

British war schemes, big lies rebuked at NATO summit

by Jeffrey Steinberg

On Sunday, April 25, the closing day of the NATO 50th Anniversary summit in Washington, D.C., British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, British Defense Secretary George Robertson, and British Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Sir Charles Guthrie held a press conference at the Ronald Reagan conference center, the principal site of the NATO gathering. The day before, the British government had abruptly cancelled three scheduled press events, including a briefing by Prime Minister Tony Blair, prompting reporters from all over the world to ask: "Where's Tony?"

The purpose of the Sunday morning press conference was to whitewash the major policy rifts that had erupted over the previous five days between Her Majesty's government and the Clinton administration, and to attempt to regain some measure of British control over the future of NATO and the ongoing military operations in the Balkans.

Not only did the Blair troika fail to achieve that objective. In response to questions from *EIR* and other news organizations, the British officials were caught, repeatedly, in lies about the past days' events, during which British plans to launch a ground war in the Balkans were scotched by President Clinton and a majority of continental western European NATO leaders, led by Germany and Italy.

In fact, from the opening day of the summit, British officials, as well as their leading surrogate, NATO press spokesman Jamie Shea, were caught publicly lying about Britain's efforts to transform NATO into a British-steered global police force, employing "high-tech" gunboat diplomacy, to collect debt, and overthrow regimes placed on London's "enemies list."

In the course of these public exchanges, vital evidence came to light, proving definitively that London, not Washington, is the author of the new imperium policy, and that Presi-

dent Clinton had decisively rejected Blair, his Balkan ground war, and his global NATO schemes.

The Sunday showdown

After Robertson and Cook delivered brief prepared remarks about the "unity" of the NATO alliance, and the closeness of the Anglo-American partnership, the question period was dominated by sharp challenges to the British cover story about NATO "unity."

A *Washington Times* reporter began the line of questioning: "Sir, the British were reported to have been more aggressively seeking an okay for the use of ground troops among all of the other NATO members, and that never really hit the public awareness of this summit. What I'd like to know is, behind the scenes, was this issue discussed, and how soon is there expected to be a decision that the NATO bombing campaign has, in effect, run its course, and failed to produce—in other words, how many . . . can you give a timeline, where NATO is expected to sit down and actually debate and discuss and decide on the use of ground troops?"

Cook bristled: "The first response would be to continue to rebuff the suggestion that Britain is the aggressor. Britain is engaged in this action precisely because we wish to restore [to] the people of Kosovo peace and security in which they can rebuild their shattered lives. On the question of ground troops, all allies are on exactly the same position. We support what has been said by Javier Solana, and we have invited him to come forward with proposals as to when it would be appropriate for ground troops to go in, to guarantee a cease-fire, to secure the territory, to enable the refugees to go back. But the military is concentrating during that context to immobilize the position by the Yugoslav army."

At that point, this reporter, jumped in with a follow-up



British Prime Minister Tony Blair (left) and President Bill Clinton at the NATO 50th anniversary summit. The smiles scarcely conceal a major rift between the American President and the British Prime Minister, which bubbled to the surface at the summit.

question: “All three of you were actually quoted in the *Washington Post* today, one would presume accurately”—Cook interjected, “Yes”—“seeming to suggest that, coming into the summit, the position of the British government was that it hoped that President Clinton would be convinced [by Blair] to go along with the idea of . . . ground troops coming in before a clear . . . white flag by [Serbian President Slobodan] Milosevic. Is there an element of frustration in how the whole process of the summit played out on that issue? Is this accurate in terms of what the British government position was, say, Wednesday or Thursday of this week, before the summit began?”

Both Robertson and Cook proceeded to lie through their teeth.

Robertson: “The British government is entirely happy with the decision that was taken by NATO, announced by the Secretary General, to review and re-review all of the options that were concerned with ground troops, and the implementation force. So that represents our position. That represented our position Thursday, when the announcement was made, and I dare say that it will be our position tomorrow when we have the press conference back in London.”

Cook, peeved at having been ambushed, tried to shift the subject: “But let’s get some reality check here, too. There are no two closer allies, the United States and Britain. Tony Blair has an excellent, close relationship with President Clinton. I speak daily to [U.S. Secretary of State] Madeleine Albright, and work very closely with her. Yesterday we spoke for 15

minutes on BBC, reinforcing each other’s messages, and demonstrating the similarity of both of our analyses, and our governments’ approach. And George Robertson has a very close working relationship with Bill Cohen. All three of us work closely with our opposite numbers, and there’s not a playing card of difference between us.”

