
Interview: Scott Ritter

One Inspector Knew the Truth About Iraq 'WMD'

A former U.S. Marine, Gulf War veteran, and UN Inspector in Iraq from 1991-97, Scott Ritter has been the most bold—and the most truthful—of all the former UN inspectors, insisting throughout the Iraq invasion buildup that under the harsh and rigorous inspections from 1991 to 1998 in Iraq, the Iraqi stockpiles of WMD had been destroyed, and its nuclear weapons program dismantled. During 2002, he strongly opposed the invasion; spoke to both the British House of Commons and the Iraqi National Congress seeking to avoid war; wrote with William Rivers Pitt War on Iraq: What Team Bush Don't Want You To Know; and came under loud attack by neo-cons and by other former inspectors, who now must acknowledge that he was right.

Ritter was interviewed by Michele Steinberg on Jan. 27; he insisted that Vice President Dick Cheney “knew that Iraq did not have the capabilities that he was alluding to, but he also knew that the only way you were going to mobilize public support for a war is to intimidate the American public through fear, fear which exploits their ignorance . . . on the issue of weapons of mass destruction.”

EIR: The first question goes to the heart of the assessments that you made. There have been a lot of statements that “no intelligence service, no team could possibly have known that there were not weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq. But everything that you’ve been saying since pretty much—you know, 2000 or whatever—that you *did* know it, and knew that inspections could confirm the unanswered questions. What was the basis of your assessment?

Ritter: Seven years work in Iraq, liaisoning with the intelligence agencies of every major interested party in the world, and knowing what they knew. I find it laughable that anybody would think that the CIA didn’t know, that Iraq did not possess significant stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction. Of course the CIA knew this. That was the basis of every CIA assessment made from 1996 on.

There should be no surprise, why Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice, in 2001, were saying—every chance they had—that Iraq did not pose a threat, that Iraq was containable, that Iraq did not have a significant military, or significant WMD capabilities. . . . That is exactly what the CIA assessments were: That we couldn’t account for everything; and that there was concern that Iraq could have the potential for *reconstituting* a WMD capability, especially now that weap-



American UN inspector Ritter was ostracized and attacked for explaining during the Iraq invasion buildup in 2002, that Iraq’s WMD programs had been destroyed during the 1990s inspection regime.

ons inspectors were removed from Iraq. But there was no hard evidence to sustain this. Everybody knew this; this is not a surprise. The Congress knew this, every single one of these Senators who are running for office right now, that were present in the U.S. Congress during that debate, they know that no substantive fact was ever provided, to sustain the assertion that Iraq reconstituted, or was possessing WMD capability.

Everything that the President acted on was speculative in nature, a hypothesis, or a total fabrication.

What I’m saying is, here we had the Bush Administration screaming fire, and Congress was sitting there, throwing fire-trucks, without ever saying: “Where’s the smoke, where’s the flame?”

EIR: That’s a very good analogy because—O.K., there were suspicions, unanswered questions, and then beginning, I guess, in November 2002, a team of the UN—the UNMOVIC group, and the International Atomic Energy Agency—went into Iraq. Could they have succeeded?

Ritter: Well, define success. Could they have succeeded in what? Disarming Iraq? Of course. But that’s not what the policy of the United States was. That’s what people have to understand. This has never been about disarming Iraq. If it was, this tragedy would have been done years ago. This has always been about sustaining an American policy of regime change. That’s the policy goal and objective of every administration since George Herbert Walker Bush in 1991. Regime change. And because that’s the policy of the United States, there’s no way Hans Blix, or Rolf Ekeus, or Richard [Butler] prior to that, could ever have done anything that would have satisfied the U.S. government, because the U.S. government did not care about disarming Iraq.

This has always been a charade. The U.S. government’s policies have always been, from day one, to remove Saddam Hussein from power.

EIR: I had the impression after your trip [to Baghdad in September 2002], after the trip of some of the really honorable congressmen like Nick Rahall, etc., that the neo-conservatives and the group in Washington never believed that Saddam Hussein was going to allow inspectors in. Do you concur with that?

Ritter: Yes, I think that they had made an assessment that they're going to set an unattainable objective, and then condemn Saddam for failing to comply. So when Saddam allowed inspectors back in, they had no appropriate response because now, what do you do? OK, so you send the inspectors in, and you can't allow them to do their job. Because if you allow them to do their job, they're going to find that there is a way to deal with Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction other than going to war.

