

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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BNL Case Needs an Independent Counsel

The Nov. 12 editorial "More Iraq Mysteries" was not alone in suggesting that the ties between Matrix-Churchill and the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro require further scrutiny if we are ever to learn the extent of the Bush administration's support for Iraq prior to that country's invasion of Kuwait.

I have been probing the BNL case since July 1990. On Feb. 4, 1991, I went to the House floor to explain the link between Matrix-Churchill, an Iraqi front company headquartered in England (which boasted a branch in Ohio until the U.S. Customs Department closed it down), and the Atlanta branch of BNL, a bank almost entirely owned by the Italian government.

I noted that Iraqis secretly owned Matrix-Churchill and that the company was "charged with finding other United States companies that would build industrial plants in Iraq." As we now know, these plants were used to build Saddam Hussein's war machine. Even as early as February 1991, I questioned how the U.S. intelligence community could have failed to know what Iraq was doing with the technology it received from U.S. companies like Matrix-Churchill. I also questioned the policy of allowing sensitive dual-use technology to be exported to Iraq, with few questions asked and almost no follow-up once the technology arrived in Iraq.

On Aug. 10, I placed in the Congressional Record a March 14, 1989, letter signed by Secretary of State James Baker that stated that Matrix-Churchill's Ohio branch was certified to serve as a contractor to Iraq. Yet, Central Intelligence Agency documents forwarded to the State Department months before the

secretary's action revealed that Matrix-Churchill was an Iraqi front company. "Oversights" such as these must be investigated.

The time has come for an investigation equipped with the funds and power to get to the bottom of this complex, immense international scandal. An independent counsel would be ideal.

The power of Congress to investigate is limited by the practical reality that it is not a judicial body, nor does it have the power to prosecute. Those functions must be carried out by others. The job of Congress is to continue its investigations into BNL and other cases with legislative purposes in mind. Congress needs to understand what happens in order to determine what laws to change and in what way. Only a special counsel can carry out the needed criminal investigation.

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