

Former inspector decries war plans

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Americans are about to be killed in a war built on "a foundation of lies," according to Scott Ritter, a United Nations arms inspector in Iraq from 1991-98.

"I think we're on the verge of making a huge mistake," he said at the University of Rochester Nov. 7.

During a press conference and then during a speech at Hoyt Hall auditorium, Ritter said President George W. Bush has misled U.S. citizens about his intentions toward Saddam Hussein. He said the U.S.-backed U.N. Security Council resolution of Nov. 9 — which demands

that Iraq comply with weapons inspections — is designed to trigger war between the United States and Iraq because it does not allow enough time for an effective inspections regime to be established. Ritter estimated such a regime would take at least two to six months to establish, and possibly two years to complete. Iraq must accept the U.N. resolution by Nov. 15, and give a full accounting of its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons by Dec. 8.

"From the very beginning, America's policy has been regime removal first, disarmament second," Ritter told a capacity crowd as he



Reuters/CNS

Former U.N. weapons inspector and Desert Storm veteran Scott Ritter talks with journalists in Baghdad, Iraq, in this 1998 file photo.

criticized the way the president is leading the nation to war. He urged the crowd to reject those who call critics of a war unpatriotic.

"I can train any monkey to wrap himself in a flag and salute the president," he said to the audience.

In recent months, Ritter has emerged as one of the most controversial critics of President Bush's call for authority to attack Iraq. Ritter recently made a film called "In Shifting Sands" about the inspections process, and wrote a 1999 book called *Endgame: Solving the Iraq Problem Once and For All*.

The former Marine major and Desert Storm veteran challenged the crowd to lobby Congress to require the president to present a better case for a pre-emptive strike against Iraq. Such a strike has already been condemned as unjustified in some Catholic quarters, including the Priest's Council of the Diocese of Rochester, which recently issued a statement against a pre-emptive strike. Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, has also written the president urging him to peacefully resolve the current dispute with Iraq.

Ritter noted that officials in President George H.W. Bush's 1989-93 administration wanted Hussein out regardless of his compliance with U.N. weapons inspections. Bush's son, Ritter said, is simply carrying out the policy first enunciated by his father's administration, a policy Bill Clinton's administration also supported by fostering three coup attempts against Hussein. He also blamed the Clinton administration for destroying the weapons-inspection process by using intelligence gathered by inspectors in its air

war against Iraq, a violation of the agreement Iraq made to allow the inspectors access to weapons sites.

Ritter, a Republican who voted for Bush, said he is no defender of Hussein, whom he considers a brutal, murderous dictator. However, he said the Iraqi regime has shown it is willing to allow U.N. inspectors into the country, whereas North Korea, pursuing a nuclear weapons program, has thumbed its nose at the idea of inspections. Nonetheless, he said, there are no plans to attack North Korea. He also questioned whether it was worth it to send American military personnel to die to liberate Iraq from Hussein's tyrannical rule.

"I hate to say it, but I'm not willing to die for the people of Iraq," Ritter said. "I'm willing to die for you."

He also warned that if war with Iraq destabilizes Jordan, Israel may use the ensuing chaos as an opportunity to "transfer" Palestinians out of the West Bank into Jordan. A recent poll showed 46 percent of Israelis support expelling Palestinians from the West Bank.

Ritter also addressed economic sanctions against Iraq, the effects of which have been blamed for the deaths of more than 1 million Iraqis. He likened the sanctions against Iraq to herding 5,000 Iraqi children a month into a stadium and shooting them. He called Hussein the "trigger-man" in the sanctions process, but added that the United States was "the accomplice."

Ritter concluded his speech by asking the crowd to continue to press U.S. leaders to explore peaceful means of settling the dispute with Iraq.

"There's no need to rush to war."

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