

Lord William Rees-Mogg takes Tony Blair to task on Yugoslavia

by Scott Thompson

There are profound, axiomatic policy differences between *EIR* founder Lyndon LaRouche, and Lord William Rees-Mogg, a Life Peer and former editor of the *Times* of London. Rees-Mogg, after all, has been a vocal proponent of a return to “neo-feudalism” through the “Information Superhighway,” a principal enemy of President William Jefferson Clinton, and a man who persistently fails to distinguish between “money” and physical economic development—as do most “New Agers.” However, of late, Lord Rees-Mogg has been writing articles calling for the most rapid execution of an “exit strategy” from the war with Yugoslavia, lest Prime Minister Tony Blair’s policies cause the entire region to degenerate into chaos, and yet another world war arise from a Balkans quagmire.

In an interview with this author, Lord Rees-Mogg, while not calling explicitly for the ouster of the British Prime Minister, was emphatic that Blair’s Yugoslav policy has failed. He stated that, after nearly two months of bombing, it is unlikely that the NATO alliance will win any more concessions than might have been achieved by diplomacy at Rambouillet.

Even more surprising, Lord Rees-Mogg stated that Russia must play a central role in devising an “exit strategy,” not only in its capacity as part of a proposed peacekeeping force, but as a diplomatic player with which the West has a long-term interest to maintain good relations. Rees-Mogg was emphatic that “NATO enlargement”—i.e., incorporating more and more of the nations in the former Soviet “sphere of influence”—must come to a halt, along with other forms of baiting the Russian bear.

And, Lord Rees-Mogg quite clearly approved of the Balkans Marshall Plan approach of President Clinton, which is especially surprising given Rees-Mogg’s early central role in trying to have the President impeached and forced from office. Nonetheless, Rees-Mogg was emphatic that, if it would cost more than \$100 billion to restore the infrastructure of the Balkans, then that is the price that NATO must pay, lest the world be left with “a bloody corpse filled with angry people.”

What Rees-Mogg’s candid commentaries signal, is that among a growing stratum of senior policy analysts in the United Kingdom, anger over the Blair government’s debacle in Yugoslavia has reached a point that it is now an open secret that Blair may have to go.

Rees-Mogg—a “cross-bencher,” who supports neither

Conservative or Labour candidates, and, especially not the Blair government—is not alone in this view.

‘The beginning of the end for Blair’

Appearing on the British Broadcasting Corp.’s “People and Politics” on May 22, another Life Peer, Lord Robert Skidelsky, said that as a result of Yugoslavia, “it’s the beginning of the end for Tony Blair.” Lord Skidelsky is one of the most prominent figures in the Conservative Party opposition. During the show, Lord Skidelsky was scathing in his attacks on the NATO strategy, insisting that the bombing was responsible for causing the Serbs to adopt a strategy of massive ethnic cleansing, and the creating hundreds of thousands of refugees. Lord Skidelsky also scorned the policy of “global interventionism” enunciated by Blair in Chicago, right before the NATO 50th anniversary summit in Washington on April 23-25 (see *EIR*, May 7).

While in Australia in early May, in a number of speeches Lord Skidelsky attacked Blair and his U.S. co-thinkers as “ethical imperialists” who are attempting to impose their values on other countries. In Melbourne on May 5, he charged that NATO was creating a “desert by bombing.”

It is believed that the statements of these two lords are representative of the growing opposition to the Blair government within the British establishment.

Interview: William Rees-Mogg

The following interview with Lord William Rees-Mogg was conducted by Scott Thompson on May 21.

Q: There seems to be a breakdown in communications between Blair and Clinton, according to press accounts in Europe. Blair and Foreign Secretary Robin Cook continue to push for ground troops and, while the *Daily Telegraph* calls him a “ditherer,” Clinton refuses to do so. What’s your view on that?

