

# Secrets Within Iraq's Archives

BY J. MICHAEL WALLER

The archives of Saddam's toppled regime hold priceless intelligence, diplomatic and economic information. But concerned parties wish some secrets would stay hidden.

Looters, journalists, soldiers and spies are scrambling to control or make off with what remains of the archives of the toppled Iraqi government. U.S. and coalition officials are fanning out across Iraq, triaging thousands of sites where secrets of the Saddam Hussein regime might be found in file boxes and scattered wreckage.

At the top of the list: Information on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and support for terrorism, and the fate of an American Navy F-18 pilot and nearly 600 Kuwaitis missing since Gulf War I in 1991. The huge bureaucracy of the now-destroyed Ba'ath Party generated vast amounts of paperwork that contain priceless intelligence: personnel files of Ba'athist leaders and officials; political-informant networks; identities of Iraqi agents and assassins abroad; details about poison gas and germ weapons; the genetic codes of international terrorist groups; money trails to the country's stolen billions [see "The Search for Saddam's Fortune," p. 22]; and, as the world is starting to see, secret payments to western politicians.

U.S. troops arrived too late to take control of many of the 23 government ministries and other intelligence-rich sites in Baghdad. Local Iraqis carted off bags of documents and videotapes from secret-police facilities. An American TV company reportedly stuffed several vehicles with secret Iraqi documents. British journalists sacked the foreign-ministry building April 22 after a reporter from London's *Daily Telegraph* discovered a document of former foreign minister Tariq Aziz in the wreckage, showing that antiwar leader George Galloway, a left-wing Member of Par-

liament, allegedly was in the pay of Saddam.

Complicating the hunt for sensitive documents and electronic files are swarms of Iranian agents with their own agenda to co-opt networks for themselves and stir up newly free Shiites to demonstrate and, it seems, revolt against the United States in favor of installing a revolutionary Islamic regime loyal to Tehran. Other governments want to have access to (or take control of) the secrets of Iraq's oil supplies, money-moving networks, weapons programs and human

operatives. Forces loyal to Saddam have been destroying evidence for weeks.

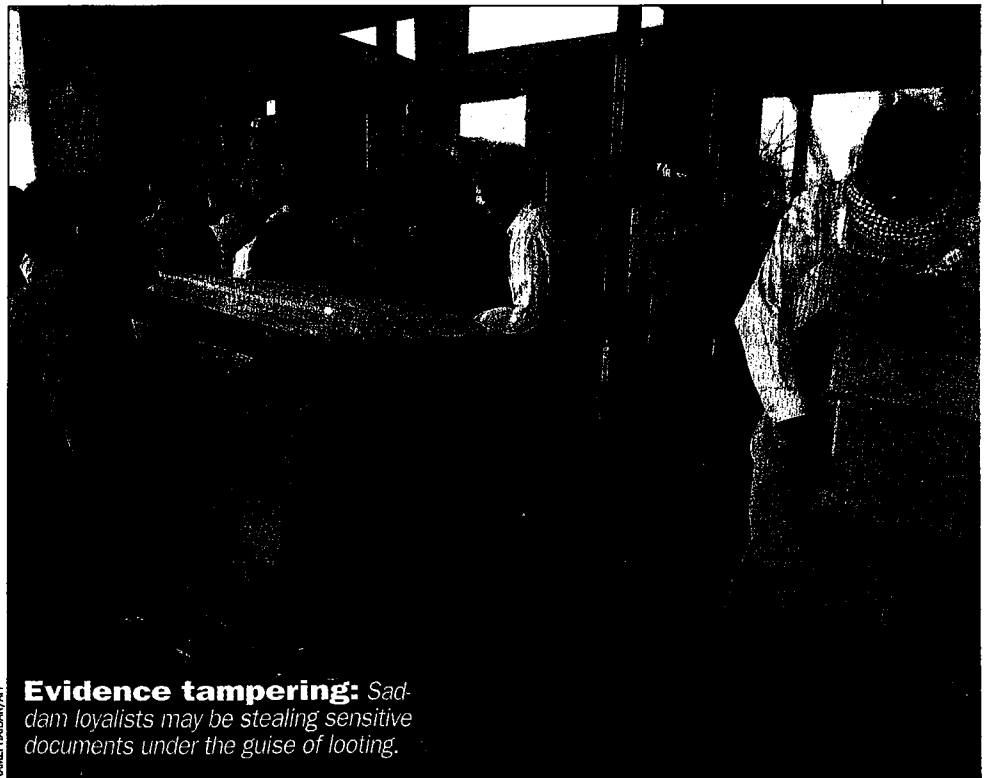
Foreign governments that had helped the regime — including Russia, France and Germany — reportedly want some of Saddam's secrets to stay secret. Even some U.S. officials are said to want to prevent certain Iraqi secrets from seeing the light of day in order to cover up for Russia and other countries in the interests of diplomacy and cooperation.

