

# United States support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq War

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American support for Ba'athist Iraq during the Iran–Iraq War, in which it fought against post-revolutionary Iran, included several billion dollars' worth of economic aid, the sale of dual-use technology, non-U.S. origin weaponry, military intelligence, and special operations training.<sup>[1][2]</sup> However, the U.S. did not directly supply arms to Iraq.<sup>[3]</sup> Of particular interest for contemporary Iran–United States relations are the repeated accusations that the U.S. government actively encouraged Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein to invade Iran (proponents of this theory frequently describe the U.S. as having given Saddam a "*green light*"), supported by a considerable amount of circumstantial evidence, but the U.S. government officially denies that any such collusion occurred, and no conclusive proof of it has been found.

U.S. government support for Iraq was not a secret and was frequently discussed in open sessions of the Senate and House of Representatives. On June 9, 1992, Ted Koppel reported on ABC's *Nightline* that the "Reagan/Bush administrations permitted—and frequently encouraged—the flow of money, agricultural credits, dual-use technology, chemicals, and weapons to Iraq."<sup>[4]</sup>

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## U.S. reaction to the conflict

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Following the Iranian Revolution, the Carter administration continued to see Iran as a bulwark against Iraq and the Soviet Union, and therefore attempted to forge a strategic partnership with the new Interim Government of Iran under Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan. "Acting head of the U.S. embassy in Tehran" Bruce Laingen realized that Iranian officials were acutely interested in U.S. intelligence on Iraq, and convinced Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Harold H. Saunders to approve an intelligence-sharing liaison with the Iranian government, culminating in an October 15, 1979 meeting between longtime Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer George Cave and the Iranian Deputy Prime Minister Abbas Amir-Entezam and Foreign Minister Ebrahim Yazdi. Cave told Mark J. Gasiorowski that he briefed Entezam and Yazdi on Iraqi military preparations and covert operations seemingly designed to facilitate a large-scale invasion of Iran, although no final decision had been made. (The content of Cave's briefing was corroborated by Laingen, Yazdi, Entezam, and Bazargan.)<sup>[5][6]</sup> In particular, echoing a March 1979 warning from Pentagon analyst Howard Teicher regarding Iraqi designs on Iran's oil-rich Khuzestan Province, Cave pointed out that Iraq had created a front organization that could instigate unrest among Khuzestan's majority–Arab inhabitants—yet Cave emphasized that war could still be avoided if the strength of Iran's armed forces did not continue its post-revolutionary decline.<sup>[7]</sup> Furthermore, Cave urged his Iranian interlocutors to monitor the movement of Iraqi troops with "the IBEX listening posts the CIA had constructed in northern Iran" under the Shah. Although Teicher and Cave's predictions proved accurate, they were the product of circumstantial evidence disputed internally within the U.S. government, and the significance of Cave's briefing has been debated.<sup>[3][6][8]</sup> For example, according to Bureau of Intelligence and Research analyst Wayne White, who was not aware of the intelligence that informed Cave's briefing: "The Iraqi army was doing little more than continuing its well-known annual schedule of primarily battalion and brigade-level training exercises ... Very little of the Iraqi military was anywhere near the Iraqi-Iranian frontier." Similarly, the head of the Iran desk at the State Department, Henry Precht, stated: "I had no impression at the time that anyone believed Iraq was planning a major attack although we thought that [Iraqi President] Saddam [Hussein] might be stirring up the Kurds. At the time I did not think he would take on his larger and still probably more potent neighbor."<sup>[6][8]</sup> On the other hand, Gasiorowski contended that "If Iran's leaders had acted on the information provided in Cave's briefings ... the brutal eight-year [Iran–Iraq War] might never have occurred."<sup>[9]</sup>



The Iranian Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi meeting with President Jimmy Carter and Zbigniew Brzezinski, 1977.

Iraq's invasion of Iran in September 1980 was preceded by a long period of tension between the two countries throughout 1979 and 1980, including frequent border skirmishes, calls by Iranian leader Ruhollah Khomeini for the Shia of Iraq to revolt against the Ba'ath Party, and allegations of Iraqi support for ethnic separatists in Iran. On June 18, 1979, U.S. chargé d'affaires Charlie Naas asked Yazdi about the deterioration in relations; Yazdi stated he "does not know what might be bothering Iraq ... certainly we have done nothing to bother them." Khomeini had recently condemned Iraq's arrest of Shi'ite leader Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, but Yazdi claimed this had nothing to do with any effort to export the Islamic Revolution to Iraq: Iran was merely concerned with protecting the "religious centers in Najaf and Karbala." Nevertheless, in a subsequent conversation between Naas and Entezam it emerged that the latter was unaware of the anti-Iraq broadcasts "Sadegh Ghotbzadeh was sanctioning in his role as managing director of National Iranian Radio and Television." Continuing to seek good relations with Iranian authorities, U.S. officials uncovered considerable evidence of Iraqi support for Kurdish rebels in Iran under the leadership of Jalal Talabani (Fatah contacts told the CIA's Beirut station that "Saddam Hussein himself was directly involved in supervising these operations"); while these rebels were not considered capable of overthrowing the Iranian government militarily, they were undermining Iranian moderates, prompting Precht to broach the possibility of meeting with Iraqi officials to persuade them that Iraq's support for the Kurds was not in its best interest. Throughout this time, Iraq's intentions toward Iran were not entirely clear, as "the Iraqi government was continuing to put out diplomatic feelers, unsuccessfully inviting a delegation led by Bazargan to visit Iraq in July 1979," while the CIA concluded in November (despite Cave's warning the previous month) that Iraq intended "to settle its differences with Iran through negotiations." Muhammed Dosky, "a Kurdistan Democratic Party representative in

