

German media reports on collusion of German intelligence agents in Iraq war

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According to reports in the German ARD television news programme “Panorama” and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper, agents of the German intelligence service BND (Bundesnachrichtendienst) provided active support for American troops engaged in the war against Iraq.

The German media reports allege that two German intelligence agents played a key role in identifying targets in Iraq in the spring of 2003 which were later bombed by American strike forces. These latest revelations of collusion between the BND and US intelligence agencies follow on the heels of reports that Germany’s former government, comprising a coalition of the Social Democratic Party and the Greens, played an active role in CIA renditions of alleged “terrorists.” It is also evident that, along with other European governments, the SPD-Green government was also aware of, and permitted, CIA flights transporting alleged terrorists to the network of prisons which the American intelligence agency has established throughout Eastern Europe.

According to the “Panorama” report, BND agents remained in Iraq following the closure of the German embassy on March 17, 2003—just three days before the start of the invasion. The work of the German agents in Iraq was officially coordinated with the American military intelligence agency DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency) and according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* this collaboration had been given official political approval at the highest level. “This was not the decision of a departmental head,” the SZ quoted an anonymous official.

Although leading government figures have immediately proclaimed their ignorance of the activities of the German agents, the phrase “political approval at the highest level” indicates that leading members of the German government at the time—chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) and his closest co-worker Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) (former head of the German chancellery and government co-coordinator with the intelligence services, and Germany’s current foreign minister) and the foreign minister Joschka Fischer (Greens)—were either aware of, or personally approved, the activities of the BND agents in Iraq.

The “Panorama” programme revealed in some detail the activities of the two German agents. One of their missions involved assisting in the targeting of Saddam Hussein for

assassination in April 2003. A subsequent US air raid in the capital city of Baghdad—based on the targeting information of the German agents—dropped four 2,000-pound bombs, flattening the identified building and killing at least 12 innocent people. The “Panorama” report alleged its source for the report is a “former Pentagon employee,” who declared that the German help was “very important” for the American offensive. The programme also claimed that one of the two BND agents involved in the operation subsequently received a medal from his American colleagues.

For its part, a statement issued by the BND last Wednesday confirmed the ongoing presence of its agents in Iraq but disputed their role in specific strategic targeting, arguing instead that its agents were active in identifying what it described as “non-targets.”

Steinmeier has denied any knowledge of the BND agents “actively supporting military actions,” but conceded that German agents were active in Iraq in gaining “their own knowledge over the developments in Iraq and the course of the war.”

These latest revelations of German involvement in the Iraq war reveal the hollowness of the opposition to the war proclaimed by German chancellor Schröder in the late summer of 2002. Schröder’s opposition at the time had nothing to do with a principled rejection of wars of aggression to defend national interests, but with the fact that German interests in the Middle East would not be furthered by such a war led by the US. He also realized that he could exploit broad public hostility in Germany to US plans for war in Iraq.

In the midst of an election campaign and trailing in the opinion polls, Schröder declared on August 5, 2002 that Germany “will not make itself available for any adventures under my leadership” and would not participate in the US war coalition. His stance against the war won broad support from the German public at the time and was crucial for the re-election of his government in September 2002.

As US preparations for an invasion accelerated, Schröder declared in January 2003 that Germany—at that time one of the rotating members of the United Nations Security Council—would not vote in favour of a resolution to go to war with Iraq.

While declaring its opposition to the war the German government in fact went to extensive lengths to support the US once it began its invasion of Iraq in March 2003. The Schröder-Fischer government guaranteed the American strike forces unrestricted use of German air space and 25 US military bases located in Germany. One of the key European strategic bases for the US war effort was and remains the Ramstein air base in the state of Hesse, where American military transport planes take off and land on a regular basis delivering munitions to the Iraq war zone and bringing back wounded US soldiers. Security for these bases is provided by the German army.

The transport of troops and material has been coordinated from the European Command logistics centre in Stuttgart, and direct preparations for the war involving the computerised war games manoeuvre, "Victory Scrimmage," have been carried out in Grafenwöhr at the Pentagon's biggest military training area in Europe. The current US campaign against Iraq would have been unthinkable without the tacit support of Germany's SPD-Green Party coalition and, since September of last year, the grand coalition of the CDU-CSU (Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union) and SPD.

Nevertheless, the German government has always maintained its opposition to any direct involvement by its military or intelligence forces inside Iraq during the course of the current war. This position has been completely undermined by the latest revelations. As an unidentified source from the BND told the ARD channel: "Despite the troubles in the relationship between Berlin and Washington, the political decision was made to continue the close relationship between the intelligence services."

The latest reports on the activities of German intelligence agents in Iraq follow accusations of German government collaboration in CIA renditions of alleged terrorists, including the abduction, detention and torture of an innocent German citizen of Lebanese descent, Khaled al-Masri. Masri was seized in 2001 by the CIA in Macedonia and flown to Afghanistan, where he was held and interrogated for five months. Masri claims that German personnel or agents speaking perfect German were involved in the course of his interrogations by the CIA. He is now conducting his own legal action against the CIA.

During an emergency parliamentary debate on Masri's case, Germany's current foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, declared that the German authorities had not been involved in the abduction and imprisonment of al-Masri and had not known about it until after he had been released.

According to a report in the *Washington Post*, however, in May 2004, prior to Masri's release, the then-US ambassador to Germany, Daniel Coats, had told Interior Minister Otto Schily that Masri had been wrongfully detained and requested that the German government keep silent on the issue.

Germany's opposition parties have since called for a full parliamentary investigation into the events surrounding the

criminal abduction of Khaled al-Masri. But any such investigation has been opposed up to now by the Green Party, whose former leader Joschka Fischer was foreign minister at the time.

Fischer has declared his outrage at the current "Panorama" report but has refused to deal in any detail with the accusations, claiming merely, "I have nothing to hide." The question arises: what is the full extent of the collaboration between the German and US intelligence services and governments in the war against Iraq and the US-led international "war against terror"? It is a matter of fact, for example, that US intelligence agents have had limited opportunities to operate inside Iran since the US embassy hostage crisis 25 years ago. Are German agents also currently collaborating with American intelligence forces in Iran?

The new leader of the German government, Angela Merkel, is currently visiting Washington for talks with the US president and administration. Prior to her trip, Merkel raised some eyebrows by indicating she favoured the closure of the US detention camp in Guantánamo Bay. There is every indication, however, that the latest revelations of cooperation between the German and US intelligence forces will result in both Bush and Merkel closing ranks, declaring their solidarity and resisting calls for any investigations into the criminal practices of both governments.

In the meantime one leading member of her party, the head of the CDU fraction, Wolfgang Bosbach, has openly defended the intervention by German agents in Iraq. Bosbach told the news channel *ntv* that he regarded "a possible cooperation with American agencies ... as neither reprehensible nor worthy of criticism."



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