

# Will Britain's Blair Crack Before 'Iraq War Summit' With Bush?

by Mark Burdman

On Feb. 24, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his 10 Downing Street propaganda machine caused a leak to appear in the London *Observer* weekly, according to which Blair would be attending a special summit with U.S. President George W. Bush, in Washington in April, at which "action against Iraq will be at the top of the agenda," and at which "details of military action to overthrow Saddam Hussein" would be "finalized." According to the *Observer*, Blair will be attempting to bolster the Anglo-American case against Iraq, by publishing a dossier, giving ostensible "detailed evidence of Iraq's nuclear capabilities."

The question on the minds of very well-informed British observers whom *EIR* has spoken to during the last week of February, is whether Blair will still be in any position, or state of mind, come April, to "deliver" a war alliance against Iraq, to the American war-hawk grouping. For one, there is massive opposition, inside Blair's Labour Party and elsewhere in the British political-military establishment, to such a war. Beyond this, the political ground is collapsing from under Blair's feet, as a round of new scandals hits his intimates, and as the social-economic situation in Britain implodes.

Admittedly, Blair's profile is, precisely, to seek military adventures, to divert from his internal difficulties, but this time around, experts concur, the momentum is moving so fast against him, that he likely has neither the credibility nor the strength, to launch a new provocation, barring some unforeseen act of spectacular terrorism, in the days ahead.

Over the Feb. 23-24 weekend, a poll was taken among 100 Labour Party parliamentarians, about whether they would support military action against Iraq. No fewer than 86 said they would not, and only 7 said they would, with the rest undecided. On Feb. 27, the pro-Labour *Guardian* daily ran a commentary headlined, "Support for a U.S. Assault On Iraq Could Rip Labour Apart," in which author Jackie Ashley affirmed that "there is something building which could be the undoing of Mr. Blair," and that, should he go ahead with this course, Blair might suffer "a trauma . . . of a different scale than anything we have seen yet."

The *Observer* article noted significant reservations about the Iraq war plans, not only in the British Foreign Office, but

also in segments of the British military.

Meanwhile, Blair finds his most loyal ally in the Cabinet, Transport Minister Stephen Byers, under assault, both for his role in overseeing the collapse of the privatized British rail system, and for his cover-up of a number of misdeeds by senior officials in his Ministry. On Feb. 26, Byers admitted to the House of Commons that he had lied about these officials. Then, Blair compounded the problem, by affirming his support for the lying Byers.

On Feb. 26, a London source spoke to *EIR*, of Blair's dilemmas with Byers, and with the "irresolvable incoherence of his own policy." "Watch what will now happen. All his problems will mount, with the health service, with the collapse of rail, and, increasingly, in education. Ultimately, he will crack, and he will be taken away, gibbering. Recall, that is what happened, previously, to British prime ministers, to Anthony Eden and to Harold Macmillan. In this country, the powers-that-be know how to break a prime minister."

When April comes around, the source stressed, "he won't be able to do it," if and when the Americans ask for support in a war against Iraq.

## 'True Friends Are Not Sycophants'

The developments of late February, cap a month that has seen a rip-roaring fight, within the British establishment, over how to orient toward a new Iraq war, and toward the Bush "axis of evil" policy, more generally. What is happening in Britain, is helping trigger similar fights in Germany and other continental European countries. It also should help catalyze such conflicts in the United States itself. Indeed, given the past decades' U.S.-Britain "special relationship," Blair's total backing for the "war on terrorism," and the influence of Great Britain in Washington policy circuits, a definitive British break with the war push, might knock off-course a war that many fear is inevitable.

The publicly fought-out intra-British establishment policy war has been triggered, in large part, by a series of statements by Chris Patten, currently European Union External Affairs Commissioner, and formerly the last British colonial governor in Hong Kong. His statements have drawn all the

more attention, as Patten was a close aide to Margaret Thatcher during her reign as Prime Minister from 1979-90, serving, variously, as Leader of the House of Commons, as Conservative Party chairman, and in other senior posts. Now, he is in open conflict with his former boss.

