

Iraq WMD Flap Has 'Mortally Wounded' Blair

by Mark Burdman and Alan Clayton

Just as falsification of intelligence on "Iraq's weapons of mass destruction" (WMD) has generated an American national controversy, so it has in Britain—with two differences. In the U.K., the controversy is hitting with a fury that, as of this writing, qualitatively surpasses what is happening in the United States. Second, and linked to this: While President George W. Bush is unlikely to be felled by the scandal, British Prime Minister Tony Blair might soon have to find a job outside 10 Downing Street, and perhaps even face criminal investigation.

One Parliamentarian in Blair's own Labour Party, Malcolm Savidge, told BBC on June 2 that the charge that Britain was misled into war by phony stories of Iraq WMD is more serious than the Watergate affair that brought down President Richard Nixon. On June 5, a London *Independent* commentary by one of Labour's "grandees," 86-year-old Lord Denis Healey, Defence Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer in earlier Labour governments, was entitled "Blair Must Quit If He Is Wrong About These Weapons."

Blair is so vulnerable because he based his entire case—legal, political, strategic, and otherwise—for war against Iraq on one, and only one issue: Iraq's alleged arsenals of atomic, biological, and chemical weapons. Not only that: He and his government promoted the most lurid claims about the alleged weapons, including that they represented an immediate, existential danger to the population of the British Isles. Through such hyperbolic psywar, and various armtwisting and blackmailing operations by his staff and circle, he forced several Parliamentarians, reluctant to support a war against Iraq, to back his policy.

Still worse, his Prime Minister's office—particularly through the agency of his extremely powerful media czar Alastair Campbell, head of the Office of Communications—infused bizarre allegations about Iraqi weapons into U.S. government structures. This resulted in President Bush, Secretary of State Powell, and others mouthing all sorts of nonsense, to justify the buildup for war. Most egregious, was the report cited and praised by Powell in his Feb. 5 UN speech; the which report, it turned out, was based on 10-year-old information, written up by an academic based in California. On Feb. 9, Lyndon LaRouche excoriated this in his statement, "Powell Apparent Victim of Hoax."

Another cause for Blair's vulnerability is that he has

made himself politically dependent, on the Iraq issues, on the most dreadful of American "Straussian" neo-conservatives. A June 5 commentary by the *International Herald Tribune's* William Pfaff, stressed the point that Blair is in trouble because of his deals with the Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz crowd, and that Blair will be badly damaged, sooner or later, by evidence that emerges from U.S. Congressional investigations into the falsification of this intelligence. Robin Cook, who resigned his post as Leader of the House of Commons in protest against the Iraq war, blasted Blair on June 4, also in the pages of the *International Herald Tribune*, for aligning Britain with the policies of Rumsfeld and the "ferociously reactionary" Wolfowitz.

Neither Donald Rumsfeld nor Paul Wolfowitz have had compunctions about stabbing Blair in the back on the WMD issue, after he had so fanatically served their purposes. When Rumsfeld recently off-handedly commented, that Saddam Hussein had probably destroyed his WMD on the eve of war, this caused Blair acute political embarrassment. But that was minor, compared to what happened when Wolfowitz told *Vanity Fair* magazine, that the issue of Iraqi WMD was simply a "bureaucratic pretext" for a consensus for war against Iraq. This comment received wide play in the British media, and forced Blair to lose his studied cool, and to make a babbling, defensive response.

In the coming days, both Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz will come under increasing scrutiny, in Congress and because of other revelations motivated by the LaRouche movement's documentation of the Straussian "Children of Satan" cabal that launched the Iraq misadventure. Now that Britain's *Tribune* magazine, the main organ of the left wing of Blair's own Labour Party, has published a major exposé of the Straussians, it is certain that Blair's dallies with this mob will themselves be further exposed in the days ahead.

