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Saddam's unidicted co-conspirator

Saddam Hussein has received a death sentence for crimes he committed more than a year before Donald Rumsfeld shook his hand in Baghdad. Let's reach back into history and extract these facts:

* On Dec. 20, 1983, the Washington Post reported that Rumsfeld "visited Iraq in what U.S. officials said was an attempt to bolster the already improving U.S. relations with that country."

* Two days later, the New York Times cited a "senior American official" who "said that the United States remained ready to establish full diplomatic relations with Iraq and that it was up to the Iraqis."

* On March 29, 1984, the Times reported: "American diplomats pronounce themselves satisfied with relations between Iraq and the United States and suggest that normal diplomatic ties have been restored in all but name." Washington had some goodies for Saddam's regime, the Times account noted, including "agricultural-commodity credits totaling \$840 million." And while "no results of the talks have been announced" after the Rumsfeld visit to Baghdad three months earlier, "Western European diplomats assume that the United States now exchanges some intelligence on Iran with Iraq."

* A few months later, on July 17, 1984, a New York Times article with a Baghdad dateline sketchily filled in a bit more information, saying that the U.S. government "granted Iraq about \$2 billion in commodity credits to buy food over the last two years." The story recalled that "Donald Rumsfeld, the former Middle East special envoy, held two private meetings with the Iraqi president here," and the dispatch mentioned in passing that "State Department human rights reports have been uniformly critical of the Iraqi President, contending that he ran a police state."

* Full diplomatic relations between Washington and Baghdad were restored 11 months after Rumsfeld's December 1983 visit with Saddam -- who went on to use poison gas later in the decade, actions which scarcely harmed relations with the Reagan administration.

* As the most senior U.S. official to visit Iraq in six years, Rumsfeld had served as Reagan's point man for warming relations with Saddam. In 1984, the administration engineered

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the sale to Baghdad of 45 ostensibly civilian-use Bell 214ST helicopters. Saddam's military found them quite useful for attacking Kurdish civilians with poison gas in 1988, according to U.S. intelligence sources. "In response to the gassing," journalist Jeremy Scahill has pointed out, "sweeping sanctions were unanimously passed by the U.S. Senate that would have denied Iraq access to most U.S. technology. The measure was killed by the White House."

These are facts that the public should know about the current defense secretary of the United States.