On Feb. 9, Patten told the *Guardian*, in respect to the “axis of evil” policy proclaimed by President George W. Bush in his Jan. 29 State of the Union address: “I think it is very dangerous when you start taking up absolutist positions and simplistic positions.” Declaring himself to be a life-long “Americanophile,” he stressed: “I hope that America will demonstrate that it has not gone on to unilateralist overdrive,” and that Europe must raise its voice, to oppose such “unhelpful” policies.

According to Patten, “Gulliver can’t go it alone, and I do not think it is helpful if we regard ourselves as so Lilliputian that we can’t speak up and say it. However mighty you are, even if you’re the greatest superpower in the world, you cannot do it all on your own.” He defended Europe’s commitment to “engage” countries such as North Korea and Iran, and said that the world needed “smart development assistance” more than “smart bombs.”

On Feb. 14, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell criticized him, in an interview with the London *Financial Times*, saying that Patten had “worked himself up a bit.” The next day, Patten retorted, in comments that were run as the lead item in the same paper: “There is not one drop of anti-Americanism flowing through my veins. . . . But true friends are not sycophants. Those of us who are concerned at certain trends in U.S. policy-making have a duty to speak up.” He warned that the current American “instinct” for unilateralism and for projecting military power is “profoundly misguided” and “ultimately ineffective and self-defeating.” Patten invoked the late British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, a hero of Bush, to defend his polemic.

On Feb. 19, speaking before NATO parliamentarians, Patten toned down his words somewhat, but nonetheless issued a stern warning to the United States, that a war against Iraq would not get support in Europe. A well-informed observer told *EIR* on Feb. 21, “Patten is worried, that an attack on Iraq could trigger enormous social tensions in Europe, and possibly lead to the break-up of NATO. He is right.”

### ‘Prepare for the Inevitable’

Patten’s persistence on the Iraq matter is all the more noteworthy as, on Feb. 11, his former boss Thatcher supported the “axis of evil” thrust, and insisted that there be “massive use of force” against Iraq, and “strong support” from America’s “allies,” for this.

The war inside the establishment escalated, when the Feb. 15 London *Times*, owned by Australian magnate Rupert Murdoch, ran a lead editorial entitled “To Free Iraq: Blair Must Prepare Party and Country for Military Action.” It declared: “With a combination of military and covert methods



*Prime Minister Tony Blair, who is gung-ho for a war against Iraq, is seeing his support melt away, from across the British political spectrum.*

now actively under discussion, the United States is preparing to destroy the regime of Saddam Hussein. The timetable is flexible, but will be dictated by America’s strategic and military readiness and by nothing else, certainly not by righteous whimperings from Brussels to Berlin. The goal is fixed. There is now overwhelmingly strong agreement in Washington, throughout and beyond the Bush Administration, that ‘containment’ of Iraq has failed, and that the Iraqi dictator’s overthrow is militarily feasible and politically urgent. His removal is not an added dimension to the Bush strategy for dealing with global terrorism; for several strong reasons, it is integral to it.”

The paper asserted: “Europe’s governments, by contrast, are running shrieking for cover, railing against American unilateralism. Britain has not joined that chorus, but nor has Tony Blair yet aligned himself with America on Iraq. Britain, alone among European countries, is on [Vice-President Dick] Cheney’s itinerary. That honor gives the Prime Minister only a few weeks to master the rising anti-Americanism in his own party, and explain why this country must stand by its most important ally. This will be the loneliest decision of his premiership. It could jeopardize his European ambitions. But to

back away from this test would be devastating to Britain's international credibility. The U.S. will 'go it alone,' if necessary. Mr. Blair must be ready, in Europe, to 'go it alone' too. He has been too slow in preparing British opinion for the inevitable. He had better start closing the gap now."

On Feb. 18, *Times* regular commentator Lord William Rees-Mogg authored a piece headlined, "The Countdown Starts for Operation Saddam." Departing from his earlier reservations about the "axis of evil" hyperbole, his lordship fully supported an American attack on Iraq, the which he also depicted as inevitable.

A reason for his mood-change, evidently, is that he just concluded a trip, in the company of British parliamentarians, to Kuwait, a country he said reminded him of "some prosperous trading city under the protection of the Roman Empire." He affirmed that Kuwait is "psychologically expecting war," and eagerly awaits an American-led effort to get rid of Saddam Hussein.

