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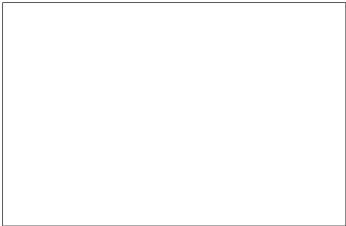
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21 June 2002

# Iraq and al-Qa'ida: Interpreting a Murky Relationship



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**Iraq and al-Qa'ida: Interpreting a Murky Relationship**

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**Key Findings**

Intelligence reporting highlights more than a decade of contacts between the Iraqi Government and al-Qa'ida based on shared anti-US goals and Bin Ladin's interest in unconventional weapons and safehaven.

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• [redacted] have reported on meetings dating from the Persian Gulf war (1990-91) between senior Iraqi officials and Bin Ladin or his lieutenants in [redacted] Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

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• Iraq and al-Qa'ida, despite competing secular and religious ideologies, agreed as early as 1993 that they would not target one another [redacted] Both sides adopted a more belligerent anti-US stance in 1998, when Saddam challenged UN weapons inspections and Bin Ladin issued his now-famous *fatwa* threatening US citizens worldwide.

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• In the past several years, Iraq reportedly has provided specialized training to al-Qa'ida in explosives and assistance to the group's chemical and biological weapons program, although the level and extent of this assistance is not clear. [redacted]

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Our assessment of al-Qa'ida's ties to Iraq rests on a body of fragmentary, conflicting reporting from sources of varying reliability. Our approach is purposefully aggressive in seeking to draw connections, on the assumption that any indication of a relationship between these two hostile elements could carry great dangers to the United States. [redacted]

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The pattern of contacts and cooperation between Iraq and al-Qa'ida over the past decade reflects wariness coupled with recognition of potential mutual benefit. In contrast to the traditional patron-client relationship Iraq enjoys with radical secular Palestinian groups, the ties between Saddam and Bin Ladin appear to be much like those between rival intelligence services, with each side trying to exploit the other for its own benefit.

• [redacted] Baghdad was more willing to cooperate after the African Embassy bombings in 1998 and al-Qa'ida's successful attack on the USS Cole in October 2000.

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- We have few reports of contacts between al-Qa'ida operatives and Iraqi regime officials. Limited direct interaction would help preserve security and may reflect the concern of both sides that discovery of such a link would provide the impetus for massive US strikes as the misdeeds of one party could lead to punishment of the other.

- Overall, the reporting provides no conclusive signs of cooperation on specific terrorist operations, so discussion of the possible extent of cooperation between Iraq and al-Qa'ida is necessarily speculative.

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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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[Redacted] if Saddam had a liaison relationship with Bin Ladin only a few senior officials would be aware. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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- An unresolved mystery surrounding Bin Ladin's years in Sudan is the prominent role of Iraqi dissidents in al-Qa'ida. These individuals, nonetheless, may have served as intermediaries with the Iraqi regime—a link consistent with the exploitative nature of the relationship.

[Redacted]

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Discoveries since 11 September shed new light on Iraqi training and possible operational links to al-Qa'ida, which may be more fully developed than we previously believed. Some of the most interesting include:

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[Redacted] Iraq provided unspecified training on chemical or biological weapons starting in December 2000, [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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• Ahmad Hikmat Shakir, an Iraqi national in Malaysia, obtained a job through an Iraqi Embassy employee as an airport expeditor and facilitated the arrival in January 2000 of Khalid al-Mihdhar—one of the 11 September hijackers—to Kuala Lumpur for a key operational meeting before Mihdhar traveled to the US. Reporting is contradictory on hijacker Mohammad Atta’s alleged trip to Prague and meeting with an Iraqi intelligence officer, and we have not verified his travels through other channels.

• As the Taliban Government in Afghanistan collapsed, at least some al-Qa‘ida operatives and fighters fled to Iraq, including most notably senior al-Qa‘ida operative Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, raising the possibility that the Iraqi regime is complicit in providing safehaven for some of these individuals. [Redacted]

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We are looking closely for Iraqi regime connections [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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Scope Note [redacted]

This Intelligence Assessment responds to senior policymaker interest in a comprehensive assessment of Iraqi regime links to al-Qa'ida. Our approach is purposefully aggressive in seeking to draw connections, on the assumption that any indication of a relationship between these two hostile elements could carry great dangers to the United States.