Washington," also believed "Iraq's overriding goal was to persuade the new government in Tehran to live up to the conditions of the Algiers Accord ... Iraq was using Kurdish groups not out of a sense of opportunism, or as a prelude to the coming conflict, but in order to consolidate agreements made with the Shah." Saddam was willing to work with Iranian moderates such as Yazdi, whom he met in Havana in October, but "the mass resignation of the Bazargan government" following the November 4th seizure of the U.S. embassy and initiation of the Iran hostage crisis—and the resulting consolidation of power under Khomeini—"would profoundly change Saddam's decision-making calculus."<sup>[6]</sup> While the Iraqi archives suggest that Saddam contemplated invading Iran as early as February 1979, he was deterred from doing so until July 1980, at which point "purges and revolutionary chaos" had rendered Iran grossly unprepared for the attack.<sup>[10]</sup>

Iranian leaders, including Khomeini and his successor Ali Khamenei, have long espoused a belief that the U.S. gave Saddam Hussein a "green light" to launch the invasion of Iran—something U.S. officials "have unanimously and vociferously denied."<sup>[6]</sup> Joost Hiltermann observed that a U.S. "green light" is also "the conventional wisdom in the Arab world."<sup>[11]</sup> In fact, Iranian suspicions that the U.S. would use Iraq to retaliate for the hostage-taking *predated* the invasion, as Carter noted in his diary on April 10, 1980: "The Iranian terrorists are making all kinds of crazy threats to kill the American hostages if they are invaded by Iraq—whom they identify as an American puppet." There are several reasons for this perception, including some circumstantial evidence. First, although the Carter administration had long been interested in rapprochement with Iraq, prior to the hostage crisis the administration's preference for Iran as the "strategic choice" effectively rendered this impossible. After the dramatic break in Iran–United States relations, however, both American and Iraqi officials made a number of positive gestures towards one another, including "a speech by Saddam denouncing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan," and culminating in an April 10 statement by Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David D. Newsom that "The United States is prepared ... to resume diplomatic relations with Iraq at any time." Saddam later acknowledged that Iraq had accepted Newsom's offer "during the two months prior to the war between us and Iran" but "when the war started, and to avoid misinterpretation, we postponed the establishment of relations."<sup>[6][12]</sup> Moreover, the CIA—desperate for intelligence on Iran—maintained contacts with Iranian opposition figures including "the Shah's last Prime Minister Shapour Bakhtiar" and Gholam Ali Oveisi, who were themselves in touch with Iraqi officials and had encouraged Saddam to invade. Even though declassified documents state the U.S. "would not fund, assist, or guide [Bakhtiar's] movement, but [was] providing the channel as a means by which he could provide us information on his intentions and capabilities," and there is no evidence either Bakhtiar or Oveisi were acting at the behest of the U.S., "the Iranian militants occupying the embassy found dozens of documents detailing these contacts"—which began "even before the hostage crisis"—and "read them extremely selectively." What ultimately convinced the Iranian leadership of "American complicity in any Iraqi attack" was the July 9 Nojeh coup plot, a failed military *coup d'état* against Khomeini funded by Iraqi intelligence through Bakhtiar (the Iraqis may have notified the Iranian authorities in advance, as they understood "the damage the subsequent purge would inflict on the Iranian military"). Bakhtiar told the plotters the U.S. "had given [the coup] its blessing," but "he was lying" as the U.S. "knew nothing about the Nojeh operation and would likely have opposed it on the grounds that it would endanger the lives of the hostages."<sup>[6]</sup> In August, Saddam made a trip to Saudi Arabia in which King Khalid "reportedly gave his personal blessing to the invasion and promised Saudi backing," which Bryan R. Gibson commented was "a very significant gesture, especially in light of the closeness of American–Saudi relations."<sup>[13]</sup> United States Secretary of State Alexander Haig told Carter's successor, Ronald Reagan, that it was during this visit that "President Carter gave the Iraqis a green light to launch the war against Iran through [Crown Prince] Fahd," as related to Haig by Fahd himself, but at a 2008 conference several academics and former U.S. officials questioned the veracity of this assertion as well as the motives of both Haig and Fahd in promulgating it.<sup>[6][14][15]</sup> As described by Malcolm Byrne: "The American veterans were unanimous that no 'green light' was ever given, and that the Haig document, while intriguing on its face, leaves far too much room for interpretation to be definitive. In any event the Saudi comments did not address the various policy arguments that militated against an invasion—chiefly, the potential danger posed to the American hostages in Tehran—which the participants said held sway with most American officials."<sup>[3]</sup>

