
Saddam's Dangerous Friends

*What a Pentagon review
of 600,000 Iraqi documents tells us.*

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

This probably ought to be big news. Throughout the early and mid-1990s, Saddam Hussein actively supported an influential terrorist group headed by the man who is now al Qaeda's second-in-command, according to an exhaustive study issued last week by the Pentagon. "Saddam supported groups that either associated directly with al Qaeda (such as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, led at one time by bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri) or that generally shared al Qaeda's stated goals and objectives." According to the Pentagon study, Egyptian Islamic Jihad was one of many jihadist groups that Iraq's former dictator funded, trained, equipped, and armed.

The study was commissioned by the Joint Forces Command in Norfolk, Virginia, and produced by analysts at the Institute for Defense Analyses, a federally funded military think tank. It is entitled "Iraqi Perspectives Project: Saddam and Terrorism: Emerging Insights from Captured Iraqi Documents." The study is based on a review of some 600,000 documents captured in postwar Iraq. Those "documents" include letters, memos, computer files, audiotapes, and videotapes produced by Saddam Hussein's regime, especially his intelligence services. The analysis section of the study covers 59 pages. The appendices, which include copies of some of the captured documents and translations, put the entire study at approximately 1,600 pages.

Stephen F. Hayes is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

An abstract that describes the study reads, in part:

Because Saddam's security organizations and Osama bin Laden's terrorist network operated with similar aims (at least in the short term), considerable overlap was inevitable when monitoring, contacting, financing, and training the same outside groups. This created both the appearance of and, in some way, a 'de facto' link between the organizations. At times, these organizations would work together in pursuit of shared goals but still maintain their autonomy and independence because of innate caution and

mutual distrust. Though the execution of Iraqi terror plots was not always successful, evidence shows that Saddam's use of terrorist tactics and his support for terrorist groups remained strong up until the collapse of the regime.

Among the study's other notable findings:

¶ In 1993, as Osama bin Laden's fighters battled Americans in Somalia, Saddam Hussein personally ordered the formation of an Iraqi terrorist group to join the battle there.

¶ For more than two decades, the Iraqi regime trained non-Iraqi jihadists in training camps throughout Iraq.

¶ According to a 1993 internal Iraqi intelligence memo, the regime was supporting a secret Islamic Pales-

tinian organization dedicated to "armed jihad against the Americans and Western interests."

¶ In the 1990s, Iraq's military intelligence directorate trained and equipped "Sudanese fighters."

¶ In 1998, the Iraqi regime offered "financial and moral support" to a new group of jihadists in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq.

¶ In 2002, the year before the war began, the Iraqi regime hosted in Iraq a series of 13 conferences for non-Iraqi jihadist groups.

The authors of the Pentagon study concluded that 'Captured documents reveal that the regime was willing to co-opt or support organizations it knew to be part of al Qaeda—as long as that organization's near-term goals supported Saddam's long-term vision.'

¶ That same year, a branch of the Iraqi Intelligence Service (IIS) issued hundreds of Iraqi passports for known terrorists.

There is much, much more. Documents reveal that the regime stockpiled bombmaking materials in Iraqi embassies around the world and targeted Western journalists for assassination. In July 2001, an Iraqi Intelligence agent described an al Qaeda affiliate in Bahrain, the Army of Muhammad, as “under the wings of bin Laden.” Although the organization “is an offshoot of bin Laden,” the fact that it has a different name “can be a way of camouflaging the organization.” The agent is told to deal with the al Qaeda group according to “priorities previously established.”

In describing the relations between the Army of Muhammad and the Iraqi regime, the authors of the Pentagon study come to this conclusion: “Captured documents reveal that the regime was willing to co-opt or support organizations it knew to be part of al Qaeda—as long as that organization’s near-term goals supported Saddam’s long-term vision.”

As I said, this probably ought to be big news. And, in a way, it was. A headline in the *New York Times*, a cursory item in the *Washington Post*, and stories on NPR and ABC News reported that the study showed *no links* between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein.

