

# Britain's Blowback

The attacks on London show that the Bush/Blair combination of war and multiculturalism is deadly.

By Stuart Reid

LONDON — We can take it, they say, and no doubt they are right. But London was better able to take it before we learned that three of the four suicide bombers were homegrown and that the fourth was from Jamaica, which is more or less the same thing. It was sobering news and quite took the wind out of our cocky sails. What had at first seemed shocking but manageable now seemed like something that could happen again and again.

The homegrown suicide bomber, it emerged, is just like his counterpart in Baghdad: he will slaughter anyone. He cares nothing for color, creed, race, or religion. And yet the suicide bomber does not operate in a political vacuum. George W. Bush supplied the context back in September 2001. In the War on Terror, said the president, those who are not with the United States are with the terrorists. Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schroeder ignored the implicit threat. Tony Blair, however, wagged his poodle tail and signed up for what was to become a global democratic revolution. The Muslim world also took sides. Now London is on the front line.

Life goes on, meanwhile, but talk of the Blitz spirit is misleading. World War II was not at all like the War on Terror. For one thing, it was a real war; for another, it was winnable; for yet another, no one ever suggested it was not a war. Many Londoners behaved with exemplary courage and dignity during the Blitz; others, however, panicked and

looted and grumbled about the Jews. This time around, there has been no panic and no looting, and no anti-Semitism—unless you count the AP report that the Israeli embassy had been told about the bombs before they went off. The report was quickly withdrawn, though not before it had been pinged around the world by the usual gang of conspiracy theorists (who for some reason have my e-mail address).

Comparisons are being made not just with the Blitz but with the IRA campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s. In those days newspaper offices got fairly regular hoax bomb warnings. Sometimes the people in the back office passed them on to the staff over the public-address system. The convention was that printers left the building, but journalists remained where they were. It was a matter of honor. I have vivid memories of one such warning, in the hot summer of 1975, when I was a copy editor at the *Guardian*. The journalists stayed put—all, that is, except for a rather beautiful arts writer who had taken his shirt off and was sitting in the newsroom bare-chested. My desk was next to a huge window, and I took the precaution of shielding my face with my hand, thus ensuring that, had a bomb gone off, my knuckles would have ended up embedded in the remains of my cranium.

If there was no panic this round, there was some jumpiness. On the morning after the attack, hundreds of thousands

of Londoners stayed at home—or in the pub—some because they saw an excuse to take a day off but many because they did not dare use public transport. Bicycle shops did brisk business. (Watch it, chaps: 430 cyclists were killed or seriously injured on London's roads in 2003.) It emerged, furthermore, that since 9/11 some Londoners—a tiny minority, no doubt—have taken to moving from one Tube carriage to another, without raising the alarm, when they see what the transport authorities refer to as a “suspicious bag.” On my first post-bomb journey, I lasted only one stop before I swapped carriages. I did not like the look of the rucksacks being carried by two Mideastern-looking types. Nor did I like the look of the Mideasterners themselves. They had shifty, rather frightened eyes. No doubt they thought I had too.

Londoners weren't the only ones to get jumpy. The United States Air Force issued a “battle staff directive” ordering airmen not to visit London. Captain Jason McCree, spokesman for USAF Lakenheath in Suffolk, said, “We are taking prudent measures to ensure the security and safety of our airmen, civilians, their families and our resources.” No one can argue with the desire of an officer to look after his men, but it occurred to some of us that an American serviceman stands more chance of being killed in a flossing accident than in a bomb attack in England. In any case,

the order was withdrawn almost as soon as it was made public. Londoners could once again focus on President Bush's stirring response to the terrorist attack: "In this difficult hour, the people of Great Britain can know the American people stand with you."

In the House of Commons, George Galloway issued a challenge to the liberal consensus—that we were dealing here with an "evil ideology," nothing more—and was accused, by Adam Ingram, the defense minister, of "dipping his poisonous tongue into a pool of blood." Try this for poison: "I condemn the act that was committed this morning. I have no need to speculate about its authorship. It is absolutely clear that Islamist extremists, inspired by the al-Qaeda world outlook, are responsible. I condemn it utterly as a despicable act. ... Let there be no equivocation: the primary responsibility for this morning's bloodshed lies with the perpetrators of those acts." But—*forbidden word*, "but"—he added: "Does the House not believe that hatred and bitterness have been engendered by the invasion and occupation of Iraq, by the daily destruction of Palestinian homes, by the construction of the great apartheid wall in Palestine and by the occupation of Afghanistan? Does it understand that the bitterness and enmity generated by those great events feed the terrorism of bin Laden and the other Islamists? Is that such a controversial point? Is it not obvious?"

The mood in London in the immediate aftermath of the attack was a lot lighter than it seems to have been in some U.S. cities. On July 7, American friends and relations got in touch to find out whether we were still alive. We began to wonder what American networks had been broadcasting: you'd have thought that the Martians had landed. One lovely and very level-headed girl wrote, "I hope you are able

to spend the next few days staying close to home and taking care of each other." Our friends meant well, and we were touched by their concern.