- We reviewed intelligence reporting over the past decade to determine whether Iraq had a relationship with al-Qa'ida and, if so, the dimensions of the relationship.

- Our knowledge of Iraqi links to al-Qa'ida still contains many critical gaps because of limited reporting [redacted] and the questionable reliability of many of our sources. [redacted]

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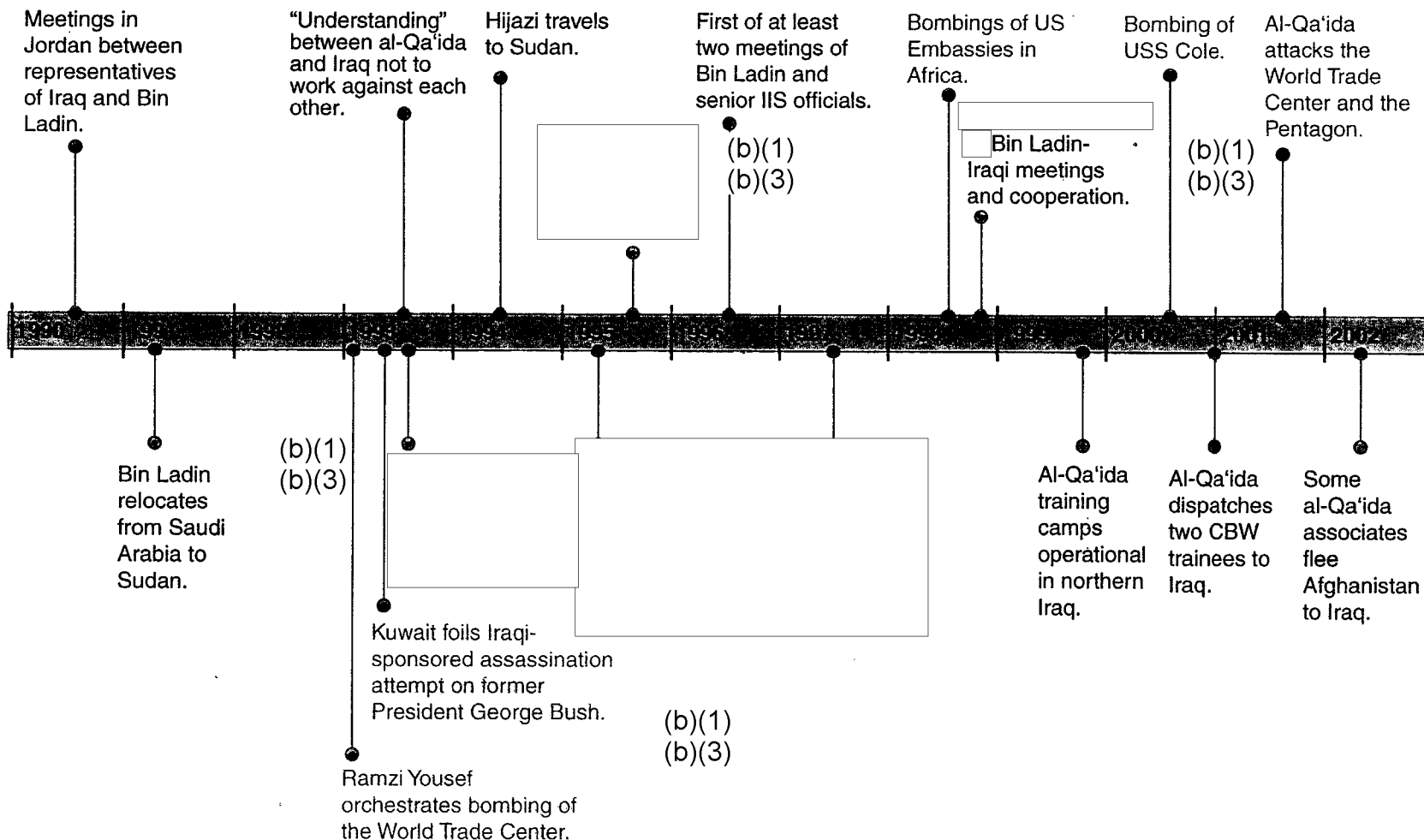
Some analysts concur with the assessment that intelligence reporting provides "no conclusive evidence of cooperation on specific terrorist operations," but believe that the available signs support a conclusion that Iraq has had sporadic, wary contacts with al-Qa'ida since the mid-1990s, rather than a relationship with al-Qa'ida that developed over time. These analysts would contend that mistrust and conflicting ideologies and goals probably tempered these contacts and severely limited the opportunities for cooperation. These analysts also do not rule out that Baghdad sought and obtained a nonaggression agreement or made limited offers of cooperation, training, or safehaven (ultimately uncorroborated or withdrawn) in an effort to manipulate, penetrate, or otherwise keep tabs on al-Qa'ida or selected operatives. [redacted]

