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Transcript of Scott Ritter Press Conference

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Organized by Traprock Peace Center at the MacDuffie School, Springfield, MA
Sunny Miller, Moderator

“Now some in the media I think are extremely complicit in this, people who should know better.”

[You may listen to the interview (47.27 minutes) and download it for non-profit use with attribution. Radio stations may play it. Both mp3 and RealAudio® versions, and a photo album of the conference, are available at http://www.traprockpeace.org/scott_ritter_26feb04.html

Scott Ritter took questions from Andrew Stelzer of WNMF radio, Tampa, Florida; Cameron Cobane and Tom Skiba of the MacDuffie School; and Noah Bein of Northampton High School; with beginning and closing questions from Sunny Miller, Executive Director of Traprock Peace Center, who moderated the live press conference with call-in participants. After the press conference, Jim Polito, WGGB/TV 40 (ABC) in Springfield, MA interviewed Ritter for the evening news.

We wish to thank Mike Gorse for his stellar work in transcribing the press conference. You may find his website at <http://mgorse.dhs.org:8000/>]

Transcript

Miller: Thank you for joining us. My name is Sunny Miller, and I am the director of Traprock Peace Center in Deerfield, Massachusetts. We are delighted to have with us Scott Ritter. Scott was the weapons inspector on the ground stationed in Iraq from 1991 to 1998, working not only with the United Nations but with many intelligence gathering services throughout the region and the world, in fact, gathering information about Iraq's existing weapons and supervising a number of the inspections over 30 missions visiting I don't know how many sites (I'm guessing there were hundreds) for the purpose of observing, collecting information, and actually dismantling weapons and weapons productions facilities. We are especially interested today, Scott, in hearing from you about how disarmament worked. We know that it did work, as we hear that there are not weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and we're also interested in the question of why inspections were not allowed to be finished and the final goal realized. How did we come to war? How did the public be guided into the perception that Iraq was a grave threat, and where do we go from here? I wonder if we could just adjust that first question of what went wrong.

Ritter: Well, if you're looking at it from the standpoint of the American intelligence services and the British intelligence services, nothing went wrong. I mean, one of the greatest frauds being perpetrated today is the concept of an intelligence failure. They didn't fail. Their mission has been all along regime change, so that succeeded. What we're confronting here is one of the greatest intelligence successes in modern history. They were tremendously successful. They were able to use deception, deceit, fabrication, manipulation, the classic tools of the trade to gain their objective, which was the elimination of Saddam Hussein. One of the main deceptions they put out there was the notion of disarmament, that there was a requirement for Iraq to be disarmed of weapons of mass destruction and that the United States and Great Britain together with the Security Council supported this requirement, and we're responsible for holding Iraq accountable to this requirement. As a weapons inspector, I can tell you that I and hundreds of my fellow colleagues aggressively pursued a disarmament objective. That was our task. We worked for the Security Council, responding to a Security Council mandate. But the notion that the United States government and the British government, and, remember, these were two nations that helped frame the Security Council resolutions that we were implementing in Iraq, the notion that they actually believed in disarmament has turned out to be a lie. They never intended on allowing Iraq to be disarmed. They never intended on allowing economic sanctions to be lifted against Iraq because, see, their policy wasn't to peacefully disarm Iraq and allow Iraq under Saddam Hussein to reintegrate itself into the family of nations. Their policy from day one, especially the United States, has been the elimination of Saddam Hussein. In order to do that, they had to continue economic sanctions against Iraq, and economic sanctions were linked to Iraq's obligation to disarm. So disarmament was only useful to the United States and Great Britain in so far as it facilitated regime change. Therefore, it's only useful in so far as you can continue the perception that Iraq has not complied with its obligation to disarm, therefore there's a legitimacy to maintain economic sanctions that have contained Saddam Hussein for a purpose, until which time we can bring together the means to achieve regime change. That was the goal. That was the objective. The CIA worked for the executive branch of the United States government, the executive branch being the President, has since '91 under three consecutive administrations pursued a policy of regime change. President George Herbert Walker Bush, the 41st President of the United States, made it clear that economic sanctions will not be lifted until which time Saddam Hussein is removed from power. This policy of sanctions-based containment linked to regime change was inherited by Bill Clinton, and, for eight years, the Clinton administration sustained that policy. Albright said on numerous occasions that economic sanctions will not be lifted until Saddam Hussein's gone. Again, this policy was inherited by Bush 43, the 43rd President, George W. Bush, the current President of the United States, and he made good on this policy. So it's a tremendous success. The notion that we had an intelligence failure is wrong. It was an intelligence success. We had a failure of democracy. We had a failure of the rule of law. We had a collective failure as the American people. We had a failure in congress to uphold the Constitution of the United States. We had a failure in the media to search for the truth. We had lots of failures, but we did not have an intelligence failure. The CIA knew that Iraq had been fundamentally disarmed. The CIA knew that there were no meaningful weapons of mass destruction programs. But, see, their job as intelligence professionals wasn't to tell the American people the truth. It was to support the policy of the executive, which was regime change, which required them to create a perception in the American public that somehow Iraq was not complying with its obligation to disarm, that Iraq had maintained weapons in violation of the Security Council resolution that constituted a threat to the people of the United States, a threat that, since September 11, 2001, simply could not be ignored.

