

# Blair and Schröder try to heal wounds at awkward summit

TONY BLAIR and Gerhard Schröder sought to heal the wounds in Europe left by the Iraq war last night but failed to mask their differences over the conflict.

At their first meeting since the war, the Prime Minister and the German Chancellor agreed to work together to bring bring democracy to Iraq and to rebuild bridges between Europe and the United States.

Although the two leaders are close political allies, their rather awkward body language at a brief press conference in Hanover showed that the strain caused by the Allied invasion had not yet eased.

Mr Schröder declined to endorse the military action by America and Britain despite its success. He said: "Whenever a dictator falls, mankind gains. There will always be conflict over what form that takes. I hope that the military gain in Iraq can be turned into a political gain for the people of Iraq and for the international community."

There were differences of emphasis over who should take charge of post-conflict Iraq. While Mr Blair said the United Nations should have a "key role", Chancellor Schröder said the reconstruction of Iraq should take place "under the UN umbrella". His words reflected the views of Germany, France and Russia that the UN should be in the driving seat - an idea opposed by the United States.

Mr Blair hoped that broad agreement could be reached on the UN's role with the details to be settled later. While admitting there were differences of opinion with Germany over the war, the Prime Minister insisted that relations between the two nations were "extremely strong and will remain so".

Last night the two leaders travelled to Athens for a summit of EU leaders today, which will discuss the future of Iraq with Kofi Annan, the UN

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in Athens

secretary general. The meeting was originally called for a ceremony to sign the accession agreement under which 10 countries will join the EU in May next year. Their presence at the talks could revive the split over Iraq between "old" and "new" Europe, because several of the new members supported the war.

Strong efforts have been made to prevent the first gathering of EU leaders since the conflict from descending into bitter recriminations about the decision by the US and Britain to go to war in the teeth of opposition led by France.

Diplomats hope the talks will be a "kiss and make up session" as the leaders put their differences behind them and agree in principle on Iraq's future. Britain will not push for a declaration endorsing the war and Mr Blair may miss part of the formal discussion on

Iraq. One British source said last night: "We hope that France and Germany are ready to move on. It's time to look forwards, not backwards."

The Athens summit will also discuss the new blueprint for decision making in the EU being drawn up by a convention chaired by the former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. There are fears that it has become bogged down and EU leaders will try to agree some common ground. Mr Blair will push his idea of creating a powerful President of the European Council to drive through the EU's agenda and represent Europe on the world stage.

The split between Britain and America over how to deal with Syria deepened yesterday. Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary, refused to endorse Washington's description of Syria as a "rogue state". He said: "We use different descriptions - Syria has an opportunity to prove that it's not in that category."

## Short: Toppling Saddam 'not worth one death'

CLARE SHORT risked another confrontation with Tony Blair over Iraq when she claimed yesterday that the "death of a human being" was not a "price worth paying" for the toppling of Saddam Hussein.

The Secretary of State for International Development, who infuriated ministers and backbenchers by reneging on her threat to resign if Britain went to war without UN backing, also criticised the Government for failing to prepare adequately for the aftermath of the fall of President Saddam.

Ms Short made her

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outspoken comments at a press briefing in London yesterday, from which British newspapers were excluded. She said: "The likelihood of very rapid regime collapse, and then the complete collapse of all public services and the kind of disorder we've had clearly we're not prepared for ..."

"There is an enormous amount to do, the situation is very worrying, we must very urgently bring order, so that people can get water, power, so the medical systems can get working."