EIR’s Edward Spannaus attempted to ask another follow-up question, but Cook would have nothing of it. However, a moment later, Cook called on *EIR*’s White House correspondent William Jones.

Jones: “In [Blair’s] press conference in Brussels, one of the reporters asked if you were trying to launch a new Crusade, and this, of course, has become a theme also in the British press, I understand. Is it not the case that . . . there are very few countries that are willing to go onto this kind of crusade that Prime Minister Blair seems to want to launch?”

Cook shot back: “I have no problem in confirming the ardor of the Prime Minister. He is determined, resolute, and we will secure the objectives, first for the sake of the refugees, but also because we are fighting for the values—security, and democracy, for the Kosovo people, and those are the values of NATO. . . . There are 18 other nations in NATO . . . that support us. There are also seven front-line countries in the region around Kosovo who support us. And repeatedly, around the rest of the world, when this is raised in international organizations, the support comes for what we are doing, and the criticism comes toward Serbia. We’re prepared to see it through, and it is clear from the discussions that we had

among the heads of government on Friday, that so also are all the others.”

The ‘accurate’ quotes

Everything that Robertson and Cook said at the press conference contradicted their own accounts to the *Washington Post*, in a story published the day of the press conference, under the by-line of Barton Gellman.

Gellman described an interview with Guthrie: “Standing on a tarmac at Langley Air Force Base, Britain’s Chief of Staff Gen. Sir Charles Guthrie spoke Wednesday of the astonishing ‘velocity’ of the Serb violence against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo since the war began, and about the limits of the air campaign to effect it. ‘I am frustrated I haven’t been able to do that—to stop it quicker,’ he said.”

Gellman next turned to Cook: “Around a dark wooden table, the next day with reporters and editors of the *Washington Post*, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook ruminated about a scenario that the Clinton administration dodged all week, sending ground troops into Kosovo without a peace agreement with Milosevic. ‘A permissive environment certainly would require one in which there was no other functioning army in Kosovo fighting us,’ he said. ‘That doesn’t necessarily require we have to have permission from Milosevic.’ ”

And on Robertson: “In a borrowed aircraft normally used by Vice-President [Al] Gore, British Defense Minister George Robertson plunged into a similar discussion about the need to win, even if that means changing tactics. ‘We will need to go in quickly when the circumstances are ripe.’ He said the 30,000 troops that NATO countries pledged, to ‘implement the peace pact’ that Belgrade would not sign, are no longer enough, and the British are willing to send in more.”

What none of the British delegates at the NATO conference would admit, was that, on April 21, during a three-hour meeting with President Clinton, Blair had repeatedly tried to draw the American leader into support for a ground war in Yugoslavia, a position that Clinton fervently rejected. At a press conference after his meeting with the President, Blair personally had lied that the British and U.S. governments were in full agreement about the Kosovo mission. White House sources told *EIR* that the President was furious at Blair’s blatant misrepresenting of what had occurred during their private talks.

On April 23, the opening day of the NATO conference, White House press spokesman Joe Lockhart, in response to a question from Spannaus, hinted at what had actually occurred at the April 21 Blair-Clinton meeting.

Spannaus: “The British press was proclaiming loudly that Tony Blair was coming here to convince President Clinton to introduce ground troops, and in fact, some of the British press—the *Daily Telegraph*, for example—went so far as to compare Blair’s mission with Maggie Thatcher coming and convincing George Bush not to ‘go wobbly’ on her. I gather

he was not successful on the ground troops aspect, but does anybody find . . . the Thatcher-Bush comparison . . . a bit insulting?”

Lockhart: “If I got into what was insulting in the press, we’d be here all evening, and I have too many areas to go through. . . . Let me just tell you what I know. Which is: The President articulated his position on ground troops well before—and many times before—Mr. Blair came to visit. He’s articulated it since. It hasn’t changed. The British have indicated their position. I’ll let them speak for themselves. And I don’t think we should get too caught up in what the latest headlines say, nor should we spend any time worrying about any historical comparisons.”

