

CIA uses Sudanese intelligence in Iraq

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At the same time as the United States has imposed sanctions and is putting pressure on Khartoum to accept a United Nations peacekeeping force in Darfur, the CIA is relying on Sudan's intelligence service to carry out spying activities in Iraq.

In a June 11 article in the *Los Angeles Times*, anonymous US intelligence officials and ex-officials explained that the Sudanese intelligence service, the Mukhabarat, had assembled a network of informants in Iraq providing information on the insurgency. The officials declined to say whether Sudanese agents were actually inside Iraq, but claimed that informants could have been recruited as they passed through Khartoum.

"If you've got jihadists travelling via Sudan to get into Iraq, there's a pattern there in and of itself that would not raise suspicion," said a former high-ranking CIA official. "It creates an opportunity to send Sudanese into that pipeline."

A second ex-official is reported as saying, "There's not much that blond-haired, blue-eyed case officers from the United States can do in the entire Middle East, and there's nothing they can do in Iraq. Sudanese can go places we don't go. They're Arabs. They can wander around."

Sudanese intelligence was also said to have helped the US in Somalia, building contacts with the Islamic Courts and fingering alleged members of Al Qaeda.

It is widely known that the US has cultivated its relationship with Sudanese intelligence, reopening the CIA station in Khartoum after 9/11. The Bush administration moved away from the previous US policy of treating Sudan as a pariah state, not only for collaboration over intelligence but also because of pressure from oil corporations interested in gaining a share of oil reserves from which they had been excluded because of sanctions. The then head of Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), General Salah Abdullah Mohamed Gosh, made

trips to CIA headquarters at Langley and met British Intelligence and CIA officials in London.

The information that this Sunni Muslim state is providing a link to insurgents in Iraq is new. It ties in with the analysis provided by Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker* magazine in March of this year—that the Bush administration has carried out a shift in Middle East policy. This "redirection," as it is known, involves backing Sunni states and even extremist groups as a counterweight to Iran and the Shiite majority in Iraq. (See "The Bush administration's new strategy of setting the Middle East aflame")

Although the *Los Angeles Times* article does not refer to it, the Sudanese government, currently chair of the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (Cissa), held the fourth conference of this African Union body in Khartoum last month. It seems that the Iraq connection was made known to journalists attending the conference. The Sudanese regime was eager to display its good relations with US intelligence to the world's press.

The event was attended by the intelligence chiefs of over 46 African countries, as well as most Western intelligence agencies, including senior CIA and British security officials. According to reports in the South African and Kenyan press, the assembled spies took part in a junket that involved NISS head Salah Al-Din Abdulla Mohammed dancing on stage and back-slapping his Western counterparts.

Journalists were taken on a visit to a refugee camp in Darfur, although they were not allowed to speak to the inmates. Every effort was made to play down the Sudanese government's role in the Darfur conflict, with General Gosh, now the chairman of Cissa, telling journalists that the Darfur crisis only existed in America, where it was an issue between Republicans and Democrats.

The importance of Sudanese intelligence to the US,

particularly with the Iraq connection, underlines the futility of the humanitarian campaign to bring in United Nations peacekeepers to alleviate the suffering of the Darfur population. It is not possible to separate American policy in Darfur and Sudan from the imperialist invasion of Iraq. The Bush administration has found it necessary to publicly denounce what it terms “genocide” being carried out by the Sudanese government, whilst working covertly through their intelligence services to collaborate with the very regime that is responsible for these crimes against humanity.

In the UN the campaign for sanctions against Sudan, led by the US and Britain, has been used to wage a propaganda offensive against China and Russia. China buys much of Sudan’s oil and both China and Russia sell it armaments.

Other major powers are now using the Darfur tragedy to advance their own agenda. French president Nicolas Sarkozy and his foreign minister Bernard Kouchner held their own conference on Darfur. Whilst inviting the US to the conference and presenting itself as supporting a UN initiative, France has its own concerns in the Darfur region—particularly its support for the shaky governments in neighboring oil-rich Chad and the Central African Republic. (See “The new Sarkozy government hosts conference on Darfur”)

China has also entered the fray. It claims to be playing a “positive and constructive” role on the Darfur issue, concerned that any bad publicity will adversely affect the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

China now claims that it has been responsible for persuading the Sudanese government to accept UN peacekeepers in addition to the existing African Union troops. It is planned that 20,000 UN and AU troops be deployed in Darfur by 2008. Beijing has appointed Liu Guijin as a special envoy on Darfur, and claims that talks between Liu and Sudan’s President Omer al-Bashir convinced the latter to drop opposition to the peacekeeping force. China has held out the possibility of providing financial backing for African troops so that the force is not so heavily dependent on the West.

Several commentators have pointed to the fact that a profusion of initiatives from foreign governments has only helped to intensify the conflict within Darfur. Last year’s attempt by the US and Britain to impose an agreement between the Sudanese government and the rebel groups failed when only one of the groups signed

it. This has encouraged the intervention of neighbouring countries, particularly Chad, and enabled the Sudanese government to foment divisions among the rebel factions, said now to number between 9 and 14.

The *Financial Times* comments that the violence in Darfur is becoming more intractable: “Aerial bombardments and battles between Arab militia and rebels are now compounded by inter-rebel fighting, raids across the Chad-Sudan border, and banditry.”

The US has been able to maintain its intelligence connections with Sudan and continues covert operations with a number of regimes, such as in the Ethiopian intervention in Somalia. But the debacle in Iraq and China’s growing economic weight in Africa are undermining its hegemonic role on the continent. In February this year the Bush administration announced that it intended to set up, by late 2008, a separate military command for Africa, known as Africom. At present the responsibility for US operations in Africa is divided between several commands. The new structure is designed to reflect the increasing proportion of American imports of oil and gas coming from Africa.

Ryan Henry, principal deputy undersecretary of defence, led a delegation to African countries last month asking them to act as hosts to Africom. He attempted to play down the imperialist role of such a force, claiming it was primarily concerned with humanitarian assistance, civic action and training.

The response, even from supposedly pro-US countries, was to oppose a public Africom presence. Countries opposed included Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Kenya. According to the *Washington Post*, Algeria and Libya were also opposed to Africom being based in a neighbouring country. The *Post* quoted Rachid Tlemcani, professor of political science at the University of Algiers: “People on the street assume their governments have already had too many dealings with the US in the war on terror at the expense of the rule of law. The regimes realise the whole idea is very unpopular.”



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