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Project Babylon: The Iraqi Supergun (U)

A Research Paper

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Project Babylon: The Iraqi Supergun (U)

A Research Paper



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**Project Babylon:
The Iraqi Supergun (U)**

Summary

*Information available
as of 9 October 1991
was used in this report*

From 1988 until 1990, Iraq was involved in an unusual weapons development program it called Project Babylon. This project included the development, manufacture, and construction of several large-caliber guns, including a 1,000-millimeter-diameter supergun. In addition, Project Babylon encompassed the development of projectiles for these guns that included conventional and rocket projectiles capable of being fired to great distances—on the order of a 1,000 kilometers for the gun-launched rockets. This project was coordinated for Iraq by the Space Research Corporation (SRC), which was also heavily involved in the development of the guns and projectiles. [REDACTED] these guns were intended for the bombardment of unspecified military and economic targets. (S) 1.5(c)(d) 1.6(d)(2)(c)

By early 1990, Iraq had successfully built and fired a 350-mm-diameter scaled version of the 1,000-mm supergun. Also, by this time, many components for the 1,000-mm supergun and two other 350-mm guns—whose immense size required out-of-country manufacture—had been delivered to Iraq. However, construction of the supergun and the two other 350-mm guns had not begun. (S) (S) (S)

In March 1990, the murder of Gerald Bull, the project leader, was the first link in a chain of events that drastically slowed the progress of Project Babylon and ultimately led to its termination. Worldwide disclosure in April 1990 of the project occurred when UK Customs seized the last eight sections that were to make up the 1,000-mm gun barrel. Other components, including several critical components like gun-barrel sections and breeches, were subsequently seized by various countries. Without these critical components, the supergun could not have been completed by Iraq. We are unable to find any evidence that Iraq obtained out-of-country aid for the project after its disclosure. (S) (S) (S)

In July 1991, in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf war, Iraq acknowledged "a long-range gun program," despite its initial denials that there was such a program. The Iraqis also admitted to the existence of the 350-mm diameter test gun and to its location, and they provided information on status of the components that were to make up the 1,000-mm supergun and two other 350-mm guns. Examination of the 350-mm test-gun site, the supergun components, and other gun components by a United Nations inspection team revealed that Project Babylon has, in fact, been terminated. In October 1991, procedures were implemented by the United Nations for the destruction of the Project Babylon components, including the 350-mm test gun. (U)

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Gerald Bull

At age 22, Gerald Bull was one of Canada's youngest citizens to earn a doctorate in aerodynamics (see figure 1). He became known for creative solutions—using a gun instead of a wind tunnel to conduct inexpensive hypervelocity aerodynamic studies—and for his impatience with what he termed "amateur scientists" and "bureaucratic redtape." At age 32, he led the extremely ambitious joint US-Canadian High-Altitude Research Project (HARP), developing state of the art for gun-launched projectiles and rockets. (u)

Soon after the end of the HARP program in 1967, Bull founded the Space Research Corporation (SRC) and built a test facility near Highwater, Quebec. He purchased the HARP guns and equipment at scrap-value prices from the US and Canadian Governments—apparently considering the idea of reviving his dream of building large-caliber guns. Through a special act of the US Congress in 1972, Bull was granted US citizenship and a security clearance and was awarded up to \$9 million in defense contracts. After the establishment of an SRC subsidiary in Belgium, Bull developed the GC-45 gun—considered to be one of the best artillery guns in the world—and advanced projectiles with almost twice the range of guns in the US arsenal.

Bull was unsuccessful in convincing the US Army to purchase his GC-45 gun and ammunition. Therefore, he decided to sell the GC-45 to the South Africans with what he considered to be approval from the US Office of Munitions Control. Later, he was charged with violating the arms embargo to South Africa and, after pleading guilty in 1980, was sentenced to 6 months in prison. Upon release from prison, he vowed never to return to North America and moved his operations to Brussels. (u)

Bull continued to sell his GC-45 gun, ammunition, and technology worldwide; he sold at least 200 systems to Iraq in the mid-1980s. Saddam Husayn was extremely impressed with these artillery guns. Further, it is possible that Bull personally persuaded Saddam Husayn to fund his dream: the building of a 1,000-millimeter supergun that could launch payloads into space as well as deliver warheads to great distances. In 1988, Iraq made Bull's SRC the managing authority for the supergun project, known as Project Babylon. (u)

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**Project Babylon:
The Iraqi Supergun**

Background: Why a Supergun?

Project Babylon was Iraq's program to develop a supergun. The architect of Gerard Bull, an organized US citizen, the program was funded by the Defense Research Corporation (SRC) in 1981. Bull had been obsessed for almost 30 years with building the world's largest gun that would be capable of launching payloads into space. We believe that Bull, because of his obsession as much as any technical or military consideration, was instrumental in convincing Iraq to initiate Project Babylon (see inset and figure 1).

Few hard facts have been obtained about Iraq's requirements for Project Babylon. Speculation abounds on why Iraq funded a project to develop a 1,000-millimeter supergun, several 150-mm diameter guns, and their projectiles. Arguments within the Intelligence Community have ranged from the belief that the gun systems possess no benefits over comparable missile systems to the belief that the gun systems are better because gun-launched rocket projectiles would be difficult to intercept as compared with missiles.

Bull considered a large-caliber gun firing rocket projectiles to be an efficient and reusable "first stage" capable of delivering moderately sized payloads (on the order of 150 kilograms (kg)). In addition, Bull boasted that a 1,000-mm gun system could be developed for far less cost than a comparable (in terms of payload) missile system. Our analysis generally supports Bull's conclusions.

The HARP Program: Forerunner to the Supergun

Project Babylon can be traced back to the 1940s joint US-Canadian High-Altitude Research Program (HARP), which used large-caliber guns to conduct

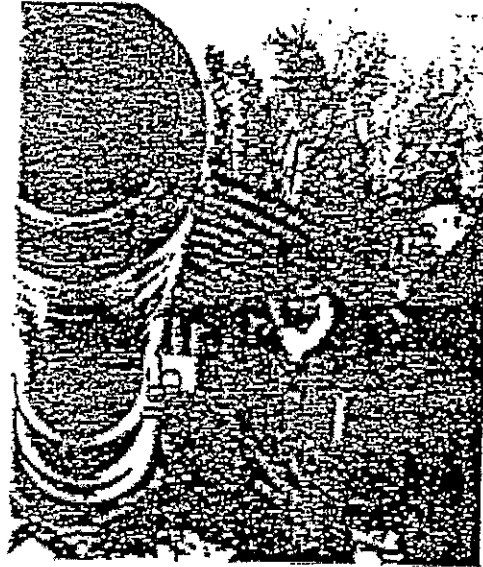


Figure 1. Gerard Bull, designer of the supergun, inspected one of his large-caliber guns in 1967.

upper-atmospheric research experiments. The HARP program succeeded in setting the world altitude record of 130 kilometers (km) for a gun-fired projectile. Further, the HARP program extended gun-launch technology, demonstrating that firing rockets from guns was feasible and that guns were theoretically capable of launching payloads to low Earth orbit or to targets thousands of kilometers downrange. The HARP program was ended in 1967 as missile technologies matured.

