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## Blair to defy anti-war protests

Million-strong demonstration will not deflect Iraq policy as ministers rally round prime minister

**Ewen MacAskill and Michael White**  
**Monday February 17, 2003**

[The Guardian](#)

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Tony Blair refused to blink last night in the face of the biggest anti-war demonstrations ever held in Britain and worldwide.

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Ministers and officials insisted the protests - which saw more than 1 million people march in London on Saturday - would not delay military preparations for war next month.

One well-placed source said: "It changes nothing at all. The quicker it is done, the better. To back down now would be the worst result possible. We would have no credibility if Saddam Hussein was still in place."

Ministers were wheeled out yesterday to buttress Mr Blair, who on Saturday claimed that there was a moral case for military action against Iraq.



In spite of their bullishness, there were signs that the scale of the protest, combined with the report by the UN chief weapons inspector, Hans Blix, on Friday, has disrupted US and British diplomatic plans.



A joint US-UK resolution authorising war that was to have been circulated at the UN security council at the weekend has been put on hold while Washington and London rethink their tactics.

In this section

The US and Britain say they still intend to seek a second resolution but must decide on its wording and on whether to present it to a sceptical security council this week or next.

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The US national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, confirmed yesterday that Washington was reviewing how to go about securing the resolution but was not considering any significant delay with regard to military action. She stressed that President Saddam had "weeks, not months".

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The US and Britain still hope to have the second resolution in place when Mr Blix reports back to the security council on February 28.

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Mr Blair will face calls to give the inspectors more time when he meets the German chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, and the French president, Jacques Chirac, at an EU summit on Iraq in Brussels tonight. The summit was called by Greece, which holds the EU presidency, to try to secure common ground but there was little optimism in London that it would achieve much more than a reiteration of support for existing UN resolutions.

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The London protest attracted people with an astonishing variety of backgrounds and political viewpoints. The numbers and diversity should be a cause of worry to a prime minister who prides himself on his awareness of public opinion.

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Mr Blair, speaking at the annual conference of the Labour party in Scotland, said that while he understood the moral concerns of the marchers, the balance of morality lay with ending a barbaric regime.

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While refusing to be dismayed by the scale of the protests, Downing Street aides took quiet satisfaction yesterday as cabinet members defended what the deputy prime minister, John Prescott, called Mr Blair's "courage, integrity and honesty" in the crisis.

[Full text of email](#)

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John Reid, the Labour party chairman, took the marchers head on, saying they recommended doing nothing, and that such a moral choice meant sustaining a status quo "under which there are people being murdered, tortured and dying and starving".

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Mr Blair's ministers insisted public opinion could flip in favour of war, provided there was a second UN resolution. They admitted it would be problematic for Mr Blair's relationship with his party if he failed to secure that.

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One minister said cabinet resignations were unlikely to extend beyond the leader of the house, Robin Cook, and that while ordinary members would leave the party, he doubted if it would amount to the predicted exodus.

Yesterday, the leftwinger Alice Mahon spoke openly of a leadership threat if Mr Blair did not allow the UN's team more time: "Yes of

course people are talking. There's no point in denying that."

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