

Scott Ritter Refutes The 'Bomb Iraq' Crowd

by Carl Osgood

Within perhaps a day or two of the Sept. 11 attacks, pundits were claiming that those attacks could not have happened without the involvement of a state intelligence service. Naturally, they all pointed at Iraq as the only possible culprit. It may be that a state intelligence agency was involved, but one man who should know, can show definitively that there is no proof that that intelligence agency came from Iraq.

That man is Scott Ritter, the former U.S. Marine Corps officer who served for several years on the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) as part of a team of weapons inspectors charged with dismantling Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capabilities after the 1991 Gulf War. Ritter appeared at the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine, in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 7, and presented a point-by-point refutation of the arguments of neo-conservative Richard Perle, former UNSCOM chief Richard Butler, and the whole gang that is calling for Iraq to be the next target in the war on terrorism.

Ritter made no secret of the fact that he is in favor of overthrowing the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein. He believes that regime to be as bad for Iraq as Perle, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and most members of Congress claim it to be. However, the difference is that Ritter refuses to accept the agenda of the Wolfowitz cabal, and is willing to expose what he believes that agenda to be. Even though Ritter, so far, excludes the danger of the "clash of civilizations" outlook of Perle, Wolfowitz, et al., what he has to say about them is anything but complimentary.

Among the points Ritter took up, was the claim that the anthrax used in the recent attacks in the United States could only have come from Iraq. He said that during 1995-98, the height of UNSCOM's activities, there was no evidence that Iraq had retained or reconstructed its biological weapons program. He said that the anthrax used in the attacks was the Ames strain, and it appears to have been processed in a manner unique to the United States. "It appears to have come from a Department of Defense source," he said.

During his UNSCOM tenure, Ritter examined many sites in Iraq that have been named by the Perle crowd as proving Iraq's links to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda organization. He also examined tens of thousands of pages of documents relating to activities at these locations. One of them was located southeast of Baghdad, identified by "defectors" as a camp

were terrorists were trained to take over airliners. Ritter said that real defectors providing actionable intelligence would never be revealed by any intelligence agency in the world. Therefore, the defectors who have been paraded in front of the TV cameras had to be people who were rejected as unreliable by intelligence agencies and turned over to the news media for propaganda purposes. The camp near Baghdad includes an airliner fuselage, as the defectors have claimed, Ritter said. However, the camp was built in the 1980s by the British Special Air Services to train security forces on hostage rescue methods, not hostage taking. Ritter maintained that that particular facility, according to documents that he examined, was still in use by Iraqi security forces, but to train people to target individuals and groups that oppose the Iraqi regime.

U.S. Manipulation

Ritter took up the issue of renewed weapons inspections in Iraq, an issue also recently raised by President George Bush. He noted that the reason the inspectors left in December 1998 was not because Iraq refused to let them inspect, but rather they were ordered out by the UN, because the U.S. bombing operation was about to get under way. He said that inspections up to that point, were carried out in such a way as to provoke a crisis, so that the bombing campaign could be launched without debate in the UN Security Council. He charged that the United States manipulated the inspection process in order to get intelligence on Saddam's personal security. It shouldn't be surprising, then, that Iraq now refuses to let inspectors back in.

Ritter also took up the issue of how much of a threat Iraq poses. He called Iraq's army "ineffective," capable of suppressing internal dissent, but unable to mount a threat outside its own borders. Instead, the threat comes from those ideologues who staked their careers on supporting the Iraqi National Congress during the 1990s, and who have now discovered, upon entering government, that the INC is corrupt and will never have the power to overthrow Saddam without lots of U.S. air power behind them. Ritter warned that if the United States launches such an operation, unilaterally and without the support of international law, the result "will be a modern-day Vietnam."

Ritter was asked, "What could Congress do to play a constructive role in dealing with Iraq?" He challenged Congress to stop playing politics with the Iraq issue. He referred to the 1998 Iraq Liberation Act and how it was rammed through Congress without meaningful debate on making the policy of overthrowing Saddam part of public law. Because of the ILA, there has been no meaningful debate on Iraq policy since 1998, "other than that which is directed by a specific committee where they parade hand-picked representatives to put forward pre-ordained rhetoric." Ritter called that a "failure of our elected leadership." He called on Congress "to understand that they do have a higher duty to the American public that goes well beyond the concept of the next election cycle," and that duty is to the public good of all Americans.