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Case Closed

From the November 24, 2003 issue: The U.S. government's secret memo detailing cooperation between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden.

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Editor's Note, 1/27/04: In today's Washington Post, Dana Milbank reported that "Vice President Cheney . . . in an interview this month with the Rocky Mountain News, recommended as the 'best source of information' an article in The Weekly Standard magazine detailing a relationship between Hussein and al Qaeda based on leaked classified information."

Here's the Stephen F. Hayes article to which the vice president was referring.

-JVL

OSAMA BIN LADEN and Saddam Hussein had an operational relationship from the early 1990s to 2003 that involved training in explosives and weapons of mass destruction, logistical support for terrorist attacks, al Qaeda training camps and safe haven in Iraq, and Iraqi financial support for al Qaeda--perhaps even for Mohamed Atta--according to a top secret U.S. government memorandum obtained by THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

The memo, dated October 27, 2003, was sent from Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas J. Feith to Senators Pat Roberts and Jay Rockefeller, the chairman and vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. It was written in response to a request from the committee as part of its investigation into prewar intelligence claims made by the administration. Intelligence reporting included in the 16-page memo comes from a variety of domestic and foreign agencies, including the FBI, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Agency. Much of the evidence is detailed, conclusive, and corroborated by multiple sources. Some of it is new information obtained in custodial interviews with high-level al Qaeda terrorists and Iraqi officials, and some of it is more than a decade old. The picture that emerges is one of a history of collaboration between two of America's most determined and dangerous enemies.

According to the memo--which lays out the intelligence in 50 numbered points--Iraq-al Qaeda contacts began in 1990 and continued through mid-March 2003, days before the Iraq War began. Most of the numbered passages contain straight, fact-based intelligence reporting, which in some cases includes an evaluation of the credibility of the source. This reporting is often followed by commentary and analysis.

The relationship began shortly before the first Gulf War. According to reporting in the memo, bin Laden sent "emissaries to Jordan in 1990 to meet with Iraqi government officials." At some unspecified point in 1991, according to a CIA analysis, "Iraq sought Sudan's assistance to establish links to al Qaeda." The outreach went in both directions. According to 1993 CIA reporting cited in the memo, "bin Laden wanted to expand his organization's capabilities through ties with Iraq."

The primary go-between throughout these early stages was Sudanese strongman Hassan al-Turabi, a leader of the

al Qaeda-affiliated National Islamic Front. Numerous sources have confirmed this. One defector reported that "al-Turabi was instrumental in arranging the Iraqi-al Qaeda relationship. The defector said Iraq sought al Qaeda influence through its connections with Afghanistan, to facilitate the transshipment of proscribed weapons and equipment to Iraq. In return, Iraq provided al Qaeda with training and instructors."

One such confirmation came in a postwar interview with one of Saddam Hussein's henchmen. As the memo details:

4. According to a May 2003 debriefing of a senior Iraqi intelligence officer, Iraqi intelligence established a highly secretive relationship with Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and later with al Qaeda. The first meeting in 1992 between the Iraqi Intelligence Service (IIS) and al Qaeda was brokered by al-Turabi. Former IIS deputy director Faruq Hijazi and senior al Qaeda leader [Ayman al] Zawahiri were at the meeting--the first of several between 1992 and 1995 in Sudan. Additional meetings between Iraqi intelligence and al Qaeda were held in Pakistan. Members of al Qaeda would sometimes visit Baghdad where they would meet the Iraqi intelligence chief in a safe house. The report claimed that Saddam insisted the relationship with al Qaeda be kept secret. After 9-11, the source said Saddam made a personnel change in the IIS for fear the relationship would come under scrutiny from foreign probes.

A decisive moment in the budding relationship came in 1993, when bin Laden faced internal resistance to his cooperation with Saddam.

5. A CIA report from a contact with good access, some of whose reporting has been corroborated, said that certain elements in the "Islamic Army" of bin Laden were against the secular regime of Saddam. Overriding the internal factional strife that was developing, bin Laden came to an "understanding" with Saddam that the Islamic Army would no longer support anti-Saddam activities. According to sensitive reporting released in U.S. court documents during the African Embassy trial, in 1993 bin Laden reached an "understanding" with Saddam under which he (bin Laden) forbade al Qaeda operations to be mounted against the Iraqi leader.

