

Ritter: Iraq War Like Nazis' Poland Invasion

by Carl Osgood

While many pre-war opponents of the Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq have been muted since the fall of Baghdad on April 9, Scott Ritter, the former UN weapons inspector, is not among them. Speaking on April 25 at the Palestine Center in Washington, D.C., Ritter showed that he is still determined to hold the Bush Administration accountable for what has happened. Ritter made clear that he would not be shedding any tears over the demise of Saddam Hussein. "My problem," he said, "is with the process" of removing Saddam Hussein. "There was no due process. This is like a West Texas lynch mob, not the act of a civilized nation." Ritter proceeded to build an unassailable legal argument that the United States had waged aggressive war in violation of international law and the U.S. Constitution.

The U.S. allegation that Iraq was stockpiling chemical and biological weapons and long-range missiles in violation of UN Security Council resolutions, provided the legal justification for its invasion; yet, Ritter argued, more than five weeks into the invasion, no such weapons have yet been found. But, before the war, said Ritter, "It was a certainty of knowledge," and the Administration was able to convince Congress to give Bush war authority on that basis: "They [the Congress] said, 'We wash our hands of this problem,' much like Pontius Pilate. Democracy ended in the United States on that day." He added that the United States "became a dictatorship of one, President Bush. He alone had the decision to go to war."

Ritter called for Bush to be held accountable for the fact that the United States went to war on the basis of forged documents, specifically referring to the claim that Iraq tried to buy 100 tons of uranium ore from Niger, to use in nuclear weapons. He noted that the CIA allowed those documents to be presented to President Bush, who referred to them in his Jan. 28 State of the Union speech. "The question I have for you, Mr. President," asked Ritter, "is, did you know it was a lie when you told it? Or are you just not that good?"

Ritter has no doubt that Vice President Dick Cheney lied, when he said that weapons inspectors would not be able to find anything, unless some Iraqi in the know, defected and revealed the locations of weapons. According to Ritter, Cheney had said that the UN Special Commission, of which Ritter was a part, was only able to find Iraq's biological weapons program, because of the August 1995 defection of Hussein Kamel, Saddam Hussein's son-in-law, then a key person in

Iraq's weapons programs. In fact, Ritter reported, Iraq had declared its biological weapons program in April 1995, "not because of a defector, but because of the hard investigatory work of the inspectors." On top of that, Hussein Kamel had told his debriefers that he had ordered everything destroyed, including chemical weapons, biological weapons, and missiles.

New Doctrine Threatens U.S. Constitution

Ritter concluded by showing that the illegal war not only threatens international law, but also the U.S. Constitution. Ritter, a former U.S. Marine, stressed that Article VI of the Constitution holds that treaties signed by the United States and ratified by the Senate are the law of the land. "So, when you hear the Bush Administration be dismissive of international law, they're being dismissive of the Constitution of the United States in the same breath. And as an American who's sworn to uphold and defend the Constitution against all enemies—foreign and, I underscore, domestic—that's unacceptable to me."

The war, he said, was not just about a dictator and his weapons. "It's the Bush Administration implementing a new doctrine of American intervention globally, a new doctrine of American unilateralism . . . a new doctrine of American imperial hegemony." This doctrine is laid down in the National Security Strategy document, released last September, which "speaks of the United States using its overwhelming economic and military power to impose an American unilateral solution on problems, unilaterally defined by the United States regardless of international law," which has been applied to Iraq.

He ended by referring to the 1946 Nuremberg war crimes trials, in which U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson used the concept of "war of aggression" to hold to account the Nazi political leaders, and their generals. He said that the term "war of aggression defines what Germany did to Poland in 1939. War of aggression is the gravest of all war crimes, because within wars of aggression all other war crimes exist. If we don't have justification for invading Iraq, then we are no better than those who invaded Poland in 1939, no better than those who invaded Kuwait in August of 1990. That is not a status I want for my country. My country is better than that."

During the question and answer period, Ritter was asked to address the widespread belief, especially in the Arab world, that if chemical or biological weapons are found in Iraq, it will be because the U.S. planted them. Ritter pointed out the technical difficulties of doing this, and of making the evidence convincing, given inspectors' extensive knowledge about Iraqi weapons programs. However, "we can't be dismissive of" such a possibility. Ritter surmised that the United States might try to build a circumstantial case, using meaningless pieces of evidence, along with unsubstantiated statements attributed to Iraqi scientists.