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The HARP program consisted of several guns, the largest being a modified US Navy 16-inch (406-mm) gun (see figure 2). This gun fired both subcaliber projectiles¹ and single-stage, solid rockets. One version of this gun—known as the Highwater gun because of its location in Highwater, Quebec—consisted of three 16-inch gun barrels bolted together. This gun was limited to horizontal firings over a flight range of 3 to 5 km (see figure 3). Test firings included projectile-sabot structural-proof tests and development testing of large, full-bore rockets with a total mass of about 1,000 kg. (u)

The state of the art for launching rockets from guns was reached during the HARP program. Specifically, difficulties associated with rocket-component and rocket-motor survival at high-launch accelerations, experienced while the rocket travels down the gun barrel, were solved. These solutions included the development of hardened components and a novel approach for supporting center-burning rocket motors. The program succeeded in firing a 180-mm fiberglass-wrapped rocket from a horizontally mounted gun (see figure 4). These tests proved that rockets could be fired from guns and, according to analysis by HARP scientists, to altitudes of over 500 km, depending on payload and rocket exit velocity. By the end of the HARP program, this development culminated in the construction of a 16-inch, two-stage solid rocket, known as Martlet 2G-1, which was fired from the gun in Highwater, Quebec, again in a horizontal position (see figure 5). HARP scientists began to design a different version of this rocket, one with three stages, which they believed would be capable of placing a small (size unspecified) payload into Earth orbit. (u)

The ultimate rocket projectile envisioned during the HARP program was a multistaged, full-bore rocket designated Martlet 4 (see figure 6). This rocket was designed to carry payloads of up to 200 kg to low

¹ A subcaliber projectile has a diameter smaller than the diameter of the gun barrel. A sabot is used to position the smaller diameter projectile within the gun barrel. Subcaliber projectiles are used primarily because of their lower mass as compared with full-diameter projectiles. Consequently, subcaliber projectiles can be fired at higher velocities than would be capable with full-diameter, heavier projectiles. A disadvantage of subcaliber projectiles is that they have a smaller (sometimes much smaller) payload capacity. (u)



Figure 2. The 16-inch HARP gun firing at the Barbados Test Range. (u)

Earth orbit. Work on this rocket projectile never progressed beyond the drawing board during HARP's duration. (u)

Project Babylon: Attempt To Build a Supergun

Project Babylon loosely consisted of two phases and several subprograms. Some of these data refer to Phase I as

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Figure 3. The 15-inch gun at
Highwater Point, was made
to launch three 18-inch torpedoes
and three 15-inch rockets.
The 15-inch gun was used to
launch the rockets.

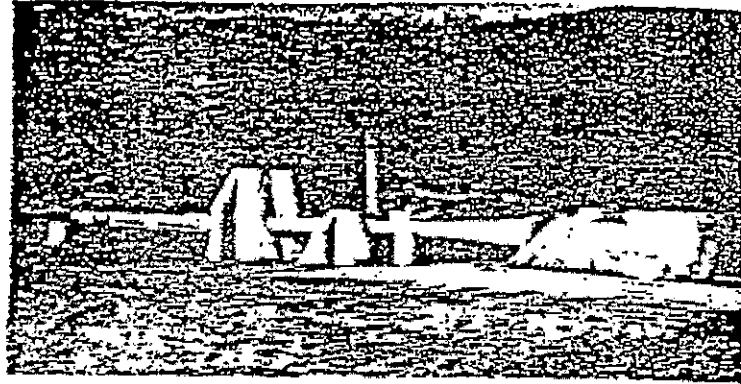
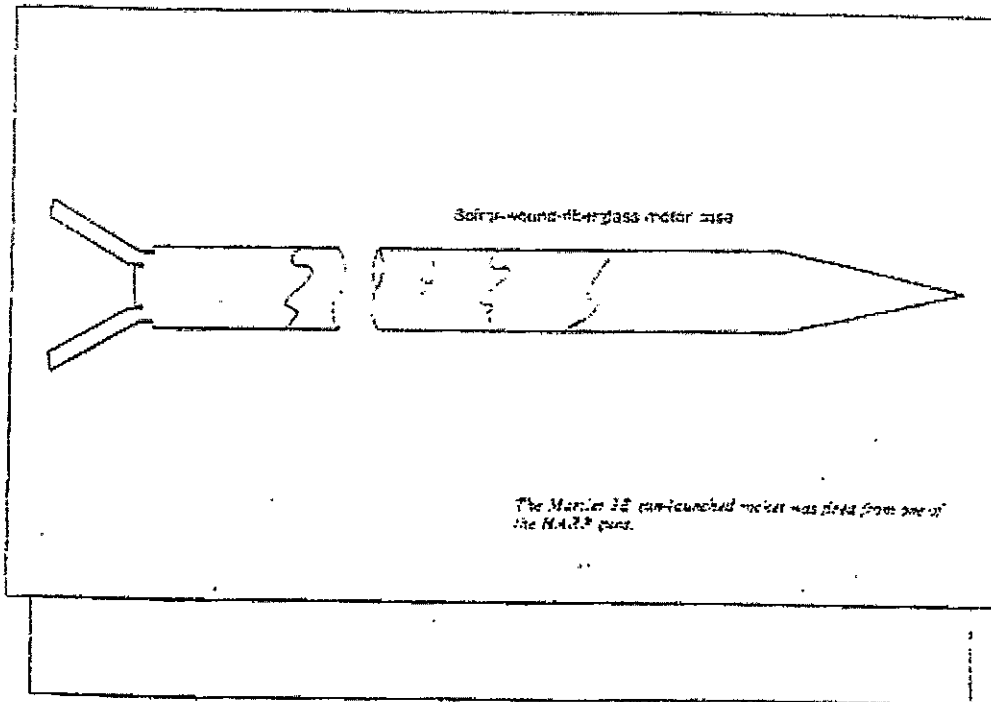


Figure 4
Martlet 3E Gun-Launched Rocket

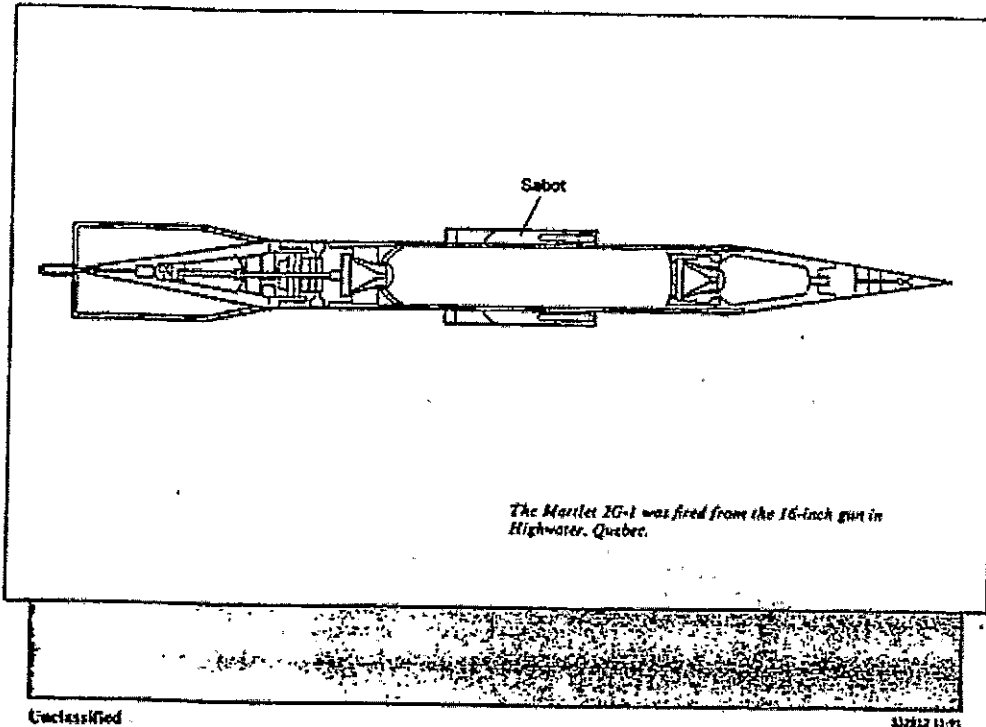


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Figure 5
Martlet 2G-1 Gun-Launched Rocket



the design and construction of two large, 1,000-mm superguns and to Phase II as the design and construction of two smaller elevating and traversing 350-mm guns (see figure 7).