Why do you think I went to Iraq in September of 2002? It wasn't because I'm sympathetic to the regime, and I wanted good things to happen to Saddam. It's because I'm sympathetic to the rule of law, and the concept of disarmament. And what I told the Iraqi National Assembly—and, in effect, I told the Iraqi government indirectly at that occasion, then directly the next day as I met with the highest officials of the land—I said you have no choice but to let inspectors back in, and fully comply, without precondition, to the demands of the Security Council. You have no choice, or you face imminent destruction. And they concurred. They said: "You're right." And that's why they allowed inspectors in.

That threw the Bush Administration for a loop because that's the last thing they expected the Iraqis to do. . . . They had to go and carefully construct a chain of events that made inspections irrelevant. They created a new resolution, 1441, that put harsh conditions on Iraq, and hoped that Iraq wouldn't comply. But even if Iraq did comply, provided a loop-hole that allowed the United States to unilaterally declare Iraq to be in non-compliance. . . . The rest of the world thought there had to be a second resolution, but the United States said no, that this resolution contained all that is necessary to initiate military action. . . .

EIR: Let's fast-forward to March 2003. I read your pieces. I read all three books: *End Game*; the Rivers Pitt piece [*War On Iraq*]; And *Frontier Justice*, which has just come out. In March 2003: It comes to a point where they were working on a second resolution. Dr. ElBaradei's staff comes up with the finding that the Niger yellowcake uranium documents are a fraud. The case appears to be falling apart very quickly. Vice President Cheney goes on television March 16, 2003, and repeats a lot of the discredited information with even more fervor than before. What do you think that was all about?

Ritter: It was about Dick Cheney lying to the American people, and lying to Congress. If Dick Cheney is not held liable for what he has done here, it's pretty much the end of American democracy as we know it. You can't have representative government if the people don't hold their elected representa-

tives accountable for actions that are done in their name. Here we have a clear-cut situation, of the Vice-President lying to the American people about something, that he knew the reality was the exact opposite.

This isn't as though he made a mistake. It's not as though he was sitting on a body of data that sustained his concerns. It's the exact opposite. He knew that Iraq did not have the capabilities that he was alluding to; but he also knew that the only way you were going to mobilize public support for a war is to intimidate the American public through fear—fear which exploits their ignorance. Their ignorance was on the issue of weapons of mass destruction. "We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud." So you have to create the perception of a nuclear threat, and that's what Dick Cheney was doing. He was lying to the American people. And I hope people would recognize and respect that when a government official tells a lie, in the course of his or her official duties, that is a felony. That's a high crime and a misdemeanor—that's an impeachable offense.

EIR: *EIR*, founded by Lyndon LaRouche, has insisted since September 2002, that Cheney was the leader of the misleaders, and LaRouche has called for his resignation or impeachment. Do you think that there are other forces seriously looking at that type of thing these days?

Ritter: No. And I'll tell you why. Because while Cheney may have been the ring-leader, he is not alone. There is culpability all around. The media is culpable in this; they are to blame for what has occurred by failing to demand answers to obvious questions, such as: "If you say there are weapons of mass destruction, where are they? Give us evidence." Congress is culpable—the kangaroo court Senator Biden and Senator Lugar presided over in late July, early August of 2002—the total abrogation of constitutional responsibilities by the United States Congress in October 2003. Giving the President their constitutional authority regarding the declaration of war, without the President actually saying he is going to war. We all know now, that the President made his decision long before, that he was going to go to war with Iraq.

But in late September, early October [2002], Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice were testifying before Congress that the President had not made such a decision. So they lied. The Congress isn't holding them accountable. Why? Because Congress would then have to hold itself accountable, and nobody in Congress is willing to acknowledge that they are culpable for this war, that they are somehow to blame.

That is just not going to happen, unless the American people, of course, make it happen, and I don't see any indication that the American people are cogniscent of their responsibilities to the Constitution. . . .

EIR: What is your assessment of the impact of David Kay's resignation, and his recent remarks. I know that his testimony in 2002 at the Biden hearings was "gung ho, let's go, Saddam

has those weapons,” etc. Has he had a change of heart? What is your assessment?