On April 9, the Defense Intelligence Agency received information from a source considered reliable, predicting that "the situation is presently more critical than previously reported" and postulating a 50% chance Iraq would invade Iran. An April 11 CIA analysis is more blunt: "Evidence indicates that Iraq had probably planned to initiate a major military move against Iran with the aim of toppling the Khomeini regime"—and had "sought to engage the Kuwaitis to act as intermediary in obtaining United States approval and support for Iraqi military action against Iran."<sup>[6][16]</sup> Carter himself has confirmed that fear the U.S. hostages would be executed if Iraq attacked was one reason he approved a failed rescue mission on April 24. In light of these alerts, the claims of senior Carter administration officials involved with Iran—including White, Naas, Precht, and head of the National Security Council (NSC)'s Iran desk Gary Sick—that they were surprised by the invasion require some explanation. In all likelihood, these warnings went unheeded because "those who doubted they amounted to compelling evidence won the argument. In effect, they were right. Only in early July did U.S. observers note the movement of Iraqi assets out of garrison with war-related 'basic loads' of ammunition" and it was not until September 17 that the CIA indicated "the intensification of border clashes between Iran and Iraq has reached a point where a serious conflict is now a distinct possibility." Even then, as recounted by State Department official W. Nathaniel Howell, U.S. officials remained unsure what to make of Saddam's intentions: "We all followed Saddam's actions and rhetoric closely but most people I knew tended to believe he was posturing." When the invasion came on September 22, "it was unclear whether Saddam had simply fallen into a rage following a smaller skirmish." White recalled: "The outbreak of war did, in fact, come as a surprise to most of us because a decent portion of Iraq's ground forces were still in garrison. The hasty movement of the remaining units up to the front immediately after the beginning of major hostilities was the activity that tended to nudge me toward the abrupt scenario in which Saddam ordered the attack before all military preparations had been completed."<sup>[6][17]</sup> Thus, in the view of Chris Emery, "it is unlikely that the United States was ever in possession of clear evidence of Saddam's intention to invade Iran. Although the Carter administration drastically underestimated the scale of Saddam's plans, the disorganized and apparently impetuous nature of the invasion, with much of the Iraqi army still in garrison, and occurring in the context of border skirmishes and aggressive propaganda, muddled the waters for U.S. observers."<sup>[6]</sup>

Once the war began, the Carter administration's policy was broadly neutral and included several actions that favored Iran, although these could also be seen as aimed primarily at preventing a wider war. While many U.S. officials were initially optimistic that limited Iraqi gains would force Iran to agree to an arms-for-hostages deal (this proved unnecessary because Iran purchased adequate arms and equipment from Syria, Libya, North Korea, the Soviet Union, and Israel), a consensus soon emerged that the war had *disrupted* whatever progress had been made during negotiations with Sadeq Tabatabaei. When Iraq unilaterally attempted to station MiG-23 aircraft, helicopters, and special forces in several Persian Gulf states to use for operations against Iran, "most made frantic attempts to dissuade the Iraqi aircraft from landing; Bahrain even physically blockaded its runways." The Iraqi presence was initially tolerated in Oman (Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said "had been a close friend of the Shah and was probably convinced by Saddam that one decisive attack could bring the revolution down") and Ras al-Khaimah (which had designs on an island the Shah had seized from the United Arab Emirates in 1971), but U.S. officials were "horrified" by the prospect of a regional war, and "after a series of telephone conversations between the White House, Sultan Qaboos, and Sheik Saqr, the Iraqis were swiftly sent on their way." Likewise, when King Hussein informed "U.S. ambassador to Jordan" Nick Veliotes that Iraq was considering the annexation of Khuzestan Province, Veliotes stated: "The U.S. was unalterably opposed to any efforts to dismember Iran." On October 3, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski advised Carter that "we should actively seek new contacts with Iran to explore the possibility of helping it just enough to put sufficient pressure on Iraq to pull back from most, if not all, its current acquisitions," citing the need "to safeguard Iran from Soviet penetration or internal disintegration." The U.S. even tried, unsuccessfully, to stop the flow of weapons from Jordan to Iraq—prompting "Saddam to claim in December that it was supporting 'Iran's aggression' against Iraq." Despite this, the U.S. tolerated the provision of weapons and intelligence from Egypt to Iraq, in exchange for Iraq's assistance in ending the diplomatic isolation Egypt had endured as a result of its Peace Treaty with Israel. In addition, the U.S. "took active steps to make sure that Iraq's ability to export [oil] through the Gulf was

unimpaired and could be quickly restored after the cessation of hostilities, primarily by expediting the purchase and early placement of single point mooring buoys," although this "had only limited effect, given the scale of Iranian retaliatory strikes." Finally, "American AWACS planes" were deployed to protect Saudi Arabia at the Saudi government's request.<sup>[6]</sup>

