

UN uncovers secret Iraqi ballistic missile project

ALAN GEORGE/LONDON

IRAQ HAS LAUNCHED at least one long-range missile project since the end of the Gulf War, according to the latest United Nations (UN) report on efforts to dismantle Saddam Hussain's weapons of mass destruction.

The revelation is certain to put back the date for any lifting of the trade embargo which is crippling Iraq's economy. Rolf Ekeus, head of the Special Commission charged with unravelling Iraq's weapons, has warned that the evidence for a forbidden rocket project could be "a clear violation of the provisions of [UN] Resolution 687" — the 1991 ceasefire resolution which ended the Gulf War.

Ekeus' report, which is being considered by the UN Security Council, says that Iraq has admitted that "...after the adoption of Resolution 687 it conducted a covert programme to develop and produce a surface-to-surface missile". It adds: "This missile would

be capable of prohibited ranges".

UN rules permit Iraq to retain missiles with a range of up to 150km (80nm), a distance deemed sufficiently short to ensure that the rockets are used only for defensive purposes. A headache for the inspectors is that much of the technology required for short-range missiles is equally applicable for longer-range weapons.

The report says that Iraq "...carried out a number of tests with modified surface-to-air missiles for this [forbidden] project".

Western officials say that the "surface-to-air missiles" in question are probably Soviet-made SA-2s. It would not be the first time that they or their derivatives have been used in the production of ground-to-ground missiles. India's locally made Agni and Prithvi missiles both include technology based on the SA-2. Cuba has also shown interest in using a re-engined SA-2 as a ballistic missile.

Strong evidence for Iraq's continued interest in long-range mis-

siles came in a seizure in Jordan in October of 115 gyroscopes and accelerometers, both crucial elements in missile-guidance systems. The equipment, possibly procured by middlemen in Austria, arrived in Amman on a flight from Moscow. Although Iraq has denied that it had tried to buy these components, it has since acknowledged that some of the shipment had reached Baghdad.

Well-placed sources say that the illicit equipment is for use in extremely long-range missiles, although it can also be used in medium-range weapons, giving them impressive accuracy. It remains unclear whether they were destined for the SA-2-based weapon or for another, as yet unknown, Iraqi missile project.

In his report to the Security Council, Ekeus comments: "There is evidence that this acquisition is for long-range missiles and thus further indicates continued activities in Iraq in the area of proscribed missiles." □

THAAD misses the target on first intercept

RAMON LOPEZ/WASHINGTON DC

THE USA SUFFERED a setback on 13 December when the Lockheed Martin Theater High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) missile failed to intercept a ballistic-missile target over the White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico. It was the THAAD's fourth flight and the first of 11 planned intercepts.

The THAAD missile was launched from the range against a Storm target which resembles a Scud missile. Also featured in the critical flight test was the THAAD battle-management command, control, communications and intelligence (BMC²I) system designed to provide fire-control data and updates to the missile. The THAAD ground-based radar (GBR) was also involved.

According to the US Army, both the Storm target and the THAAD missile flew as programmed, but the kill vehicle missed the target. "The technical guys are scratching their heads because everything pointed to a hit," it adds.

THAAD programme officials are evaluating telemetry and other test data to try and sort out what happened. Although "concerned" about the test failure, the officials see no "showstoppers" emerging, the Army says. Both the BMC²I and the GBR performed as planned, it maintains. A total of 14 demonstration/validation tests are planned. The next THAAD flight will be scheduled after investigators have determined the reasons behind the test failure.

The THAAD would be used to engage theatre ballistic missiles at high altitudes and long ranges using hit-to-kill technology. Engineering and manufacturing development is scheduled to begin in 1996, and low-rate initial production could begin in 1999.

Introduction would take place in 2001. As many as 1,500 THAAD missiles, 100 launchers and 18 ground-based radars may be procured by the Pentagon. □

China may buy Varyag from Ukraine

CHINA IS ONCE again considering purchasing the aircraft carrier the *Varyag*, with discussions taking place during the recent visit of the Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma to Beijing.

The *Varyag*, the first Soviet-designed carrier intended to be equipped with a steam catapult, was three-quarters complete at the Nikolayev shipyard in Ukraine when work stopped. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, neither Russia nor Ukraine has been able to finance completion of work.

Anatoly Kinakh, Ukrainian deputy prime minister accompanying Kuchma in China, says that several different options were discussed, ranging from the completion of the carrier at one of Chinese



The Kuznetsov's sister carrier could yet enter service — but with China

shipyards, to selling it off as scrap metal. Kinakh considers that a sale of the *Varyag* as a combat ship "...is rather possible"

Kinakh is quoted by news

agency Interfax-Ukraine as saying that the Ukrainian Government understands that, if completed and sold, the carrier may change the balance of power in the region. □