'It Would Be Mad To Believe Mr. Blair'

In extremely heated June 4 British Parliamentary debates, leading figures in both opposition parties, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, put forward calls for a "full public inquiry" into the matter of falsification of intelligence to drag Britain into war. The demand, written up in the form of a Parliamentary resolution by the Liberal Democrats, was put to a vote on the afternoon of June 4. The resolution was voted down, by a 98-vote majority, because the great majority of Labour Parliamentarians refused to buck the party machine, in many cases after being subject to intimidation and threats. Eleven Parliamentarians (MPs) from Blair's party did vote with the opposition.

The opposition Conservatives, significantly, have broken the political pact they reached with Blair before and during the Iraq war. Pro-war Conservative leader Iain Duncan-Smith blasted Blair's manipulation of intelligence. However, during the June 4 debate, Duncan-Smith's debate performance was so wimpish as to let Blair off the hook, and allow the belea-

guered Prime Minister breathing space. There is growing talk, within Conservative circles, of replacing the hapless Tory leader, too.

During the debate, Blair unveiled a damage-limitation maneuver, when he announced that the all-party Select Committee on Intelligence would be holding hearings on the Iraqi WMD matter. In a June 4 discussion with *EIR*, Cambridge University Professor Corelli Barnett proclaimed that this is “no good, because this Committee reports privately to the Prime Minister. It would be semi-official, and worthless, especially because the Blair government is hunkering down, to prevent anything authentic from being done.”

Barnett reported a separate decision made in the Parliament June 4, by MPs independent of Blair in the Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, for hearings. But here too, he had reservations, because “its powers are limited. . . . Here in Britain, unlike in the United States, there are no open Congressional hearings. That is, even if the hearings are public—as is the case with the [Congress] Foreign Affairs Committee, but not the Intelligence Committee—one cannot *require* evidence, like an American Congressional committee can do. A civil servant can refuse to attend, and/or ‘Crown Prerogative’ can be invoked. So, I’m sure the Foreign Affairs Committee would do its best, but it may not get too far. The real battle, now, is between the push for a full public inquiry, vs. the government’s efforts to obstruct any real inquiry.”

But Blair was damaged by the accusation of former International Development Secretary Clare Short, who resigned from the government May 12, but who had been in the Blair Cabinet as war plans were being discussed. In her address to MPs, Short charged that the Prime Minister had secretly promised President Bush, last Summer, to go to war against Iraq. She said: “There were very, very senior figures in Whitehall who said to me that the Prime Minister had agreed in the Summer to the date of Feb. 15, for military action, and that was later extended to mid-March. . . . The fact that there was deceit on the way to military action is a very grave accusation I am making. If we can be deceived about this, then what can we not be deceived about?”

Cook, another figure with much “inside knowledge” into the pre-war machinations, demanded that Blair retract the absurd and discredited British government claim, that Saddam Hussein was procuring uranium from Niger to make a nuclear bomb, a claim that was mouthed by George W. Bush, in his 2003 State of the Union address. Blair refused to retract. Cook asked, “The U.S. Marine Corps can now say we were wrong [about Iraqi WMD], why cannot we say it?”

Blair’s hyperbolic and manic self-defense in the Parliament has reinforced his image as a fast-talking liar. As London *Independent* Parliament correspondent Simon Carr wrote June 5, “It would be mad to believe Mr. Blair. . . . Foremost among his many abilities, the man can tie a reef knot with the two ends of his tongue.”

‘His Ascendancy Is Destroyed’

On the eve of the June 4 Parliament debate, a leading British Atlanticist figure commented, “The Summer will be dominated, in both Washington and London, by this weapons of mass destruction issue. But the fact is, it will have more immediate political consequences for Tony Blair, than it will have for George W. Bush. Blair is more vulnerable than Bush is. Blair had very significant opposition to his Iraq policy, from a wide range of leading Labour Party Parliamentarians, from Church bishops, and others, of a type that Bush never experienced. And, a disaffected Parliamentary Labour Party is potentially threatening to any Prime Minister.” He stressed that there are “pretenders to the throne,” waiting for Blair to fall flat on his face. These include Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, whose personal dislike for Blair and ambitions to become the next British Prime Minister are well-known, and the outspoken Robin Cook.

Professor Corelli Barnett commented that “Blair might well survive for a time, but the whole business has mortally wounded him. His spell is busted, and his ascendancy is destroyed.”