In Emery's judgement, claims that the Reagan administration's later "tilt" in favor of Iraq during the Iran–Iraq War was merely a continuation of Carter-era policies cannot be supported by available evidence: "The policy that emerged was characterized by a desire to preserve all options, while trying to avoid actions that would undermine the Carter Doctrine or establish an opening for the Soviet Union. The impetus for America to adjust its policy of neutrality, and take a definitive position on which side to back, came in 1982, when the Iranian military threatened to overrun Iraq." Indeed, "the State Department's transition team advised the incoming government" to avoid threatening Iran militarily or assisting the Iranian opposition, as doing so would "make an eventual rapprochement with Iran more difficult."<sup>[6]</sup> In Carter's own account, "I despised Saddam Hussein, because he attacked Iran when my hostages were being held. It was President Reagan who established diplomatic relations with Saddam Hussein after I left office."<sup>[18]</sup> Gibson averred: "If Washington had any foreknowledge of the invasion, logic would suggest that the timing would be postponed until after the hostages were successfully released."<sup>[13]</sup> Peter Hahn states that "there is no evidence to support the Iranian contention" that the U.S. helped instigate the conflict, finding several holes in this theory.<sup>[19]</sup> Regardless of whether the U.S. provided any express "green light" to Saddam, Iranians continue to view the failure of the United Nations Security Council to condemn Iraq's invasion—or to recognize Iraq as the aggressor until after Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait nearly a decade later—as a form of tacit complicity in Iraq's aggression against Iran—not just on the part of the U.S., but the entire world.<sup>[20][21]</sup>

## Support

By mid-1982, the war's momentum had shifted decisively in favor of Iran, which invaded Iraq to depose Saddam's government.<sup>[3][22]</sup> CIA analyst Bruce Riedel recounted: "You just had a series of *catastrophic* Iraqi defeats. They had been driven out of Iran, and the Iraqi army looked like it was falling apart."<sup>[23]</sup> "The Reagan administration feared that Iran's army might slice through Iraq to the oilfields of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia";<sup>[24]</sup> Veliotis, then "Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs," "outlined a nightmare scenario in which the Iranians invade Iraq, they defeat Iraq, and then head straight for Israel, which is distracted and debilitated by its ongoing adventure in Lebanon." As a result, the U.S. gradually abandoned its policy of neutrality.<sup>[23]</sup>



President Ronald Reagan and Vice President George H. W. Bush work in the Oval Office of the White House, July 20, 1984.

In February 1982,<sup>[25]</sup> Iraq was removed from the State Department's list of State Sponsors of Terrorism to ease the transfer of dual-use technology to that country.

According to investigative journalist Alan Friedman, Secretary of State Alexander Haig was "upset at the fact that the decision had been made at the White House, even though the State Department was responsible for the list." "I was not consulted," Haig is said to have complained.<sup>[1]</sup> In March, President Reagan signed National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 4-82—seeking "a review of U.S. policy toward the Middle East"—and in June Reagan signed a National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) co-written by NSC official Howard Teicher, which determined: "The United States could not afford to allow Iraq to lose the war to Iran."<sup>[24][25]</sup> Pursuant to this Directive, Thomas Twetten arrived in Baghdad on July 27 to share CIA satellite imagery on Iranian troop movements with the Iraqi Mukhabarat. This was "the first U.S. provision of intelligence to Iraq," and sparked a short-lived debate over whether Iraq would tolerate a CIA presence in the country: Mukhabarat head Barzan Tikriti told Twetten to "get the hell out of Iraq," but Iraqi military intelligence—"having already drooled over it and having said repeatedly how valuable it was"—subsequently informed Twetten "we'll continue to look at your information, and we'll assess whether it is of use to us in any way."<sup>[23]</sup> Reports of Iraq's use of chemical weapons against Iran reached the CIA as early as 1983, but the U.S. took no action to restrain Iraq's violations of

international law, failing even to alert the UN.<sup>[26]</sup> In late 1983, Reagan selected Donald Rumsfeld as his envoy to the Middle East; Rumsfeld met Saddam in Baghdad in December 1983 and March 1984. "On November 26, 1984, Iraq and the U.S. restored diplomatic relations."<sup>[25]</sup>

According to Teicher's 1995 affidavit and separate interviews with former Reagan and Bush administration officials, the CIA secretly directed armaments and hi-tech components to Iraq through false fronts and friendly third parties such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Kuwait, and they quietly encouraged rogue arms dealers and other private military companies to do the same:

