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CIA Shared Data With Iraq Until Eve of Invasion

Despite Saddam's Behavior, Ties Continued 2 Years Later Than Senate Panel Had Reported

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The CIA continued intelligence exchanges with Iraq until the eve of Iraq's Aug. 2, 1990, invasion of Kuwait, sources said yesterday.

The secret relationship was described by one source as "formal and rigid" at the end. But it was apparently maintained by the Bush administration despite increasingly belligerent talk from Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in the months before the invasion.

The exact nature of the final intelligence exchanges was not known, "but it was not high-level stuff," another source said.

The disclosure, however, was embarrassing for both the CIA and the Senate intelligence committee. After looking into the issue last fall during confirmation hearings for CIA Director Robert M. Gates, the committee concluded in a formal report that U.S. intelligence-sharing with Iraq had stopped at the end of the Iraq war two years earlier.

In fact, the sources said, the panel had been given several different dates by CIA officials before, during and after the hearings—each one setting a later date for the end of the sharing. The full picture emerged only after the hearings had con-

cluded and a senior CIA official submitted the final date in writing.

"We put the report together in a hurry and we may have fallen down in not using the last and best answer," said a legislative source. "There was some fault on both ends. Nobody here feels duped or anything like that."

According to the Senate panel's final report, the cooperation began in 1984 when President Ronald Reagan authorized the CIA "to share limited intelligence" with Baghdad "in order to forestall a total Iraqi collapse in its war with Iran."

The relationship was expanded in 1986 "to enhance Iraq's pursuit of the war" and "continued on a sporadic basis until 1988 when the war . . . ended," the committee said in its 225-page report on Gates's nomination. "U.S. assistance," the report continued, "was limited to providing intelligence and advice with respect to pursuit of the war."

Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.), chairman of the House Banking Committee, challenged that account in a House floor speech last month. A critic of the Bush administration's courtship of Iraq as a potential counterweight to Iran, Gonzalez disclosed secret records that showed the intelligence-sharing was still in effect as of a May 24, 1990 meeting of the National Security Council's deputies committee.

The session had been called to

consider steps that could be taken in response to threats by Saddam, and an options paper prepared at the State Department for the NSC listed the pros and cons of cutting off "intelligence cooperation."

"Intelligence exchanges have warned since the [Iran-Iraq] Gulf War cease-fire," the options paper said. "PRO: They still provide Iraq with limited information on Iranian military activity that would be missed. CON: Ending this contact would cut off our very limited access to this important segment of the Iraqi establishment."

The memo was addressed to national security adviser Brent Scowcroft with a request that he send it on to Gates, then his top deputy, for review. But the intelligence-sharing option discussed in the memo did not come up at the meeting, sources said, and so it continued as part of the ongoing relationship with Baghdad, which was not broken until the invasion.

Although the Senate intelligence committee statement seemed to be talking about a total cutoff of U.S. intelligence-sharing with Iraq at the end of its war with Iran, the committee only meant to discuss the sharing of tactical or militarily useful intelligence, according to legislative sources.

The committee was told in a letter from Gates's predecessor as CIA director, William H. Webster, that

sharing of intelligence on political matters continued for more than a year after the August 1988 end of the Iraq-Iran war. This claim was generally supported in a classified report on U.S.-Iraqi relations by the CIA's inspector general that was reviewed by the committee.

During a closed hearing called as a part of the Senate's review of Gates's nomination, a senior CIA official made clear for the first time that the intelligence-sharing continued until early 1990. Based upon this and other information about the nature of the intelligence provided to Iraq, the committee concluded that the arrangement did not constitute a covert action and did not require a specific presidential "finding" or authorization.

After Gates's nomination was approved, the CIA came to understand that the closed testimony of its senior official was in error, sources said. It then sent the committee a written correction of the testimony that extended the period of known U.S.-Iraqi intelligence collaboration by roughly another three to four months.

A legislative source said he believed that little substantive information was passed to Iraq during these final months, and that the final disclosure did not warrant a review of the committee's endorsement of the administration decision not to require a presidential finding.