

# GulfWire

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## Perspectives



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### WHAT'S GOING ON? BUSH'S MEETING WITH BLAIR IN CONTEXT BY JOHN DUKE ANTHONY

[Washington, D.C. - February 1, 2003] Immediately following yesterday afternoon's press conference by British Prime Minister and U.S. President George W. Bush, Kuwait TV's Nightly News Program interviewed GulfWire Publisher Dr. John Duke Anthony for his analysis and assessment of the event. Below is an edited and unofficial transcript of the interview.

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**Kuwait TV:** What is your conclusion regarding the press conference?

**Dr. John Duke Anthony:** The conclusions are relatively few but clear.

**Kuwait TV:** Meaning what?

**JDA:** Meaning that a meeting of the two heads of government at this time should not come as surprise to anyone. Meaning that nothing could be more likely, natural, and appropriate than the two of them getting together at this time.

**Kuwait TV:** Why is that?

**JDA:** The reasons encompass what is special to them both and what they share in terms of needs, concerns, and interests.

**Kuwait TV:** How so?

**JDA:** For one, most of the world believes that the Bush Administration has not yet made a sufficiently persuasive case for launching an attack against Iraq at this time. Blair's visit can be seen as part of an effort to change this. That is, no one can say that his involvement in such an effort is irrelevant. Quite the opposite.

**Kuwait TV:** In what way?

**JDA:** Blair is an exceptionally gifted communicator. His public pronouncements are almost always clear, articulate, and at times even eloquent.

**Kuwait TV:** How is this expected to make a difference?

**JDA:** For one thing, it comes on the heels of the fact that, in the past 24 hours, eight more countries, all European, signed a letter to President Bush indicating that, like Great Britain, they, too, were prepared to stand by the United States with regard to the unfolding situation relating to Iraq in the uncertain days ahead. Impressive as that is, what's missing is context and perspective.

**Kuwait TV:** Such as?

**JDA:** Such as the fact that these eight countries constitute barely a third of the European Union's member-countries. Such as it points up the extraordinary divisions between and among these countries with regard to this issue in the sense that the great majority is still unwilling to sign such a letter of support for the United States.

Such as the fact that neither of the two most important and powerful European countries that would truly make a difference in this matter - France and Germany - are as yet unconvinced that the United States has made a compelling case in support of its readiness and willingness to invade Iraq at this time.

Such as the fact that, of the world's more than 200 countries, 187 of which are members of the United Nations, after all this time, no more than 4% are prepared to state publicly that the line of argumentation being pursued by the United States is persuasive in terms of being either accurate or legitimate.

**Kuwait TV:** Beyond that, what are your impressions of what is going on between Great Britain and the United States on this issue?

**JDA:** The meeting can be seen as but one among many milestones in a continuum of close cooperation between the two on a broad range of international issues dating from long before 9-11 and accelerating since then. It can be seen as yet another chapter in a tradition of high-level cooperation between the two countries dating back as far as anyone can remember, indeed going back to when the previous leaders of these two countries were cooperating closely long before Bush and Blair came to power.

But, beyond this, there's another reason why a meeting of the two at this time is of special importance, one that is given little notice in much of the media.

**Kuwait TV:** And what is that?

**JDA:** It has to do with what Great Britain brings to the table that the United States does not yet have in the way of adequate knowledge and understanding of the inner workings of Iraq. It has to do with the fact that Blair heads a country whose Middle East specialists know far more about the inner workings of Iraq than is the case with respect to their counterparts in the United States. In this, the British are unique.

**Kuwait TV:** How so?

**JDA:** It has to do with the history of their exceptional position and role with regard to Iraqi domestic and external affairs for an extended period in the last century. Compared to the paucity of American knowledge and understanding on this front, the degree of British empirical education and exposure to the issues on the ground inside Iraq, British expertise in this regard far exceeds anything comparable among Americans.

To put this into perspective, outside U.S. intelligence circles [and outside the circle of Iraqi defectors and recent immigrants to the United States, as well as members of the Iraqi opposition in exile] no more than two native American citizens would be able to hold their own in conversation of up to 45 minutes or so with regard to knowing what they are talking about based on their extensive first hand experience inside Iraq. No more than this number can explain in depth and with confidence how Iraq operates socially, culturally, ethnically, tribally, and religiously - this, despite the fact that the population of the United States exceeds 280 million people.

The result is that the situation, as far as American capabilities for the exercise of seasoned judgment in dealing with the Iraqi people are concerned, is rather grave. This said, it is true that increasing numbers of Americans have visited parts of northern Iraq, where most of the country's Kurdish population is located. But knowledge of that sub-region of the country is hardly sufficient to warrant extrapolation from such knowledge to judgments and generalizations about other parts of the country, let alone Iraq as a whole.

On a per capita basis, British specialists know a thousand times more than Americans about the history, culture, heritage, and domestic dynamics of the country and the very complex inter-relationships among the Iraqi people. In a way, this is not only scandalous [in terms of America's needs, concerns, interests, and objectives in Iraq]. It is also dangerous.

One reason this is so is that from 1967 to 1984, when the United States had no direct diplomatic relations with Iraq, the number of Americans living and working in the country [rounded off to the nearest even number] was next to zero. During the six years after diplomatic relations [between Baghdad and Washington] were restored in 1984, until they were broken again in 1990, the total number of Americans living and working in Iraq, including the U.S. Embassy and various business representatives, was fewer than twenty.

Most Americans are completely unaware of the kinds of challenges that such realities pose for what we are trying to accomplish with and in Iraq.

**Kuwait TV:** Thank you.

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**Remarks by the President and British Prime Minister Tony Blair - Jan. 31, 2003**

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030131-23.html>

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