Another facilitator of the relationship during the mid-1990s was Mahmudouh Mahmud Salim (a.k.a. Abu Hajer al-Iraqi). Abu Hajer, now in a New York prison, was described in court proceedings related to the August 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania as bin Laden's "best friend." According to CIA reporting dating back to the Clinton administration, bin Laden trusted him to serve as a liaison with Saddam's regime and tasked him with procurement of weapons of mass destruction for al Qaeda. FBI reporting in the memo reveals that Abu Hajer "visited Iraq in early 1995" and "had a good relationship with Iraqi intelligence. Sometime before mid-1995 he went on an al Qaeda mission to discuss unspecified cooperation with the Iraqi government."

Some of the reporting about the relationship throughout the mid-1990s comes from a source who had intimate knowledge of bin Laden and his dealings. This source, according to CIA analysis, offered "the most credible information" on cooperation between bin Laden and Iraq.

This source's reports read almost like a diary. Specific dates of when bin Laden flew to various cities are included, as well as names of individuals he met. The source did not offer information on the substantive talks during the meetings. . . . There are not a great many reports in general on the relationship between bin Laden and Iraq because of the secrecy surrounding it. But when this source with close access provided a "window" into bin Laden's activities, bin Laden is seen as heavily involved with Iraq (and Iran).

Reporting from the early 1990s remains somewhat sketchy, though multiple sources place Hassan al-Turabi and Ayman al Zawahiri, bin Laden's current No. 2, at the center of the relationship. The reporting gets much more specific in the mid-1990s:

8. Reporting from a well placed source disclosed that bin Laden was receiving training on bomb making from the IIS's [Iraqi Intelligence Service] principal technical expert on making sophisticated explosives, Brigadier Salim al-Ahmed. Brigadier Salim was observed at bin Laden's farm in Khartoum

in Sept.-Oct. 1995 and again in July 1996, in the company of the Director of Iraqi Intelligence, Mani abd-al-Rashid al-Tikriti.

9 . . . Bin Laden visited Doha, Qatar (17-19 Jan. 1996), staying at the residence of a member of the Qatari ruling family. He discussed the successful movement of explosives into Saudi Arabia, and operations targeted against U.S. and U.K. interests in Dammam, Dharan, and Khobar, using clandestine al Qaeda cells in Saudi Arabia. Upon his return, bin Laden met with Hijazi and Turabi, among others.

And later more reporting, from the same "well placed" source:

10. The Director of Iraqi Intelligence, Mani abd-al-Rashid al-Tikriti, met privately with bin Laden at his farm in Sudan in July 1996. Tikriti used an Iraqi delegation traveling to Khartoum to discuss bilateral cooperation as his "cover" for his own entry into Sudan to meet with bin Laden and Hassan al-Turabi. The Iraqi intelligence chief and two other IIS officers met at bin Laden's farm and discussed bin Laden's request for IIS technical assistance in: a) making letter and parcel bombs; b) making bombs which could be placed on aircraft and detonated by changes in barometric pressure; and c) making false passport [sic]. Bin Laden specifically requested that [Brigadier Salim al-Ahmed], Iraqi intelligence's premier explosives maker--especially skilled in making car bombs--remain with him in Sudan. The Iraqi intelligence chief instructed Salim to remain in Sudan with bin Laden as long as required.

The analysis of those events follows:

The time of the visit from the IIS director was a few weeks after the Khobar Towers bombing. The bombing came on the third anniversary of a U.S. [Tomahawk missile] strike on IIS HQ (retaliation for the attempted assassination of former President Bush in Kuwait) for which Iraqi officials explicitly threatened retaliation.

IN ADDITION TO THE CONTACTS CLUSTERED in the mid-1990s, intelligence reports detail a flurry of activities in early 1998 and again in December 1998. A "former senior Iraqi intelligence officer" reported that "the Iraqi intelligence service station in Pakistan was Baghdad's point of contact with al Qaeda. He also said bin Laden visited Baghdad in Jan. 1998 and met with Tariq Aziz."

11. According to sensitive reporting, Saddam personally sent Faruq Hijazi, IIS deputy director and later Iraqi ambassador to Turkey, to meet with bin Laden at least twice, first in Sudan and later in Afghanistan in 1999. . . .

