

INTRODUCTION – HOW TO ASSESS THE BLAIR LEGACY?

TERRENCE CASEY

On the morning of 2 May 1997, an exhausted and victorious Tony Blair arrived at 10 Downing Street amid cheers and flag-waving supporters. After 18 years in the wilderness, Labour was back— unquestionably so, with its majority of 179. It was, of course, a rebranded party born of past defeat: not the Labour of beer and sandwiches, but ‘New Labour’ of claret and cool Britannia. That morning, all seemed within the grasp of the new, vibrant Prime Minister. And the contrast to John Major could not have been starker. The Conservatives were a lackluster, exhausted government, whose final years were marked by policy drift and political sleaze. By dragging Labour back to the political center, Blair and his allies hoped not only to win the election, but to make it once again an enduring party of government in the eyes of the electorate. In their manifesto they exclaimed that Britain deserved better. Hospitals, schools, roads--all things they said the Tories neglected--would be put right. With Blair leading the way, New Labour was going to make Britain great again. Blair told the Downing Street crowd, ‘Today, we are charged with the deep responsibility of government. Today, enough of talking - it is time now to do.’

For the public a decade on, however, the Blair Governments simply had not done enough. His 1997’s approval ratings of 72 per cent were replaced by active dislike of the man and

gray disillusionment with his administration. The PM's approval plunged to 28 per cent by April 2007 (Ipsos MORI, 2007). Yet this is something of a paradox. By many of the objective measures of political performance – economic growth, low unemployment, and improved public services -- the Blair government was a success. But the public was having none of it. This collective funk was captured in a survey published shortly before he left office: clear majorities felt the quality of life and the delivery of public services had suffered under New Labour. Only 27 per cent thought the country a more successful place than in 1997; only 26 per cent gave the government a positive overall rating.¹

If domestic discontent weakened Blair's popularity, his decision to participate in the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003 left it mortally wounded. His party also turned against him. Despite delivering electoral riches, the relationship was never strong. With no connections to the union movement, he was never really one of them; it was from the start a marriage of convenience. The Iraq decision was too much for them. Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown had been the long serving heir-apparent, going back to the purported deal struck between the two at their Granita meeting in May 1994. In the wake of Iraq a growing number of Labour backbenchers wanted that day to come sooner rather than later. Even before the 2005 general election Blair felt obliged to publicly state his intention to step down before the end of the parliament. Impatient for a date certain, a handful of junior government aides tried to force the issue by resigning in fall of 2006. The mini-coup attempt failed, but forced the Prime Minister's to set the timetable for withdraw. In May he announced that he would step down in 27 June 2007.

On that spring morning Prime Minister Blair stepped through the famous front door of Number 10 to nothing more than the snaps of cameras, and headed for his final Question Time in the Commons. It was an uncharacteristically mild and laudatory affair, with relatively softball questions and best wishes from the leaders of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. Even the often acerbic Democratic Unionist Leader Ian Paisley had nothing but kind words. To conclude, Blair simply stated, 'I wish everyone, friend or foe, well. And that is that. The end.' He exited to a standing ovation. After a brief meeting with the Queen, he slipped off the British political stage, no longer wanted by his party, largely unloved by his people. Brown, the media anointed 'dour Scotsman', stepped before the banked journalists on Downing Street and quoted his old school motto: 'I will try my utmost'. The glitz and glamour of Blair's entry was nowhere to be seen. The image was one of sober dedication, the mood serious. The Blair era had come to an end.

Tony Blair was one of few British premiers to dominate their age. Yet what is his lasting importance? This volume examines the legacy of Blair and his three New Labour Governments. Used here, 'legacy' means the ways Labour altered—or did not alter—the structures and relationships between institutions, changed the terms and the limits of political debate, established an ideological stamp, transformed economic management, and repositioned Britain in a wider world. 'Tony Blair's legacy' then encapsulates how he and New Labour fundamentally *changed* British politics, for good or ill. Of course, the record of any decade-long government is significant, and obviously no one volume can treat the subject exhaustively. The examination here is thus organized around the themes of politics, policy, governance, and foreign affairs.

ASSESSING LEGACIES

Should Tony Blair be considered one of the great Prime Ministers of modern British history? There is certainly a *prima facie* case that he should. He was the youngest premier since 1812 and had the longest tenure in office of any 20th Century premier bar Margaret Thatcher. He governed Britain through a period of political stability and economic prosperity. He led the country through multiple humanitarian interventions, not to mention major wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Finally, he led Labour to landslide victories twice and was the party's first leader to win three consecutive general elections. But did he equal the great premiers of Britain?

It is often said that great political leaders 'make the weather' rather than suffer it– they are able to set the agenda and transform politics rather than merely responding to the climate (Theakston and Gill, 2006, p. 196). During the 20th century three administrations had undoubted meteorological influence: the Liberal Government under Henry Campbell-Bannerman and Henry Herbert Asquith (1905-15); the postwar Labour Government of Clement Attlee (1945-51); and the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher and John Major (1979-97) (The following draws on Riddell, 2006, Chapter 1; and Studlar, 2007).

