

Book: Israel, Lobby Pushing Iran War

Nathan Guttman | Fri. Dec 29, 2006

A former United Nations weapons inspector and leading Iraq War opponent has written a new book alleging that Jerusalem is pushing the Bush administration into war with Iran, and accusing the pro-Israel lobby of dual loyalty and “outright espionage.”

In the new book, called “Target Iran,” Scott Ritter, who served as a senior U.N. weapons inspector in Iraq from 1991 to 1998 and later became one of the war’s staunchest critics, argues that the United States is readying for military action against Iran, using its nuclear program as a pretext for pursuing regime change in Tehran.

“The Bush administration, with the able help of the Israeli government and the pro-Israel Lobby, has succeeded,” Ritter writes, “in exploiting the ignorance of the American people about nuclear technology and nuclear weapons so as to engender enough fear that the American public has more or less been pre-programmed to accept the notion of the need to militarily confront a nuclear armed Iran.”

Later in the book, Ritter adds: “Let there be no doubt: If there is an American war with Iran, it is a war that was made in Israel and nowhere else.”

Ritter’s book echoes recent high-profile attacks on the pro-Israel lobby by former President Jimmy Carter and by scholars Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer. Ritter, who recently returned from a weeklong speaking engagement on The Nation cruise, speaks of a “network of individuals” that pursues Israel’s interests in the United States. The former weapons inspector alleges that some of the pro-Israel lobby’s activities “can only be described as outright espionage and interference in domestic policies.” Ritter also accused the American Israel Public Affairs Committee of having an inherent dual loyalty. He called for the organization to be registered as a foreign agent.

Representatives for both Aipac and the Israeli Embassy in Washington declined to comment on Ritter’s accusations.

In his book, Ritter also accuses the pro-Israel lobby of invoking the memory of the Holocaust and of crying antisemitism whenever Israel is accused of betraying America. “This is a sickening and deeply disturbing trend that must end,” Ritter writes.

According to Ritter, Iran is far from developing a nuclear weapons program and will not do so in the future if the world makes sure that stringent inspections are in place to verify that the Iranians live up to the requirements of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

“If Iran does make a political decision to develop nuclear weapons, it will take them a decade and it won’t go undetected,” Ritter said. “But it will take the U.S. only five weeks to build up a force capable of destroying Iran by air strikes. It’s a timeline of five weeks compared to a decade, so I’m not worried about taking a risk.”

As for Israeli and American fears regarding Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president who vowed to “wipe Israel off the map,” Ritter dubbed the leader a “sick joke” and asserted that he does not make the decisions in Tehran.

Ritter argues that the Bush administration knows that inspections can solve the Iranian nuclear problem but, at the urging of Jerusalem and its American allies, is in reality pursuing a different goal: regime change in Tehran.

“Israel has, through a combination of ignorance, fear and paranoia, elevated Iran to a status that it finds unacceptable,” Ritter writes in his book. “Israel has engaged in policies that have further inflamed this situation. Israel displays arrogance and rigidity when it comes to developing any diplomatic solution to the Iranian issue.”

Ritter is no stranger to controversy.

As a U.N. weapons inspector in Iraq, he headed several surprise inspection missions that were denied access to suspicious sites, and led to the Saddam Hussein regime accusing Ritter of being an American spy. The frequent refusal of the Iraqis to provide Ritter and his team access to sites of interest led eventually to the abandonment of the inspection regime in Iraq. Ritter resigned his post in 1998, accusing the United States and the U.N. of caving in to the Iraqis.

But Ritter later became a leading voice warning against taking military action against Iraq, arguing that a resumption of inspections would be sufficient to contain Hussein. He accused the United States of trying to use the U.N. inspection force for spying purposes and claimed that Iraq was deliberately held to higher standards than other countries in order to justify a military invasion.

In early 2004, Ritter charged in an interview on the Web site Ynet, operated by the daily Yediot Aharonot, that Israeli intelligence had deliberately overstated what it knew to be a minimal threat from Iraq in an effort to push America and Britain to launch a war. Ritter’s accusations were roundly rejected across the Israeli political spectrum. Security officials interviewed by the Forward insisted that no branch of the military could or would deliberately skew the findings in that way, but they also said that Israeli intelligence tended to exaggerate threats because it was operating under flawed assumptions.

Now Ritter is arguing that a similar effort is under way to produce an attack against Iran.

Speaking to the Forward this week, Ritter stressed that he is not accusing all American Jews of having dual loyalty, saying that “at the end of the day, I would like to believe that most of American Jews will side with America.”

Ritter is already working on his next book, due for publication in March 2007. In this tome, he sets out to teach the anti-war movements that he supports how to wage an effective campaign to win over American public opinion.

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