[T]he United States actively supported the Iraqi war effort by supplying the Iraqis with billions of dollars of credits, by providing U.S. military intelligence and advice to the Iraqis, and by closely monitoring third country arms sales to Iraq to make sure that Iraq had the military weaponry required. The United States also provided strategic operational advice to the Iraqis to better use their assets in combat ... The CIA, including both CIA Director Casey and Deputy Director Gates, knew of, approved of, and assisted in the sale of non-U.S. origin military weapons, ammunition and vehicles to Iraq. My notes, memoranda and other documents in my NSC files show or tend to show that the CIA knew of, approved of, and assisted in the sale of non-U.S. origin military weapons, munitions and vehicles to Iraq.<sup>[27]</sup>

The full extent of these covert transfers is not yet known. Teicher's files on the subject are held securely at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and many other Reagan Era documents that could help shine new light on the subject remain classified. Teicher declined to discuss details of the affidavit with the *Washington Post* shortly before the 2003 invasion of Iraq.<sup>[28]</sup>

About two of every seven licenses for the export of "dual use" technology items approved between 1985 and 1990 by the U.S. Department of Commerce "went either directly to the Iraqi armed forces, to Iraqi end-users engaged in weapons production, or to Iraqi enterprises suspected of diverting technology" to weapons of mass destruction, according to an investigation by House Banking Committee Chairman Henry B. Gonzalez. Confidential Commerce Department files also reveal that the Reagan and Bush administrations approved at least 80 direct exports to the Iraqi military. These included computers, communications equipment, aircraft navigation and radar equipment.<sup>[29]</sup>

In conformance with the Presidential directive, the U.S. began providing tactical battlefield advice to the Iraqi Army. "The prevailing view", says Alan Friedman, "was that if Washington wanted to prevent an Iranian victory, it would have to share some of its more sensitive intelligence photography with Saddam."<sup>[1]</sup>

At times, thanks to the White House's secret backing for the intelligence-sharing, U.S. intelligence officers were actually sent to Baghdad to help interpret the satellite information. As the White House took an increasingly active role in secretly helping Saddam direct his armed forces, the United States even built an expensive high-tech annex in Baghdad to provide a direct down-link receiver for the satellite intelligence and better processing of



Donald Rumsfeld meets Saddām on 19–20 December 1983. Rumsfeld visited again on 24 March 1984, the day the UN reported that Iraq had used mustard gas and tabun nerve agent against Iranian troops. The *NY Times* reported from Baghdad on 29 March 1984, that "American diplomats pronounce themselves satisfied with Iraq and the U.S., and suggest that normal diplomatic ties have been established in all but name."<sup>[25]</sup>



the information ...<sup>[1]:27</sup>

The American military commitment that had begun with intelligence-sharing expanded rapidly and surreptitiously throughout the Iran–Iraq War. A former White House official explained that "by 1987, our people were actually providing tactical military advice to the Iraqis in the battlefield, and sometimes they would find themselves over the Iranian border, alongside Iraqi troops."<sup>[1]:38</sup>

Iraq used this data to target Iranian positions with chemical weapons, says ambassador Galbraith.<sup>[30]</sup>



The MK-84: Saudi Arabia transferred to Iraq hundreds of U.S.-made general-purpose "dumb bombs".<sup>[1]</sup>

According to retired Army Colonel W. Patrick Lang, senior defense intelligence officer for the United States Defense Intelligence Agency at the time, "the use of gas on the battlefield by the Iraqis was not a matter of deep strategic concern" to Reagan and his aides, because they "were desperate to make sure that Iraq did not lose."<sup>[31]</sup> Lang disclosed that more than 60 officers of the Defense Intelligence Agency were secretly providing detailed information on Iranian deployments. He cautioned that the DIA "would have never accepted the use of chemical weapons against civilians, but the use against military objectives was seen as inevitable in the Iraqi struggle for survival." The Reagan administration did not stop aiding Iraq after receiving reports affirming the use

of poison gas on Kurdish civilians.<sup>[32][33]</sup>

Joost R. Hiltermann says that when the Iraqi military turned its chemical weapons on the Kurds during the war, killing approximately 5,000 people in the town of Halabja and injuring thousands more, the Reagan administration actually sought to obscure Iraqi leadership culpability by suggesting, inaccurately, that the Iranians may have carried out the attack.<sup>[34]</sup>

## Bear Spares

With the UN-imposed embargo on warring parties, and with the Soviet Union opposing the conflict, Iraqi engineers found it increasingly difficult to repair and replace hardware damaged in battle.<sup>[35][36]</sup> According to Kenneth Timmerman, "Saddam did foresee one immediate consequence of his invasion of Iran: the suspension of arms supplies from the USSR."<sup>[2]</sup>