Ritter: Well, it’s not a change of heart. David Kay has come to the only conclusion the facts will sustain. He has no choice now, but to tell the truth. But notice, he’s put some interesting spin on this. His conclusions are correct, but then he starts to hypothesize and say some things that are a) wrong; or b) inconsistent.

First of all, he says that this is an intelligence failure; that it is the CIA which owes the President an apology—not the President owing the American people an apology. This is wrong. As I already said, the CIA knew in 1998 that Iraq had been fundamentally disarmed. The CIA knew that Iraq had 90-95% of its weapons capabilities destroyed by UN weapons inspectors, verifiably so, and that 100% of the industrial capacity of Iraq was monitored by U.N. inspection teams, and that Iraq was not reconstituting or continuing to produce weapons of mass destruction capabilities. The CIA knew this. . . .

Everything Colin Powell presented to the Security Council, February 2003, has turned out to have been wrong. And Colin Powell and the CIA knew it was wrong when he presented it. He knew that he could not state with the certainty that he did, that this represented *de facto* proof that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. So it is not an intelligence failure, it’s a policy-maker failure. . . . The President had made a decision that he was going to invade Iraq, and he was constructing a case for this invasion based upon the misrepresentation and fabrication of data to the Congress and to the American people, to sustain this contention that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, when the reality was the facts pointed in a completely opposite direction.

Look, I published an article in *Arms Control Today* in June 2000, that documented the case for the qualitative disarmament of Iraq. We knew in 2000 that Iraq did not possess the stockpiles that the President said they possessed. It was known by everyone, from the inspectors on down, to the intelligence community, [and] to the policy-makers. . . . Paul Wolfowitz has acknowledged that this issue was picked, because it was one that could be sold to the American public with relative ease, exploiting the ignorance and the fear that is derived from ignorance regarding Iraq and weapons of mass destruction, especially post-9/11.

EIR: That was the *Vanity Fair* piece, right?

Ritter: Well, Paul Wolfowitz made the assertion before the *Vanity Fair* piece, but yes.

EIR: In your book, *Frontier Justice*, you mention the “PNAC posse,” the ‘New American Century,’ which Wolfowitz is connected to. Do you think they were really the driving force behind the whole prevarication, and this preemptive war doctrine?

Ritter: Well, they wrote it. So I think you can come up with no other answer besides “Yes.” These people we call the

“PNAC posse”—I call the PNAC posse—are the same people who are in government today. They run the government. There is no differentiating between the Project for a New American Century (PNAC), and the Bush Administration. They are one and the same.

EIR: Well, there was some backlash against Cheney quoting *The Weekly Standard*—which is sort of an outgrowth of PNAC—when they received a memo from the Pentagon about Saddam Hussein’s connection to al-Qaeda, way after the fact. Have you had a chance to look at that article? What’s your view on the Iraq/al-Qaeda so-called connection?

Ritter: Well, I don’t view *The Weekly Standard* as any more than a propaganda rag, so I don’t read it unless there is something of particular—maybe I should go read that particular article—but Dick Cheney has not only lied about the nuclear connection, but he’s lied about the al-Qaeda connection.

There has never been a link between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda. In fact, again the CIA knows—this isn’t guess work—they know that Saddam Hussein would never have connections to al-Qaeda, that Saddam Hussein was working against al-Qaeda, and that al-Qaeda was plotting against Saddam Hussein—that the two were mortal enemies. So the concept of somehow Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden coming together under common cause is, first of all, an analytical improbability that was not sustained with any factual data. It was purely hypothetical. There was no reality behind that charge.

EIR: Well, now let’s try and deal with the future. Before the invasion itself, you denounced the idea of military action as unnecessary and unjustified. Do you think the occupying forces should get out?

Ritter: Well, again, let’s use the fire analogy. Iraq is on fire, and the fuel that sustains that fire is the presence of American troops. You’ve got to remove the fuel from the fire; and therefore, the only way to do that is to get the American troops out. I think that any solution that we talk about regarding Iraq, that doesn’t incorporate the removal of an illegitimate American occupying power, is a solution that’s doomed to fail.

EIR: You have a lot of military experience, especially compared to the chicken-hawks. And I’ve heard some very distinguished former military people draw an analogy to the Vietnam insurgency. What’s your view of the resistance to the occupation: Is it just a bunch of disgruntled people, as GW would say, or is there a real insurgency? Can Iraq be unified?

