

Ritter Debunks Iraq War Hype in London

by Mark Burdman

Amidst growing nervousness among British leaders that Tony Blair will very soon have Britain at the side of the United States in a new war against Iraq, Scott Ritter's presentation in the British Parliament had considerable impact. The former chief United Nations weapons inspector in Iraq, and former U.S. Marine, spoke to a cross-party group of parliamentarians on July 16, in the Grand Committee Room of the House of Commons, and *EIR* reporters were present.

Ritter blew apart the case for attacking Iraq, primarily by debunking the massive hype, in the U.S., British, and other media, that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein possesses "weapons of mass destruction"—chemical, biological, and nuclear—and threatens to deploy these against countries around the world, and/or to provide them to terrorist groups like Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda.

Ritter emphasized that his presence in London was motivated by a great urgency, because war could start as early as September-October. He gave two indications of this. The Boeing Corp. is working overtime, replenishing stocks of precision-guided bombs and missiles that had been run down during the attack on Afghanistan, and is preparing to deliver them by the end of September. And the 1st Marine Division, based in California, has had its training schedule accelerated, in order to be prepared for deployment in the Gulf, by early Autumn.

What all this indicates, he reported, is that "economic, political, diplomatic, and military capital" is being expended on launching this war, and should this capital achieve "too much mass," war "becomes inevitable." Therefore, "it must be stopped now."

Ritter urged the parliamentarians, to launch a great national debate in the U.K. Given Britain's unique relationship to the United States, this might have some impact back in his own country, even if the "unilateralist" crowd in Washington is in a mood to listen to nobody. It is all the more necessary for Britons, as, so far, British Prime Minister Blair has been acting like a "loyal dog . . . being used to impose" whatever the American administration desires.

"Don't let America fail itself, fail you, and fail the entire world," Ritter appealed. "There has to be a debate, and the vehicle is with you." Usefully, he added that such necessary, open discussion about fighting a war before it happens, is

fundamental to a democracy, and is mandated by the principles one finds in the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution, and in President Abraham Lincoln's 1863 Gettysburg Address, in which Lincoln insisted that government must be "of the people, by the people, and for the people."

The Neo-Cons and the Drunk

Ritter's polemic was all the more convincing for two reasons. First, he himself had been largely responsible for disarming Iraq, when he worked as chief weapons inspector, from 1991-98. Iraq had been disarmed, as of December 1998, "as close to the zero level as is humanly possible." Second, Ritter is hardly a "pacifist," but a former Marine Corps officer and "moderate conservative," a card-carrying Republican who voted for George W. Bush in 2000. As he made clear, he fully supports the official "line" on the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorism, about Osama bin Laden's guilt, and therefore gives his 100% backing to the war against Afghanistan. He also made it clear, that he has no sympathy whatsoever for Saddam Hussein, whom he regards as a cruel despot. Ritter *would* be in favor of military action, were he to believe that Iraq possessed the "weapons of mass destruction"; he is sure it does not.

Such a background lent a special credibility and passion to his argument. As he told his audience, what worries him most, as an American patriot, is the effect the war drive against Iraq is having on America itself. Even if he accepts the official version of the Sept. 11 events, he sees U.S. politics having been hijacked, since that date, by a group of "neo-conservatives," who have created a culture of "fear-mongering and demonization," with special emphasis on Saddam Hussein, who is obsessively—and falsely—identified in the media, and by leading Bush Administration officials, as "the head of the snake" of world terrorism.

"Since Sept. 11, American democracy is under attack," Ritter insists, and the best of American values are "being swept aside." The American media has become so "egregious" on Iraq, he affirmed, that the situation in the United States has become "very dangerous." He noted that several of the leading neo-conservatives, now in senior posts in the Bush Administration, signed an open letter in 1999 accusing President Bill Clinton of having failed to fund the Iraqi Liberation Act, which mandated support for the anti-Saddam opposition—an opposition which, Ritter insisted, is "not worth talking about." Signers, he revealed, included Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, Undersecretary of State John Bolton, Special Trade Representative Robert Zoellick, and Defense Policy Board Chairman Richard Perle.

