

UN inspectors in Iraq helped spy for the CIA

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United Nations weapons inspectors in Iraq served as a cover for US intelligence-gathering, including efforts to track the movements of Saddam Hussein and other key Iraqi officials, according to reports published Wednesday by the *Boston Globe* and the *Washington Post*.

The intelligence provided by the weapons inspectors was later used to target US air strikes during Operation Desert Fox, the US-British assault on Iraq last month, with the aim of killing the Iraqi president.

These reports vindicate the denunciations of UNSCOM over the past several years by Iraqi spokesmen, who have pointed to the close links between the UN inspectorate and American and Israeli intelligence agencies. Both the *Globe* and the *Post* confirmed that UNSCOM collaborated extensively with the Israeli Aman (military intelligence), the CIA and British intelligence.

One implication of these revelations is clear. As US officials demanded ever more intrusive searches of alleged weapons facilities--which they knew had already been effectively dismantled by the Persian Gulf war and eight years of inspections and sanctions--they had another purpose in mind. They were engaged in profiling the Iraqi security apparatus and monitoring Saddam Hussein's movements, to assist in efforts to kill the Iraqi leader, either through outright assassination, a coup attempt or as a consequence of US air strikes.

The front-page reports on the spy role of the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) cited advisers to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, US intelligence officials and former UNSCOM official Scott Ritter, the American ex-Marine who resigned from the agency last August. Both UN spokesmen and Clinton administration officials denied the reports, but provided no factual refutation.

The *Post* quoted a source close to Annan declaring, "The secretary-general has become aware of the fact

that UNSCOM directly facilitated the creation of an intelligence collection system for the United States in violation of its mandate. The United Nations cannot be party to an operation to overthrow one of its member states. In the most fundamental way, that is what's wrong with the UNSCOM operation."

According to the *Globe* account, which was far more detailed than the *Post*'s, UNSCOM's relationship with US intelligence services, always close, underwent a significant change in February 1996. At the initiative of Scott Ritter, UNSCOM began to target not merely alleged Iraqi nuclear, biological and chemical weapons facilities--its mandate from the Security Council--but also what Ritter labeled the Iraqi "concealment mechanism," i.e., the entire internal security and counterintelligence apparatus which is the font of Saddam Hussein's dictatorial power.

US intelligence agencies supplied UNSCOM with high-tech equipment that made it possible for the UN inspectors to eavesdrop on secret communications between the elite military units responsible for Hussein's personal security. These units, the Special Republican Guard and the Special Security Organization, were the principal targets of the US-British bombing raids on December 16-19.

In September 1996, then-chairman of UNSCOM, Swedish diplomat Rolf Ekeus, complained in a letter to CIA Director John Deutch that the US agency was not sharing the fruits of the electronic monitoring conducted by UNSCOM inspectors on the ground in Baghdad. This was the first of a series of clashes between UNSCOM and the CIA over control of the joint operation.

These arguments, which reflected conflicts between rival powers on the Security Council, especially France and Russia versus the US and Britain, culminated in March 1998, when the CIA took over the electronic monitoring, automating it so that UNSCOM

participation was no longer necessary. The equipment continues to function to this day, the *Globe* reported, nearly a month after all UNSCOM personnel were withdrawn from the Iraqi capital.

The *Globe* quotes Ritter saying that UNSCOM inspectors tracked Saddam Hussein's own movements. "We knew a hell of a lot of information about presidential security," he said. A Clinton administration official all but acknowledged that UNSCOM was spying on Hussein under cover of searching for "weapons of mass destruction." "Saddam's personal security apparatus and the apparatus that conceals weapons of mass destruction are one and the same," he said.

The *Globe* noted that the chief of Hussein's personal security operations, Abid Hamid Makhmoud, was specifically targeted during Operation Desert Fox. His home was blown up by a US bomb or cruise missile.

There are discrepancies between the *Globe* report and the *Post* report which have a political significance. The *Post* is silent on the role of Ritter and provides far fewer details of the electronic intelligence-gathering operation. The Washington newspaper revealed that it had withheld such details from an earlier article, published October 12, which first made public the name of the CIA-UNSCOM joint venture, "Operation Shake the Tree." The *Post* said that, at the CIA's request, it was continuing to suppress these details.

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