

Former weapons inspector exposes “Big Lie” of Iraqi WMD

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Former United Nations chief weapons inspector Scott Ritter’s latest book, *Frontier Justice: Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Bushwhacking of America*, is a scathing critique of the Bush administration’s main pretext for the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Ritter, a ballistic missile technology expert, served 12 years in the US Marine Corps, where he worked in military intelligence in the former Soviet Union and the Middle East. He joined the United Nations Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM) weapons inspection program in Iraq in 1991, taking part in 52 inspections, 14 of them as chief inspector. Ritter quit UNSCOM in 1998, becoming a vocal critic of the UN economic sanctions that devastated Iraq in the 1990s and an active campaigner against the Bush cabal’s preparation for the pre-emptive assault against the Middle Eastern nation.

Frontier Justice presents a valuable account of his experience as an intelligence insider, providing details of a decade-long effort to destabilize the Hussein regime.

The author begins by describing his attempts to thwart the Bush administration’s stampede to war in the fall of 2002. Increasingly frustrated by the fraudulent nature of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings held on Iraq—characterized by the author as a “Stalinist kangaroo court”—Ritter traveled to Iraq to urge the regime to agree to the return of the weapons inspectors. (UNSCOM inspectors were withdrawn from Iraq in December 1998 to coincide with US and British bombing attacks.) Ritter felt that a renewal of the inspections with unconditional access to the country offered a slim chance of averting war.

Pleading his case before the Iraqi National Assembly in Baghdad in September 2002, Ritter said: “I know that weapons inspectors were used to collect

information pertaining to the security of Iraq... I know that the vast majority of the more than one hundred targets bombed by the United States and Great Britain during [Operation] Desert Fox [the military’s name for the December 1998 attacks] had nothing to do with weapons production capability... But I also know that there will be no peaceful resolution of this current crisis unless Iraq allows the unconditional return of weapons inspectors.”

Ritter told the Iraqi parliament that UNSCOM’s monitoring of Iraq was “the most intrusive on-site inspections regime in the history of arms control.” The inspections “never once found evidence of either retained proscribed capability or efforts by Iraq to reconstitute prohibited capability that had been eliminated by the inspectors. All of this was done with the full cooperation of Iraq.” Shortly after Ritter’s speech, the Iraqi regime agreed to unconditionally open its doors to the inspections team.

Ritter gives important details about the conduct of UNSCOM inspections that demonstrate that the Clinton administration carried out a policy in Iraq just as lawless—if on a lesser scale—than that pursued by George W. Bush. He describes his resignation from UNSCOM in 1998 when Richard Butler, its executive chairman from 1997 to 1999, “allowed the United States to use the unique access enjoyed by the UNSCOM inspectors through their Security Council mandate to spy on Saddam Hussein.” The intelligence gathered by the inspectors was used to target US air strikes in December 1998 during Desert Fox.

“Most of the targets bombed during Operation Desert Fox had nothing to do with weapons manufacturing. Ninety seven ‘strategic’ targets were struck during the seventy-two hour campaign; eighty-six were solely related to the security of Saddam Hussein—palaces,

military barracks, security installations, intelligence schools, and headquarters. Without exception, every one of these sites had been subjected by UNSCOM inspectors (most of these inspections had been led by me), and their activities were well-known and certified as not being related to UNSCOM... The purpose of Operation Desert Fox was clear to all familiar with these sites: Saddam Hussein, not Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, was the target," Ritter asserts. In other words, the Clinton administration authorized military strikes that were actually attempts to assassinate the Iraqi president, actions illegal under both international and US law.

Frontier Justice ends with an impassioned denunciation of the Bush administration's foreign and domestic policy, orchestrated by a cabal of right-wing neoconservatives organized in the Project for a New American Century (PNAC). Ritter highlights the dangers arising from the Patriot Act, the Homeland Security Department and the "deliberate neglect of matters of national security in so far as the attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, were not only predictable, but also preventable... The FBI and CIA had detailed information concerning many of the future hijackers and their intent to do harm, but did little to detain them."

Ritter declares, "The PNAC posse speaks of the dangers of Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, and the other 'rogue states,' but the sad truth is that Sheriff Bush and his PNAC posse pose the greatest threat to the security of the United States, and international peace and security for that matter, that the world has known for sometime. In typical Orwellian doublespeak, Bush and his posse posture in defense against tyranny, while perpetrating tyranny themselves. They are the masters of the Big Lie."

The longtime Marine and former weapons inspector concludes by stating that "the America of today has drifted dangerously close to oligarchy, and if not stopped, runs the risk of becoming a neo-fascist state run by the PNAC ideologues in concert with their corporate power brokers." However, in the face of this reality, he offers no solution but moral appeals to rediscover "what it means to be an American" and "resist the temptations of Empire."

In the end, Ritter offers no political alternative but the lamest of arguments for the election of a Democratic

candidate for president in 2004. To restore the "ideals and values of American democracy," he advocates a choice "guided by the basic ABCs of this new revolution of democratic self-government: Anything but Bush and Cheney."

But Ritter has already confirmed the complicity of Clinton, Gore and the congressional Democrats in what he himself describes as a criminal conspiracy against the American and Iraqi people. His "anything but" amounts to embracing some other hardened defender of imperialist interests, perhaps less reckless and unilateral than the current White House gangsters, but nonetheless reactionary.



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