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Iraq and al-Qa'ida: Reported Contacts and Events, 1990-2002

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**Iraq and al-Qa'ida: Interpreting  
a Murky Relationship**

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**Conflicting Motives in the Relationship**

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Numerous intelligence reports on Usama Bin Ladin's al-Qa'ida organization and the Iraqi regime indicate that the two sides have had contacts and discussed cooperation since the early to mid-1990s. Much of the reporting is suggestive rather than conclusive, and a review of al-Qa'ida's terrorist activity during this period provides few indications the two have cooperated on specific terrorist operations. Nevertheless, common motives provide the foundation for a relationship.

Our assessment of al-Qa'ida's ties to Iraq rests on a body of fragmentary, conflicting reporting from sources of varying reliability.

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**Shared Anti-US Agenda.** Saddam Hussein and Usama Bin Ladin share a hatred for the United States and the Saudi royal family as well as a strong desire to expel Western military forces from the Arabian Peninsula. Bin Ladin's focus on opposing the United States solidified during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in reaction to the stationing of Western forces on Muslim soil to attack another country—Iraq.

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- Bin Ladin and Saddam almost simultaneously adopted a more confrontational stance against the United States in 1998. Bin Ladin was able to exploit Iraq's high-profile standoff and ultimate expulsion of UN weapons inspectors.
- The Palestinian *intifadah's* anti-Western theme over the past year may have spurred Bin Ladin and Saddam to develop closer ties.

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**Plausible Deniability.** Iraq's history as a state sponsor of terrorism and its diplomatic goal of eroding UN sanctions would make any cooperation with al-Qa'ida an extremely sensitive

- Helps maintain security and prevents a backlash among some al-Qa'ida associates who are hostile to Saddam's secular ideology and policies.

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This assessment was prepared by the DCI Counterterrorist Center's Office of Terrorism Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief,

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- Responds to concerns of both parties that discovery of such a relationship would provide the impetus for a massive US strike, and similarly, that the misdeeds of one party will lead to punishment of the other. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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Despite their shared goals, Saddam Hussein and Usama Bin Ladin are not natural allies. Ideological disagreements have fostered distrust between them and rule out the sort of patron-client relationship that Baghdad has forged with secular terrorist groups, such as the Abu Nidal organization (ANO). [redacted]

[redacted]

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- Iraqi agents, however, botched attempts to mount attacks in Indonesia and the Philippines in January 1991, while Iraq's most capable terrorist surrogates—secular Palestinian groups such as the Palestine Liberation Front—either remained on the sidelines or lacked overseas infrastructure to carry out attacks during the Gulf crisis.

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- The arrest and expulsion of [redacted] suspected Iraqi agents abroad during 1990-91 weakened Iraq's overseas terrorist capabilities, which may have spurred Saddam toward new methods, tactics, and alliances. [redacted]

Saddam's setbacks in 1991 failed to dissuade him from striking US interests. In 1993, Iraq tried to assassinate former President Bush during his visit to Kuwait in a hastily assembled plot orchestrated by the Iraqi Intelligence Service (IIS). At the same time, Sunni extremists with varying degrees of association to Bin Ladin mounted a highly destructive attack on the World Trade Center. [redacted]

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(b)(3) **Early Ties From Persian Gulf War** [redacted]

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 may have provided the spark for Bin Ladin's first contacts with Iraq. Angered by King Fahd's decision to invite US forces to defend Saudi Arabia, Bin Ladin reportedly tried to avert a US military attack in Kuwait by sending emissaries to Jordan to meet with Iraqi Government representatives [redacted]

[redacted]

**The Sudanese Bridge Between Bin Ladin and Iraq**

[redacted]

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The alleged 1990 meeting in Jordan provided the backdrop for direct contacts between Iraqi officials and Bin Ladin in Sudan, where Bin Ladin moved in 1991. National Islamic Front leader Hassan al-Turabi, who was promoting an ambitious pan-Islamic foreign policy, reportedly helped Bin Ladin develop relationships with Iran and Iraq. [redacted]

[redacted] The reporting base emphasizes Bin Ladin's interest in expanding his organization's capabilities through ties to Iraq, but Saddam also may [redacted]

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have been equally intrigued by the prospects of using al-Qa'ida to advance his own agenda.

