

Galloway tongue-lashes Coleman

Committee documents show Bush political friends and family paid Oil-for-Food kickbacks to Saddam Hussein

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British Member of Parliament George Galloway presented the U.S. Senate with the best tongue lashing since U.S. Army counsel Joseph Welch excoriated Senator Joseph McCarthy over his witch hunt directed at one of Welch's law firm associates who had been a member of the Lawyer's Guild: "You've done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?"

The May 17 testimony by Galloway, the newly-elected Respect Party member for East London's Bethnal Green and Bow constituency, was in response to a report issued by Minnesota Republican Senator Norm Coleman's Permanent Select Subcommittee on Investigations that charged Galloway with personally profiting from Iraq's United Nations Oil-for-Food program.

For Galloway, it was déjà vu. He had already successfully fended off charges that he accepted oil money from Saddam Hussein and successfully sued the neoconservative-owned Daily Telegraph for libel. Articles in the Telegraph and Christian Science Monitor citing documents from the Iraqi Foreign Ministry implicating Galloway in the Oil-for-Food scandal were later determined to be forgeries.

Shortly after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, the U.S. occupation authorities in Iraq invited Telegraph reporters into the bombed out remains of Iraqi intelligence headquarters. Among the documents "found" by the paper's reporters were those that "revealed" that Galloway had solicited hundreds of thousands of dollars from Iraq, funds skimmed from the Oil-for-Food program.

Coleman's committee resurrected the spurious charges against Galloway in its report. Mark L. Greenblatt, the counsel for the committee, relied on new suspicious documents said to have been obtained from the Iraqi Oil Ministry, now run by convicted bank embezzler and disinformation source Ahmad Chalabi. In addition, former Saddam officials Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan and Foreign Minister, Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, and an unnamed "senior official" of the regime, who are all incarcerated in U.S. military prisons awaiting trials that could lead to the death penalty, were all cited by Coleman's committee as supporting the documents used to charge Galloway and his humanitarian charity, Mariam's Appeal, with accepting oil proceeds from Iraq. Coleman stated that the ex-Iraqi officials were not looking for leniency in describing Iraq's oil deals with foreign officials. However, Coleman failed to state that the chief Iraqi prosecutor for the upcoming trials is Salem Chalabi, the nephew of Ahmad Chalabi, whose oil ministry was reported by the committee to have produced the questionable documents. Salem is also a law partner of Marc Zell, the East Jerusalem-based former law partner of outgoing Pentagon official

Douglas Feith, whose former aide, Lawrence A. Franklin, has been indicted for passing classified information to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC)—a major funder of Coleman’s political campaigns and multiple trips to Israel—and Israeli embassy officials.

Poorly reproduced copies produced by the committee indicated that a Jordanian businessman and philanthropist named Fawaz Zuraiqat was the middleman for the oil transactions. Zuraiqat, who did business in Iraq during Saddam’s regime, became the chairman of Mariam’s Appeal after Galloway stepped down.

During the testimony, Greenblatt testified that the unnamed official was asked, “Did Iraq grant oil allocations to Galloway?” The counsel said the official tersely responded with, “Yes.” Greenblatt also testified that the senior unnamed official confirmed “a document” used as proof against Galloway was authentic. Coleman asked Greenblatt how he knew the documents in question were genuine. Greenblatt responded that they “corroborate with other documents.” Galloway later pointed out in his testimony that other documents from the same time period as those produced by the committee were proven to be forgeries.

The committee’s documents allegedly obtained from the Iraqi Oil Ministry contain references to an oil company called Aredio Petroleum Company. One document contains the words “Fawaz Zuraiqat–Mariam’s Appeal” in parentheses after “Aredio Petroleum Company.” Galloway testified that he had never heard of Aredio Petroleum before the Senate hearing.

Galloway and observers at a press conference noted that the committee not only translated the Oil Ministry documents and prepared a manipulated version to serve as report exhibits but also covered the poorly-copied Arabic versions with the manipulated English copies, making it impossible to read in their entirety the original Arabic text.

Carl Levin, who once was also accused by neoconservatives of accepting Oil-for-Food money from Saddam Hussein’s government, concentrated on the role of Bayoil, a Houston-based company, in evading Iraqi sanctions and profiting from the Oil-for-Food program.

