

Coalition of the Too Willing

Despite the demonstrable folly of the Iraq War, Bush will find no shortage of allies if he turns his sights on Iran.

By John Laughland

WHAT HAS HAPPENED to the Europeans? As the third anniversary of the invasion of Iraq has come and gone, a new attack on Iran seems to loom. President George W. Bush has said that Iran is an issue of “grave national security concern,” which is diplomat-speak for “we might attack it.” Washington’s and Tel Aviv’s desire for regime change there is well known, and neither state has ruled out air strikes.

Seymour Hersh and others say that inside the Pentagon everyone admits that secret plans are being drawn up for an attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities. This all comes after a long period in which the Europeans have been trying to reach a diplomatic solution to the crisis and to avoid a military one. And yet the reaction from the so-called anti-American Europeans to the apparent likelihood of another American war in the Middle East has been deafening silence.

Of course there was never any chance that London would dissent from Washington. Although public opinion in Britain, on both Left and Right, is as febrile in its hostility to George W. Bush as it is in France, Italy, or Greece, the entire British political class is in the grip of a fiercely ideological belief in the absolute inviolability of the Atlantic alliance. It is obvious that Tony Blair will enter history as the prime minister who stamped out what few embers of independence still glowed in the ashes of British diplomacy, but the new opposi-

tion Conservative front bench team is trying to be more Blairite than Blair in foreign affairs as well as in domestic.

In a truly hallucinatory act, the Tory shadow foreign secretary made a special pilgrimage to Washington in February to arrange a future meeting between the new leader, David Cameron, and George W. Bush—a man who is held in as much contempt for the Iraq War in Britain as he is in the United States and the rest of the world, now more than ever. It is difficult to think of any act better calculated to make the electorate despise the Tories even more than it already does, and one is reminded of the suicidal loyalty with which tiny bands of fanatics from all over Europe converged on the ruins of Berlin in the spring of 1945 to immolate themselves on the altar of Hitler’s *Götterdämmerung*.

The same goes for Italy, where there is a consensus within the political class on the need to remain friendly with the Americans, even though this is precisely the opposite of the view held by the electorate itself: Silvio Berlusconi has had to fight public opinion tooth and nail to ensure that Rome continues to support the United States in Iraq and elsewhere.

But what about Paris and Berlin? In 2003, France and Germany famously opposed the attack on Iraq. Paris forged an anti-Washington alliance not only with Berlin but even with Moscow. But although the ancient roots of Anglo-Saxon Gallophobia were then tapped, as the neocons railed in fury against perfid-

ious France, the greatest surprise was in fact the behavior of the Germans. Facing a difficult election, then-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder struck a chord that had not been heard in German politics since the late 1940s when the Social Democrat leader Kurt Schumacher had opposed both European integration and the burgeoning hegemony of the U.S. Schröder’s decision to overturn 50 years of German loyalty to the U.S., and his clever articulation of the German public’s visceral hostility to the Iraq War, were the catalyst for the explosion of a curiously German fusion of resentment and preachiness: a people that for two generations had been force-fed pacifism and anti-militarism with its mother’s milk now reasoned that the fact that it had been so uniquely evil in the past meant that it had a unique right to teach the rest of the world moral lessons about the dangers of war in the future.

However, those heady days have now passed when the Franco-German stance against the war elicited the paranoid front-page splash in *National Review* in February 2003, “Putsch! How to Defeat the Franco-German Power Grab.” Instead, the European political class seems to be contemplating the possibility of an attack on Iran with resignation, or even enthusiasm. Those countries that opposed an attack on Iraq in 2003 are now saying that they will support one on Iran.

In February 2006, the new Chancellor Angela Merkel dusted off the old one-

size-fits-all neocon argument about appeasement and said that the mullahs in Tehran were like the Nazis in the 1930s and that the world had to learn the lessons of Munich. (For good measure, she travelled to the Bavarian capital to make these remarks.) She had already flown to Washington to see George W. Bush in January in order to stress trans-Atlantic opposition to the Iranian nuclear program. The French president, Jacques Chirac, meanwhile went even further. In a keynote speech delivered at an air force and naval base in Brittany in January, Chirac said that France would herself contemplate nuking the Iranians if necessary. “The leaders of states,” he said, “who would consider using, in one way or another, weapons of mass destruction, must understand that they would lay themselves open to a firm and adapted response on our part. And this response could be a conventional one. It could also be of a different kind.”

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To some extent, the Franco-German opposition to the United States over Iraq was in any case a chimera. It has recently emerged that German secret agents were active in Baghdad in the run-up to the Iraq War. The allegation has not been satisfactorily refuted that they actually helped the Americans determine their military targets. It has also been recently alleged that Saddam’s Foreign Minister Naji Sabri was not only the primary source for the tales about weapons of mass destruction but also that he was working for French intelligence as well as for the CIA. These reports imply either that elements are at work within the French and German

secret services that are under the control of someone other than their respective governments or that the governments themselves were playing a clever double-game for public consumption.

Whatever the truth, the fact is that both the Chirac and Schröder governments moved swiftly after the invasion of Iraq to repair the damage done to their relationship with George W. Bush. In September 2003, Germany under Schröder agreed to increase its troop presence in Afghanistan in order to take some pressure off the American armed forces in Iraq, while in 2004, Chirac’s government boasted of its co-operation with Washington in the overthrow of the Haitian president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. So much for the creation of a new anti-American geopolitical bloc.

