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By Thomas P. Healy

*Perhaps it's a sign of these bizarre times that the country's most outspoken critic of the Bush administration's plan to invade Iraq is an avowed hawk. For several months now, ex-Marine Scott Ritter, who served as the chief U.N. weapons inspector in Iraq until 1998, has relentlessly presented arguments against invading Iraq in talks around the country, in op-ed pieces in major newspapers, and on radio and television. You won't find the 41-year-old son of a career Army officer putting flowers in the ends of gun barrels, but his blunt, forceful arguments might be persuasive enough to gain wider attention for opposition to the administration's press toward war. Ritter spoke with In These Times during a visit to Indianapolis.*



Charles Jenks / [traprockpeace.org](http://traprockpeace.org)

**Former U.N. weapons inspector Scott Ritter: speaking out against war on Iraq.**

### **What are your main objections to a U.S. invasion of Iraq?**

I am not a peace activist. I am not a pacifist. I am a warrior. I loved the Marine Corps—we stood for serving our country! But there is a time and a place to fight to defend this country. We must defend our country if we are threatened. If Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, then clearly Saddam Hussein must be dealt with. But we are not at risk from weapons of mass destruction from Saddam Hussein—there's no evidence.

If the United States unilaterally invades Iraq, we will go to war as a rogue nation ourselves and join

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the short list that includes North Korea, which invaded South Korea, and Saddam Hussein, who invaded Kuwait. And I don't want to be on that list.

**In 1991, at the end of the Gulf War, the United Nations set up a special commission to monitor the destruction of Iraq's missiles and weapons of mass destruction. How effective were the U.N. inspectors?**

UNSCOM inspectors were the best forensic investigators in the world. We were pretty good at doing our job. By 1996 we were able to ascertain that 90 to 95 percent of Iraq's capabilities were destroyed. When Richard Butler came on board in 1997, we had already fundamentally disarmed Iraq.

**Then you were kicked out.**

Saddam Hussein didn't kick out the U.N. inspectors. They were ordered out by the U.S. government, which then used information they provided to bomb 100 locations that had nothing to do with weapons of mass destruction. So the weapons inspectors were used by the United States. This is the reality: When Madeleine Albright called up Richard Butler and said, "Jump!" Richard Butler always said, "How high?" It was obvious from day one.

**After you resigned from UNSCOM in August 1998, you testified before Congress that if inspectors were removed from Iraq, they would have the capacity to reconstitute weapons of mass destruction. Isn't that a legitimate concern now?**

Just because Iraq has had time to do bad things doesn't mean they've done them. Iraq *must* be found to have weapons of mass destruction.

**Do economic interests play a factor in the war effort?**

Talk to any businessman about Iraq. This is the worst thing for business. This is stupid. Actually, oil prices are going up.

Iraq is currently pumping to capacity based upon the available pumping technology. But if they upgraded their capacity, they could double or triple output. Amer Muhammad Rasheed, the Iraqi oil minister, has plans for Iraqi oil production that are very ambitious.

American oil companies right now are playing it both ways. We have American oil executives going to an Amman, Jordan, meeting with Iraqi government officials to discuss a post-sanctions environment. You also have American oil companies sitting down with Ahmed Chalabi, the Iraqi opposition leader, talking about a post-regime economic environment. And they come from the same company. So they're hedging their bets.

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FILM: Beware, for I am the *Master of the Flying Guillotine*.

## **So why the headlong rush to war?**

I think this is more about the people surrounding George W. Bush—Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, John Bolton, Richard Perle—who have committed their political and intellectual capital to regime removal. They've invested in this so much that they've boxed themselves into a rhetorical and ideological corner where they have no ability to maneuver. We've trapped ourselves with our own rhetoric, with our own speculations, with our own ideology, our own politics. I think that's what this is all about. This is about politics.

## **If any other head of state used the term “regime change” it would be called terrorism.**

It *is* terrorism.

## **As you travel the country, what level of awareness do you see in the American people about this issue?**

I think the vast majority of Americans are just tragically ignorant—not just about Iraq, but about the rest of the world as a whole. They are susceptible to the kind of propagandistic manipulation that's taking place. ■

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