

# **“Transcript of a meeting between Saddam Hussein and U.S. Congressman Bill Richardson”**



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The Minutes of the Meeting of Mr. President Leader Saddam Hussein, may God Protect him,  
With Bill Richardson, Member of the American Congress  
On Sunday Afternoon, 16 July 1995

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American Side Attendees

- Mr. Kevin Murphy – Mr. Bill Richardson’s Assistant
- Mrs. Mary King
- Mr. Peter Born

Iraqi Side Attendees

- Mr. Tariq Aziz – Deputy Prime Minister

Attendees from the Office of his Excellency

- Major General ‘Abd Hamid Mahmoud, Secretary to the President of the Republic

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**Mr. President Leader:** Welcome. You must be tired from your travel from Amman to Baghdad.

**Mr. Bill Richardson:** Yes, especially that our trip was from Washington to Amman and then to Baghdad, not to mention that Mr. Tariq Aziz had asked us to start working immediately upon arrival.

**Mr. President Leader:** Yes, he told me that your meeting lasted for three hours.

**Mr. Bill Richardson:** And after that, we had dinner together. We hope to see Baghdad this afternoon and then get some rest, even though I doubt it.

**Mr. President Leader:** The weather in Baghdad is nicer in the fall and spring than the summer and now we are in the blistering hot month of July. Thus, the intense heat of July caused the Iraqis to revolt against the regime in July 25 years ago.

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**Mr. Bill Richardson:** The weather in my home state of New Mexico on the Mexican borders is similar to the weather of Baghdad in summertime. The weather is the same in Washington, the capital, in July and August.

Mr. President, I would like to thank you for the good hospitality that we received from all officials since we arrived in your country. You have expressed feelings of friendship toward me and I am grateful for that and I appreciate it. I would like to thank your ambassador to New York, Mr. Nazar Hamdoun, in particular, for the role he played. I also have special thanks to Mr. Tariq Aziz for the courtesy and affection he has expressed to us since yesterday. However, I told him that I will not talk openly about this courtesy of the Iraqis so that I will not tarnish your reputation.

**Mr. President Leader:** No, you can talk about this in Iraq, because when Comrade Tariq Aziz welcomes his guests this will be a positive proof to convince the Iraqis that he is one of them. As the guest, hospitality was and still is the most important attribute for Iraqis even before our birth and coming into power.

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At the same time, personal grudges will not build up inside the Iraqis toward anyone they are fighting. They do not allow the war to block all human notions in which they believe, because they know that there is a reason for their fight. Therefore, we thank Comrade Tariq Aziz since you, as a guest in Iraq, are pleased with him.

**Mr. Bill Richardson:** I would like to clearly state that, on behalf of the United States and the American people, I hereby ask you for a human initiative on your part to release both American detainees, William Barloon and David Daliberti. The United States and the international community are going to regard this initiative as an important action done by Iraq, and I believe that such an initiative will be a very positive step forward, to improve relations between the United States and Iraq. That is why I came to Iraq for this humanitarian mission.

I am only one of many officials elected in my government which is, as you know, an important government with [numerous] spheres of influence and massive power, not to mention that the American Congress has vast authorities and influence on the foreign policy; it has expressed on many occasions its disapproval of the decisions of the United States President.

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I did not vote for the decision to go to war against Iraq, as I believe in the importance of diplomatic action to resolve the conflict. I was hoping that the meeting between Mr. Tariq Aziz and the former American Secretary of State, James Baker, would lead to a diplomatic action before the break out of an armed conflict.

I am also a very close friend of President Clinton. I accomplished many diplomatic missions in North Korea, Haiti, Bosnia, Mexico, and Burma, to improve the government's performance. However, I must explain to Your Excellency that I do not work for the benefit of the Department of State or its Secretary, Warren Christopher; I am a politician working for the benefit of my state's people. Thus, I am independent.

Iraq does not have many friends in the American executive power [*branch*], and I think I am playing the role of a channel reaching the highest levels of government. This channel aims at establishing a dialogue between both your country and ours, and trying to settle our disagreements, such as the disagreement on the biological weapons issue in the United Nations and the Security Council sanctions resolution on the 11<sup>th</sup> of next September.

