

Reflections on Scott Ritter's Talk

by Mike Duffy

The Steering Committee of Huntington Woods Peace Citizenship and Education Project was told a few months ago that Scott Ritter and Jeff Cohen were touring the country to talk about the still real risk that the United States Government will attack Iran, at least with bombers and special forces, and perhaps more. They and we feel that would be a disaster of unknown magnitude. I have read articles in which the comparison is made to the beginning of World War I, i.e. if no one were to back down quickly, the world might reorder itself in fairly short order. Jeff Cohen talked about the role of the media in supporting national policy and Scott Ritter talked about the policy itself.



Scott Ritter was a United Nations arms inspector in Iraq from 1991 to 1998. During that time the UN was charged with destroying all nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and the related manufacturing capabilities.

He was a chief inspector in almost half of the inspection missions in which he participated, according to his wikipedia biography.

He analyzed conflict with Iran from two perspectives. First, he looked at the history of the push for war against Iraq and a makeover of the Middle East as envisioned by the Project for a New American Century (PNAC). If you go to their website www.newamericancentury.org you can read their early papers, including their assessment that a new Pearl Harbor might be necessary to galvanize American public opinion regarding what they saw as the necessity of the US controlling and policing the world. Regime change in Iraq and Iran were key parts of that plan. Scott Ritter is of a firm opinion that "plan" is the operative word, and he is certain in his own mind that the Bush administration still wants to use force against Iran. Second, he noted the similarity of the psychology of fear which is grounded in lies being used to support a conflict with Iran very much as was done to support conflict with Iraq.

The initiation of conflict could come from a manufactured lie as in the Gulf of Tonkin, or from actual retaliation by Iran being used as justification for attack. It could also rely on the Lieberman-Kyl resolution as passed by Congress which says that the US can enter hostilities with Iran if Iran or its proxies takes action against the United States. Bush could say that an action against the occupation by Iraqis is an action by Iranian proxies. The means for starting conflict are in place.

He also made clear that the military assets needed to attack Iran are in place.

Next, he insisted that the war in Iraq was morally wrong and a crime because it was not based on imminent danger but upon lies. To be sure, many people want the occupation of Iraq to cease because it is going badly, but it should be opposed in principle. Conflict with Iran should also be opposed in principle, because as with Iraq, there is no imminent danger.

So, how do we know that there is no imminent danger? Here he appealed to his training as an arms analyst and his on the ground experience and knowledge from being a UN arms inspector in Iraq. In Iraq for example:

- He said that the UN was able to certify that Iraq had no nuclear weapons and had no way to make them.
- Iraq had destroyed almost all of its missiles and launching equipment
- The Iraqi government had destroyed its biological and chemical arms
- All purported incriminating evidence was established to be non incriminating, i.e. something else
- All this was known by the US government because of arms inspections and analysis

Regarding Iran, he said that if Iran were to get nuclear arms it would qualify as imminent danger. In fact, he vowed to re-enlist in the Marines to take action in that event. He also said that because of trying to establish a Uranium enrichment program for nuclear power in defiance of the US government, they had taken some actions in secret. As a result, he said, they should be held to higher standards of inspection than otherwise, and they have agreed to that. In other words Iran is not an imminent nuclear threat and its government is now proceeding lawfully. This answer is not satisfying to me because I think nuclear power and nuclear weaponry are closely linked if you take a sufficiently long view, but based on the logic of nuclear inspection as presently enforced, it is sufficient.



He went further. He discussed the recently issued National Intelligence Estimate which said Iran stopped its nuclear bomb program in 2003. That was a lie, he said, because Iran never had a national program to develop nuclear bombs, and all purported evidence to the contrary has been shown to be phony. If true, then all past calls to take military action against Iran based on a nuclear threat have been dishonest. This lie, however, makes more credible the argument that because Iran supposedly had a nuclear weapons program, it will resume it given the chance, and therefore Iran is now a threat. Bush has even said that Iran is guilty until proven innocent.

Scott handicapped the odds of conflict with Iran at 80%. This brought forth startled sighs from the audience. He said the best chance of avoiding conflict is to politicize the possibility of conflict. As an indirect response to a question he said we should not want a military mutiny, nor should we expect one. It is up to us as citizens, and especially citizens in this election season.

I believe that our audience took his warning very seriously. I also believe the general public does not take the possibility of conflict with Iran seriously. That means we have a lot of work to do. Our politicians in Michigan do not even want to talk about this. The media, print and broadcast want to ignore it. We should not let our politicians or the media ignore it, and in the longer term, we must break media concentration. It was right that Jeff Cohen and Scott Ritter come as a team: we need to confront both the policy and the apologists for the policy.