The archives have explosive intelligence, diplomatic, economic and commercial value. They also are, in the right hands, powerful tools of political warfare, by which secrets can be deployed to discredit and even hunt down adversaries, empower friends and help a divided society come to terms with its hideous recent past.

"Everyone has been hunting for loot or evidence except, it seems, Western intelligence agencies, which appear to have let this unique opportunity pass," noted *Daily Telegraph* reporter David Blair. More than 1,000 Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) analysts are on their way to Iraq to itemize and index the regime's written records.

But the evidence may be fast disappearing.

Many Iraqis want everything exposed, especially the grimly thorough records of the Mukhabarat secret police. Those files contain the answers to their agonized questions of the whereabouts and fates of their lost loved ones: sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, grand-



**Evidence tampering:** Saddam loyalists may be stealing sensitive documents under the guise of looting.

## Iraqi Archives Show Russia's Hidden Hand

The captured archives are starting to show that post-Soviet Russia hadn't stopped its old Soviet ways in Iraq.

Among the initial revelations:

- Russia's SVR foreign-intelligence service recently spied on British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, eavesdropping on their conversations and passing the information to Saddam Hussein's regime.

- As recently as last fall, Russia was continuing to train the Iraqi secret police. Rooting through an office of the Mukhabarat secret police, Robert Collier of the *San Francisco Chronicle* discovered documents showing that the SVR trained five Iraqi officers in "phototechnical and optical means" and "acoustic-surveillance means" of snooping and eavesdropping. Moscow first denied the report but later confirmed it, saying it was trying to help Iraq fight organized crime and terrorism.

- U.S. soldiers found a letter from a Russian arms company dated July 2001, signed by Russian Col.-Gen. Vladislav Achalov, offering to sell conventional arms to the regime in violation of U.N. sanctions. Most controversial, at least in Russia, was the widely reported incident during the fighting when coalition forces opened fire on a Russian diplomatic convoy fleeing Baghdad for Syria. The Moscow newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, which has strong sources within the Russian military and intelligence services, cites "intelligence sources" as saying that U.S. Army commandos tried to stop the convoy based on the CIA's belief that the Russians were attempting to smuggle some of Iraq's most sensitive political secrets out of the country. Australian SAS forces initially blocked the vehicles.

According to the report, in late March SVR officers met daily with Iraqi officials to plan to gain control of Mukhabarat archives. The Kremlin wanted material for three purposes: to protect Russian interests in post-Saddam Iraq, to establish

Baghdad's covert financing of Russian political groups and to gain access to Iraqi intelligence assets in other countries.

"The CIA was under the impression that the SVR was evacuating Saddam's secret archives under the diplomatic cover of the ambassador's convoy," according to the Russian report. "This also explains why at several occasions after the firing the American troops had tried to search the Russian vehicles." SVR spokesman Boris Labusov claims, "This information is completely untrue and ungrounded."

Russian Ambassador to Iraq Vladimir Titorenko denied to *Pravda* that the Russians had been trying to spirit sensitive Iraqi archives out of the country into Syria.

What really happened? U.S. intelligence sources aren't talking. But Russian tradecraft and practice show a precedent. A parliamentary investigation in post-Communist Poland found that before many archives in Central and Eastern Europe were destroyed, they were copied and shipped to Russia. A Czech parliamentary probe reached a similar conclusion. Moscow then penetrated the newly democratic societies by controlling former internal-security agents of the old Communist regimes. Jiri Ruml, in the early 1990s chief of a parliamentary commission to investigate the StB Soviet-era security forces, reported to lawmakers that the files of 10,000 StB agents and informers were missing, and that "former collaborators of the StB are still continuing their activity, and their network reaches into the new parliament."

Germany discovered a similar problem. Chief Prosecutor Alexander von Stahl said publicly in mid-1992 that the Russian intelligence service had reactivated approximately 400 ex-East German Stasi officers and agents against the federal republic and other NATO countries.

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parents, uncles, aunts and cousins, husbands and wives; a quarter-million or more innocent Iraqis who vanished without a trace.

Video and print journalists have done their job. A few recorded the sterile offices and filthy outbuildings where the Ba'athist regime did its cruelest work. Bloodied meat hooks hang on chains above concrete warehouse floors still stinking of fly-infested gore and bowel movements from the recently murdered prisoners who died screaming, fouling themselves, impaled on the rusted steel.