Rees-Mogg said: "In Horace's view, Augustus maintained the Pax Romana because he faced each threat and overcame it. This is the logic of all great world powers, whether one calls them empires or spheres of influence. The Pax Americana can be based only on the same logic. . . . The Emperor Augustus added seven provinces to the Roman Empire, largely in the search for peace.

"Weapons of mass destruction in the hands of hostile powers threaten the United States, just as the Parathions or the Germans threatened Rome. There will not be a stable peace in the Middle East until Saddam Hussein's regime is removed. That is what Kuwaitis believe; more importantly, it is what President Bush believes."

On Feb. 19, the *Times* published a column by neo-conservative ideologue Irwin Stelzer, resident at the American Enterprise Institute think-tank in Washington and a confidant of certain Bush Administration circles. Entitled, "Bush Turns Away From the Weaklings of Europe," Stelzer erupted: "Europeans and Americans are now living on different planets, a prominent Washington pundit with impeccable conservative credentials and clear lines into the Bush White House told me at a recent dinner party for a small group of Administration members and their confidants. . . . The consensus in Washington—both among the people who influence American policy and those who make it—is that Europe is irrelevant to the world today."

Stelzer claimed that U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is one of those in the Administration who harbors a deep dislike for "Gaullism" in Europe.

### **'Mr. Blair Should Beware'**

On Feb. 26, the London *Daily Telegraph*, the mouthpiece of Canadian magnate and Hollinger Corporation chief executive Conrad Black, gave 100% backing to a new war against Iraq, and called on Blair to break with the continental Europeans, and ally with the United States, on this.

On Feb. 20, former British Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sir Alan Munro penned a letter to the *Times*, accusing it of being "bellicose," and arguing against current war plans against Iraq.

The most emphatic statements against such designs, have come from pro-Labour Party (although not necessarily pro-Blair) writers in the left-liberal *Guardian* and *Observer*, both of which have warned Blair to stay clear of flight-forward war moves.

In a Feb. 9 editorial, the *Guardian* warned Blair that should he join the war drive against Iraq, he would risk a revolt inside the Labour Party. Then, on Feb. 16, the paper ran a lead editorial, "America's New War: We Should Not Back This Iraq Attack," in which it warned that it would be "a massive mistake for the British government" to do so.

On Feb. 17, *Observer* editor Will Hutton, in a signed commentary, echoed this. While denouncing Saddam Hussein as a "dangerous dictator," Hutton warned that "the unilateral decision to declare war upon another state without a *casus belli*, other than suspicion, will upset the fabric of law on which international relations rests, as well as destabilizing the Middle East." He declared that the Labour Party "will break," if Britain is "too slavish" toward Washington, on this war. Hutton advised: "Mr. Blair should beware. . . . This is the new political drama. Watch out."

On Feb. 19, senior *Guardian* diplomatic correspondent Hugo Young noted that while Blair appears to be "insouciant" about, and "comfortable" with American foreign policy, despite the "axis of evil" rhetoric, this attitude is out of touch with much of the high-level thinking in Britain. "Behind the scenes, in the ceaseless turmoil of diplomatic activity between London and Washington, things are a little more complicated," Young reported, claiming that there are growing U.S.-British tensions over American resistance to providing "an American element" to the Afghan peacekeeping forces, and over Iran.

But "the big challenge is certainly Iraq." Young claimed that, whatever Blair may be thinking, there is growing realization in London that American strategy vis-à-vis Iraq "risks getting muddled and therefore very dangerous." Under such conditions, other "options" are under consideration in Britain, with the most interesting being a possible agreement with Russian President Vladimir Putin to oppose an Iraq strike. According to Young, "Assembling a united, pragmatic case against a violent, destabilizing attempt to depose Saddam is work that the British and Russian leaders are well-placed to do."

As for Blair, Young concluded, if he keeps just mouthing how he supports American policy, Blair will render himself completely irrelevant, in the face of intense opposition inside the Labour Party. Eight days later, the *Guardian* published the article reported above, warning that support for an Iraq war would "rip Labour Party," and create a "trauma" for Blair.