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I am willing to return to Iraq prior to that date, let us say early September, to resume dialogue if you wish to do so. But if we want my mission to be successful it has to be done in extreme secrecy. Therefore, I was hesitant to call myself a presidential envoy in this mission for many reasons. From the legal aspect, I do not work for the president and that is why I cannot negotiate in his name. However, the president is very much aware of my visit, as I have spoken with him about it many times. I have also spoken to his deputy, Vice President Al Gore, and the Secretary of State, Christopher, last week. Also, National Security Advisor, Anthony Lake, contributed to this issue as he played the role of liaison officer between the executive power [*branch*] and us regarding this mission.

I would like to explain that the President of the United States cannot dismiss me from my post because I do not work for him. He is my friend and I want to help him improve relations with Iraq. And if we want these relations to improve we must totally trust each other while emphasizing the secrecy of my mission.

I came to Iraq trying to resolve this humanitarian problem. I did not resort to the media means or any other alternative, rather I came directly to Iraq to show my respect to Your Excellency and request the release of the two detainees in the name of the American people and the American President, in particular, because they are innocent victims of the current tension between our two countries although they have made a mistake.

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I believe resolving this problem and bringing these two detainees back with me will create an atmosphere of good will in the United States and will prove to my government that President Saddam Hussein acted in a humanitarian and fair manner. Therefore, I am asking Your Excellency very respectfully to release them as the beginning of a bridge that will improve relations between our countries.

I do not know whether I will succeed in changing the American policy, but I will try because I have faith that these deteriorating relations between our countries are harmful to your people and mine, as well as to the people in the region.

I apologize if I took too long talking even though I promised not to do so. But politicians, and Democrats like me, in particular, who are outside of power, do so to compensate for not being part of the majority in the Congress.

**Mr. President Leader:** We welcome you. Based on the principles that you mentioned and the request President Clinton sent with you, and in appreciation of your direct efforts and the trouble you went through in your travel from America to Jordan and then Baghdad, I will use my constitutional authorities and release both detainees. You may take them back with you to America.

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**Mr. Bill Richardson** (standing and shaking hands with the President): Thank you very much, Mr. President.

**Mr. President Leader:** And if you want to make sure that the Iraqi courts act objectively in general, we can reveal to you some verdicts issued by these courts for non-American foreigners from friendly countries and Arabs, meaning citizens who are part of our nation, because they illegally crossed the borders, as we still consider ourselves in war-like conditions.

Thus, pursuant to war conditions, we have an emergency law adopted by the courts to sentence anyone who illegally crosses the borders.

However, I have to say that when the court looked at the case of these two Americans along with the known facts about the nature of the relations between our countries, I felt somehow the impact of this atmosphere. At the same time, I cannot accuse them with this.

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In 1987, when the American frigate came under fire from an Iraqi fighter [*bomber*], 37 sailors were killed and another hundred were injured. And although the mistake happened because the captain of the frigate entered a prohibited zone when the war was ongoing between Iran and us, this incident was painful. But how did the American president act regarding this issue back then? He acted very wisely and we still remember this with great appreciation, as he handled the problem in its framework with all its painful aspects where the relations between the two countries were not impacted.

In late 1988 or early 1989, the Voice of America broadcasted a comment made by the State Department, and said that it represented the point of view of the official government. The comment had indications of bad intentions, which forced us to object to this American stance. Shortly thereafter, the American Under Secretary of State came to us with a letter of apology on behalf of the American President. This stance had a positive impact on us and we greatly appreciated it.

So, we believed and still do that if the dialogue among nations ceases, the relation between these nations will lose many particularities.

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And we must remember that God, to Whom be ascribed all perfection and majesty, dialogues with human being in His heavenly books, talks to him, and comes up with words to convince him, without saying “This is an order and whether convinced or not, one must execute it.” God, to Whom be ascribed all perfection and majesty, creator of mankind, tries to come up with words that will convince people that He is God and the Book represents His opinion.

Therefore, this approach to relations must be adopted with greater reason between countries, regimes, and leaderships. We had relations with America and examples of them were mentioned prior to the aggression on us in 1991, and the leadership that held a dialogue and established positive relations with America is the same leadership of today.

