

own cabinet ministers after she thrice denounced his Iraq policy as "reckless" in a radio interview—about as clear a breach of the ancient constitutional principle of collective cabinet responsibility as one can imagine. As various Brutuses in the cabinet surreptitiously whet their knives, Caesar suddenly appears very vulnerable: talk is now open of a leadership challenge to Blair within the Labour Party.

Like Mrs. Thatcher, whom he admires, Blair is convinced—as are many neo-conservative theorists in the USA—that the only realities in politics are willpower and force. Just as neocons like William Kristol and Robert Kagan have been insisting since 1996 that the "present danger" is a failure of America's will to establish "benevolent global hegemony," so Blair acts on the principle that his own willpower can overcome all opposition and resolve all contradiction. So far, this tactic has worked. Unfortunately, reality has a nasty habit of refusing to be willed away, and it is particularly stubborn when it comes to the principle of non-contradiction—that something cannot both be and not be. At the Azores summit, Blair's demon eyes blazed furiously as he seemed to will away the nonsense he was speaking—the UN Security Council Resolutions justified ignoring the UN Security Council and that Iraqi oil must be administered by the UN because it belongs to the Iraqi people. Whether he is finally coming apart mentally is open to debate; but the reality check is approaching so fast that the time cannot be far off when the British public will turn on Blair with the same contempt they heaped on Matilda in the Belloc poem: "Every time she shouted 'Fire!', they only answered, 'Little liar!'" ■

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[Hapsburg hangover]

That 1914 Feeling

The lights are going out, again.

By Martin Sieff

IT WAS AN open-and-shut case. The rogue state had been sponsoring international terrorism for decades. Its leaders had long expressed ambitious expansion plans to swallow their neighbors or large chunks of nearby territory. It was run by men who had not only slaughtered their predecessors but also women and children in crimes that astonished the world. And now there was every reason to suspect it had actively plotted and supported a terrorist conspiracy.

The leaders of the great, civilized multinational state that had been the victim of the outrage were determined to root out what they regarded as the source of the terrorism. They were going to invade that rogue state, topple its killer rulers—and no one, in truth, disputed that they were evil—and take it down.

So morally certain were they of the rightness of their cause that they saw no need to rally international opinion. They dismissed arguments that the rogue state was part of one of the largest ethnic groups on earth and that hundreds of millions of their ethnic cousins might rise up on their behalf and in their defense. They knew that they were part of the greatest concentration of military power and high tech weaponry ever known in the history of the world. They would have their war, and the rogue state at the heart of the axis of evil

sworn to dismember their great and internationally respected nation would be destroyed at last. After all, the troubled corner of the world where the rogue state existed had long been a breeding ground for terror. It was time for the great nation to take it in hand and re-order it for its own good, bringing enlightenment and civilization where none had existed.

But it did not work out that way. Because the rogue state in question was not Iraq but Serbia. The great nation that had been assaulted by terrorist attack was not the United States but the Hapsburg Empire of Austria-Hungary—the most enlightened, tolerant, and long-lasting political system that Central Europe had ever known—or has ever known since. The outrage that terrorized the great nation was not the destruction of the World Trade Center but the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. And the terrorist group that carried out the atrocity was not al-Qaeda but the Black Hand.

Like the civilian strategists of the Bush administration, the military commanders of Austria-Hungary were convinced that the rogue state they were about to assault had masterminded the terrorist plot. But like the Bush administration today, they did not have any hard evidence actually to prove it. The alleged meeting between 9/11 plot leader

Mohammed Atta and Iraqi intelligence officials in Prague appears to have been a figment of the fertile imaginations of Iraqi dissidents encouraged by hawks in the Department of Defense. Ironically, the link between key elements of the Serbian government and the Black Hand was all too real, but the Austro-Hungarian intelligence service was too incompetent to find it.

Serbia's aggressive designs on her neighbors were also real and were indeed all fulfilled at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. The perception across Europe that Serbia was a murderous rogue state that harbored international terrorists was quite true as well. The previous Serbian royal family had been slaughtered in a frightful coup a decade before—the queen and her young children literally cut to pieces by the conspirators. The killers continued to hold positions of power and leadership at the time of the archduke's assassination a decade later.

Serbia, like Iraq, was part of a larger world. Serbia was Orthodox Christian and Slav just as Iraq is Muslim and Arab. Still, Austria-Hungary, backed by Imperial Germany, had got away with annexing Bosnia-Herzegovina, including fateful Sarajevo just six years before. Russia, still enfeebled by the aftermath of its 1905 defeat by Japan and the revolution that had erupted thereafter was in no condition prevent the seizure. This gave Austria-Hungary's leaders the misplaced confidence that "the Slav Street" could be safely ignored forever, just as neo-conservatives today argue that Arab popular nationalist pressure, the "Arab Street," is also a myth because it did not erupt in 1991.

There was no United Nations Security Council in 1914, but there was something very similar, a venerable Concert of Europe in which the five great powers of the continent—Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and

Russia—had, for an entire century, worked with a surprising degree of unity to prevent any local wars from getting out of control.

Their arrangement in many respects foreshadowed the more formal structure of the one part of the United Nations that has been constructive and truly valuable over the past six decades—the veto power accorded to the five permanent members of the UN Security Council that they have wielded both for themselves and their favored client states.

