

The Telegraph

By Christopher Booker



What on earth does Ban Ki-moon, the UN's Secretary-General, think that Martin Kobler, his personal representative in Iraq, is up to?

I have reported before on the extraordinary story of the betrayal of 3,200 Iranian dissidents who, for 30 years after the 1979 Iranian revolution, lived in Camp Ashraf, a little desert town near the Iranian border. In 2003, in return for disarming, they were given guarantees of their safety by a US general. But no sooner had US forces departed than, in 2009 and 2011, the town was attacked by Iraqi and Iranian forces, directed by Iraq's prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, leaving 47 residents dead and hundreds injured.

Last year, Martin Kobler, head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (Unami), brokered a deal with Mr Maliki and the Iranian government, whereby the town's residents were persuaded to move to Camp Liberty, a former US base near Baghdad, promising that this would be a staging post before they could be resettled abroad. A report for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees found that Liberty met none of the basic requirements of a refugee camp. But, at Kobler's direction, this was rewritten to say the opposite, so that when the residents arrived they found they were the victims of a horrible deception.

Their new home was no more than a cramped and squalid prison, where they were robbed of their belongings, bullied night and day by brutal Iraqi and Iranian guards, and deprived of water, food and medical supplies. Two weeks ago, the camp was heavily mortared, leaving seven residents dead and 100 injured. The German ambassador to Baghdad, Britta Wagner, issued a statement expressing her government's "full support" for the work of Unami. The head of Unami, Martin Kobler, is Ms Wagner's husband.

In Washington, backed by an array of former senior US government officials, New York's former mayor, Rudy Giuliani, made an impassioned speech, calling on Ban Ki-moon to fire Mr Kobler, saying that Camp Liberty was "not only a concentration camp, it's a killing field", and that it was Kobler who had "permitted it to become a killing field".

So bizarre has been the part played by the UN's man in Iraq that I asked the Foreign Office to explain our own government's position on these events. Its reply was that, while condemning the attack on Camp Liberty that "killed or injured a number of residents" (and "it is reported, Iraqi guards at the camp"), "we also fully support the work of Mr Kobler as the Secretary-General's Special Representative". Well, well.