of concern," and reported no signs of revived weapons building, an Associated Press analysis shows.

The review of intelligence reports and U.N. records underlines chief inspector Hans Blix's statement that the international experts have uncovered no "smoking guns" in Iraq in almost 400 inspections since late November.

Blix flies to Baghdad on Sunday to seek more information from Iraqi officials to resolve discrepancies in accounts of old weapons of mass destruction — including, for example, of a dozen empty chemical warheads found last week. But his U.N. teams' work, keying on locations spotlighted by Washington and London, seems thus far to support Iraq's contention that its old weapons establishment is not making new forbidden arms.

Since those U.S.-British assessments were issued last September and October, Washington officials have said repeatedly they have additional, undisclosed information — "solid" evidence — that Baghdad is violating the U.N. ban on Iraqi chemical, biological and nuclear arms. But they have made no such information public.

Blix's deputy, Demetrius Perricos, told reporters Wednesday that some intelligence tips received have been useful, but "some of them are speculations." Another U.N. source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said on the eve of the visit by Blix and chief nuclear inspector Mohamed ElBaradei that no new "actionable" intelligence has been forthcoming.

Many of the suspicions raised in the headline-making U.S.-British reports were based on satellite imagery of Iraqi installations, remote photos taken during the inspectors' four-year absence from Iraq. Now that more than 100 U.N. specialists can again "see under the roofs," as Perricos put it, the alarms look less warranted.

American intelligence analysts, for example, wrote that new structures photographed at Tuwaita, a former nuclear weapons complex south of Baghdad, might indicate a revival of weapons work. Since Dec. 4, however, inspectors from ElBaradei's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have scrutinized that vast complex almost a dozen times, and reported no violations.

In the same way, the CIA raised alarm in October about the al-Mutasim missile factory south of Baghdad, where the Iraqis are building their Ababil-100 short-range missile under a U.N. edict prohibiting such weapons with ranges longer than 90 miles.

"The size of certain facilities there," the CIA alleged, "suggests that Baghdad is preparing to develop systems that are prohibited by the U.N." — that is, longer-range weapons.

After five unannounced visits to al-Mutasim in the past month, however, the U.N. missile experts have reported no clear evidence of such intentions. The specialists will maintain a close watch on the Mutasim plant, however, as part of a long-term disarmament program keeping the eyes of the world on the Iraqi military-industrial establishment.

The long-term monitors will focus, too, on the Fallujah chemical complex west of Baghdad, where the Iraqis have rebuilt a chlorine production operation wrecked by U.S. bombing in the 1991 Gulf War. Chlorine, a chemical with many civilian uses, can also be a component of chemical weapons.

The CIA report said the "dual-use" operation could be diverted quickly to such banned production, and Iraq "is trying to hide the activities of the Fallujah plant."

But the inspection teams — with U.N. authorization to drop in anywhere, anytime unannounced — have surveyed the Fallujah site three times since December, most recently on Jan. 8. The next day, Blix told the U.N. Security Council, "If we had found any 'smoking gun' (in Iraq) we would have reported it to the Council."

Blix noted previously that inspectors have discovered dual-use equipment at Fallujah that was disabled by other U.N. inspectors in the 1990s but was repaired and put back into service by the Iraqis. His agency will monitor that equipment, he said.

Three other examples of what last September's British intelligence report described as "facilities of concern," and the U.N. follow-up:


- **Al-Qaim uranium refinery.** In addition to being on the British list, U.S. analysts last October said new structures at this site in the western desert might signal renewed work on nuclear weapons. In the 1980s, the Iraqis had refined uranium at the phosphates complex in the early stages of an effort to build a nuclear bomb, a program dismantled by the IAEA in the 1990s. But after a thorough two-day survey in December, and another surprise visit by helicopter on Jan. 7, the U.N. inspectors did not report finding such violations.
- **Al-Dawrah plant.** This animal vaccine plant west of Baghdad produced botulin toxin in the 1980s as part of the Iraqi biological weapons program later uncovered by the United Nations. The recent CIA report contended Iraq's announcement two years ago that it was renovating the facility might mask new weapons plans. But inspectors and journalists who scoured the small site on Nov. 28 found it abandoned and full of trash. The United Nations will monitor it.
- **Al-Rafah test site.** On their first day of renewed inspections, Nov. 27, the U.N. experts sped to this installation, west of Baghdad, where missile engines are tested. The CIA report had said "the only plausible explanation" for a new, larger test stand sighted at Al-Rafah was that the Iraqis were developing prohibited longer-range missiles. The inspectors reported no such conclusion, however, and last week observed the test firing of a U.N.-authorized engine at the site.

The seven other "facilities of concern" scrutinized by U.N. inspectors were the nuclear facilities at Al-Furat, Al-Sharqat and Al-Taji; the Ibn Sina and Qa Qa chemical plants; the Amariyah vaccine institute; and the Al-Mamoun missile fuel plant.

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