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War drive

George Galloway slams US war-mongers

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George Galloway's May 17 appearance before Senator Norm Coleman's Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs committee turned into a propaganda disaster for the the US, and a victory for the anti-war movement and Respect. Below we publish the full text of Galloway's opening statement.

Introduction

Respect supporters gave Galloway a three-minute standing ovation when he appeared at a rally in central London the day after his appearance before the Senate committee. The committee chair, Republican neo-conservative Norm Coleman, made a big error of judgement in allowing Galloway to appear before the committee.

Formally Galloway was there to reply to charges that he was given vouchers to sell 20 million barrels of oil by the Saddam government, in return for his opposition to the threat of US invasion.

These charges were easily brushed aside by Galloway, and were indeed in substance identical to similar accusations made by the right-wing London Daily Telegraph, which resulted in a High Court libel victory for Galloway in December 2004, along with £100,000 damages (the Telegraph is appealing against the ruling).

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/galloway_ap203.jpg]

Instead Galloway turned the tables, becoming the accuser and not the accused. He launched a sustained attack on the war and the continued occupation of Iraq, as well as the US's previous history of supporting Saddam and selling him arms.

His entire testimony was shown live on major US television networks, putting eloquently the anti-war case in a country where anti-war and anti-Bush views are rarely heard in the mass media. BBC's News 24 channel, which is broadcast by satellite and cable worldwide, carried the whole 47 minutes of Galloway's appearance.

The London Independent daily newspaper commented that "it would be an odd judge who did not agree that Galloway emerged as the victor" in the confrontation. The right-wing New York Daily News carried the banner headline: "Brit roasts senators in oil."

Galloway's propaganda coup is another boost for Respect, following some very good results in the May 5th general election, especially of course Galloway's victory in Bethnal Green and Bow. Reports from around the country in the wake of the speech all suggest - for the moment at least - a big boost in interest in Respect and attendance at meetings.

At the Respect rally on May 18, national secretary John Rees argued that Respect had established a "bridgehead", but like all bridgeheads it means either going forward or being driven back into the sea. For him going forward meant establishing a "mass membership party."

We can be sure that attacks on Galloway will intensify. Already he has assumed the role of previous popular left-wing leaders like Arthur Scargill and Tony Benn as being the 'whipping boy' for the right-wing press and right-wing

broadcasters. New 'scandals' will be 'discovered' against him, it is possible that a legal attempt to overturn his election result may be made (on the grounds of some electors voting twice) and Senator Norm Coleman made an oblique threat against him after the committee appearance.

If Galloway had lied, said Coleman, "there would have to be consequences of that." In other words if the committee judges that he was lying, they can demand Galloway's extradition to the US to face charges of perjury, where he could face a year of more in prison.

– Galloway's testimony has been removed from the website of the committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. Their press office refused to say why.

Download sound files of [Galloway speech](#).

Go to [BBC report](#) including video.

Transcript of Galloway's opening statement

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 in the last few years in Washington, but for a lawyer you are remarkably cavalier with any idea of justice. I am 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 written to me or telephoned me, without any attempt to contact 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.

Then, I want to put this in the context where 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 2002. By no stretch of the English language can that be described as "many meetings" with Saddam Hussein.

As a matter of fact, I have met Saddam Hussein exactly the same number of times as Donald Rumsfeld met him. The difference is that 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 let 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 Defence made of his.

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I was an opponent of Saddam Hussein when 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 doing commerce.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/norm_coleman.jpg]

Sen. Norm Coleman

You will see from the official parliamentary record Hansard, from March 15 1990 onwards, voluminous evidence that I have a rather better record of opposition to Saddam Hussein than you do and than any other member of the British or American governments do.

Now you say in this document, you quote a source, you have the gall to quote a source, without ever having asked me whether the allegation from the source is true, that I am "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 have 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 Zhirinovskiy and even Pasqua, they would have been up there in your slideshow 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 conman Ahmed Chalabi, who many people to their credit in your country now realise played a decisive role in leading your country into the disaster in Iraq.

There were 270 names on that list originally. That's somehow been filleted 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 Dahar Yassein Ramadan. Well, you have something on me. I've never met Mr Dahar Yassein Ramadan. Your sub-committee apparently has.

But I do know that he's your prisoner. I believe he's in Abu Ghraib prison.

I believe he is 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 airbase, 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 Dahar Yassein 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 (legal counsel) Mr Greenblatt.

Your Mr Greenblatt was absolutely correct. What counts is not the names on the paper, what counts is where's 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 today.

Now, you refer at length to a company names 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 daresay 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 were quoting against me interviewed yesterday actually is? Now, one of the most serious of the mistakes 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.

You assert on page 19, not once but twice, that the documents that you are referring to cover a different period in time from the documents covered by the Daily Telegraph which were a subject of a libel action won by me in the High Court in England late last year.

You state that the Daily Telegraph article cited documents from 1992 and 1993 whilst you are dealing with documents dating from 2001.

Senator, the Daily Telegraph's documents date identically to the documents that you were dealing with in your report here.

None of the Daily Telegraph's documents dealt with a period of 1992-93. I had never set foot in Iraq until late in 1993 - never in my life.

There could possibly be no documents relating to oil-for-food matters in 1992-93, for the oil-for-food scheme did not exist at that time.

And yet you've allocated a full section of this document to claiming that your documents are from a different era to the Daily Telegraph documents when the opposite is true. Your documents and the Daily Telegraph documents deal

with exactly the same period.

But perhaps you were confusing the Daily Telegraph action with the Christian Science Monitor. The Christian Science Monitor did indeed publish on its front pages a set of allegations against me very similar to the ones that your committee have made. They did indeed rely on documents which started in 1992-93. These documents were unmasked by the Christian Science Monitor themselves as forgeries.

Now, the neocon websites and newspapers in which you're such a hero, senator, were all absolutely cock-a-hoop at the publication of the Christian Science Monitor documents, they were all absolutely convinced of their authenticity.

They were all absolutely convinced that these documents showed me receiving \$10 million from the Saddam regime. And they were all lies.

In the same week as the Daily Telegraph published their documents against me, the Christian Science Monitor published theirs which turned out to be forgeries and the British newspaper, Mail on Sunday, purchased a third set of documents which also upon forensic examination turned out to be forgeries. So there's nothing fanciful about this. Nothing at all fanciful about it.

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.

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 one 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-Qaida. I told the world, contrary to your claims, that Iraq had no connection to the atrocity on September 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 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,

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from the theft of billions of dollars of Iraq's wealth.

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 Haliburton 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 in 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.