Miller: I want to ask a question and then turn it over to our many guests who also have questions. Is the misperception that Iraq was a threat concocted effectively with the complicity of the media, or do you suppose that the media really didn't have a chance to understand all that you understood? Was the media duped, or was the media complicit?

Ritter: Well, when you say the media, I mean that's a lot of people out there, a lot of organizations, so it's very difficult to lump them all together in this one overriding entity called the media. I'd say that the media is, in many cases, an extension of the American public. The media feeds off of the American public and then turns around and feeds the American public. You get a little circle. In the case of Iraq, it's a circle of ignorance. No one in the United States understands Iraq. Very few people do. I think the majority of Americans prior to March 2003 would have had a hard time pointing out Iraq on a map, couldn't have named the capital of Iraq, couldn't have named the five major cities of Iraq, would have a hard time talking about what the ethnic make-up of Iraq was, what the religious composition of Iraq was. You know, there is just a lot of ignorance out there about Iraq, what Iraq is, and from that ignorance comes fear, fear that was effectively exploited by the Bush administration after September 11 but fear that was exploited by all administrations prior to that. We were told that Saddam Hussein was the personification of evil, that he was the Middle East equivalent of Adolph Hitler. I think it's laughable today now that we realized that the Middle East equivalent of Adolph Hitler was pulled out of a spiderhole in a farm outside of Tikrit. Adolph Hitler went down swinging in his bunker, requiring a million and a half Russians to storm the city of Berlin to take him out. Saddam didn't go down quite that way. So I think that's proof positive that the comparison between Hitler and Saddam had been exaggerated in the extreme. Saddam was a brutal dictator, somebody who brutalized his own people, somebody who threatened his neighbors: Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and others. But he's not the Middle East equivalent of Adolph Hitler. But, because we're ignorant of Iraq, we're therefore fearful of that which we don't know, and this was exploited by the media because it's a good story. It's a great story. Fear sells. Terror sells. War sells. Evil sells. So they're selling us evil, and the media picks it up, so the media started feeding off of its own distortion of the truth. Now some in the media I think are extremely complicit in this, people who should know better. The New York Times, for instance, America's leading newspaper, had, or still has (I hope she's not with them for too much longer, but she's still employed and paid by them) a reporter named Judi Miller. Judith Miller is a Pulitzer Prize winning reporter, the preeminent reporter on Iraq for the New York Times. And Judi Miller put headline after headline out there about the weapons of mass destruction programs that exist in Iraq, about the threat posed by Saddam Hussein, etc, etc. When I went to college, the New York Times was the newspaper my professor said we could buy and we could quote in our papers, that it was a quotable source. I'll tell you what. I wouldn't quote too much from the New York Times today, not after I know about what Judi Miller did. She relied on a single source of information, Ahmad Chalabi, the head of the Iraqi National Congress. This is the same Ahmad Chalabi who if he goes to Jordan will be put in jail for over 25 years, 25 years to life, for embezzlement. He's a criminal. He's somebody who has just admitted this week to lying about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs. He said, 'it's okay, we're heroes in error,' he said, because our objective all along was to eliminate Saddam Hussein. Therefore, the ends justify the means, and, you know, we did what we had to do to get the United States government to sell a war to the American people. So Judi Miller used Ahmad Chalabi without checking up on him, knowing what kind of fraudulent person he is, and used his information to put on the front page of the New York Times. So Judi

Miller and the New York Times I think don't get a pass on the concept of just being mistaken. That was deliberate on their part to misinform the American people. So the media, I think, is an extension of the overall level of ignorance that exists in the United States today.

Miller: Thank you for the thoroughness of your answer. Online with us is Andrew Stelzer of WNMF in Tampa, Florida. Andrew, what question do you have today.

Stelzer: Hi there. Well, I have a couple questions. First of all, you started going into the role of Ahmad Chalabi, and I'm wondering if you had any more comments on the fact that I guess the Pentagon has agreed to set aside even more money for the information collection program, which Chalabi is in charge of, and what we can make of that. I read a little bit that it was kind of a circular information channel where the U.S. government would set up meetings between the media and Chalabi, knowing he was lying, and then they would use those media reports which they had set up as justification for their war. If you could go a little bit more into Chalabi, and then I'll have a second question right after that.