In this atmosphere, Ritter charged that President Bush is performing like "a drunk at the wheel of American foreign policy today." His administration has made a "considerable



Former UN Chief Inspector in Iraq during the 1990s, Scott Ritter, appeared in Parliament in London as part of his effort to stop a new U.S. attack on that country. Ritter insists that there is no evidence to back up claims of Iraqi weapons-of-mass-destruction capabilities, just a “desperate” drive for war.

expenditure of political capital” in “regime change” in Iraq, and is pushing “every fear button possible” to whip up an anti-Iraq fervor and to brand opponents of war as unpatriotic.

Missing from Ritter’s analysis, was any mention of how the rapidly accelerating economic and financial collapse in the United States is driving the momentum toward war.

‘There Is No Smoking Gun’

The kernel of Ritter’s polemic, is that creatures in and around the Bush Administration are so “desperately, desperately” committed to this war, that they have hyped the “weapons of mass destruction” (WMD) issue, because they failed in their original two efforts: first, to link Saddam to al-Qaeda/Sept. 11; and then, to link him to the anthrax attacks that occurred soon thereafter. But the problem with their third, WMD track, is that there is *no evidence whatsoever* that Iraq possesses these capabilities. In fact, all indications point in precisely the opposite direction: that the job that Ritter and his UN team completed, in 1998, has removed that threat.

Parliamentarians in attendance, themselves, backed up Ritter’s charge, that a much-promised “dossier” by the Blair government, purporting to “prove” that Iraq possesses chemical, biological, and/or nuclear weapons, has never materialized. Of even greater importance, is that the Bush Administration has never come forward with actual evidence, leaving even senior figures of the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee—to whom Ritter has spoken—in the dark about what is supposedly going on. Similarly, many NATO ambassadors with whom he has met, “feel lied to, and betrayed,” because, when Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Armitage each made trips to NATO headquarters, each refused to show evidence of Iraqi WMD capabilities.

“There is no smoking gun,” Ritter bluntly charged. On the technical level, he said that building weapons of mass destruction is not a simple act, but requires a sophisticated

scientific-technological-industrial infrastructure, of the type that he and his team dismantled in Iraq, in the 1990s. It is not possible to re-create this, domestically, by some act of magic. In addition, to build such weapons post-1998, and to engage in what he called the “re-configuration” required to do so, Iraq would have to import technological and industrial equipment and components. This could not have occurred without attracting the notice of the world’s leading intelligence services (American, British, Israeli, French, German, Russian), which monitor Iraq very closely.

To those who make all sorts of claims about “the Iraqi WMD threat,” Ritter emphasized that the question must be posed, “How do you know?” This is all the more essential, in countries that have histories as democracies, like the United States and United Kingdom.

‘Osama bin Laden Will Have Won’

The former UN chief inspector painted a most gruesome picture, of what a new war against Iraq would look like, and what consequences it would bring in its wake. His essential point, was that such a war would “only reinforce Osama bin Laden,” as it would be “the opening salvo in a clash of civilization between the West and Islam.” In Iraq itself, the only ultimate replacement for Saddam would be an “anti-Western Islamic fundamentalist regime.” This would have a “domino effect” throughout the region, with the regimes of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, etc. falling. “Osama bin Laden will have won. An invasion of Iraq is the quickest way to lose the war on terrorism. It is a bad idea. It must be stopped, and stopped now.”

Leading American generals are opposed to a new war, but will not engage in “outright mutiny” against the civilian leadership of Bush and Rumsfeld; Ritter characterized them as “foot-dragging,” and causing consternation in the Bush Administration. They are demanding many tens of thousands more troops than the 70,000 insisted on by Wolfowitz, who believes that it will be “easy for Special Operations” to do the job in Iraq. These generals reject such idiocy, but—and here is the paradox—if their demands for 250,000 troops and related matériel are met, the fighting will be all the more devastating. That only reinforces Ritter’s opposition. He derided the propaganda, emanating from the Wolfowitz circles, that a war against Iraq will be an easy matter. The “coterie of generals” from Iraq, who held a big meeting in London on July 13-14, “is not, and never will be,” a structure like the Afghan Northern Alliance, he affirmed. (See last week’s issue for full coverage.) Second, the Iraqi Army *will* fight, and will not simply surrender, as the “coterie” had claimed, because what is at stake is the destruction of their own nation. Third, the Iraqi people will view an American-led attack as an “invasion of sovereignty, and will fight us.” Unlike the 1991 Gulf War, the fighting, this time, will not be on desert plains. “The population will resist, and the population will be destroyed. This is not a war I want to be associated with.”