

Weather**Today:** Thunderstorms.

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Friday: Thunderstorms.

High 82. Low 66.

Details, B8

The Washington Post

THURSDAY, JULY 2, 2009

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Hussein Pointed to Iranian Threat

Specter of Arms Allowed Him to Appear Strong, He Told U.S.

By GLENN KESSLER
Washington Post Staff Writer

Saddam Hussein told an FBI interviewer before he was hanged that he allowed the world to believe he had weapons of mass destruction because he was worried about appearing weak to Iran, according to declassified accounts of the interviews released yesterday. The former Iraqi president also denounced Osama bin Laden as "a zealot" and said he had no dealings with al-Qaeda.

Hussein, in fact, said he felt so vulnerable to the perceived threat from "fanatic" leaders in Tehran that he would have been prepared to seek a "security agreement with the United States to protect [Iraq] from threats in the region."

Former president George W.

Bush ordered the invasion of Iraq six years ago on the grounds that Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction and posed a threat to international security. Administration officials at the time also strongly suggested Iraq had significant links to al-Qaeda, which carried out the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

Hussein, who was often defiant and boastful during the interviews, at one point wistfully acknowledged that he should have permitted the United Nations to witness the destruction of Iraq's weapons stockpile after the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

The FBI summaries of the interviews — 20 formal interrogations and five "casual conversations" in 2004 — were obtained under the

Freedom of Information Act by the National Security Archive, an independent non-governmental research institute, and posted on its Web site yesterday. The detailed accounts of the interviews were released with few deletions, though one, a last formal interview on May 1, 2004, was completely redacted.

Thomas S. Blanton, director of the archive, said he could conceive of no national security reason to keep Hussein's conversations with the FBI secret. Paul Bresson, a bureau spokesman, said he could not explain the reason for the redactions.

The 20 formal interviews took place between Feb. 7 and May 1, followed by the casual conversa-

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Hussein Denounced Bin Laden to U.S. Interviewer

HUSSEIN, From Page A1

tions between May 10 and June 28. Hussein was later transferred to Iraqi custody, and he was hanged in December 2006.

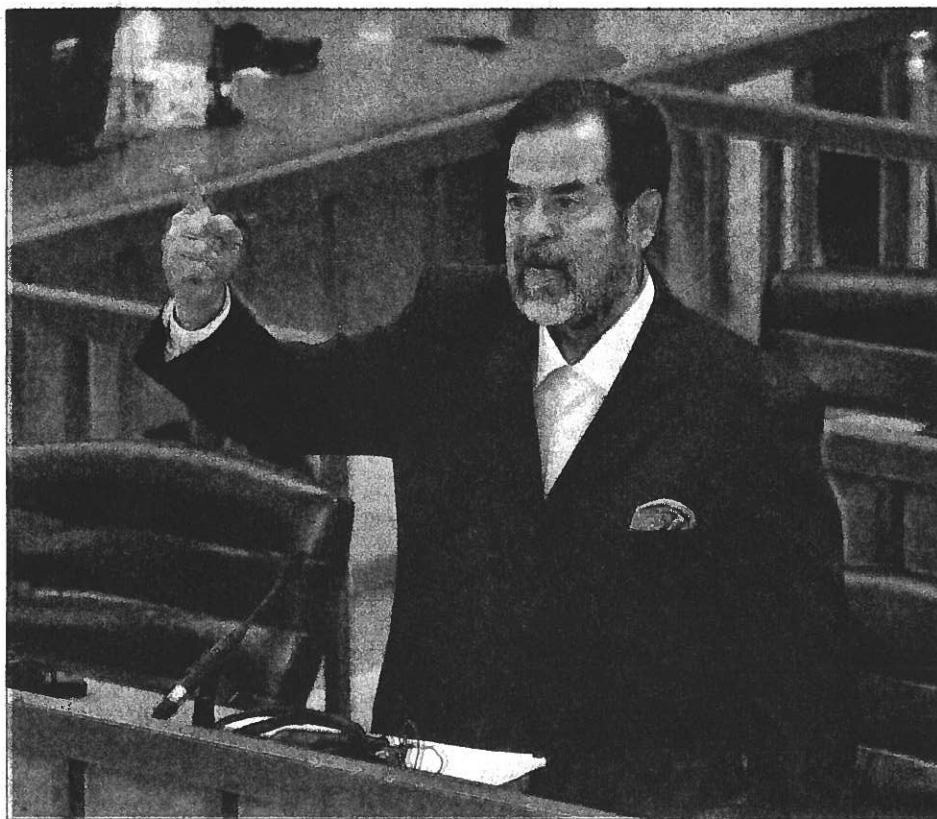
The formal interviews covered Hussein's rise to power, the Kuwait invasion, and Hussein's crackdown on the Shiite uprising in extensive detail, while the subject of the weapons of mass destruction and al-Qaeda were raised in the casual conversations, after the formal interviews. Blanton said this suggests that the FBI received new orders from Washington to delve into topics of intense interest to Bush administration officials.