One “beneficiary list”—supposedly found in the archives of the Iraqi Oil Ministry and translated by the shadowy Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), a Washington, DC-based group with links to Israel’s Likud Party—contained the name Shaker Al-Khafajji, an Iraqi-American businessman who was reported to have given \$400,000 to former UN weapons inspector and war critic Scott Ritter to produce a documentary. According to the alleged oil ministry documents, Al-Khafajji was said to have received a 10.5 million barrel oil allocation from Iraq. That same list contained the name of George Galloway, who was listed as a recipient or co-recipient of 19 million barrels of Iraqi oil. Galloway’s Mariam’s Appeal contributor and later chairman Fawaz Zureikat (the spelling used in the MEMRI documents), was said to have received 6 million barrels. The list was also published in Baghdad by a new independent newspaper named Al Mada,

When pressed by Coleman if he knew that Mariam’s Appeal, named for an Iraqi girl who was battling cancer, had received money from Saddam through Zuraiqat, Galloway said that the Jordanian businessman was the charity’s third largest donor (375,000 British pounds) after United Arab Emirates President Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahayan and Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah. Galloway said Zuraiqat made introductions on behalf of Mariam’s Appeal in Baghdad and that he was not aware of all of Zuraiqat’s business dealings. Galloway said that Coleman likely “didn’t know what business his AIPAC donators were involved in.”

Galloway drew the committee's attention to the fact that British Attorney General Lord Goldsmith ordered the British Charity Commission to investigate Mariam's Appeal and found "no problem" after "every penny in and out" were scrutinized. He said the audit found no donations from Aredio Petroleum as alleged in the committee documents. Galloway said Zuraikat never gave him any money from "an oil deal, a cake deal, or a bread deal."

The charges brought by Coleman's committee largely rehashed the original accusations contained in the MEMRI-laundered documents. Those same MEMRI documents contained the names of French Senator and former Interior Minister Charles Pasqua, who was also cited in the Coleman Committee documents. Other recipients named in the MEMRI-tainted documents included the very same Russian political parties and leaders mentioned in the Coleman Committee report, including Vladimir Zhironovsky's Russian Liberal Democratic Party. Even an adviser to anti-war Pope John Paul II, French priest Father Jean-Marie Benjamin, was implicated in the MEMRI documents. Benjamin was accused of accepting 4.5 million barrels of oil because he arranged a meeting between Tariq Aziz, an Iraqi Christian, and the pope. Benjamin is secretary general of the Assisi-based Beato Angelica Foundation and once served as a special events official for UNICEF where he collaborated with the late actors Peter Ustinov and Audrey Hepburn.

In addition to anti-Iraq war political parties, politicians, and businessmen in France, Russia, Britain, Indonesia, Syria, Jordan, Turkey, Serbia, Canada, Lebanon, Palestine, Brazil, Egypt, India, South Africa, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Switzerland, Kenya, Libya, Malaysia, Morocco, Netherlands, China, Vietnam, Yemen, Nigeria, Sudan, Thailand, Tunisia, Pakistan, Chad, Myanmar, Belarus, Austria, and Ukraine, U.S. politicians who opposed the Iraqi war were also implicated because they supposedly (according to the neocon spin machine of newspapers and websites) accepted campaign contributions from Al-Khafajji. Among Al-Khafajji's recipients were Michigan Democrats Carl Levin, David Bonior, and John Conyers, as well as Bill Clinton and Al Gore's 1996 presidential campaign. The neocons claimed that all five Democratic leaders were involved in the Oil-for-Food scandal by association with Al-Khafajji's political donations.

According to the Calgary Sun, Canadian Arthur Milholland, the CEO of Calgary-based Oilexco (which allegedly received 9.6 million barrels of oil from Saddam), directly implicated MEMRI in the forgeries of the documents used by the Telegraph and Al Mada (also cited by the Coleman committee). He told the paper, MEMRI "has some motives." Leith Shbeilat, chairman of the anti-corruption committee of the Jordanian Parliament was alleged to have received 15.5 million barrels of oil from Saddam. It is noteworthy that Shbeilat heads a committee that has jurisdiction over calls to have current Iraqi Oil Minister Ahmad Chalabi extradited to Jordan to serve a long prison sentence for his conviction for embezzling \$300 million from the collapsed Petra Bank of Jordan, the third largest bank in the country.

Galloway testified that Coleman, a lawyer, had been "cavalier with justice" in his investigation and accusations. Galloway also noted several errors in the committee documents and report. He said he met with Saddam twice—in 1994 and August 2002—and that did not constitute "many meetings" as stated in the Republican majority report. Galloway said he met with Saddam as many times as Donald Rumsfeld. However, Galloway said while that he met with Saddam to avert war, Rumsfeld met with Saddam "to sell him guns and give him maps."

When Coleman accused Galloway of being an outspoken supporter of Saddam's regime,

Galloway responded by emphasizing that he condemned Saddam in outspoken terms and provided the committee with a dossier containing Hansard parliamentary records of those denunciations. Galloway said he had a better record of opposition to Saddam than Coleman or “any other member of the American or British governments.”

