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Captured documents reveal multiple links between Saddam, Al Qaida

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon's Institute for Defense Analyses reviewed 600,000 documents, known as the Harmony data base and captured in the Iraq war.

The report said Saddam's intelligence services began working with Al Qaida elements against the United States as early as 1993. The president ordered attacks on the U.S. military presence in Arab League states, particularly in Somalia, where Al Qaida was active.

Translator Amir Mohsen shows off a Saddam Hussein picture while searching through documents at the former Mukhabarat (Iraqi Intelligence Service) building in Baghdad.

A 1993 memorandum from the Iraqi Intelligence Service to Saddam discussed a plan to train operatives from Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Jihad, cited in the 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, was founded by Ayman Zawahiri, today the No. 2 figure in Al Qaida.

In 1999, Iraq began supporting an unidentified Islamic Kurdish group. Two years later, Iraqi intelligence was said to have recruited suicide bombers for attacks in

Saudi Arabia.

But the documents also demonstrated Saddam's distrust of Al Qaida. An alleged architect of the 1993 bombing of New York City's World Trade Center, Abdul Rahman Yassin, was imprisoned in Iraq under orders from Saddam, who did not believe the Islamic insurgent.

The institute concluded that it could not find a "smoking gun" to link the Saddam regime to Al Qaida strikes. Iraq was not found to have directly cooperated with Al Qaida in attacks on Western or Arab targets. Instead, the Pentagon report found that Saddam agreed to train Al Qaida operatives in Iraq.

"The rise of Islamist fundamentalism in the region gave Saddam the opportunity to make terrorism, one of the few tools remaining in Saddam's 'coercion' tool box," the report, titled "Saddam and Terrorism: Emerging Insights from Captured Iraqi Documents," said.

"Is there anything in the captured archives to indicate that Saddam had the will to use his terrorist capabilities directly against the United States?" the report asked. "Judging from Saddam's statements before the 1991 Gulf War with the United States, the answer is yes."

The institute concluded that Saddam's relationship

with Al Qaida was similar to the workings of cocaine rings in Colombia during the 1990s. Those gangs remained rivals even as they cooperated to expand the market for cocaine.

"Recognizing Iraq as a second, or parallel, 'terror cartel' that was simultaneously threatened by and somewhat aligned with its rival helps to explain the evidence emerging from the detritus of Saddam's regime," the report said.

Most of Saddam's targets were said to have been Iraqi nationals. The report said Saddam sought to use Islamic and other insurgents against the United States and his enemies, but the plots failed because of what appeared to have been incompetence.

"Evidence that was uncovered and analyzed attests to the existence of a terrorist capability and a willingness to use it until the day Saddam was forced to flee Baghdad by coalition forces," the report said. "The answer to the question of Saddam's will in the final months in power remains elusive."

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