

'Inner War' Heats Up in Britain Over Iraq War

by Mark Burdman

During the first days of March, British Prime Minister Tony Blair stepped up his commitment to join with the United States in an attack on Iraq. But the more that Blair moves in this direction, the stronger becomes the opposition to him, inside Britain. Informed continental European strategists judge, that the outcome of this fight inside Britain, may be one determining factor in whether this new war occurs. Leading experts in Britain, moreover, say that the growing opposition to Blair on the Iraq issue is only the most visible sign, that decisions may have been made at the highest echelons in the U.K., to try to dump the Prime Minister politically.

On March 1, Blair arrived in Australia, for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. No sooner had he arrived than he began a series of interviews with the Australian media, warning of the threat posed by Iraq because of its development of "weapons of mass destruction," and reminding his audience that he intends to go to Washington in April, to discuss joint actions against Saddam Hussein with President George W. Bush.

On March 5, Blair's Foreign Secretary Jack Straw penned an article for the London *Times*, alleging that Saddam was rushing to produce nuclear weapons and must be stopped. Straw arrogantly dismissed the concerns of those who say, that more than ten years of economic sanctions have already punished Iraq more than enough.

On March 6, the London *Guardian* prominently ran a story headlined, "Britain and U.S. Prepare Public for Iraq Strike." Citing Foreign Office sources, the *Guardian* said Britain and the United States had worked out a "joint strategy." The paper stressed that British and Western "public opinion" is to be prepared by the Blair government's issuance of a "dossier," supposedly documenting Iraq's efforts to procure nuclear weapons.

Also March 6, Blair told the British Parliament, during a 90-minute debate on Iraq: "Iraq is plainly in breach of the United Nations Security Council resolutions in relation to the accumulation of weapons of mass destruction, and we have to deal with it." This was reported in a front-page article in London's *Daily Telegraph*, the daily with the closest ties to the Bush Administration, with the banner headline, "Count-down To War on Saddam," and subtitled, "Britain Prepares To Join Attack on Iraq."

The *Telegraph* reported that British Ambassador to the

United Nations, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, is working closely with his American counterpart, John Negroponte, in launching a major diplomatic-political offensive at the United Nations, to force a confrontation with Iraq on allowing UN weapons inspectors into the country. Wrote the *Telegraph*, "Washington wants the UN to issue a new demand for inspectors to be admitted, but hopes that Saddam rejects this, and so provides the *casus belli*."

'Two Different Americas'

But reactions against this war push have been swift. On March 2, a 20,000-person demonstration was held in London's Trafalgar Square, against both a new war against Iraq, and the ongoing bombing campaigns in Afghanistan. Organizer Jeremy Corbyn, a parliamentarian from Blair's and Straw's own Labour Party, told BBC that the bombing of Afghanistan had already caused more civilian deaths than the Sept. 11 attacks in the United States, and that Afghanistan is descending into utter lawlessness, with only the capital city Kabul under some form of minimal control.

The March 6 debate was motivated by a Parliamentary Motion submitted on March 4, by 39 parliamentarians—more than the usual anti-war "Labour left." The motion read: "That this House is aware of the deep unease among honourable Members on all sides of the House at the prospect that Her Majesty's Government might support United States military action against Iraq; . . . believes that such a course of action would disrupt support for the anti-terrorism coalition among the Arab states; and instead urges the Prime Minister to use Britain's influence with Iraq to gain agreement that United Nations weapons inspections will resume."

Also on March 6, one British leading daily newspaper that had been heretofore gung-ho about the new war, the London *Times*, published two commentaries blasting Blair for jumping on the war bandwagon, especially in view of the fact that the war in Afghanistan is taking a new and ugly turn. Regular *Times* commentator Alice Miles wrote a piece entitled, "Blair Would Follow Bush to Baghdad, But Then What?" She wrote that opposition to a new military adventure against Iraq is now extending beyond the traditional anti-war Labour left, into other parliamentary quarters. Blair would probably choose to ignore this, but the problem for him, is that the opposition undoubtedly extends into his own Cabinet, which is harder to ignore.