Phase II was the development of gun-launched rockets (GLRs) for both the 1,000-mm and 350-mm guns. We differentiate between the various phases and subprograms as follows. (S, P, C)

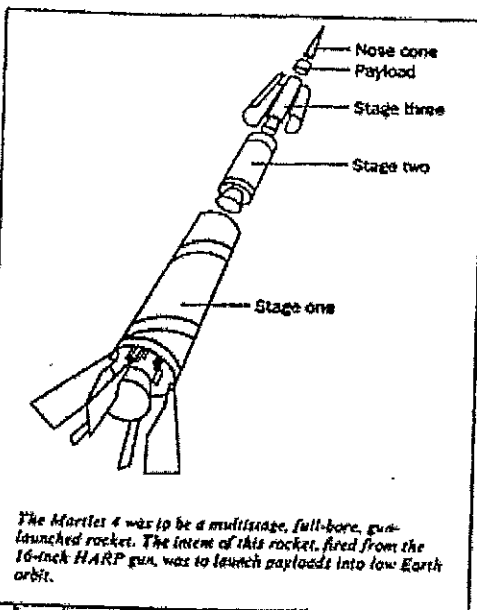
Phase I

Phase I involved a 1,000-mm-diameter supergun designated S-1000 (see figure 8). This gun was to have a barrel length of 150 meters and was to have been emplaced in a fixed position on a mountainside at about a 45-degree elevation. This gun would be able to fire on targets only along its fixed gun-target line.

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Figure 6
Martlet 4 Gun-Launched Rocket



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[redacted] no construction of the 1,000-mm supergun had ever occurred. (S, X, NC, OC)

Supporting Phase I was a scaled version of the S-1000 supergun, known as the S-350 L150, with a 150-mm-diameter barrel (see the section, "The Only Gun To Fire: The S-350 L150"). This smaller scale gun was

successfully test-fired, in a horizontal position, using test slugs and subcaliber projectiles. It was later moved to an inclined site for further testing to more accurately replicate the emplacement of the larger supergun. (S, X, NC, OC)

Also supporting Phase I was another 1,000-mm-diameter test gun that was to have been mounted horizontally for test firings. This gun was to be the prototype whose data would have been combined with that of the 350-mm test gun for incorporation into the finalized design of the operational 1,000-mm supergun. [redacted] we know that some preliminary work on the support structure for the 1,000-mm horizontal gun had been done by early 1990. Even though the fabrication of some 1,000-mm horizontal-gun parts had occurred, construction of the gun itself had never been started. (S, X, F)

Phase II

We believe that Phase II of Project Babylon involved two 350-mm-diameter guns, designated S-350 ET, capable of elevating and traversing (see figure 9). These guns would provide a more flexible system than the fixed supergun for targeting—the capability to fire on targets at various azimuths. SRC gun designers indicated, as revealed in documentary data, that the payload capacity of the subcaliber projectiles would be very small—about 15 to 20 kg. The designers began planning GLRs that would provide these 350-mm guns with the capability to deliver a 100-kg payload to a range of about 1,000 km. We believe, therefore, that GLRs were intended as the primary projectile for these smaller guns. (S, X, F)

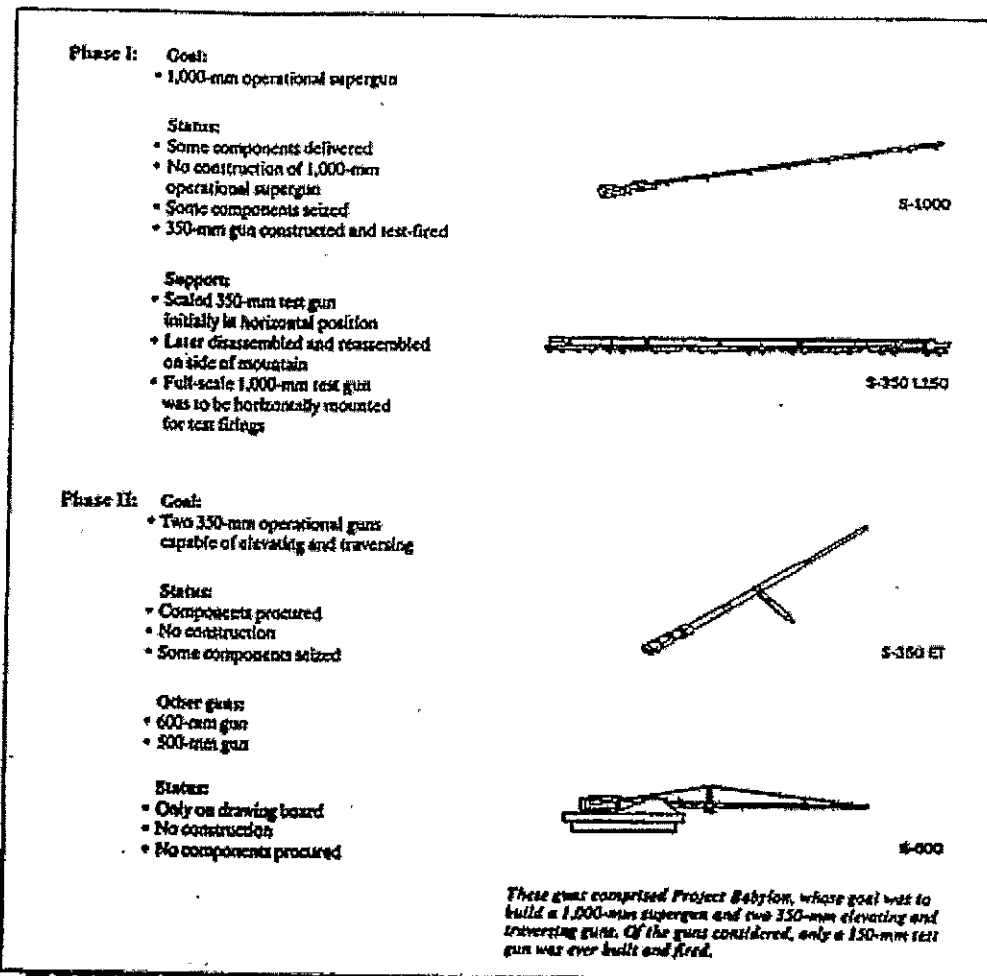
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Other Guns

Separate from Phase I or II were guns of 500-mm and 600-mm caliber proposed by the SRC and at least considered by Iraq. Initially, a 500-mm gun was examined to address the issue of the small-payload capacity of the S-350 guns, particularly with their subcaliber projectiles. This 500-mm gun, like the S-1000, would be in a fixed position and fire both GLRs and subcaliber projectiles. No construction or component procurement for this gun occurred. (S, X, NC)

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Figure 7
Guns of Project Babylon



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Figure 8
The S-1000 Supergun

