

Christian Science Monitor admits using forged documents against antiwar British MP Galloway

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Scottish Labour MP George Galloway has issued High Court libel proceedings against the *Telegraph* newspaper over a claim that he received money from Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. The move follows a public apology to Galloway by the *Christian Science Monitor* for having made similar allegations based on forged documents.

In April the *Telegraph* claimed that Galloway had secretly received at least £375,000 a year from the Iraqi government. It alleged that he had made substantial profits by receiving money from the "oil for food" programme. The newspaper also claimed Galloway received a percentage of the profits on a number of food contracts he had supposedly obtained with the Iraqi ministry of trade. The *Telegraph* said it had evidence Galloway had a meeting with an Iraqi agent, on December 26, 1999, at which he asked for more money, further alleging that Galloway had used the Mariam Appeal, which he founded, as a front to conceal his secret commercial dealings with Iraq's intelligence service. All of these allegations were based upon documents said to have been discovered in the bombed-out ruins of the Iraqi Ministry of Information building in Baghdad by *Telegraph* reporter David Blair.

The story was then picked up by the American newspaper *Christian Science Monitor*, which claimed to have obtained its own documents showing that Galloway had received some \$10 million from the Iraqi regime over an 11-year period for the promotion of its interests in the West.

The *Monitor* has now been forced to apologise for its story. Its June 20 edition published a retraction stating that the documents were forgeries. The retraction, "Galloway papers deemed forgeries: Iraq experts, ink-aging tests discredit documents behind earlier *Monitor* story," said that after publishing the initial article of April 25, 2003, "An extensive *Monitor* investigation has subsequently determined that the six papers detailed in the April 25 piece are, in fact, almost certainly forgeries.

"The Arabic text of the papers is inconsistent with known examples of Baghdad bureaucratic writing, and is replete with problematic language, says a leading US-based expert on Iraqi government documents. Signature lines and other format elements differ from genuine procedure," the article stated.

Two of the documents dated 1992 and 1993 "were written within the past few months, according to a chemical analysis of their ink.

The newest document—dated 2003—appears to have been written at approximately the same time."

Monitor editor Paul Van Slambrouck said, "At the time we published these documents, we felt they were newsworthy and appeared credible, although we did explicitly state in our article that we could not guarantee their authenticity."

"It is important to set the record straight: We are convinced the documents are bogus. We apologize to Mr. Galloway and to our readers," he declared.

An accompanying article by Van Slambrouck declared, "On this story, we erred. Our report said what we knew, honestly and carefully. With this follow-up story Friday, we are continuing our effort to tell what we know, as fully and fairly as we can, to set the record straight."

The *Monitor's* apology is, however, one of the most backhanded in the history of journalism. It launched its investigation only the British newspaper, *Mail on Sunday*, ran an article May 11 that disputed the authenticity of documents obtained from the same source as the *Monitor's* documents, an Iraqi general the *Mail* named as Salah Abdel Rasool. The *Mail's* article said its writer had purchased other documents from the general alleging payments to Galloway. Those documents, unlike the *Monitor's*, included purported Galloway signatures.

"Extensive examination of the documents by experts has proved they are fakes, bearing crude attempts to forge the MP's signature," the *Mail* said.

Galloway rejected the *Monitor's* apology, saying the story went into print without ever having been put to him. He told *Sky News* that "the basic checks" weren't made and that the paper could not now just shrug it off as a mistake.

"I want to know who forged these documents. I am calling on the prime minister, as head of the co-occupying power in Iraq, to investigate how this conspiracy came about," Galloway said in an earlier statement.

"As a member of the House of Commons, indeed as a British subject, I have the right to the protection of the British intelligence services from a conspiracy hatched by persons unknown but whose handiwork was conducted in foreign territory co-occupied by Great Britain."

"I don't accept their apology. Firstly, a newspaper of their international standing should have conducted these basic checks

on the authenticity of these documents before they published them and not more than two months afterwards.

“This internationally renowned newspaper published on its front page, in virtually every country in the world, that I took 10 million dollars from Saddam Hussein, based on papers which have proved to be forgeries.

