

Where Are Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction?

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BEGALA: Thank you both for joining us. I know you've got votes on Capitol Hill, so thanks for taking the time.

Congressman Pence, let me begin with you. As Tucker mentioned, Senator Pat Roberts is the Republican Chairman of the select Committee on Intelligence in the United States Senate. By tradition, the Senate runs its intelligence community in a very, very bipartisan manner.

Sources on the Hill today told me that Senator Jay Rockefeller, the vice chairman of that committee, a Democrat, was not even informed about the press conference, much less the plans that Roberts has. Doesn't that suggest this is actually just partisan and maybe even a rigged deal?

REP. MIKE PENCE (R), INDIANA: Well, I'll tell you what, it may be partisan, but in a peculiar way, Paul, I mean, quite frankly, I talked to members of the House Intelligence Committee today here on the House floor and they thought that the suggestion that the Senate Intelligence Committee or the House Committee, as you know, Paul, work very closely together, needed to begin to look into this kind of information when they have all along, members of both parties, of both chambers' intelligence committees, have been all along studying the evidence for over a decade of the clear presence of a WMD program in Iraq was really questionable.

I was disappointed when Senator Roberts made the pronouncement that he made. The Intelligence Committee has a role to play. They've been playing it all along.

CARLSON: Congresswoman Schakowsky, the implication for many on the Democratic left is that there was some sort of conspiracy or cover up, the administration misled the public into thinking Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. I want to read you a quote from Dick Gephardt,

a Democrat in the House.

He said this on Sunday on CBS. "I think we have plenty of evidence that these weapons" -- that being weapons of mass destruction -- "were there and are there. And if they're not, if it's not true, there will be lots and lots of people who will be proven wrong."

In other words, it's not the Bush administration who misled America if those weapons turn out to be there, everybody thought they were there. This is true, isn't it?

REP. JAN SCHAKOWSKY (D), ILLINOIS: Well, it's not just the presence of weapons. It's whether or not they posed a serious and imminent threat to the United States and the rest of the world. And that was the pretext for the war.

And, for heaven sakes, if they weren't going to be used when we invaded, then clearly they were not a threat. And either, one, the intelligence was bad; two, the intelligence was manipulated, i.e. maybe there was some lying going on; or, three, they do exist, have been unprotected, our troops there are still at risk, or they've fallen into the wrong hands and do pose a serious threat, and we failed to protect them.

BEGALA: In fact, Congressman Pence, let me give you a few specifics. Our president told us before the war that Iraq had biological weapons. We now know that before the war his Defense Intelligence Agency told him there was not conclusive evidence of bioweapons production.

He told us that the IAEA, an inspection regime, said that Saddam Hussein was close to a nuclear weapon. The IAEA tells us that that's false.

He told us that these aluminum tubes were used for weapons. Even Condoleezza Rice, the president's national security adviser, says that that was false.

He told us Saddam Hussein tried to buy uranium in Africa. We now know that that was a forgery and false.

He said that there were close links to al Qaeda. We now know from two top al Qaeda leaders before the war that there were no such links. And he told us that these trailers that had been found were used to produce biological weapons and chemical weapons. We now know that that is false.

Isn't that enough to demand an inquiry, at least?

PENCE: Well, it might be enough for you, Paul, but I'd rather put my confidence in the overwhelming evidence of over a decade, beginning in 1991, when Saddam Hussein admitted to possessing 10,000 chemical warheads to UNSCOM. He also admitted to possessing 412 tons of chemical munitions.

And Paul, if you'll remember, I think you were in the Clinton administration in those years when Saddam Hussein threw out the weapons inspectors in 1998. President Clinton, your old boss,

ordered a bombing of Iraq to protect our interest against the nuclear, chemical and biological weapons that Iraq possessed. And so there is overwhelming evidence spanning two administrations, Paul, that these weapons were there.

BEGALA: That's right. They were there in 1998. President Clinton did, in fact, launch four days of massive air strikes against every single known or suspected weapon site. Isn't it logical to presume then that those strikes worked and destroyed his weapons and the inspections and the sanctions kept him from reconstituting it, so that, in fact, the (UNINTELLIGIBLE) were right that there was no imminent threat, right?

PENCE: Well, Paul, that is wishful thinking. It doesn't explain why Saddam Hussein then for five years continued to resist to provide any evidence that he had in fact destroyed those weapons or they were otherwise destroyed. It really defies logic and common sense and the overwhelming consensus of the intelligence community of the western world to suggest that a weapons program, weapons of mass destruction was not present in Iraq leading all the way up to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

CARLSON: Congresswoman Schakowsky, you said a minute ago -- and I want to pick up on this -- that you suggested that the administration was "lying" in its representation of the threat that Iraq posed. I want you to think about what you just said.

