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Iraq: The Uses of Terror



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An Intelligence Assessment

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Iraq: The Uses of Terror



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An Intelligence Assessment

*Information available as of 31 January 1982
has been used in the preparation of this report.*

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This assessment was prepared by
Office of Near East-South Asia Analysis.
Comments and queries are welcome and may be
directed to the Chief, Persian Gulf Division,
NESA,

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It was coordinated with the Office of Global Issues,
the National Intelligence Officer for Near East
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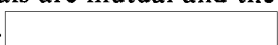
**Iraq:
The Uses of Terror**



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Key Judgments

Iraq continues to use terrorism as an instrument of national policy.¹ It has, however, altered its targets to reflect changing national priorities and goals, and it relies more than earlier on its own nationals to conduct terrorist operations. Its principal targets now are Iranians and domestic opponents who are frequently attacked abroad. Nonetheless, links to anti-Israeli Palestinian factions and other groups have not been severed. We believe Iraq will sponsor their activities when the goals are mutual and the risk to its present national policy needs are minimal.



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Iraq's more cooperative attitude toward Arab leaders and especially toward those in the Persian Gulf is born of a coincidence of President Saddam Hussein's desire to increase Iraq's regional power and international influence and Iraq's need for friends and financial aid because of its war with Iran. Iraq's aspirations were encouraged principally by three major events. Egypt and Syria, Iraq's traditional rivals for Arab leadership, were isolated and weak; Iran, its rival in the Gulf, was in the throes of revolution; and oil wealth offered the prospect of economic development and freedom of maneuver between the superpowers.



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These prospects have been clouded over the past 17 months by several developments that could again alter Iraq's choice of targets and its means of terrorism. Syria and Saudi Arabia are making new initiatives aimed at Arab leadership. Iraq's bid to defeat Iran and establish its own hegemony in the Gulf is failing and there is no end in sight to the war, which has weakened Iraq's economic base. Superpower military presence in the region is growing, unchecked by regional consensus, and Israel—regardless of the Baghdad-orchestrated summits—can strike at Iraq with impunity. Whatever new tacks Iraqi policy might take, we believe Baghdad will continue to use the tactics of terror and regard them as legitimate and necessary instruments of national policy.



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¹ This assessment uses the definition of terrorism applied in



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- Terrorism: the threat or use of violence for political purposes by individuals or groups, whether acting for, or in opposition to, established governmental authority, when such actions are intended to shock, stun, or intimidate a target group wider than the immediate victims.
- International terrorism: terrorism conducted with the support of a foreign government or organization and/or directed against foreign nationals, institutions, or governments.



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The Iraqi Record

Baghdad earned a reputation in the 1970s as a backer of international terrorists. Eager to broaden its reputation as a foe of Zionism and imperialism, Iraq gave money, arms, training, and safehaven to a variety of Arab and non-Arab groups,



The aid went primarily to Palestinian factions for operations against Israel. Baghdad also used the Palestinian factions to wage undeclared war on Syria and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

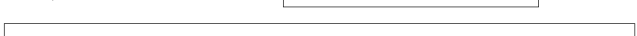
The focus of Iraq's support in the mid-1970s, according to Iraqi leadership statements, was anti-Syrian Palestinian groups fighting in Lebanon. These groups included the Arab Liberation Front, the pro-Soviet Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) led by George Habbash, the PFLP faction led by Wadi Haddad, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Front for the Liberation of Palestine led by Abu al-Abbas, and the Palestine Popular Struggle Front. Iraq created the Black June Organization in 1976 to counter growing Syrian influence in Lebanon. Its leader, Sabri al-Banna (Abu Nidhal), was a former member of Fatah who had been condemned by Fatah after he tried to assassinate Yasir Arafat in 1974. Black June acted as Iraq's surrogate in wide-ranging acts of sabotage in Lebanon and Syria against the Assad government and in Baghdad's occasional wars with Arafat and the PLO.

Aid was not limited to the Palestinians. The Italian Red Brigades, the West German Baader-Meinhof gang, and the Japanese Red Army trained in Iraq in the mid-1970s. Iranian, Bahraini, Omani, and Polisario Front guerrillas reportedly also used Iraqi training camps. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman—a Marxist-oriented dissident group based in Aden—had an office in Baghdad, as did the Popular Front for the Liberation of Bahrain and the National

Liberation Front—Bahrain. Iraq does not appear to be training West European, Japanese, and Arab terrorists at present. It is aiding Iranian dissidents.



Support for national liberation movements, especially those in black Africa, also was a popular Baath Party cause in the 1970s. Baghdad aided guerrilla groups from Afghanistan, South Yemen, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Chad, and Eritrea.



