

Faleh Kheiber

A US soldier guards a burning Humvee after an attack. Now the Mukhabarat secret police are being recruited to track down guerrillas

# CIA recruits Iraq's feared secret police

AMERICAN forces have launched a covert campaign to recruit former officers of the Mukhabarat, Saddam Hussein's infamous secret police, who were responsible for the deaths and torture of tens of thousands of innocent Iraqis.

Dozens of agents are now in the pay of the Americans, who have turned to their former foes for help in hunting resistance groups responsible for daily guerrilla attacks against coalition forces.

The agents are also involved in the hunt for Saddam and in identifying and tracking down Iraqis suspected of spying for Iran and Syria, the neighbouring countries most hostile to Washington.

The decision to employ rather than prosecute some of those who worked for one of Saddam's most brutal organs of state security has angered form-

er opposition groups now represented on the governing council, the transitional body set up to help run Iraq.

"We are under strict instructions not to publicise our work with the Americans, but dozens of former Mukhabarat officers have already been recruited," said Mohammed Abdullah, a colonel who spent 10 years in the Mukhabarat and eight in military intelligence.

"They need us. The Mukhabarat was one of the best state security organisations in the world. We had informants everywhere. Most of all the Americans need intelligence. Who better to give it to them than us?"

Abdullah, 48, has worked with the CIA and American forces since early May. A fluent English speaker, he is paid \$700 a month.

A long-time member of the

## Mark Franchetti Baghdad

Ba'ath party, he made no attempt to hide his respect for Saddam nor to deny that the Mukhabarat tortured and killed on an awesome scale.

In his new job he helps the Americans identify Ba'ath party loyalists who could be worth questioning. He is also trying to win over influential tribal leaders in and around Baghdad.

"Saddam was highly intelligent and he loved his people," Abdullah said. "He was a strong leader and the mistakes he made were the fault of people around him who gave him poor advice."

"Everyone now is saying they hated Saddam. They are lying. But I don't see anything wrong in working with the Americans."

"I want to help rebuild my country and I must adapt to these changes."

US officials claim all recruits from the former Mukhabarat are vetted. But establishing exactly what an Iraqi agent did under Saddam is difficult, not least because many secret police files were destroyed before the fall of Baghdad. The Americans often find themselves forced to rely on Mukhabarat agents already working for them when selecting new recruits.

"It's a very delicate issue," said Imad Shibib of the Iraqi National Accord, which is represented on the governing council. "The Americans need better intelligence to bring stability, but they cannot afford to alienate Iraqis who suffered at the

hands of the regime by recruiting people who committed crimes."

CIA officers in Iraq have particularly sought out former Mukhabarat agents who specialised in counterintelligence against Syria and Iran. One such agent is "Khalid", a colonel who served the organisation for 25 years. He was approached by the Americans two weeks ago but refused to work with them.

Khalid's cell was one of several from the feared Fifth Section of the Mukhabarat that dealt ruthlessly with Iraqis spying for Syria and Iran. Although he claimed never to have used physical violence against suspects, he admitted to sitting in on interrogations during which alleged foreign spies were tortured.

"They were given electric shocks or were attached to a reinforced fan and left to spin for an hour from the ceiling," he said. "They were severely beaten with batons, and sometimes relatives would be beaten in front of a suspect to force

him to talk." Despite his past, Khalid was approached by the CIA through a former Mukhabarat colleague. He had a three-hour meeting with a CIA officer who debriefed him about his work with Iraqi double agents.

Khalid, who declined because he felt he would be betraying his country, said the American officer was especially interested in any Syrian and Iranian agents who may still be active in Iraq.

Members of the Al Dawa party — which claims 250,000 of its supporters were killed under Saddam — are indignant at the willingness of the Americans to work with former Mukhabarat members.

"Those who committed crimes against the Iraqi people should be put on trial, not given jobs," said Walid al-Hilli, the general secretary of a human rights group linked to the party.

"Not all agents were torturers, but the Americans should not turn a blind eye to someone's criminal record just for the sake of good intelligence."