At a certain phase, and because of the circumstances of the revolution and regime development, and because of the past backgrounds, we did not have relations with America. Therefore, we felt that our international relations in the balanced framework that we want were missing an important factor, and that is the relationship with America.

And at the peak of our relations with the former Soviet Union, we had relations with advanced Western countries, such as France, for example, with whom we had advanced friendly relations. And when we decided to establish these relations with the West, including America, we did not mean to align with the West at the expense of the East.

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And when we established advanced relations with the East, we did not mean to align with the East at the expense of the West, but the interest of our people was rather the key point. It is normal to see ourselves as a vital part of the world today, and part of a comprehensive human perspective to the effect that we cannot look at our interests only without looking at the interests of other parties, which all fall within the framework of a project based on the rules of international law.

Therefore, our relations were good, in general, until August 02, 1990 with all Western countries, and they were also good with the Eastern countries.

Perhaps some kind of apathy prevailed in our relations with the former Soviet Union, because of their stance toward the armed conflict between Iran and us. However, our relations with America were good and balanced before stopping the grain transaction with Iraq in April 1990. Our relations were also very good with France and Britain, and we had normal or friendly relations with all Western countries.

We do not want to talk about what happened on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August, as this takes [*too*] long and you are our guest. This is your first visit to Iraq and we do not want to burden you.

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I heard that you cannot accept the hospitality of the Iraqi government because of the American Congress's laws that prohibit that. But once we get to know each other well, and once you understand us well you will tell us one day that you want to come to Iraq, and we will say: No, do not come because you do not want our hospitality. The Iraqis will be upset if they hear that their guest does not get full hospitality in their country, and this is a fact.

Anyway, you are welcome any time you come to Iraq to continue our dialogue, and you will find someone to dialogue with you in a modern and balanced framework. We did not want to see the relations between our countries reach the point where they are now nor did we plan for this, but it happened. So if there is an intention to look for a way to repair this relationship we are totally willing [*to cooperate*], as we do not live the last decade but we always look to the future. We believe it would not be wise to keep the relationship between the United States and us the way it is now, because the region's stability requires a different type of relationship between us, especially since this region represents a vital part of the world. We believe it is not in our interest or the interest of America or the region for relations to continue the way they are.

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**Mr. Bill Richardson:** Mr. President, please allow me to thank you as both a human and the head of state for taking the initiative to approve the release of both detainees. American people, the American President, and the Congress are going to be grateful for your humanitarian initiative.

You were the leader who shifted Iraq toward the West in the 80's, and I hope this visit and my upcoming one will make me a channel to build better relations between Iraq and the United States because these relations are not strong at the present time, as you know. I hope we will be able to resolve our disagreements about the biological issue in a way that will enable us to improve our relations in the future.

**Mr. President Leader:** I have said to you that you had a dialogue that lasted three hours with brother Tariq Aziz, and this is normal because Baghdad did not see any American for a very long time. Therefore, we still have a lot to do and we have to dialogue with regard to many issues.

**Mr. Bill Richardson:** Thank you very much, Mr. President. I would like to praise the great effort made by the delegation accompanying me, and please allow me to introduce them to your Excellency:

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Kevin Murphy, my advisor on foreign policy affairs and a member of the House of Representatives, Dr. Peter Born, my close friend who made the first contact to start this mission with Mr. Nazar Hamdoun, who is making a special effort with me to get vaccines for Iraqi children, and Mrs. Mary King, who visited Iraq 17 times and knows it very well. She helped me a lot with understanding your country. She also loves Iraq very much and has a long history of working for humanitarian causes, civil rights, etcetera. And as you know, Mrs. Mary and her husband Peter were among the senior employees of the government of former American President Carter and they are close friends to him.

**Mr. President Leader:** You are all welcome.

**Mr. Bill Richardson:** Thank you very much, Mr. President, and please allow me to offer you a present, which is a piece of pottery that represents the manual handicraft industry of the people of my state New Mexico.

**Mr. President Leader:** Thank you very much.

After that, Mr. President Leader said his warm goodbyes and expressed his appreciation to his guest.

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