When he launched his attack, the Soviets were busy playing games in Iran. They were not amused that the Iraqis upset their plans. For generations the KGB had been working to penetrate Iran's Shiite clergy. In February 1979, when Ayatollah Khomeini took power and threw the Americans out of Iran, the Soviets stood to gain more than they had ever believed possible. ... KGB boss Yuri Andropov [had] little difficulty in convincing Brezhnev and Kosygin to agree to an embargo on arms to Iraq ... p. 83-84

The United States assisted Iraq through a military aid program known as "Bear Spares", whereby the U.S. military "made sure that spare parts and ammunition for Soviet or Soviet-style weaponry were available to countries which sought to reduce their dependence on the Soviets for defense needs."<sup>[27]</sup> According to Howard Teicher's court sworn declaration:

If the "Bear Spares" were manufactured outside the United States, then the U.S. could arrange for the provision of these weapons to a third country without direct involvement. Israel, for example, had a very large stockpile of Soviet weaponry and ammunition captured during its various wars. At the suggestion of the United States, the Israelis would transfer the spare parts and weapons to third countries ... Similarly, Egypt manufactured weapons and spare parts from Soviet designs and provided these weapons and ammunition to the Iraqis and other countries.

Little today is known about this program as details remain scarce.

## Dual-use exports

On February 9, 1994, Senator Riegle delivered a report -commonly known as the Riegle Report- in which it was stated that "pathogenic (meaning 'disease producing'), toxigenic (meaning 'poisonous'), and other biological research materials were exported to Iraq pursuant to application and licensing by the U.S. Department of Commerce." It added: "These exported biological materials were not attenuated or weakened and were capable of reproduction."<sup>[39]</sup> The report then detailed 70 shipments (including anthrax) from the United States to Iraqi government agencies over three years, concluding "It was later learned that these microorganisms exported by the United States were identical to those the UN inspectors found and recovered from the Iraqi biological warfare program."<sup>[40]</sup>

Donald Riegle, Chairman of the Senate committee that authored the aforementioned Riegle Report, said:

U.N. inspectors had identified many United States manufactured items that had been exported from the United States to Iraq under licenses issued by the Department of Commerce, and [established] that these items were used to further Iraq's chemical and nuclear weapons development and its missile delivery system development programs. ... The executive branch of our government approved 771 different export licenses for sale of dual-use technology to Iraq. I think that is a devastating record.



Iraq purchased 8 strains of anthrax from the United States in 1985, according to British biological weapons expert David Kelly.<sup>[37]</sup> The Iraqi military settled on the American Type Culture Collection strain 14578 as the exclusive strain for use as a biological weapon, according to Charles Duelfer.<sup>[38]</sup>

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control sent Iraq 14 separate agents "with biological warfare significance," according to Riegle's investigators.<sup>[41]</sup>

## Combat planning and battlefield intelligence

More than 60 US Defense Intelligence Agency officers provided combat planning assistance, and the US also provided battlefield intelligence to Saddam Hussein's military.<sup>[42][43]</sup>

## Diplomatic support



In 1984, Iran introduced a draft resolution to the United Nations Security Council, citing the Geneva Protocol of 1925, condemning Iraq's use of chemical weapons on the battlefield. In response, the United States instructed its delegate at the UN to lobby friendly representatives in support of a motion to take "no decision" on the use of chemical munitions by Iraq. If backing to obstruct the resolution could be won, then the U.S. delegation were to proceed and vote in favour of taking zero action; if support were not forthcoming, the U.S. delegate were to refrain from voting altogether.

USDEL should work to develop general Western position in support of a motion to take "no decision" on Iranian draft resolution on use of chemical weapons by Iraq. If such a motion gets reasonable and broad support and sponsorship, USDEL should vote in favor. Failing Western support for "no decision," USDEL should abstain.<sup>[44]</sup>

Representatives of the United States argued that the UN Human Rights Commission was an "inappropriate forum" for consideration of such abuses. According to Joyce Battle, the Security Council eventually issued a "presidential statement" condemning the use of unconventional weapons "without naming Iraq as the offending party."<sup>[25]</sup>

## Parties involved

According to Russ Baker, writing in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, a "vast network" based in the U.S. and elsewhere, fed Iraq's warring capabilities right up until August 1990, when Saddam invaded Kuwait.<sup>[45]</sup>

### Sarkis Soghanalian

Alan Friedman writes that Sarkis Soghanalian, one of the most notorious arms dealers during the Cold War, procured Eastern Bloc and French origin weaponry, and brokered vast deals with Iraq, with the tacit approval of the Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>[1]</sup>

The most prominent [arms merchant] was Sarkis Soghanalian, a Miami-based former CIA contractor who brokered tens of billions of dollars' worth of military hardware for Iraq during the 1980s, reporting many of his transactions to officials in Washington. [Soghanalian] was close to the Iraqi leadership and to intelligence officers and others in the Reagan administration. In many respects he was the living embodiment of plausible deniability, serving as a key conduit for CIA and other U.S. government operations. p. 36