Rees-Mogg: Well, I think Blair failed to foresee what the reaction of the other NATO powers would be. But, the initial NATO position, as you know, was that there would be no ground invasion. . . . And, that position reflected the political

situation in the various NATO countries, not just the United States. It certainly reflected the feeling that the United States did not want to engage in a war in which there would be American casualties, for reasons which go back to the Somalia debacle, to Vietnam, I think. And, for perfectly genuine, serious reasons. And, Clinton also had the difficulty that there wasn't a majority for a ground war in Congress. . . . So, the situation of the United States, which is a major contributor to NATO arms, was clearly: They weren't going to commit themselves to a ground war at that point, and they quite likely would not commit themselves later on.

But, the same was true of the most important European countries, for rather different reasons. Because of the Second World War, Germany has a very strong pacifist tradition. The one thing they don't want to get into is another situation where Germany could appear to be the aggressor. They've got a mainly conscript army, and conscripts they're not entitled to use—I think outside Germany—but certainly, they're not entitled to go and send them into Yugoslavia. But, I think there's a Constitutional prohibition on that—

Q: Right. I believe there is.

Rees-Mogg: And, the government is a Red-Green government [i.e., the Social Democratic-Green coalition], which has made it absolutely clear that it would be difficult to keep the Greens in support of a bombing policy, and absolutely impossible to maintain the coalition if there was a ground attack. So that, the German government, and that's the largest of the European Union countries, was clearly opposed to a ground attack.

France has got four members of the French Communist Party [in the cabinet] who take an anti-bombing view, let alone an anti-attack view. And, the coalition between the French Social Democrats and the French Communists wouldn't have held together in the event of ground attack, in my view.

Certainly, Italy, which is absolutely essential from a military standpoint, has a coalition with political difficulties that seem to be impossible—

Q: It is said that the government might fall, if—

Rees-Mogg: Yes. And, public opinion in Italy is not enthusiastic. It's not pro-Albanian, because there have been a lot of Albanian refugees to Italy simply from the Albanian civil war, whom the Italians haven't liked.

Greece is pro-Serb, basically, in its public opinion, and Hungary cannot be used as a staging post, because there are 340,000 Hungarians as an ethnic minority in Serbia who might themselves be ethnically cleansed, if Hungary were used.

So that, a realistic appraisal from the beginning was that there was no prospect for mounting an effective ground invasion, and that the bombing strategy was as far as they dared to go.

Now, you have to ask a question. Did Tony Blair under-

stand this and decide to defend his own position with his own public by saying, "Well, I asked for a ground invasion and I couldn't get Clinton to agree with it." That's like putting the blame on Clinton. Or, did he sincerely want a ground invasion? And, some people take one view and some people take the other. If you think that he sincerely wanted a ground invasion, and just sort of hadn't worked it out, but he couldn't have one, then you think that he's strikingly ill-informed. If you think that he always knew there couldn't be a ground invasion, but decided that he could blame it on Clinton and avoid the ultimate consequences with his own people: So that's dirty politics. But, I suppose you can say that that's the sort of politics that Clinton would have done to him.

Q: You have written a lot recently about an exit strategy. What is your thinking on that?

Rees-Mogg: I thought from the beginning that the overriding rule of our diplomacy in the Balkans is that the West [NATO] must keep in mind good relations with Russia. And, that any attempt to pursue a policy which Russia couldn't go along with was likely to produce an unsatisfactory result. I think we shall get a negotiated settlement of some kind, given the negotiations currently going on. I think it will be after having done an enormous amount of damage to the infrastructure of Yugoslavia, and [after having] killed quite a few people. And, after having seen Yugoslavs expel the Albanian refugees—many, or perhaps most of whom, will never return to their country. We shall end up with terms as good as we could have negotiated at the time of Rambouillet, if we had been more realistic.

Q: How would you include the Russians? What would you have them do? Would they be taking part in a peacekeeping force?

Rees-Mogg: Basically, I think that one wants to encourage Russia to be part of the peacekeeping force, and encourage them very much, obviously, to act as the brokers of the settlement. Because, the Yugoslavs will not give a better settlement than the Russians are prepared to insist on.

