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Three Iraq Myths That Won't Quit

By Scott Ritter

06/26/06 "AlterNet" -- -- It is hard sometimes to know what is real and what is fiction when it comes to the news out of Iraq. America is in its "silly season," the summer months leading up to a national election, and the media is going full speed ahead in exploiting its primacy in the news arena by substituting responsible reporting with headline-grabbing entertainment.

So, as America closes in on the end of June and the celebration of the 230th year of our nation's birth, I thought I would pen a short primer on three myths on Iraq to keep an eye out for as we "debate" the various issues pertaining to our third year of war in that country.

The myth of sovereignty Imagine the president of the United States flying to Russia, China, England, France or just about any other nation on the planet, landing at an airport on supposedly sovereign territory, being driven under heavy U.S. military protection to the U.S. Embassy, and then with some five minutes notification, summoning the highest elected official of that nation to the U.S. Embassy for a meeting. It would never happen, unless of course the nation in question is Iraq, where Iraqi sovereignty continues to be hyped as a reality when in fact it is as fictitious as any fairy tale ever penned by the Brothers Grimm. For all of the talk of a free Iraq, the fact is Iraq remains very much an occupied nation where the United States (and its ever decreasing "coalition of the willing") gets to call all the shots.

Iraqi military policy is made by the United States. Its borders are controlled by the United States. Its economy is controlled largely by the United States. In fact, there simply isn't a single major indicator of actual sovereignty in Iraq today that can be said to be free of overwhelming American control. Iraqi ministers continue to be shot at by coalition forces, and Iraqi police are powerless to investigate criminal activities carried out by American troops (or their mercenary counterparts, the so-called "Private Military Contractors"). The reality of this

myth is that the timeline for the departure of American troops from Iraq is being debated (and decided) in Washington, D.C., not Baghdad. Of course, as with everything in Iraq, the final vote will be made by the people of Iraq. But these votes will be cast in bullets, not ballots, and will bring with them not only the departure of American troops from Iraq, but also the demise of any Iraqi government foolish enough to align itself with a nation that violates international law by planning and waging an illegal war of aggression, and continues to conduct an increasingly brutal (and equally illegitimate) occupation.

The myth of Zarqawi I have said all along that the poll figures showing Americans to be overwhelmingly against the war in Iraq were illusory. Only 28 percent of Americans were against the war when we invaded Iraq. The ranks have swelled to over 60 percent not because there has been an awakening of social conscience and responsibility, but rather because things aren't going well in Iraq, and there is increasing angst in the American heartland because we seem to be losing the war in Iraq, and no one likes a loser. So when the word came that the notorious terrorist, Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, was killed by American military action, the president suddenly had a "good week," and poll numbers adjusted slightly in his favor. However, the facts cannot be re-written, even by a slavish American mainstream media. Zarqawi was never anything more than a minor player in Iraq, a third-rate Jordanian criminal whose exploits were hyped up by a Bush administration anxious to prove that the insurgency that was getting the best of America in Iraq was foreign-grown and linked to the perpetrators of the 9/11 terror attacks nonetheless. The reality of just how wrong such an assessment is (and was) has been pounded home in blood. Since Zarqawi's death, the violence has continued to spiral out of control in Iraq, with Americans continuing to die, Iraqis still being slaughtered, and Zarqawi and his organization, successor and all, still as irrelevant to reality as ever. The war against the American occupation in Iraq is being fought overwhelmingly by Iraqis. The insurgency is growing and becoming stronger and more organized by the day. This, of course, is a reality that the Bush administration cannot afford to have the American people know about in an election year, as a compliant media, having sold its soul to the devil in hyping of the virtues of an invasion of Iraq back in 2002-2003, continues to dance with the party that brought them by supporting the Republican position, by and large, that the conflict in Iraq is a winnable one for America. Good ratings, more dead Americans (and Iraqis, but who is counting?) and a war that will never end until the United States finally slinks out, defeated, its tail tucked firmly between its legs.

The myth of WMD Regardless of what Sen. Rick Santorum and the lunatic neoconservative fringe want to think, no weapons of mass destruction have been found in Iraq. Citing a classified Department of Defense report that claims some 500 artillery shells have been found in Iraq by U.S. forces since the invasion and

subsequent occupation of Iraq in March 2003, Santorum and his cronies in the right-wing media have been spouting nonsense about how Bush got it right all along, that there were WMD in Iraq after all. He conveniently fails to report that there is nothing "secret" about this data, it has all been reported before (by the Bush administration, nonetheless), and that the shells in question constitute old artillery munitions manufactured well prior to 1991 (the year of the first Gulf War, and a time after which the government of Saddam Hussein stated -- correctly, it turned out -- that no WMD were produced in Iraq). The degraded sarin nerve agent and mustard blister agent contained in the discovered munitions had long since lost their viability, and as such represented no threat whatsoever. Furthermore, the haphazard way in which they were "discovered" (lying about the ground, as opposed to carefully stored away) only reinforces the Iraqi government's past claims that many chemical munitions were scattered about the desert countryside in remote areas following U.S. bombing attacks on the ammunition storage depots during the first Gulf War. Having personally inspected scores of these bombed-out depots, I can vouch for the veracity of the past Iraqi claims, as well as the absurdity of the claims made today by Santorum and others, who continue to hold personal political gain as being worth more than the blood of over 2,500 dead Americans.

These three myths -- WMD, Zarqawi and Iraqi sovereignty -- are what members of Congress should be debating in their halls of power, the American media should be discussing either in print or across the airwaves, and that discussion should constitute the foundation of a movement towards accountability, where the citizens of the United States finally point an accusatory finger at those whom they elected to represent them in higher office, and who have failed in almost every regard when it comes to Iraq. But then again, silly me for thinking this way, believing that there was an engaged constituency within America that knows and understands the Constitution of the United States and seeks to live each day as a true citizen empowered by the ideal and values set forth by that document. I had overlooked the Fourth Myth -- that American citizens are engaged in our national debate.

Scott Ritter served as chief U.N. weapons inspector in Iraq from 1991 until his resignation in 1998. He is the author of, most recently, "[Iraq Confidential: The Untold Story of the Intelligence Conspiracy to Undermine the U.N. and Overthrow Saddam Hussein](#)" (Nation Books, 2005).

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