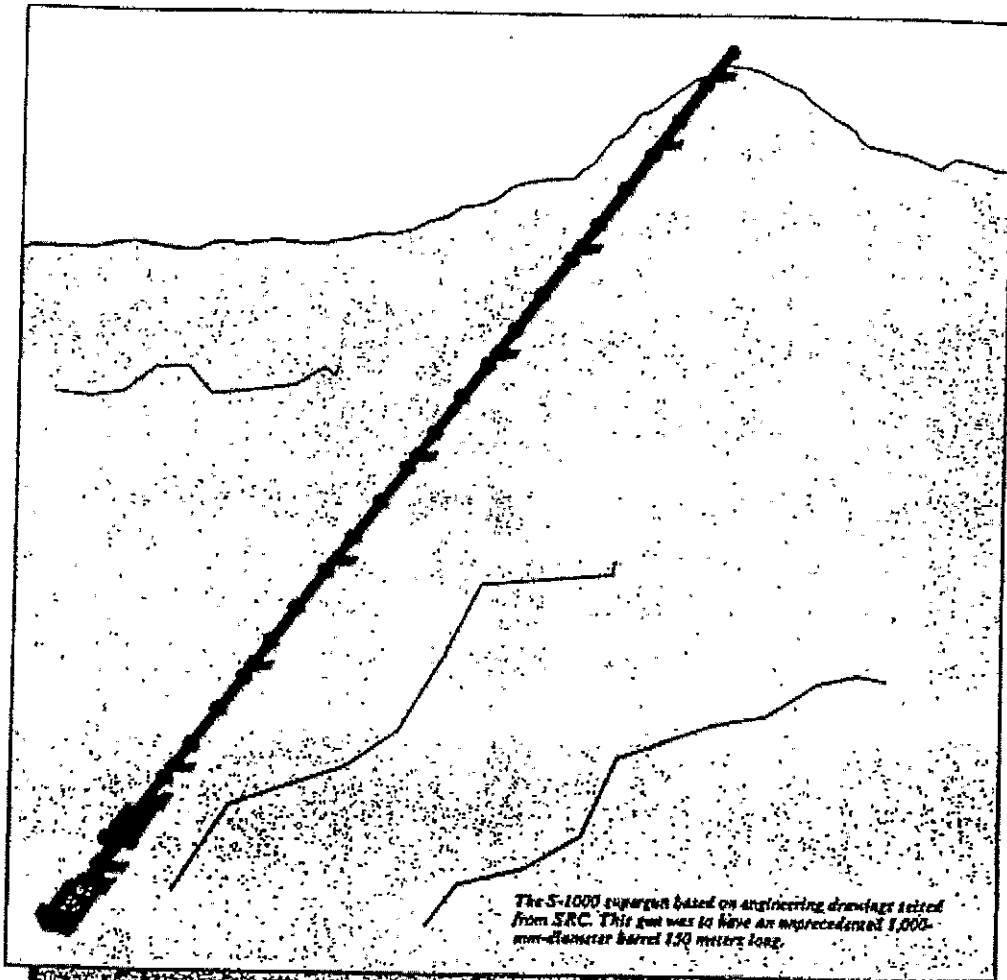
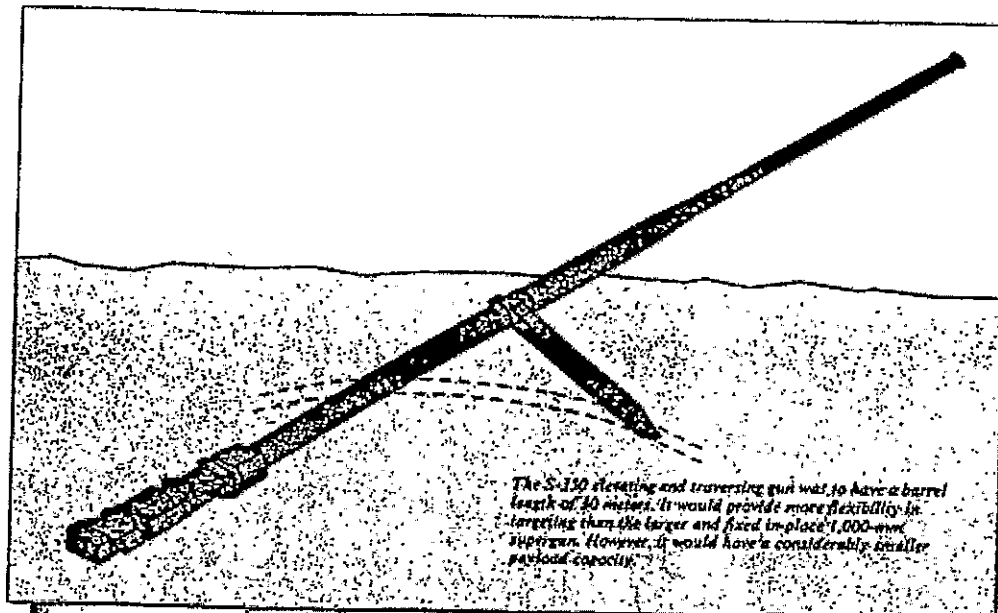


Figure 9
S-350 Elevating and Traversing Gun



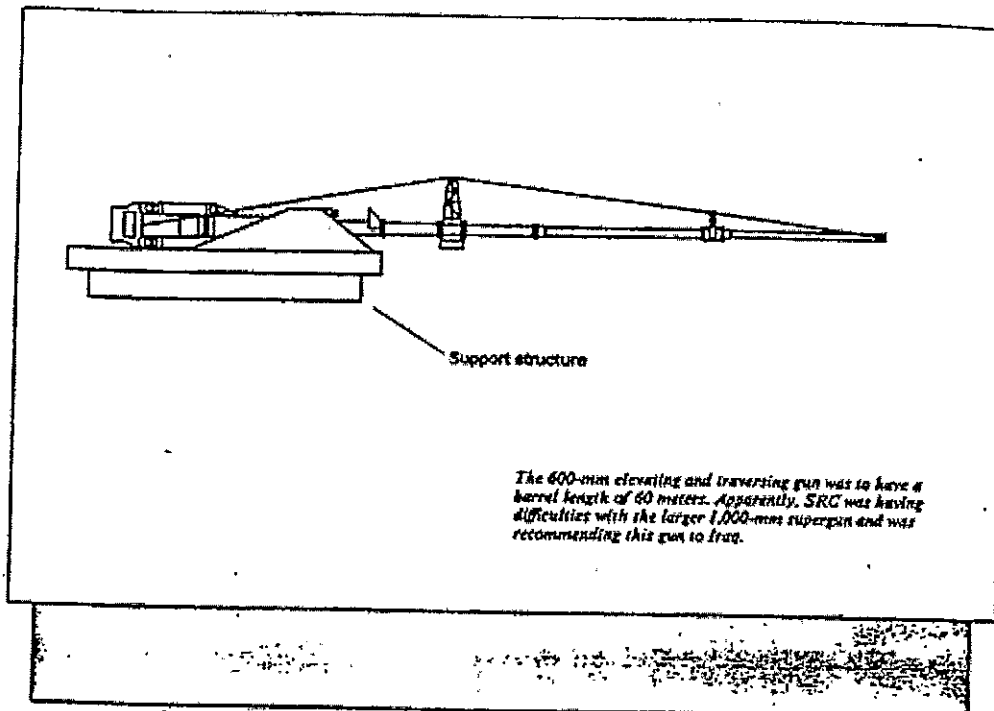
The S-350 elevating and traversing gun was to have a barrel length of 40 meters. It would provide more flexibility in targeting than the larger and fixed in-place 1,000-mm supergun. However, it would have a considerably smaller payload capacity.

Unspecified problems during the development of the 1,000-mm supergun were implied by SRC endorsement of another large-caliber gun, as revealed in documentary data. A plan for a 600-mm gun system was in the proposal stage in early 1990 (see figure 10). This gun was to have provided the capability to launch larger payloads than the 350-mm guns, because of its larger size, and was to have provided more targeting flexibility than the fixed 1,000-mm supergun, because it could elevate and traverse. We believe

that this 600-mm gun represented a "lower-tech solution" as compared with the larger supergun and, consequently, may have been easier to develop. [REDACTED] this 600-mm gun was designed to fire subcaliber and (simpler) rocket-assisted projectiles (not GLRs) similar to those fired from conventional artillery guns. (S)

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Figure 10
The 600-mm Elevating and Traversing Gun



The 600-mm elevating and traversing gun was to have a barrel length of 60 meters. Apparently, SRC was having difficulties with the larger 1,000-mm supergun and was recommending this gun to Iraq.

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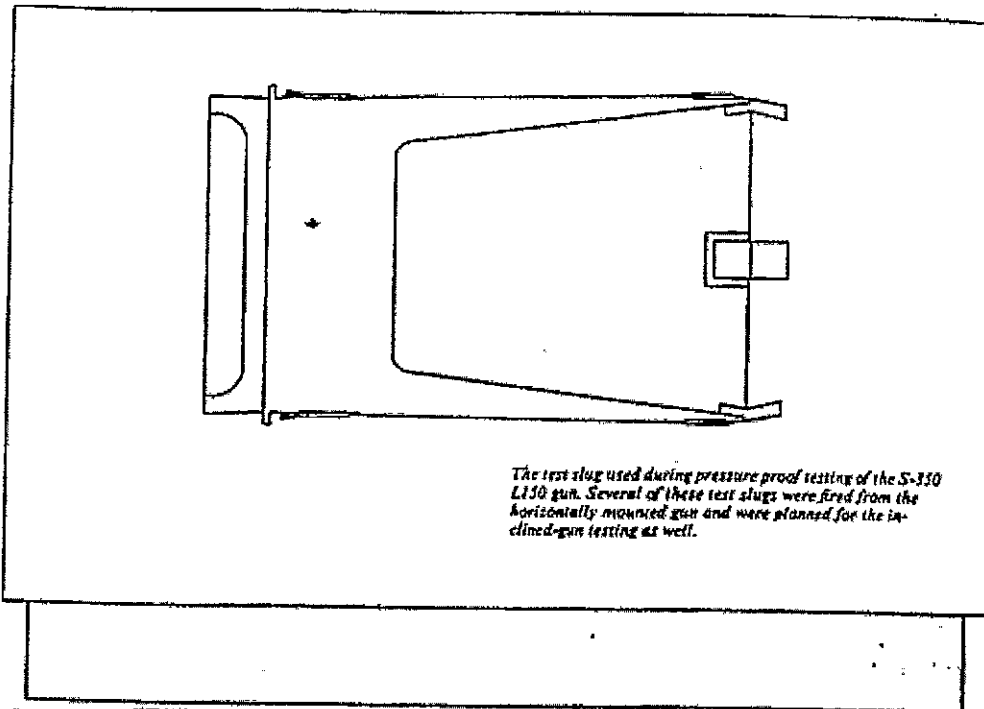
Projectiles