This conspiracy that you just posited would include the president, the vice president, Condoleezza Rice, the national security adviser, Secretary of State Colin Powell. It would include the head of the Defense Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, untold generals in every branch of the armed services.

It would also include France and Iran. The leaders of both countries said, yes, they believe Saddam had Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. That's a pretty huge conspiracy. Do you want to rethink the allegation?

SCHAKOWSKY: Well, now Donald Rumsfeld himself has said that perhaps they were in fact destroyed. We said, oh, we're not going to let the United Nations play a cat and mouse game. That's exactly what it looks like we're doing.

Look, this is war we're talking about. Whether -- if this administration and all those that you've said decided that they were only going to pick and choose, cherry pick the information that they wanted to make the case to send hundreds of thousands of our young men and women off to war, some to die, then they ought to have told us exactly what the truth was.

CARLSON: It's lying that we're talking about. You accused someone of lying. Do you think Colin Powell was lying?

SCHAKOWSKY: I said there are three options. The intelligence was bad, that they manipulated or even lied about the evidence, or that the weapons are there. Those are three options, and we ought to have a full investigation to find out if the truth was told and what we knew.

And if there are intelligence failures, let's find out about it. If not, why politically did we hear about this drumbeat to go to war when in fact those weapons -- we may have had intelligence. In fact, we know that there was no reliable evidence.

BEGALA: I'm sorry to cut you off. We're going to have to go to a quick break. And Congressman Pence, you're going to have a chance to respond in just a minute, because when we come back, Wolf Blitzer will have the latest on the headlines, including the latest on today's attacks in the Middle East.

And then here on CROSSFIRE, we will have "RapidFire", where the questions and answers are going to be even faster than President Bush's excuses for finding weapons of mass destruction or not.

And of course we have not forgotten our audience question. Stay tuned and see if Tucker Carlson has to start looking at a few cookbooks to find recipes for filet of sole. Stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

CARLSON: Thank you, Wolf, for those headlines. We look forward to your report at the top of the hour. But it's time now for "RapidFire", the fastest Q&A session in television.

We're talking about the Bush administration's intelligence, or perhaps lack thereof, about Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction. Joining us from Capitol Hill, Illinois Democratic Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky. And she is, by the way, my party's chief deputy whip in the House. And Indiana Republican Congressman Mike Pence.

CARLSON: Congresswoman, the public overwhelmingly supported this war. Do you really think Democrats are going to get political mileage out of questioning it now?

SCHAKOWSKY: Don't you think it is important that we know the truth? The truth about whether or not we were misled about going to war? That's the important thing.

BEGALA: Congressman Pence, it is a fact that Saddam Hussein didn't use weapons of mass destruction, as Ms. Schakowsky said earlier. Did he not use them because either, A, he didn't have them, or B, he's just too nice a guy?

PENCE: Well, it's probably, C, he may have been either killed or neutralized early in this engagement. The reality is, while we haven't found weapons of mass destruction yet, Paul, we did find literally hundreds of chem bio-suits that were deployed along the Baghdad border, as well as empty munitions that were created suitable for chemical weapons. And we found those mobile labs that Secretary of State Powell predicted that we would find. We found evidence of a program, if not the weapons themselves.

CARLSON: Congresswoman, don't you think it is a bit fishy that none of the people who claim they were pressured into a certain point of view by the administration is willing to go on the record?

SCHAKOWSKY: Well, you know you were talking -- you were making fun of Hans Blix before. He talked about the kind of pressure that was put on the U.N. inspectors to shape the information in a different way that suited the administration. And we talked about browbeating by Paul Wolfowitz.

You know this administration has been known to use retribution. And I don't blame them, necessarily, for not wanting to step forward. And if we're going to use this now to go into other countries, they may start thinking we're crying Wolfowitz.

BEGALA: Congressman Pence, do you support an open process and an open report about weapons of mass destruction?

PENCE: I support process that is open, in a way, Paul, that is consistent with our national security interest. The reason why we have secrecy on the House Intelligence Committee and among our leadership is to protect and promote our national interest.

But I think Jan and I both agree that it is important that the American people have confidence in our leadership. When all the facts are known, I know they will know President George W. Bush did the right thing in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

CARLSON: OK. Congressman Pence, Congresswoman Schakowsky, thank you both very much. We appreciate it.