How can a study offering an unprecedented look into the closed regime of a brutal dictator, with over 1,600 pages of “strong evidence that links the regime of Saddam Hussein to regional and global terrorism,” in the words of its authors, receive a wave-of-the-hand dismissal from America’s most prestigious news outlets? All it took was a leak to a gullible reporter, one misleading line in the study’s executive summary, a boneheaded Pentagon press office, an incompetent White House, and widespread journalistic negligence.

demographic, spouting much the same rhetoric, and promoting a common historical narrative that promised a return to a glorious past. That these movements (pan-Arab and pan-Islamic) had many similarities and strategic parallels does not mean they saw themselves in that light. Nevertheless, these similarities created more than just the appearance of cooperation. Common interests, even without common cause, increased the aggregate terror threat.

B. The Terror “Business” Model of Saddam Hussein

Saddam’s interest in, and support for, non-Iraqi non-state actors was spread across a wide variety of revolutionary, liberation, nationalist, and Islamic terrorist organizations. For years, Saddam maintained training camps for foreign “fighters” drawn from these diverse groups. In some cases, particularly for Palestinians, Saddam was also a strong financial supporter. Saddam supported groups that either associated directly with al Qaeda (such as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, led at one time by bin Laden’s deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri) or that generally shared al Qaeda’s stated goals and objectives.⁹⁷

Saddam was a pragmatist when it came to personal and state relationships. He and many members of his regime understood that whatever the benefits of a relationship, there was always a potential for internal and external costs for associating too closely with some of these groups. Saddam’s reaction to this concern often swung like a pendulum, from arresting members of Wahabi sects to “extending lines of relations” to a new radical Kurdish Islamic group.⁹⁸

In one case, Iraq’s ambassador in Switzerland, who was also Saddam’s half-brother Barzan al-Tikriti, recommended that the Director of the IIS meet directly with an Egyptian who had strong connections to “Islamic parties and anti-Western Islamic organizations,” and who was offering his assistance in brokering an alliance. But the director of the IIS department responsible for Arab issues did not concur with the ambassador’s recommendation and cautioned in an internal memorandum that a meeting at such a level would “not serve the current Iraqi situation...and will make us lose our main target.” He went on to note that working with the religious parties was dangerous at this time because they were

On Monday, March 10, 2008, Warren P. Strobel, a reporter from the McClatchy News Service first reported that the new Pentagon study was coming. “An exhaustive review of more than 600,000 Iraqi documents that were captured after the 2003 U.S. invasion has found no evidence that Saddam Hussein’s regime had any operational links with Osama bin Laden’s al Qaeda terrorist network.”

McClatchy is a newspaper chain that serves many of America's largest cities. The national security reporters in its Washington bureau have earned a reputation as reliable outlets for anti-Bush administration spin on intelligence. Strobel quoted a "U.S. official familiar with the report" who told him that the search of Iraqi documents yielded no evidence of a "direct operational link" between Iraq and al Qaeda. Strobel used the rest of the article to attempt to demonstrate that this undermined the Bush administration's prewar claims with regard to Iraq and terrorism.

With the study not scheduled for release for two more days, this article shaped subsequent coverage, which was no doubt the leaker's purpose. Stories from other media outlets tracked McClatchy very closely but began to incorporate a highly misleading phrase taken from the executive summary: "This study found no 'smoking gun' (i.e. direct connection) between Saddam's Iraq and al Qaeda." This is how the *Washington Post* wrote it up:

An examination of more than 600,000 Iraqi documents, audio and video records collected by U.S. forces since the March 2003 invasion has concluded that there is 'no smoking gun' supporting the Bush administration's prewar assertion of an 'operational relationship' between Saddam Hussein and the al-Qaeda terrorist network, sources familiar with the study said.

Much of the confusion might have been avoided if the Bush administration had done anything to promote the Pentagon study. An early version was provided to National Security Adviser Steve Hadley more than a year ago, before November 2006. In recent weeks, as the Pentagon handled the rollout of the study, Hadley was tasked with briefing President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney. It's unclear whether he shared the study with President Bush, and NSC officials did not respond to repeated requests for comment. But sources close to Cheney say the vice president was blindsided.

After the erroneous report from McClatchy, two officials involved with the study became very concerned about the misreporting of its contents. One of them said in an interview that he found the media coverage of the study "disappointing." Another, James Lacey, expressed his concern in an email to Karen Finn in the Pentagon press office, who was handling the rollout of the study. On Tuesday, the day before it was scheduled for release, Lacey wrote: "1. The story has been leaked. 2. ABC News is doing a story based on the executive summary tonight. 3.

