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Saddam, bin Laden link found: Canadian reporter

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CBC News

BAGHDAD - Secret documents uncovered in the bombed headquarters of Iraq's former spy agency show the first clear link between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden's terrorist network, according to a Canadian journalist.

Mitch Potter, a foreign correspondent with the *Toronto Star*, says he discovered the file while digging through what's left of the Mukhabarat intelligence office. The CIA had already looked over the rubble and left.

The document, which refers to an al-Qaeda envoy's visit to Iraq in 1998, had bin Laden's name amateurishly covered with liquid whiteout, Potter told CBC Newsworld Saturday night.

"Very gingerly we lifted up all the liquid paper and revealed three times bin Laden's name," he said in a telephone interview from Baghdad.

"It's a top secret file, it was marked top secret, and of course they went to great lengths to try to mask the contents of it.

"We just happened to have a very, very diligent interpreter with us today who went that extra mile and found something that was not meant for our eyes."

Several other Arabic translators have since been shown the document and confirmed that bin Laden's name is on it, according to the newspaper.

The *Star* published Potter's full account of the discovery on Sunday. Another journalist, Inigo Gilmore of London's *Sunday Telegraph*, was present when the file was found.

The handwritten document describes the al-Qaeda operative's visit to Iraq, according to Potter. It says the purpose was "to gain the knowledge of the message from bin Laden, and to convey to his envoy an oral message from us to bin Laden."

The United States has long alleged a connection between Iraq's former leader and terrorist groups like al-Qaeda. Washington said one of its reasons for using military force to topple Saddam's regime was because he had weapons of mass destruction that could end up in the hands of people like bin Laden. Saddam denied possessing

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Mitch Potter

any such weapons, or of having ties with al-Qaeda's Sept. 11 attacks against the U.S.

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