

Commonwealth Revolt Grows vs. Warmongers

by Mark Burdman

Open political warfare has erupted in Great Britain, and in leading traditional outposts of the British Empire/Commonwealth outposts such as Australia, over the Iraq war. Pro-war Prime Ministers Tony Blair of Britain and John Howard of Australia are getting deeper and deeper into the mire, as they shamelessly support this insane war adventure.

On Feb. 5, hours before U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell delivered his indictment of Iraq to the United Nations Security Council, British defense intelligence officials leaked a “top secret” report, which had been prepared three weeks earlier, to BBC defense correspondent Andrew Gilligan. The report asserted that there are no current links between Iraq and the al-Qaeda terrorists. Such a link had been stated by U.S. President George W. Bush in his State of the Union address, and soon thereafter, Prime Minister Blair told the British Parliament that there are such links, without providing any evidence whatsoever. Powell spent one-third of his address attempting to prove such links.

According to Gilligan, this was an “almost unprecedented” leak by intelligence officials, because it “flatly contradicts” official government policy. He commented that British military intelligence people are angry that their work has been repeatedly “politicized” to help build the Blair government’s case against Iraq.

The report documents how Saddam’s Baathist regime and Bin Laden’s al-Qaeda mistrust each other, and have incompatible ideologies. Bin Laden has denounced the Baathists as an “apostate regime.” The report states that Bin Laden’s “aims are in ideological conflict with present-day Iraq.”

A senior continental European strategist said, in a background discussion on Feb. 5: “I am not astonished that British military intelligence would leak this. These are no-nonsense people. They are fed up with how their work has been misused by this government for the purposes of this war.”

A British defense establishment figure, also on Feb. 5, stressed that “this leak is coming from a very high level here. There is a group of military people who have very strong reservations about this war. This time around, it is not the usual suspects who are coming up with the arguments against the war, but rather top people in the military, in military intelligence, and in the Ministry of Defence.”

This British source affirmed: “It is not Iraq as such that has them concerned. More than that, is the question of the *consequences* of this war for the wider region. They, like me,

have been troubled by the growing influence in American official quarters of an evangelical-fundamentalist line, according to which, what is simplistically called 'freedom' and 'democracy' can be exported everywhere. And even worse, that freedom and democracy must be imposed by force, and that longer-term, more patient methods must be tossed aside. All of this is very dubious, and there has been too little public discussion of this bigger agenda behind the Iraq war, and what its consequences might be."

The day after Powell's speech, British security sources kept up the pressure. According to a front-page article in the Feb. 6 *Guardian*, "British security services were quick to distance themselves" from one of Powell's pieces of "evidence" allegedly linking Iraq to al-Qaeda. Unnamed security sources charged that Powell was "jumping to conclusions," and making a leap too far, in claiming that the recent murder of Special Branch officer Stephen Oakes, in Manchester, England, was linked to a leading al-Qaeda terrorist harbored by Iraq.

One other sign of high-level dissatisfaction with the war push, was that Britain's Channel 4 TV chose, on Feb. 4, to air significant portions of an interview with Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein conducted by former Labour Party Cabinet Minister and Parliamentarian Anthony Wedgwood Benn. This is the first interview Saddam Hussein has given to a Western interviewer in 12 years. Benn has come under sharp attack in various quarters for acting as a stooge for Iraq, but has responded, equally sharply, that he is now 77 years old, doesn't care about criticism, and is acting to stop a war, in large part out of concern for his ten grandchildren.

In response to the moves by the British secret services,

Blair and his Foreign Secretary Jack Straw only dug themselves in deeper, by insisting that Iraq *was* linked to al-Qaeda—again providing no evidence. Straw further embarrassed himself by manically rallying to Powell's support, during the Security Council debate. One highly informed continental European source commented scornfully, that "Straw made an ass of himself" in the debate.

An Historic Setback

As for Australia's Howard, who has defined himself as the "Deputy Sheriff" of the U.S. War Party in Asia, on Feb. 5 the Australian Senate passed, by a 33-31 margin, a no-confidence motion against him for his handling of the Iraq crisis. While the vote has no legislative clout, BBC and various news wires stress that this is an important symbolic gesture, because it is the Senate's first vote of no-confidence in a serving leader in its 102-year history.

The censure was in reaction to Howard's having deployed troops to the Gulf. Australia is the only country, outside of Britain, to deploy forces to the Gulf, to join U.S. forces that are there.

BBC described the debate, which began on Feb. 4, as "heated." Sen. Bob Brown, head of the Australian Greens, said the no-confidence vote marked an "historic condemnation of the government." According to Brown, Howard's "gross manhandling of Australia's involvement deserved the strongest parliamentary rebuke."

Recent polls indicate that 76% of Australians oppose their country's participation in a U.S.-led war, although the number supporting military action goes sharply up if the action has UN backing.

Scandal in Britain Over 'Dossier' Cited by Powell

A British dossier on Iraq, released on Feb. 4 and lavishly praised in his UN speech by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell the next day, is significantly based on material produced 12 years ago by a graduate student, BBC reported on Feb. 7.

In his speech, Powell declared, "I would call my colleagues' attention to the fine paper that the United Kingdom distributed yesterday, which describes, in exquisite detail, Iraqi deception activities."

The problem is, according to British TV Channel 4, that most of the data was plagiarized, coming from two academics and a graduate student, and certain wording was changed by the British government, to make a

stronger case against Iraq. BBC reported: "The Channel 4 report said that even typographical and grammatical errors from the student's work were included in the U.K. government dossier. It also noted that the student acknowledged that the information was 12 years old in his report, but the government doesn't make the same acknowledgment."

Conservative Party Shadow Defence Secretary Bernard Jenkin said, "The government's reaction to the Channel 4 News report utterly fails to explain, deny, or excuse the allegations made in it. This document has been cited by the Prime Minister and Colin Powell, as the basis for possible war. Who is responsible for such an incredible failure of judgment?"

Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesman Menzies Campbell added: "This is the intelligence equivalent of being caught stealing the spoons. The dossier may not amount to much, but this is a considerable embarrassment for a government trying still to make a case for war."