

Will 'Teflon Tony' Go Before Iraq War Begins?

by Mark Burdman

Alarm has spread across the British political spectrum, over the officially stated likelihood that Great Britain will join the United States in a war against Iraq. The worsening economic and social crisis inside Britain is also feeding the dismay in Parliament, among the political class and intellectuals. For the first time since Tony Blair became Prime Minister in May 1997, there have been calls for him to resign.

By March 20 over 130 British members of Parliament (MPs), from all parties, had endorsed a parliamentary "early motion," against British participation in a new war against Iraq. The total of signers is approaching one-fourth of the 659 members of the House of Commons.

Two moves by Defense Secretary Geoff Hoon, during the week of March 18, greatly increased apprehensions. Hoon announced that Britain would be sending 1,700 new troops to Afghanistan, to join U.S. forces in offensive operations. This is the largest British troop deployment since the 1991 Gulf War. Its announcement triggered a raucous Commons debate on March 19 and 20. In the Parliament, and in leading strategic and military-planning circles, the fear is expressed that Britain is getting involved in Vietnam War-style "mission creep" in Afghanistan.

Hoon then added to the temperature by mooted British use of nuclear weapons against Iraq, and possibly against other so-called "states of concern," such as Libya, North Korea, and Iran. In a March 20 speech, he blurted out that "dictators . . . can be absolutely confident that in the right conditions, we would be willing to use our nuclear weapons." The *Daily Telegraph* on March 21 headlined, "U.K. Warns Saddam of Nuclear Retaliation."

Hoon was echoing Henry Kissinger's maniac "utopian" threats to use nuclear weapons, delivered in a speech in Italy the day before. The stage is set for Blair's "war planning" sessions with Bush, the week of April 8 in the United States. But Blair the actor is being pushed off the stage, even as the war approaches.

'Could Be Gone By the End of the Year'

Over the March 16-17 weekend, the first of the growing drumbeats for Blair to step down, were heard. Maverick Labour Party MP Tom Dalyell, leader of the fight inside the Parliament against a new Iraq war, told the Commons, "Any-

body after more than five years in Downing Street has to reflect. Margaret Thatcher stayed too long, and I think John Major stayed a bit long in power. I have a general view that, in my 40 years' experience, it is not a good thing for Prime Ministers to overstay their welcome."

George Galloway of Scotland, another maverick MP in Blair's Labour Party, went beyond this, in comments to the weekly *Spectator* magazine. According to Galloway, there is now talk in the Parliament "tea rooms," of replacing Blair. More than one Labour MP has raised the idea of a "leadership challenge" to Blair. "Nobody died or even gasped at such rebellious talk," he stressed. "It's been one damn thing after another." The March 17 *Sunday Times* observed that Dalyell's and Galloway's attacks, while representing marginal Labour forces, might be a "straw in the wind," for something more serious.

Jackie Ashley, parliamentary correspondent for the pro-Labour *Guardian*, wrote on March 20 that in the "tea rooms" of the Parliament, "for the first time since he was elected [Labour Party] leader in 1994, Tony Blair's political mortality is being discussed. . . . A Cabinet Minister privately predicts he could be gone by the end of the year."

Ashley asked: "Just what is going on? Can the skids really be under Teflon Tony?" She reports growing talk of a "leadership challenge" to Blair. Blair "is deeply frustrated by his falling media image. He often seems drained. He always meant to go when he was ahead, not visibly behind."

On Feb. 27, Ashley had written a *Guardian* feature, "Iraq Could Rip Labour Apart," warning that an Iraq war "could be the undoing of Mr. Blair." Her contention, now, that Blair could "auto-destruct," conforms to what *EIR* has been reporting in recent articles: British Establishment forces opposed to Blair, say they will drive up the pressure on him until eventually he will be "broken," and will be "taken away gibbering," as has happened to other British Prime Ministers.

The March 19 *Guardian* editorial warned, "Tony Blair, Watch Out." The paper reported that 51% of those recently polled opposed a war with Iraq, with the opposition, surprisingly, even stronger among Conservative and Liberal Democratic voters, than in the Labour Party. The editorial warned Blair, that he should not become an adjunct to "right-wing U.S. bellicosity" and to "deeply dangerous schemes." The Prime Minister "is being isolated on the Iraq front," the paper reported. "Mr. Blair does not speak for Britain on Iraq. . . . The stakes are very high, and the key test is now Iraq."

