

# British intelligence employee arrested for leaks on US bugging of UN

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A high-ranking female employee at Britain's top secret government surveillance headquarters, GCHQ, has been arrested following leaks regarding the Bush administration's spying operation against members of the United Nations Security Council.

On March 2 the *Observer* reported that the US National Security Agency (NSA) had been bugging members of the Security Council in advance of the UN vote on whether to go to war against Iraq. The surveillance operation was reportedly ordered by Condoleezza Rice, President Bush's national security adviser, with the aim of finding information that could be used to help pressurise member countries into voting for the Anglo-American resolution authorising war. The operation included bugging home and office telephone lines, as well as intercepting emails.

The *Observer* detailed a January 31 memo from NSA official Frank Koza in Maryland to GCHQ in Cheltenham, England, asking the spy centre to participate in the US surveillance operation. The memo singled out Angola, Cameroon, Guinea, Bulgaria, Chile and Pakistan (the so-called waverers on the Security Council) for particular attention. It requested information on these countries' "policies", "negotiating positions" and "alliances", that could "give US policymakers an edge in obtaining results favourable to US goals or to head off surprises", but made plain the operation could also be extended to all UN delegations if necessary—"minus US and GBR of course".

Whilst the leak was given only a cursory mention in the media, and was almost entirely passed over by the US press, the security services have gone into overdrive to try and establish its source.

Police confirmed at the weekend that a 28-year-old GCHQ employee had been arrested on suspicion of

contravening the Official Secrets Act and released on bail pending further inquiries. Further arrests are expected, as the *Observer* reported that the largest "spy hunt" in Britain for some years is currently under way. The UN has also begun its own investigation into the US bugging operation, which was reportedly discussed at the organisation's counterterrorism committee.

The Bush administration was reportedly furious that the memo had been leaked. US intelligence sources have confirmed to the *Observer* that US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld would have been involved in any decision to mount such an operation, which would also have been communicated to President George W. Bush.

Spying on members of the UN Security Council forms just one part of US campaign aimed at trying to ensure the body cooperates with its plans for the military subjugation and takeover of Iraq. The Bush administration is also attempting to bribe, cajole and threaten delegations—especially from poorer countries—into backing its war plans.

According to the newspaper, the memo was believed to have been distributed via Echelon, NSA's international surveillance system which links the US, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and which France had previously denounced as a "privileged Anglo-Saxon" club.

Reports indicate that the reasons for the leak go far beyond individual matters of conscience and point to deep divisions within the intelligence services themselves over the US-led drive to war.

Wayne Madsen, of the Electronic Privacy Information Centre, stated, "my feeling is that this was an authorised leak. I've been hearing for months of people in the US and British intelligence community who are deeply concerned about their governments

‘cooking’ intelligence to link Iraq to Al Qaeda.”

The *Observer* had originally stated that it received the memo after it had been sent to a “friendly foreign intelligence agency”, but its March 9 edition confirmed that it “was passed to this newspaper by British security sources who objected to being asked to aid the American operation.”

It continued that the leak “raises as many questions as the number of secrets it reveals. The most pressing of these remains: why would a career intelligence officer risk discovery, ignominy and imprisonment to leak it in the first place?”

According to the newspaper, tensions between the intelligence service and the Blair administration have become palpable over the last months, reflecting sharp differences within sections of the British establishment as a whole over Blair’s course—especially as it appears that the prime minister’s willingness to act in defiance of international and domestic opinion has isolated it within Europe and at home.

In parliament on February 26, 199 MPs voted in favour of an amendment criticising the government’s rush to war. Some 121 Labour MPs supported the protest, making the vote the largest backbench rebellion in the history of the Labour Party.

The dissidents are by no means all pacifists, much less opponents of a resurgence of British imperialism. Their viewpoint was summarised by the former Conservative chancellor of the exchequer, Kenneth Clarke, who explained that whilst he supported Blair’s efforts to be a close ally of the US, and its bridge to Europe, the government’s efforts to justify its policy by resorting to outright falsification—such as alleging links between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda—were an “insult to our intelligence” and threatened Britain’s strategic interests in the Middle East and globally.

Sections of the security services have accused the government of bringing the intelligence agencies into disrepute in its rush for short-term political gain, after it was caught out in a series of lies aimed at justifying its support for war against Iraq.

In September the government released a dossier purportedly outlining the extent of Iraq’s possession of “weapons of mass destruction”. Derided by much of the world as blatant propaganda aimed at justifying the drive to war, the dossier was reportedly the subject of bitter rows between Downing Street and the security

services—the latter complaining that it was top-heavy with political point scoring.

In December, the government released a second dossier, this time from the Foreign Office outlining Iraq’s human rights abuses, which it explicitly linked with the possibility of war. Amnesty International criticised the reports timing, as “opportunistic and selective”, whilst in Europe the *Frankfurter Rundschau* summed up opinion on the document as leaving “a bitter aftertaste”.

Most notoriously, in January the government released another dossier, “Iraq—its infrastructure of concealment, deception and intimidation”. The document was singled out for praise by US Secretary of State Colin Powell as the latest in intelligence information during his February 5 address to the UN aimed at pushing the body into line. Within hours, however, the dossier was exposed as being extensively plagiarised from an American student’s PhD thesis.



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