

SEPTEMBER 22, 2003 SCHAKOWSKY: BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S MISSTATEMENT OF THE DAY -

IRAQ - AL QAEDA CONNECTION WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Chief Deputy Whip, issued today's "Bush Administration's Misstatement of the Day" on contacts between Iraq and Al Qaeda:

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[In a March 19, 2003 letter to Congress](#), President Bush declared that diplomacy alone cannot solve the situation in Iraq and that he was authorized to use force against "nations, organizations, or persons who planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001."

However, on 9/17/03, President Bush finally admitted:

"No, we've had no evidence that Saddam Hussein was involved with September the 11th." (Bush Disavows Hussein-Sept. 11 Link; Administration Has Been Vague on Issue, but President Says No Evidence Found. *Washington Post*, 9/18/03)

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Schakowsky said, "One of President Bush's leading justification for going to war in Iraq has come tumbling down, but the true believers in the Administration continue to mislead the American people. There is no evidence linking Iraq to 9/11 or Al Qaeda."

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Even after President Bush's admission, members of his administration are still trying to leave the impression that Iraq was involved in the terrorist attacks of 9/11 by linking it to those really responsible for the tragedy of 9/11. Deputy Secretary of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz, said on Sunday (9/21/03) during a New School University Forum in New York:

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"Iraq did have contacts with Al Qaeda." (*New York Times*, 9/22/03)

Yet, once again, there is no evidence. As reported in the *New York Times* on June 27, 2003, "The chairman of the monitoring group appointed by the United Nations Security Council to track Al Qaeda told reporters that his team had found no evidence linking Al Qaeda to Saddam Hussein."

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And a story in the November 4, 2002 *Los Angeles Times* reported that U.S. allies fighting Al Qaeda in Europe found no evidence of an Iraqi-Qaeda connection. (See Below)

Allies Find No Links Between Iraq, Al Qaeda

Evidence isn't there, officials in Europe say, adding that an attack on Hussein would worsen the threat of terrorism by Islamic radicals.

By Sebastian Rotella

Times Staff Writer

November 4, 2002

PARIS -- As the Bush administration prepares for a possible military attack on Iraq that it describes as the next logical step in its war on terror, some of its strongest front-line allies in that war dispute Washington's allegations that the Baghdad regime has significant ties to Al Qaeda.

In recent interviews, top investigative magistrates, prosecutors, police and intelligence officials who have been fighting Al Qaeda in Europe said they are concerned about attempts by President Bush and his aides to link Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to Osama bin Laden's terror network.

"We have found no evidence of links between Iraq and Al Qaeda," said Jean-Louis Bruguiere, the French judge who is the dean of the region's investigators after two decades fighting Islamic and Middle Eastern terrorists. "And we are working on 50 cases involving Al Qaeda or radical Islamic cells. I think if there were such links, we would have found them. But we have found no serious connections whatsoever."

Even in Britain, a loyal U.S. partner in the campaign against Iraq, it's hard to find anyone in the government making the case that Al Qaeda and the Iraqi regime are close allies. In fact, European counter-terrorist veterans who are working with American counterparts worry that an attack on Iraq, especially a unilateral U.S. invasion, would worsen the threat of radical Islamic terrorism worldwide and impede their work.

"A war on Iraq will not diminish the terrorist threat. It will probably increase it," said Baltasar Garzon, Spain's best-known investigative magistrate, who is prosecuting Al Qaeda suspects in Madrid as alleged accomplices in the Sept. 11 attacks. "It could radicalize the situation in the Middle East.... As for the investigations of Sept. 11, doors would close in the Arab world that have helped in the fight against Al Qaeda. And a war would do nothing to bolster the investigation into the attacks in the United States."

The European critics aren't limited to the usual suspects: instinctively anti-American, pro-Arab politicians and pundits whose voices are often the loudest in the Iraq debate here. On the contrary, Bruguiere, Garzon and other investigators have won praise from U.S. officials for their tough tactics and proven willingness to lock up suspected terrorists during the past year.

Even before Sept. 11, long-running cases in Europe were valuable resources for U.S. investigators working to learn more about Islamic networks. Investigations in France, Spain and elsewhere have helped build cases against Zacarias Moussaoui, an alleged accomplice of the hijackers who awaits trial in Virginia, and other suspects.

The criticism in Europe reinforces the misgivings of some U.S. congressional leaders and intelligence officials about hawks in the Bush administration who allege that Iraq could have even played a role in the Sept. 11 attacks. Critics say that the evidence is weak and that intelligence agencies are feeling political pressure to implicate Iraq in terrorism.