Two projectile types were considered for Project Babylon: subcaliber projectiles and GLRs. These projectile types, like most of Project Babylon, borrowed heavily from the HARP program. A variety of projectiles had been identified and were in various stages of development by early 1990 (see table 1). (S, NF)

~~SECRET~~ cylindrical test slugs were constructed for the proof testing of the S-350 L130 test-gun breech and barrel. These test slugs, though aerodynamically unstable, were intended to duplicate the actual projectile's mass (see figure 11). The test slugs allowed the proper internal gun

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Figure 11
Test Slug Fired From the S-350 Test Gun



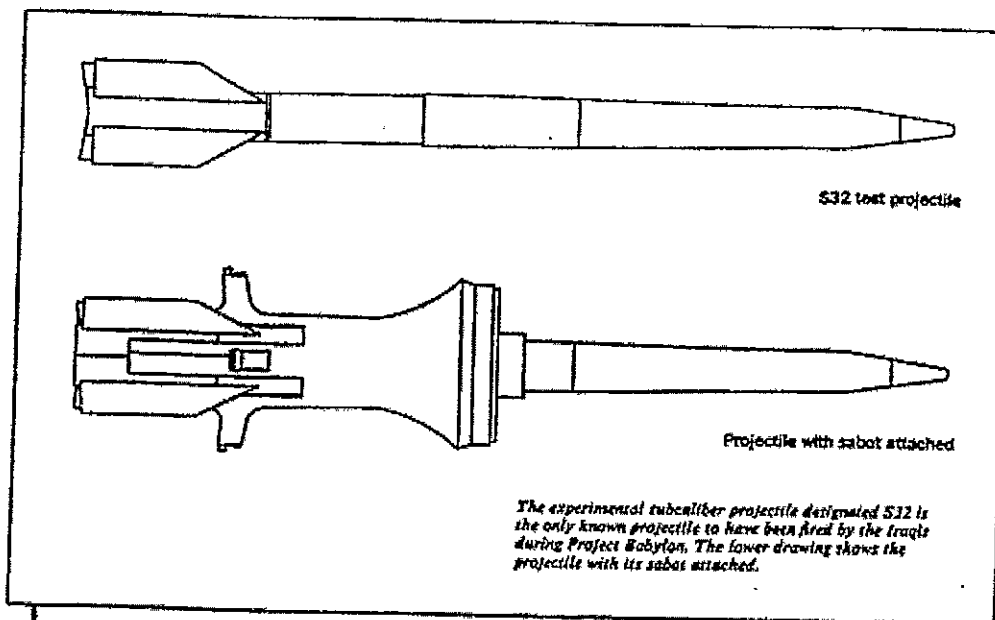
The test slug used during pressure proof testing of the S-350 L150 gun. Several of these test slugs were fired from the horizontally mounted gun and were planned for the inclined-gun testing as well.

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Documentary data reveal that a relatively simple G&C scheme was investigated. A ground-based radar would track the projectile after firing, and a ground-based computer system would combine this tracking data with exit velocity and meteorological data to determine what corrections were required to hit the desired target. Correction commands would be

transmitted to the projectile by a ground-based controller, adjusting control surfaces (fins) located on the projectile body, to change its course. This type of G&C system requires that all necessary maneuvering be accomplished while the projectile is in the atmosphere immediately after firing, a period of about 10 seconds, according to SRC calculations. (S. H. SRC)

Figure 12
S32 Subcaliber Projectile for the S-350 Test Gun



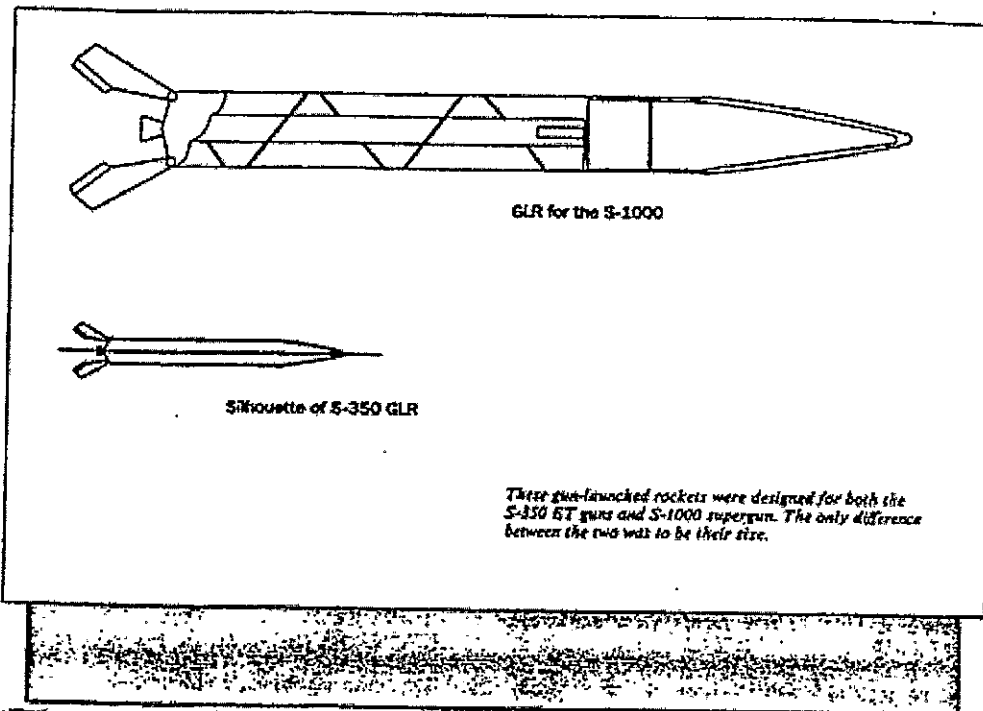
International Participation: Vital to the Project

Participation of companies outside Iraq was essential for Project Babylon. This participation supplemented lacking in-country manufacturing capability and helped to maintain the fast-paced schedule that had been established for the project. The sheer size of the

supergun and its components required the support of a variety of companies from all over the world, including the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, and Belgium (see table 2). These companies manufactured components, including barrel sections, recoil mechanisms, propellant, elevating and traversing

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Figure 13
Gun-Launched Rockets



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items, and structural pieces. No one company manufactured all the components necessary to construct a gun, and, apparently, some companies were not even aware that they were building components intended for a gun system. (Says)

Most of the components for all the Project Babylon guns were delivered to Iraq by early 1990, with the

exception of some critical components. In April, however, when UK Customs seized the last eight sections that make up the 1,000-mm gun barrel, public disclosure prevented the delivery of any more items. Before then, some 44 other 1,000-mm-barrel tubes had already been delivered to Iraq and had been identified