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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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• This directive followed a Bin Ladin "understanding" with Saddam, according to [Redacted] information [Redacted] released in US court documents during the African Embassy bombing trial. [Redacted]

We judge al-Qa'ida also could have benefited indirectly from Iraqi support to Sudan's chemical weapons effort during the mid-1990s—a period when Bin Ladin's organization already was pursuing an unconventional weapons capability [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

• Information acquired before and after the US strike on the Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Sudan in August 1998 suggests multiple links between Bin Ladin and the plant, which in turn may have had an Iraqi connection.

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Whatever the specific role of the Sudanese in brokering contacts, Bin Ladin clearly was looking for outside assistance in building a capable terrorist apparatus and unconventional weapons capabilities.

[Redacted] the two sides also agreed to cooperate on unspecified activities. [Redacted] (b)(3)

[Redacted]

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[Redacted] in 1996. [Redacted] Bin Ladin met with senior IIS representatives twice that year.

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[Redacted]

[Redacted] a key interlocutor with Bin Ladin in Sudan was Faruq Hijazi.

[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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• Saddam reportedly sent Hijazi to meet with Bin Ladin at least twice [Redacted] in Sudan [Redacted] An Italian press report in 1998 alleges Hijazi visited Sudan to meet Bin Ladin as early as June 1994 and again in 1998 after Hijazi had been named Iraq's Ambassador to Turkey.

[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

**Conflict With the United States Advances Ties, 1997-98** [Redacted]

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An unresolved mystery surrounding Bin Ladin's years in Sudan is the role of Iraqi nationals in al-Qa'ida, characterized [Redacted] as Iraqi dissidents who nonetheless may have served as intermediaries with Baghdad. Saddam still could have employed exploitive methods—such as threats to family members and associates remaining in Iraq—to engage al-Qa'ida through an unwilling Iraqi cadre.

Contacts between al-Qa'ida and the Iraqi regime persisted after Bin Ladin's move to Afghanistan in mid-1996 as both parties began taking a more aggressive stance against the United States and al-Qa'ida associates apparently filtered into Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq. Bin Ladin, for his part, may have viewed US-Iraqi tensions as an issue he could exploit. In February 1998—despite few indications of contacts the previous year—Bin Ladin issued his now-famous *fatwa*, declaring that all Muslims have a religious duty “to kill Americans and their allies, both civilian and military,” worldwide.

- The timing of the statement appears linked to Iraq's standoff against UN weapons inspectors in February 1998 and the prospect of US airstrikes against Iraq.

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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The ground for cooperation grew more fertile as both parties in 1998 adopted a more aggressive stance toward the United States. Just as Baghdad's standoff with weapons inspectors coincided with Bin Ladin's provocative *fatwa* in February, the UN's withdrawal of inspectors in December based on Iraq's noncompliance coincided with Bin Ladin's claim in an interview that all US citizens are legitimate targets because they pay taxes to the US Government.

[Redacted]

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Discussion on possible cooperation on CBW—and possibly radiological or nuclear—programs may have developed in earnest during this period.

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[Redacted] al-Qa'ida may have requested Iraqi assistance on chemical and biological weapons (CBW) [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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By 1999, the reporting suggests al-Qa'ida established a beachhead in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq, possibly with Saddam's approval.

[Redacted]

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**Hints of Closer Cooperation, 1999-2001** [Redacted]

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A growing volume of [Redacted] reporting—some of it probably circular and possibly stimulated by perceived US animus toward Iraq—since 1999 alleges Iraq's training of al-Qa'ida personnel, especially in unconventional weapons.

