

Profound Policy Brawl Is Behind Demands To Dump Blair

by Jeffrey Steinberg and Scott Thompson

A broad majority within the British Establishment has delivered a “*sayonara*” message to Prime Minister Tony Blair. In a series of stinging media attacks, which began while Blair was in Washington, conferring with George Bush, Blair was told that his time is up, and that he should depart from 10 Downing Street—pronto.

But behind the latest “Dump Blair” drive is a much more profound policy brawl, which could spawn dramatic changes within the British establishment. One extreme outcome could be a breakup of the no-longer-United Kingdom, and a splintering of the Club of the Isles, the real seat of power of the British Crown and City of London financial oligarchy. An only slightly less dramatic outcome would be the emergence of a solid Scottish power bloc, at the helm of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth—under the public leadership of the oh-so Scottish Gordon Brown, the former Edinburgh rector and son of a Church of Scotland preacher.

First the moves to oust Blair:

“Mr. Blair, it is time to recognize your errors and just go,” reads the headline of an Aug. 3 editorial in London’s *Financial Times* written by “Sir Roderick Braithwaite, UK ambassador to Moscow 1988-92 and then foreign policy advisor to John Major and chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee.” The attack on Blair is presented in quite unusual language:

“A spectre is stalking British television, a frayed and waxy zombie straight from Madame Tussaud’s. This one, unusually, seems to live and breathe. Perhaps it comes from the Central Intelligence Agency’s box of technical tricks, programmed to spout the language of the White House in an artificial English accent. . . .

“But whatever our sympathy for Israel’s dilemma, Mr Blair’s prime responsibility is to defend the interests of his own country. This he has signally failed to do. Stiff in opin-

ions, but often in the wrong, he has manipulated public opinion, sent our soldiers into distant lands for ill-conceived purposes, misused the intelligence agencies to serve his ends and reduced the Foreign Office to a demoralised cipher because it keeps reminding him of inconvenient facts. He keeps the dog, but he barely notices if it barks or not. He prefers to construct his ‘foreign policy’ out of self-righteous soundbites and expensive foreign travel.

“Mr Blair has done more damage to British interests in the Middle East than Anthony Eden, who led the UK to disaster in Suez 50 years ago. In the past 100 years—to take the highlights—we have bombed and occupied Egypt and Iraq, put down an Arab uprising in Palestine and overthrown governments in Iran, Iraq and the Gulf. We can no longer do these things on our own, so we do them with the Americans. Mr Blair’s total identification with the White House has destroyed his influence in Washington, Europe, and the Middle East itself: who bothers with the monkey if he can go straight to the organ-grinder?”

“Mr Blair has seriously damaged UK domestic politics, too. He has thus made it harder to achieve what should be a goal of policy for any British government: to build a tolerant multi-ethnic society within our own islands. . . .

“For now, he should no longer attempt to stand upon the order of his going, but go. At once.”

A number of diplomats, strategic experts, and Foreign Office mandarins have also blasted Blair’s full backing for the Bush-Cheney Middle East policy and Israel.

- Sir Christopher Meyer, Britain’s Ambassador in Washington from 1997 to 2003, told BBC, in an interview aired July 29, “Right now, in this crisis, the United States has only one special relationship and that is with Israel.” Meyer warned that all other relationships, “including ours,” are in a secondary or even a third category.

- Oliver Miles, former British Ambassador to Greece and Libya, stated: “It seems we and Uncle Sam think that shooting people is a good idea. I think it is quite monstrous and I think many of my colleagues share that view. The idea you can’t have a ceasefire until you have a full agreement is the tearing up of the way in which conflicts have been resolved since the Old Testament. It is a coded way of saying we hope that Israel will win.”

- Robert Lowe, Middle East specialist at the Royal Institute for International Affairs (RIIA), criticized Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett for behaving like a “yes-man” to Blair, suppressing traditional Foreign Office advice. “It is a deeply flawed approach by the British.”

- Robin Kealy, former British Ambassador to Tunisia and former consul-general to Jerusalem, declared: “What I see is Israel potentially getting itself into a right mess. . . . Their good friends should be giving them some pertinent advice on the issue of proportionality and counterproductiveness.”