Far from being the seed of an impractical and unattainable world government, the UN Security Council veto system reflects hard, real nation-state interests and political realities—*realpolitik* indeed. Today, with its cavalier determination to ignore that restraint, the Bush administration is proving as heedless of consequences as Austria-Hungary's leaders and their German allies were when they shattered the Concert of Europe and delivered their similar ultimatum to Serbia in July 1914.

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION IS PROVING AS HEEDLESS OF CONSEQUENCES AS AUSTRIA-HUNGARY'S LEADERS AND THEIR GERMAN ALLIES.

Winston Churchill—who has been endlessly (mis)quoted by today's neo-conservatives to justify their imperial fantasies, wrote in his great history, *The World Crisis*, how he perceived that ultimatum when he learned of it on July 24, 1914. Churchill used terms eerily appropriate to the Bush administration's uncompromising diktats to Saddam Hussein: "This note was clearly an ultimatum; but it was an ultimatum such as had never been penned in modern times. As the reading proceeded it seemed absolutely impossible that any

State in the world could accept it, or that any acceptance, however abject, would satisfy the aggressor."

Churchill was right, of course. For he knew that the rulers in Vienna, like the War Party today, were as intent on their own destruction as the Gadarene swine. They did not want to be satisfied. How the Serbian extremists rejoiced! For, like al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden on 9/11, the Black Hand was laying a far vaster trap for the great, tolerant empire it hated not just perpetrating a terrorist attack against it. The Serbian nationalists in 1914, like al-Qaeda in 2001, wanted Armageddon. They wanted an apocalyptic Clash of Civilizations that would bring the Hapsburg Empire crashing down in ruins. And, thanks to the self-righteousness of the empire's leaders, they got it.

Like Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, Serbia's leaders, while no moral exemplars, proved cagey opponents. They too went through the motions of yielding to international pressure and did not reject the Austrian ultimatum outright, but accepted most of its terms, just as

Saddam allowed United Nations arms inspectors onto his territory and acknowledged their discovery of some weapons. But the Hapsburg Empire's leaders were set on war, just as America's are today.

The leaders of other great powers then, as now, balked at the prospect of even such a "just war." Sir Edward Grey, Britain's foreign secretary played the role of German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and French President Jacques Chirac today. He suggested an international conference to defuse the crisis—a mechanism that had worked well and

often before. It was indeed the method the Concert of Europe had used for generations to deal with such kinds of unpleasantness. But Austria-Hungary's ally, Germany, contemptuously rejected the proposal in terms that President Bush and his courtiers are literally echoing today.

They should rather heed the wise advice of their own hero Churchill. Writing in his autobiography, *My Early Life*, from the vantage point of 1930, he recalled the supreme confidence of his own British Empire in 1899 that the Boer War would be over in weeks, perhaps even days, and warned, "Let us learn our lessons. Never, never, never believe any way war will be smooth and easy. Always remember, however sure you are that you can easily win, that there would not be a war if the other man did not think he also had a chance."

There were those at the time who could see where the July ultimatum to Serbia would lead. Count Berchtold, the foreign minister of the empire dined one warm, pleasant Viennese day at his favorite café with an old friend, the liberal Jewish editor of one of Vienna's most respected newspapers. He laughed off his appalled friend's warning that unleashing hostilities against Serbia would set off a general war in which their beloved empire would be destroyed and horrific communist revolutions would sweep the entire continent of Europe.

"And who will lead this terrible revolution of yours?" the foreign minister asked. "Mr. Bronstein, I suppose, sitting over there, endlessly arguing as usual with his friends!" Mr. Bronstein became better known to the world as Leon Trotsky, right-hand man to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and future creator of the Red Army. ■

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Meet "New Europe"

Up close, neither democratic nor pro-Bush.

By Chad Nagle

TALLINN, ESTONIA—Responding to a reporter's question about German and French opposition to a U.S.-led war, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld famously said, "You're thinking of Europe as Germany and France. I don't. I think that's 'old Europe.' If you look at the entire NATO Europe today, the center of gravity is shifting to the East." The Pentagon chief was of course drawing attention to countries from the former Communist bloc that have expressed support for Washington's war plans, thus highlighting a pro-American counterweight to the ostensibly "anti-U.S." sentiments of the Germans and the French. So what does Mr. Rumsfeld's "New Europe" actually look like?

One of the ten European Union (EU) candidates whose governments signed a "Letter to Washington" in support of a U.S. war was the Republic of Estonia, which gained independence from the

USSR in 1991. Estonia has been hailed as a success story of democracy and the free market and has received invitations to join both NATO and the EU. But the reality on the ground contrasts palpably with rosy official reports.

After the letter was publicized, it came to light that neither the president nor anyone else here in Estonia—except the pro-Western prime minister—knew anything about the official endorsement. "Nobody in parliament knew of the letter to Washington until after it was publicized," says Dr. Uno Silberg, a member of the Estonian People's Union, one of six parties in parliament. "Our party made an official protest, but the rest of the legislators came to an 'understanding' a few days later. It was all part of the 'business plan' in Estonia."

On Feb. 2, President Arnold Ruutel expressed opposition to the war in a public statement. "Let us keep peace in



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