Since the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime, sites associated with Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs have been destroyed, and Iraqi missile engines have turned up in Europe, according to a May 28 report from the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC). The report states that “recent satellite imagery” shows that a number of sites in Iraq containing equipment and materials that could be used to produce illicit weapons “have been either cleaned out or destroyed.”

The report does not rule out the possibility that Hussein’s government removed the material, stating that “[i]t is not known whether such equipment and materials were still present at the sites during the time of coalition action in March and April of 2003.” The report adds, however, that “it is possible that some of the materials may have been removed from Iraq by looters of sites and sold as scrap.”

UN Security Council resolutions adopted after the 1991 Persian Gulf War tasked the United Nations Special Commission—UNMOVIC’s predecessor—with inspecting and supervising the destruction of Iraq’s prohibited weapons. UN weapons inspectors have not been able to carry out on-the-ground inspections since leaving Iraq just before the invasion began in March 2003. That role has been taken over by the U.S.-led Iraq Survey Group (ISG), which has refused to share its results with UNMOVIC, despite repeated public appeals by UNMOVIC Executive Chairman Demetrius Perricos and other officials. Still, UNMOVIC has continued a limited investigation using other means and by sifting through its existing data.

The report echoes an April letter from International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei to the UN Security Council. ElBaradei wrote that commercial satellite imagery revealed “extensive removal of equipment and, in some instances…entire buildings” from Iraqi nuclear facilities. The IAEA had a mandate similar to UNMOVIC’s, but limited to Iraq’s nuclear-related sites. (See ACT, May 2004.)

UNMOVIC, along with the IAEA, is continuing to investigate the fate of the missing material. The report reveals that, through IAEA investigators’ photographs taken at a scrap yard in Rotterdam, UNMOVIC has discovered missile engines that were used both in Iraq’s SA-2 surface-to-air missiles and its prohibited surface-to-surface al Samoud missiles. Iraq was in the process of destroying the al Samoud missiles when the invasion began.

The total number of missing engines is unknown. The report says that between five and 12 “similar engines...had been seen in the yard in January and February,” adding that “more engines could have...passed through the scrap yard unnoticed.” UNMOVIC experts compared one engine’s serial number against the commission’s database and found that the engine had been under UNMOVIC monitoring. UNMOVIC personnel visited the scrap yard in April.

The IAEA was investigating the discovery of a small amount of lightly refined uranium ore found in a shipment of scrap metal that was sent to the Rotterdam scrap yard. Agency investigators first visited the site in January and have made several additional visits since then.

UNMOVIC spokesperson Ewen Buchanan told Arms Control Today June 22 that commission experts found 20 more SA-2 engines at scrap yards in Jordan, along with other dual-use equipment that had
been under UNMOVIC monitoring. Commission experts also found other items in the Rotterdam scrap yard made of “dual-use materials,” the May report explained.

UNMOVIC is also evaluating Iraq’s efforts to acquire prohibited weapons items and materials between December 1998 and November 2002, when UN inspectors were absent from Iraq. The Bush administration argued before the invasion that Iraq was reconstituting its WMD programs through illicit procurement. Assistant Secretary of State for Nonproliferation John Wolf stated June 15 that “Iraq was procuring, and positioning itself to develop WMD capabilities on the bedrock of previously established programs.”

The report reveals that Iraq acquired some items and used them in its prohibited missile programs. (See ACT, November 2003.) Additionally, Iraq acquired “a variety of dual-use” items and materials for possible use in biological or chemical weapons programs, but there is “no evidence” that Iraq actually used the materials for weapons purposes. Although some of these items were acquired through illicit channels, Iraq eventually declared most of them to UNMOVIC. Some of these declarations, however, were “misleading,” the report says.

In June 22 remarks to a nonproliferation conference organized by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Perricos raised questions about the fate of the ISG after the scheduled June 30 handover of power in Iraq from U.S. occupation authorities to a transitional Iraqi government.

“There’s no idea of what will happen after June 30, under whose authority and under whose supervision,” he said.

Perricos observed that the most recent UN resolution concerning Iraq reaffirmed the Security Council’s decision to revisit UNMOVIC’s role in continuing to ensure Iraq’s disarmament and an accounting of its prewar programs.

**New Weapons Discovery**

Charles Duelfer, the CIA’s chief adviser to the ISG, told FOX News June 24 that the group has found “10 or 12” artillery shells containing either sarin nerve agent or mustard agent. Duelfer said the shells date back to the 1991 Gulf War, FOX News reported.

Iraq produced both mustard and sarin prior to the Gulf War but never provided UN arms inspectors with a complete accounting of these agents. The ISG found a single artillery round filled with sarin in May, but the shell was rigged as an improvised explosive device, which made it ineffective as a chemical weapon. (See ACT, June 2004.)

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