

THE DAILY TEXAN

Entertainment | 11/3/05

'Thirty Days' examines Britain's buildup to war

By Gerry Martinez

The climate of 10 Downing Street between March and April of 2003 was turbulent, as Prime Minister Tony Blair aligned with the United States in sending British forces into Iraq. During these critical days, Sir Peter Stothard, editor of the Times Literary Supplement, was granted privileged access to Tony Blair and what became the British "war cabinet." Sir Peter's inside account, "Thirty Days: Tony Blair and the Test of History," is fascinating as it sheds light on this piece of recent history, a history that desperately needs to be exposed and pored over.

The book reads like a political thriller, as Sir Peter guides readers through 10 Downing Street.

"No. 10 is a home, an office and a prison," he states.

In recounting the many forms of opposition that Tony Blair faced, Sir Peter introduces readers to key players such as French President Jacques Chirac; Robin Cook, former Leader of the House of Commons; and former cabinet minister Clare Short. Both Cook and Short resigned in protest of the Iraq War. Worthy of note is that the book is written in the present tense, infusing a real sense of dramatic urgency. This is the kind of journalism assignment for which most would kill.

"A lot of journalism is just luck," said Sir Peter. "It didn't work out by planning. I wasn't selected [initially for this assignment]. It was just pure happenstance."

Sir Peter was able to witness a side of Tony Blair that the public rarely gets to see. The result is a fascinating insider portrait of a political leader. Readers get a sense of Blair's optimism and unwavering

conviction.

"[The Prime Minister] liked to persuade. He liked to be liked," said Sir Peter.

However, he said that Blair's primary motivation for going to war was a shared conviction with President Bush that allowing Saddam Hussein to remain in power was simply immoral.

"There are ... Christian beliefs that he shares not only with his family but with George Bush," said Sir Stothard, "a moral revulsion at how Saddam Hussein treats his own people."

"Thirty Days" is a remarkable achievement in how it manages to remain neutral to the pro-war and anti-war sides of the debate surrounding the legitimacy of the war in Iraq. The book does not condemn or applaud Tony Blair for his decision to go to war.

But, as Sir Peter said, the Prime Minister will have to enjoy the impartiality while it lasts.

"History will judge Tony Blair,,," he said, "whether he asks it to or not."