14. According to a sensitive reporting [from] a "regular and reliable source," [Ayman al] Zawahiri, a senior al Qaeda operative, visited Baghdad and met with the Iraqi Vice President on 3 February 1998. The goal of the visit was to arrange for coordination between Iraq and bin Laden and establish camps in an-Nasiriyah and Iraqi Kurdistan under the leadership of Abdul Aziz.

That visit came as the Iraqis intensified their defiance of the U.N. inspection regime, known as UNSCOM, created by the cease-fire agreement following the Gulf War. UNSCOM demanded access to Saddam's presidential palaces that he refused to provide. As the tensions mounted, President Bill Clinton went to the Pentagon on February 18, 1998, and prepared the nation for war. He warned of "an unholy axis of terrorists, drug traffickers, and organized international criminals" and said "there is no more clear example of this threat than Saddam Hussein."

The day after this speech, according to documents unearthed in April 2003 in the Iraqi Intelligence headquarters by journalists Mitch Potter and Inigo Gilmore, Hussein's intelligence service wrote a memo detailing coming meetings with a bin Laden representative traveling to Baghdad. Each reference to bin Laden had been covered by liquid paper that, when revealed, exposed a plan to increase cooperation between Iraq and al Qaeda. According to that memo, the IIS agreed to pay for "all the travel and hotel costs inside Iraq to gain the knowledge of the message from bin Laden and to convey to his envoy an oral message from us to bin Laden." The document set as the goal for the meeting a discussion of "the future of our relationship with him, bin Laden, and to achieve a direct meeting

with him." The al Qaeda representative, the document went on to suggest, might provide "a way to maintain contacts with bin Laden."

Four days later, on February 23, 1998, bin Laden issued his now-famous fatwa on the plight of Iraq, published in the Arabic-language daily, al Quds al-Arabi: "For over seven years the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples." Bin Laden urged his followers to act: "The ruling to kill all Americans and their allies--civilians and military--is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it."

Although war was temporarily averted by a last-minute deal brokered by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, tensions soon rose again. The standoff with Iraq came to a head in December 1998, when President Clinton launched Operation Desert Fox, a 70-hour bombing campaign that began on December 16 and ended three days later, on December 19, 1998.

According to press reports at the time, Faruq Hijazi, deputy director of Iraqi Intelligence, met with bin Laden in Afghanistan on December 21, 1998, to offer bin Laden safe haven in Iraq. CIA reporting in the memo to the Senate Intelligence Committee seems to confirm this meeting and relates two others.

15. A foreign government service reported that an Iraqi delegation, including at least two Iraqi intelligence officers formerly assigned to the Iraqi Embassy in Pakistan, met in late 1998 with bin Laden in Afghanistan.

16. According to CIA reporting, bin Laden and Zawahiri met with two Iraqi intelligence officers in Afghanistan in Dec. 1998.

17. . . . Iraq sent an intelligence officer to Afghanistan to seek closer ties to bin Laden and the Taliban in late 1998. The source reported that the Iraqi regime was trying to broaden its cooperation with al Qaeda. Iraq was looking to recruit Muslim "elements" to sabotage U.S. and U.K. interests. After a senior Iraqi intelligence officer met with Taliban leader [Mullah] Omar, arrangements were made for a series of meetings between the Iraqi intelligence officer and bin Laden in Pakistan. The source noted Faruq Hijazi was in Afghanistan in late 1998.

18. . . . Faruq Hijazi went to Afghanistan in 1999 along with several other Iraqi officials to meet with bin Laden. The source claimed that Hijazi would have met bin Laden only at Saddam's explicit direction.

An analysis that follows No. 18 provides additional context and an explanation of these reports:

Reporting entries #4, #11, #15, #16, #17, and #18, from different sources, corroborate each other and provide confirmation of meetings between al Qaeda operatives and Iraqi intelligence in Afghanistan and Pakistan. None of the reports have information on operational details or the purpose of such meetings. The covert nature of the relationship would indicate strict compartmentation [sic] of operations.