The *Washington Post* is doing a story based on rumors they heard from ABC News. The document is being misrepresented. I recommend we put [it] out and on a website immediately."

Finn declined, saying that members of Congress had not been told the study was coming. "Despite the leak, there are Congressional notifications and then an official public release. This should not be posted on the web until these actions are complete."

Still under the misimpression that the Pentagon study undermined the case for war, McClatchy's Warren Strobel saw this bureaucratic infighting as a conspiracy to suppress the study:

After the erroneous report from McClatchy, two officials involved with the study became very concerned about the misreporting of its contents. One of them said in an interview that he found the media coverage of the study 'disappointing.'

The Pentagon on Wednesday canceled plans for broad public release of a study that found no pre-Iraq war link between late Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and the al Qaeda terrorist network. . . . The reversal highlighted the politically sensitive nature of its conclusions, which were first reported Monday by McClatchy.

In making their case for invading Iraq in 2002 and 2003, President Bush and his top national security aides claimed that Saddam's regime had ties to Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda terrorist network.

But the study, based on more than 600,000 captured documents, including audio and video files, found that while Saddam sponsored terrorism,

particularly against opponents of his regime and against Israel, there was no evidence of an al Qaeda link.

An examination of the rest of the study makes the White House decision to ignore the Pentagon study even more curious. The first section explores "Terror as an Instrument of State Power" and describes documents detailing Fedayeen Saddam terrorist training camps in Iraq. Graduates of the terror training camps would be dispatched to sensitive sites to carry out their assassinations and bombings. In May 1999, the regime plotted an operation code-named "Blessed July" in which the top graduates of the terrorist training courses would be sent to London, Iran, and Kurdistan to conduct assassinations and bombings.

A separate set of documents presents, according to the Pentagon study, "evidence of logistical preparation for terrorist operations in other nations, including those in the West." In one letter, a director of the Iraqi Intelligence Service (IIS) responds to a request from Saddam for an inventory of weapons stockpiled in Iraqi embassies throughout the world. The terrorist tools include missile launchers

and missiles, “American missile launchers,” explosive materials, TNT, plastic explosive charges, Kalashnikov rifles, and “booby-trapped suitcases.”

The July 2002 Iraqi memo describes how these weapons were distributed to the operatives in embassies.

Between the year 2000 and 2002 . . . explosive materials were transported to embassies outside Iraq for special work, upon the approval of the Director of the Iraqi Intelligence Service. The responsibility for these materials is in the hands of heads of stations. Some of these materials were transported in the political mail carriers [Diplomatic Pouch]. Some of these materials were transported by car in booby-trapped briefcases.

Saddam also recruited non-Iraqi jihadists to serve as suicide bombers on behalf of the Iraqi regime. According to the study, captured documents “indicate that as early as January 1998, the scheduling of suicide volunteers was routine enough to warrant not only a national-level policy letter but a formal schedule—during summer vacation—built around maximizing availability of Arab citizens in Iraq on Saddam-funded scholarships.”

The second section of the Pentagon study concerns “State Relationships with Terrorist Groups.” An IIS document dated March 18, 1993, lists nine terrorist “organizations that our agency [IIS] cooperates with and have relations with various elements in many parts of the Arab world and who also have the expertise to carry out assignments” on behalf of the regime. Several well-known Palestinian terrorist organizations make the list, including Abu Nidal’s Fatah-Revolutionary Council and Abu Abbas’s Palestinian Liberation Front. Another group, the secret “Renewal and Jihad Organization” is described this way in the Iraqi memo:

It believes in armed jihad against the Americans and Western interests. They also believe our leader [Saddam Hussein], may God protect him, is the true leader in the war against the infidels. The organization’s leaders live in Jordan . . . when they visited Iraq two months ago they

Throughout the new Pentagon study, passages from the source documents are displayed in translation. This one details an operation codenamed “Blessed July.”

[Continued]

I would also like to go over here the orders that were issued by you during the first and second meetings with your Excellency, which lay the groundwork for the success of these operations.

Codename of the special operations is BLESSED JULY

The duties will be divided into two branches, which are:

A – Bombings

B – Assassinations

- The execution order for Jordan is canceled.
- Reminding members who are captured in the European area to use death capsules on themselves.

