

British MP Blasts Senate Iraq Charges

British Parliamentarian George Galloway (Labour) appeared before the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations on May 17, to answer charges made against him in hearings on the United Nations Oil-for-Food Program. Galloway's statement followed opening presentations by Senators and investigators that outlined the charges against him and others, but made clear that at least 50% of the surcharge-kickbacks which were made to Saddam Hussein, were carried out by the American company Bayoil.



We include here the bulk of Galloway's opening statement, and some of his interchange with Subcommittee Chairman Sen. Norm Coleman (R-Minn.) and Ranking Democrat Sen. Carl Levin (Mich.). Subheads have been added.

Senator, I am not now nor have I ever been an oil trader and neither has anyone on my behalf. I have never seen a barrel of oil, owned one, bought one, sold one, and neither has anyone on my behalf.

Now, I know that standards have slipped over the last few years in Washington, but for a lawyer, you're remarkably cavalier with any idea of justice.

I'm here today, but last week, you already found me guilty. You traduced my name around the world without ever having asked me a single question, without ever having contacted me, without ever having written to me or telephoned me, without any contact with me whatsoever. And you call that justice.

Now, I want to deal with the pages that relate to me in this dossier, and I want to point out areas where there are—let's be charitable and say "errors." And then I want to put this in the context that I believe it ought to be.

On the very first page of your document about me, you assert that I have had many meetings with Saddam Hussein.

This is false.

I have had two meetings with Saddam Hussein, once in

1994, and once in August of 2002. By no stretch of the English language can that be described as "many meetings with Saddam Hussein."

As a matter of fact, I've met Saddam Hussein exactly the same number of times as Donald Rumsfeld met him.

The difference is Donald Rumsfeld met him to sell him guns and to give him maps, the better to target those guns.

I met him to try and bring about an end to sanctions, suffering, and war. And on the second of the two occasions, I met him to try and persuade him to allow Dr. Hans Blix and the United Nations weapons inspectors back into the country; a rather better use of two meetings with Saddam Hussein than your own Secretary of State for Defense made of his.

In the same opening paragraph, you assert that I was an outspoken supporter of the Hussein regime. This is false.

I have brought along here a dossier for all the members of your committee, of statements by me, as early as the 15th of March 1990, in which I condemn the Saddam Hussein dictatorship in the most withering terms, a stance I have taken since around about the time you were an anti-Vietnam War demonstrator.

I was an opponent of Saddam Hussein when [the] British and American governments and businessmen were selling him guns and gas.

I used to demonstrate outside the Iraqi Embassy when British and American officials were going in and out doing commerce. You will see from the official parliamentary record, *Hansard*, from the 15th of March 1990 onwards, voluminous evidence that I have a rather better record of opposition to Saddam Hussein than you do, and than any members of the British or American governments do.

'You Have Nothing on Me, Senator'

Now, you say in this document—you quote a source—you have the gall to quote a source without ever having asked me if the allegation from the source was true—that I am, quote, "the owner of a company which has made substantial profits from trading in Iraqi oil."

Senator, I do not own any companies beyond a small company whose entire purpose, whose sole purpose, is to receive the income from my journalistic earnings from my employer, Associated Newspapers, in London.

I do not own a company that's been trading in Iraqi oil. And you had no business to carry a quotation—utterly unsubstantiated and false—implying otherwise.

Now, you have nothing on me, Senator, except my name on lists of names from Iraq, many of which have been drawn up after the installation of your puppet government in Baghdad.

If you had any of the letters against me that you had against [Vladimir] Zhirinovskiy and even [Charles] Pasqua, they would have been up there in your slide show for the members of your committee today.

You have my name on lists provided to you by the Duelfer inquiry, provided to him by the convicted bank robber and

fraudster and con man Ahmed Chalabi, who many people—to their credit—in your country now realize played a decisive role in leading your country into the disaster in Iraq.

There were 270 names on that list originally. That has somehow been filtered down to the names you chose to deal with in this committee.

Some of the names on that committee included the former secretary to His Holiness Pope John Paul II, the former head of the African National Congress presidential office, and many others who had one defining characteristic in common: They all stood against the policy of sanctions and war which you vociferously prosecuted and which has led us to this disaster.

You quote Mr. Taha Yassin Ramadan. Well, you have something on me: I have never met Mr. Ramadan; your subcommittee apparently has.

But I do know that he is your prisoner. I believe he's in Abu Ghraib prison. I believe he's facing war crimes charges punishable by death.

In these circumstances, knowing what the world knows about how you treat prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison, in Bagram Air Base, in Guantanamo Bay—including, I may say, British citizens being held in those places—I'm not sure how much credibility anyone would put on anything you manage to get from a prisoner in those circumstances.

But you quote 13 words from Taha Yassin Ramadan, whom I have never met. If he said what he said, then he is wrong.

And if you had any evidence that I had ever engaged in any actual oil transaction, if you had any evidence that anybody ever gave me any money, it would be before the public and before this committee today, because I agreed with your Mr. Greenblatt. Your Mr. Greenblatt was absolutely correct.

What counts is not the names on the paper; what counts is: where is the money, Senator? Who paid me hundreds of thousands of dollars of money?