Blair has built an abominable record of deception and dissimulation. On the BBC’s *Newsnight*, on Feb. 6 of this year, he said he would not go to war without a second UN Security Council resolution, unless the weapons inspectors concluded there had been no progress in the disarming of Iraq, or if there was an “unreasonable veto” from one Security Council permanent member against a majority in favor of war. In fact, Britain went to war unilaterally with the Americans, with the weapons inspectors protesting they still had work to do, and without the so-called second resolution being voted upon. On March 18, a skeptical House of Commons was persuaded to vote to endorse the war on the sole grounds that “Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles . . . pose a threat to international peace and security.” A large number of reluctant Labour MPs were cajoled into voting in favor, on the basis of trust in the Prime Minister.

Over the preceding months, Blair had built up his case, repeatedly asserting that Saddam Hussein possessed WMD. On Sept. 24, 2002, he told the House of Commons that “his weapons of mass destruction regime is active, detailed and growing. . . . Intelligence concludes that Iraq has chemical and biological weapons, that Saddam has continued to produce them, that he has existing and active military plans for the use of chemical and biological weapons, which could be activated within 45 minutes”.

As the London *Times* noted on June 4, Blair was to repeat this “within 45 minutes” line more than once in the following period. It has since been revealed, by Armed Forces Minister Adam Ingram, that the “information” on this, had come from a single, uncorroborated source in Iraq. BBC’s Defence Correspondent Andrew Gilligan reported May 29, citing an unnamed source, that the “45 minutes” had been inserted in the 55-page dossier on orders from 10 Downing Street, and the

man responsible was Alastair Campbell, who wanted the dossier “sexed up.”

The dubious Mr. Campbell was, earlier in his life, a professional gigolo, according to a 1999 biography by British journalist Peter Osborne.

Remember Eden and Suez

The “45 minutes” claim has come back to haunt Blair. Challenged on it on June 4, Blair told the House of Commons that it was entirely the work of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). It was the JIC which had prepared the 55-page dossier released to the public last September. The top-secret JIC—made up of the heads of the three security services, the chief of defence intelligence, and other senior officials—is seldom in the public eye. Its job is to evaluate information produced by MI-5, MI-6, GCHQ-Cheltenham, Special Branch, and other intelligence services and sources. In this way, the collection and interpretation of intelligence are kept separate from each other; JIC’s assessments are expected to be objective and agenda-free. Its papers usually only cross the desks of senior ministers and officials.

Departing from traditional secrecy, Blair said in his foreword to the dossier that he “wanted to share with the British public the reasons why I believe this issue to be a current and serious threat to the U.K. national interest.” The “45 minutes,” naturally, was at the core of the “current and serious threat” psywar.

Secret memos leaked to the *Sunday Times* June 1, indicate that the Iraq dossier was the product of extensive consultations between John Scarlett, the JIC’s chairman, and Alastair Campbell, the Prime Minister’s communications director. In the days leading up to its publication, drafts of the dossier were sent to Campbell; Jonathan Powell, the Prime Minister’s Chief of Staff; Sir David Omand, the government’s terrorism and security coordinator; and Sir David Manning, the Prime Minister’s senior foreign policy adviser. Scarlett, according to insiders, was under pressure from Campbell to write a conclusion highlighting the most important “facts” in the dossier. A former MI-6 board member, he protested that assessments contain not facts but judgments; by their nature they cannot be definitive. It appears that, after the wrangling, Downing Street covered its back by requiring Scarlett’s formal endorsement of the dossier. He wrote to Campbell that he was “content” with the final text, which “reflects as fully and accurately as possible,” the Iraq WMD intelligence.

But, according to reports in the June 4 *Daily Telegraph* and June 5 London *Guardian*, the most senior levels of the British intelligence services are seething with anger, at the political manipulation of intelligence work. The *Telegraph* says that many professionals are recalling, how then-Prime Minister Anthony Eden distorted intelligence, to rig Britain’s involvement in the 1956 Suez War. Soon thereafter, Eden was forced out of office.