'More Reminiscent of a Dictatorship'

Before the point is reached where Blair might resign, he will likely be faced with resignations inside his own Cabinet. International Development Secretary Clare Short threatened to resign, declaring, over the March 16-17 weekend, that she was strongly opposed to "a blind military attack on Iraq," and warning Blair, "We all have bottom lines." Other Cabinet ministers are also hinting that they may resign



British Secretary of Defense Geoffrey Hoon generated new opposition in Britain to a war on Iraq, by clearly threatening to use nuclear weapons against Saddam Hussein, and other "dictators." Hoon's statement coincided with a similar threat by Henry Kissinger.

in the event of a war with Iraq. Home Secretary David Blunkett has sent a memorandum to Blair, warning that Britain would be faced with massive social unrest, should it join such a war.

On March 17, former Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam wrote a piece in the pro-Labour *Sunday Mirror*, warning that she found it "harder and harder" to defend the Blair government, especially because it is so willing to ally with Washington in a "reckless" action against Iraq. Another Labour influential, Rosie Boycott, quit Labour and joined the opposition Liberal Democrats. She charged that Blair's government was "more reminiscent of a dictatorship than a free, healthy, democratic system." She was resigning from Labour, she declared, after "a lifetime of support," because Blair's "New Labour" was run by a small number of people, who "brook no criticism, and turn savagely on anyone."

What is more extraordinary about the current British situation, is that massive opposition to an Iraq strike is coming from hard-core loyalists of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. This, though Thatcher herself is a shrill

supporter of the "axis of evil" lunacy, and current Conservative Party leader Iain Duncan-Smith—who is very close to the Washington neo-conservative think-tank circuit—has insisted that Britain give 100% support to a new American strike on Iraq.

The anti-war defections from within the Thatcher camp began during February, as *EIR* reported then, with a number of remarkable statements by European External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten, former chairman of the Conservative Party and last colonial Governor in Hong Kong. In mid-March this was echoed by Sir John Nott, formerly Thatcher's Defense Secretary during the Malvinas ("Falklands") War. Nott told the Thatcherite *Daily Telegraph*, in comments that were published in the paper's lead article on March 11, that he was "irritated" by American pressures that Britain give unquestioning support to the "war on terrorism." Said Nott, "I am against the Americans smashing things up with bombing raids, then letting us be the auxiliary policemen to pick up the pieces."

During the week of March 11, Nott's views were echoed by former Conservative Party Foreign Secretary Lord Douglas Hurd, and former Foreign Office Minister of State Douglas Hogg.

Also remarkable, is that a number of hard-core conservative commentators have "jumped ship" on the Iraq issue. In a couple of commentaries during the week of March 18, conservative historian Robert Harris declared that though he had supported every recent war Britain has fought, from the 1982 "Falklands War," to the 1991 Gulf War, and the Kosovo and Afghanistan campaigns, he drew the line at a new war against Iraq, which would be unjustified, senseless, and almost certainly counterproductive.

The *Daily Telegraph* published a March 21 op-ed by Cambridge University Prof. John Casey, entitled "There Is No Justification for Waging War Against Iraq." Casey, also a conservative, charged that the "axis of evil" campaign was typical of an alarming "Manichean" attitude toward the world that often erupts in the United States. Casey said that the conditions for a "just war" have not been met, in the case of Iraq, and charged: "We are looking for excuses for a war when the decision to wage it has already been taken. That has very unpleasant historical resonances. . . . Neither on grounds of reason nor justice—let alone our national interest—has the case for war been made."

Thatcher's own standing in the universe suffered a significant setback when she issued her latest memoirs on March 18, with the Orwellian title, *Statecraft*, in which she declared that all humanity's problems have come from the European continent; that Britain should leave the European Union; and that Britain should instead join the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This outburst fueled suspicions in Britain that the Baroness was losing her grip. Indeed, her physician announced on March 19, that she was "ill."