

'Before You Send A Single Briton To Die'

by Tam Dalyell

Tam Dalyell is the longest-serving member of Britain's House of Commons, and a veteran of military service. He authorized EIR to publish his letter to British Prime Minister Tony Blair on the threat of an Iraq war. It was printed in the London Times on Jan. 6 under the headline, "In the Name of Democracy, Mr. Blair, Read This Before You Send a Single Briton To Die." Mr. Dalyell's direct attack on "the Cheney-Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz" group, echoes the opposition by American military officers—such as Gen. Anthony Zinni—to a war, and to the "chicken-hawks" demanding it. It also reflects rising opposition in Britain, to Blair's war policy on Iraq.

Dear Prime Minister

Before they are sent into action, at undoubted risk to their own lives, and inevitably, to other innocent lives, do not British Forces have this right? To know that it is the settled conviction of their countrymen and countrywomen that their cause is just, and their task urgent for the British people.

I concede that, whatever I may have thought about the wisdom of military action in the Falklands and in the Gulf, there was such a general conviction. But in the case of Iraq, what would you think if you were serving in the Forces, if you knew that the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Field Marshals Lord Bramall and Sir John Stanier, General Patrick Cordingley [British commander during the 1991 Gulf War], and a host of others, right across the spectrum of British life, were vehemently opposed to what you as Prime Minister were asking them to do?

What is the precise military objective? Is this a basis for risking life? Before going along any further with the Cheney-Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz agenda, and before you dispatch any more British forces to the Gulf, you owe the Services one thing: a vote in the House of Commons on an unambiguous motion as to whether Britain should go to war without a clear, updated decision by the United Nations.

Prime Minister, we are supposedly a parliamentary democracy. Each one of us in the House of Commons should be made to feel personally responsible for the grave step of sending our constituents, their fathers, mothers or children into the perilous situation of a pre-emptive strike. Iraqis will surely fight to defend their homeland as they did not in 1991 to keep a debatable conquest.

I would regard this as the most important vote of my 41 years in Parliament. It is a matter of irony that in the U.S. presidential system, Congress has been more genuinely consulted than the House of Commons in what we used to call, proudly, a parliamentary democracy. Morally, you cannot shelter under the Royal Prerogative. In a case of pre-emptive action, rather than reaction to aggression, you must give Parliament a free vote.

You will have been told that there are many members of the Labour Party, at the grass roots, without whose support none of us would be MPs, who will simply not work for achieving a third-term Labour Government if you attack Iraq. There would be a bonfire of party membership cards. And many MPs would put their deep political beliefs and experience above any instruction from the whips to vote against their judgement and their conscience.

Invited to Abu Dhabi in December to give a lecture, I found nothing but alarm and foreboding among opinion leaders from the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf States, the very countries that provided bases and much of the finance for the 1991 Gulf War. Asked to the Palace to see Sheikh Sultan Bin Zayed al Nahyan, he explained to me: "An attack on Iraq will be seen as, Christian against Islam. That may not be how Mr. Blair sees it, but that is how it will be seen throughout the Arab world." And so it will.

What To Do?

Those, like myself, who have heard you at private meetings cannot doubt the sincerity of your desire "to help Africa." How can you prioritise war in Iraq when a fraction of the costs involved would make a significant difference to Ethiopia, Somalia, and the Sudan?

What to do? Give an honest assessment on the findings of Hans Blix and his inspectors. If Cheney-Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz continue to set the bar higher, whatever Iraq does, refuse to go along with them. Recognise that their agenda, even if inspectors come up with nothing serious, is regime change and control of Iraqi oil reserves.

Adherence to what is right may have little direct influence on Cheney-Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz. But a stand against an unnecessary war by you would have a considerable effect on American public opinion. A CNN poll puts support for war against Iraq, in the absence of UN endorsement, at 26 per cent. If the British were to say: "No. After what has happened since the inspectors went in, we think war is unjustified"; the American people's support for military action would plummet further. This might persuade President Bush to hold back from war.

You, in these circumstances, Prime Minister, have the unique power to stop the war, because American opinion itself would not support a war, without the backing of the Security Council and the United Kingdom. If you choose to do so, many of us believe that your actions at this stage could restrain President Bush.