Galloway also criticized Coleman for quoting an unnamed source without finding out if the allegations were true. He asked Coleman, “Who is this senior former official? Don’t I or the committee or the public have a right to know?” In a dramatic moment, Galloway thundered, “You have nothing on me, senator, other than my name on lists from your puppet government in Iraq.” Galloway added, “Knowing how you treat prisoners, I’m not sure how much credibility can be placed on the statements of prisoners.” He said, “Iraq never paid a cent to me or to Mariam’s Appeal.”

Galloway said that one of the Coleman committee’s most serious mistakes was stating that its alleged newly discovered documents covered a different period of time than the Daily Telegraph 2001 documents. He pointed out that the Telegraph documents covered 2001 and that they dated identically to the documents in the committee’s report. Galloway stated that the Christian Science Monitor published documents from 1992 and 1993 alleging that Galloway accepted Iraqi oil money but that these were unmasked as forgeries. Although the 1992 and 1993 documents were said to deal with the Oil-for-Food program, Galloway emphasized that the program did not exist then. However, Galloway said that neocon websites and papers were “all cock-a-hoot over the documents,” later proven to be forgeries.

Galloway said the case for war was “a pack of lies” and that the Coleman committee hearings was the “mother of all smoke screens” to divert attention away from the real Oil-for-Food scandal. He said that Halliburton had stolen Iraq’s money and that \$8 billion of Iraq’s wealth had been stolen since the war. In addition, Galloway pointed out that \$800 million in cash was given out in Iraq by U.S. military commanders. Galloway told the committee that the “real sanctions busters were your own companies and politicians.”

Galloway was correct in criticizing the Coleman committee for not concentrating on U.S. violations of Iraqi sanctions and pay-offs to Saddam in the Oil-for-Food program. The U.S. oil companies involved in the sanctions busting have long-standing connections to the Bush family and their largest corporate benefactors.

The Democratic minority report stated, “From 2000 to 2002, Bayoil (USA), Inc., and its affiliates, operating out of Houston, Texas, became one of the largest importers of Iraqi oil into the United States.” The report also states, “Samir Vincent, an Iraq-born American, obtained Iraqi oil allocations through his company Phoenix International LLC (McLean, Virginia), and sold them to Chevron Products Company, a division of Chevron USA, Inc.”

Federal authorities later indicted Vincent for his role in the oil-for-food scheme. Vincent pleaded guilty. Vincent was a close confidante of 1996 Republican Vice Presidential candidate Jack Kemp, who had opposed the Iraqi sanctions. Newsweek magazine reported that in October 2004, the FBI interviewed Kemp about his relationship with Vincent.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice sat on the board of Chevron before she joined the Bush White House as National Security Adviser. The company named one of its oil supertankers the SS Condoleezza Rice.

Bayoil is incorporated in the Bahamas with affiliates in Switzerland and Luxembourg. A Chilean-Italian named Augusto Giangrandi, a resident of Florida, served as chairman of Bayoil. Although Bayoil principals David Chalmers, Jr., Briton John Irving, and Ludmil Dionissiev, a Bulgarian citizen and permanent resident of Houston, were indicted, Giangrandi was not touched.

Giangrandi has a history that goes back to the Iran-Iraq war when Donald Rumsfeld was helping to arm Saddam and when the Reagan-Bush administration was violating UN arms sanctions imposed against both warring parties. During the war, Iraq bought hundreds of millions of dollars worth of cluster bombs and other weapons from Carlos Cardoen, a Chilean arms manufacturer who was close to Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet. In 1983, Cardoen hired Giangrandi, then a resident of Florida, to ship zirconium from the United States to Iraq. Zirconium is used in the manufacture of cluster bombs. Giangrandi falsely stated in his expert license application that the zirconium would be used for mining explosives in Chile. Giangrandi also owned Cosmos of Livorno, Italy, the manufacturer of mini-submarines and served as president of Swisstech, Cardoen's marketing unit.

According to a 1995 deposition by Howard Teicher, a Reagan National Security Council official, Cardoen was working for the CIA to illegally ship military hardware to Saddam. Giangrandi's operation was part of a much larger criminal conspiracy involving agricultural loans guaranteed by the Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation and funded by Italy's Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL). The failed Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) (also known as the Bank of Crooks and Criminals International) had connections to both BNL and Ahmad Chalabi's Petra Bank. In 1992, The Wall Street Journal reported that George W. Bush and Jeb Bush had been named as potential witnesses in the class action lawsuit brought about the clients of BCCI who had been defrauded in the bank's collapse. During the time, George W. was involved in various failed oil companies in Houston and Jeb, operating from a base in Miami, was involved in suspicious real estate deals.

There was another Florida connection to the illegal arms shipments to Iraq. Iraqi arms dealer Ishan Barbouti worked with Iran-contras felon Richard Secord to secretly ship large amounts of cyanide from Product Ingredient Technologies, a food-flavoring factory in Florida, to Iraq for use in Saddam's nerve gas production during the 1980s. All of these transactions involving Bayoil's Giangrandi, Cardoen, Secord, and Barbouti, were known to President George H. W. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker.