Ritter: There is definitely a real insurgency. Look, just this month we’ve lost 38 people, dead. When you go through what killed them, they were killed either by having their helicopter shot down; by improvised explosive devices, tearing their trucks and bodies apart; by mortar attacks; or by rocket-propelled grenade ambushes. The reason I’m bringing this up: Our troops are not being killed closing with and destroying the enemy through firepower maneuver. We’re not taking the

battle to the enemy. The enemy is taking the battle to us. They are picking us off one by one. And this is widespread. Right now it seems to be concentrated in the Sunni triangle, but that's only because the Shi'a are looking for political advantage, so they don't want to alienate the Coalition Provisional Authority at this point in time.

But the Shi'a are on the verge of exploding if we don't give them "one man, one vote," if we tinker with this transition of power that is taking place. This is a popular-based resistance that's not linked to Saddam Hussein, it's linked to the American presence in Iraq, the illegitimate American presence in Iraq.

What we need to realize is, that we can't win this war. In fact, we have already lost this war, because war is an extension of politics, and the political reasons for going to war in Iraq have yet to be met and cannot be met. We will not be greeted as liberators by the Iraqis, that's too late. We are now seen by everyone as occupiers, and for the most part, as illegitimate occupiers. We will not bring the American-style democracy that we wanted. If democracy comes to Iraq, it will come in the form of an Islamic republic which is brought about by democratic processes. But if you give Iraq "one man, one vote," Iraq will be an Islamic republic. That is an inherently different, and vastly more dangerous situation than anything we faced under Saddam Hussein's dictatorship.

So we are not going to prevail. What we're probably going to have—because we won't let an Islamic republic come to power—is, we're going to have a civil war in Iraq with American troops stuck in the middle. The last time the United States intervened in a civil war of any note was in Lebanon in the 1980s, and we know what happened. Our marines got slaughtered in their barracks—it was a lose-lose proposition that resulted in the withdrawal of American troops. That's the future of our involvement in Iraq if we don't break from the failed policy objectives of George W. Bush. I think we need to acknowledge that we made a mistake, I think we need to acknowledge that there is a role, the only role that can be played to resolve this is by the United Nations, and we need to transfer political and military control of Iraq to a United Nations authority which then seeks to rapidly transition that power to the Iraqi people. . . .

It is not in our national interest to stay in Iraq. We are in a much worse situation today than we were at any time under Saddam Hussein's government.

EIR: You've spoken at least twice to members of the British House of Commons, before the invasion, and I understand you were there recently, although I didn't see anything in the press—not surprisingly. How do you see the situation in Britain now? Are there going to be inquiries, the David Kelly reports, the Hutton Report is due out tomorrow, any views?

Ritter: We have yet to see what is going to happen. First of all, we don't know what the Hutton Report is. I think that Tony Blair is in probably the most dangerous position he's



One of the photos placed on the White House website in January 2003, then used by Secretary Powell at the UN on Feb. 5, 2003, as "indisputable proof" of Iraqi ABC weapons production. They proved nothing. "Dick Cheney was lying to the American people, and lying to Congress," says Ritter. "If Dick Cheney is not held liable for what he has done here, it's pretty much the end of American democracy as we know it."

been politically, ever. There is a real chance that Tony Blair's government will fall. But let's see what the Hutton Report says, and also see what it doesn't say. I think it is important to note that if the Hutton Report comes off as a white-wash, that that is an issue that is going to be a problem for the Blair government, and the Hutton inquiry.

So let's not try to get too cute with predicting the future, but let's know this: that Tony Blair is in a lot of hot water for his statements about Iraq. He is widely seen as, at a minimum, exaggerating—and by many, as lying—about the threat Iraq posed. And the people of Great Britain, and the British Parliament, seem to take to heart, more than their American counterparts, the concept of any elected official lying. They also take to heart international law. And the fact is, that if Saddam Hussein doesn't have weapons of mass destruction, that makes the British invasion of Iraq illegal in the eyes of interna-

tional law. . . . So the fallout of not only the Hutton Report, but in combination with David Kay's recent conclusions, puts Tony Blair at great risk, politically.

EIR: Do you think that it also puts George W. Bush at great risk?

