

Blair's Fate Hinges On Iraq War Coverup

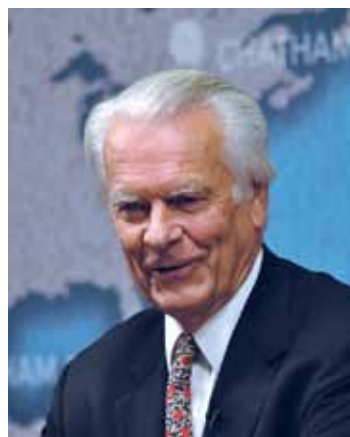
by Carl Osgood

Lord David Owen, former Foreign Secretary, former Member of Parliament, Privy Councillor, Member of the House of Lords since 1992, among other distinctions, has charged that former Prime Minister Tony Blair and current Prime Minister David Cameron are engaged in a conspiracy to block the release of certain documents to the Iraq Inquiry, chaired by Sir John Chilcot.

As reported May 29 by the London *Telegraph's* chief political commentator, Peter Osborne, Owen said, at a public event the previous weekend, that the Inquiry "is being prevented from revealing extracts that they believe relevant from exchanges between President Bush and Prime Minister Blair." The culprits, he said, Tony Blair and Cameron: "Publication of the Bush extracts would not be blocked if Tony Blair had not objected, nor if that objection had not been supported by the present prime minister, David Cameron. Both men are hiding behind conventions that are totally inappropriate given the nature of the inquiry."

But, according to Osborne, Owen didn't stop there. He went on to suggest that Blair and Cameron have entered into a political deal, under which Cameron sits on the documents that Blair wants withheld, in return for neutrality or even tacit political support for the Tories in the next general election, scheduled for 2015. "No 10 [Number 10 Downing Street, the Prime Minister's residence—ed.] reveals that they are in constant contact on many issues with Tony Blair, and Blair's own people confirm this," he said. "Not for nothing does Cameron see himself still as the 'heir to Blair.' It is hard to escape the conclusion that No 10 hopes to win the neutrality or possibly tacit support of Blair by the General Election."

Owen backed up his charge in an interview published on May 28 on the Total Politics blog, where he indicated that the Inquiry has full rights to whatever documents it needs. "What is happening now is a defensive mechanism of people who are trying to evade the tall impact of the Inquiry," he said. "It's as if they s to be raised about whether or not, for example, the truth



Chatham House

Lord David Owen

was told to Parliament."

The Chilcot Inquiry was first convened in 2009 by then-Prime Minister Gordon Brown to, as Brown put it at the time, draw what "lessons" could be learned from Britain's involvement in the Iraq War of 2003-11. Its final report was originally to be re-

leased by the end of 2011, but is now looking like it won't come before 2014. It got bogged down after taking much testimony from numerous government officials of the time, and the publication of many declassified documents, when the government, by then, headed by Cameron, refused to turn over certain documents to the Inquiry, particularly those concerning the discussions between Blair and U.S. President George W. Bush.

According to numerous accounts, including many already provided to the Inquiry, Blair promised Bush, as early as April 2002, that if the U.S. decided to invade Iraq, Britain would be there right beside U.S. forces. Blair has plenty of motivation to keep the truth about those discussions secret, not the least of which, Osborne points out, is that Blair's business empire, based on dispensing advice to Middle Eastern and African dictators, could not exist without at least the tacit support of the Foreign Office.

The implications of nailing Blair are much wider, though, and Osborne gets it. "If Chilcot were to conclude that Tony Blair lied over Iraq (and many well-placed people are convinced he did) it would be a first-order catastrophe for the former prime minister," Osborne writes. "He would be disgraced, just as Anthony Eden was after it emerged that he had lied to Parliament over the invasion of Suez in 1956. His political life would be over and his reputation destroyed. It is not merely that he would be unable to return to British politics. He would also be forced to abandon all ambitions on the international stage, such as his professed desire to become European Union president," or, Osborne could have added, his drive to ignite World War III in the Middle East.