UK Experts to Help Iraq Destroy Chemical Residues

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BAGHDAD (AP) — Britain will help the Iraqi government dispose of what's left of deposed Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons, still stored in two bunkers in north of Baghdad, the British embassy in Baghdad announced Monday.

The British Defense Ministry will start training Iraqi technical and medical workers this year, an embassy statement said. The teams will work to safely destroy remnants of munitions and chemical warfare agents left over from Saddam's regime. He was overthrown in 2003 following an American-led invasion.

Saddam stored the chemical weapons near population centers so that he could access them quickly, despite the danger to his civilian population.

Most of Iraq's chemical weapons were destroyed by military forces in 1991 during the first Gulf War or by U.N. inspectors after the fighting. The inspections halted just before the invasion.

Iraq is a party to the U.N. Chemical Weapons Convention and must get rid of the remaining material, according to terms of the pact.

The head of the Iraqi National Authority, Mohammed Al Sharaa, said the remnants "represent a great challenge to the Iraqi experts to safely dispose." He called the agreement with British authorities "a good opportunity for Iraqi experts to benefit from the well-known expertise of U.K. experts."

British Ambassador to Iraq Simon Collis said Britain is glad to assist in what he called "this difficult and dangerous task."

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