

US Senate resumes attack on antiwar MP George Galloway

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British antiwar MP George Galloway has denounced a US Senate subcommittee's claim that he lied under oath when he rejected assertions that he had received money from the Iraqi oil-for-food programme. He has accused Republican Senator Norm Coleman, chairman of the subcommittee, of mounting a political vendetta.

The subcommittee's latest report charges Galloway with personally soliciting and receiving eight oil allocations totalling 23 million barrels from the Hussein government between 1999 and 2003. It alleges that at least £252,000 was channelled to Galloway's Mariam Appeal, opposing sanctions against Iraq, through its chairman, Jordanian businessman Fawaz Zureikat. Galloway is said to have "knowingly made false or misleading statements under oath" when he appeared before the subcommittee.

The report also says that Galloway's estranged wife Dr. Armineh Abu-Zayyad received £85,000 in connection with one allocation of oil, again through Zureikat.

Galloway has stressed that the supposed fresh evidence presented by Coleman on October 24 consists almost exclusively of allegations apparently made by Iraq's former deputy prime minister Tariq Aziz, Vice President Taha Yasin Ramadan and oil minister Amer Rashid, who have been in jail since the US invasion of Iraq.

The MP has challenged the Senate subcommittee to sue him for perjury and for Coleman to debate him in a venue of his choosing in his home state of Minnesota.

The allegations are largely a restating of the charges previously made against Galloway by the subcommittee, which also focused on his connections with Zureikat. Galloway has freely admitted that Zureikat provided funds to the Mariam Appeal and that he did not know where they had originated.

In May, the subcommittee issued a report naming Galloway as a beneficiary of oil allocations under the UN programme, just days after his election as MP for the Respect-Unity Coalition on an antiwar ticket. Galloway, who had successfully challenged similar allegations by the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Christian Science Monitor* in court, insisted on refuting the subcommittee's charges in person.

His May 17 appearance before the committee, in which he denounced the US and British government's illegal war against Iraq and described the charges against him as the "mother of all smokescreens," was shown around the world. Responding to claims that he had met repeatedly with Saddam Hussein, he told the subcommittee, "As a matter of fact, I have met Saddam Hussein exactly the same number of times as [US Secretary of Defence] Donald Rumsfeld met him. The difference is Donald Rumsfeld met him to sell him guns and to give him maps the better to target those guns."

Coleman has admitted that the subcommittee's decision to pursue Galloway was motivated by an effort to refute his earlier testimony and that the "additional evidence ... demonstrates that the testimony Mr. Galloway provided to the subcommittee was false and misleading."

A Senate aide told the media that the charges would be referred to the US Justice Department for investigation of possible perjury, false statements and obstruction of a congressional proceeding—infractions that carry a sentence of up to five years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine. The report has also been passed on to British authorities.

In response, Galloway said, "The evidence is statements made by people on trial for genocide and now living in the dungeons of the American occupation

in Iraq. Knowing what we do about what happens to people in those dungeons, you don't have to be a genius to work out why, after May, they would get somebody to say what they want them to say."

He reiterated, "There is not a shred of truth in any of these allegations. There has been no impropriety and I have not received even one thin dime from the oil-for-food programme."

Galloway demanded Coleman "put up or shut up." "I am demanding prosecution, I am begging for prosecution," he said. "I am saying if I have lied under oath in front of the senate, that's a criminal offence. Charge me and I will head for the airport right now and face them down in court as I faced them down in the Senate room."

"Because I publicly humiliated this lickspittle Senator Norman Coleman—one of Bush's right-hand men—in the US Senate in May, this sneak revenge attack has been launched over the past 24 hours."

The MP said he was unaware of the £84,000 allegedly deposited into his estranged wife's bank account by Zureikat: "These are allegations about my soon to be ex-wife, who divorced me on the front pages of the *Sunday Times* five days before the last general election."

Dr. Armineh Abu-Zayyad has rejected the allegation against her, stating, "I have never solicited or received from Iraq or anyone else any proceeds of any oil deals, either for myself or for my former husband."

For his part, Zureikat told the *Independent*, "I have been to Washington, New York and Texas travelling on my own passport with the knowledge of American officials. No one wanted to question me. I have restarted my business with Iraq and I have an office there. Iraqi officials have encouraged me to continue doing business."

"I have had meetings with American officials. They wanted to talk to me about Iraq before the war, but oil did not come up and George Galloway did not come up. I asked them to check me out and they said they had done that and there were no problems."

Galloway's assistant Ron McKay also challenged the validity of the witness statements. "Tariq Aziz has been in custody and we know from his lawyer this Senate committee offered him a deal—just what I do not know, whether reduced charges or freedom." He said that it was "ironic" that "Aziz, Yasin and Saddam are being

accused, on the one hand, of being homicidal maniacs and on the other of being relied upon to give a true and accurate statements uncoerced."

Today a United Nations investigation, headed by Paul Volcker, former chairman of the US Federal Reserve, will issue its own report into companies and individuals alleged to have received oil allocations.

Galloway has already stated that he was given an advance copy of the Volcker inquiry's findings, and that it concluded that he had received no money.



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