In the last two months, Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and others have periodically revived and expanded on the allegations.

On Friday, Bush specifically linked Hussein to the terrorist network. "We know he's got ties with Al Qaeda," Bush said during an election rally in New Hampshire. "A nightmare scenario, of course, is that he becomes the arsenal for a terrorist network, where they could attack America and he'd leave no fingerprints behind. He is a problem."

The U.S. leaders have made much of a supposed meeting between Mohamed Atta, the leader of the Sept. 11 hijackers, and an Iraqi spy in Prague, the Czech capital, last year. They have cited "bulletproof evidence," in Rumsfeld's words, of the recent presence of Al Qaeda members in Iraq and of contacts between senior Al Qaeda figures and the Baghdad regime that allegedly go back years. They have accused Iraq of training Al Qaeda terrorists in the use of chemical weapons.

Premise Called Flawed

European experts say they haven't seen U.S. proof or been able to confirm the accusations independently. The Europeans say the premise is flawed because Hussein embodies the kind of secular Arab dictators whom Bin Laden has sworn to bring down.

Talk of an Iraq-Al Qaeda connection is "nonsense," said a high-ranking source in the German intelligence community. "Not even the Americans believe it anymore."

The German government has resolutely opposed a potential war on Iraq, partly out of domestic electoral calculations. And it has angered Washington in the process. France has pursued a diplomatic offensive to tone down a proposed U.S. resolution at the United Nations mandating aggressive weapons inspections in Iraq, while asserting that it could accept military action approved by the U.N.

In contrast, Britain, Spain and Italy have indicated that they would support a U.S.-led attack even if the U.N. process breaks down.

Yet Spain's Garzon breaks ranks with his government when it comes to Iraq. The famously independent judge considers himself a leftist and has criticized the indefinite imprisonment of terrorism suspects at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, although his anti-corruption probes and battle against Basque separatist terrorists have made him enemies on the left as well.

"I have seen no link to Al Qaeda. No one has demonstrated it to me," Garzon said. "And therefore we have to be very careful not to confuse the citizens. One thing is that you don't like the Iraqi regime, that Saddam Hussein is a dictator. But there are many terrible dictators. That's not a reason to start a war with all the consequences it could have for millions of innocents."

Of all the intelligence services in the world, British agencies probably work the closest

with U.S. spies. The sharing of sensitive information appeared evident in a British government dossier in September that laid out charges about Hussein's program to develop weapons of mass destruction. The report closely resembled Washington's accounts of Iraq's arsenal.

The British have been much quieter when it comes to any alliance between Iraq and Al Qaeda, however. Asked about the matter Wednesday, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw sounded diplomatic.

"It could well be the case that there were links, active links, between Al Qaeda and the Iraqi regime before Sept. 11," Straw said. "What I'm asked is if I've seen any evidence of that. And the answer is: I haven't."

No Prague Meeting

Straw said there is some evidence of such links during the past year but did not elaborate. And on a crucial point, he and his aides made it clear that the allegations of a meeting in Prague between Atta and an Iraqi intelligence agent - Exhibit A for U.S. hawks who accuse Hussein of having a hand in the Sept. 11 plot - have been disproved.

In other countries with considerable expertise, investigators said they have come across scattered examples of limited connections: An Iraqi member of Al Qaeda turned up in an Italian case. There are signs of Al Qaeda suspects moving through Iraq en route to other countries before and after Sept. 11, according to Spanish and French law enforcement.

But European investigators said the Al Qaeda presence is stronger in Pakistan, Syria, Yemen and Iran than it is in Iraq. Since the war in Afghanistan, Iran in particular has become a busy refuge for Bin Laden's operatives, according to French investigators.

And Saudi Arabia, officially a U.S. ally, has been deeply involved in the worldwide funding mechanism that helps sustain Al Qaeda operations as well as fundamentalist ideologues active in recruitment of terrorists and the theology of violence, European investigators said.

"If connections to a country are going to be the rationale, the Americans would have to bomb Saudi Arabia," a Spanish official said sarcastically.

Bruguiere, the French judge, took issue with the idea that an invasion of Iraq would make the world safer from terrorism.

The main thing that Iraq and Al Qaeda have in common is enmity toward the United States, according to Bruguiere and others. That is not enough to create an alliance, but it could cause a resurgent Al Qaeda to exploit a U.S. military operation that produced civilian casualties and an extended occupation of Iraq, the same way Al Qaeda uses the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to whip up resentment of the West.

A U.S. military intervention in Iraq could "globalize anti-American and anti-Western sentiment," Bruguiera said. "Attacking Iraq would intensify Islamic terrorism, not reduce it."