Also, my view is that NATO made a great mistake at the Yalta agreement: The agreement was that the Russian sphere of influence should include half of Germany, part of Austria, the whole of Central Europe, East Central Europe, and the whole of the Balkans except for Greece, which was to remain inside the Western sphere of influence. The collapse of the Soviet Union and its disintegration led to NATO thinking that the whole of this could be reversed. I think that they were right about Central Europe, because Poland and the Czech Republic and Hungary are basically Western looking. And that, whether the Russians liked it or not, the switch of those three countries to become members of NATO, and eventually members of the European Union, made perfectly good geopolitical sense. I do not think that the idea which is still maintained in NATO, of bringing Romania and Bulgaria into

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NATO, makes sense at all. And, I think that the Russians will always be deeply uncomfortable about having NATO as that kind of a dominant power in the Balkans.

Q: What do you think about the eventual inclusion of Ukraine, as Zbigniew Brzezinski has suggested?

Rees-Mogg: Have they suggested?

Q: Zbigniew Brzezinski suggested that NATO expansion ought to continue indefinitely, and, ultimately, it ought to include Ukraine.

Rees-Mogg: I think that's crazy. I didn't know he'd suggested that.

Q: He did it in a book called *The Grand Chessboard*.

Rees-Mogg: Yes, I've always thought Brzezinski was very, very arrogant and incompetent in his geopolitical advisory role, and a thoroughly bad thinker. But, that seems to me to be terribly bad advice, which means that you really perpetually have either, in some sense, to keep Russia down (with all the resentment that that would create), or you would have Russia in a war-fighting mood. And, Russia, even at its low point, is, by its geographical dimension, one of the great powers. It's also a major nuclear power. . . .

No, I think that NATO has not understood about the real long-term importance of Russia, or at least that the U.S. government has failed to do so, and the rest of NATO went along with it. And, that that's been part of this tragedy. With Russia, I think we could have gotten a much better settlement for the Kosovo people.

Q: Do you have any thoughts on the firing of Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov? Were you upset by that? Do you think that causes instability? Or, do you think it's a positive development?

Rees-Mogg: I don't know. I mean, I think that Primakov seemed to be doing a reasonably good, if not inspired, job. But, it seems to have worked for [Russian President Boris] Yeltsin, in that it took all of the steam out of the impeachment, which I thought was a threat to his position. And, he seems to have got away with it.

Q: So, other than working with Russia, is there anything else that you're thinking is essential for the exit strategy?

Rees-Mogg: No, I think that the bombing obviously has done an enormous amount of damage and has put pressure on [Serbian President Slobodan] Milosevic. It's also put back pressure on NATO. I think one of the issues is, who's going to rebuild Yugoslavia? . . . We don't want to leave Yugoslavia, or what remains of it, as a sort of bloody corpse full of angry people.

Q: Right. President Clinton has called for the equivalent of a Marshall Plan for the Balkans. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Rees-Mogg: I think that in—anyway, a very large sum of money is plainly necessary.

Q: It's been estimated that there is \$120 billion in infrastructure damage alone.

Rees-Mogg: I mean, these figures are fairly broad, aren't they? But, I would have thought that NATO would have found \$100 billion to undo the damage that NATO has done. And, let alone looking after the restoration of the people in Kosovo, where [the damage] has been partly done by NATO and partly by the Serbs. And, that's one of the disadvantages of this particular line of strategy. . . . You created a new problem for yourself without solving the old one. You now will get, in my view, no better a solution—probably a far worse solution—of the existing problem than could have been got without doing this. And, you've got to solve the new problem that's been created.

Q: Exactly. Now, do you think that Blair will be in trouble as a result of his continued push for ground troops, which the Clinton administration continues to reject?

Rees-Mogg: No. I mean, I think he ought to be. . . . He's had a big loss in domestic politics, and that is that a very high proportion of the political analytical community, people who are really studying the world situation, think that he has handled it extremely badly and blame him for it. And that, no doubt, will gradually seep out.

In terms of the images in the public and the way it plays, he is very popular and even a heroic figure.

Q: So, he's viewed as heroic calling for "stiff resolve," while everybody else is "dithering"?

Rees-Mogg: He's heroic in calling for stiff resolve knowing perfectly well that nobody else will allow him to do it.