Gibbets and gallows suspended from office ceilings mark where countless innocent Iraqis met death by strangulation. Mass graves of gassed Kurdish men, women and children are discovered and exhumed in the north. Across Iraq, friends and family members scrape through freshly dug dirt, wailing in grief and gagging at the stench as they uncover rotting remains, wrists still tied behind with cord and a bullet in the brain. In selfless acts of charity, the living carry away what is left of the dead for proper religious burial.

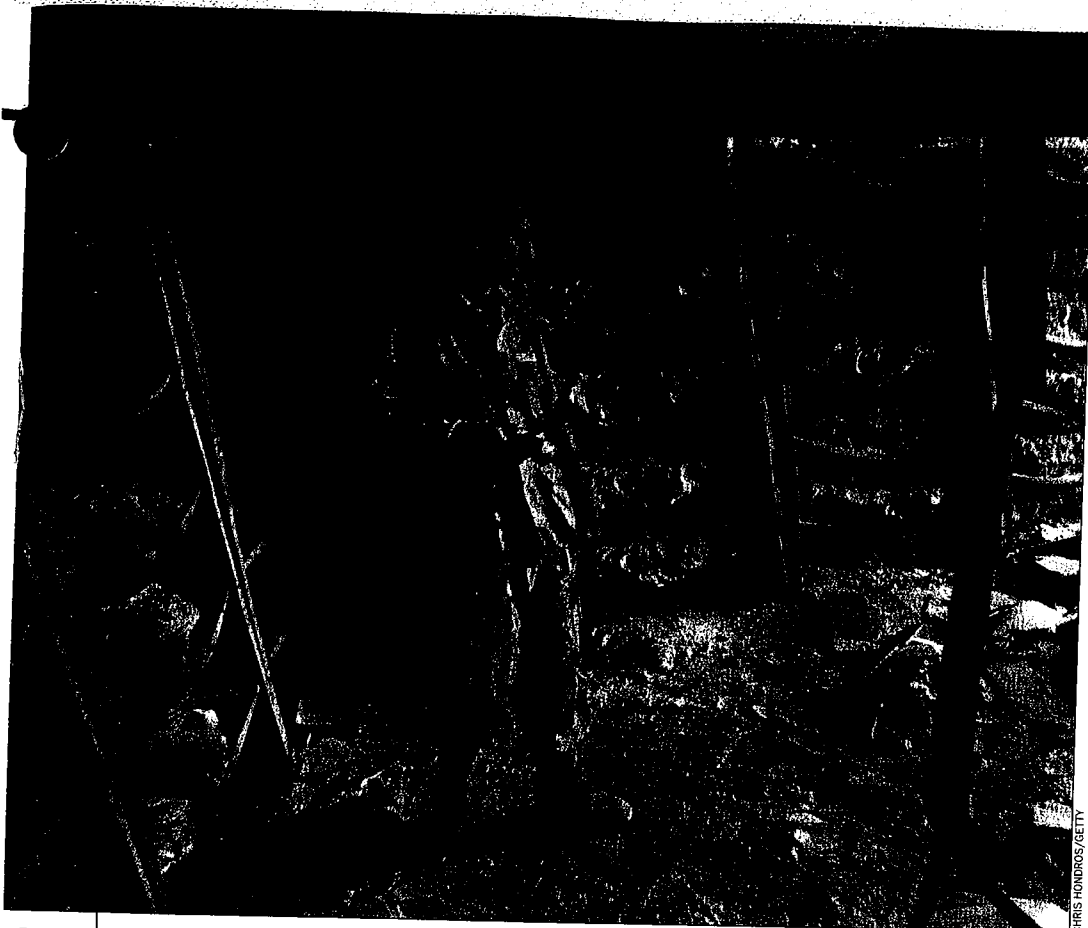
The archives have begun to retch up the names of the torturers and executioners and the men who commanded them. In town after town, frantic men and women loot Mukhabarat centers, not to haul back booty of monetary value, but to find that cardboard folder, that sheet of paper, that file containing details about their loved ones' fates. Pentagon sources say they fear the archives will disappear.

News organizations have provided examples of what some of the archives contain, thanks in part to local residents who filled burlap bags with documents and videotapes and carried them out to the streets. A group calling itself the Committee of Free Prisoners collects information about those who had disappeared into Saddam's jails, enters names and data from captured archives into computer spreadsheets and helps throngs of people learn what usually is a terrible truth. Sifting through files alongside grieving Iraqis at the Qasimiyeh torture center, Robert Fisk of the *Toronto Star* itemized the names of the prison guards, the torturers and their commanding officers. *Newsweek* gained access to a cache of files detailing the tradecraft, brutality and incompetence of Iraq's internal-security and foreign-intelligence organizations.

