

Former Diplomats Warn: Blair, Bush To Fail

by Mary and Mark Burdman

Fifty-two former ambassadors and other high-level former senior diplomatic officials of the United Kingdom, have written a harshly critical open letter to Prime Minister Tony Blair, to express their “deepening concern” about the policies Blair is following in “the Arab-Israeli problem,” and in Iraq, “in close co-operation with the United States.” The ambassadors warn that “there is no case for supporting policies which are doomed to failure.”

At the same time, leaders of the British military are also openly expressing their opposition to the way U.S. forces are running the war. On April 21, in a most unusual step, General Sir Michael Jackson, the Chief of General Staff, told the Commons Defence Committee: “We must be able to fight with the Americans. That does not mean we must be able to fight *as* the Americans. That the British approach to post-conflict [Iraq] is doctrinally different to the U.S., is a fact of life.”

In Parliament April 28, Blair defended the repeated heavy U.S. bombardments of Fallujah, claiming this was a matter of having to “fire back,” and that U.S. soldiers were not killing civilians. Blair had also given a joint press conference with President Bush in Washington April 16, to express his approval of the agreement by Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, to tear up the “Road Map” for peace. The former ambassadors then decided to write their open letter, deeming Blair’s move an “abandonment of principle.” Blair seems to have endorsed an agreement which is “one-sided and illegal, and which will cost yet more Israeli and Palestinian blood,” the ambassadors wrote.

“We feel the time has come to make our anxieties public, in the hope that they will be addressed in Parliament and will lead to a fundamental reassessment,” wrote the ambassadors April 26.

Efforts to play down the letter’s impact, did not wash. Blair’s own former foreign secretary Robin Cook wrote on April 28: “By the standards of diplomatic communiques, [the] statement is off the Richter scale.”

A day earlier, Sir Crispin Tickell, U.K. ambassador to the UN during the 1990 first anti-Iraq war, wrote a second open letter, saying that he had “never seen such a level of worry and despair among those who have been involved in the diplomatic field, ever before.” It took organizer Oliver Miles, a former ambassador to Libya, only two days to get the signatures, Tickell wrote. “If this continues all we can look forward

to is unending war.”

The letter’s signers include former ambassadors to Iraq, Israel, Russia, Greece, and the United Nations, former High Commissioners to Commonwealth nations, governors, and senior international officials.

“Worse was to come,” in the “new” Bush-Sharon policies. Their dismay, the former officials wrote, was heightened by Blair’s “abandonment of principle, . . . at a time when rightly or wrongly, we are portrayed throughout the Arab and Muslim world as partners in an illegal and brutal occupation in Iraq.”

“All those with experience of the area predicted that the occupation of Iraq by the Coalition forces would meet serious and stubborn resistance. . . . The military actions of the Coalition forces must be guided by political objectives and by the requirements of the Iraq theatre itself, not by criteria remote from them,” the ambassadors wrote.

Britain has an interest to work “as closely as possible with the United States,” they wrote, and “in exerting real influence as a loyal ally.” Yet, the former officials conclude, “If [exerting such influence] is unacceptable or unwelcome, there is no case for supporting policies which are doomed to failure.”

In addition, some 108 Members of Parliament have signed a motion by Richard Burden, chairman of the All Party Britain-Palestine Parliamentary Group, which expresses “strong concerns” about George Bush’s support for Ariel Sharon.

Broad Opposition to Blair

The British military is getting more worried as the bloody U.S. tactics in Fallujah and elsewhere are only increasing the Iraqi opposition. The U.S.-led “coalition” is weakening as Spanish and other troops withdraw, and it is clear Britain will be under heavy pressure to send in more soldiers, as Foreign Secretary Jack Straw acknowledged on BBC radio April 22. More troops, “are said to be at an advanced stage.” There are now some 7,700 British servicemen in Iraq, and another 1,100 in the region, and some 1,700 could be sent in.

Richard Norton-Taylor, *The Guardian*’s security affairs editor, wrote on April 20 that the British in Iraq are “accomplices in the quagmire,” and this is causing “deep unease” in Whitehall. There is “no sign” of Blair’s supposed “decisive influence” on the Bush Administration.

Another indication of growing unease in London, was the appearance April 24 of a nasty article on the figure termed “the White House Svengali”—Vice President Dick Cheney. “To measure the influence Dick Cheney wields within the White House, it is worth asking whether the United States would have gone to war in Iraq if he had not been Vice-President,” wrote journalist Roland Watson.

“Would there have been war without him? Mr Cheney was undoubtedly one of the two people central to the construction and execution of Mr Bush’s case, without whose support the President would have found it much harder to go to war. The other was Tony Blair.”