

Opposition To Iraq War Grows in Europe

by Mark Burdman

August is a month in which great wars have been launched, or the psychological-propaganda offensives for such wars have dramatically escalated. Those with the relevant historical knowledge, would recall the Summers of 1914, 1938, and 1939. Others might want to throw in the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, encouraged by leading Anglo-American circles, which launched the “Gulf War” drive during the ensuing months. Now, in 2002, the world is confronted with rapidly escalating preparations for an American-led invasion of Iraq, an invasion that is intended as the next, crucial step in the “perpetual war” strategy of the pro-empire crowd in Washington.

But now, there is one encouraging feature that can be added to the picture: The drive toward war has triggered a quantitative and qualitative opposition to what growing numbers in Europe, the Arab world, and the United States itself, perceive as an insane adventure that would trigger incalculable consequences in the Near East/Gulf and beyond, and do enormous damage to the already dysfunctional world economy.

In Europe that opposition had been, until early August, most publicly expressed in, and to a great extent restricted to, Great Britain—nevertheless a factor of great importance given the U.K.’s long-standing “special relationship” with the United States. Opposition in the U.K. continues to grow. The new feature is that opposition to an Iraq war, since the weekend of Aug. 3-4, has become a central political issue in Germany, which faces national elections on Sept. 22. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, battling for re-election against Christian Democratic Union (CDU)-Christian Social Union (CSU) candidate Edmund Stoiber, has attacked the coming Iraq war. Schröder’s comments have ended the silence in Germany that has prevailed over Iraq—aside from the Helga Zepp-LaRouche-led Civil Rights Solidarity Movement (BüSo) party and a handful of other political forces.

The British and German critics are being moralized by indications that senior figures in the U.S. military and intelligence community are also opposed to the Bush Administration’s drive toward this new confrontation.

Iraq War Would ‘Escalate World Economic Crisis’

At an election campaign event of his Social Democrats (SPD) in his home city of Hannover on Aug. 3, Chancellor

Schröder spoke out against plans for a military attack on Iraq. “I can only warn those that neither think of the consequences, nor have any political concept for the Middle East as a whole,” he said. “Whoever goes in there, must know how to get out.”

Schröder said that Germany showed solidarity with the United States after Sept. 11, but there would be no German role in any “military adventure.” He made clear that there would not be a replay of 1991, when Germany agreed to pay for a good part (up to \$25 billion) of the Bush-Thatcher war on Iraq. As he put it, “Germany no longer is a country in which politics is replaced by the checkbook.” Schröder insisted that there is no substitute for a political solution to the Iraq problem.

On Aug. 7, Schröder responded to a reader in *Bildzeitung*, the tabloid read by millions of Germans every day. Schröder said that because the military operation in Afghanistan has not been finished, he is “opposed to an attack on Iraq. It would be seen less like an act of defense, and it could destroy the international alliance against terrorism. . . . The Middle East needs a new peace, not a new war. This is what our policy is dedicated to. And that alone is appropriate for the political and economic necessities. Everything else would escalate the crisis of the world economy and bring nothing but economic troubles for us.”

Schröder’s opponent Stoiber, and Stoiber’s chief foreign policy spokesman Wolfgang Schäuble, both denounced the Chancellor for undermining solidarity with the United States and on other grounds. However, among leading CDU elements, there is significant unease about the coming war. On Aug. 6, Karl Lamers, the foreign policy spokesman of the CDU parliamentary group, denounced the coming war, in comments that were echoed by SPD foreign policy spokesman Gernot Erler. Both emphasized, in interviews, that among the political initiatives for a solution to the Saddam Hussein problem, a peaceful solution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is most urgent. By contrast, they pointed out, an Iraq war would vastly increase problems throughout the Mideast region.

Among the Free Democrats, former Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher said, in an interview on Aug. 6, that he knew of no one of importance in all of Germany who was for a new war on Iraq. He added that it is necessary to unite all the opposition in Europe for one European voice against the war, to convince the United States that political solutions are the better approach to such problems as Iraq.

What Genscher is calling for, is having resonance in Italy. According to a leak in the daily *Corriere della Sera* on Aug. 8, the Italian government is in the process of bringing together several European and Arab governments for a joint initiative to solve the tensions in and around Iraq, especially over allowing United Nations weapons inspectors into the country through diplomatic rather than military means. Many European countries have reportedly agreed to participate in this process, although the British and French governments are staying out.