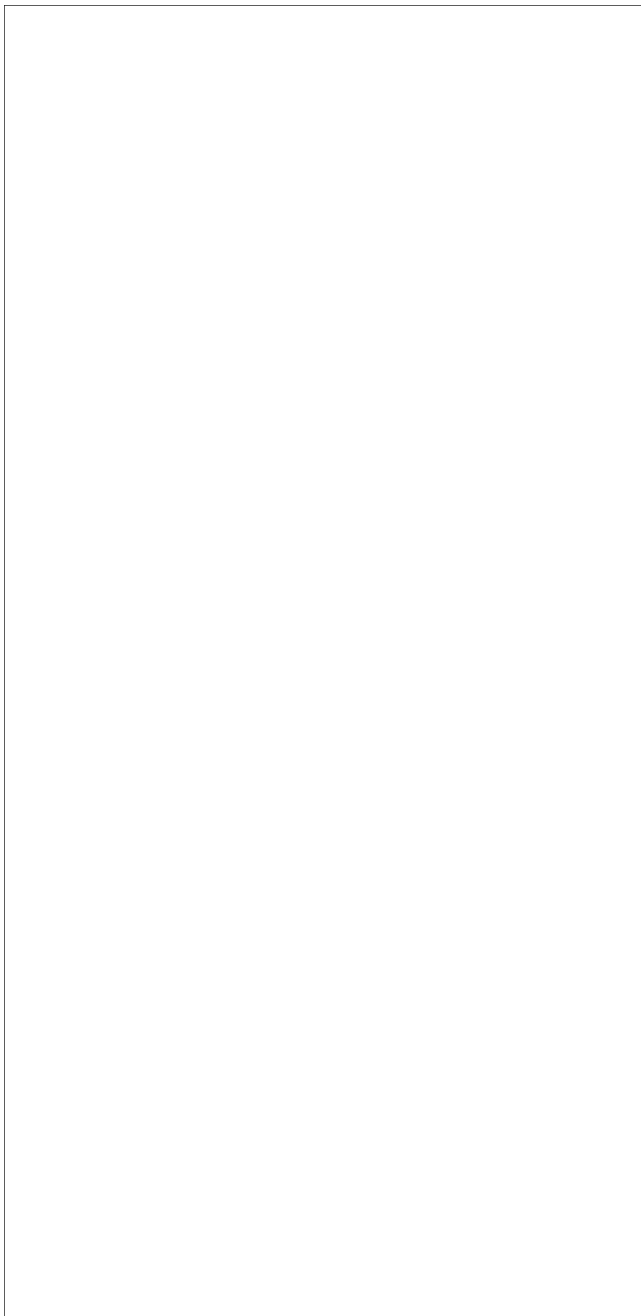
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- Saddam may have perceived that Bin Ladin had some interests in northern Iraq that could have coincided with his own. [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

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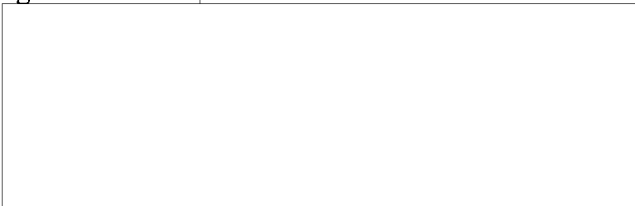
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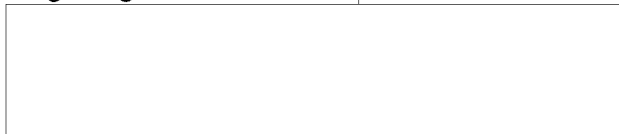
guarded secrets.



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• Baghdad was more willing to cooperate after the 1998 Africa Embassy bombings and al-Qa'ida's successful attack on the USS Cole in October 2000.

• Iraq provided unspecified chemical or biological weapons training for two al-Qa'ida associates beginning in December 2000.



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**Other Unconventional Training.**

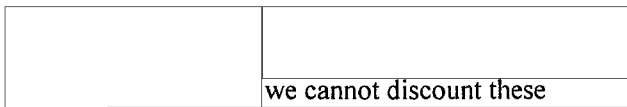
reports since 1999 suggests the Iraqi regime has sponsored other training for al-Qa'ida. These reports are part of larger body of reporting over the past decade that ties the Salman Pak Unconventional Warfare Training Facility, outside Baghdad, to Iraqi surrogate groups such as

Arab trainees of various nationalities. Reports surged after 11 September from defectors of questionable reliability who claimed that al-Qa'ida engaged in training at Salman Pak.

