



Yousef Altan / AP

Wealth of information: Hussein Kamel, former Iraqi minister of military industry

Exclusive: The Defector's Secrets

Before his death, a key defector said Iraq had destroyed all its chemical and biological weapons but had retained the design and engineering details of its WMD

by John Barry
Newsweek

March 3 issue - Hussein Kamel, the highest-ranking Iraqi official ever to defect from Saddam Hussein's inner circle, told CIA and British intelligence officers and U.N. inspectors in the summer of 1995 that after the Gulf War, Iraq destroyed all its chemical and biological weapons stocks and the missiles to deliver them.

KAMEL WAS SADDAM Hussein's son-in-law and had direct knowledge of what he claimed: for 10 years he had run Iraq's nuclear, chemical, biological and missile programs. Kamel told his Western interrogators that he hoped his revelations would trigger Saddam's overthrow. But after six months in exile in Jordan, Kamel realized the United States would not support his dream of becoming Iraq's ruler after Saddam's demise. He chose to return to Iraq -- where he was promptly killed.

Kamel's revelations about the destruction of Iraq's WMD stocks were hushed up by the U.N. inspectors, sources say, for two reasons. Saddam did not know how much Kamel had revealed, and the inspectors hoped to bluff Saddam into disclosing still more. And Iraq has never shown the documentation to support Kamel's story. Still, the defector's tale raises questions about whether the WMD stockpiles attributed to Iraq still exist.

Kamel said Iraq had not abandoned its WMD ambitions. The stocks had been destroyed to hide the programs from the U.N. inspectors, but Iraq had retained the design and engineering details of these weapons. Kamel talked of hidden blueprints, computer disks, microfiches and even missile-warhead molds. "People who work in MIC [Iraq's Military Industrial Commission, which oversaw the country's WMD programs] were asked to take documents to their houses," he said. Why preserve this technical material? Said Kamel: "It is the first step to return to production" after U.N. inspections wind down.

Kamel was interrogated in separate sessions by the CIA, Britain's M.I.6 and a trio from the United Nations, led by the inspection team's head, Rolf Ekeus. *Newsweek* has obtained the notes of Kamel's U.N. debrief, and verified that the document is authentic. *Newsweek* has also learned that Kamel told the same story to the CIA and M.I.6. (The CIA did not respond to a request for comment.)

The notes of the U.N. interrogation -- a three-hour stretch one August evening in 1995 -- show that Kamel was a gold mine of information. He had a good memory and, piece by piece, he laid out the main personnel, sites and progress of each WMD program. Kamel was a manager -- not a scientist or engineer -- and, sources say, some of his technical assertions were later found to be faulty. (A military aide who defected with Kamel was apparently a more reliable source of technical data. This aide backed Kamel's assertions about the destruction of WMD stocks.) But, overall, Kamel's information was "almost embarrassing, it was so extensive," Ekeus recalled -- including the fact that Ekeus's own Arabic translator, a Syrian, was, according to Kamel, an Iraqi agent who had been reporting to Kamel himself all along.

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