



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on October 15, 2014

## Chemical Weapons Found in Iraq Were Not Those Used to Justify Invasion

U.S. troops and U.S.-trained Iraqi forces uncovered about 5,000 chemical weapons in Iraq between 2004 and 2011 and soldiers were injured by these weapons in six instances. However, the weapons had not been manufactured during an active, ongoing chemical weapons program, which the Bush administration cited as justification for the 2003 invasion of Iraq.



*Details of the discovery of these weapons were published by the New York Times on October 14, in a lengthy, 9,000-word report written by former Marine Corps officer and veteran journalist C.J. Chivers.*

Despite injuries to our troops, the U.S. government withheld information about the discovery of the weapons even from troops it sent into harm's way and from military doctors.

“‘Nothing of significance’ is what I was ordered to say,” retired Army Major Jarrod Lampier told the *Times*. Lampier was on site when the largest chemical weapons dump, containing 2,400 warheads, was found.

The *Times* report offered reasons why the news of the discovery of the weapons and the injuries they inflicted on our soldiers was withheld from the public:

Participants in the chemical weapons discoveries said the United States suppressed knowledge of finds for multiple reasons, including that the government bristled at further acknowledgment it had been wrong. “They needed something to say that after Sept. 11 Saddam used chemical rounds,” Lampier said. “And all of this was from the pre-1991 era.”

Others pointed to another embarrassment. In five of six incidents in which troops were wounded by chemical agents, the munitions appeared to have been designed in the United States, manufactured in Europe and filled in chemical agent production lines built in Iraq by Western companies.

All the weapons found in Iraq were produced during a crash program started in the 1980s for use against Iran during the Iran-Iraq War from September 1980 to August 1988. Since the overthrow of the Shah in the 1979 Iranian revolution, and the subsequent hostage crisis that began with the occupation of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran by Iranian revolutionaries on November 4, 1979 — after which 52 American diplomats and citizens were held hostage for 444 days — the United States and the revolutionary Iranian government had regarded each other as fierce adversaries.

With this history, the United States covertly aided Saddam Hussein in his war against Iran. A report in the *New York Times* on August 18, 2002 referenced then-current statements made by President George W. Bush and his national security advisor, Condoleezza Rice, that Iraqi use of chemical weapons against Iran was justification for “regime change” in Iraq. The article, headlined “Officers Say U.S. Aided Iraq



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in War Despite Use of Gas,” pointed to the blatant hypocrisy of the Bush administration’s position, given U.S. complicity in Iraq’s earlier chemical weapons program.

When the *Times* contacted Frank Carlucci, the Reagan administration defense secretary from 1987-89, he stated: “I did agree that Iraq should not lose the war, but I certainly had no foreknowledge of their use of chemical weapons.”

Col. Walter Lang, retired, the senior defense intelligence officer at the time of the Iraq-Iran War, told the *Times* he would not discuss classified information, but added that both DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency) and CIA officials “were desperate to make sure that Iraq did not lose” to Iran.

“The use of gas on the battlefield by the Iraqis was not a matter of deep strategic concern,” Land said. He added that Reagan’s aides were more concerned that Iran not break through to the Fao Peninsula and spread the Islamic revolution to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Colonel Lang said that the DIA “would have never accepted the use of chemical weapons against civilians, but the use against military objectives was seen as inevitable in the Iraqi struggle for survival.”

The chemical weapons discovered during the post-Saddam U.S. occupation of Iraq, according to what was revealed in this latest exposé, were basically surplus war materiel left over from Iraq’s war with Iran. The *Times* report noted:

All had been manufactured before 1991, participants said. Filthy, rusty or corroded, a large fraction of them could not be readily identified as chemical weapons at all. Some were empty, though many of them still contained potent mustard agent or residual sarin. Most could not have been used as designed, and when they ruptured dispersed the chemical agents over a limited area, according to those who collected the majority of them.

Despite the fact there is no evidence that Saddam’s government manufactured chemical weapons after 1991, President Bush, on September 12, 2002, while attempting to build a case for the 2003 Iraq invasion, said: “Right now, Iraq is expanding and improving facilities that were used for the production of biological weapons.” (Unlike the chemical weapons found by U.S. troops, no biological weapons at all were found.)

Bush continued, “The regime is rebuilding and expanding facilities capable of producing chemical weapons.”

Had the discovery of the chemical weapons been useful to the Bush administration when they were first uncovered, there is little doubt that their discovery would have been widely publicized by the White House to justify the 2003 invasion. Instead, their discovery was kept a secret, even when hiding their existence posed a serious threat to our troops in Iraq. Far from justifying the invasion of Iraq, the age and obsolescence of the weapons only confirmed that the invasion had been launched under false pretenses.

In our July 6, 2008 article, [“Did We Get Lied Into War?”](#) we described the findings of a 170-page report compiled by the Senate Intelligence Committee, concluding five years of investigations. The committee focused especially on five key speeches made by administration officials concerning “the threats posed by Iraq, Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, Iraqi ties to terrorist groups, and possible consequences of a US invasion of Iraq.” It selected statements from those five speeches pertaining to eight categories: nuclear weapons, biological weapons, chemical weapons, weapons of mass destruction, methods of



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delivery, links to terrorism, regime intent, and assessments about the postwar situation in Iraq.

We will look at what the Senate report said about chemical weapons. It first cited an excerpt from a Bush speech delivered on September 12, 2002:

United Nations' inspections also revealed that Iraq likely maintains stockpiles of VX, mustard and other chemical agents, and that the regime is rebuilding and expanding facilities capable of producing chemical weapons.

The Senate report offered this reaction to the Bush assertion:

The committee's conclusions initially related that statements by the administration "regarding Iraq's possession of chemical weapons were substantiated by intelligence information." But then it added: "Statements ... regarding Iraq's chemical weapons production capability and activities did not reflect the intelligence community's uncertainties as to whether such production was ongoing." [Italics in original.]

The committee's "postwar findings" once more contradict prewar administration allegations, finding: "The Iraq Survey Group conducted its review of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs and found that there 'were no caches of CW munitions.'"

But Saddam's antique store of chemical weapons, some of which were developed with the help of Western governments to use against Iran, have not outlived their usefulness. The *Times* report notes:

Many chemical weapons incidents clustered around the ruins of the Muthanna State Establishment, the center of Iraqi chemical agent production in the 1980s.

Since June, the compound has been held by the Islamic State [ISIS], the world's most radical and violent jihadist group.

It would not be surprising if our government soon announced that we must send troops to Iraq to prevent ISIS from accumulating some of those same second-hand chemical weapons that were used to justify the removal of Saddam Hussein.

*Photo: AP Images*

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