

New Alliances Form in Britain Against Planned War on Iraq

by Mark Burdman

It is certainly unprecedented, in the last two decades of British politics, that leading figures of the Labour Party left wing who usually oppose foreign military actions of the British government, should publicly praise the views of a former Chief of the Imperial Defense Staff, who served under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Exactly that is now happening. The usual “left-right” alignments are being turned upside down, as opposition to British participation in the planned American-led war against Iraq spreads through higher echelons of the British military, religious, and political establishment.

There is no doubt, that British Prime Minister Tony Blair is personally committed to this war, and that his government has already set in motion, the basics of British participation in this war, including redeploying British forces previously stationed in Afghanistan and in the Balkans, into Near East and Gulf regions relevant to a massive attack on Iraq. The July 28 London *Observer*, a paper close to the ruling Labour Party, ran a front-page article, asserting that Blair and President George W. Bush have privately come to agreement on British participation in the war, even if the specific invasion plans have yet to be pinned down.

But the closer the moment comes to the outbreak of this war, various forces in Britain are set into motion against it. In many cases, these are people who, from an informed historical standpoint, know that an invasion of Iraq can only end in calamity.

‘What the Bloody Hell Do We Do When We Get There?’

On July 29, Field Marshal Lord Bramall, who was Chief of the Imperial Defense Staff from 1982-85, wrote a letter to the London *Times*, calling into question the wisdom of the coming war. Bramall warned that an invasion of Iraq could well “make things infinitely worse. Petrol rather than water would have been poured on the flames, and al-Qaeda would have gained more recruits.”

He went on: “America, with all the power at its disposal, and with no other superpower to gainsay it, can presumably and eventually achieve any military objective it wishes. I cannot help, however, but be reminded of that remark by a notably ‘hawkish’ General (later Field Marshal) Gerald Templar who,

when, during the Suez crisis (1956), Britain was planning a massive invasion of Egypt, through Alexandria, said something to the effect of: ‘Of course we can get to Cairo, but what I want to know is, what the bloody hell do we do when we get there?’ ”

Bramall’s letter was praised by Tam Dalyell, 70, the longest-standing member of the House of Commons (he is known as Father of the House). Speaking on July 29, Dalyell urged Blair to heed Bramall’s advice, adding, “Is it contemplated, occupying a resentful Iraq—and having been there in 1994 and 1998, I think it will be resentful—for my expected lifetime, and possibly yours?” Dalyell has been the most outspoken opponent in the House of Commons against a war against Iraq.

Bramall’s intervention was complemented by Sir Michael Rose, former commander of United Nations forces in Bosnia. General Rose was justifiably attacked by *EIR*, during the 1990s, for his role in overseeing the brutal Anglo-American policies in Bosnia in the years prior to the 1999 Kosovo war. But on the subject of Iraq, Rose has drawn the right conclusions. He is typical of that type of British military figure, whom Lyndon LaRouche, in a July 27 interview, characterized as those “senior crocodiles,” whose opposition to the Iraq war is becoming an important factor, in potentially impeding the momentum toward war.

Rose wrote an article for the July 29 *Evening Standard*, with the headline, “The Madness of Going To War With Iraq,” in which he stated, “There are huge political and military risks associated with launching large-scale ground forces into Iraq.”

On May 25, Rose had penned a commentary for the *Times*, warning that an invasion of Iraq would be an “enormous and terrible strategic blunder,” the which “would equate in terms of folly with Germany’s decision to attack Russia during the Second World War. . . . The risks and potentially negative consequences far outweigh any possible benefits.”

Of great importance, respecting British military figures’ resistance to this war, was the decision by the British Ministry of Defense, to announce during the week of July 22, much earlier than usual, that Chief of the Imperial Defense Staff Sir Michael Boyce is being replaced, and Boyce is to retire in the coming months. According to intelligence leaks, Boyce has

been opposed, behind the scenes, to the war, and has been skeptical of Pentagon claims about Saddam Hussein's links with al-Qaeda, and his alleged stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction. Boyce has reportedly criticized some American commanders for acting like a "20th-Century posse"; has expressed discontent over the conduct of the campaign in Afghanistan; and has been in conflict with the media team at Blair's 10 Downing Street, for replacing factual discussion of military-strategic realities with "spin."

