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Claims of Scud Destruction Unverified

Inspectors Fail to Substantiate U.S. Assessment of Attacks on Launchers

The United Nations Special Commission on Iraq has not found evidence to confirm a widely publicized U.S. military claim during the Persian Gulf War that American personnel destroyed many of Iraq's mobile Scud missile launchers, a commission spokesman said yesterday.

The spokesman, Tim Trevan, was responding to a report in yesterday's New York Times quoting Scott Ritter, a former Marine captain who is a missile analyst with the commission, as saying that no mobile launchers were destroyed during the war.

Ritter declined to speak with reporters yesterday, but Trevan said the New York Times op-ed piece had omitted a portion of Ritter's statement attributing to the Iraqi government the claim that no Iraqi launchers were destroyed by coalition forces.

Trevan said that "all of the operational missiles verified as destroyed by the commission were either destroyed under commission supervision or were claimed by Iraq to have been destroyed by Iraq itself. The commission has no evidence to contradict these Iraqi statements, but neither can it be certain that these statements are true."

Trevan added that the commission "cannot rule out that other launchers or missiles not yet declared by Iraq nor discovered by the commission might have been destroyed by coalition actions." U.N. officials have previously accused Iraq of misstating data on Scud missiles, charging that it underreported the total number of missiles in its possession before the war.

The op-ed piece was written by Mark Crispin Miller, a professor of media studies at Johns Hopkins University and the author of the forthcoming book "Spectacle: Operation Desert Storm and the Triumph of Illusion."

During the war, commanding Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf said that U.S. forces had destroyed 30 fixed-site launchers and as many as 16 of the estimated 20 mobile launchers that Iraq possessed. But Miller said U.N. officials determined, during 11 inspections beginning in June 1991, that only 12 fixed-missile sites were destroyed.

At a Jan. 30, 1991, briefing, Schwarzkopf said 11 vehicles carrying Scuds were bombed. But Miller said the vehicles were probably carrying fuel, not Scuds.