Information about connections between al Qaeda and Iraq was so widespread by early 1999 that it made its way into the mainstream press. A January 11, 1999, Newsweek story ran under this headline: "Saddam + Bin Laden?" The story cited an "Arab intelligence source" with knowledge of contacts between Iraq and al Qaeda. "According to this source, Saddam expected last month's American and British bombing campaign to go on much longer than it did. The dictator believed that as the attacks continued, indignation would grow in the Muslim world, making his terrorism offensive both harder to trace and more effective. With acts of terror contributing to chaos in the region, Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait might feel less inclined to support Washington. Saddam's long-term strategy, according to several sources, is to bully or cajole Muslim countries into breaking the embargo against Iraq, without waiting for the United Nations to lift it formally."

INTELLIGENCE REPORTS about the nature of the relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda from mid-1999 through 2003 are conflicting. One senior Iraqi intelligence officer in U.S. custody, Khalil Ibrahim Abdallah, "said that the last

contact between the IIS and al Qaeda was in July 1999. Bin Laden wanted to meet with Saddam, he said. The guidance sent back from Saddam's office reportedly ordered Iraqi intelligence to refrain from any further contact with bin Laden and al Qaeda. The source opined that Saddam wanted to distance himself from al Qaeda."

The bulk of reporting on the relationship contradicts this claim. One report states that "in late 1999" al Qaeda set up a training camp in northern Iraq that "was operational as of 1999." Other reports suggest that the Iraqi regime contemplated several offers of safe haven to bin Laden throughout 1999.

23. . . . Iraqi officials were carefully considering offering safe haven to bin Laden and his closest collaborators in Nov. 1999. The source indicated the idea was put forward by the presumed head of Iraqi intelligence in Islamabad (Khalid Janaby) who in turn was in frequent contact and had good relations with bin Laden.

Some of the most intriguing intelligence concerns an Iraqi named Ahmed Hikmat Shakir:

24. According to sensitive reporting, a Malaysia-based Iraqi national (Shakir) facilitated the arrival of one of the Sept 11 hijackers for an operational meeting in Kuala Lumpur (Jan 2000). Sensitive reporting indicates Shakir's travel and contacts link him to a worldwide network of terrorists, including al Qaeda. Shakir worked at the Kuala Lumpur airport--a job he claimed to have obtained through an Iraqi embassy employee.

One of the men at that al Qaeda operational meeting in the Kuala Lumpur Hotel was Tawfiz al Atash, a top bin Laden lieutenant later identified as the mastermind of the October 12, 2000, attack on the USS Cole.

25. Investigation into the bombing of the USS Cole in October 2000 by al Qaeda revealed no specific Iraqi connections but according to the CIA, "fragmentary evidence points to possible Iraqi involvement."

26. During a custodial interview, Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi [a senior al Qaeda operative] said he was told by an al Qaeda associate that he was tasked to travel to Iraq (1998) to establish a relationship with Iraqi intelligence to obtain poisons and gases training. After the USS Cole bombing in 2000, two al Qaeda operatives were sent to Iraq for CBW-related [Chemical and Biological Weapons] training beginning in Dec 2000. Iraqi intelligence was "encouraged" after the embassy and USS Cole bombings to provide this training.

The analysis of this report follows.

CIA maintains that Ibn al-Shaykh's timeline is consistent with other sensitive reporting indicating that bin Laden asked Iraq in 1998 for advanced weapons, including CBW and "poisons."

Additional reporting also calls into question the claim that relations between Iraq and al Qaeda cooled after mid-1999:

27. According to sensitive CIA reporting, . . . the Saudi National Guard went on a kingdom-wide state of alert in late Dec 2000 after learning Saddam agreed to assist al Qaeda in attacking U.S./U.K. interests in Saudi Arabia.

And then there is the alleged contact between lead 9/11 hijacker Mohamed Atta and an Iraqi intelligence officer in Prague. The reporting on those links suggests not one meeting, but as many as four. What's more, the memo reveals potential financing of Atta's activities by Iraqi intelligence.

The Czech counterintelligence service reported that the Sept. 11 hijacker [Mohamed] Atta met with the former Iraqi intelligence chief in Prague, [Ahmed Khalil Ibrahim Samir] al Ani, on several occasions. During one of these meetings, al Ani ordered the IIS finance officer to issue Atta funds from IIS financial holdings in the Prague office.