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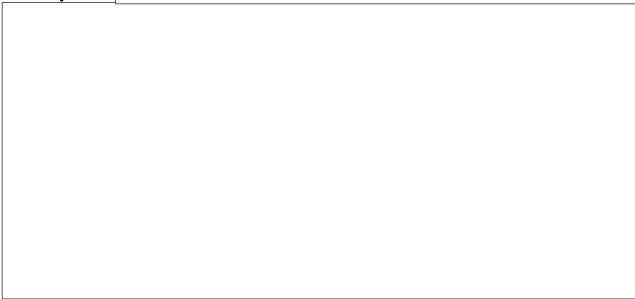
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we cannot discount these

reports

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**The CBRN Angle.** The most ominous indications of Iraqi-al-Qa'ida cooperation involve Bin Ladin's chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) ambitions. Although Iraq historically has tended to hold closely its strategic weapons experts and resources, Baghdad could have offered training or other support that fell well short of its most closely

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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

• Shakir's travel and past contacts also link him to a worldwide network of Sunni extremist groups and personalities, including suspects in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center and indirectly to [Redacted] Bin Ladin-associated [Redacted]

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A less productive lead came from foreign government service [Redacted] indicating that hijacker Muhammad Atta met with an IIS officer in Prague in April of 2001. The reporting on this trip is contradictory, and we have not verified Atta's travel through other channels. At this time, the only visit of Atta to Prague that is corroborated was in June 2000. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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Indications of an Iraqi connection to other major terrorist attacks are similarly tantalizing but inconclusive. Investigations of the 1996 Khobar Towers and 1998 African Embassy bombings uncovered no Iraqi involvement, although the bombings in Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam fell on the anniversary of the introduction of US troops into Saudi Arabia in 1990—a date which, if relevant to the attack, is significant both to Bin Ladin and Saddam.

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Although the investigation into the attack on the USS Cole in October 2000 unearthed no specific Iraqi connections, fragmentary reporting points to possible Iraqi involvement.

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**11 September and Other anti-US Attacks.**

[Redacted] suggests ties between Baghdad and the 11 September hijackers but offers no conclusive indication of Iraqi complicity or foreknowledge. A former Malaysia-based Iraqi national, Ahmed Hikmat Shakir, facilitated the arrival of one of the 11 September hijackers Khalid al-Mihdhar for an operational meeting in Kuala Lumpur in January 2000. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Shakir worked for four months as a part-time airport facilitator in Kuala Lumpur, a job he claims to have obtained through an Iraqi Embassy employee. [Redacted] the employee, Ra'ad al-Mudaris, is a former IIS officer.

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**Iraqi Links to the First World Trade Center Attack**

A judgment that Iraq is behind the 1993 bombing would rest on the assumption that Baghdad forged operational ties within the worldwide network of Sunni extremists almost immediately after the Gulf war, and some information could suggest such a conclusion.

- Ramzi Yousef, mastermind of the first World Trade Center attack and a follow-on plot in Manila, entered the US on an Iraqi passport without a US visa in 1992. Yousef fled the US after the attack with a passport based on documentation from Kuwait—the types of documents Iraq would have been in a position to confiscate during its 1990-91 occupation of Kuwait.
- Abdul Rahman Yasin, a fugitive in the bombing, is of Iraqi descent, lived in Iraq as a child, and fled to Iraq in 1993 with Iraqi assistance following the attack. Another potential Iraqi link is the maternal uncle of convicted bomber Jordanian national Mohammad Salameh, who held a Fatah post in Iraq.

[Redacted]

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We have indications that support skepticism of Iraqi involvement.

- [Redacted] suggests that stolen Iraqi passports appeared in abundance at the time of Yousef's entry into the US, so Yousef would not have had to have received his from Baghdad.

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- We have no indication Iraq has used confiscated Kuwaiti documentation to create false identities [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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- On the fugitive Yasin, Baghdad has offered the explanation that it has held Yasin for fear that Washington would misrepresent Yasin's role in the attack to implicate Iraq. Baghdad has a history of holding detainees for long periods to use as political leverage.
- If Salameh's Palestinian uncle in Iraq acted as a controller for the bombers, Baghdad probably would have forbidden him to relocate to the West Bank, where he settled in 1995 [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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Saddam has tried to dispel perceptions of Iraqi ties to al-Qa'ida since 11 September, lest he undermine his strategy to isolate Washington in the region and in the UN Security Council. [Redacted]

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**Iraq as a Potential Safehaven, 2002** [Redacted]

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[Redacted] reporting show that unknown numbers of al-Qa'ida associates fleeing Afghanistan since December have used Iraq—including the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq, Baghdad, and other regions—as a safehaven and transit area. We lack positive indications that Baghdad is complicit in this activity, but the persistence of an al-Qa'ida presence and the operatives' silence about any harassment from Iraqi authorities, who closely monitor the population, may indicate Baghdad is acquiescent or finds their presence useful.

