

MI6 involved in spying against Iraq through UNSCOM

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An investigation by the *Independent* newspaper disclosed on Monday, January 25 that British secret intelligence agents worked as part of the United Nations teams of arms inspectors (UNSCOM) in Iraq.

According to sources in Whitehall and at the UN in New York, British MI6 officers first infiltrated UNSCOM in 1991. The *Independent* quoted these sources as saying, "A number of officers were asked if they were interested in the posting--one officer joined for a period," and that additional officers were thought to have rotated through the teams. Spies were drawn from the intelligence services in Britain, as well as the US and Israel.

Acting on the disclosures, Liberal Democrat MP Norman Baker was to table a series of questions on MI6 involvement in UNSCOM to Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and Defence Secretary George Robertson. Baker said that he would be "very, very angry if the independence and integrity of the UNSCOM was compromised in this way. To include MI6 and Ministry of Defence intelligence staff deliberately in the UN teams is to undermine the UN itself." The Foreign Office, which selects British members for UNSCOM, has so far refused to comment on the disclosures. It also refused to make available a list of the British weapons inspectors, claiming that such a list was not available.

The *Independent* investigation follows revelations earlier this month that information passed to Washington by weapons inspectors had been used to identify targets in last month's British and American attacks on Iraq. Most controversial have been reports that the US supplied UNSCOM with an eavesdropping device to tap Iraqi officers' communications. Sources say the US demanded overall control of the machine and made sure all data received was shown only to experts from a narrow club of states. Those with full

access reportedly came from just four countries--the US, Australia, New Zealand and Britain. Explicitly barred were countries opposed to military action, including Russia and France.

The investigation again exposes the secretive activities of the UN's supposedly neutral body. It substantiates the Iraqi regime's charge that UNSCOM functioned as a covert intelligence gathering operation on behalf of US and British imperialism. Over its eight years of operation, UNSCOM built up an extensive apparatus involving some 100 personnel. In the course of its supposed search for "weapons of mass destruction", it had access to hundreds of sites--including many factories and laboratories unrelated to military purposes. It even demanded access to the headquarters of the ruling Baath party and Saddam Hussein's presidential palaces. These searches enabled the gathering of sensitive political and military information on Iraq, which was then used by the US and Britain to select targets for bombing raids. Earlier this month sections of the American press revealed details of the how UNSCOM inspections provided a regular stream of information to the Pentagon and CIA.

UNSCOM's demands for Iraq to prove the unprovable--i.e., that it does not possess anywhere in the country the capacity to produce biological and chemical weapons--provided the pretext for imperialist aggression. The US government even participated in drafting Richard Butler's December report on UNSCOM's inspection, which was used to justify the four-day bombing raids that began on December 16.

UNSCOM's role ensured that economic sanctions against Iraq have remained in place since the 1990 gulf war. The arms inspectors must confirm that all suspected weapons of mass destruction have been eliminated before the sanctions can be lifted. At the end

of last year Denis Halliday, the outgoing United Nations co-ordinator of the UN "oil for food" programme, reported that 4,000 to 5,000 Iraqi children were dying every month due to the impact of sanctions. But the embargo was maintained while UNSCOM extended its spying activities on behalf of their paymasters.



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