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## Post-Election Britain

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# Thatcher's two pressing challenges

by Mark Burdman

In the estimation of reliable British insiders, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher will be faced with two pressing challenges, after her June 11 landslide election victory.

*Domestically*, Britain emerges from June 11 a deeply divided nation. The country is split, as never before, along north-south lines, with Scotland providing a special and most problematic case.

*Strategically*, British experts stress that the reality underlying the public debate up to the election, between the "strong nuclear deterrence" policy of Mrs. Thatcher and the "unilateral disarmament" policy of Labour's Neil Kinnock, is the more fundamental question of whether Britain is going to be a dependable strategic partner for the United States internationally, a question for the moment focused on an anticipated East-West crisis in the Persian Gulf.

The June 14 London *Sunday Telegraph* published a colored map of the election results, with blue representing the Tory Party, red the Labour Party, and other parties (the Alliance and small parties.) having different colors. Leaving aside some splotches of other colors, the top of the map is overwhelmingly red, the bottom overwhelmingly blue. East of Wales (where Labour beat the Tories, 24-8), in the center-to-south of the U.K., from the latitude of Monmouth, Worcester, Gloucester southward to the Channel, *only three Labourites won parliamentary seats*, outside of Greater London itself! In each of the regions of South West, South East, and East Anglia, Labour won only *one* seat, and the combined margin in these three regions, was 170-3. For all of southern U.K., below the cited latitude, the margin was 259-37 in the Tories' favor, which explains the overall Tory parliamentary majority of over 100, in the elections as a whole.

For the north of the U.K., there are two related, but ultimately distinct, patterns. In Scotland, the Labour vs. Tory victory margin was 50-10, with the Alliance and the Scottish National Party also winning seats. For Scotland as a whole, there is well over a two-thirds representation arrayed against the ruling party in Parliament, for the first time in over 200 years in the U.K. Some in Britain call this the "doomsday scenario": the Tories winning almost everywhere else in the U.K., but losing massively in Scotland.

The anti-Tory factor is not only, or perhaps not even

primarily, a result of the economic crisis of Scotland, particularly in its urban centers like Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen. Rather, what is afoot, is a combined economic, social, and political revolt, with strong regionalist—"nationalist" undertones, against what is perceived to be an English-centered Thatcherite leadership insensitive to Scottish problems.

The other pattern is that of most of northern England, from the belt of formerly industrial cities like Liverpool, Manchester, and Sheffield, up north to Leeds and Newcastle. Here, unquestionably, the economic issue is primary. These cities have been devastated by the collapse of industry. Unemployment often is as high as 40%, social services are miserable, and the inner cities are often totally decayed and violence-ridden.

These cities are mostly congregated in the York and Humberside region and North region, where Labour won by a 60-29 margin. Hence, counting Scotland, Labour's margin over the Tories for the northern U.K., is 110-39!

Of all the southern regions, Labour had the best showing *inside* London, where it won 23 seats; London's inner city exhibits many of the same problems as other cities in the U.K. Several notorious radicals, like former Greater London Council head Ken Livingstone, an advocate of direct social confrontation, won in London.

Unless health, social services, transportation, and education are upgraded in Tory priorities, and unless the unemployment problem is tackled—3 million Britons are unemployed, officially, out of a total population of 55 million—Mrs. Thatcher is headed for very tough months.

### Weinberger vs. Hammer

On the strategic plane, the issue goes beyond nuclear weapons, zero options, and so on, to Britain's crucial global capabilities. For example, in the Persian Gulf, the British can play a "bridgehead role," should a crisis erupt there, which no one else, emphatically not the Israelis, can play. Will the British agree to upgrade their cooperation with the United States on this level? Before the elections, U.S. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger spent some days in the U.K., meeting with senior defense planners, to reinforce Britain's commitment.

During the same week of June 1, however, the "Anglo-Soviet Trust" made a big countermove, with the trip to the U.K. of KGB multimillionaire Armand Hammer. According to British sources, Hammer was there to bolster a deal made by Labour shadow foreign secretary Denis Healey with the Soviets, during Healey's pre-electoral visit to Moscow. These sources affirm that Healey reached a deal, for Britain *not* to work with the United States in the Gulf, should a crisis erupt in that region, and should Labour come to power.

Since the same British sources estimate that an East-West crisis in the Gulf-Middle East is a near certainty in the period ahead, we have hardly seen the last chapter in the fight to define Britain's international strategic role.