Shea is caught lying

The exchanges between *EIR* and the Cook-Robertson-Guthrie trio demonstrate clearly that Britain’s policy going into the bilateral meeting between Blair and Clinton, was to draw the United States into supporting a full-scale NATO ground war in Kosovo, a war that would have inevitably led to a broader Balkan war, and that would have spread from there. President Clinton rejected Blair’s plan. The British lied about the policy rift, while trying, through every underhanded means available, to get their way, despite the American, and continental European, opposition. Canada, a leading force in the British-American-Commonwealth (BAC) constellation, fully supported Britain’s push for a ground war. From Gellman’s April 25 *Washington Post* story:

“Canadian Prime Minister [Jean] Chrétien said before arriving in Washington that Canada would supply ground troops and support a NATO decision to use them in combat if necessary. Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy and Defense Minister Art Eggleton insisted that the air campaign is working, but that it was only ‘prudent’ to look at other options, including the introduction of ground troops.”

On April 23, the heads of state of the 19 NATO countries spent the first three and a half hours behind closed doors, formulating NATO’s policy on the Kosovo crisis. The rejection of a ground war was codified during a press briefing by NATO Secretary General Javier Solana that afternoon. President Clinton’s own earlier decision, to launch a renewed effort for a diplomatic settlement, through the Russia government and United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, carried the day.

Yet, even as this policy was being hammered out, the “Queen’s own” NATO spokesman, Jamie Shea, was spinning a version of events remarkably similar to what Robin Cook had told the *Washington Post* in his interview of April 22.

Shea proffered that NATO might send in ground troops without a cease-fire agreement with the Milosevic government in Belgrade, under the British definition of “permissive environment.” This time, Shea was caught in his lie by Martha Raditz of ABC News.

At the April 23 daily NATO press briefing, Raditz asked



Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien (left) and British Prime Minister Tony Blair. The two Commonwealth leaders came to the NATO summit, pressing for a ground war in the Balkans. They were rebuffed by the majority of other NATO leaders.

Shea: “Can you give us the latest definition for what a ‘permissive environment’ is, or is it now, semi-permissive?”

Shea, as if reading from a script, declared: “A permissive environment is an environment in which the Serb forces would not be posing any resistance to an incoming international security force, and in which an international security force would be able to get on with its job of creating a security environment with the least hindrance, and with the maximum chances of very rapid success. That definition, of course, is up to NATO leaders. They will know what a permissive environment is, when they see it.”

Several hours later, President Clinton’s National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, speaking to the press at the same podium used by Shea, was asked about Shea’s definition.

Berger sharply contradicted the Shea-Cook formula: “A permissive environment would be one in which the government in Belgrade either would accept its presence, or acquiesce to its presence. That’s pretty straightforward.”

‘H.M.S. Windbag’ sunk

By the close of the first session of the heads of state meetings on April 23, it was clear to all participants that President Clinton was not reading from the British script. This no doubt encouraged continental European leaders to assert their own differences with London, on a wide range of NATO issues, from the role of the United Nations Security Council in pre-approving all NATO “out-of-area” activities, to the so-called European Security and Defense Identity, a Blair-initiated An-

glo-French concoction that asserted the role of the European Union (EU) in shaping Europe’s future defense posture. The ESDI issue infuriated Turkey, an important NATO member, that has been banned from EU membership for 10 years on dubious grounds.

In the following articles, which include our firsthand reports from the NATO summit, covering press briefings and official statements by the heads of state of France, Germany, Italy, Macedonia, and others, continental Europe weighed in on a number of crucial issues, beating back a succession of bellicose British tacks.

The NATO heads of state “Statement on Kosovo,” issued on April 23, officially adopted the five-point peace proposal put forward in early April by UN Secretary General Annan. All references to a “NATO-only,” a “NATO-led,” or a “NATO-core” peacekeeping force were eliminated. Article 3 merely cited “the stationing in Kosovo of an international military presence.”

Article 7 cited the crucial role of Russia: “Russia has a particular responsibility in the United Nations and an important role to play in the search for a solution to the conflict in Kosovo. Such a solution must be based on the conditions of the international community as laid out above. We want to work constructively with Russia, in the spirit of the Founding Act.” Indeed, Russia’s indispensable role in a peaceful settlement of the Kosovo crisis was a constant theme throughout the weekend. On April 25, at the close of the summit, Sandy Berger announced that Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Tal-

bott was being sent to Moscow, to pursue the Russian peace mediation.

