

THE SADDAM INTERVIEWS

The National Security Archive has posted a bunch of FBI interview reports from Saddam's interrogation. As the NSA notes, this record is not complete.

Not included in these FBI reports are issues of particular interest to students of Iraq's complicated relationship with the U.S. – the reported role of the CIA in facilitating the Ba'ath party's rise to power, the uneasy alliance forged between Iraq and the U.S. during the Iran-Iraq war, and the precise nature of U.S. views regarding Iraq's chemical weapons policy during that conflict, given its contemporaneous knowledge of their repeated use against Iranians and the Kurds.

This series of interviews also does not address chemical warfare in Kurdish areas of Iraq in 1987-1988, although an FBI progress report says Saddam was questioned on the topic. One interview, #20, is redacted in its entirety on national security grounds, although it is not clear what issues agents could have discussed with Saddam that cannot now be disclosed to the public.

While they don't say it specifically, there are interview notes specifically excluded. Not noted by the NSA, for example, is that the CIA interrogated Saddam from the time he was captured in mid-December until when the FBI took over in February. As Charles Duelfer describes in his book, *Hide and Seek*, they weren't the best equipped to conduct this interrogation.

While the team was expert, only one analyst had spent much time in Iraq and personally knew senior Iraqis. (389)

Furthermore, as NSA does suggest, there are more "Casual Conversations" than have been turned over to NSA. Duelfer, for example, describes Special Agent Piro, Saddam's interrogator, finally getting Saddam to open up in April.

Saddam began to open up with Piro in April, at least in his informal meetings. (402)

As you can see from the NSA list of interview materials, there's a gap in what NSA got from the end of March through May—precisely the period when Duelfer describes Saddam beginning to open up.

I'm still reading these reports, but for the moment I'm interested in a paragraph from the June 11 Conversation (it is mislabeled June 1 in the NSA list).

Hussen commented he allowed the UN inspectors back into Iraq to counter allegations by the British Government. Hussen stated this was a very difficult decision to make, but the British Government had prepared a report containing inaccurate intelligence. It was this inaccurate intelligence on which the United States was making their decisions. However, Hussein admitted that when it was clear that a war with the United States was imminent, he allowed the inspectors back into Iraq in hopes of averting war. Yet, it became clear to him four months before the war that the war was inevitable.

Though the report doesn't acknowledge this, the British report was the September 24, 2002 White Paper on Saddam's WMD—one that was very similar to our own NIE (this was the "sexed up" dossier, and it made the Niger uranium claim more strongly than our own NIE did). And the report also doesn't acknowledge that Saddam concluded war was inevitable when the US released its own

report on what Saddam had "left out" of his WMD declaration on December 19, 2002—precisely "four months before the war." In other words, what Saddam must have been saying is that it was clear the US was using faulty intelligence in September-October 2002, and it became clear with that December 2002 report that they continued to make false claims about his WMD.

Also note, the very last Conversation included here—from June 28, 2004—shows that the FBI was still trying to shore up a claim that Saddam had ties to Al Qaeda at that late date. Apparently, Saddam pointed out,

HUSSEIN stated that the United States used the 9/11 attack as a justification to attack Iraq. The United States had lost sight of the cause of 9/11.

Funny—the dictator noticed what we all noticed too.