Execution Steps:

- Select 50 Fedayeen martyrs according to the required specifications.
- Admit them to the Intelligence School to prepare them for their duties.
- After passing their tests they will be selected for their targets as follows:
 - The top ten will work in the European field – London.
 - The second ten will work in the Iranian field.
 - The third ten will work in the self-ruled [Kurdish] area.

After passing the final test the Fedayeen will be sent as undercover passengers, each one according to his work site.”

An example of the kind of mission implied in the BLESSED JULY capability is documented in a series of memoranda from April 2000. The intended target was the leader of the Iraqi National Congress, Ahmad Chalabi. Using a forged passport, the Fedayeen volunteer was to travel through northern Iraq, making his way to London “for the purpose of executing a sanctimonious [sic] national duty which is eliminating the hostile agent Ahmad Chalabi.”¹⁰ The operation failed, in part, because the Iraqi agent failed to obtain a visa to enter the United Kingdom.

demonstrated a willingness to carry out operations against American interests at any time.

Other groups listed in the Iraqi memo include the “Islamic Scholars Group” and the “Pakistan Scholars Group.”

There are two terrorist organizations on the Iraqi Intelligence list that deserve special consideration: the Afghani Islamic Party of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) of Ayman al Zawahiri.

This IIS document provides this description of the Afghani Islamic Party:

It was founded in 1974 when its leader [Gulbuddin Hekmatyar] escaped from Afghanistan to Pakistan. It is considered one of the extreme political religious movements against the West, and one of the strongest Sunni parties in Afghanistan. The organization relies on financial support from Iraq and we have had good relations with Hikmatyar since 1989.

In his book *Holy War, Inc.*, Peter Bergen, a terrorism analyst who has long been skeptical of Iraq-al Qaeda connections, describes Hekmatyar as Osama bin Laden's "alter ego." Bergen writes: "Bin Laden and Hekmatyar worked closely together. During the early 1990s al-Qaeda's training camps in the Khost region of eastern Afghanistan were situated in an area controlled by Hekmatyar's party."

It's worth dwelling for a moment on that set of facts. An internal Iraqi Intelligence document reports that Iraqis have "good relations" with Hekmatyar and that his organization "relies on financial support from Iraq." At precisely the same time, Hekmatyar "worked closely" with Osama bin Laden and his Afghani Islamic Party hosted "al Qaeda's terrorist training camps" in eastern Afghanistan.

The IIS document also reveals that Saddam was funding another close ally of bin Laden, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad organization of Ayman al Zawahiri.

In a meeting in the Sudan we agreed to renew our relations with the Islamic Jihad Organization in Egypt. Our information on the group is as follows:

¶ It was established in 1979.

¶ Its goal is to apply the Islamic shari'a law and establish Islamic rule.

¶ It is considered one of the most brutal Egyptian organizations. It carried out numerous successful operations, including the assassination of [Egyptian president Anwar] Sadat.

¶ We have previously met with the organization's representative and we agreed on a plan to carry out commando operations against the Egyptian regime.

Zawahiri arrived in Afghanistan in the mid-1980s, and "from the start he concentrated his efforts on getting close

to bin Laden," according to Lawrence Wright, author of *The Looming Tower*. The leaders of EIJ quickly became leaders of bin Laden's organizations. "He soon succeeded in placing trusted members of Islamic Jihad in key positions around bin Laden," Wright reported in the definitive profile of Zawahiri, published in the *New Yorker* in September 2002. "According to the Islamist attorney Montasser al-Zayat, 'Zawahiri completely controlled bin Laden. The largest share of bin Laden's financial support went to Zawahiri and the Jihad organization.'"

Later, Wright describes Zawahiri's role in the founding of al Qaeda.

Toward the end of 1989, a meeting took place in the Afghan town of Khost at a mujahideen camp. A Sudanese fighter named Jamal al-Fadl was among the participants, and he later testified about the event in a New York courtroom during one of the trials connected with the 1998 bombing of the American embassies in East Africa. According to Fadl, the meeting was attended by ten men—four or five of them Egyptians, including Zawahiri. Fadl told the court that the chairman of the meeting, an Iraqi known as Abu Ayoub, proposed the formation of a new organization that would wage jihad beyond the borders of Afghanistan. There was some dispute about the name, but ultimately the new organization came to be called Al Qaeda—the Base. The alliance was conceived as a loose affiliation among individual mujahideen and established groups, and was dominated by Egyptian Islamic Jihad. The ultimate boss, however, was Osama bin Laden, who held the checkbook.