The FBI spokesman did not know why those subjects were raised in the later meetings. In an interview last year on CBS's "60 Minutes," George L. Piro, the agent who conducted the interviews, said he purposely put Hussein's back against the wall "psychologically to tell him that his back was against the wall," but he did not use coercive interrogation techniques, because "it's against FBI policy." The interviews released yesterday do not suggest any use of coercive techniques.

During the interviews, Piro, who conducted them in Arabic, often appeared to challenge Hussein's account of events, citing facts that contradicted his recollections. He even forced Hussein to watch a graphic British documentary on his treatment of the Shiites, though that did not appear to shake the former president.

At one point, Hussein dismissed as a fantasy the many intelligence reports that said he used a body double to elude assassination. "This is movie magic, not reality," he said with a laugh. Instead, he said, he had used a phone only twice since 1990 and rarely slept in the same location two days in a row.

Hussein's fear of Iran, which he said he considered a greater threat than the United States, featured prominently in the discussion about weapons of mass destruction. Iran and Iraq had fought a grinding eight-year war in the 1980s, and Hussein said he



BY DAVID FURST — GETTY IMAGES

Former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein shouts as he receives a guilty verdict in November 2006 in Baghdad.

was convinced that Iran was trying to annex southern Iraq — which is largely Shiite. "Hussein viewed the other countries in the Middle East as weak and could not defend themselves or Iraq from an attack from Iran," Piro recounted in his summary of a June 11, 2004, conversation.

"The threat from Iran was the major factor as to why he did not allow the return of UN inspectors," Piro wrote. "Hussein stated he was more concerned about Iran discovering Iraq's weaknesses and vulnerabilities than the repercussions of the United States for his refusal to allow UN inspectors back into Iraq."

Hussein noted that Iran's weapons capabilities had increased dramatically while Iraq's weapons "had been eliminated by the UN sanctions," and that eventually

Iraq would have to reconstitute its weapons to deal with that threat if it could not reach a security agreement with the United States.

Piro raised bin-Laden in his last conversation with Hussein, on June 28, 2004, but the information he yielded conflicted with the Bush administration's many efforts to link Iraq with the terrorist group. Hussein replied that throughout history there had been conflicts between believers of Islam and political leaders. He said that "he was a believer in God but was not a zealot... that religion and government should not mix." Hussein said that he had never met bin Laden and that the two of them "did not have the same belief or vision."

When Piro noted that there were reasons why Hussein and al-Qaeda should have cooperated —

"The threat from Iran was the major factor as to why [Hussein] did not allow the return of UN inspectors."

George L. Piro
FBI agent

they had the same enemies in the United States and Saudi Arabia — Hussein replied that the United States was not Iraq's enemy, and that he simply opposed its policies.