Ritter: I think you've hit on it. Chalabi is a source that never had any credibility. He's a man who left Iraq many years ago. He's not an intelligence officer. He doesn't have a network of human resources in Baghdad that he controls and reports to him. He is somebody who is able to organize in a shadowy manner because he's a criminal. This is what he does. He's a criminal banker who defrauded the Jordanian government of hundreds of millions of dollars. This is what he does for a living, and he was selected by the CIA to create a shadow opposition group, the Iraqi National Congress, and he succeeded at this. Part of the need to have the Iraqi National Congress was to create the perception of a viable opposition to Saddam Hussein. So you create an entity, but now that entity has to create its own legend, its own myth, so Ahmad Chalabi became very proficient at fabricating stories of resistance, taking a hundred fighters and turning them into tens of thousands. He would suddenly talk about the absolute decay inside Iraq, how people were just waiting for the United States army to intervene so that they could overthrow Saddam Hussein. We would be met with flowers and song, and everybody would love us. And this dates back to 1993. This isn't something new. This is what Chalabi did. And the CIA, which was working with him, realized this man's fraudulent. This man has no integrity. This man is incapable of telling the truth. And the CIA walked away from him because the CIA, at least at one point in time, had a requirement that intelligence information meet a certain standard, and none of the data provided by Ahmad Chalabi met that standard. But Ahmad Chalabi's information did meet a political standard, an ideological standard. That is, for those who were promoting regime change, promoting the elimination of Saddam Hussein, his information was a god-send. It was manna from heaven. And primarily what I'm talking about are people who, in the time of Bill Clinton, constituted what is known as the Project for a New American Century, or PNAC, neoconservative, right-wing ideologues who have a history of closeness with the right-wing government in the state of Israel who are the natural enemies of Saddam Hussein and want to eliminate Saddam Hussein, remove him from power. They were pushing the Clinton administration to be more aggressive in terms of regime change, and they would use Ahmad Chalabi's information. Now the people that were in the Project for a New American Century include people like Dick Cheney, people like Richard Pearl, Paul Wolfowitz, Douglass Fife(sp?), Scooter Libby(sp?). Now those names, with the exception of Pearl, all constitute some of the most senior people in the Department of Defense today, so what we have is when President Bush 43 gets elected to the Whitehouse, we have Dick Cheney and his

PNAC clique following him in and taking over the Pentagon, which means an Ahmad Chalabi now has a direct line to some of the most powerful decision-makers, and his information is influencing these decision-makers. Again, it's not because it's quality information. We know by the CIA's rejection of Ahmad Chalabi that he is not recognized for the accuracy of his reporting. But it's politically useful information because what the Pentagon does is take this information and peddle it off to the media. The Pentagon under Cheney had talked about creating an office of information whose job was to influence the media in the United States and abroad in a manner which is beneficial to the United States. Now this met with a storm of criticism. People said that the United States shouldn't be engaged in disinformation. So they quickly walked away from the formal application of disinformation, but they continued the reality of it, having the Pentagon channel through the INC data about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction programs.

Stelzer: Are you referring to the office of Special Plans?

Ritter: The Office of Special Plans was a current incarnation of this, but it was happening prior to that. Judi Miller has been reporting on the Iraqi National Congress for some time now. It predates the Bush administration's ascension to power. This relationship between PNAC and the media and using Ahmad Chalabi as a filter for passing this information happened in the 1990's prior to Bush being elected. It's something that continued. They tried to create a formal entity, the office of information, I forget what the exact name of it was, but that was swept aside. The Office of Special Plans continued this work, continued to be a conduit. And you know how it worked. It wasn't as though Chalabi would come forward and say, 'I have a defector. Here he is, and I want him to use him.' Wolfowitz, being the Depute Secretary of Defense, would say, 'we need information about a link with Al Qaeda.' And Chalabi suddenly would produce three defectors who magically worked at a training camp where Al Qaeda was in Iraq training hijackers in groups of four and five to use knives to hijack American-style jetliners. Now this, of course, occurred right after September 11 that helped make that link between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda that never existed, but Chalabi's defectors got front-page treatment from the New York Times. Frontline, a PBS station, made a documentary that featured one of these fraudulent defectors. And everybody who knew the situation in Iraq knew this was a lie. I was interviewed for that Frontline program. I spent an hour and a half on tape (they have it, I challenge them to produce it) where I told them all this information is wrong. Everything this man says is a lie. If you go forward with this, you are perpetrating the lie. PBS went forward with the Frontline documentary. It didn't have one word from me in it. They just went forward as though it was accurate. Judi Miller and I were on the phone numerous times where I just challenged her to find another source of information besides Ahmad Chalabi. She couldn't because that's all she had: a liar telling lies. And yet she published them as though they were the truth. That's what Ahmad Chalabi did. Now he received money to do this. If you're a liar, you just manufacture data. It doesn't cost that much money, but you have to be seen as being legitimate. So Ahmad Chalabi worked with the Pentagon through the state department to create information collection programs that cost the U.S. taxpayers millions of dollars. Now this money was used to give Chalabi a nice flat in Georgetown, a great condominium in the Mayfair district in London, and allowed him to fly first class and have nice suits, allowed him to front well in front of congress when he testified. It had nothing to do with collecting information. He wasn't paying a network of sources. He was a fabricator. He would fabricate sources, bring people in, coach them, and have them provide information. You know, the Pentagon is still requesting over 3 million dollars this year to pay Ahmad Chalabi for this information. Why?