In the early 1990s, Zawahiri and bin Laden moved their operations to Sudan. After a fundraising trip to the United States in the spring of 1993, Zawahiri returned to Sudan where, again according to Wright, he "began working more closely with bin Laden, and most of the Egyptian members of Islamic Jihad went on the Al Qaeda payroll." Although some members of EIJ were skeptical of bin Laden and his global aspirations, Zawahiri sought a de facto merger with al Qaeda. One of his top assistants would later say Zawahiri had told him that "joining with bin Laden [was] the only solution to keeping the Jihad organization alive."

Once again, it's worth dwelling on these facts for a moment. In 1989, Ayman al Zawahiri attended the founding meeting of al Qaeda. He was literally present at the creation, and his EIJ "dominated" the new organization headed by Osama bin Laden.

At precisely the same time Zawahiri was "joining with bin Laden," the spring of 1993, he was being funded by

In 1989, Ayman al Zawahiri attended the founding meeting of al Qaeda. He was literally present at the creation, and his Egyptian Islamic Jihad "dominated" the new organization headed by Osama bin Laden.

Saddam Hussein's Iraq. As Zawahiri's jihadists trained in al Qaeda camps in Sudan, his representative to Iraq was planning "commando operations" against the Egyptian government with the IIS.

Another captured Iraqi document from early 1993 "reports on contact with a large number of terrorist groups in the region, including those that maintained an office or liaison in Iraq." In the same folder is a memo from Saddam Hussein to a member of his Revolutionary Council ordering the formation of "a group to start hunting Americans present on Arab soil, especially Somalia," where al Qaeda fighters were preparing to battle U.S. troops. A second memo to the director of the IIS instructs him to revise the plan for "operations inside Somalia."

More recently, captured "annual reports" of the IIS reveal support for terrorist organizations in the months leading up to the U.S. invasion in March 2003. According to the Pentagon study, "the IIS hosted thirteen conferences in 2002 for a number of Palestinian and other organizations, including delegations from the Islamic Jihad Movement and the Director General for the Popular Movement for the Liberation of al-Ahwaz." The same annual report "also notes that among the 699 passports, renewals and other official documentation that the IIS issued, many were issued to known members of terrorist organizations."

The Pentagon study goes on to describe captured documents that instruct the IIS to maintain contact with all manner of Arab movements and others that "reveal that later IIS activities went beyond just maintaining contact." Throughout the 1990s, the Iraqi regime's General Military Intelligence Directorate "was training Sudanese fighters inside Iraq."

The second section of the Pentagon study also discusses captured documents related to the Islamic Resis-

This page describes the 2002 annual report of the Iraqi Intelligence Services's M8 Directorate of Liberation Movements. The directorate hosted 13 conferences that year for delegations from Palestinian and other terrorist groups.

dering action in Somalia aimed at the American presence, Osama bin Laden was doing the same thing.⁴⁵

Evidence of Saddam's continuing interest and support for global terrorist activities is found in a 2002 annual report of the IIS M8 Directorate of Liberation Movements. The first two-thirds of the report list all of the subjects of the 2002 intelligence reporting, ranging from commentary on various Western newspaper articles to information on the contacts with and support for various regional groups.⁴⁶

But it is the last third of the report that is much more interesting. The IIS hosted thirteen conferences in 2002 for a number of Palestinian and other organizations, including delegations from the Islamic Jihad Movement and the Director General for the Popular Movement for the Liberation of al-Ahwaz.⁴⁷ The same document also lists messages that various terrorist groups sent to Saddam (37 messages), Saddam's Deputy (22), and Tariq Aziz (6). The titles of the message range from simple best wishes on Saddam's birthday to the following:

- Information on the number of Palestinian martyrs killed vs. Zionists killed.
- Requests for military equipment and for help for the families of suicide bombers.
- Information on (1) the financial status of various terrorist organizations, (2) the volunteers for suicide operations, and (3) rumors of a plan to assassinate Saddam Hussein.⁴⁸

