

Britons heap scorn on Blair

Linda S. Heard

British Prime Minister Tony Blair is set to follow in the footsteps of arguably the greatest British leader - Sir Winston Churchill - the only British politician to receive America's highest accolade: the Congressional Gold Medal. Blair's even gone one-up on the cigar-puffing bulldog, credited for saving Britons from forcibly speaking German. Blair has been accorded the double honour of addressing a joint session of Congress this week.

Blair's master of spin, Alistair Campbell, when asked by Blair how he should begin a speech to the nation, once joked: "How about 'My fellow Americans...'" Sounds like good advice when the British PM looks as though he has been putting America's interests before those of his own citizens and is viewed by many in the US as a hero. A recent New York Times headline read: "In Blair we trust". In Britain, headlines are far more likely to be along the lines of "Blair must go". There is increasing pressure in Whitehall for Blair to turn down Bush's medal while a Labour Member of Parliament was quoted by a Scottish newspaper as saying acceptance of the honour would be like "taking an award from Satan".

Britons are increasingly despondent at Blair's apparent subservience to American dictates made apparent when nine British citizens are being held at Guantanamo without the protection of the Geneva Conventions. Blair's outrage, if he feels any at all, is yet to be publicly aired. It's doubtful that Bush would be as reticent in his condemnation were alleged American terrorists being held incommunicado in, say, the Falklands. Britain has also signed a one-way extradition treaty with the US which eliminates the requirements of prima facie evidence against a British suspect, and signed a bi-lateral agreement promising that Britain will not seek to deliver Americans to the International Criminal Court.

It's little wonder the British government has

State of the Union address.

Blair merely does what he does best. Fix a messianic gaze, ooze sincerity and stick to his story against all odds. George Bush, thanks to a nationalistic public, which largely feels that its born-again leader can do no wrong, may emerge from the Iraqi controversy smelling like roses. Not so Tony Blair. A recent poll has indicated that the British public do not trust him "as far as they can throw him" while his counterpart in the Conservative Party, Ian Duncan Smith, rounded upon him during Prime Minister's Question Time yelling: "Nobody believes a word you say any more."

The fact there are now two "dodgy plagiarised dossiers" instead of one isn't helping Blair's case either or the fact that former UN Chief Weapons Inspector, Hans Blix, has weighed in saying that Blair was wrong to make the 45-minutes claim. Amid calls for his resignation from such former supporters as Clare Short, who quit her post as international development secretary over Iraq, and former minister Glenda Jackson, the Blair hardly flinches. Instead, he is actively seeking new powers to attack rogue states. Blair has involved Britain's military in four conflicts during his six years in office - Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Iraq - and appears eager for more.

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been accused of all give and no take. Taken to its logical conclusion, innocent British citizens risk ending up in Camp Delta without the protection of their government, their judicial rights sold out from under them. After the attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001, it was Blair who leapt up to append Britain to America's hip ready to fight America's wars. America's poster boy stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Bush in his "war on terror" and didn't hesitate in approving Orwellian legislation at home shadowing US Attorney General John Ashcroft's Patriot Act.

In a nutshell, Britain has invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, simulated terrorist attacks with biological and chemical weapons at home and, in the lead up to the Iraq war, surrounded its airports with tanks and snipers. Yet Britain has never been attacked before, except by the military wing of the IRA. It is surely peculiar that Britain would create enemies where none existed, all for the sake of its American ally. It is hard to fathom just what exactly Britain has gained from its adventurism. Certainly not Iraq reconstruction contracts, which went to White House cronies, or applause from Britain's allies in the Mideast! On the contrary, its soldiers have been sacrificed while the British taxpayer is likely to be asked to dig ever deeper into his pockets.

Without Blair's intensity and single mindedness, it is doubtful whether Britain would have partnered the US in its invasion of Iraq. Blair may have risked his neck on the political chopping block but his lurid and exaggerated statements concerning Iraq's WMD and alleged links to Al Qaida won over parliament's initial reluctance. Many of his claims have since been debunked. While arguments over the existence or otherwise of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction rage on both sides of the Atlantic, Blair appears content to be America's fall guy. It was Britain, which said that Iraq was seeking uranium from Niger, says the CIA, while George Tenet conveniently flagellates himself for not removing this discredited assertion from George Bush's

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A document circulated by Number 10, Downing Street, during a summit of foreign heads of state held in London has provoked a row between Blair and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder. The document reads: "the rights to sovereignty brings associated responsibilities to protect citizens" and implies that Western democracies should take it upon themselves to interfere wherever there may be civil war or oppression - a ticket to invade in other words. But before dictators around the world begin shivering in their jackboots, it looks as though Blair is destined to leave office before they are ousted. His supporters are thin on the ground nowadays, forcing him to rely upon the good offices of such American friends as Bill Clinton who urged Britain's political left to rally round Blair or risk the phoenix of conservatism.

Some might say that conservatism has already experienced a renaissance in the form of Blair who pays mere lip service to the aspirations of left-wing Labour Party ideology. I believe that those who begrudge the British PM his American medal are being mean spirited. Let him bask in a little adulation while he still can. After all, when he finally departs Downing Street, he'll be lucky to find as much as a gold watch among a growing haystack of brickbats.

A THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Use soft words and hard arguments.

—English Proverb