MD 500 Defender: Iraq acquired 60 multi-role military helicopters directly from the United States in 1983. Additional helicopter sales prompted congressional opposition, forcing the Reagan administration to explore alternative ways of assisting Saddam.<sup>[1]</sup>

In an interview with William Kistner, Soghanalian stated that he was "working closely with the U.S. government".<sup>[46]</sup> According to Timmerman, Soghanalian also helped the Iraqis obtain TOW anti-tank missiles, for which he was later prosecuted by the United States Department of Justice.<sup>[2]</sup>

### Banca Nazionale del Lavoro

The "Iraqgate" scandal revealed that a branch of Italy's largest bank, Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL), in Atlanta, Georgia relied partially on U.S. taxpayer-guaranteed loans to funnel \$5 billion to Iraq from 1985 to 1989. In August 1989, when FBI agents raided the Atlanta branch of BNL, branch manager Christopher Drogoul was charged with making

unauthorized, clandestine, and illegal loans to Iraq – some of which, according to his indictment, were used to purchase arms and weapons technology.<sup>[47]</sup>

According to the *Financial Times*, the companies involved in the scandal by shipping militarily useful technology to Iraq were Hewlett-Packard, Tektronix, and Matrix Churchill's Ohio branch.<sup>[45]</sup>

Even before the Persian Gulf War started in 1990, the *Intelligencer Journal* of Pennsylvania in a string of articles reported: "If U.S. and Iraqi troops engage in combat in the Persian Gulf, weapons technology developed in Lancaster and indirectly sold to Iraq will probably be used against U.S. forces ... And aiding in this ... technology transfer was the Iraqi-owned, British-based precision tooling firm Matrix Churchill, whose U.S. operations in Ohio were recently linked to a sophisticated Iraqi weapons procurement network."<sup>[45]</sup>

"One entire facility, a tungsten-carbide manufacturing plant that was part of the Al Atheer complex," Kenneth Timmerman informed the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, "was blown up by the IAEA in April 1992 because it lay at the heart of the Iraqi clandestine nuclear weapons program, PC-3. Equipment for this plant appears to have been supplied by the Latrobe, Pennsylvania manufacturer, Kennametal, and by a large number of other American companies, with financing provided by the Atlanta branch of the BNL bank."<sup>[48]</sup>

Aside from the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and ABC's Ted Koppel, the Iraq-gate story never picked up much momentum, even though the U.S. Congress became involved with the scandal. See an article by journalist William Safire, introduced into the *Congressional Record* by Rep. Tom Lantos.<sup>[47]</sup>

By contrast, Alcolac International, a Maryland company, transported thiodiglycol, a mustard gas precursor, to Iraq. Alcolac was successfully prosecuted for its violations of export control law.

## Index of American companies

According to German daily newspaper *Die Tageszeitung*, which is reported to have reviewed an uncensored copy of Iraq's 11,000-page declaration to the U.N. Security Council in 2002, almost 150 foreign companies supported Saddam Hussein's WMD program. Twenty-four U.S. firms were involved in exporting materials to Baghdad.<sup>[49]</sup> An even longer list of American companies and their involvements in Iraq was provided by the *LA Weekly* in May 2003.<sup>[50]</sup>

## Energy development and security

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### Aqaba pipeline project

The United States government supported the construction of new oil pipeline that would run westward from Iraq across land to the Jordanian port city of Aqaba, permitting access from the Red Sea. The Bechtel Corporation was the prime contractor for this project. Donald Rumsfeld discussed the advantages of the pipeline personally with Saddam Hussein in 1983. The Aqaba project never made it past the drawing board, however, because of its proximity to Israel, which planners insisted upon. So near to the border it would run, the Iraqi leadership feared the Israeli side could disable the pipeline at a later date, simply by "lobbing a few hand grenades" at it.<sup>[2]</sup>



### Tanker War and U.S. military involvement

The Tanker War started when Iraq attacked Iranian tankers and the oil terminal at Kharg island in 1984. Iran struck back by attacking tankers carrying Iraqi oil from Kuwait and then any tanker of the Persian Gulf states supporting Iraq. Both nations attacked oil tankers and merchant ships, including those of neutral nations, in an effort to deprive the opponent of trade. After repeated Iraqi attacks on Iran's main exporting facility on Khark Island, Iran attacked a Kuwaiti tanker near Bahrain on May 13, 1984, and a Saudi tanker in Saudi waters on May 16. Attacks on ships of noncombatant nations in the Persian Gulf sharply increased thereafter, and this phase of the war was dubbed the "Tanker War."