The M8 annual report also notes that among the 699 passports, renewals, and other official documentation that the IIS issued, many were issued to known members of terrorist organizations. Moreover, it states that the IIS took four million *dinars* from its own budget to finance Palestinian terrorist groups and a further ten million to support Iraqi-sponsored terrorist activities in Iran.⁴⁹

The IIS also provides a list of activities that it considered "exemplary events," for example:

- Re-equipping and training Palestinian fighters in al-Quds training camps [in Iraq].

tance organization in Kurdistan from 1998 and 1999. The documents show that the Iraqi regime provided "financial and moral support" to members of the group, which would later become part of the al Qaeda affiliate in the region, Ansar al Islam.

The third section of the Pentagon study is called “Iraq and Terrorism: Three Cases.” One of the cases is that of the Army of Muhammad, an al Qaeda affiliate in Bahrain. A series of memoranda order an Iraqi Intelligence operative in Bahrain to explore a relationship with its leaders. On July 9, 2001, the agent reports back: “Information available to us is that the group is under the wings of bin Laden. They receive their directions from Yemen. Their objectives are the same as bin Laden.” Later, he lists the organization’s objectives.

¶ Jihad in the name of God.

¶ Striking the embassies and other Jewish and American interests anywhere in the world.

¶ Attacking the American and British military bases in the Arab land.

¶ Striking American embassies and interests unless the Americans pull out their forces from the Arab lands and discontinue their support for Israel.

¶ Disrupting oil exports [to] the Americans from Arab countries and threatening tankers carrying oil to them.

A separate memo reveals that the Army of Muhammad has requested assistance from Iraq. The study authors summarize the response by writing, “the local IIS station has been told to deal with them in accordance with priorities previously established. The IIS agent goes on to inform the Director that ‘this organization is an offshoot of bin Laden, but that their objectives are similar but with different names that can be a way of camouflaging the organization.’”

We never learn what those “previous priorities” were and thus what, if anything, came of these talks. But it is instructive that the operative in Bahrain understood the importance of disguising relations with al Qaeda and that the director of IIS, knowing that the group was affiliated with bin Laden and sought to attack Americans, seemed more interested in continuing the relationship than in ending it.

The fourth and final section of the Pentagon study is called “The Business of Terror.” The authors write: “An example of indirect cooperation is the movement led by Osama bin Laden. During the 1990s, both Saddam and bin Laden wanted the West, particularly the United States, out of Muslim lands (or in the view of Saddam, the “Arab nation”). . . . In pursuit of their own separate but surprisingly ‘parallel’ visions, Saddam and bin Laden often found a common enemy in the United States.”

They further note that Saddam’s security organizations and bin Laden’s network

were recruiting within the same demographic, spouting much of the same rhetoric, and promoting a common historical narrative that promised a return to a glorious past. That these movements (pan-Arab and pan-Islamic) had many similarities and strategic parallels does not mean they saw themselves in that light. Nevertheless, these similarities created more than just the appearance of cooperation. Common interests, even without common cause, increased the aggregate terror threat.

As much as we have learned from this impressive collection of documents, it is only a fraction of what we will know in 10, 20, or 50 years. The authors themselves acknowledge the limits of their work.

In fact, there are several captured Iraqi documents that have been authenticated by the U.S. government that were not included in the study but add to the picture it sketches. One document, authenticated by the Defense Intelligence Agency and first reported on *60 Minutes*, is dated March 28, 1992. It describes Osama bin Laden as an Iraqi intelligence asset “in good contact” with the IIS station in Syria.

Another Iraqi document, this one from the mid-1990s, was first reported in the *New York Times* on June 25, 2004. Authenticated by a Pentagon and intelligence working group, the document was titled “Iraqi Effort to Cooperate with Saudi Opposition Groups and Individuals.” The working group concluded that it “corroborates and expands on previous reporting” on contacts between Iraq and al Qaeda. It revealed that a Sudanese government official met with Uday Hussein and the director of the IIS in 1994 and reported that bin Laden was willing to meet in Sudan. Bin Laden, according to the Iraqi document, was then “approached by our side” after “presidential approval” for the liaison was given. The former head of Iraqi Intelligence Directorate 4 met with bin Laden on February 19, 1995. The document further states that bin Laden “had some reservations about being labeled an Iraqi operative”—a comment that suggests the possibility had been discussed.

