

The Gulf War: 20 Years Later

Was the war worth the blood and treasure we spent on it? Here's whom to ask.



by Kenneth R. Timmerman

Monday marked the twentieth anniversary of the second Gulf war, which detractors call the invasion of Iraq. I have always looked at it as the liberation, as do many Iraqis.

But most Americans have been taught a history of lies, a history forged by left-wing political activists and their allies in the media and rarely contradicted by those who knew the truth.

Even [Britannica](#), the once authoritative encyclopedia, has bowed to the political orthodoxy, referring to Saddam Hussein's "alleged" possession and manufacture of weapons of mass destruction.

That is the founding myth of the “Bush lied, people died” Democrats and the media.

So were there weapons of mass destruction in Iraq at the time of the U.S. invasion?

Absolutely. We know that because the United States and its coalition partners assembled a team of over 1,400 special forces operators, scientists and intelligence analysts to scour Iraq for the evidence. And what they reported has been wildly mischaracterized – at times, even by the leaders of that very effort.

David Kay, a former IAEA inspector who became famous for his parking lot “standoff” with Saddam’s goons, told the Senate Armed Services Committee on January 23, 2004, that WMD stockpiles would not be found in Iraq. “I don’t think they existed,” Kay said.

“Stockpiles” quickly became the defining term. But in Kay’s interim report to the House intelligence committee, just four months earlier, he painted a very different picture. “We have discovered dozens of WMD-related program activities and significant amounts of equipment that Iraq concealed from the United Nations during the inspections that began in late 2002,” [he said](#).

This included:

- * A prison laboratory complex that may have been used for human testing of BW agents and “that Iraqi officials working to prepare the U.N. inspections were explicitly ordered not to declare to the U.N.” Why was Saddam interested in testing biological-warfare agents on humans if he didn’t have a biological weapons program?

- * New research on BW agents, brucella and Congo-Crimean hemorrhagic fever, and continuing work on ricin and aflatoxin that were not declared to the United Nations.

* “Continuing covert capability to manufacture fuel propellant useful only for prohibited Scud-variant missiles, a capability that was maintained at least until the end of 2001 and that cooperating Iraqi scientists have said they were told to conceal from the U.N.”

* “Plans and advanced design work for new long-range missiles with ranges up to at least 1,000 kilometers [621 miles] – well beyond the 150-kilometer-range limit [93 miles] imposed by the U.N.”

* “[C]landestine attempts between late 1999 and 2002 to obtain from North Korea technology related to 1,300-kilometer-range [807 miles] ballistic missiles... antiship cruise missiles and other prohibited military equipment,” Kay reported.

But guess what? The media largely ignored that testimony, focusing instead on the single word, “stockpiles.”

In testimony before Congress on March 30, 2004, Kay’s successor, Charles Duelfer, revealed that the ISG had found evidence of a “crash program” to construct new plants capable of making chemical and biological warfare agents. The ISG also found a previously undeclared program to build a “high-speed rail gun,” a device apparently designed for testing nuclear-weapons materials. That came in addition to 500 tons of natural uranium stockpiled at Iraq’s main declared nuclear site south of Baghdad, which the International Atomic Energy Agency [told me](#) had been intended for “a clandestine nuclear-weapons program.”

The Pentagon ultimately spent \$70 million to quietly [ship that natural uranium stockpile to Canada](#) in 2007. But no one ever talks about that.

The inspectors also found [hundreds of tons of agricultural chemicals](#) used to make pesticides – and nerve gas. These were, in fact, stockpiles of binary chemical weapons.

[In a summary](#) of his three volume report to the CIA, Duelfer concluded that “Saddam was directing resources to sustain the capacity to recommence producing WMD once UN sanctions and international scrutiny collapsed” – a collapse that was only forestalled by the U.S. invasion.

But to the Democrats who voted to approve the Iraq war and who were desperately seeking to walk back that vote, no stockpiles meant “Bush lied, people died.”

Several White House advisors later acknowledged that Karl Rove instructed them to ignore new evidence of WMD in Iraq after the war. “Let these sleeping dogs lie; we have lost that fight so better not to remind anyone of it,” [David Wurmser recalled](#).

In an oped in the Wall Street Journal in 2010, [Rove admitted](#) that failing to push back against the lies told about WMD in Iraq was his “biggest mistake” while in the White House. It was also a betrayal of the Americans who laid down their lives to defend us and a travesty of the truth.

So was the war worth the blood and treasure we spent on it?

Don't ask the media, the Democrats, or Saddam Hussein supporters among Iraq's Sunni population. Ask the gold star families.

And then ask those Iraqis who were the victims of Saddam's Republic of Fear.

Ask the Kurds who earlier this month commemorated the thirty-fifth anniversary of the mass poison gas attack against the Iraqi city of Halabja that killed more than 5,000 civilians.

Ask the families of the more than 100,000 Iraqi Kurds who were massacred during Saddam's genocidal Anfal campaign in 1988.

Ask the Shia in Basra, Karbala, or in Baghdad itself, who lived in constant fear of Saddam's goons.

Saddam's apologists – who still live and speak publicly in Iraq and in the Arabic media – want you to believe that “millions” of Iraqis died in the war and that the United States decimated Iraq's infrastructure so that even today they don't have clean water or reliable electricity.

Iraqis have had twenty years and hundreds of billions of dollars of U.S. taxpayer aid to rebuild their infrastructure. If there are still gaps, blame the corrupt Iraqi politicians.

But Iraqis of all backgrounds today have one thing they could only dream about in 2003, and it is the most precious thing of all: their freedom. Americans purchased that freedom for them at great cost. What they do with it will be the legacy they leave their children.

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Ken Timmerman's latest book, [And the Rest is History: Tales of Hostages, Arms Dealers, Dirty Tricks, and Spies](#), includes detailed accounts of his encounters with the heads of Saddam Hussein's WMD programs.