

Former CIA Official Details

Counterterrorism Chief Clarridge Tried to Arrange Capture of

By Walter Pincus
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Two senior CIA officers secretly visited Baghdad in 1986 in an unsuccessful bid to persuade President Saddam Hussein's government to allow the United States to capture a Palestinian terrorist then living in Iraq, according to the forthcoming memoirs of a former top CIA clandestine officer.

Duane R. "Dewey" Clarridge—then head of the CIA's counterterrorism center, and one of the two who made the trip—writes that the goal was to arrange the capture of Abu Abbas, who led the terrorist attack on the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro in 1985 in which American Leon Klinghoffer was killed.

In retrospect, the CIA agents' hope for Iraqi cooperation seems wildly misguided. But Clarridge says it was based on a previously undisclosed portion of a top-secret deal forged by then-CIA Director William J. Casey: Washington expected Iraq to take moves against terrorists in return for delivery of U.S. satellite intelligence information to Iraq to help it in its war with Iran at the time.

CIA delivery of intelligence to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war has long been known, but Clarridge for the first time writes that the Iraqis were supposed to respond by ending their terrorist activities around the world, no longer harboring known terrorists such as Abbas and providing Washington information on terrorist activities.

"That was the real quid pro quo for the intelligence," Clarridge said this week in a telephone interview.

While Iraq apparently reined in some support for terrorism, it didn't hold up its side of the bargain.

"Although we had given the Iraqis intelligence to improve their battlefield performance—particularly in the air—they were not fulfilling their end of the agreement," Clarridge writes in "A Spy for All Seasons," to be published in January.

Moreover, regardless of whether the Iraqis acted against terror-

ism, the United States had a strategic interest in helping Iraq to block an Iranian triumph, which would have seriously destabilized the Persian Gulf region.

The Iraqi episode is one of dozens of CIA operations that Clarridge, one of the agency's more celebrated "cowboy" operatives, describes in an amazingly detailed book about his 33-year career. He remarked in the interview how surprised he was that the agency cleared the Baghdad episode and many others for publication.

His career, rooted in the Cold War and CIA's Ivy League "old boy network," is worth studying now to see examples of the good, the bad and the useless of the old clandestine side of the agency, which is in such turmoil today. Clarridge, who helped set up the

plan "insane," as did Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz, with whom they met later that same day. They never met Saddam. After midnight, 12 hours after arriving, they were on their way out. Of course there had to be a final cup of tea with their intelligence chief host at the airport. He kept other passengers waiting on the Air France commercial plane awaiting Clarridge and his companion, blocked from leaving by an Iraqi armored personnel carrier.

Clarridge writes of his concern that "the Iraqis . . . had suckered the U.S. government into a deal with no intention of fulfilling their end of the bargain" and his frustration that he had failed. But the bright side was "we had signaled that we were on the offensive against terrorists and their supporters" and knowledge that he

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Nicaraguan contra rebel force in 1981 and the counterterrorism center in 1986, ended up being indicted in the Iran-contra affair for lying to Congress. Before coming to trial, he was among those pardoned in 1992 by President George Bush.

Clarridge writes that he and another agency officer went to Baghdad in the spring of 1986 in an agency jet expecting to meet with Saddam and carrying what he calls "not the greatest plan" to get the terrorist who had led the group that murdered Klinghoffer, a wheelchair-bound American passenger on the ill-fated cruise ship.

Under the plan, the Iraqis were to fly Abbas on one of their planes to Yemen, but their aircraft was to be forced down before it got there allowing U.S. officers to seize the terrorist without implicating the Baghdad government.

Not surprisingly, Clarridge writes, the Iraqi intelligence chief, Dr. Fadil Barak, considered the

had a dinner reservation in Paris that evening with an old CIA comrade.

At about the same time in 1986 that Clarridge undertook his clandestine mission to Baghdad, President Ronald Reagan's national security adviser Robert McFarlane and White House aide Lt. Col. Oliver L. North were secretly plotting a somewhat similar trip to Tehran to help Iraq's opponent in the war. They were to take CIA intelligence and U.S. arms and seek as a quid pro quo Iranian assistance in freeing American hostages held in Lebanon.

"Ollie didn't know about the Iraq operation," Clarridge said in the interview.

Clarridge does not discuss in the book that the agreement with Iraq was not shared with Congress, but said in the interview it was done under the so-called "liaison" relationships that the CIA had and still maintains with foreign intelligence organizations.

Another portion of Clarridge's

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book deals with Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, with whom Clarridge had close relations during the time he ran Latin American operations for the CIA.

He writes that despite U.S. knowledge of Noriega's alleged involvement with drugs and money laundering, the Panamanian was used by the United States for a variety of missions in the 1980s. One was to send an unsuccessful request to Fidel Castro on Oct. 26, 1983, to have all his forces surrender to Americans who had invaded Grenada the day before.

Noriega passed on the message, which Clarridge says had originated with then-Vice President Bush, to one of the Cuban leader's senior officials. "Castro, of course, chose not to issue any order to cease hostilities," Clarridge writes.

In one of the many frank passages in this unusually detailed book about CIA operations and personnel, Clarridge says that U.S. officials knew in the early 1980s of the allegations of Noriega's drug dealings and money laundering but "our DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] considered him more clean than not. He provided them with information that led to seizures of drugs and drug runners. Perhaps he was simply handing the DEA his rivals."

The CIA has recently come under criticism for using drug traffickers during the Reagan administration to support the Nicaraguan contras against the Sandinista regime in Managua.

Although CIA knowledge of Noriega's illegal activities has been described in congressional and court testimony, Clarridge gives a firsthand description of how the Panamanian leader was employed.

While Noriega was still a lieutenant colonel and head of his country's intelligence service, Clarridge writes, he agreed in 1981 to a CIA request for use of Snake Island off the west coast of Panama as a training ground for anti-Sandinista forces. Structured as a business deal, the CIA arranged for use of the island "through a Panamanian company connected with Noriega,"



FILE PHOTO BY RICH LIPSKI—THE WASHINGTON POST

Former CIA official Duane R. "Dewey" Clarridge writes that Iraq didn't hold up its end of the bargain after obtaining U.S. intelligence about Iran.

according to Clarridge. The operation ended shortly after it began, Clarridge says, because of internal Panamanian politics and possible Cuban pressure, but "Noriega remitted the unused funds for the . . . venture."

Snake Island, Clarridge insists, was the only contra operation he knew of that involved Noriega.

Clarridge insists that after Noriega was indicted by U.S. Attor-

ney Leon Kellner in Miami, either he or one other former CIA official who knew the Panamanian leader well could have helped negotiate his departure "peacefully . . . and into a nice cozy exile somewhere."

Instead, he writes, a heavy-handed message was delivered by the Bush administration and eventually there was a U.S. invasion with bloodshed and the spending of millions of dollars.