

M I C H I G A N

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Levin Releases Newly Declassified Intelligence Documents on Iraq-al Qaeda Relationship

Documents show Administration claims were exaggerated

WASHINGTON -- Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., today released documents recently declassified at his request that illustrate that some claims of a cooperative relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda made by top administration officials in support of the Iraq war were contrary to what U.S. intelligence officials believed to be true.

"These documents are additional compelling evidence that the Intelligence Community did not believe there was a cooperative relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda, despite public comments by the highest ranking officials in our government to the contrary," Levin said. "At a time when the Senate is considering nominees for the newly restructured leadership of the Intelligence Community, these documents remind us of the need to strengthen the independence and objectivity of intelligence assessments, and to guard against the misuse or exaggeration of intelligence by policymakers."

The documents that Levin released undermine Administration claims regarding 1) Iraq's involvement in training al Qaeda operatives, and 2) the likelihood that a meeting occurred between 9/11 hijacker Mohammed Atta and an Iraqi intelligence officer in Prague in April 2001.

Iraqi training of al Qaeda members:

On October 7, 2002, President Bush asserted that "Iraq has trained al Qaeda members in bomb-making and poisons and deadly gases."

However, according to the newly declassified excerpts of classified documents:

* A June 21, 2002 CIA report, "Iraq and al-Qa'ida: Interpreting a Murky Relationship," states that, relative to a report that Iraq provided chemical and biological weapons assistance to al Qaeda, "the level and extent of this is assistance is not clear." The document notes the "many critical gaps" in the knowledge of Iraqi links to al Qaeda because of "limited reporting" and the "questionable reliability of many of our sources."

* The October 2, 2002 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq's Continuing WMD Programs states: "As with much of the information on the overall [Iraq-al Qaeda] relationship, details on training and support are second-hand or from sources of varying reliability." It also notes that that the Intelligence Community "cannot determine...how many of the reported plans for CBW [Chemical and Biological Warfare] were actually realized."

* A January 29, 2003 CIA report, "Iraqi Support for Terrorism," discusses the lack of "evidence of completed training," and says most of the reports of training "do not make clear whether training" was "actually implemented." It indicates that some number of the reports appeared to be based on "hearsay," and that others were "simple declarative accusations of Iraqi-al Qa'ida complicity with no substantiating detail or other information that might help us corroborate them."

Likelihood of Atta meeting with Iraqi officials:

On December 9, 2001, Vice President Cheney said that the Prague meeting had been "pretty well confirmed," and on September 8, 2002, he said, "Mohamed Atta, who was the lead hijacker, did apparently travel to Prague on a number of occasions. And on at least one occasion, we have reporting that places him in Prague with a senior Iraqi intelligence official a few months before the attack on the World Trade Center." When asked if the CIA thought the report of the meeting was credible, he said, "it's credible." On January 9, 2004, Cheney further said, "We did have reporting that was public, that came out shortly after the 9/11 attack, provided by the Czech government, suggesting there had been a meeting in Prague between Mohamed Atta, the lead hijacker, and a man named al-Ani, who was an Iraqi intelligence official in Prague, at the embassy there, in April of '01, prior to the 9/11 attacks." That was the one that possibly tied the two together to 9/11."

However, according to the newly declassified documents:

* A June 21, 2002 CIA report, "Iraq and al-Qa'ida: Interpreting a Murky Relationship," states: "Reporting is contradictory on hijacker Mohammed Atta's

alleged trip to Prague and meeting with an Iraqi intelligence officer, and we have not verified his travels."

* A January 29, 2003 CIA report, "Iraqi Support for Terrorism," states: "some information asserts that Atta met with al-Ani, but the most reliable reporting to date casts doubt on this possibility."

Levin requested declassification of the document excerpts in April 2004 as part of his Armed Services Committee minority inquiry into Iraq intelligence failures. The declassified portions of the documents relate to the Intelligence Community's analysis of Iraq's connections to al Qaeda, and demonstrate that the Intelligence Community 1) did not conclude that Iraq had provided training to al Qaeda in Weapons of Mass Destruction technologies, and 2) that it was skeptical of an alleged meeting between the lead 9/11 hijacker (Mohammed Atta) and an Iraqi intelligence official in Prague five months before the 9/11 attacks.

As a key part of its case for going to war, the Bush Administration repeatedly suggested that Iraq had a significant cooperative relationship with the people who attacked us on 9/11. The documents provide new, previously classified details demonstrating that Administration statements about the Iraq-al Qaeda relationship were not supported by the underlying intelligence.