We occupy Iraq. We own Iraq. Why do we need Ahmad Chalabi? Because we can't find weapons of mass destruction, so Ahmad Chalabi's job is to continue to produce human sources that will continue to perpetrate the lie, sustain the lie that there are weapons there to be found. You can't explain the Pentagon, though, because these are run under national intelligence programs, and George Tenet is the director of the CIA. He's responsible for all of these programs. So it's George Tenet that's doing this. Tenet's been very effective at holding Ahmad Chalabi off at arm's length. Tenet is also responsible for this. Tenet is part of the problem. He's not somebody who gets a free pass on this when you can't put it all at the Pentagon's doorsteps. This is money under programs managed by George Tenet. If he had any integrity at all, he would demand that this money be stopped, but he's not.

Stelzer: Do you see Chalabi becoming the fall guy, especially since he's an Iraqi? It seems like for a few days, perhaps, with his admitting that he made up this evidence, but now his organization is still getting money.

Ritter: You know who is going to be the fall guy. It's amazing the circle that has taken place here. David Kay resigns saying there will be no weapons of mass destruction found in Iraq. He says 'don't blame the President. It's not the President's fault. The President does not owe the American people an apology for getting us involved in a war that's killed 560 Americans, wounded 4,000 Americans, and killed thousands of Iraqis and cost hundreds of billions of dollars. No, that's not the President's fault. It's an intelligence failure.' So now George Tenet comes out, makes a presentation to Georgetown, says 'oh, it's not an intelligence failure. First of all, we never told the President that there was an imminent threat. We put out caviated assessments. We get some of it right. We get some of it wrong. That's the nature of the intelligence business. And we had to rely on human sources.' Up comes Ahmad Chalabi, who says, 'yeah, well, I provided the human sources, and, guess what, we lied. We lied because Saddam is evil, and the ends justify the means.' And now look how the argument has shifted. Saddam is evil. The ends justify the means. What you see today, when you have Paul Wolfowitz and company saying before the war in Iraq that there's four reasons that we can go to war in Iraq, (1) weapons of mass destruction, Saddam has them. He's supposed to get rid of them. That's a threat. (2) Saddam's a link with Al Qaeda. There's bullet-proof evidence, Donald Rumsfeld said. It's there. We know it. Three is the synergism between these first two links. If Saddam's got weapons, he's got links with Al Qaeda, we have to assume he's transferring that wmd capability to Al Qaeda, who has shown a proclivity for attacking the United States, and we're going to get hit again. The fourth reason is the criminal nature of Saddam Hussein's regime, the human rights violations. Paul Wolfowitz said the fourth reason does not justify the expenditure of one American life. No American boy or girl should die in Iraq because of the crimes committed by Saddam Hussein. But what do we have today? We're almost a year into the occupation. No weapons of mass destruction. David Kay says they're not there; we're not going to find them. No link with Al Qaeda. It never happened. We found in a letter that was discovered with Saddam Hussein. He hates Al Qaeda. He hates Osama Bin Laden. The two are mortal enemies. So there is no linkage there. Therefore, that third linkage, that synergism, can't exist because there's nothing to gain friction on. There's no wmd. There's no linkage. Which means the only reason we're in Iraq is the criminal nature of Saddam Hussein, and that's what we're being told now. We're there because Saddam had rape rooms that the President talks about, torture palaces. This is why we're in Iraq. Before the war, we were told that's not justification for any loss of American life. Now we have 560 Americans dead, and we're told that's

the only justification. Chalabi's playing the game. He's an extension of the new argument, which is Saddam is evil, we had to confront evil, and the ends justify the means. We're being continuously told by the President and by his administration, 'you know, Saddam's gone, we solved this problem, it's over. You know, we've done something good. The world's better off with Saddam. The people in Iraq are better off with Saddam.' You know, that's debatable, but I'll tell you who's not better off because of this; the American people, because we went to war on the basis of a lie. We went to war in a perversion of the American way of doing business. Congress abrogated their constitutional responsibility regarding a declaration of war. The President had to lie to the American people and lie to the American congress to get us moving along. This is not about the truth. This is about a lie. So America has suffered because of this. American is not better off because we went to war in Iraq. We're much worse off, and it goes well beyond the cost of this war in terms of life and money. It's what it did to our moral standing as a people, what it did to a nation that claims to be a nation of laws that are set forth in the Constitution of the United States of America. No, we act in a manner which is a step away from the Constitution. No, we're worse off today. We're much worse off today than we before we invaded Iraq.