According to a well-informed British strategist with access to many sources in the Ministry of Defense, the views expressed by Bramall, Rose, and Boyce are shared by one-half of the active and retired British military. The other half are toeing the Blair government line, and are moving into place those British units and capabilities that would be involved in an Iraq invasion.

A New View From the Church of England

On the religious front, the key development is, the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Rev. Rowan Williams, upon being officially named to his post, immediately distanced himself from the "Blair line" on Iraq, saying he would support no military action that was not first backed by the United Nations. This is a departure from the war-loyal views of the previous Church head, Dr. George Carey.

Earlier, while his announcement to the post was still pending, Williams had signed a petition, together with leading Anglicans and Catholics, which appeared in a Catholic publication, strongly protesting a war with Iraq. A number of prominent Christian organizations in the U.K., such as Pax Christi and the Church of Scotland's Church and Nation Division, have signed on to such protests.

On July 29, Blair held a private meeting with Williams, details of which were not divulged.

'Never So Incoherent'

Approximately 160 British parliamentarians have signed on to a motion, introduced some months ago, calling into question British participation in a war against Iraq. The most active among these, such as Tam Dalyell and his Labour colleague Alice Mahon, are demanding that the Parliament, which formally recessed on July 25 and which is not scheduled to reconvene until October, immediately be recalled, for extended debate, should the government be considering bringing Britain into the Iraq war. Dalyell and Mahon have stated publicly, that their initiative is, in significant part, motivated by the July 16 briefing to the House of Commons by former leading United Nations weapons inspector in Iraq Scott Ritter, challenging the Anglo-American claim that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction (see last week's *EIR*).

Three times during the week of July 22—once before a British Labour Party parliamentarians' meeting, once during a House of Commons debate, and then at a press conference—Blair was peppered with questions about British intent toward



British Prime Minister Tony Blair, promiser of the famous "dossier" on Iraq and weapons of mass destruction which has never appeared, faces a great deal of British opposition to his desire to put a British spearpoint on an American shaft to attack Iraq.

Iraq. He was evasive, at times incoherent. At one point, he said discussion would only become necessary "when" a decision was made that war against Iraq would be necessary. This caused such an outcry, that 10 Downing Street immediately issued a clarification, saying that the Prime Minister had mis-spoken, and had intended to say "if," not "when"! At the same time, he has made clear, in a number of interviews and leaks from Downing Street, that he fully intends to join with the United States, in this war.

On July 31, senior *Times* commentator Simon Jenkins denounced the Blair policy respecting Iraq. "I cannot recall a time when British policy toward a troubled part of the world was so incoherent," he wrote, adding that the situation in Britain was "becoming surreal," as the likelihood of British involvement in the Iraq war was growing, although "soldiers do not want a war. Diplomats do not want a war. Politicians do not want a war."

Jenkins characterized Blair's behavior in the following terms: "When Tony Blair was asked at a press conference last week about an early attack on Iraq, his body language went absent without leave. His cheek muscles twitched, his eyes darted, and he reached beneath his desk for help. Was he seeking a panic button or a White House messenger? The answer was worse. He raised a comfort mug to hide his lips and took a large caffeine hit. He stumbled out a 'no comment.' . . .

"Mr. Blair is like an East European leader in the Soviet era, forced to support anything Moscow does without knowing what it is."

A City of London source commented to *EIR* July 30: "Blair is a weak man, and precisely because he is weak, he will join with the U.S. in this war. But the result will be, his government will be wrecked. There will be a massive revolt within his own party, and that will bring his government down, probably sooner rather than later."