And the commentary:

CIA can confirm two Atta visits to Prague--in Dec. 1994 and in June 2000; data surrounding the other two--on 26 Oct 1999 and 9 April 2001--is complicated and sometimes contradictory and CIA and FBI cannot confirm Atta met with the IIS. Czech Interior Minister Stanislav Gross continues to stand by his information.

It's not just Gross who stands by the information. Five high-ranking members of the Czech government have publicly confirmed meetings between Atta and al Ani. The meeting that has gotten the most press attention--April 9, 2001--is also the most widely disputed. Even some of the most hawkish Bush administration officials are privately skeptical that Atta met al Ani on that occasion. They believe that reports of the alleged meeting, said to have taken place in public, outside the headquarters of the U.S.-financed Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, suggest a level of sloppiness that doesn't fit the pattern of previous high-level Iraq-al Qaeda contacts.

Whether or not that specific meeting occurred, the report by Czech counterintelligence that al Ani ordered the Iraqi Intelligence Service officer to provide IIS funds to Atta might help explain the lead hijacker's determination to reach Prague, despite significant obstacles, in the spring of 2000. (Note that the report stops short of confirming that the funds were transferred. It claims only that the IIS officer requested the transfer.) Recall that Atta flew to Prague from Germany on May 30, 2000, but was denied entry because he did not have a valid visa. Rather than simply return to Germany and fly directly to the United States, his ultimate destination, Atta took pains to get to Prague. After he was refused entry the first time, he traveled back to Germany, obtained the proper paperwork, and caught a bus back to Prague. He left for the United States the day after arriving in Prague for the second time.

Several reports indicate that the relationship between Saddam and bin Laden continued, even after the September 11 attacks:

31. An Oct. 2002 . . . report said al Qaeda and Iraq reached a secret agreement whereby Iraq would provide safe haven to al Qaeda members and provide them with money and weapons. The agreement reportedly prompted a large number of al Qaeda members to head to Iraq. The report also said that al Qaeda members involved in a fraudulent passport network for al Qaeda had been directed to procure 90 Iraqi and Syrian passports for al Qaeda personnel.

The analysis that accompanies that report indicates that the report fits the pattern of Iraq-al Qaeda collaboration:

References to procurement of false passports from Iraq and offers of safe haven previously have surfaced in CIA source reporting considered reliable. Intelligence reports to date have maintained that Iraqi support for al Qaeda usually involved providing training, obtaining passports, and offers of refuge. This report adds to that list by including weapons and money. This assistance would make sense in the aftermath of 9-11.

Colin Powell, in his February 5, 2003, presentation to the U.N. Security Council, revealed the activities of Abu Musab al Zarqawi. Reporting in the memo expands on Powell's case and might help explain some of the resistance the U.S. military is currently facing in Iraq.

37. Sensitive reporting indicates senior terrorist planner and close al Qaeda associate al Zarqawi has had an operational alliance with Iraqi officials. As of Oct. 2002, al Zarqawi maintained contacts with the IIS to procure weapons and explosives, including surface-to-air missiles from an IIS officer in Baghdad. According to sensitive reporting, al Zarqawi was setting up sleeper cells in Baghdad to be activated in case of a U.S. occupation of the city, suggesting his operational cooperation with the Iraqis may have deepened in recent months. Such cooperation could include IIS provision of a secure operating bases [sic] and steady access to arms and explosives in preparation for a possible U.S. invasion. Al Zarqawi's procurements from the Iraqis also could support al Qaeda operations against the U.S. or its allies elsewhere.

38. According to sensitive reporting, a contact with good access who does not have an established reporting record: An Iraqi intelligence service officer said that as of mid-March the IIS was providing weapons to al Qaeda members located in northern Iraq, including rocket propelled grenade (RPG)-18 launchers. According to IIS information,

northern Iraq-based al Qaeda members believed that the U.S. intended to strike al Qaeda targets during an anticipated assault against Ansar al-Islam positions.

The memo further reported pre-war intelligence which "claimed that an Iraqi intelligence official, praising Ansar al-Islam, provided it with \$100,000 and agreed to continue to give assistance."

CRITICS OF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION have complained that Iraq-al Qaeda connections are a fantasy, trumped up by the warmongers at the White House to fit their preconceived notions about international terror; that links between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden have been routinely "exaggerated" for political purposes; that hawks "cherry-picked" bits of intelligence and tendentiously presented these to the American public.

