

Brits grow wary of war, resentful of U.S.

Glenn Frankel

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LONDON — In a recently televised satire here titled "Between Iraq and a Hard Place," George W. Bush is depicted as an idiot who can't seem to grasp why Saddam Hussein isn't cooperating with the U.S. timetable for war. American democracy is defined as "where there are two candidates and the one with the most votes loses," and Britain's role in the forthcoming military campaign is starkly simple:

"What is it that the Americans want from us?" asks a British official.

"From us?" replies an army general. "Dead bodies."

Prime Minister Tony Blair is the Bush administration's staunchest international ally in its campaign against Iraq and war on terrorism. But apart from Blair and his inner circle, there is growing unease and

resentment here not just about Iraq but about U.S. power and foreign policy in general, according to political analysts, commentators and politicians.

There are fears that the United States is determined to act without heeding the concerns of its allies — and fears that Britain will be dragged along in its wake. These fears have spread far beyond the traditionally anti-American hard left — known here as "the usual suspects" — to include moderates and conservatives as well.

"There's no question the anxiety is moving into the mainstream," said Raymond Seitz, a former U.S. ambassador to Britain who is vice chairman of Lehman Brothers Europe. The debate here, he said, has shifted. "It's not about how you deal with weapons of mass destruction or how you combat the threat of terrorism in the world, it's about how do you

constrain the United States. How do you tie down Gulliver?"

The Guardian newspaper and the ICM polling group found last week that 30 percent of respondents now support the idea of war, down from 42 percent in October. Opposition has risen from 37 percent to 47 percent.

Criticism of America here begins with Iraq but quickly broadens to accusations that Washington is aiding and abetting Israeli repression of Palestinians and is a gluttonous society of large cars, fast food and environmental degradation seeking cheap Iraqi oil to feed its consumption habits.

"People in America don't understand that Blair is a rather lonely figure within his own party and within the country as a whole" concerning war and the alliance with the United States, Michael Gove, a columnist for the Times of London newspaper, said. "Anti-Americanism is a real

force here and a growing one."

Other British observers insist that what's growing here isn't anti-Americanism, but rather healthy criticism of a superpower gone awry. "A vast majority of the British people are favorable to the United States, but a substantial majority are opposed to George W. Bush," said Godfrey Hodgson, a veteran journalist and author.

Much of the outrage is indeed aimed at Bush, whose colloquial speaking style and Texas accent don't go over well here. A cartoon in a week ago Sunday's Observer newspaper depicted him as the Lone Ranger and Blair as Tonto. When Blair expresses doubts about the Iraq campaign, Bush replies: "Shut up, Tonto, and cover my back."

British opposition differs from that found in other European allies such as France, which has a complicated relationship with the United

States, and Germany, with its post-World War II aversion to warfare.

By contrast, Britain has a martial tradition similar to America's, and its relationship to the United States remains one of the world's enduring love affairs. After the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, Blair was one of the first foreign leaders to express sympathy and solidarity, and he sat next to Laura Bush during President Bush's speech to Congress regarding the attacks.

But there always was an alternative view that the United States had gotten some of what it deserved, that the attacks were payback for decades of ignoring Third World grievances. Following a BBC televised panel discussion two days after the attacks, panelist and columnist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown wrote: "We share your grief, America — totally.

"But you must share our concerns."

War countdown begins to accelerate this week

Ron Hutcheson

Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — President Bush will start what his aides say is the countdown to war with Iraq this week by confronting nations around the world with a stark choice between military action or more diplomacy.

The rapid-fire developments are to begin on today, when U.N. weapons inspectors report on their efforts to find and destroy Iraq's hidden weapons. Bush will make his case for aggressive action the next day in the nationally televised State of the Union speech and could order many more troops into the Gulf to back up U.S. resolve.

The issue bounces back to the

United Nations on Wednesday when the 15-member Security Council goes behind closed doors to debate the next move.

The looming diplomatic showdown has unleashed pent-up resentments toward the United States, with potentially far-reaching consequences. Relations between the United States and key European allies are in a downward spiral, and so far the administration has been unable to make Iraq's behavior, not America's, the issue.

In some foreign capitals, the crisis in Iraq is viewed as a classic case of American arrogance. Suspicions about Bush's motives, anger over his seeming disregard for Eu-

ropean opinion and longstanding grievances fueled by America's military superiority, economic clout and unrivaled status as the dominant world power are finding voice in the Iraq debate.

In Davos, Switzerland, business and political leaders at the World Economic Forum have used the gathering to vent their frustration with U.S. foreign policy, especially on Iraq. Representatives from the Arab League and the European Union urged Bush to stay within the framework of the United Nations and international law.

On Sunday, Secretary of State Colin Powell told the forum that Bush is in "no great rush" to launch

an attack on Iraq, but simultaneously warned: "The United States believes that time is running out."

Even foreign leaders who agree that Saddam Hussein is a menace — and many do — say they don't see justification for war now. At the United Nations, France, Germany, China and Russia have apparently teamed up in an effort to block any U.S. war plans. Great Britain is standing with the United States, nervously.

No matter what happens at the United Nations — and debate could drag on — Bush says he will not back down.

Inside the White House, presidential advisers shrug off the increasing-

ly vocal opposition from allies as well as poll results in this country showing widespread opposition to unilateral military action. Although as many as two-thirds of Americans say they support the use of force against Iraq, support turns to opposition if the United States acts alone or in defiance of the United Nations.

Administration officials insist that Bush would have plenty of backers if he decided to go to war and gave a strong rationale for action. He will not attempt to do that in Tuesday's speech, but will explain why he is nearing that point, aides said.

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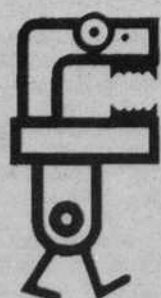
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