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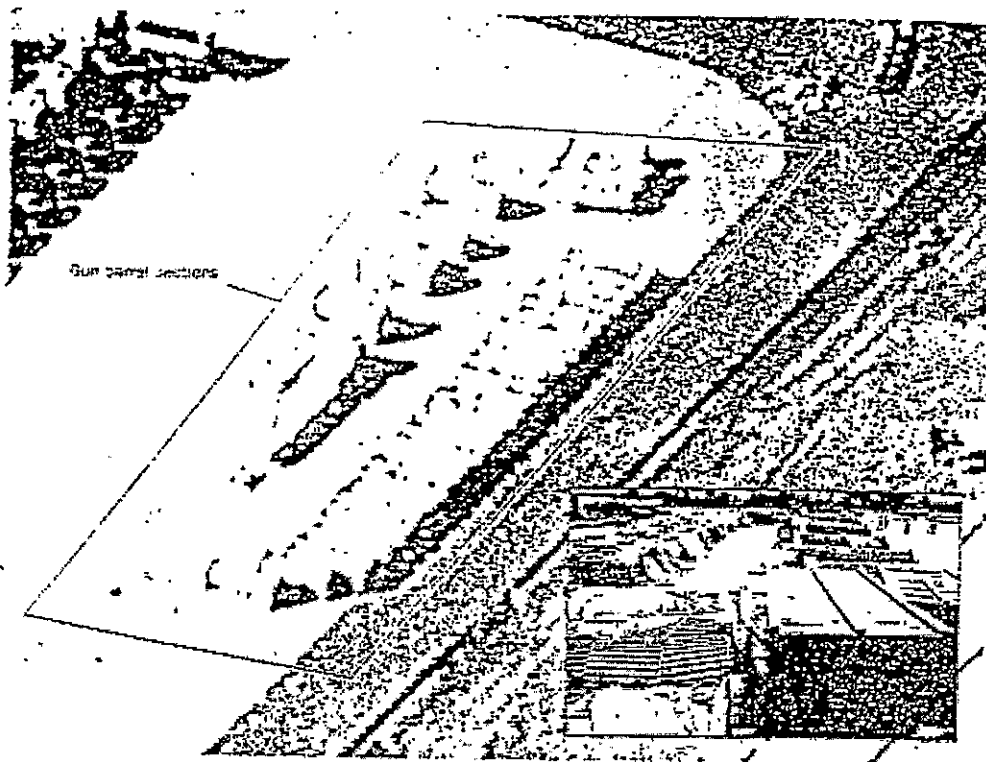


Figure 14. Satellite imagery of Iskandariya, Iraq, shows what we believe to be the large barrel sections that were to make up the gun barrel for the 1,000-mm supergun.

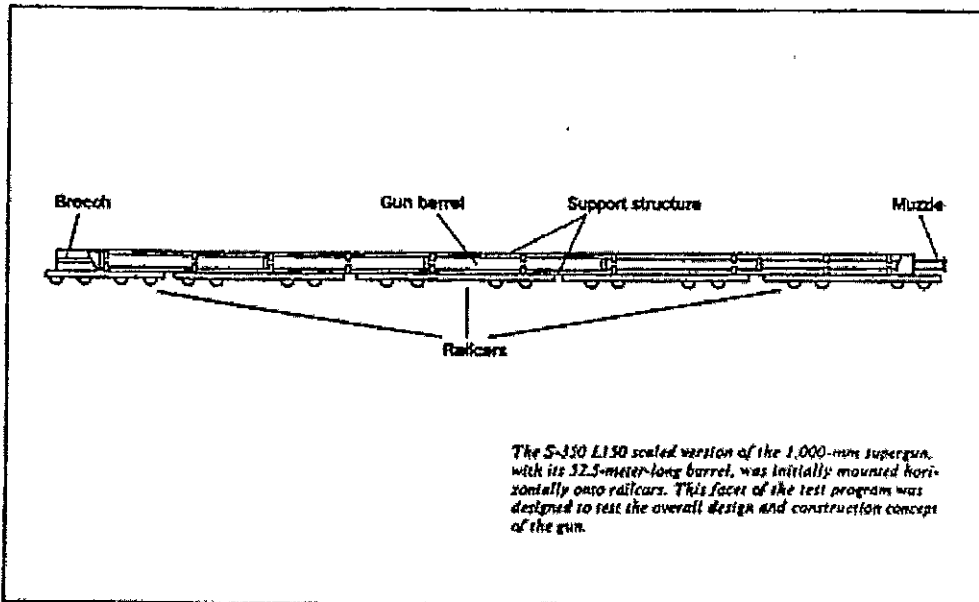
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The final testing of the S-350 L150, with subcaliber projectiles fired downrange for the first time, was to occur at the end of March 1990 (see figure 16). We believe that this test program was probably never completed. These tests were designed to more accurately replicate how the larger supergun would be used. The gun was mounted against the side of a

mountain and would fire both subcaliber and rocket projectiles as they became available. Data from these tests were to be used to calibrate the exterior ballistics calculations made for the subcaliber projectiles fired from the 350-mm gun—specifically to determine whether their expected range would be achieved.

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Figure 15
S-350 L150 Test Gun Mounted on Railcars



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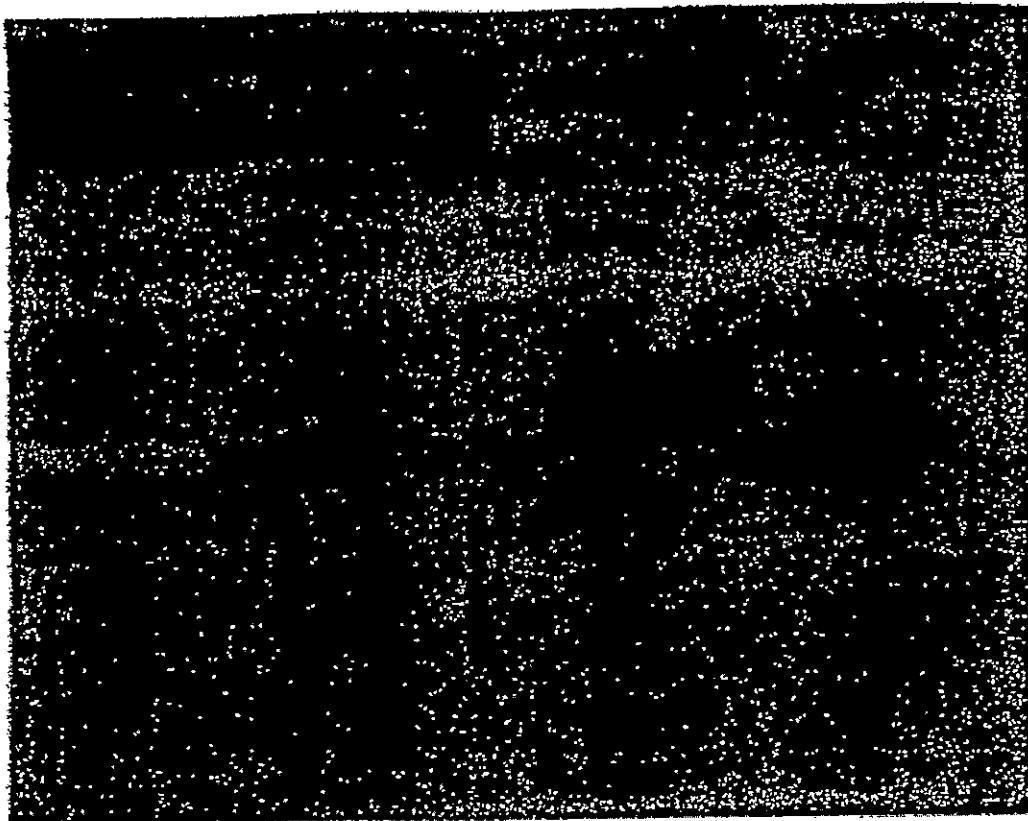
A Future for Project Babylon?