The answer to that is, nobody. And if you had anybody who ever paid me a penny, you would have produced them here today.

Now, you refer at length to a company named in these documents as Aredio Petroleum.

I say to you under oath here today: I have never heard of this company. I have never met anyone from this company. This company has never paid a penny to me.

And I'll tell you something else: I can assure you that Aredio Petroleum has never paid a single penny to the Mariam Appeal campaign; not a thin dime.

I don't know who Aredio Petroleum are, but I dare say, if you were to ask them, they would confirm that they have never met me, or ever paid me a penny.

Whilst I'm on that subject, who is this senior former regime official that you spoke to yesterday? Don't you think I have a right to know? Don't you think the committee and the public have a right to know who this senior former regime official you are quoting against me, interviewed yesterday, actually is?

Now, one of the most serious of the mistakes that you have made in this set of documents is, to be frank, such a schoolboy howler as to make a fool of the efforts that you have made. . . .

The existence of forged documents implicating me in commercial activities with the Iraqi regime is a proven fact. It's a proven fact that these forged documents existed and were being circulated amongst right-wing newspapers in Baghdad, and around the world, in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Iraqi regime.

Smokescreen To Cover U.S. Crimes

Now, Senator, I gave my heart and soul to oppose the policy that you promoted.

I gave my political life's blood to try to stop the mass killing of Iraqis by the sanctions on Iraq, which killed a million Iraqis, most of them children. Most of them died before they even knew that they were Iraqis, but they died for no other reason other than that they were Iraqis, with the misfortune to be born at that time.

I gave my heart and soul to stop you committing the disaster that you did commit in invading Iraq.

And I told the world that your case for the war was a pack of lies.

I told the world that Iraq, contrary to your claims, did not have weapons of mass destruction.

I told the world, contrary to your claims, that Iraq had no connection to al-Qaeda.

I told the world, contrary to your claims, that Iraq had no connection to the atrocity on 9/11/2001.

I told the world, contrary to your claims, that the Iraqi people would resist a British and American invasion of their country, and that the fall of Baghdad would not be the beginning of the end, but merely the end of the beginning.

Senator, in everything I said about Iraq, I turned out to be right and you turned out to be wrong, and 100,000 people have paid with their lives: 1,600 of them American soldiers sent to their deaths on a pack of lies; 15,000 of them wounded, many of them disabled forever, on a pack of lies.

If the world had listened to Kofi Annan, whose dismissal you demanded; if the world had listened to President Chirac, who you want to paint as some kind of corrupt traitor; if the world had listened to me and the anti-war movement in Britain, we would not be in the disaster that we are in today.

Senator, this is the mother of all smokescreens. You are trying to divert attention from the crimes that you supported, from the theft of billions of dollars of Iraq's wealth.

The Real Scandal in Iraq

Have a look at the real Oil-for-Food scandal.

Have a look at the 14 months you were in charge of Baghdad—the first 14 months—when \$8.8 billion of Iraq's wealth went missing on your watch.

Have a look at Halliburton and the other American corporations that stole not only Iraq's money, but the money of the

American taxpayer.

Have a look at the oil that you didn't even meter, that you were shipping out of the country and selling, the proceeds of which went who knows where.

Have a look at the \$800 million you gave to American military commanders to hand out around the country without even counting it or weighing it.

Have a look at the real scandal breaking in the newspapers today, revealed in the earlier testimony of this committee, that the biggest sanctions busters were not me or Russian politicians or French politicians; the real sanctions busters were your own companies, with the connivance of your own government.

During the questions and answers, Galloway had an acrimonious interchange with Senator Coleman, which centered on the role of an Iraqi businessman, Fawaz Zuraiqat, who served on Galloway's foundation. This was followed by an exchange with Senator Levin, on the question of his view about the propriety of kickbacks in the Oil-for-Food Program. The substance of his answer on the latter question follows:

Here's my answer, and I hope it does delight you.

I opposed the Oil-for-Food Program with all my heart, not for the reasons that you are troubled by it, but because it was a program which saw the death—I'm talking about the death now, I'm talking about a mass grave—of a million people, most of them children, in Iraq.

The Oil-for-Food Program gave 30 cents per day, per Iraqi, for the period of the oil-for-food program: 30 cents for all food, all medicine, all clothes, all schools, all hospitals, all public services.

I believe that the United Nations had no right to starve Iraq's people because it had fallen out with Iraq's dictator.

David Bonior, your former colleague, Senator, whom I admired very much, a former chief whip here on the Hill, described the sanctions policy as "infanticide masquerading as politics."

Senator Coleman thinks that's funny, but I think it's the most profound description of that era that I have ever read: "infanticide masquerading as politics."

So I opposed this program with all my heart, not because Saddam was getting kickbacks from it—and I don't know when it's alleged these kickbacks started—not because some individuals were getting rich doing business with Iraq under it, but because it was a murderous policy of killing huge numbers of Iraqis. That's what troubles me. That's what troubles me.

Now, if you're asking me, is Mr. Zuraiqat in some difficulty like all the other companies that it would appear paid kickbacks to the Iraqi regime, no doubt he is. Although it would appear he's quite small deer compared to the American companies who were involved in the same thing.