[Redacted]

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**Scenarios Since 1998** [Redacted]

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If Iraqi cooperation with al-Qa'ida has increased since 1998, both sides would certainly have taken steps to mask it. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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- Senior al-Qa'ida terrorist planner Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was in Baghdad in late May 2002, seeking medical treatment for war injuries, [Redacted]

Zarqawi apparently traveled to Iraq in alias.

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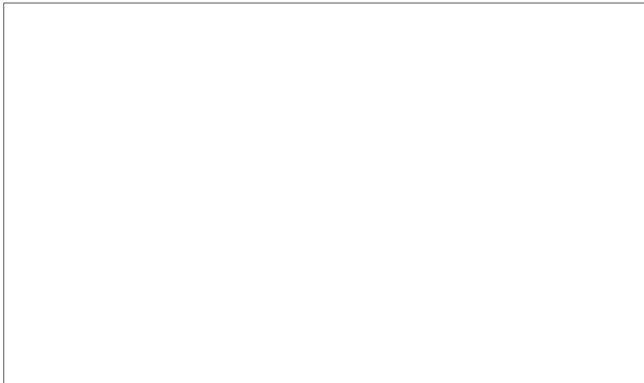
- In the north, the Iraqi Government does not control the base of operations for the Islamic extremist group Ansar al-Islam, [Redacted] that indicates Iraqi intelligence operatives are active there. Some al-Qa'ida associates may have migrated to Kurdish areas of the country now controlled by Ansar. [Redacted]

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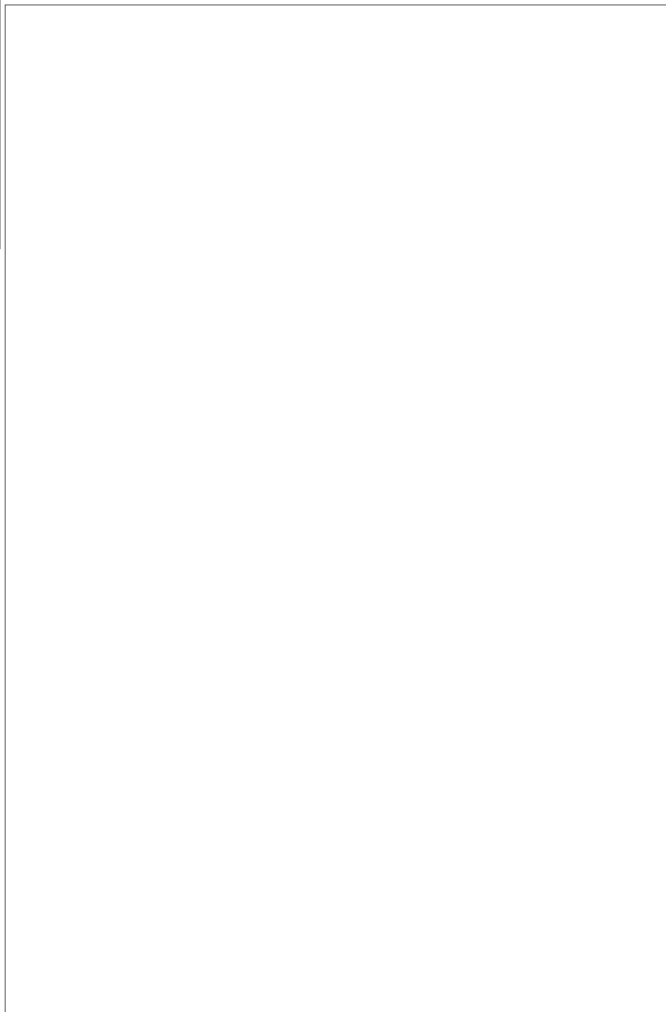
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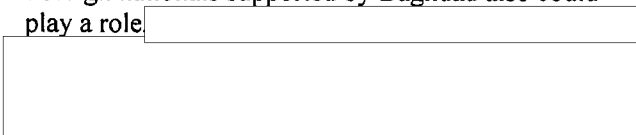


— And possibly in the Czech Republic, where hijacker Mohammad Atta may have had dealings with an IIS officer.