Stelzer: I have one last question. Any comments on the resignation of Richard Pearl from the defense policy board?

Ritter: Richard Pearl did his job. He was part of the selling of this war and telling lies. He's become an embarrassment and an inconvenience to the Product for a New American Century, for the neoconservatives. He has some questionable business practices. So he's resigning. Richard Pearl will be taken care of. Trust me, he's not going to lose any money. He'll still have his condominiums in Paris and around the world. It's a tactical move by those who want to seek to deflect attention away from what really occurred here, who was really responsible for directing us to war, because Richard Pearl played a huge role in shaping the media and shaping public opinion to support this war.

Miller: Thank you, Scott. We're joined here at McDuffie School by four student reporters and online from Bloomfield, the metropolitan learning center. Let's go to Cameron Cobain at McDuffie School. What's your question, Cameron?

Cobane: As chief weapons inspector in Iraq during the 90's, you maintain that you and your team achieved a 90-95% level of verified disarmament. How was this verified exactly?

Ritter: Well, first of all, you work off an information baseline. The Iraqis were responsible for providing that information, first off. It was their responsibility to provide us with a complete declaration and a list of the totality of their capabilities. The Iraqis failed to do this. So, right off the bat, it raises concern about what constitutes 100%. So one of our jobs as weapons inspectors was to forensically reconstruct that baseline. We couldn't trust the Iraqis. They had already shown their proclivity to lie to us, submit false declarations. So what we did is reconstruct, reverse engineer their weapons programs. We traveled around the world. We visited the countries where they bought material. We hunted down protocols, contracts, invoices, bills of lading, letters of credit, and we were able to build up what they had acquired. So we know the material baseline that they had. And then we acted on that. The Iraqis declared only having four of a certain kind of machine which was used to produce ballistic missiles. We found out that they had bought, say, 15.

The Iraqis had declared four. We had counted four. But now, because we had documents that showed they had 15, we were able to go in and say, 'give us the 15.' We were able to find out that they had acquired tens of tons of growth media for biological warfare programs. The Iraqis denied having a biological warfare program. They said it's all civilian, it's all legitimate. But when we found the documentation that showed that they have acquired thousands of times more growth media than any legitimate civilian use could account for, the Iraqis had to admit, yes, we had a biological warfare program. That's how we did it. We went at it forensically. It took a long time. It took us four years to get the Iraqis to admit having a biological weapons program. It took us three years to get them to come clean on chemical weapons. It took us a year and a half, two years, to get them to admit the totality of their ballistic missile program. This is why I say 90-95%, because there's still a fudge factor there. We also have a problem in that the Iraqis would declare what we call unilateral destruction. Once we confronted them on their lies, they would say, 'yes, you're right, we lied, but don't worry, we destroyed it all.' And we'd say, 'where's the documentation that showed you destroyed it all?' 'Well, it was all verbal orders. It was blown up in this field over here.' Well, we could go and confirm that something had been destroyed, and if we dug and took soil samples, etc, we could confirm that what was destroyed was what the Iraqis said was destroyed. But we couldn't confirm the quantities. We knew a lot of it was there, but we couldn't confirm the absolute number that the Iraqis declared. So there was always a certain level of uncertainty that existed in these numbers. But at the end of the day, we were able to track most of it down, and that's why 90-95% confirmed, verified, is accounted for. Because we put eyes on target, and we know it. We're not taking anybody's word. The Iraqis lied to us a few too many times for us to ever trust their word. We never trusted them. We trusted the findings of our investigation.

Cobane: How did the Clinton administration use this information? What did they do with it, and why wasn't it passed to the Bush administration?

Ritter: Well, the Clinton administration inherited a policy of regime change from the first Bush administration. Bill Clinton, when he came into power, said, 'you know, I'm a Southern Baptist. I believe in deathbed conversions,' and he had this notion that he could work with Saddam and change Saddam's mind and maybe work with Saddam, and he was slapped down by Republicans and Democrats alike who had already bought into what I call the theocracy of evil. Saddam is evil. He is the Middle East equivalent of Adolph Hitler. You can't deal with Saddam. You can't deal with evil. The only thing you can do with evil is confront it decisively. That's a political reality that was inherited by the Clinton administration, so that's what Bill Clinton did. He continued a policy of regime change, which means he's not searching for the truth. As the weapons inspectors are uncovering the reality of Iraq's weapons programs, which are significant, and are dealing effectively with them, that is a truth that is inconvenient to the Clinton administration, because if we find Iraq to be disarmed, then Security Council resolutions requiring economic sanctions to be lifted would kick in, and, if you lift economic sanctions, you've broken the containment of Saddam, and, if you break the containment, you can't speak of regime change, so our success became the enemy of the Clinton administration, which is one of the reasons why I resigned. If you recall why I resigned in August of 1998, I said that we could no longer do our job. The Iraqis were obstructing us, the Council wasn't backing us, the United States was stopping more inspections than Saddam did. From November, 1997 to August, 1998, Madeleine Albright and Sandy Berger conspired to interfere, manipulate, and stop seven inspections that I was responsible for leading. Seven.