The haphazard, frenzied dumping of documents is great for those in the news business and for certain Iraqi families, but human-rights workers, potential prosecutors, intelligence officers and others are worried. "These government documents are critical evidence of 25 years of atrocities," says Kenneth Roth of Human Rights Watch. "Countless families in Iraq will need access to these archives to establish what happened to their missing relatives." The group estimates that between 250,000 and 290,000 Iraqis disappeared at the hands of Saddam's security forces. Other estimates top 300,000. The archives, Roth says, hold the secrets to their fate.

Others would just as soon see the documentation disappear. German and French leaders reportedly worry about revelations that they helped arm and equip Saddam. Russian defense analyst Pavel Felgenhauer writes that the Kremlin fears public disclosure of its post-Soviet secret cooperation with Saddam. That cooperation, according to revelations from reporters in the field, included training of Mukhabarat and intelligence officers, illegal sales of weapons and espionage against NATO countries on Saddam's behalf [see sidebar at left].

U.S. intelligence has a huge task ahead: sifting through heaps of scattered files, documents, logbooks and journals, and going through thousands of microfilm cartridges found in the wreckage of offi-



CHRIS HONDROS/GETTY

**Up in smoke:** Many thousands of documents were destroyed by coalition attacks upon Iraqi government ministries.

cial buildings and the homes of Ba'athist leaders. Some reports say the secret police had as many as 60 local headquarters in the capital alone, with intelligence headquarters sprawling over eight square kilometers.

Many officials managed to remove or destroy key archives before or in the early days of the war. "I found a great pile of plastic rubbish bags at the back of one villa, each stuffed with the shreds of

thousands of papers," reports Fisk of the *Toronto Star*. The U.S. Army encountered similar sights, in one house discovering three shredders and plastic garbage bags stuffed with shredded papers. Coalition air strikes and cruise-missile attacks incinerated large amounts of valuable intelligence, as British journalists reported from the foreign ministry.

There's still a bright side for the archive preservationists. Herbert Romerstein, a former U.S. Information Agency official involved with the preparation and release of documents from the captured archives of the ousted Marxist-

Leninist regime in Grenada in 1983, and who worked with Soviet archives in Russia and Ukraine, observes that totalitarian regimes have a propensity to store multiple, dispersed copies of the same documents, meaning that files destroyed in one building might survive elsewhere.

And the Pentagon can rely on a considerable body of outside talent that is experienced and disciplined in how to use captured archives for purposes of secret intelligence and political warfare against the enemy. In 1991, Kurdish fighters overran police stations, Mukhabarat centers and other official buildings, collecting 18 tons of Iraqi documents, which they hid in the mountains and ultimately shipped to the United States for preservation and analysis. The University of Colorado houses 5.5 million pages of Iraqi secret-police documents from 1991, in addition to documents from the

Soviet Union, Communist China and defunct Third World dictatorships. The documents helped Human Rights Watch to identify atrocities and the names of the perpetrators, according to a 1994 report the group authored with Middle East Watch titled, *Bureaucracy of Repression*.

Captured documents, skillfully exploited, can help Iraq, with friendly Western countries, make a complete break with the old regime and its ways.

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## How to Exploit the Iraqi Archives

Skillful exploitation of the captured archives can help win the peace in Iraq, according to intelligence experts and others who have worked with archives from the former Soviet bloc. The American Foreign Policy Council, a private Washington-based think tank, has been developing means of taking control of the assets of totalitarian secret-police systems, including their archives. The foundation conducted a years-long study, yet to be published, examining how six former Soviet-bloc countries handled the legacies of the secret police. Current efforts in Iraq might benefit from the study, sources fa-

miliar with the reports say. Among the uses of the archives:

- Weed out the bad guys. Personnel files and Ba'ath Party records can help the coalition and free Iraqis determine the bad from the not-so-bad, screening police, civil servants, teachers, businessmen and others in positions of responsibility. Recent precedent provides internationally accepted standards to ban elements from the old regime from future political, economic and social life. In Central Europe, this process is called "lustration."
- Disenfranchise the Ba'athists who live in stolen properties, return the properties to their rightful owners and break the Ba'athists' economic dominance.
- Recover stolen funds and treasures.
- Help Iraqis re-establish their identities, ethnicity and rightful property.

- Identify suspected Iranian and Wahabi agents and operations networks within Iraq. Saddam Hussein amassed substantial files on them. The files should be used to neutralize those networks.

- Identify Saddam's clandestine networks of agents and assassins abroad.

- Identify Iraq-backed terrorist individuals and organizations that operate against the United States and its allies.

- Provide evidence to prosecute former Iraqi officials for war crimes and other crimes against humanity.

- Unmask Iraqi agents' and paid assets around the world.

- Discredit Western individuals, corporations and governments that openly or covertly sided with Saddam.

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