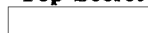
Iraq's willingness to offer shelter, training, money, and arms involved it in a number of terrorist operations in the 1970s,



Groups receiving training and safehaven in Iraq were responsible for the hijacking in July 1973 of a Japanese airliner in Dubai by the PFLP and the Japanese Red Army, the hijacking in July 1976 of a French airliner to Entebbe by the PFLP, attacks on the Semiramis Hotel in Damascus and the Intercontinental Hotel in Amman in 1976, and an assassination attempt in October 1977 on Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam in which the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates was killed. The last three attacks were all Black June operations. In 1978 Black June and Iraqi intelligence fought a series of battles with the PLO. They staged terrorist attacks on PLO offices in the United Kingdom, France, Kuwait, and Pakistan, killing the PLO



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representatives in London, Paris, and Kuwait as well as a French policeman. Black June also assassinated Yusuf al-Sibai, editor of the influential Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram* and a close friend of President Sadat.

some cases withdrew financial aid to Black June, the PFLP, and the DFLP. It also reduced its support for radical organizations targeted against its conservative Arab neighbors.

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Iraq routinely is blamed for terrorist operations in Syria because of the longstanding enmity of the two Baath regimes, but the extent of its involvement is unknown. Iraq, however, has had contacts with the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and with other anti-Assad factions over the years.

The war with Iran gave impetus to Iraq's policy of seeking better relations with fellow Arabs. Concerned with PLO support for Iran and eager to enlist Sunni Arab support against the Khomeini government in Tehran, Iraq further reduced its aid to terrorist groups and closed the Baghdad offices of the PFLP and DFLP. Baghdad drew closer to the Gulf Arab states and Jordan, relying on them for financial aid and logistical support against Iran.

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The Changes

Iraq's foreign policy goals were changing by the late 1970s as it attempted to play a more influential international role. President Saddam Hussein, bolstered by rapidly rising oil revenues and confident of his control over the Baath Party and the government, wanted to end his country's diplomatic isolation and build its economic and military power. He wanted to be included in regional decisionmaking and to participate more fully in the Arab League, the Islamic community, and the nonaligned movement.

At the same time, decreasing evidence of Iraq's support for European terrorist groups may have reflected Baghdad's concern that its continued involvement with such groups would retard its improving relations with the West and damage its access to Western military technology. Iraq began in the mid-1970s to broaden its access to European military suppliers, in particular French, West German, Italian, and British companies which manufactured advanced fighter aircraft, artillery, surface-to-air missiles, radars, and electronic equipment. Baghdad has more recently become interested in purchasing US military equipment as well.

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The first signs of a possible shift came as early as 1975, when Saddam—then the second most powerful figure in Iraq—signed the Algiers Accord with the Shah of Iran. This effectively ended the latest round of Kurdish rebellion and put relations with Tehran on an even keel. He also started talks with the Saudis aimed at reducing tensions and settling border disputes.

The Constants

Iraq's changing foreign policy ambitions produced a shift in targets for terrorism but not a shift away from terrorism as an instrument of policy. Baghdad now relies more on its own agents than on outside groups, and its targeting has shifted toward Iranian and pro-Iranian groups, with less emphasis on Israel and the conservative Gulf Arab regimes. It continues to rely on terrorist tactics against antiregime Iraqis—especially Kurds, Shias, and Communists—both in Iraq and abroad.

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Jordan and the conservative Arab monarchs in the Gulf paid little heed to Baghdad's overtures until late 1978, when two developments made Iraqi offers of cooperation more acceptable. These were Egyptian President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in November and the revolution in Iran.

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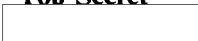
Egypt's rapprochement with Israel gave Iraq the opportunity to compete for Cairo's position of Arab leadership. Baghdad was host to two anti-Sadat summits in 1978 and 1979 and improved relations with Syria and the PLO. As further proof of its intentions, Baghdad,

Iraq began its pursuit of Iranian targets not long after Khomeini came to power. Orders for attacks on Iranian diplomats and facilities were routinely issued by the summer of 1980, especially to Iraqi agents in the Gulf and Lebanon, where local conditions could

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closed training facilities and offices and in