Miles wrote that extreme caution is now necessary: the Americans have no clear idea of what kind of government would follow the fall of Saddam Hussein, nor no real idea of what kind of military action is needed. There is "no strategy, no clarity." But beyond all this, there is one other, most decisive factor: "At the moment, the United States doesn't even have an exit strategy for Afghanistan."

Her attacks were echoed by *Times* senior commentator Simon Jenkins.

Throughout the week, nasty barbs at Blair have been

launched in the pro-Labour Party London *Guardian* and the *Observer* Sunday weekly. On March 5, the well-informed *Guardian* senior commentator Hugo Young wrote, under the headline “Why Is Blair Banging the Drum for an Attack on Iraq?,” that Blair “has launched himself on another of his missions,” with “calculated” and “gratuitous” threats against Iraq. Young revealed, that there is growing disquiet over the Iraq war option both in the Foreign Office—which is most interesting in view of the above diatribe by Foreign Secretary Straw—and in the Ministry of Defence.

The disquiet in the British strategic community is likely to grow, with the return to Britain on March 1, of a senior military specialist who spent two weeks in the United States. He is telling the British government that there are “two different Americas,” with the Washington strategic-military-intelligence community in an “arrogant,” flight-forward state of mind, but with organizations and individuals outside Washington feeling much more cautious and reluctant about new war adventures. In a private discussion, this individual said he was “staggered” and “astonished” at the arrogant war mood in Washington, and will be advising British officialdom to keep in mind “the other America,” before rushing into a new military adventure.

Multiple Woes

Blair has not been helped by a number of other factors. For one, he has destabilized the Commonwealth with his all-out, flight-forward attack on Zimbabwe’s President Robert Mugabe. Second, he has been embarrassed by President Bush’s announcement of protective tariffs for U.S. steel, as this undermines all the rhetoric about supposed Anglo-American agreement on “free trade.” This is all the more the case, as Indian businessman Mittal, a big funder of the Labour Party, who is already at the center of a scandal involving illicit British government aid in winning him a steel contract in Romania, has been funding a campaign in the United States for steel tariffs—against imports of British steel into the United States!

Third, Blair’s government is sinking into a morass of corruption and lying, particularly over the abominable behavior of his closest ally inside the Cabinet, Transport Secretary Stephen Byers, who has overseen the past few years’ destruction of the British rail infrastructure network.



British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw (left, with the EU’s Javier Solana and NATO Secretary General Lord George Robertson) has gone out on a limb pushing for British partnership in an American war on Iraq; but opposition is reportedly strong even within Straw’s Foreign Ministry.

‘This Prime Minister Has To Be Destroyed’

The backlash against Blair is intense within certain Establishment circles. One British military-intelligence specialist told *EIR* on March 6, “Tony Blair doesn’t live on this planet! Nobody can ridicule Blair any more, because he’s already ridiculous. He goes around the world, telling everybody how to run things, while Britain itself is in a colossal mess, and he doesn’t care. He thinks it’s his moral right and moral duty, to lecture everybody. Yet the fact is, people start laughing when he opens his mouth.”

On March 5, another City of London figure added that the leading elements in the British policy Establishment think that Blair is “out of control. This happens to British Prime Ministers. They get stuck on a certain flight path, and it becomes impossible to nudge them off it. Leading figures among the powers-that-be have sadly concluded, that this Prime Minister has to be destroyed. The decision was reached already in the Autumn of last year, when he, quite unnecessarily, had a mania about travelling to all sorts of places around the world that had no interest in him being there.”

According to this source, “It takes a couple of years to get rid of a British Prime Minister.” He insisted that the Establishment will ratchet up the pressures on Blair until he “cracks, and has to be taken away, babbling. This is what is done to British Prime Ministers.” Because of this, some in the City of London think that “Blair will be in no position to deliver British support to the Americans, on the war with Iraq.”