Bin Laden requested that Iraq’s state-run television network broadcast anti-Saudi propaganda, and the document indicates that the Iraqis agreed to do this. The al Qaeda leader also proposed “joint operations against foreign forces” in Saudi Arabia. There is no Iraqi response

In one folder is a memo from Saddam Hussein to a member of his Revolutionary Council ordering the formation of ‘a group to start hunting Americans present on Arab soil, especially Somalia.’

provided in the documents. When bin Laden left Sudan for Afghanistan in May 1996, the Iraqis sought “other channels through which to handle the relationship, in light of his current location.” The IIS memo directs that “cooperation between the two organizations should be allowed to develop freely through discussion and agreement.”

In another instance, the new Pentagon study makes reference to captured documents detailing the Iraqi relationship with Abu Sayyaf, the al Qaeda affiliate in the Philippines founded by Osama bin Laden’s brother-in-law. But the Pentagon study does not mention the most significant element of those documents, first reported in these pages. In a memo from Ambassador Salah Samarmad to the Secondary Policy Directorate of the Iraqi Foreign Ministry, we learn that the Iraqi regime had been funding and equipping Abu Sayyaf, which had been responsible for a series of high-profile kidnappings. The ambassador informs Baghdad that such support had been suspended. “The kidnapers were formerly (from the previous year) receiving money and purchasing combat weapons. From now on we (IIS) are not giving them this opportunity and are not on speaking terms with them.” That support would resume soon enough, and shortly before the war a high-ranking Iraqi diplomat named Hisham Hussein would be expelled from the Philippines after his cell phone number appeared on an Abu Sayyaf cell phone used to detonate a bomb.

What’s happening here is obvious. Military historians and terrorism analysts are engaged in a good faith effort to review the captured documents from the Iraqi regime and provide a dispassionate, fact-based examination of Saddam Hussein’s long support of jihadist terrorism. Most reporters don’t care. They are trapped in a world where the Bush administration lied to the country about an Iraq-al Qaeda connection, and no amount of evidence to the contrary—not even the words of the fallen Iraqi regime itself—can convince them to reexamine their mistaken assumptions.

Bush administration officials, meanwhile, tell us that

The document shown here presents “evidence of logistical preparation for terrorist operations in other nations.”

Two other documents present evidence of logistical preparation for terrorist operations in other nations, including those in the West. It is not clear from these documents if these weapons were being staged for a specific purpose or stockpiled for future contingencies. **Extract 2** is a response from the Iraqi Intelligence Service (IIS) to a letter from Saddam asking for a list of weapons available in Iraqi embassies overseas.

Extract 2

Subject: Weapons Information:

[July 2002]

1. We would like to inform you of the following:

- Romania – Missile launcher and missile
- Athens [Greece] – Explosive charges
- Vienna [Austria] – Explosive charges, rifles with silencers, hand grenades, and Kalashnikov rifles
- Pakistan – Explosive materials of TNT
- India – Plastic explosive charges and booby-trapped suitcases
- Thailand – Plastic explosive charges and booby-trapped suitcases
- Prague [Czech] – Missile launcher and missile
- Turkey – Missile launcher, missile, and pistols with silencers
- Sana’a [Yemen] – Missile launcher, missile, plastic explosives and explosive charges
- Baku [Azerbaijan] – American missile launcher, plastic explosives and booby-trapped suitcases
- Beirut [Lebanon] – American missile launcher, plastic explosives and booby-trapped suitcases
- Gulf nations – Explosive material outside the embassies

2. Between the year 2000 and 2002 ... explosive materials were transported to the embassies outside Iraq for special work, upon the approval of the Director of the Iraqi Intelligence Service. The responsibility for these materials is in the hands of heads of stations. Some of these materials were transported in the political mail carriers [Diplomatic Pouch]. Some of these materials were transported by car in booby-trapped briefcases. ¹¹

the Iraq war is the central front in the war on terror and that American national security depends on winning there. And yet they are too busy or too tired or too lazy to correct these fundamental misperceptions about the case for war in Iraq, the most important decision of the Bush presidency.

What good is the truth if nobody knows it? ◆