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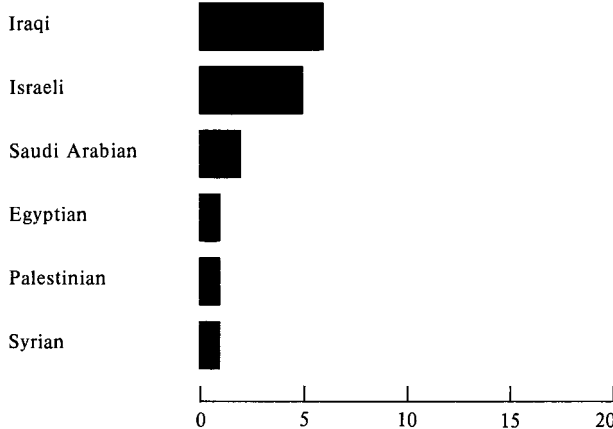


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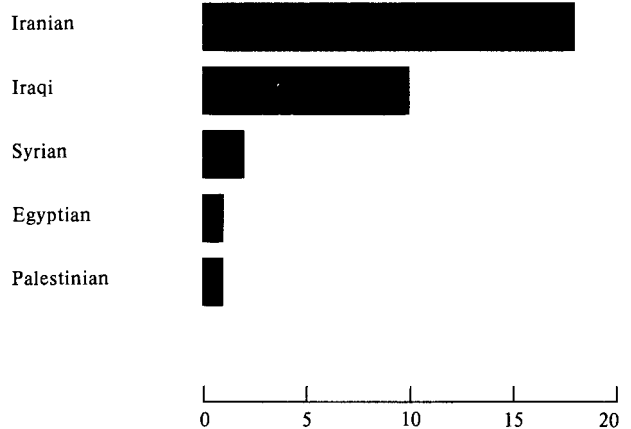
Nationalities of Victims of Iraqi Terrorist Attacks

Number of Incidents

1970-78



1979-81



This chart only includes incidents directly instigated by Iraq. It does not include incidents by surrogate groups receiving Iraqi aid, such as Black June and the Arab Liberation Front. These groups have been excluded because

not all of their acts are sponsored by Baghdad and because Iraq now relies more on its own agents than on outside groups.



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mask Iraqi activities. In Lebanon Iraqi intelligence used the Arab Liberation Front and the Baath Party of Lebanon as well as its own operatives to assassinate Iranian officials and Iranian sympathizers in the PLO; to bomb embassy, airline, and newspaper offices; and to attack pro-Iranian Lebanese Shia elements hostile to Baghdad. Iraqi agents tried to assassinate Iranian Foreign Minister Ghotbzadeh in Kuwait in April 1980. One month later five Arabs recruited and trained by Iraq seized the Iranian Embassy in London, holding it and hostages for several days.

Baghdad also has increased its contacts with exiled Egyptian dissidents over the past year, including former aides to President Nasir—Muhammad Haykal and Ashraf Marwan—and former Chief of Staff Saad Shazli.



Prime domestic targets are Kurdish dissidents, Iraqi Communists, pro-Iranian Shias, and anyone suspected of opposing the regime or slandering its leaders. Iraqi intelligence has made repeated attempts to assassinate Kurdish Democratic Party head Masud Barzani and to disrupt antiregime Kurdish groups in Europe. In July 1980 West Berlin police arrested two Iraqi diplomats carrying explosives to a Kurdish student conference. Iraqi intelligence routinely reports on journalists, scholars, and politicians in exile who “defame” Iraqi leaders and thereby can become “candidates for liquidation.” A prominent Iraqi journalist in Beirut was killed in June 1979. His crimes included criticizing Saddam Hussein and working for a PLO newspaper. In 1978 Iraqi intelligence agents killed Abd al-Razzaq al-Naif in London. The target of earlier attempts, Naif had been Iraq’s Prime Minister briefly in 1968.

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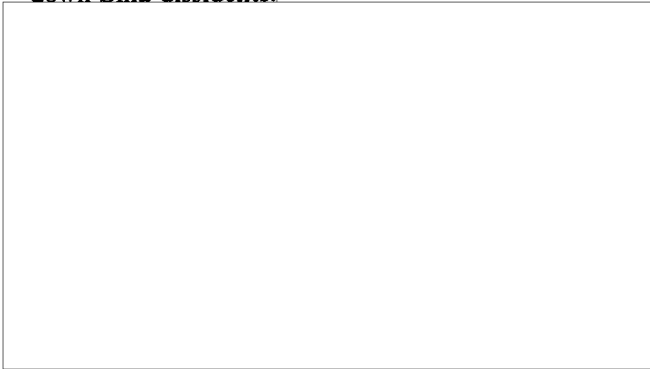
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Iraqi intelligence is particularly zealous in tracking down Shia dissidents.

Iraq's current relationship with Black June is unclear.

