

Opposition Grows In U.K. To Afghan War Fiasco

by Mark Burdman

As British Prime Minister Tony Blair keeps up his frenetic international diplomacy, most recently to Washington, toward realizing what his chief foreign policy adviser Robert Cooper has defined as a “New Empire” run by the Anglo-Americans, prominent British establishment figures are arguing that the Afghan war and related strategic operations are disastrous and insane.

A London source who has extensive contacts in the British military and diplomatic community, explained to *EIR*, on Nov. 7, that unease about what is happening now, is strongest among “the older generation of strategists and historians, who recall World War II, and are especially against the use of carpet bombing.” Such people are very concerned that Blair “lacks the experience” to handle such crucial matters as conducting a war, he said.

As an example of such criticism, he pointed to an Oct. 31 speech before the official Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in London by Sir Michael Howard, one of Britain’s leading military historians, who is Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford University. Sir Michael began, by excoriating those in the Bush Administration who immediately characterized the battle against the alleged culprits of the Sept. 11 atrocities, as “a war.” This, he pronounced, was a “terrible and irrevocable error.” He described what is being done now in Afghanistan in the name of the “war against terrorism,” as “like trying to eradicate cancer-cells with a blowtorch.”

According to Howard, the current strategy has, ironically, given the terrorists the initiative. No matter what happens now to him personally, whether he is killed and becomes a martyr, or survives, Osama bin Laden “can’t lose.”

Howard reserved his strongest attacks for those “figures on the right” who, “seeing themselves cheated of what the Germans used to call a *‘frisch, fröhliche Krieg’* — a short, jolly war in Afghanistan — demand one against a more satisfying adversary, Iraq; which is rather like the drunk who lost his watch in a dark alley, but looked for it under a lamp, because there was more light there.” Howard argued that, precisely because of their “imperial experience,” Britain and France should understand better than anybody, that the problems of Islamic nations cannot be dealt with in this way, and that an exit strategy must be found. “Prolongation of the war is likely to be disastrous. Even more disastrous, would be its extension, as American opinion seems increasingly to demand, in a ‘Long March’ through other ‘rogue states,’ beginning with

Iraq, in order to eradicate terrorism for good and all, so that the world can live at peace. I can think of no policy more likely, not only to indefinitely prolong the war, but to ensure that we can never win,” he said.

Noting Blair’s repeated insistence that people should “keep their nerve,” Howard concluded that “it is no less important that we should keep our heads.”

The RUSI is widely promoting the speech, through the Internet and other means, indicating that it has struck a chord among elements in the British military establishment opposed to the Blair flight-forward. It has been praised, by leading commentators in the British press.

Bombing Brings ‘The Greater Danger’

Another voice against the war, was a letter to the editor in the Nov. 7 London *Times*, co-authored by Lord Denis Healey, Baroness Mary Warnock, and other prominent, politically liberal figures in the British establishment. Healey was British Foreign Secretary (1964-70) in the Labour Party government, and was an outspoken opponent of the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq. Warnock is a leading “ethicist” and philosopher who, in the past, has sharply criticized the ultra-liberal economic policies of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Healey, Warnock, et al. demanded that the bombing of Afghanistan must stop, because it leads to “more civilians killed; more discord in Pakistan which could end in fundamentalists getting power, and with nuclear weapons at their disposal; possible overthrow of the Saudi and Egyptian regimes; and a general flare-up in the Middle East. The longer the bombing continues, the greater the danger, while leaving bin Laden untouched in his bomb-proof cave.”

Another important voice raised against the current strategy was that of Imran Khan, head of the Pakistan Movement for Justice Party. Khan has impeccable connections into the highest echelons of the British establishment, including, ironically, into those circles which had helped build up the bin Laden “Afghan resistance” capability in the first place. He is married to the former Jemima Goldsmith, daughter of the late Sir James Goldsmith, one of the main bankrollers and controllers of the “resistance,” linked to Britain’s MI6 foreign intelligence service.

On Nov. 2, Khan was the guest speaker at the London Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA, or Chatham House), the leading policy think-tank in Britain. He warned that the bombing of Afghanistan had put Pakistani President Gen. Pervez Musharraf under siege, especially as the country was “on the verge of bankruptcy.” Khan said the mood in Pakistan has swung strongly against the Anglo-Americans, and that “sympathy has moved to the people of Afghanistan.” Should the bombardments continue during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan (which begins on Nov. 17), Musharraf would become isolated, and possibly threatened by his own officers. This all could evolve into a major regional disaster, Khan affirmed.