

# Pentagon Sought Exchange With Iraq

## 3 Months Before Kuwait Invasion, U.S. Pushed Military Training Plan

By Jeffrey Smith

The Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff sought to establish a military training and exchange program with Iraq less than three months before that country's armed forces invaded Kuwait in August 1990, internal Pentagon documents show.

The department's proposal called for training Iraqi soldiers in land mine countermeasures, aerial reconnaissance and field operations, plus arranging reciprocal visits to war colleges and other exchanges,

the classified documents state. The plan, one document shows, was to increase U.S. influence and relations with the Iraq military.

The Joint Chiefs suggested starting the exchange program in a secret directive by President Bush in October 1989, before classification "on a case-by-case basis" of lethal military assistance to Iraq. But the State Department evidently blocked the plan out of concern that it would provoke a domestic political outcry, the documents show.

The documents, which were surrendered by the administration to

Democratic legislators investigating U.S. policy toward Iraq before the Persian Gulf War, said a military document to prevent withdrawal of U.S. support for expanding U.S.-Iraq commercial ties and curtailing the pouring of sensitive U.S. technology into Iraq. At Baghdad, while the government there was building up its war machine.

Spokesmen for the Defense Department and Joint Chiefs of Staff yesterday declined to comment on the plan. But a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee chairman, Sam Gejdenson (D-Conn.), said the doc-

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uments raise new questions about Washington's willingness to enhance Baghdad's military prowess when other Middle East nations viewed Iraqi forces as a growing regional menace.

"Even after [Iraqi President] Saddam Hussein threatened [in April 1990] to 'burn half of Israel' with binary chemical weapons, attempted [in March 1990] to smuggle nuclear triggers, and moved missile bases [in early 1990] closer to Israel, the Department of Defense wanted to provide him with military assistance," Gejdenson said. "What could DOD have been thinking?"

According to the documents, the plan was put forward in response to Bush's National Security Directive (NSD) 26 of October 1989. The directive called for establishing new military ties and various other U.S. "incentives" aimed at moderating Iraqi behavior and promoting long-term stability in the Middle East.

Attempting to pull Iraq closer to the West, the Bush administration approved an additional \$1 billion in agricultural trade credits for Iraq, expanded U.S. exports of sensitive high-technology goods and fended off congressional calls to punish Iraq with trade sanctions for human rights abuses and the gassing of ethnic Kurds.

The roots of the plan evidently lay in a June 29, 1989, cable to Washington from Joseph Wilson III, who on that day was acting U.S. ambassador in Baghdad. Wilson said in the cable that "now is the time to test the sincerity" of recent Iraqi statements favoring a broader dialogue with Washington by approving some "low-cost" exchanges urged by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense.

"We are under no illusion about the Iraqis. This is a police state," the cable said. But it added that Iraqi leaders had recently shown "a modicum of political maturity" by promising not to use chemical weapons first

in war and by promptly compensating Washington for an Iraqi warplane's accidental attack on the USS Stark in May 1987.

Five months later, the U.S. Central Command in Tampa said in a cable to Washington that "we concur with Ambassador [to Iraq April] Glaspie that implementation of low-level, non-lethal military

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assistance would greatly facilitate developing an improved military dialogue with and access to the senior military leadership and the government of Iraq."

The cable from the Central Command, then headed by Army Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, listed 10 separate initiatives that should be pursued with Iraq. They ranged from supplying Army field manuals and English language textbooks to training Iraqi personnel in military medicine, mine countermeasures, aviation security and "IR [infrared] countermeasures for the [Iraqi] president's aircraft."

As head of the Central Command, Schwarzkopf was responsible for U.S. military action in most of the Middle East and Persian Gulf. Fourteen months later, he directed the international military campaign that ousted Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

In January 1990, a secret cable to Schwarzkopf from the director of strategic plans and policy for the Pentagon's Joint Staff reported that "notwithstanding the President's NSD 26 declaration" favoring the idea, the State Department has decided "the U.S. domestic political climate . . . [was not] supportive of increased military relations" with Iraq.

In view of the State Department's concerns, the Pentagon was unable to obtain a formal presidential determination that would have made Iraq eligible to receive direct U.S. military assistance, according to the cable. The cable therefore advised Schwarzkopf to get around the political obstacles by beginning military training, staff visits and "other localized contact" with Iraq that would not be funded by the Defense Department.

A Central Command spokesman said yesterday he was unfamiliar with the Joint Staff proposal or the earlier Schwarzkopf plan.

There is evidence that neither plan was realized. A Joint Chiefs of Staff position paper, written for an interagency meeting of senior administration officials on May 29, 1990, reported for instance that "U.S. military-to-military relations with Iraq are nearly nonexistent."

But senior military officials continued to favor establishing such ties. The May 29 paper asserted that "allowing low-level, non-lethal military-to-military exchanges would be a positive tool for U.S. policy in the region." It also recorded the Joint Chiefs' opposition to halting trade with Iraq, which some legislators were seeking then because of Iraqi threats against Israel.