Carl Levin, a senior member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, made those points as recently as November 9, in an appearance on "Fox News Sunday." Republicans on the committee, he complained, refuse to look at the administration's "exaggeration of intelligence."

Said Levin: "The question is whether or not they exaggerated intelligence in order to carry out their purpose, which was to make the case for going to war. Did we know, for instance, with certainty that there was any relationship between the Iraqis and the terrorists that were in Afghanistan, bin Laden? The administration said that there's a connection between those terrorist groups in Afghanistan and Iraq. Was there a basis for that?"

There was, as shown in the memo to the committee on which Levin serves. And much of the reporting comes from Clinton-era intelligence. Not that you would know this from Al Gore's recent public statements. Indeed, the former vice president claims to be privy to new "evidence" that the administration lied. In an August speech at New York University, Gore claimed: "The evidence now shows clearly that Saddam did not want to work with Osama bin Laden at all, much less give him weapons of mass destruction." Really?

One of the most interesting things to note about the 16-page memo is that it covers only a fraction of the evidence that will eventually be available to document the relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda. For one thing, both Saddam and bin Laden were desperate to keep their cooperation secret. (Remember, Iraqi intelligence used liquid paper on an internal intelligence document to conceal bin Laden's name.) For another, few people in the U.S. government are expressly looking for such links. There is no Iraq-al Qaeda equivalent of the CIA's 1,400-person Iraq Survey Group currently searching Iraq for weapons of mass destruction.

Instead, CIA and FBI officials are methodically reviewing Iraqi intelligence files that survived the three-week war last spring. These documents would cover several miles if laid end-to-end. And they are in Arabic. They include not only connections between bin Laden and Saddam, but also revolting details of the regime's long history of brutality. It will be a slow process.

So Feith's memo to the Senate Intelligence Committee is best viewed as sort of a "Cliff's Notes" version of the relationship. It contains the highlights, but it is far from exhaustive.

One example. The memo contains only one paragraph on Ahmed Hikmat Shakir, the Iraqi facilitator who escorted two September 11 hijackers through customs in Kuala Lumpur. U.S. intelligence agencies have extensive reporting on his activities before and after the September 11 hijacking. That they would include only this brief overview suggests the 16-page memo, extensive as it is, just skims the surface of the reporting on Iraq-al Qaeda connections.

Other intelligence reports indicate that Shakir whisked not one but two September 11 hijackers--Khalid al Midhar and Nawaq al Hamzi--through the passport and customs process upon their arrival in Kuala Lumpur on January 5, 2000. Shakir then traveled with the hijackers to the Kuala Lumpur Hotel where they met with Ramzi bin al Shihb, one of the masterminds of the September 11 plot. The meeting lasted three days. Shakir returned to work on January 9 and January 10, and never again.

Shakir got his airport job through a contact at the Iraqi Embassy. (Iraq routinely used its embassies as staging grounds for its intelligence operations; in some cases, more than half of the alleged "diplomats" were intelligence operatives.) The Iraqi embassy, not his employer, controlled Shakir's schedule. He was detained in Qatar on

September 17, 2001. Authorities found in his possession contact information for terrorists involved in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the 1998 embassy bombings, the 2000 attack on the USS Cole, and the September 11 hijackings. The CIA had previous reporting that Shakir had received a phone call from the safe house where the 1993 World Trade Center attacks had been plotted.

The Qataris released Shakir shortly after his arrest. On October 21, 2001, he flew to Amman, Jordan, where he was to change planes to a flight to Baghdad. He didn't make that flight. Shakir was detained in Jordan for three months, where the CIA interrogated him. His interrogators concluded that Shakir had received extensive training in counter-interrogation techniques. Not long after he was detained, according to an official familiar with the intelligence, the Iraqi regime began to "pressure" Jordanian intelligence to release him. At the same time, Amnesty International complained that Shakir was being held without charge. The Jordanians released him on January 28, 2002, at which point he is believed to have fled back to Iraq.

Was Shakir an Iraqi agent? Does he provide a connection between Saddam Hussein and September 11? We don't know. We may someday find out.

But there can no longer be any serious argument about whether Saddam Hussein's Iraq worked with Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda to plot against Americans.

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