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Documents Show U.S. Aware Iraq Was Terrorist Haven

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By RUTH SINAI
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U.S. officials knew Palestinian terrorists were finding a safe haven in Baghdad, but for eight years the Reagan and Bush administrations rejected congressional attempts to punish **Iraq**, newly declassified documents show.

In 1982, the Reagan administration removed **Iraq** from a list of countries believed to support international terrorism. The decision lifted a ban on U.S. trade with **Iraq**, opening the way for eight years of American military and economic aid that ended only when the Iraqis invaded Kuwait in August 1990.

In order to remove **Iraq** from the list - enabling the United States to help prevent an Iranian victory in the Iran-**Iraq** war that began in September 1981 - the administration had to certify to Congress that **Iraq** had ceased supporting terrorist groups.

Yet, a July 1, 1986, memo to then-Secretary of State George Shultz - obtained Friday by The Associated Press - said that wasn't the case.

"The Iraqis initially endeavored to preserve their terrorist assets, resorting to subterfuge to divert attention from their continued support for terrorist groups," said the memo, which was declassified by the State Department at the request of Rep. Sam Gejdenson, D-Conn.

In mid-1982, for example, the Black June organization of Palestinian terrorist Abu Nidal was operating out of **Iraq**, attacking Israeli and Jewish targets in Europe, according to the document written by the department's intelligence bureau.

That occurred after **Iraq** was removed from the terrorism list and at a time when **Iraq** was assuring the United States that it no longer supported Abu Nidal, the memo said.

After 1983, Abu Nidal was expelled from **Iraq**, it added.

"Even recently, however, there have been developments that suggest that **Iraq** remains reluctant to cut completely its links to terrorist groups," the document said.

For example, two men arrested in October 1985 at the airport in Rome were found to have bombs in their luggage and to be working for the May 15 group led by Baghdad-based bomb-maker **Abu Ibrahim**, according to the report.

The notorious Abu Abbas, nom de guerre for the head of the organization that hijacked the cruise liner Achille Lauro in 1985, "seems to have been permitted to take refuge in **Iraq**" after the attack, the memo said.

News reports of these developments prompted repeated questions from members of Congress about **Iraq's** record and warnings from lawmakers that **Iraq** would have to be returned to the terrorism list.

But Shultz assured them in a 1985 letter - a copy of which was also made available - that **Iraq** would be restored to the terrorism list if evidence were found that it had resumed supporting these groups.

The 1986 memo summed up U.S. efforts to rein in **Iraq's** support for terrorism as "eventually fruitful."

But some 1990 State Department cables paint a different picture.

On June 23, 1990, department officials summoned Iraqi Ambassador Mohamed al-Mashat to demand that **Iraq** expel Abu Abbas after he sent armed commandos to attack an Israeli beach the previous

month.

Four days later, another cable showed the department believed Abu Nidal's organization was back in **Iraq**.

The cables noted that members of Congress were demanding that **Iraq** be placed back on the terrorism list.

Before further steps could be taken, **Iraq** invaded Kuwait and was returned to the list.

Associated Press Writer

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