Between 1990 and 1991, three journalists who were investigating various aspects of Cardoen's secretive arms trading activities were found dead in suspicious circumstances. They were freelance writer Danny Casolaro, found dead from wrist slashes in a bathtub in a Martinsburg, West Virginia, hotel; Lawrence Ng, a stringer for the Financial Times, found shot to death in the bathtub of his apartment in Guatemala City; and Jonathan Moyle, a British aviation journalist found hanging in the closet of his hotel room in Santiago, Chile. Moyle had uncovered details of Cardoen's role in the Bush 41 deal to illegally ship weapons to Iraq.

Under the Oil-for-Food program, the Saddam regime was charging a hefty surcharge per barrel of oil—money that went directly into the bank accounts of Saddam and his closest officials. According to the Democratic minority report, while French company TotalFinaElf objected to paying the surcharge, American companies like ExxonMobil and Texaco began to acquire Iraqi oil through third parties that were paying the surcharge. These third parties included Bayoil.

In mid-February 2003, just weeks from the onset of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, oil tankers began loading Iraqi crude at the Iraqi port of Khor al-Amaya. The Bush administration-approved sanction-busting oil shipments involved a Jordanian company named Millennium, owned by the Shaheen Business Investment Group and a Connecticut-based shipbroker called Odin Marine, Inc. Oil tankers were permitted to off load their oil at the UAE port of Fujairah for reshipment on larger tankers without any interference from the U.S. Navy-led Maritime Interdiction Force (MIF), set up to enforce the sanctions. Giangrandi's company, Italtech, was involved in a number of the shipments as a U.N. contract holder (lifter).

When Iraq's Oil Minister expressed his suspicion that the oil shipments would never get by the U.S. Navy defenses, a mysterious high-ranking visitor told him the Iraqi oil was "for the sake of the people who work for the defense of the United States. It will pass through safely." When the unknown visitor later asked for additional oil shipments from Khor al-Amaya he assured the minister that "you will never hear about this in the press any more. The U.S. forces will make them be quiet."

Millennium chartered seven ships through Odin. Shipping communications obtained by the committee proved that the tankers traveled with the full knowledge and acquiescence of the Maritime Interdiction Force, then under the command of a U.S. naval officer, Commander Harry French. The MIF permitted all the ships loading oil from Khor al-Amaya to leave the Gulf without interference. Odin became concerned about the legality of the shipments and eventually contacted U.S. State Department official Amy Schedlebauer. Two hours after Odin's general counsel contacted Schedlebauer, she responded in an e-mail: 'AWARE OF THE SHIPMENTS AND HAS DETERMINED NOT TO TAKE ACTION.'

Coleman and Levin wrote a February 8, 2005, letter to Rumsfeld asking about the operations of the Maritime Interdiction Force in the Gulf prior to the war. A similar letter was sent to the State Department inquiring about the illegal Khor al-Amaya oil shipments. To date, the committee has not received an answer from either Rumsfeld or Rice.

Minority report documents indicate that one of the largest recipients of Bayoil Iraqi oil shipments was Enron, the bankrupt company that served as a virtual slush fund for the political campaigns of George H. W. Bush, George W. Bush, and California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The following describe the shipments to Enron:



At the same time Enron Chairman Kenneth ("Kenny Boy") Lay was involved in Vice President Dick Cheney's Energy Task Force secret dealings and when he was stuffing hundreds of thousands of dollars into the pockets of George W. Bush and Cheney's political campaign, he also managed to illegally stick \$206, 757 into the pockets of Saddam Hussein and his cohorts.

The Iraqi Oil-for-Food scandal also involves one of the Bush children—Dorothy "Doro" Bush Koch, sister of George W. Bush and married to Bobby Koch, reportedly a cousin in the oil industry Koch family, the owner of Koch Industries, which is also one of Bush's largest political donors. The minority committee report indicates that Koch Industries was also a major recipient of illegal Iraqi oil and a huge source of kickbacks to Saddam Hussein:



The total sum in kickbacks from George W. Bush's cousin-in-laws to Saddam's bank accounts: \$1,294,620.

George Galloway was correct when he called the Coleman Committee the "mother of all smoke screens." Major political contributors and friends of Bush not only paid illegal kickbacks to Saddam Hussein but personally profited from sanctions-busting with Iraq. Those involved in the scheme included individuals who date back to the Reagan/Bush 41 "cluster bombs and biological and chemical weapons-for-oil" scandal of the 1980s. Galloway is correct when he stated that there is enough evidence on Mr. Bush and Mr. Blair and their neocon advisers to park them in prison cells in The Hague for an awfully long time.

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