

[Sign in](#) | [Register](#)

Go to:

## The Observer Special reports

<a href="#">Home</a>	<a href="#">UK news</a>	<a href="#">International</a>	<a href="#">Politics</a>	<a href="#">Business</a>	<a href="#">Comment</a>	<a href="#">Leaders</a>	<a href="#">Focus</a>
<a href="#">Sport</a>	<a href="#">Review</a>	<a href="#">Magazine</a>	<a href="#">Screen</a>	<a href="#">Travel</a>	<a href="#">Cash</a>	<a href="#">Letters</a>	<a href="#">Food</a>



# British spy op wrecked peace move

Martin Bright, Peter Beaumont and Jo Tuckman in Mexico  
Sunday February 15, 2004

[The Observer](#)

A joint British and American spying operation at the United Nations scuppered a last-ditch initiative to avert the invasion of Iraq, The Observer can reveal.

Senior UN diplomats from Mexico and Chile provided new evidence last week that their missions were spied on, in direct contravention of international law.

### Tools

- [Text-only version](#) ▶
- [Send it to a friend](#) ▶
- [Save story](#) ▶

### The Observer

- [Front page](#) ▶
- [Story index](#) ▶

### Recent articles

[UK firms 'well-placed' to win Iraq contracts](#)

[Four GIs wounded in Iraq ambush](#)

[GCHQ mother: My girl is not a traitor](#)

The former Mexican ambassador to the UN, Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, told The Observer that US officials intervened last March, just days before the war against Saddam was launched, to halt secret negotiations for a compromise resolution to give weapons inspectors more time to complete their work.

Aguilar Zinser claimed that the intervention could only have come as a result of surveillance of a closed diplomatic meeting where the compromise was being hammered out. He said it was clear the Americans knew about the confidential discussions in advance. 'When they [the US] found out, they said, "You should know that we don't like the idea and we don't like you to promote it."'

The revelations follow claims by Chile's former ambassador to the UN, Juan Valdes, that he found hard evidence of bugging at his mission in New York last March. The new claims emerged as The Observer has discovered that Government officials seriously considered dropping the prosecution against Katharine Gun, the translator at the GCHQ surveillance centre who first

[Amec confident of key role fixing Iraqi power](#)

[Spying games on the road to war](#)

[Penn's praise for spy heroine](#)

[23 killed as Iraqi rebels overrun police station](#)

[Iraq veterans to be studied for mental effects of 'friendly fire'](#)

[British spy op wrecked peace move](#)

[Baghdad leaders reveal that coup plot duped MI6](#)

[How spies chose the intelligence that justified war](#)

[Britain spied on UN allies over war vote](#)

[US officials knew in May Iraq had no WMD](#)

[Nine killed in bomb attack on Iraq police](#)

[Will there ever be a victory for UK business in Iraq?](#)

## The Guardian

[Front page](#)

[Story index](#)



disclosed details of the espionage operation last March.

According to Whitehall sources, officials feared the prosecution would leave the Government and the intelligence services open to embarrassing disclosures. They were known to be concerned that the 29-year-old Chinese language specialist would be seen as a patriotic young woman acting out of principle to reveal an illegal operation rather than as someone who betrayed her country's secrets. They are also known to be worried that any trial would force the disclosure of Government legal advice on intervention in Iraq, described by one source as 'at best ambiguous'.

Gun has attracted high profile support, particularly in the US, where her case has been taken up by Hollywood stars, civil rights campaigners and members of Congress. Yesterday, Oscar nominee, Sean Penn, told The Observer that Gun was 'a hero of the human spirit'.

Aguilar Zinser also paid tribute: 'She is serving a noble cause by denouncing what could be illegal acts,' he said.

The operation by the US National Security Agency and GCHQ was revealed by The Observer last March, after a leaked memo showed US spies had begun an intelligence 'surge' on members of the UN security council in which they needed British help.

Liberal Democrat Foreign Affairs spokesman Menzies Campbell last night called on Foreign Secretary Jack Straw to clarify Britain's role: 'If the allegations that these operations had ministerial authority are well-founded, then it could hardly be more serious for the Government. There will be understandable uproar at the UN. On the other hand, if the eavesdropping took place without Ministers knowing, then the question is, who was in charge?'

The Mexican government confirmed last week that diplomatic letters were sent to Straw last December asking him to clarify whether GCHQ was involved in spying on its UN allies. They have yet to receive a response. The Foreign Office refused to comment on the new allegations.

But the revelations of the former Mexican ambassador will not go away as he is planning a book about his experiences at the United Nations.

Aguilar Zinser told The Observer that the meeting of diplomats from six nations took place about a week before the decision not to put the resolution to the vote. They were working on a draft document of a compromise solution when the American intervened.

'We had yet to get our capitals to go along with it, it was at a very early stage. Only the people in the room knew what the document said. The surprising thing was the very rapid flow of information to [US] quarters.

'The meeting was in the evening and they call us in the morning before the meeting of the Security Council and they say, 'We appreciate you trying to find ideas, but this is not a good idea.' I say, "Thanks, that's good to know." We were looking for a compromise and they [the US] say, "Do not attempt it."

### **Observer special reports**

[Iraq: Observer special](#)

[Observer Worldview](#)

### **News: the dirty tricks memo**

08.02.2004: [Britain spied on UN allies over war vote](#)

09.03.2003: [GCHQ arrest over Observer spying report](#)

09.03.2003: [UN launches inquiry into American spying](#)

09.03.2003: [The spies and the spinner](#)

### **Comment and reaction**

09.03.2003: [Stephen Pritchard: Our spy story spelt conspiracy to some](#)

09.03.2003: [Ian Davis: The long history of UN espionage](#)

09.03.2003: [Norman Solomon: US press slow to react](#)

09.03.2003: [Martin Bright: I was Drugged](#)

### **Have your say**

[Dirty tricks: join the online debate](#)

[Email us at letters@observer.co.uk](mailto:letters@observer.co.uk)

[Email martin.bright@observer.co.uk](mailto:martin.bright@observer.co.uk)

[More from the Readers' editor](#)

### **A selection of global reaction (external links)**

[ABC Lateline: Martin Bright interview](#)

[Baltimore Sun: Dirty tricks leak](#)

[Asia Times: US takes bugging to 'new levels'](#)

[Pravda: Chile to investigate spying](#)

[White House: Ari Fleischer press briefing](#)

[NZ Herald: New Zealand spy base used](#)

[Caribbean: Coalition of the arm twisted](#)

[Newsday: US deflects allegation](#)

[La Segunda: Chile investigates \(in Spanish\)](#)

[Salon: Uncle Sam's dirty tricks](#)

### **The Observer broke the story**

02.03.2003: [Revealed: US dirty tricks to win vote on Iraq war](#)

02.03.2003: [The leaked memo](#)

### **More from Guardian Unlimited**

[Special report: Iraq](#)

[Special report: United States](#)



Guardian Unlimited © Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004