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Foreign nationals supported by Baghdad also could play a role.



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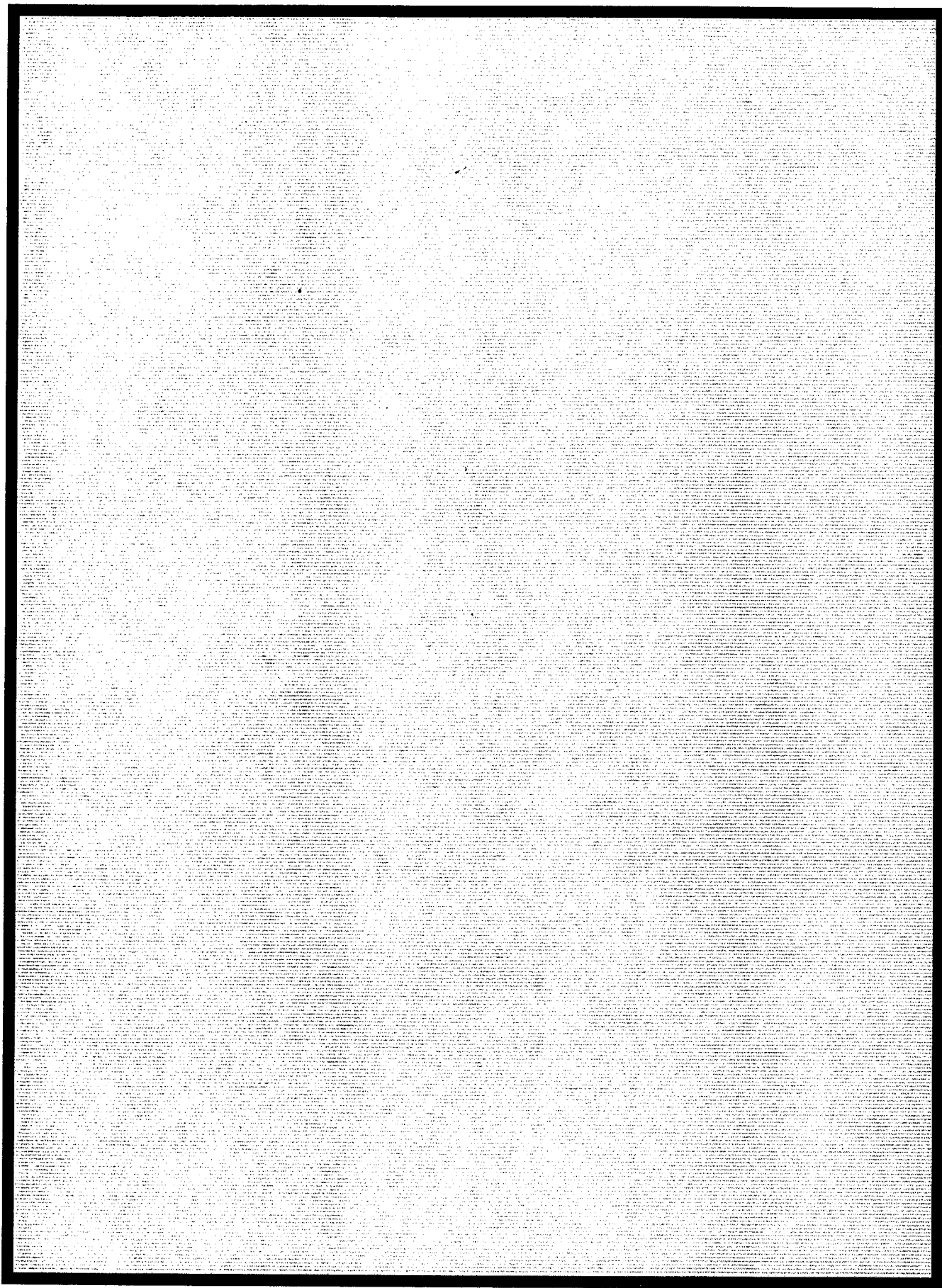


— In Malaysia, where an Iraqi Embassy employee assisted the Iraqi national airport facilitator who met one of the hijackers in January 2000.



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