

### **Chemical Warfare Finding 3**

Human intelligence collection against Iraq's chemical activities was paltry, and much has subsequently proved problematic.

Analysts were not alone in contributing to a flawed assessment about a resuscitant Iraqi CW program. Collectors, too, were involved—but mostly by their conspicuous absence. Against Iraq’s program, Intelligence Community collectors failed to produce much either in terms of quantity or, worse, validity, thus making analysts’ jobs considerably harder, and influencing analysts to place more weight on the imagery intelligence than it could logically bear.

A small quantity of human source reporting supplied the bulk of the narrow band of intelligence supplementing the imagery intelligence. And the most striking fact about reporting on Iraq’s CW program was, as with other elements of Iraq’s weapons programs, its paucity. Yet there was more than just scarcity, for—as with sources on Iraq’s supposed BW program—many of the CW sources subsequently proved unreliable. Indeed, perhaps even more so that with the BW sources, Community analysts should have been more cautious about using the CW sources’ reporting, as much of it was deeply problematic on its face. In our view, prior to the war, analysts should have viewed at least three human sources more skeptically than they did. In addition, post-war, questions about the veracity of two other human sources have also surfaced.

### ***Sources Whose Reliability Should Have Been Questioned Prior to the NIE***

One source, an Iraqi defector who had worked as a chemist in Iraq through the 1990s, reported information that made its way into the NIE.<sup>526</sup> This happened even though, from the start of his relations with the U.S. Intelligence Community, the Community had deemed aspects of his reporting not credible. His information survived, despite these indications that he might be an unreliable source, because analysts simply rejected those parts of his reporting that seemed implausible and accepted the rest. For example, he claimed that Iraq had produced a combined nuclear-biological-chemical weapon, a claim that analysts recognized at the time as absurd.<sup>527</sup> Analysts were also skeptical of his claim that Iraq had begun producing “tons” of VX in 1998 in mobile labs, because such labs would be very unlikely to have the capacity to produce such large amounts of agent.<sup>528</sup>

Despite these highly suspect claims, analysts credited the source’s reporting that Iraq had successfully stabilized VX.<sup>529</sup> As one analyst reviewing his reporting after the war said of it, “half seems credible and half seems preposterous.”<sup>530</sup> Yet at the time the NIE was written, with substantial skepticism about the validity of much of his information, analysts nevertheless judged his

reporting to be “moderately credible.”<sup>531</sup> In our view, given that important parts of his information were simply unbelievable and recognized as such by analysts, the Community should have approached him and his intelligence with more caution—and certainly should have been more skeptical about using selections from his reporting in the authoritative NIE.

Indeed, analytic skepticism about the source’s claims was later confirmed by revelations about his operational history, revelations that led to the Intelligence Community deeming him a fabricator and recalling his reporting, although not all of his reporting was recalled until almost one year after the war started.<sup>532</sup> He had initially come to the CIA’s attention via a foreign intelligence service, which asked for the CIA’s assistance after he had approached them.<sup>533</sup> In March 2003, however, the CIA terminated contact with him, after administering an examination in February 2003 during which he was deceptive. CIA had also learned that he had—before approaching this foreign service—already been debriefed by two other intelligence services, indicating that he was something of an “information peddler.”<sup>534</sup> Moreover, one of these two services had concluded that although his pre-1991 information was credible, his post-1991 information was both not credible and possibly “directed” by a hostile service.<sup>535</sup> CIA started to recall his reporting in March 2003, but did not recall all of it until February 2004.<sup>536</sup>

Another source, who was described as a contact with “good but historical access” but lacking “an established reporting record,” reported in July 2002 that, as of 1998, Iraq was producing mustard and binary chemical agents.<sup>537</sup> At the same time, he also reported on a “wide range of disparate subjects,” including on Iraq’s missile program and nuclear and biological weapons programs.<sup>538</sup> Such broad access, on its face, was inconsistent with what analysts understood to be Iraq’s well-known tendency towards compartmentation of sensitive weapons programs.<sup>539</sup> Yet because of the Community’s *own* compartmentation—working-level analysts saw reporting on *their* area but not on others—they did not realize at the time that one source was reporting on a range of topics for which he was unlikely to have access.<sup>540</sup> Moreover, although analysts did not know it at the time, the source obtained his information from unknown and undescribed sub-sources.<sup>541</sup>

Finally, a third source provided information that was technically implausible on its face. His reporting claimed that Iraq had constructed a factory for the production of castor oil that could be used for the production of sarin.<sup>542</sup>

Although castor beans can be used to make ricin, not sarin—a fact that analysts readily understood—analysts did not discount the information.<sup>543</sup> Instead, they interpreted it in a way that would cure the technical difficulty, reading it as indicating that the facility could produce *both* sarin and ricin.<sup>544</sup> But in so doing, analysts were consciously compensating for technical errors in the reporting. This exercise of “compensating for errors” in the reporting may well be appropriate in some instances, as when the source of the report may not have the competence to report accurately on a given technical subject.<sup>545</sup> But such speculative interpretation must be carefully balanced with a healthy skepticism, especially when, as in the case of Iraq’s CW program, the intelligence as a whole on the subject is weak and analysts’ underlying assumptions are strong. An untethered “compensating for errors” runs the risk of skewing the analysis in the direction of those assumptions, as, unfortunately, happened here.

### ***Sources Whose Reliability Has Been Questioned After the NIE***

The remaining human intelligence sources relied upon to support the conclusion that Iraq had restarted CW production, while not so problematic on the surface as the sources just described, have become questionable in hindsight.

One liaison source, details about whom cannot be disclosed at this level of classification, reported on production and stocks of chemical and biological weapons and agents, based on what he learned from others in his circle of high-level contacts in Baghdad.<sup>546</sup> While this source provided general information on Iraq’s CW program, he provided few details. In our view, the bottom line on this source was that he had no personal knowledge of CW and provided few details of CW capabilities—factors that should have prompted caution in using his reporting as significant evidence that the Iraqis had restarted CW production.

One other human source—while unlikely to have affected the NIE because his reporting dissemination was so limited—was also called into question after the start of the war. In September 2002, a liaison service reported that a senior Iraqi official had said that Iraq was producing and stockpiling chemical weapons.<sup>547</sup> The source of the information claimed to have spoken with this senior official on this topic. CIA was able to confirm at the time of the report that the senior official had been in contact with the source. After the start of the war, however, when CIA officers interviewed the senior official, he denied ever making such comments. Although the CIA’s Directorate of Operations

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requested liaison assistance in clarifying this issue, as of March 2005 the issue remained unresolved.



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