- Most significant is a commentary in the July 31 *Times* by Matthew Parris, a former personal assistant to ex-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and a veteran of the Conservative Party. Under the title, “How Mad for Britain To Be the U.S. Poodle,” Parris wrote that he is all for the “special relationship,” but “we see danger in conflating one rogue U.S. President with the personality and the ideals of a whole great nation.” In five years from now, the Bush Presidency will be seen “as a kind of nightmare, an aberration, a dreadful memory. . . . People who today describe themselves as neo-cons will be denying that they were ever attracted by these delusional enthusiasms.” But, “I utterly despair of Mr. Blair recovering the sanity to quit this ship of fools before it sinks. . . . This Conservative leader [David Cameron] has no need yet to nail his colors to any mast. Let him give the good ship *Neocoon* a wide berth. In five years time her hulk will be with the fishes. And it will not be ‘anti-American’ to say so.”

- And finally, Lord William Rees-Mogg, the *Times*’ weekly columnist who had once been among Blair’s leading conservative boosters, delivered his verdict in a July 31 column, titled “Why Blair Must Step Aside.” Rees-Mogg zeroed in on Blair’s lapdog performance on the Lebanon crisis: “I believe in the need to defend Israel, which I see ultimately as a threatened nation,” he wrote. “I believe in the alliance with the United States; I believe in the importance of helping Iraq to recover and develop, though that process has obviously been mishandled. But I do not believe in a system of dominoes in which when Israel makes a mistake, the United States has to back it, and when the United States backs Israel’s mistake, Britain has to come into line. That strategy is no help to Israel or to British interests.”

Rees-Mogg’s conclusion: “Mr Blair still has real political capital in the US, both with President Bush and with the American public. But he has virtually exhausted his political capital at home. The task of protecting the Anglo-American relation-

ship and developing a Middle Eastern strategy that British public opinion will support is now nearly impossible, but Gordon Brown as a new Prime Minister would at least have some chance. Mr Blair is now the victim of his nine years in office. He is no longer the man who can hope to achieve the impossible.”

The Bigger Picture

Behind the move to replace Blair is a far more profound policy battle at the very highest levels of the British Establishment, centered around the unspoken question of how Britain will respond to the looming collapse of the entire post-Bretton Woods monetary system. One senior U.S. intelligence source advised that “the Scottish” are making a move within the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, to either grab a much greater grip on power, or to go on their own, by forging independent ties to like-minded groupings on the European continent. The links, for example, between the Royal Bank of Scotland and the Spanish-based Banco Santander, have vastly expanded in recent years, particularly in Ibero-America, where the banks have grabbed up major privatized assets, and vast tracts of agricultural land.

It was the Scottish National Party which produced the “loans-for-peerage” dossier that has generated police investigations into corruption within the Labour Party, leading directly to Blair’s doorstep.

Among the many issues being hotly debated behind the scenes, in addition to a shakeup of the Scottish, Welsh, and English power-sharing within the Club of the Isles, is the future of the Anglo-American “special relationship.”

As one senior U.S. intelligence figure put it: Since the Suez crisis of 1956, in which the British were the first to back down in the face of pressure from U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower, one faction in Britain—today represented by Blair—has argued that the partnership with the United States is the key to Britain’s role in the world. However, even some among that hard-core Anglo-American faction have concluded that Blair failed, miserably, to steer that partnership to London’s benefit.

The source also said that, both in London and Washington, there is going to be a major effort to reverse the Bush-Blair consolidation of executive power, which has occurred to the detriment of Parliament and Congress. “And then there is the issue of Charles. How will his reign recast the struggle for power between the City and the Crown?”

The new Conservative Party leader, David Cameron, has signalled his own political alignment with the American neo-conservative apparatus which, for the time being, dominates the Republican Party. This, too, carries profound implications, which are also being fought out behind the scenes in London, several sources report.

However these tumultuous battles play out, one thing is emerging as a near certainty: They will continue to be thrashed out after Tony Blair has departed 10 Downing Street.