Ritter: It should. One would think that the same democratic processes that are in place in Great Britain would apply here in the largest democracy in the world. This is a fundamental test for the American people. If we allow the President to get away with misrepresentation of fact, with lying to the American people, and we don't hold him accountable, then we no longer function as a representative democracy, because a key element of a representative democracy is the concept of accountability. . . . So here we have a clear-cut case where the President either was incompetent, or lied, or a combination of the two, about the most sacred issue of trust between an Executive and the people, and that is war and peace. The President has us engaged in a war that is illegitimate—based on a lie—and what are we going to do about it?

EIR: Good point. I'm concerned that something has turned up again recently, just this past week—including from David Kay—that Syria is where the missing WMD might be.

Ritter: An outright fabrication on the part of David Kay.

Again, let's use the fire analogy. He's just yelled "smoke and fire," but he's provided no proof. . . . It simply is yet another politically motivated smoke screen conducted by David Kay to protect the President. The first, of course, is that this is an intelligence failure, and that it is the CIA's fault, not the President's fault. And now the second one is to provide not only an excuse for the President—by saying "Maybe this stuff went to Syria, and that's why we didn't find it"—but to provide an opening for the President and PNAC posse to take on Syria, which of course is the next nation in their nation-building sights.

And so, David Kay is once again is operating with the most wanton level of irresponsibility one could imagine. Compare his statements to the U.S. Congress in the decade of the '90s, and early 2000 in the build-up to the war, and you'll see that David Kay in his most recent statement, not only contradicted everything he said, but discredited his own self. Because he sat before Congress, and said, "There can be no doubt these weapons exist"; that he knows personally these weapons exist. So this says a lot about his ability to ascertain the truth and reality.

EIR: The various defectors—Ahmed Chalabi, exiles, [Khidir] Hamza—a lot of stock was put in what they had to say, including, I think, this on Syria; although the specific exiles might be different ones. You've had personal experience, and you've found them really wanting on credibility.

Ritter: Well, first of all, since 1995, there's been no significant defector out of Iraq. The last significant defector to leave

Iraq was Hussein Kamal, Saddam Hussein's son-in-law; and he told us that all the weapons had been destroyed—something Dick Cheney misrepresented again before the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in August 2002. Dick Cheney said just the opposite, that Hussein Kamal led us to biological weapons and claimed there was an active nuclear program. An outright lie, and again Dick Cheney was Vice President, with total access to intelligence information.

Ahmed Chalabi has made a career out of selling himself by selling defectors. It is curious, the process that takes place. It started with UNSCOM, where he came in and talked to us about what our requirements were. "What did we need, information-wise?" And we talked about the things we were interested in; and magically, Chalabi produced defectors that provided information that allegedly filled out information gaps. On the surface, it seemed great. I mean, this was manna from heaven. But the reality was—once we dug into it—every single one of the information reports that he provided turned out to be fabricated, or grossly exaggerated.

So UNSCOM dropped him like a bad habit; but then the PNAC posse picked him up. He became the darling of Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Don Rumsfeld—they loved his reports. He became the darling of the media. Judy Miller made a career at the *New York Times* peddling the lies of Ahmed Chalabi. Jeff Stein wrote a book with another liar, named [Khidir] Hamza, who we knew was a liar—Hussein Kamal identified him as a liar and a peddler of false documents and false information. The CIA knew for certain that Hamza was not who he said he was; and yet, because Hamza fit well politically with what we were trying to achieve—i.e. exploiting the ignorance of the American people and the fear that is generated by that ignorance, by speaking of a nuclear capability—suddenly Hamza is the darling. A liar, that the CIA knows is a liar, is permitted to testify before the highest committees of the United States Senate, on an issue pertaining to war.

Hamza testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in late July, early August 2002. . . . The CIA knew he was a liar; the Senators knew he was a liar; and yet, they allowed him to sit there before the American people and peddle lies. . . .

EIR: And yet we went to war, and that war is costing at least \$1 billion per week, not to mention the lives.

Ritter: I'm not as worried about the money, as the lives. The money is a big deal; as a former Marine officer, I care a hell of a lot about the young men and women who wear the uniform of the United States of America, and who have sworn to give their lives in defense of their country. It is our responsibility as American citizens to make sure that before we ask them to make that ultimate sacrifice, that we ensure that it is a cause *worthy* of that sacrifice. And we have failed egregiously on that issue. These brave men and women are in Iraq, dying right now on the basis of a lie.