

TOM DAVIS, VIRGINIA,
CHAIRMAN

DAN BURTON, INDIANA
CHRISTOPHER SHAYS, CONNECTICUT
ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, FLORIDA
JOHN M. McHUGH, NEW YORK
JOHN L. MICA, FLORIDA
MARK E. SOUDER, INDIANA
STEVEN C. LATOURETTE, OHIO
DOUG OSE, CALIFORNIA
RON LEWIS, KENTUCKY
JO ANN DAVIS, VIRGINIA
TODD RUSSELL PLATTS, PENNSYLVANIA
CHRIS CANNON, UTAH
ADAM H. PUTNAM, FLORIDA
EDWARD L. SCHROCK, VIRGINIA
JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR., TENNESSEE
NATHAN DEAL, GEORGIA
CANDICE MILLER, MICHIGAN
TIM MURPHY, PENNSYLVANIA
MICHAEL R. TURNER, OHIO
JOHN R. CARTER, TEXAS
MARSHA BLACKBURN, TENNESSEE
PATRICK J. TIBERI, OHIO
KATHERINE HARRIS, FLORIDA

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-6074
FACSIMILE (202) 225-3974
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
TTY (202) 225-6852

www.house.gov/reform

HENRY A. WAXMAN, CALIFORNIA,
RANKING MINORITY MEMBER

TOM LANTOS, CALIFORNIA
MAJOR R. OWENS, NEW YORK
EDOLPHUS TOWNS, NEW YORK
PAUL E. KANJORSKI, PENNSYLVANIA
CAROLYN B. MALONEY, NEW YORK
ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS, MARYLAND
DENNIS J. KUCINICH, OHIO
DANNY K. DAVIS, ILLINOIS
JOHN F. TIERNEY, MASSACHUSETTS
Wm. LACY CLAY, MISSOURI
DIANE E. WATSON, CALIFORNIA
STEPHEN F. LYNCH, MASSACHUSETTS
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, MARYLAND
LINDA T. SANCHEZ, CALIFORNIA
C.A. DUTCH RUPPERSBERGER,
MARYLAND
ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON,
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
JIM COOPER, TENNESSEE
BETTY MCCOLLUM, MINNESOTA

BERNARD SANDERS, VERMONT,
INDEPENDENT

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, EMERGING THREATS,
AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Christopher Shays, Connecticut
Chairman

Room B-372 Rayburn Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
Tel: 202 225-2548
Fax: 202 225-2382

Statement of Rep. Christopher Shays October 5, 2004

The United Nations Oil-for-Food Program (OFFP) was mugged by Saddam Hussein. Through cynical yet subtle manipulation, he and an undeclared Coalition of the Venal on the Security Council exploited structural flaws in the program and institutional naiveté at the UN to transform a massive humanitarian aid effort into a multi-billion dollar sanctions-busting scam.

How did it happen? How was a well-intentioned program, designed and administered by the world's preeminent multinational organization, so systematically and thoroughly corrupted?

The answers emerging from our investigation point to a debilitating combination of political paralysis and a lack of oversight capacity, allowed to metastasize behind a veil of official secrecy. Acceding to shameless assertions of Iraqi sovereignty - sovereignty already betrayed by Saddam's brutal willingness to starve the Iraqi people - the UN gave the Hussein regime control over critical aspects of the program. Saddam decided with whom to do business and on what terms. While Chinese, French and Russian delegates to the Security Council's Sanctions Committee deftly tabled persistent reports of abuses, the contractors hired to finance and monitor the program had only limited authority to enforce safeguards.

We will hear from those contractors today. BNP Paribas, the international bank retained by the UN to finance oil and commodity transactions through letters of credit, describes its functions as purely “non-discretionary.” Saybolt International, responsible for verifying oil shipments, faced physical and political constraints on performance of their work. And the firm Cotecna Inspection was given only a “limited, technical role” in authenticating shipments of humanitarian goods into Iraq.

The UN appears to have assumed the rigor of commercial trade practices would protect the program; while the contractors took false comfort in the assumption the UN would assure the integrity of this decidedly non-commercial enterprise. Once it became clear the Security Council was politically unable to police the program, no one had any incentive to strengthen oversight mechanisms that would only be ignored.

As this and other investigations got underway, the companies expressed a willingness to provide detailed information on their Oil-for-Food activities. But confidentiality provisions in UN agreements prevented their coming forward until the Committee’s “friendly” subpoenas trumped those contractual restraints. Since then, they have provided thousands of pages, and gigabytes of data, which we and other committees are reviewing.

Today we are releasing some of those documents because, apart from any findings or recommendations we might adopt, a major goal of this investigation is to bring transparency to secretive U.N. processes and put information about an important international program in the public domain. The documents provide the first detailed glimpse into the structural vulnerabilities and operational weaknesses exploited by Saddam and his allies.

From what we have learned thus far, one conclusion seems inescapable: The UN sanctions regime against Iraq was all but eviscerated, turned inside out by political manipulation and greed. Saddam’s regime was not collapsing from within. It was thriving. He was not safely contained, as some contend, but was daily gaining the means to threaten regional and global stability again once sanctions were removed.

Testimony from our witnesses today will contribute significantly to our ongoing oversight, and to public understanding of the United Nations Oil-for-Food Program. We thank them for their participation today and we look forward to their continued cooperation in our work.