

# Britain's Jack Straw warns Europe not to anger the US

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Britain's Foreign Secretary Jack Straw made an extraordinary statement while speaking before a House of Commons foreign affairs select committee on March 4.

Straw warned his European colleagues not to go too far in obstructing US plans for war against Iraq, lest it cause Washington to abandon "multilateral" institutions such as the United Nations.

"What I say to France and Germany and all my other EU colleagues is 'take care', because just as America helps to define and influence our politics, so what we do in Europe helps to define and influence American politics," Straw told the gathering of MPs.

"And we will reap a whirlwind if we push the Americans into a unilateralist position in which they are the centre of this unipolar world," he went on.

Straw's remarks were extraordinary not because of what they reveal about the British government's strategy regarding war against Iraq. Prime Minister Tony Blair has made plain that his backing for a US-led war, even in defiance of the UN and the major European powers and most importantly of popular sentiment in Britain itself, flows from his belief that British interests will be best served by establishing a quid pro quo with its more powerful Atlantic partner.

But they were remarkable given that much of the British government's propaganda against opponents of war recently has been to accuse them of "appeasement"—in reference to the Munich Agreement drawn up between Britain, France, Italy and Germany on September 29, 1938.

At Munich the British government had fully supported Hitler's demands for the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, under the pretext of establishing autonomy for the large German-speaking population in the Sudetenland region. Under British and French

pressure the Czech government was forced to accept Hitler's ultimatums. On September 28, a four-power summit in Munich, involving British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, French Prime Minister Edouard Daladier, Hitler and Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, agreed Germany's annexation of large parts of Czech territory in return for Hitler's pledge of "peace in our time". On March 15, 1939, however, German troops marched into Prague and six months later the Nazis invaded Poland, triggering World War Two.

Blair drew a direct analogy with Munich on February 28, when he cited Chamberlain's agreement with Hitler before a press conference. Chamberlain, was "a good man who made the wrong decision," Blair said, warning that the lesson was that attempts to "appease" Saddam Hussein were bound to fail.

The prime minister's comment was directed against France and Germany's efforts to restrain Washington's rush to war on the United Nations Security Council, but in an interview with the *Guardian* newspaper on March 1 Blair broadened his accusation of appeasement to include the millions of antiwar protestors that had taken to the streets across the world over the weekend of February 15-16.

In the 1930s, "a majority of decent and well-meaning people said there was no need to confront Hitler and that those who did were warmongers. When people decided not to confront fascism, they were doing the popular thing, they were doing it for good reasons, and they were good people ... but they made the wrong decision," he said.

Blair's analogy is false in numerous respects, not least his assertion that Britain's ruling class were "doing the popular thing" in seeking to compromise with Hitler. But if the Munich analogy is taken to mean siding with a greater power determined on aggressive

expansion, regardless of the consequences, then Straw's remarks reveal the Blair government as the true inheritors of Chamberlain's crown. It is the US, after all, that has issued one ultimatum after another against a desperately poor and vastly militarily weaker Iraq as part of its drive to establish its unchallenged world domination. And Straw's claim that it will prove possible to forestall the US "whirlwind" by going along with Washington's demands will prove just as shortsighted and disastrous as did similar claims in the case of Nazi Germany more than 50 years earlier.



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