Saddam Hussein's government interfered with three inspections during that time, so the Clinton administration has a better record of stopping weapons inspections than Saddam Hussein did. Why? Because inspections were inconvenient. The policy of the United States has never been disarmament. That's what inspections are about. The policy of the United States has been regime change. So the Clinton administration was as guilty as the Bush administration of distorting the truth, of misrepresenting the facts. The thing that differentiates between the Clinton administration and the Bush administration is that the Clinton administration never took the step of outright war with Iraq, a physical invasion of that country using hundreds of thousands of American troops. Only George W. Bush did that.

Cobane: Did these administrations comply with the media or avoid them?

Ritter: You mean cooperate with the media? They lied. The bottom line is they lied. No American administration since 1991 has been honest with the media and the American people about American policy objectives vis a vis Iraq. None have been honest about the disarmed status of Iraq. In 1992, during the first Bush administration, I led a series of inspections in Iraq focused on ballistic missile capabilities. When we came back from the inspections in October of 1992, we can account for 817 of 819 missiles procured by Iraq from the former Soviet Union. We think we know what happened to the other two. We know they're not operational because we've got scraps of metal, but we don't have enough scraps of metal to say fully that two missiles are fully accounted for. So there's two missiles we have a question mark of, but 817 of 819 missiles are accounted for. This was briefed to the U.S. intelligence community. We got a steely reception. The director of the CIA at that time came out and said, 'it's the U.S. government's position that there are 200 missiles left in Iraq,' and they would provide no evidence to sustain that. So, from the very beginning, the policy has been to lie to the American people and lie to the American congress about the true disarm status of Iraq. Now weapons inspectors, we had to go back in and look for 200 missiles. I carried out a year-long investigation, went back to the CIA this time under Bill Clinton in 1993, October and November, 1993, sat down and met with James Woolsey, the head of the CIA, and his senior staff, brief him the same thing, we can account for all but two. They came back and re-did their numbers. They said there's 15 to 20, and that's what you have to find, and they provided no evidence to sustain it. So this is the clearest example yet of just how the CIA was not interested in the true status of disarmament taking place in Iraq, because they had another agenda, and that's an agenda that is fueled by covert findings signed by the President of the United States authorizing the CIA to remove Saddam Hussein from power. The CIA's number 1 objective in Iraq was never disarmament. It was always the elimination of Saddam Hussein, and UN weapons inspections, as I said, was useful only in so far as it continued to sustain the notion that Iraq had these weapons. But whenever those pesky inspectors started saying, 'hey, maybe we disarmed Iraq,' the CIA had to come down hard and put out a different story, a story that was not based on truth. Based on lies, lies that continued to feed off themselves until we have the situation we found on the eve of this most current war where the American public and congress of the United States actually believed that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Miller: So I want to go back to McDuffie students here. Tom Skiba, do you have a question for Scott Ritter?

Skiba: Hi. You spoke about the unfair comparison of Saddam to Adolph Hitler, but how much of a threat did he pose to specifically Iraqis themselves, the people under his regime?

