

New York Times raises new charges against German intelligence

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A month before the Iraq war began, the German Intelligence Service (BND) is alleged to have handed over a copy of Saddam Hussein's plan for the defence of Baghdad to American military commanders. The claim was made by the *New York Times* this Monday, based on a secret report by the US supreme command.

The report immediately unleashed a fiery controversy. The German Intelligence Service and the government categorically denied the truth of the report. A BND spokesperson said the German agents stationed in Baghdad had neither procured nor passed on the plan to the US: "Both [claims] are not correct, both do not apply." Government spokesman Ulrich Wilhelm explained that German agents were unaware of the defence plan for the Iraqi capital and therefore could not have passed it on to the US.

New York Times executive editor Bill Keller responded with a statement on Tuesday, revealing that the article written by defence expert Michael R. Gordon was based on a secret study by the American supreme command (Joint Forces Command) on Iraqi military strategy from 2005. With regard to the issue of German collaboration, this study, Keller wrote, is "explicit and unqualified"

Keller then quoted directly from the secret study, which states that on February 3, 2003 in Qatar, a "German LNO" (liaison officer) passed on a sketch of the Iraqi defence strategy to the US military secret service (DIA). This was then passed on to US military headquarters led by General Tommy Franks.

The sketch is said to have been drawn up on December 18, 2002 at a meeting between Saddam Hussein and his military commanders to discuss a new defence plan. "The Germans had two agents operating in Baghdad prior to the start of the war. The overlay was provided to the Germans by one of their sources in Baghdad (identity of the German source unknown)," according to the study by the Joint Forces Command.

New York Times defence expert Gordon Thattaches great importance in his article to this sketch. "The plan gave the American military an extraordinary window into Iraq's top-level deliberations, including where and how Mr. Hussein planned to deploy his most loyal troops," he writes.

If the exposures in the *New York Times* are accurate, the German Intelligence Service and Germany's former Social Democratic-Green Party government were much more deeply involved in the Iraq war than they care to admit. Over the past few months, it had already become clear that the government led by Social Democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schröder co-operated closely with the US government despite his official rejection of the war.

Last summer, in the case of a German army officer who refused to obey orders, the German Administrative Court concluded that, with its support for the Iraq war, the German government had supported a military action in violation of international law. The court referred in particular to the use of US military facilities on German soil and the granting of flyover rights for American and British military aircraft.

Then, in the middle of January, a German TV program and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported on the activities of two German Intelligence agents stationed in Baghdad during the war, who allegedly identified targets for advancing American troops. The government admitted the existence of the two agents and the passing on of information to US officials, but claimed that the relevant data did not contain military targets, but rather dealt exclusively with the identification of institutions to be protected - hospitals, embassies etc.

In order to head off the call for a parliamentary commission of inquiry, the government agreed to present a comprehensive report on the issue to the Parliamentary Control Committee (PKG), which meets in secret. Last Thursday, the PKG concluded its hearings, and the

government even published part of the classified report that it had submitted to the committee. This document included an admission that the coordinates of buildings in Baghdad were passed on to the US—something which the government had previously denied. It maintained, however, that no information of military significance was supplied to Washington.

The article in the *New York Times* appeared just four days after this report and is obviously a reaction to it. If the article proves to be true, not only will the former SPD-Green government be discredited because of its active role in the war, but also the new, German grand coalition (Christian Democratic Union, Christian Social Union, SPD), which has continued to mislead the public on the issue. The head of the German chancellery Thomas de Maizière, an old friend and close confidante of Chancellor Angela Merkel, bore responsibility for the report to the PKG, which denied any support for the war.

There is much to indicate that the report in the *New York Times* is, at least in part, factually correct. Even Wolfgang Bosbach, the deputy chairman of the CDU/CSU Bundestag faction, had to admit: “I do not believe that the report has absolutely no basis in fact.”

The *Frankfurt Rundschau* called the rejection of the report by the German government “a denial in a roundabout manner.” The denial is “unmistakable and clear,” but has “an extremely narrow focus,” the paper continued. “The word ‘wrong’ only applies to the course of events in the manner presented by the defence expert of the *New York Times*, Michael Gordon in his article.”

In other words, the German government denies that events took place exactly in the way Gordon describes, but does not rule out that they could have occurred in a similar manner.

If one compares the report in the *New York Times* with previous explanations given by the German government, then a number of contradictions emerge. According to the official German version, the two BND agents who were present during the war in Baghdad are said to have begun their work on February 15. This means that the same agents could not have handed over a highly-sensitive document on February 3.

Green Party deputy Hans Christian Ströbele, a member of the PKG for many years, has questioned whether the BND had additional agents operating in Baghdad—at least before the war began. “The question arises, at what time, how many and what sort of agents were active in Baghdad,” he told the newspaper *Die Welt*. The presence of additional, hitherto-unknown intelligence agents would

explain the contradictions between the version of events given by the *New York Times* and that maintained by the German government.

Last week Ströbele submitted a “dissenting report” which sharply criticised the official government report on the activities of the BND and demonstrated that the agency had very probably supplied Washington with information that was used to prepare the war.

It has also been revealed that the BND had actually stationed a contact man in the US army headquarters in Qatar. The agent P.—pseudonym “Gardist”—is said to have been “the addressee for all requests for information” that the US supreme command sought to have passed on to the two BND agents in Baghdad, according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. “His task was to forward the requests of the Americans—allegedly there were a total of 33—to the BND centre.” From there, they were passed on as a request for information to Baghdad.

According to the *New York Times*, Germany, which officially opposed the war, was internally classified by US military as “non-coalition, but cooperating.”

The parliamentary control committee will meet on Monday, March 8, in a special session to deal with the new claims made by the *New York Times*. It is not clear whether any new facts will emerge. This can hardly be expected, given that up to now the government and BND have only served up small doses of intelligence at a time - and then only because they had no other choice.

In the meantime, the revelations threaten to damage not only the reputation of the government of Schröder and Joschka Fischer (Greens), whose opposition to the Iraq war becomes less and less credible, but also the stability of the current government led by Angela Merkel (CDU), which has made clear it does not have the slightest interest in exposing the murky operations of the German secret service.



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