

ple, the lowest unemployment figures that Britain has had in a decade and the fact that the reforms introduced by his two successive Labor governments are now working to Britain's advantage at their optimum levels. He also went on quite unreservedly to claim the credit for New Labour (as his government likes to describe itself) taking the British economy to a size that is now bigger than that of France and Italy respectively.

He then talked about the Labor Party's success in bringing about devolution in Scotland and Wales through the creation of a Scottish parliament and a Welsh assembly. He proudly described it as the Labor Party's landmark achievement, which gave practical shape to the long talked of devolution of Britain. He even went on to mention the progress made in respect of the pacification process in Northern Ireland with the signing of the Good Friday agreement some four years ago.

It is remarkable that even though Tony Blair has not for a moment had it easy ever since the Iraq crisis erupted and he became such a controversial figure in the world as well as in Britain, he has indeed displayed remarkable political dexterity in being able to hold on to his ground.

Without any doubt he has had his share of luck through all these vicissitudes as a parliamentary leader. It was indeed no ordinary feat for Tony Blair to have survived successive setbacks such as the failure to find any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the row over the quality of British intelligence that led to the decision to go into Iraq, the unusual circumstances that followed the government's row with the British Broadcasting Corporation and the consequential suicide of the British scientist Dr Kelly. To cap it all, he was absolved by two successive inquiries into these matters.

Even the post-occupation reverses in Iraq with mounting casualties, a discordant public opinion situation at home and the loss of the local council elections in Britain, did not deter him from taking the hard decisions that were required.

One must grudgingly give Tony Blair and his Labor government the credit for having been able to withstand every uproar inside the House of Commons as well as on the streets of Britain. In the history of parliamentary democracy few leaders have been able to acquire the sort of durability that is now possessed and displayed by Tony Blair.

One is naturally compelled to ponder on what sustains Tony Blair in his continuation at the pinnacle of British politics and his consistent ability to ride out crisis after crisis that could have dislodged a

forced him to resign and make way for Harold Macmillan.

In any case, going into a major expedition without the support of the Americans can be a hazardous affair for anyone at any time and especially today since we do find ourselves placed unfortunately in a unipolar world.

Why Tony Blair was able to commit British participation in the Iraqi expedition is due to a mixture of several factors. After all, Iraq used to be a British mandate. The Iraq Petroleum Company used to be one of Britain's prized possessions. Britain may today be a reduced power because of the social revolution it has gone through as well as because of having lost an empire, but its memories of grandeur have not quite evaporated in the minds of its leadership.

The British Foreign Office, a succession of British Foreign Secretaries and a host of Arabic-speaking British diplomats remain ardent Arabists. In an essentially American-sponsored Iraq adventure, the British saw for themselves a definite role for the future.

If the adventure turns out to be successful and Iraqi oil is the focus of the American quest, then surely the British can end up with a fair slice of any new oil dispensation in Iraq. Britain's historical connections in the Middle East place her at an advantage in any post-war management of Iraq. The important thing is that the 9/11 events did not leave Britain unaffected. In Britain it generated a deep sense of Anglo-Saxon sympathy and solidarity with the United States and an urgency to jointly take up this challenge to both countries.

There was naturally a harking back to the days of Churchill and the period of World War II that reminded Britain of its debt to America when it came to the rescue of a beleaguered Britain. And that is precisely why the British parliamentary resolution to take up arms in Iraq went through with massive support across the political divide and was voted for by Labor, Conservative and Liberal MPs.

But that was not all that ensured British support for the Americans after the events of 9/11. The two weightiest factors were indeed the support thrown in by the British monarch and the need felt by the British and Americans for ensuring the dominance of the English-speaking world culture.

That is precisely why Tony Blair cannot for the foreseeable future walk away from the office of Prime Minister of Britain in the middle of the Iraq expedition. When the British monarch and the three major political parties of Britain back any decision, it stands elevated to the level of an act of state, which no one can prevent from happening. Not even a British court will question its validity.