‘A Blunder and a Crime’

As for Britain, Prime Minister Tony Blair is facing a political tidal wave against British participation in a war against Iraq. This internal process in the U.K. is being reinforced by what is happening in Germany, as leading SPD figures have come out attacking nominal social democrat Blair for acquiescing to American-led war plans.

During the week of Aug. 5, an opinion poll was released which was devastating for Blair, especially as such polls are often used as messages from inside the establishment to British leaders. It showed, that should Blair side with Bush in a new attack on Iraq, support for him would sink so low, *Guardian* commentator Martin Kettle wrote, that his main Labour Party rival, Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, will be Prime Minister by Christmas.

What is most revealing, is the vocal opposition to a new war from leading figures in the military-defense establishment, who served in senior posts under former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, though she herself is a raving enemy of Iraq and a supporter of the new war.

On Aug. 5, Thatcher’s 1982-85 Chief of the Defence Staff, Field Marshal Lord Bramall, made his third declaration within a week against the war. His attacks had begun on July 29, with a letter to the London *Times*, warning that an attack on Iraq would pour “petrol rather than water” on the flames in the Mideast, would lead to an extremely messy quagmire for the invaders, and could well “make things infinitely worse.” Then, over the Aug. 3-4 weekend, Lord Bramall told BBC: “This is a potentially very dangerous situation, in which this country might be swept into a very, very messy and long-lasting Middle East war. . . . You don’t have license to attack someone else’s country just because you don’t like the leadership.” He said that evidence that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction is “desperately sparse,” and chastised the Blair government for not having produced the evidence it claims it possesses.

Lord Bramall said that his comments had been greeted with approval by some fellow retired senior officers. It has been confirmed to *EIR*, by two leading British strategists, that Bramall is much respected in the British military, and that his views on Iraq have considerable resonance in both the active and retired military.

Backing Bramall was Sir Michael Quinlan, formerly permanent undersecretary of the British Ministry of Defence in the Thatcher years of 1988-92, and widely known in the British Whitehall policy establishment for promoting Britain’s nuclear deterrent. In an Aug. 7 commentary in the *Financial Times*, Quinlan called into question many of the justifications being put forward for such a war, and asserted: “An assault could be costly, in military and civilian lives, and in damage to an already ravaged society.” He quoted Winston Churchill: “Never, never, never believe that any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on that strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter.”

Quinlan said that an assault on Iraq “looks like an unnecessary and precarious gamble, unless there emerges new evidence against Mr. Hussein altogether more compelling than any yet disclosed. To invert Boulay de la Meurthe’s cynical saying, starting such a war would be worse than a blunder: It would be a crime.”

He called on the British government to give a signal as soon as possible, “whether public or private,” that “neither military participation nor political support was to be assumed” from America’s “most solid ally,” should there be an attack on Iraq.

The views of military/defense figures such as Bramall and Quinlan are receiving considerable support from senior figures in the British political and diplomatic establishment. Lord Douglas Hurd, former Foreign Secretary in Conservative Party governments, stated during the week of Aug. 5, that an attack on Iraq would be the worst strategic fiasco by the West since the 1956 Suez crisis, when Britain, France, and Israel attacked Egypt. According to the British media, a wide array of retired and active British diplomats who deal with the Arab world are against the Iraq attack.

From among parliamentarians, the most interesting phenomenon is the support that Bramall is getting from longtime “leftist” figures, such as the Labour Party’s Tam Dalyell and Alice Mahon, both of whom are fighting for the immediate recall of Parliament—which recessed on July 25 and is not due to reconvene until October—should a war begin, and British participation come onto the agenda.

‘We Could Have an Explosion in the Middle East’

From the U.S. side, what is most encouraging is the reported opposition to a new war among many senior active military figures, who have not gone on the record, but have made their views known through leaks in the press and other means.

More public are the Aug. 3-4 weekend statements by Brent Scowcroft, who had been U.S. National Security Adviser during the 1991 Gulf War, and who is now chairman of the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. “It’s a matter of setting your priorities. There’s no question that Saddam is a problem,” he said. “But the President has announced that terrorism is our number-one focus. Saddam is a problem, but he’s not a problem because of terrorism.”

Saying he was certain that Saddam could be dislodged, Scowcroft warned: “I think we could have an explosion in the Middle East. It could turn the whole region into a cauldron, and destroy the war on terror.” Scowcroft pointed to the “almost consensus” around the world, against America going to war with Iraq.

Scowcroft’s views draw particular interest in Germany. It was he who, in February 2002, denounced the pro-war ravings of the McCain-Lieberman-Perle-Wolfowitz “Gang of Four,” at the annual Wehrkunde international defense gathering in Munich.