Ritter: I think anybody who opposed the regime of Saddam Hussein was a grave threat. He has a history of torturing and killing tens of thousands, maybe even more, of his own citizens. Millions of Iraqis fled the country out of fear of repression from Saddam Hussein's government. So I think that there is legitimacy. I'm an eye witness to it, to the horrific nature of his regime. I think we need to put it in the context of history. The brutal suppression of the Kurds, if you take a look at how the Kurdish people are treated by all the nations that have Kurdish minorities, Iraq, until the late 1980's, had the best record of treatment for the Kurds of any. The Iranians have a worse record of suppressing the Kurds. The Turks definitely have a pretty bad record of suppressing the Kurds. The Syrians aren't much better. Iraqi Kurdistan had a level of autonomy in terms of government that was unequalled in any other country. During the Iran-Iraq war, however, the Kurdish minority was used by the Iranians as a tool to fight Saddam, and so you had Iraqi Kurds actually switching sides and fighting for the Iranians. Now how would we treat that in the United States. I'm just curious; what would happen if South Carolina decided that they were going to withdraw from the union? Wait, they did that. It was called a civil war, and we fought the war for four some odd years, a brutal war in which we killed hundreds of thousands of Americans. Read up your history about what the Union did in the Sheshendoah Valley to break the back of the confederacy's ability to feed and sustain the army of northern Virginia. Talk about Sherman's march to the sea and suddenly understand how horrible civil wars are. Research the Russian civil war, and see what the reds and the whites did to one another and the brutality that took place. I'm not condoning Saddam Hussein's treatment of the Kurds. I condemn it in the strongest terms, but let's put it into perspective. People call it genocide. It is not genocide. It is brutal suppression of a population base that had committed treason. Committed treason. They had joined the Iranians. The same thing with the Shi'a. What happens during a time of war if a significant population base rises up against central authority? They've committed treason. And that's what the Shi'a did, and Saddam suppressed them brutally. Killed tens of thousands of them. I'm not condoning it. I'm condemning it, but let's put it in perspective. This is not Saddam running around gunning down the Shi'a. Fact is if you take a look at 1991, 70% of the Shi'a were on the side of Saddam. Of the 30%, not all of them rose up. Many were just sitting on the sidelines. It was a minority that rose up in 1991, and they were brutally suppressed. Saddam has a history of brutally suppressing, and let's not sugarcoat, murder, rape, and torture of those who oppose his regime. And he did so. But, you know, we knew about this. This is not a great secret. We stood by in the 1980's and let him do it. He gassed the Kurds in Halabja, or some people say he gassed. There's a question of whether or not it was Iranian gas or Iraqi gas. But we know he used gas against Kurds. We did nothing. We said nothing. We know he used gas against the Iranians. We did nothing. We said nothing. Worse, we sent U.S. teams to Baghdad with intelligence information, satellite photography, signals intercept, and helped plot out Iranian military positions on these photographs and then sat back and watched as the Iraqis planned chemical weapons attacks. We knew they were attacking Iran using chemical weapons, and not only did we not step up and say stop, but when they asked for more intelligence information, we provided it. And how do I know this? Because I've debriefed Wafik ai-Samarai, the director of military intelligence of the Iraqi army. He's the one who met with Rumsfeld. He's the one who met with Rumsfeld's people. He's the one who met with the CIA. He's the one who sat in a room while all of this took place. That's the reality of it. I'm not condoning anything Saddam did. I'm condemning him in the harshest terms. But to sit back here

and suddenly say we have to invade Iraq because of the horrific nature of the regime, that's absurd in the extreme. What do we do about the Sudan? We know there's thousands of people sold into slavery every day in the Sudan. Are we going to go to war in the Sudan to liberate the people of the Sudan? A million of them have been starved. There's a brutal civil war there. What about Chechnya and the genocide? There's true genocide taking place in Chechnya, the Russians slaughtering the Chechnyans, bombing them, maybe even using chemical weapons. Are we going to go to war against Russia because of what they've done to the Chechnyans? I mean, this is where I draw the line. America is not the world's policeman. It's not our responsibility to go in and police up the problems that every nation has. It's hypocrisy to say we're going to go to war in Iraq because of Saddam's suppression of the people when we're turning our back on the rest of the world. And I'm not saying, therefore, that we should change our policy and intervene willy-nilly. We've got enough problems here at home that we need to turn our attention to and use our tax-payer money on. I think the elderly in America are a little bit concerned about Alan Greenspan's statement that social security might have to be cut. But wait a minute. You're going to cut social security, but you're going to spend \$160 billion on war in Iraq? Let's balance this one out a little bit.

Miller: I'd like to invite anyone online now to identify yourself please. Do we have any callers joining us?

Bein: My name is Noah Bein from Northampton High School. In a recent speech at Frontier Regional, you said there were two options. One was that Bush knew he lied, knew that there were no weapons, that he lied to people, or that he didn't know, which meant he was incompetent. And so do you think that there could have been a third option, which has to do with the Office of Special Plans, which meant that he didn't know that he was fed the information by this third link with a political agenda?

Ritter: When you're the senior executive of a company or you're the senior executive of a country, as Harry Truman once said, "the buck stops here." I mean 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, there's a place called the Whitehouse, and there's the oval office. There's a desk with a series of phones. And the most powerful man in America sits there, called the President. He makes decisions. Now some things can be delegated. He delegates a lot of things. But the decision to go to war is his and his alone. He can go to congress and ask for a declaration of war, but he's the commander in chief. He makes his call. The buck stops there. So I think that, as the man responsible for that decision, he has a responsibility to ensure that all the data that's put before him is double-checked and triple-checked. He has the ability to ask questions. Where did this information come from? What's the source of this information? Is there something to back it up? Are you asking me to go to war on a single source of information? That's his responsibility, so if he sat there and allowed his decision to be shaped by the Office of Special Plans, then he's incompetent, especially when one considers that the Office of Special Plans has no legitimacy in the hierarchy for advising the President of the United States about intelligence threats. That is the soul project of the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, the DCI, George Tenet, and, as George Tenet said in his speech at Georgetown three weeks ago, he said 'I am the man who meets with the President six days a week. I am the man who is the front of the intelligence community to the President, not the Pentagon, not anybody else. I am.' So did the President ignore the director of central intelligence and go with the Pentagon and the OSP? If he did so willingly, then he's a liar. He's corrupt. He has no integrity. If

