

# Iraq war: suspected war criminal at the side of Bush?

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The poison gas attack carried out in the northern Iraqi city of Halabja which killed several thousand Kurdish civilians in March 1988 has been continually used by US president Bush and other leading representatives of the American government to justify a change of government in Iraq. There is now extensive evidence that the person responsible for this atrocity is actively participating in the current war against Iraq—and he is fighting on the side of the US.

Nizar Al-Khazraji, was the head of the Iraqi army between 1987 and 1990. On Sunday March 16, he disappeared from Denmark where he had been living in exile for the past four years. According to reports in the Danish newspaper *BT*, he was picked up close to his home by CIA agents, transported to the German city of Hamburg, and then flown in a military plane to Saudi Arabia. All of this is alleged to have taken place with his agreement.

Last weekend the *Washington Post* reported Iraqi exile sources as saying that Al-Khazraji was now in Qatar, the operational headquarters of US Central Command, along with another former Iraqi general, Najib Sahli. Sahli is also the subject of a war crime investigation in Denmark over the use of chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq war. They are both thought to be imparting their knowledge of the Iraqi army to the US military.

Al-Khazraji was being held under house arrest in Denmark and investigated for his role in war crimes. He has been accused of ordering the poison gas attack on Halabja and also being responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of Kurds. Al-Khazraji denies the charges but there is no doubt that he was the commanding officer of Iraqi forces during a period of intense Iraqi military action against the Kurds.

He fell into disfavour in Iraq and left the country in

1995. Four years later he moved to Denmark which refused to agree on terms of political exile but at the same time tolerated his presence in the country under circumstances where it was evident he could not be sent back to Iraq.

The Danish parliamentary opposition demanded an inquiry and accused the government of doing a favour to the CIA by deliberately allowing Al-Khazraji to leave the country. The right-wing Danish ruling coalition led by Anders Fogh Rasmussen is one of the few European governments to fully back the war path of president Bush.

Al-Khazraji has publicly stated in several interviews that he would like to join the combat front line. But the police, who had been ordered to watch over his apartment, were withdrawn shortly before the start of the war, conveniently allowing him to slip away.

Those familiar with US-Iraqi relations will be hardly surprised to learn that one of the men responsible for the massacre of Kurds in 1988 is now working with the CIA. It is very probable that Al-Khazraji's links to the CIA date back to before his departure from Iraq. In 1988 Washington actively backed the Iraqi army in its war against Iran.

The US and other western countries delivered the know-how, the laboratories and the substances necessary to produce the poison gas that was also used against Iranian soldiers. This is why there is so little said in the west about the events which took place in Halabja. Those in charge of the White House in 1988 were president George Bush senior, the current American vice president Richard Cheney and current defence minister Donald Rumsfeld—the latter pair are key figures today in the war against Iraq.

The fact that Bush junior is prepared to enlist the services of a man accused of war crimes underlines the

brazen cynicism employed by the American government to justify its illegal war against an impoverished country.



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