Lloyd's of London, a British insurance market, estimated that the Tanker War damaged 546 commercial vessels and killed about 430 civilian mariners. The largest of attacks were directed by Iran against Kuwaiti vessels, and on November 1, 1986, Kuwait formally petitioned foreign powers to protect its shipping. The Soviet Union agreed to charter tankers starting in 1987, and the United States Navy offered to provide protection for tankers flying the U.S. flag on March 7, 1987. Operation Prime Chance was a United States Special Operations Command operation intended to protect U.S.-flagged oil tankers from Iranian attack. The operation took place roughly at the same time as Operation Earnest Will, the largely Navy effort to escort the tankers through the Persian Gulf.



Agusta-Bell 212 ASW: The Italian subsidiary of Bell Textron sold Iraq military helicopters fitted out for anti-submarine warfare. This deal needed, and duly received, government approval.<sup>[2]</sup>

Under international law, an attack on such ships would be treated as an attack on the U.S., allowing the U.S. to retaliate militarily. This support would protect ships headed to Iraqi ports, effectively guaranteeing Iraq's revenue stream for the duration of the war.

Special Operations Forces also assisted in this effort. The 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment operated AH-6 helicopters from a large barge anchored at sea. A second platform was manned by Special Forces from Fort Bragg, piloting OH-58Ds. "These things looked extremely sinister. They were all black and bristling with antennas and had a huge round sight module about two feet in diameter stuck on a mast above the rotor blades. ... The impression you got, just looking at one of these things on the ground, was of a giant insect staring at you before you die", a Special Forces officer is quoted as saying.<sup>[1]</sup>

On April 14, 1988, the frigate *USS Samuel B. Roberts* was badly damaged by an Iranian mine. U.S. forces responded with Operation Praying Mantis on April 18, the United States Navy's largest engagement of surface warships since World War

II. Two Iranian ships were destroyed, killing 55 sailors in the process, and an American helicopter was shot down, killing the two pilots.<sup>[51]</sup>

A number of researchers and former military personnel contend that the United States carried out Black operations against Iranian military targets during the war. Lt. Col. Roger Charles, who worked in the Office of the Secretary of Defense at the Pentagon, says the Navy used specially equipped Mark III patrol boats during the night, with the intent of luring Iranian gunboats away from territorial waters, where they could be fired upon and destroyed. "They took off at night and rigged up false running lights so that from a distance it would appear there was a merchant ship, which the Iranians would want to inspect."<sup>[1]</sup>

Information collected from Operation Eager Glacier, a top-secret intelligence-gathering program, was also used to bomb manufacturing plants inside Iran by the CIA.<sup>[1]</sup>

## The USS *Stark* incident

An Iraqi jet fighter mistakenly attacked the USS *Stark* in May 1987, killing 37 servicemen and injuring 21.<sup>[52]</sup> But attention in Washington was on isolating Iran; accepting Saddam's apology for the error, the White House criticized Iran's mining of international waters, and in October 1987, the U.S. attacked Iranian oil platforms in retaliation for an Iranian attack on the U.S.-flagged Kuwaiti tanker *Sea Isle City*.<sup>[51]</sup>

## Longer term interests

In October 1989, President Bush signed NSD 26, which begins, "Access to Persian Gulf oil and the security of key friendly states in the area are vital to U.S. national security." With respect to Iraq, the directive stated, "Normal relations between the United States and Iraq would serve our longer term interests and promote stability in both the Persian Gulf and the Middle East."<sup>[53]</sup>

## See also

- CIA activities in Iraq
- International aid to combatants in the Iran–Iraq War
- Iran Air Flight 655
- Iran–Contra affair
- Iran–Saudi Arabia proxy conflict
- Iraq–United States relations
- Operation Staunch was created in spring 1983 by the United States State Department to stop the illicit flow of U.S. arms to Iran.
- Soviet support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war
- Italian support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war

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15. **United States Ambassador to Saudi Arabia James E. Akins** provided an anecdote that may be related to the rumored "green light": "When disintegration started, and a report was prepared on this—the economic and political and military disintegration of [Iran]—the army had been totally purged, and the people who were taking over were young and incompetent. The implication was that the government would not last too much longer. A copy of such a report was given to the Saudis, and the Saudis were quite impressed by it, because they were deathly afraid of the government of Iran's mullahs. What the Saudis did with this report is where this narrative breaks down somewhat. There are a lot of people who believe that the Saudis gave a copy of this to Saddam. But no Saudis ever told me that it was given, and no Iraqi has ever told me that they got a copy of this report from the Saudis, although they could have. Whether they did or not, Saddam also reached the same conclusion on his own. There's no doubt about that. If he got confirmation of his conclusion from an American report, that would have made him even more determined to move against Iran." See *"An Interview with James Akins"* (<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saddam/interviews/akins.html>). *PBS Frontline*. 2000. Retrieved 2017-05-01.
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## External links

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- Shaking Hands with Saddam Hussein: The U.S. Tilts toward Iraq, 1980-1984 (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB82/index.htm>) National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 82
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