The Berger announcement was doubly significant. It not only confirmed that the Clinton administration is actively encouraging the Russian peace initiative (earlier that day, President Clinton had spoken by phone with Russian President Boris Yeltsin for nearly an hour), along with Germany and Italy, in particular. It also signalled that Vice President Gore, who had been the presumed “official channel” to President Yeltsin’s Yugoslav emissary, former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, had been taken “out of the loop.” Gore’s absence from the entirety of the summit was another signal that the Vice President has been downgraded.

The focus on Russia’s vital role in the peace effort was not lost on Blair. On April 23, *EIR* reporters at the summit learned that Chernomyrdin had proposed to come to Washington on April 24, to brief NATO leaders on his first diplomatic foray to Belgrade. Blair “pitched a fit,” according to one German source, and forced the other NATO leaders to politely turn down Chernomyrdin’s offer.

A watered-down ‘Concept’

The second day of the NATO summit was devoted to the future of the Atlantic Alliance. For a year, defense and foreign policy planners in all of the NATO capitals had been working on a “New Strategic Concept,” defining the purpose of NATO, going into the 21st century. The British government, along with its assets and allies in the governments of other NATO countries (including within the Principals Committee of the Clinton administration), had been pressing to transform NATO into a global police force, unaccountable to any international agencies, especially the United Nations Security Council, which includes Russia and China among its five permanent members. The British-orchestrated U.S. and British bombings of Iraq, beginning in December 1998, and the NATO air campaign against Yugoslavia, had been touted by the British as the precedent for NATO’s decoupling from the Security Council. “Might makes right,” Blair and company had argued.

Her Majesty’s NATO press voice, Jamie Shea, had announced on the morning of April 24, that the final, approved version of the “New Strategic Concept” would be ratified by the heads of state, and released to the public by noon.

In fact, the final version was not released until 7 p.m., following hours of emergency meetings among the NATO heads of state and foreign and defense ministers. While the final version retained some of the egregious formulations peddled by London, the idea of a “global NATO” was, for the time being, severely set back; and, if French President Jacques Chirac is correct, the decoupling of NATO from the UN Security Council was defeated.

At his press conference that day, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana answered a question posed by this writer, confirming this assessment:

Steinberg: “Could you please elaborate on the aspect of the out-of-area deployment of NATO? For example, was it discussed whether or not this would extend into areas like the Persian Gulf? And secondly, could you also explain where the discussion process stands on the issue of how NATO is going to deal with weapons of mass destruction, which obviously has global implications, as well?”

Solana answered carefully: “Well, I think that the two questions you have posed to me are very clear in the strategic concept, and it will be very clear in a communiqué that will be distributed in the coming hour.

“As far as the extent, the geographic extent: Well, as you know, NATO is not a universal organization. NATO is a territorial-limited organization; his aim, his commitment, his engagement is to what we call the Eur-Atlantic issue, the Eur-Atlantic area. And we are prepared to cooperate to the security and the stability of the Eur-Atlantic area. Of course, there may be risks, there may be challenges; they may arise from outside the Eur-Atlantic area that may have effect in the Eur-Atlantic area, but our main concern is the region in which we have to cooperate to the stability and security of the so-called Eur-Atlantic area. With that, I think I answered your question.”

Reconstruction of Southeast Europe

Day three of the NATO summit was devoted to meetings between NATO heads of state and the leaders of the seven “front-line states” bordering Yugoslavia. There was a larger meeting of the NATO leaders with the heads of most of the 24 nations in the Partnership for Peace. The absence of PFP member Russia from the session was deplored by Italian Prime Minister D’Alema as “tragic.”

One theme that shone through the sessions had been first emphasized by President Clinton in his April 15 foreign policy address in San Francisco: the need to look beyond the war in the Balkans to a postwar plan for the reconstruction of the entirety of Southeast Europe. During the course of the summit, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder announced that he would be hosting a summit in Bonn on May 27, to take up the urgent issue of economic development for the region.

Postscript

On April 27, a *Washington Post* front-page story confirmed what this news service was already widely reporting. “As world leaders began descending on Washington last week some top U.S. officials worried that the [U.S. and British] governments were not exactly singing from the same sheet. Senior British officials kept raising publicly the prospect that ground troops might be needed to bring Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic to heel in Kosovo—precisely the message Clinton did not want dominating the three-day NATO summit that ended yesterday. So at a three-hour meeting at the White House on Wednesday, Clinton appealed to Blair that ‘this is not the time to be talking about ground troops,’ a White House official yesterday recounted.”