

As US bombing raids continue

Spy revelations vindicate Iraqi charges

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As US warplanes continue their attacks on targets inside Iraq, press reports in the United States are providing further confirmation of charges that the regime of UN sanctions and weapons inspections has been manipulated from start to finish by the US government.

The *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, followed by other daily newspapers, have established that the Central Intelligence Agency planted agents among the UNSCOM inspectors operating within Iraq from the time the Persian Gulf war ended in 1991 until the inspectors were kicked out by the Iraqis last November.

The Clinton administration has justified military action against Iraq on the grounds that it was necessary because of Baghdad's opposition to the activities of the UNSCOM inspectors. But all the while Washington was using UNSCOM for its own purposes, inserting intelligence agents and equipment into arms inspection teams so as to conduct electronic eavesdropping and other covert activities.

Details of the operation appeared in the March 2 edition of the *Washington Post*. By this account, the CIA operated behind the back of UNSCOM officials for three years, using arms inspection teams as a cover to gather information unrelated to the UN's weapons monitoring mission. This contradicts repeated assertions by the Clinton administration. For example, on February 23 State Department spokesman James Foley denounced charges that US spies worked through UNSCOM as "unfathomable except as elements which can only serve Saddam Hussein's propaganda machine."

Earlier reports have documented that intelligence agents for the United States, Britain, Australia and Israel worked under the cover of UNSCOM. These revelations substantiate Iraqi charges that UN weapons inspections were a front for covert efforts by the US and its allies to overthrow the government of Saddam Hussein.

These reports prove that the US government and the media have systematically lied to the American public.

They underscore the recklessness of the US and the determination of the White House, CIA and Pentagon to exploit the opportunities provided by the UNSCOM regime to target Iraq for aggression.

The latest exposure of official US lies and provocations coincides with a step-up of the bombing campaign against Iraq. On March 1 American planes dropped 30 laser-guided bombs in a 60-minute period, the heaviest bombardment since the end of Operation Desert Fox in December. Iraq said the bombs damaged a pipeline to Turkey, halting the flow of oil, Iraq's principal export. Bombs also hit a residential area near Mosul in northern Iraq, killing one civilian and injuring nine others.

US Secretary of Defense William Cohen said the air strike targeted an Iraqi communications facility. According to the US European command, in the March 1 attack "US F-15s dropped more than 30 2,000-pound and 500-pound laser-guided bombs on Iraqi communications sites, radio relay sites, and anti-aircraft artillery sites."

The US air attacks amount to an illegal and undeclared war against the people of Iraq. While the White House and the American media refer to "no-fly zones" in northern and southern Iraq as though they had some sort of official status, the ban on Iraqi air operations in these zones was unilaterally imposed by the US, Britain and France in the wake of the gulf war, and has never been authorized by the UN Security Council.

Since launching the bombing the US has inflicted numerous civilian casualties. US rules of engagement do not restrict pilots to responding to specific attacks, and the US military has expanded its list of targets to include "command-and-control and communications centers."

The current US air war against Iraq is the predictable outcome of US policy. The *Post* revelations demonstrate that as far as the White House was concerned, UNSCOM, far from being a peacekeeping operation, was a vehicle to prepare further military action, including the assassination of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Among the chief

functions of American agents on UN weapons teams was the interception of Iraqi military communications. To this end the United States secretly rigged UNSCOM offices and equipment with electronic listening devices. The information obtained, while not having any bearing on weapons inspection, was of great value to US military planners.

In 1995 American intelligence officials saw an opportunity to set up the UNSCOM "remote monitoring system" to intercept Iraqi microwave transmissions. UNSCOM began transmitting images directly to its offices in Baghdad using radio transmissions from video cameras at monitoring sites, instead of storing data on magnetic tape at the sites as before. The US intelligence agents who set up and maintained the new equipment installed devices capable of intercepting Iraqi microwave transmissions as well.

Press reports earlier this year, confirmed by the Clinton administration, revealed that the United States and UNSCOM officials colluded in spying on Iraq using commercial scanners to intercept low-powered VHF radio transmissions. The information was relayed to the US National Security Agency at Fort Meade, Maryland and was used to monitor the movement of Hussein and other top Iraqi leaders.

The Americans kept the second spy operation secret from UNSCOM because, as one US official quoted by the *Post* declared, "we were very concerned about protecting our independence of access [to Iraqi communications].... We did not want to rely on a multinational body that might or might not continue to operate as it was operating."

Rolf Ekeus, former head of UNSCOM and now Swedish ambassador to the US, has denied any knowledge of the second US spy operation. Richard Butler, current UNSCOM chief, has refused to comment on the allegations, but a spokesman denied that he knew of the eavesdropping.

The former top American nuclear weapons inspector at UNSCOM, David Kay, confirmed that Britain, France and Russia supplied spies to the operation. He told *USA Today*, "I personally took the first GB officer and the first British and French intelligence officers into Iraq. They all brought different skills."

The United States apparently kept its spy operation secret even from Britain, its closest ally. According to sources cited by the *Post* an Iranian agent in Baghdad detected the encrypted US transmissions and sent a message to Tehran speculating that the Americans were

using UN headquarters in Baghdad for intelligence gathering. The British government intercepted the Iranian message in May 1997 and requested an explanation from officials of the US National Security Agency. However the Americans continued to keep the British in the dark about the covert spying.

Further documentation of espionage activity by the United States from within UNSCOM comes from former weapons inspector Scott Ritter. In a book set to be published in April, Ritter asserts that American spies were covertly placed on UNSCOM teams one year after the end of the gulf war in 1991. He claims that he and a top CIA official helped organize some of the most intricate UN inspections, and that CIA personnel were placed on inspection teams. He said that nine CIA officials were present in Iraq during a failed 1996 coup attempt.

Ritter, a former US Marine officer, resigned as a UN weapons inspector last summer after publicly criticizing the Clinton administration, which he claimed was undermining the arms inspection program.

The revelations about US spying in UNSCOM are intensifying the conflict between within the UN Security Council between the US and Britain, which continue to attack Iraq with bombs and missiles eight years after the end of the gulf war, and France, Russia and China, which are opposed to military action and back a relaxation of sanctions and the embargo on most trade.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who has lined up with France, Russia and China, held a press conference March 2 where he deplored the latest revelations, noted that he did not control the operations of UNSCOM, and warned that the infiltration of American spies would make future disarmament and peacekeeping operations more difficult.



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