This return to normal was consolidated in September 2005 with the election of Angela Merkel. Her victory was achieved only with massive campaign-

the German conservatives under Mrs. Merkel was essential so that Germany would “normalize” its relationship with Washington and not concentrate its foreign policy priorities on its European partners (i.e. France) alone.

Although Merkel’s Christian Democrats now govern in coalition with the Social Democrats—because their victory was by such a narrow margin—the very first issue they negotiated with their former opponents in the contract defining the terms of their Grand Coalition was foreign policy. In November 2005, both parties agreed to dissolve the Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis that had been built by Schröder (himself no longer in government) and to adopt instead an overtly hostile attitude to President Putin in Russia.

And what about the people? Here, too, it seems that there is little chance of any strong European opposition to an attack on Iran. The issue is not debated with anything like the intensity with which the attack on Iraq was argued over in 2002 and 2003. One can hazard various reasons for this. The first is that war against Iran remains only one possibility among others, whereas the month-long build-up of troops in Kuwait made it obvious that an attack on Iraq was inevitable, even when Tony Blair and George W. Bush pretended that no decisions had been taken. The second could be that there has been a very substantial degradation in relations between Christians and Muslims in Europe, following the assassination of a prominent Dutch film director by a Muslim fanatic in November 2004, the bomb attacks in London in July 2005, the largely Muslim riots in France later in 2005, and the riots and violence generated by the Danish cartoons of the prophet Mohammed in 2006. Unlike Iraq, Iran is an Islamic republic and therefore likely to attract fewer friends in Europe in the current climate.

There is, however, a third possibility—the most depressing of all. Opposition to the Iraq War caused one of the most important mass movements in recent European political history. Between one and two million people marched against the war in London in February 2003, and the war elicited the biggest ever rebellion by British members of Parliament against their own government. Huge marches were held in the other European capitals on many other occasions. In previous ages and in other circumstances, such vast numbers of politically motivated people in the streets could have generated a revolutionary situation, or at least exerted very substantial political influence on the government of the day: a contributory factor to the downfall of Margaret Thatcher, for instance, was the rioting against the poll tax in 1990.

But these marches and these protests achieved precisely nothing. Tony Blair and the other pro-war European leaders sailed on regardless. They managed to pull off an impressive feat of Marcusian repressive tolerance—tolerating dissent precisely to be able more easily to ignore it. The subsequent years gave rise to huge ructions in Britain, as the lies Blair told over Iraq were systematically exposed. Again, nothing happened. Blair remains in power through sheer tenacity of will and sheer brazen lying, as do the other leaders and politicians who supported the war, with the single exception of José Maria Aznar in Spain. The Iraq War, in other words, pitted public opinion against the collective decisions of the political class with an intensity seen only every few decades. Public opinion having decisively lost that battle, there seems little energy left to start another one now. ■

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Sibel Edmonds, the FBI Turkish translator turned whistleblower who has been subjected to a gag order, could provide a major insight into how neoconservatives distort U.S. foreign policy and enrich themselves at the same time. On one level, her story appears straightforward: several Turkish lobbying groups allegedly bribed congressmen to support policies favorable to Ankara. But beyond that, the Edmonds revelations become more serpentine and appear to involve AIPAC, Israel, and a number of leading neoconservatives who have profited from the Turkish connection. Israel has long cultivated a close relationship with Turkey since Ankara's neighbors and historic enemies—Iran, Syria, and Iraq—are also hostile to Tel Aviv. Islamic Turkey has also had considerable symbolic value for Israel, demonstrating that hostility toward Muslim neighbors is not a *sine qua non* for the Jewish state.

Turkey benefits from the relationship by securing general benevolence and increased aid from the U.S. Congress as well as access to otherwise unobtainable military technology. The Turkish General Staff has a particular interest because much of the military spending is channeled through companies in which the generals have a financial stake, making for a very cozy and comfortable business arrangement. The commercial interest has also fostered close political ties, with the American-Turkish Council, Turkish American Cultural Alliance, and the Assembly of Turkish American Associations all developing warm relationships with AIPAC and other Jewish and Israel advocacy groups throughout the United States.

Someone has to be in the middle to keep the happy state of affairs going, so enter the neocons, intent on securing Israel against all comers and also keen to turn a dollar. In fact, the neocons seem to have a deep and abiding interest in Turkey which, under other circumstances, might be difficult to explain. Doug Feith's International Advisors Inc., a registered agent for Turkey in 1989-1994, netted \$600,000 a year from Turkey, with Richard Perle taking \$48,000 annually as a consultant. Other noted neoconservatives linked to Turkey are former State Department number three Marc Grossman, current Pentagon Undersecretary of Defense for Planning Eric Edelman, Paul Wolfowitz, and former Congressman Stephen Solarz. The money involved does not appear to come from the Turkish government, and FBI investigators are trying to determine its source and how it is distributed. Some of it may derive from criminal activity, possibly drug trafficking, but much more might come from arms dealing. Contracts in the hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars provide considerable fat for those well placed to benefit. Investigators also are looking at Israel's particular expertise in the illegal sale of U.S. military technology to countries like China and India. Fraudulent end-user certificates produced by Defense Ministries in Israel and Turkey are all that is needed to divert technology to other, less benign consumers. The military-industrial-complex/neocon network is also well attested. Doug Feith has been associated with Northrop Grumman for years, while defense contractors fund many neocon-linked think tanks and "information" services. Feith, Perle, and a number of other neocons have long had beneficial relationships with various Israeli defense contractors.

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