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Abu Nidhal transferred his offices and allegiance from Baghdad to Damascus last year because of Iraqi attempts to restrict his operations.

the Iraqis closed down facilities that had been used by Black June, and Abu Nidhal was looking for patrons in Syria, Libya, and Eastern Europe. indicate Black June is still conducting its activities from Baghdad. The Iraqis, however, are not on good terms with Abu Nidhal and are not likely to sponsor Black June efforts at this time against Assad or Arafat. Abu Nidhal remains a potential asset to use for operations against Israel or other targets when the goals are mutual and the risks acceptable.

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Nor have the Iraqis totally forsworn links to the Palestinian radicals. The Israeli raid on the nuclear facility at Tuwaitha in early June 1981 rekindled Iraqi interest in Palestinian terrorism directed against Israel. Following the attack Baghdad was in touch with Fatah, with a PFLP splinter group known for anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish bombings in Europe, and with renegade Palestinian activist Abu Daud (Daud was responsible for planning the massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in 1972). Some Fatah officials claim Baghdad provided the explosive devices used in bombing a synagogue in Vienna in August 1981.

Outlook

Iraq's targets of terrorism could change again based on new directions in foreign policy and national policy needs. Nonetheless, Saddam Hussein expects Iraq's more cooperative attitude toward its Arab neighbors to gain him an expanded role in regional affairs. He also expects Iraq's apparent lack of support for European-based terrorists to bolster its international image and help remove barriers to acquiring more advanced technology from the West. But Iraq's current policy of emphasizing support for some terrorist groups and deemphasizing others rests on a fragile base. For example, if:

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Baghdad is sheltering remnants of the PFLP group led by Wadi Haddad, who died in 1978. One of the splinter groups is the Fifteen May Organization for the Liberation of Palestine, headed by Abu Ibrahim. Fifteen May claims responsibility for a grenade attack on Jewish school children in Belgium in July 1980 and for attacks on Israeli airline offices and embassies in Rome, Istanbul, Athens, and Vienna following the attack on Tuwaitha. The group has its headquarters in Baghdad, but Fifteen May also has received aid from Libya and Syria.

- *The war with Iran ends.* This probably would mean a reduction in Baghdad's assistance to anti-Khomeini terrorist groups, although Iraq will continue to feel threatened by Tehran whether it is ruled by mullahs or leftists.

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- *Relations with Syria worsen.* Iraq continues to provide support to anti-Assad groups, Baghdad will avoid direct confrontations with Damascus as long as its war with Iran continues. The two countries are longstanding rivals, however, and Saddam could redirect his energies to Syria when the war ends.

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Saddam Hussein has admitted sheltering members of the PFLP-SC (Special Command) led by Salim Abu Salim, another offshoot of the Haddad PFLP organization. This group's only known activities so far have been in Kuwait, but Saddam denies Iraqi sponsorship of their operations.

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- *Saddam's "moderation" fails to win new friends or gain him entry into regional councils.* The war with Iran forces Saddam to maintain good relations with his neighbors; he needs their transportation facilities, their money, and their political support. If the war ended and Saddam believed that his moderate policies toward the Gulf Arabs were not producing results—for example, eventual membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council—he might revert to his more familiar pattern of threat and intimidation. Baghdad has not broken completely with the PFLO, although its offices are closed, and support for it and other antiregime dissidents in Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE could easily be upgraded.

Baghdad will continue to aid groups that are pro-Soviet, but it is unlikely to do so strictly at Moscow's behest. In some cases, as with its assistance to Nicaraguan and Salvadoran rebels, Iraqi and Soviet objectives will coincide and raise suspicions of collusion. But Iraq also will continue to give support to groups in direct conflict with the USSR, as it did in Afghanistan, South Yemen, and Eritrea. Baghdad will encourage countries and organizations to maintain their independence of both superpowers, but at the same time recognize that conditions can make necessary relationships with the Soviets, the United States, or both.

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- *The Palestinians modify their demands and choose settlement with Israel.* Historically Iraq rejects an Arab settlement with Israel, although Baghdad currently is minimizing its rejectionist views. Its newfound moderation, however, must be suspect, and Iraqi cooperation with radical Palestinians to undermine a settlement is a real possibility.

- *Saddam comes under ideological pressure from the party or the military.* Important elements within the Baath Party probably are uncomfortable with Saddam's close relations with the kings of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman—all once targets of Baathist subversion.

- *Superpower pressure affects Iraqi attitudes toward the use of terrorism.* Baghdad's willingness to back away from terrorism when more important Iraqi interests are at stake was demonstrated by its review of aid given to Salvadoran rebels following a US demarche last March and its assurance to the United States that the aid was "a one-time action that would not be repeated." The demarche came at a time when the sale of Boeing aircraft to Iraq was being considered.

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