South Park "conservatives" were a different matter. Check out [www.secondbreakfast.net](http://www.secondbreakfast.net) for its embarrassing "F\*\*\* YEAH" celebration of plucky little London: Rowan Atkinson! Benny Hill! Churchill! John Cleese! The Beatles! David Beckham! Monty Python! Margaret Thatcher! Kicking French butt over and over and over! F\*\*\* YEAH! You get the picture. These guys pick everything that is repulsive or clichéd about Great Britain and proclaim their "politically incorrect" love of it. Their gushings were, however, accompanied by grotesque pieties, beginning with an introductory moral health warning from the blogger-in-chief: "This is not to be callous in light of the horrors that happened today in London, but I thought our British friends could use as many gestures of support as possible." So

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determined were these people not to be callous, not to offend the tender sensibilities of their slow-witted readers that, "given the occasion," they struck Guy Fawkes from the list of great Britons. Oops. Close call. Coarse is OK, coarse is cool; but tasteless, truly tasteless, is ... well, it's not nice, is it?

A week after the bombings, millions of Londoners and millions of people worldwide—and 9,000 British troops in Iraq—observed two minutes' silence for the victims. I was at home and forgot, but in truth I do not much care for mass demonstrations of grief. My wife, in most respects a New York wiseguy, is more demonstrative, however, and

stood in silence with her coworkers in the East End. Later she gave money to a Cockney girl collecting for the victims and said she hoped that some of it would go to the bombers' families, since they are victims too. The Cockney said she hoped so too. There is a lot of anger in London, but there is also a great sense of sadness and pity, even pity for the bombers. One of the survivors of the Piccadilly line bomb, Angelino Power, a barrister, told an ITN reporter that anyone who could commit such an evil act deserved our pity.

In King's Cross a couple of days after the bombing, I met Brother Ben, of the Mustard Seed Evangelical Church, who said that the only way to respond to the horror was with love. We must love our enemies, he said. Sure, I said, but sometimes we must also kill them. No, said Brother Ben. Then you fight forever, and no one wins. Brother Ben was no theologian, but his simple faith was disarming, and his answer to evil is at least as good

as Tony Blair's, who proposes to defeat it by further reducing our liberties—by, for example, introducing ID cards—and by continuing to wage war against terror with all his might and main. One thing he won't countenance, however, is criticism of Islam. Like his pal George W. Bush, he will not say anything that might be construed as racist or in breach of the canons governing multiculturalism. At the same time, however, he is prepared to sacrifice innocent Arab life in the name of freedom and democracy. It hasn't worked; it won't work. ■

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# Republic Undone

How militarism overtook American patriotism

By John Lukacs

IN THE BEGINNING of the third American century the United States found itself in a situation that was unprecedented and unexpected. It had become the only superpower of the world. In one sense this was the outcome of a Eurasian earthquake, the collapse of a Russian empire, which occurred largely without American intervention. In another sense, this was the result of a resurgent nationalism among the American people—something that most of them were mentally, and spiritually, comfortable with.

Many have attributed the collapse of the Soviet Union to Ronald Reagan: his massive armament program, they contend, forced the Soviet Union into bankruptcy. This was not so. The end of the Soviet Union was the result of a vast erosion of belief in Communism and in the benefits of its system, something of which Mikhail Gorbachev had become convinced. This man, largely without powerful external or internal pressures, dismantled the second-largest empire in the world within a few years. Why he acted thus had nothing to do with the American military budget, while it may have had much to do with the mysterious, guilt-ridden vagaries of the Russian soul.

That was not how Reagan, and the myriad of his followers, saw it. Their preoccupation was primarily with the evil of international Communism rather than with the geographical reality of Russia. The American propensity to identify the opponents of the United States as “Evil,” as the antitheses of

America the Good, made Americans overlook the weakness of the Russian empire. A result was the vast armament program on which Reagan and his government embarked: the federal defense budget more than doubled, from \$134 billion in 1980 to \$299.3 billion in 1990.

But more was involved than spending. The words, the voices, and the very gestures of this president showed a sentimental and somewhat puerile passion for the American military, from someone who spent World War II in Hollywood. Before that, even presidents who had once been generals employed civilian manners. But now there were Reagan’s fervent, sentimental expressions when speaking to American soldiers, sailors, and airmen. There was, too, his willingness to employ the armed forces in rapid and spectacular military operations against minuscule targets like Grenada, Nicaragua, and Libya.

No great harm was done in the short run. It behooves us to give credit to Reagan, who eventually concluded that Gorbachev was sincere, whereby no undue ideological obstacles remained against the gradual cessation of the Cold War. Creditable, too, was the reaction of the mass of the American people to this enormous historic change. In the warming climate, their animosity melted fast away.

The diminution of the Russian empire and other changes on the world scene during the 12 years of Reagan and the elder Bush were tremendous events of long-range consequence, leading to great changes both in the course of the

gigantic American ship of state and in its command structure.

But we ought to be aware of an attendant contemporary condition, which is the American people’s general lack of interest in and ignorance of these events. It was the slackness of interest in world affairs that probably led to the erosion of President George H.W. Bush’s popularity after the Gulf War, an erosion sufficient to result in Clinton’s electoral victory.

Of their “It’s the economy, stupid!”: the slogan of Clinton’s propagandists during that election campaign was an insufficient explanation. No fundamental, important, or radical changes had occurred in the economies and finances of most Americans in the early 1990s. There occurred a large inflation of paper values and sometimes of profits, contributing probably to Clinton’s electoral victories both in 1992 and 1996. But when that bubble finally burst in 2000, that was not why the “conservative” George W. Bush defeated Al Gore.

From the very beginning of his presidency, Bill Clinton, sinuous and alert, sensitive to the eddies and whirls of public opinion, revealed ever more obvious faults of character. His decisions were marked by a superficial opportunism and habit of prevarication. He was not much interested in foreign policy, leaving relevant decisions to other members of his government, sometimes with questionable results. During his second term he chose for his secretary of state Madeleine Albright, who, among other questionable endeavors, extended NATO to three Eastern