We assess that the Iraqi supergun will not be completed, especially since UN inspection teams are rendering the gun barrels inoperable. Further, we believe that Iraq will not continue the development of any of the other 350-mm guns of Project Babylon. Unlike

Bull's GC-45 artillery guns, the guns of Project Babylon were not "whole systems" that could be purchased by the Iraqis. (S)

We believe that Iraqi expectations of the success and progress of Project Babylon were inflated, on the basis

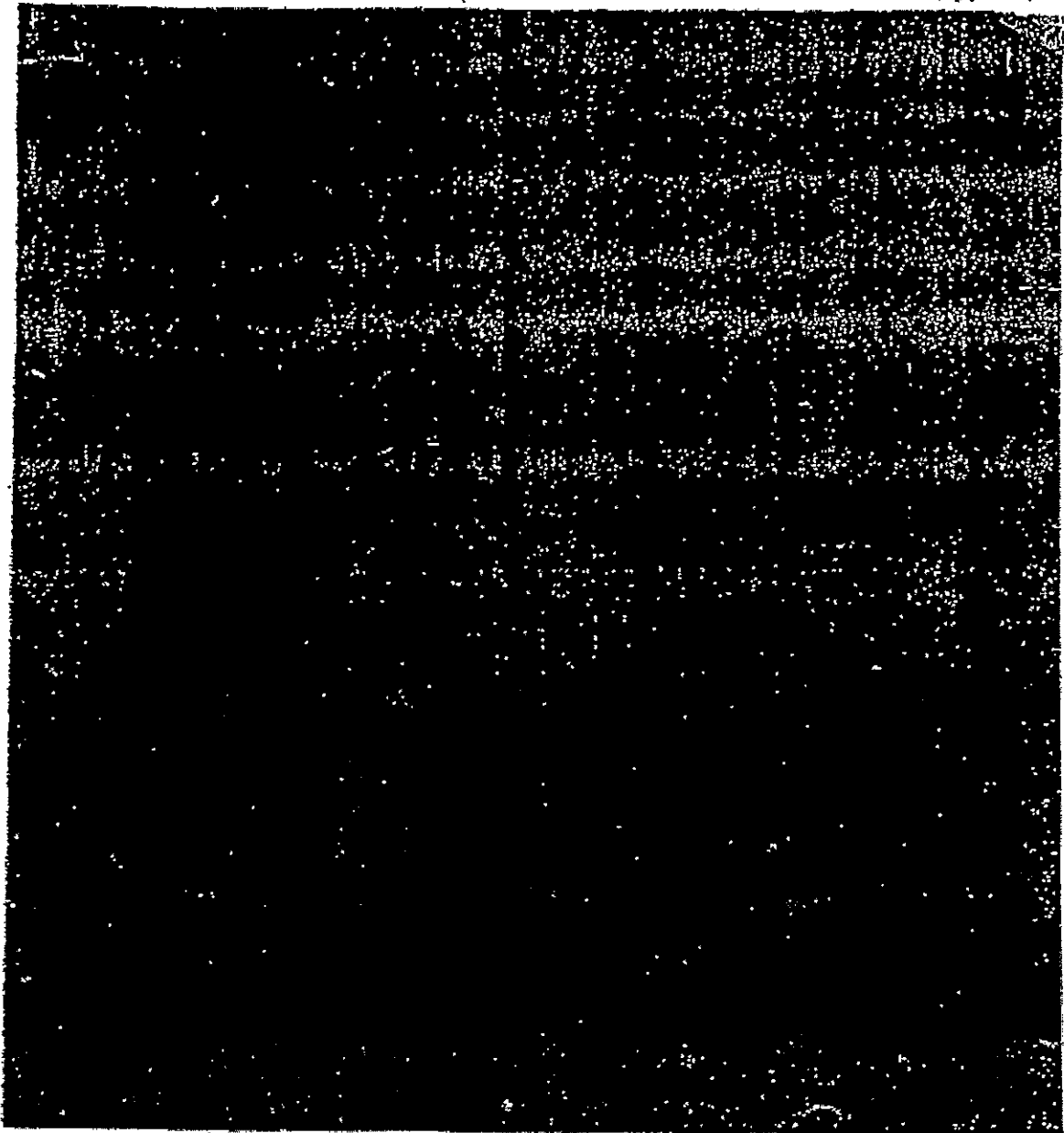
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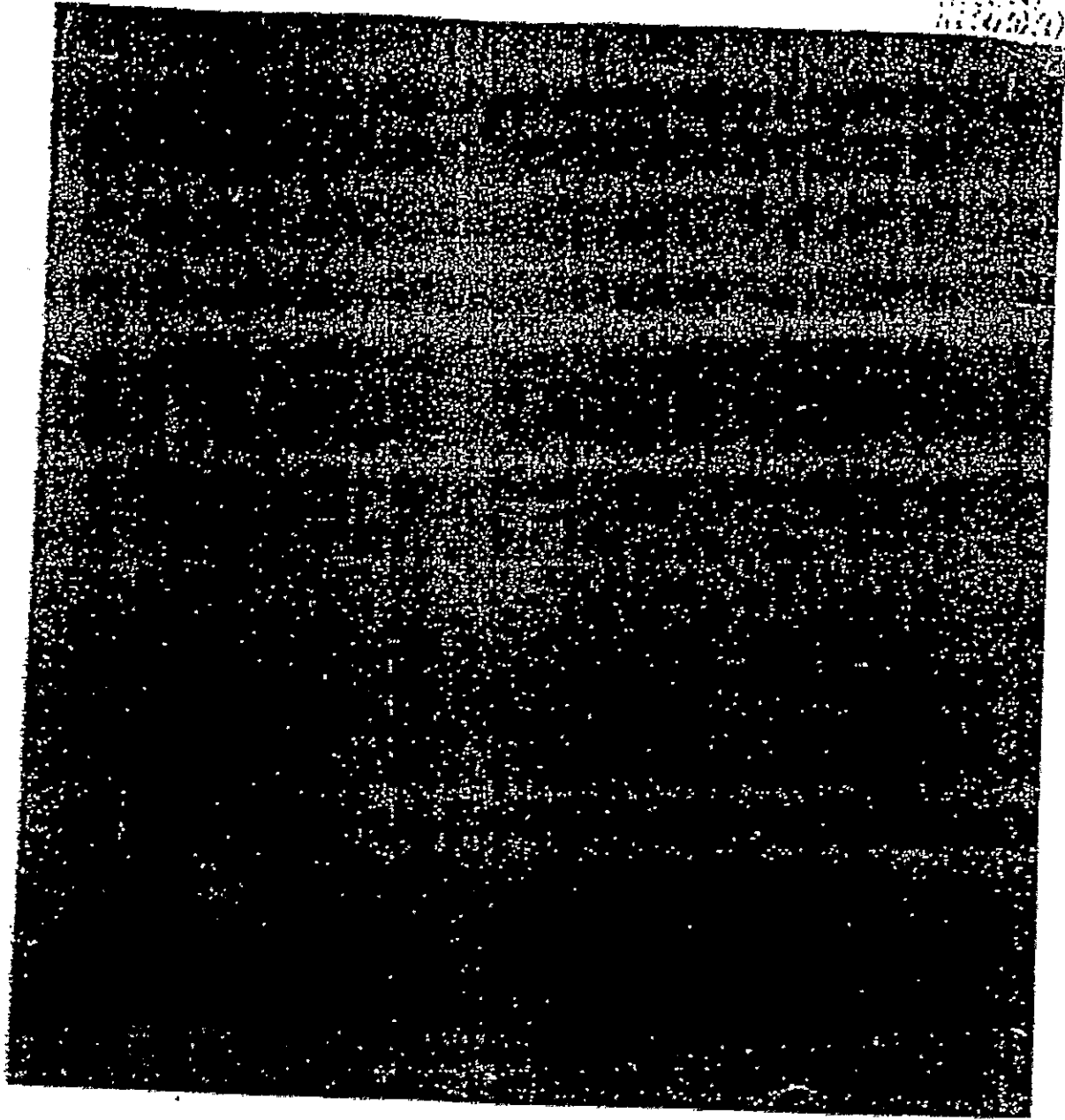
of promises from the SRC. We are uncertain why the SRC felt the need to conduct such a formidable weapons development program at such an accelerated pace. Even though Project Babylon's foundation was the proven technology of the HARP program, significant development time, representing at least a two- to three-year program, was required according to SRC documents. This development program depended on much work being performed in parallel with out-of-country assistance.