he did so as a dupe, he's incompetent. So I stick with my original assessment; the President either lied to us or he's incompetent, or we have a melding of the two.

Miller: Thank you. Any other callers online, or, Noah, do you have a follow-up question?

Bein: Thank you for answering.

Miller: I believe the Bloomfield students had to return to another class, so I want to take any last questions here at McDuffy.

Jenks: Just one question. I guess you've made it quite clear that weapons of mass destruction were not the reason why we went to war in Iraq. Why did we go to war in Iraq?

Ritter: Well, ultimately that's a question that can only be answered by the man who got us involved. I have my perception that's based on observing as an outsider. I wasn't an insider sitting down in the Pentagon or the White House as they made these decisions, so all I have is an opinion. I think that the reason we went to war in Iraq deals with the ideologically driven agenda of what we call the Project for a New American Century, or the neoconservative ideologues who today populate the senior-most decision-making hierarchy of the Bush administration. When they say a new American century, what they're speaking of is America's status as the soul remaining super-power and how they want to remain the status unchallenged, that they will not allow any nation or group of nations to step forward and take a role that was once held by the Soviet Union as a counter to the United States, that America enjoys supremacy and we're going to maintain this supremacy, and we will do so by preemptively dealing with those threats, political, military, economic, that emerge. We will not allow any nation or group of nations to be our equals. We alone determine what constitutes the national interest not only inside our borders but outside our borders, and we will respond unilaterally, preemptively if required, to deal with these, and, in the Middle East, we're dealing with a region that has a tremendous amount of economic resources (oil), we're dealing with a region that is governed by governments that we consider to be inherently unstable. Therefore the instability of these governments threatens our ability to be able to rely on this region as a sustainable source of oil. So we want to transform this region. This is something the Project for a New American Century speaks of, the regional transformation of the Middle East away from a centuries-old, theocratic, feudalistic means of government to western-oriented liberal democracies. That's the ideal. But I think that's just a salesmanship. It's basically replace government that we can't control with governments we can control so that we can have, you know, sustained access to the oil. That's why we went to war in Iraq. It's part of implementing this policy of American unilateralism that was published in September of 2002, the national security strategy of the United States. I'm not making this up. It's a U.S. government document. It's the doctrine of the Bush administration, and Iraq is a manifestation of this doctrine.

Miller: I'd like to ask one closing question, Scott. In light of this great failure of both the American people, parts of the media, and congress and our executive office, what prescription do you offer? What hopeful message do you offer the youth of this country, the elders of this country? Can we return to the agenda of disarmament, or will we face perpetual war? What tools do we have, and what is our next step to help get back on the path of disarmament?

Ritter: I think if you focus on disarmament and you focus on these tools, you focus on too narrow of an agenda because what we're looking at here with Iraq is a manifestation of an absolute failure of this country to function properly. The inability to pursue a disarmament agenda over a regime change agenda is a manifestation of how the national agenda can be hijacked by a narrow minority who pushes an extreme point of view. You can't talk about building anything positive unless you have a solid foundation. In the United States, that foundation is the Constitution, the rule of law, the concept of representative democracy. So the first thing we have to do is make representative democracy work when the key elements of that is not just electing officials, and I have to tell you when we call ourselves a representative democracy, we're not. When you have less than 35% of the eligible voting public participating in elections, there's not true representation taking place here. But, even after we elect people to office, in order for the concept of representative democracy to work, you have to hold them accountable for what they do. So the only way we can ever get disarmament back on the table or doing the right thing inserted into the way we govern ourselves is to hold those who have carried out this massive dereliction of duty, this fraud, this deception, accountable for their actions, and we do so by voting them out of office. Anybody who played a role in perpetrating fraud and deception regarding the war with Iraq is no longer worthy of the trust and confidence in the American public, and we should make them aware of this by voting them out of office in the next election.

Miller: Thank you very much. Scott Ritter is the author of THE END GAME: SOLVING THE IRAQ PROBLEM ONCE AND FOR ALL and FRONTIER JUSTICE: WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION AND THE BUSHWHACKING OF AMERICA.

It's a pleasure to hear your comprehensive view of these challenges ahead.

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