

## Iraq... The Aftermath

### Crossing Interests

#### "Shaking Hands With the Butcher" \*

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There is a wonderful photograph floating around the Internet these days. It is not a fake; it is not doctored; it is real. It shows the smiling face of a much



younger Donald Rumsfeld shaking hands with the Butcher of Baghdad.

This photo was taken December 20, 1983, when Rumsfeld was sent to Iraq as a special envoy of Ronald Reagan. It has come to light recently as part of a series of documents that have been declassified and that tell the tale of an obnoxious US policy that was every bit as indefensible as the present US policy.

During the 1980s, US policy embraced Saddam Hussein. Diplomatic relations with Iraq had been suspended since 1967 (Arab-Israeli conflict) but the United States wanted

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to renew ties and to provide assistance to Iraq. During the period where the US moved to establish this good rapport with Iraq, the American interest was in ensuring that Iraq was not defeated by Iran in a war that was ongoing between the two nations. Iran, you will remember, had done a nasty thing to America by taking over the US embassy in Tehran and holding several dozen Americans hostage for over a year. Even though that situation was resolved by the time the US renewed its relationship with Baghdad, memories of hatred for Iran died slowly.

And during this period of renewed friendship, it was well known to the US that

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Saddam Hussein had invaded Iran and had long-range nuclear aspirations that probably included an eventual nuclear weapon capability. It was also known that terrorists were being harbored in Baghdad, that the human rights of Iraqi citizens were being abused, that Saddam possessed chemical weapons and had probably used them on his own people as well as on the Iranians.

The declassified documents include a lot of material that reports on two Rumsfeld trips to Baghdad, on Iraq's use of the chemical weapons, and decision directives signed by President Reagan that reveal the specific US policies for the region: preserving oil access, expanding US ability to exert military influence in the area.

They also include a US cable recording the conversation between Rumsfeld and Saddam on the day this photo was taken. Rumsfeld apparently told CNN during an interview on September 21, 2002 that he had cautioned Saddam about the use of chemical weapons during this meeting but the transcript shows this is not the case.

There is also a National Security Decision Directive dated April 5, 1984, which calls for an "unambiguous" condemnation of the use of chemical weapons, although it does not mention Iraq. What it does state, though, is a stress on protecting Iraq from Iran's "ruthless and inhumane tactics" and ensuring a plan of action to avert an Iraqi collapse.

In 1984, the United States and Iraq consulted about a resolution proposed to the United Nations by Iran, in regard to Iraq's chemical weapons. The Iranian resolution was presented to the Security Council and called for a condemnation of Iraq's use of these weapons. Iraq conveyed to the United States that it wanted a lower-level response that did not name any country in regard to the chemical warfare; the US supported this request.

Astoundingly, there is also a US document that publicly condemns the use of chemical weapons in the Iraq-Iran war, without naming names. Ayatollah Khomeini had refused to end hostilities until Saddam Hussein was ejected from power. The written and public US response was: "The United States finds the present Iranian regime's intransigent refusal to deviate from its avowed objective of eliminating the legitimate government of neighboring Iraq to be inconsistent with the accepted norms of behavior among nations." Well, pardon me. Did I miss the point where the legitimate government of Iraq became the illegitimate government? Did I miss the memo that said eliminating governments is acceptable for the United States but no one else?

The United States claimed to be officially neutral during the Iraq-Iran war and claimed that it provided arms to neither side. Well, not directly maybe. Arms were shipped to Iran via Israel and various countries in Europe, Asia, and South America. Initially, the Iraqis started with a Soviet-supplied

arsenal but needed more as the war raged. By mid-1982, Iraq was on the defensive and the United States decided that an Iranian

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victory would not be in US interests. So they accelerated contact with Baghdad, removed Iraq's name from a State Department list of nations supporting terrorism, pressured the Export-Import Bank to provide Iraq with financing and to enhance its credit standing to allow it to obtain loans from other international financial institutions. The United States Agriculture Department provided taxpayer guaranteed loans to Iraq for the purchase of American commodities.

Although formal relations with Iraq were not established until November 1984, the US had begun several years earlier to provide Iraq with intelligence and military support (in secret, and contrary to official US neutrality policies) on direct order of Ronald Reagan. And about this time, the US began to funnel weaponry and military equipment to Iraq. It came either through intermediary nations or by deliberately turning a blind eye to the obvious; for instance, in April 1984 the State Department willingly accepted the declaration of Bell Helicopter Textron that the helicopters they were selling to Iraq's Ministry of Defense were not in any way configured for military use. No doubt they were for covering the morning traffic reports for Radio Baghdad.

During the spring of 1984, the US reconsidered its policy of selling nuclear-related equipment and knowledge to Iraq. The documents reveal the US was certain that even after the conflict with Iran was ended, Iraq would continue to develop its nuclear program up to the point of possessing nuclear weapons. Although Iraq resides in a

dangerous part of the world, no one had blinked when Israel stockpiled a large cache of nuclear weaponry because proliferation was not a priority for Reagan's administration. Throughout the earlier part of the 1980s, the Reagan White House had downplayed Pakistan's nuclear program in order to avoid congressionally mandated sanctions against Pakistan. This was to ensure that the US could continue to provide massive military assistance to Pakistan in return for its support of the Afghanis who were fighting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

What makes this whole matter so perverted is that the current US administration uses against Iraq exactly what a former US administration gave to Iraq. Bush and Rumsfeld describe Iraq in stark, moralistic terms to persuade a skeptical world that a premeditated and pre-emptive attack on Iraq is just. They claim that this all arises because Saddam has nasty weapons, although the US administration, partly with the assistance of Rumsfeld, looked the other way during the time that Saddam may actually have been using those nasty weapons. In Reagan's days in office, chemical warfare conducted by a country with which the US wanted to be friendly was a potential embarrassment but they found a way around that obstacle. Now, a past history of chemical warfare is enough reason for the Bush government to wipe away the former position of the United States that the "objective of eliminating the legitimate government of neighboring Iraq [is] inconsistent with the accepted norms of behavior among nations."

At least now we can all see clearly that the morals of the United States are only those of convenience.

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