“They did not even speak to me before publishing these allegations. My legal action against them continues.”

Many of the *Monitor*'s own readers also felt that an apology was not an adequate response and criticised the editor's statement as seeking to justify running the story.

“Regarding your June 20 article ‘Galloway papers deemed forgeries’: Will an ‘apology’ repair the damage to Mr. Galloway's reputation? As a supposedly professional publication, you have a duty to fact check before you publish articles that are potentially so devastating to individuals,” wrote Carolyn Gray from Jupiter, Florida.

“Documents conveniently ‘uncovered’ in the days following the war amid heavy looting and destruction should have been viewed with the highest skepticism—especially when they reveal ‘facts’ about one of the most influential and outspoken critics of the war. Is it too much to believe that someone might have an agenda to smear such a man?” asked Gil Gillman from Pittsburgh.

John F. Garcia from Iowa City, Iowa wrote: “Let me encourage the *Monitor* to hang on to this story, now that you've made this limited concession to the truth. Are we to believe a has-been Iraqi general spontaneously dabbles in Britain's domestic politics for a mere cut of an \$800 translation fee?

“Your apology is nice, but your readers would prefer you to make it up to us by looking underneath the documents.”

Far from conducting such an investigation, the *Monitor* has accompanied its formal retraction of its story with efforts to shore up the credibility of the accusations made by the *Telegraph*. The June 20 article states that “the *Monitor*'s documents were different in many details from those of the *Daily Telegraph*, and came from a different source.”

The *Monitor* further reports, “After examining copies of two pages of the *Daily Telegraph*'s documents linking Galloway with the Hussein regime, Mneimneh [head of Iraq Research and Document Project in Washington] pronounces them consistent, unlike their *Monitor* counterparts, with authentic Iraqi documents he has seen.

“Moreover, a direct comparison of the language in the *Monitor* and *Daily Telegraph* document sets shows that they are somewhat contradictory.

“The papers in the *Monitor*'s possession alleged that Galloway began receiving funds from Iraq in the early 1990s. One of the *Daily Telegraph*'s, dated January 2000, alleges that Iraqi officials were just beginning their consideration of a financial relationship with Galloway.

“Of the *Monitor*'s papers, he says, ‘My gut reaction to [these documents] is that they are extremely suspicious.’”

The implication, though embarrassing for the *Monitor*, is that the documents it used are fakes but the *Telegraph*'s are authentic and can even be used to prove the inaccuracy of Rasool's crude forgeries.

Telegraph has declared that it stands by its original story and has used the *Monitor*'s comments to back up the authenticity of the documents supposedly “stumbled” upon by reporter David Blair in April.

Following publication of the *Monitor*'s retraction, in a June 20 statement *Telegraph* editor Charles Moore said, “We have complete confidence in our story, our reporter and the authenticity of our documents.”

“The *Christian Science Monitor*'s retraction has no bearing on the *Daily Telegraph*'s story. Our story was based on a different set of documents found in a different set of circumstances. They were not supplied or given to us but unearthed by our reporter, David Blair, in the foreign ministry in Baghdad.”

“We note that the experts employed by the CSM pronounced that the documents on which our story was based appeared to be genuine,” he added.

After Galloway issued the writ, Moore said the action would be defended.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* pointed out in its article of May 3, “Media attack on MP George Galloway aimed at smearing antiwar protests,” the circumstances in which the *Telegraph*'s documents were supposedly uncovered are just as suspicious as the handing of documents to the *Monitor* by Rasool.

Blair himself was forced to remark, “Why the contents of the room with the box files survived is a mystery. Its walls are blackened by fire, yet most of the folders are intact.”

The WSWS noted that the claim that hundreds of CIA and MI6 operatives missed what Blair and a handful of other journalists discovered in a casual search would convince no one. All indications are that the press smear campaign against Galloway is part of an orchestrated witch-hunt in which the hidden hand of the security services is working beneath the surface of events in an attempt to discredit all those who opposed the US-British war and the continued occupation of Iraq.



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