Notwithstanding the efficiencies of using a gun as a first stage for rocket projectiles and the "reasonable" nature of a gun, we believe that the lack of mobility inherent in such a large system would make it vulnerable and place serious restrictions on its use as a weapon in a future conflict.

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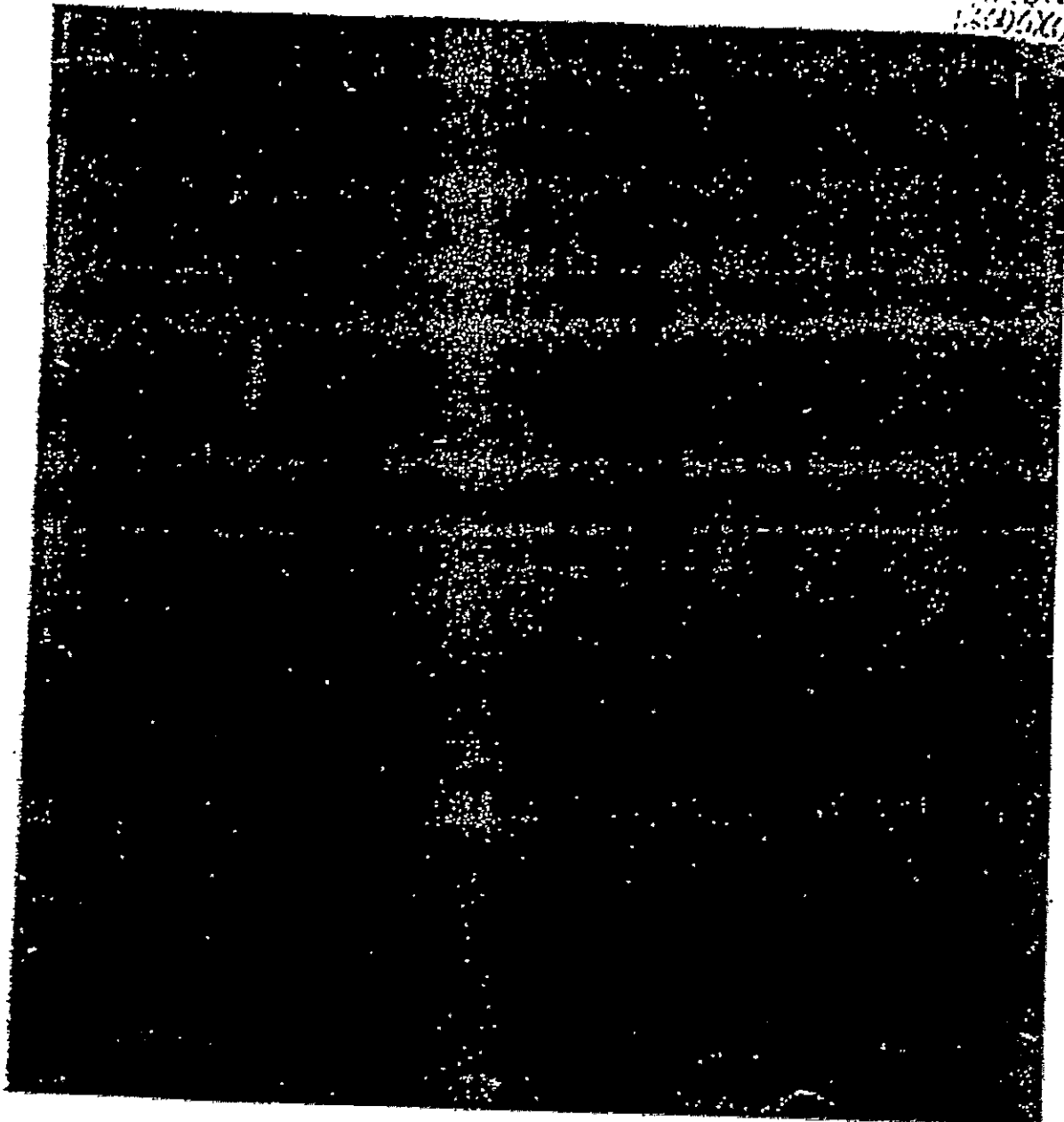


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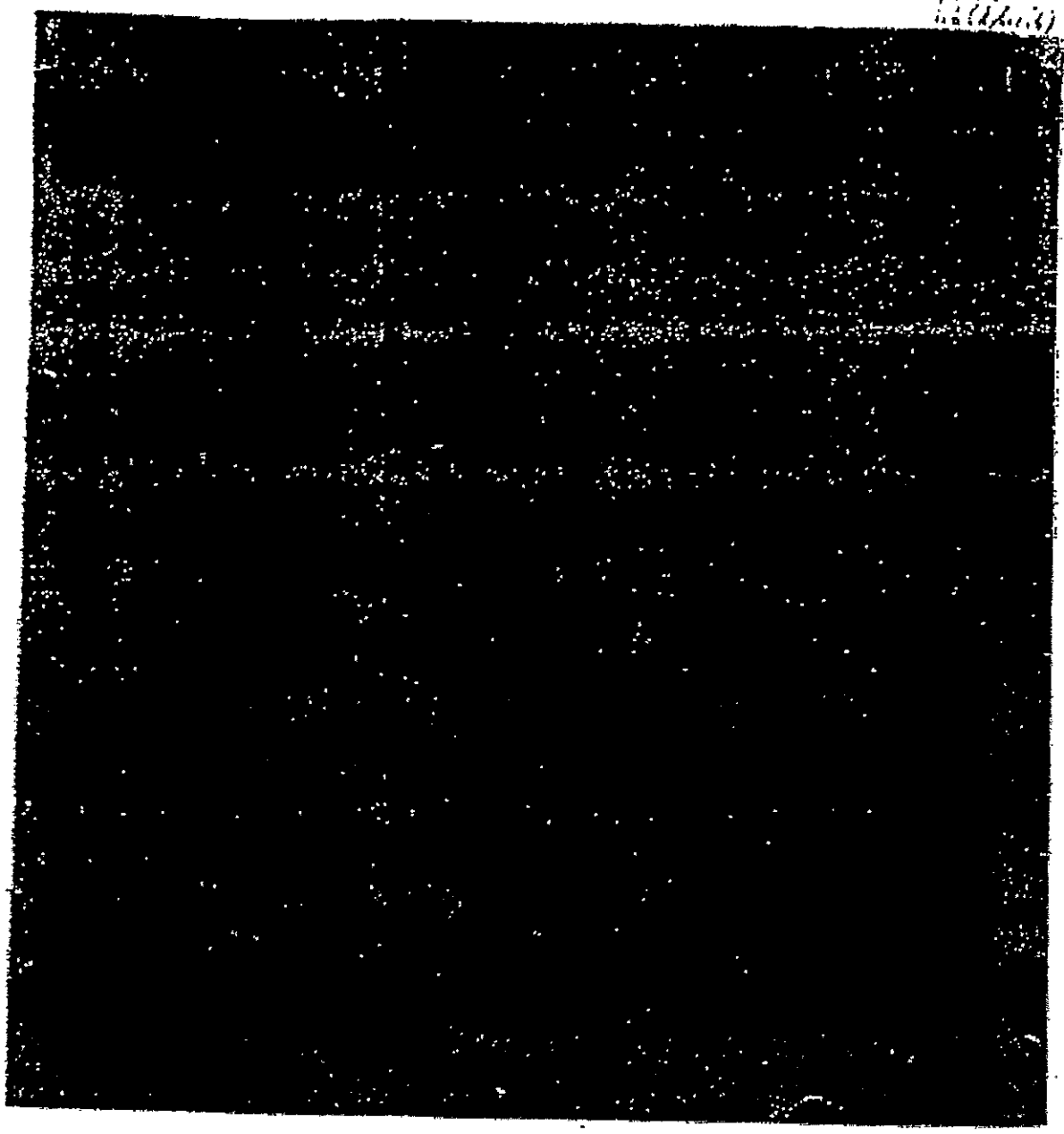


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