The country's last Liberal Government won a landslide election largely on the issue of free trade and moved on to establish the foundations of the British welfare state, changing the perception of the state's role from the passive night watchman of the Victorian era toward accepting responsibility for improving the lot of the poor through taxation and redistribution (Riddell, 205, p. 4). The battle over David Lloyd George's 'People's Budget' led also to the showdown with the House of Lords and the permanent curtailing of the Lord's legislative powers via the 1911 Parliament Act. Finally, Asquith brought Britons into, and Lloyd George guided them through, the conflagration of the First World War.

The Attlee Government transformed both the policies and the politics of the postwar period. By nationalizing the 'commanding heights' of industry (rail, steel, coal, electricity, gas), the state entered into direct economic control of a significant share of the economy. They also adopted the tools of Keynesian demand management as a means of securing full employment. The universal welfare state was greatly expanded, with the National Health Service (NHS) as its flagship. Taken together, the changes in domestic policy amounted to a fundamental alteration of the boundaries between the public and private sectors, with a considerable role for the state in both providing services and managing the economy. Acceptance of the Keynesian mixed economy and the universal welfare state by the second Churchill Government – and Conservative governments through the early Seventies – converted this into a 'postwar consensus'.²

Yet it was the inability of these policies to stem Britain's relative economic decline that led to Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government. Thatcher changed the terms of political debate, redefining the postwar consensus as a cause rather than solution of Britain's ills. Wherever feasible, the teachings of neoliberal scholars like Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman were put into action, particularly via the early adoption of tight, anti-inflationary monetarist policies. Thatcher soldiered on through then resulting unemployment, refusing a U-turn *à la* Edward Heath. The Conservatives also sought to decrease the state's role by cutting taxes, reducing spending and privatizing state holdings. Marginal tax rates were slashed and the core industries nationalized under Attlee (and a good chunk of council houses) were back in private sector hands by decade's end. The welfare state, particularly the NHS, proved a much more impenetrable redoubt; net government spending was essentially unchanged.³ Thatcher also attacked 'corporatism', meaning the privileged consultative role of interest groups, mainly unions (Studlar, 2007, p. 13), culminating in the defeat of the miners' strike of 1984-5. If the pillars of the postwar consensus were nationalization, full employment, respect for union power, and the welfare state, then three out of four pillars were demolished by the Iron Lady. Only the welfare state proved resilient.

Did three New Labour governments 'change the weather' in comparable ways? The chapters that follow explore various policy domains to answer this question, with a conclusion by Jonathan Tonge providing a reflective overview. The concern here is to set out parameters for the book as a whole.

Agreeing on a conceptual framework for assessing historical importance is difficult indeed. League tables of Prime Ministers may make for great political sport, but their scholarly value is limited by their inherent subjectivity and murky standards of comparison. Historians and political scientists are particularly at odds (see Theakston and Gill, 2006; their results are discussed in more detail in Tonge below). Still, a structured evaluation of any leader's political legacy must build on three foundations: comprehensive scope; a long-term view; and clearly elaborated standards of comparison.

Legacies are multifaceted. Proper understanding requires a *comprehensive analysis* of policies pursued and institutions restructured – ‘...the consequences of decisions already taken, as well as the consequences of those that have not been taken’ (Gamble, 2007, p. 123). It also means surveying the political landscape, sketching new political boundaries. Distinguishing legacies across multiple areas is also necessary as achievement (or radical change) in one area may be countered by disappointment (or stasis) in another. Finally, scholars should avoid disproportionately emphasizing even the most prominent of single decisions. In Blair's case, of course, this would be the Iraq War. Labour's reputation may suffer for the Iraq adventure, but this should not distract from the broader picture. After all, each of the three ‘weather changing’ governments discussed above saw their parties suffer long-term electoral droughts thereafter (Wilson, 2007, p. 5).

Existing scholarly evaluations of the Blair decade vary. For Vernon Bogdanor (2007), the key legacies are public service reform, constitutional amendments, and the war in Iraq— with real and lasting substantive changes in the former overwhelmed by war's political

costs. Graham Wilson (2007), distinguishes policy, institutional, and political domains, and sees New Labour's legacy as the net change overall. Policy changed only moderately compared to the previous Conservative Government; institutional power was spun off to devolved institutions, while Downing Street concentrated its grip on the central core of government. Politically, Blair returned the Labour Party to electability and three victories, but the foundations of his political support in the public and the party were in fact weak. Taken together, Wilson views Blair as more of a consolidating than radical leader, promoting a kinder, gentler Thatcherism (Wilson, 2007, p. 12). Finally, Donley Studlar (2007) adopts the distinction between political eras (encompassing the key issues and policies of a period) and political orders (alterations in party competition and institutional practices). In his view New Labour brought the political order of Britain into congruence (increasing transparency and accountability through, for example, devolution) with the political era of neoliberalism initiated by Thatcher.

In the concluding chapter of this volume, Jonathan Tonge takes an approach similar to Bogdanor, Wilson, and Studlar. He adopts four tests: (1) whether 'Blairism' amounted to a coherent ideology; (2) whether his government produced novel and durable policies; (3) whether the 'Blair settlement' was sufficient to reshape the policies of the Conservatives; and, finally, (4) whether the Labour Party emerged as a 'Blairite' organization. Tonge's conclusion is supported by the book's twenty substantive chapters, each of which is focused on a specific area, but broadly falling under the headings of politics, policy, governance, and foreign affairs. Taken together, the book offers a comprehensive overview of the impact of ten years of Blair.

To assess legacies one must also transcend ephemera. It follows that scholars should do more than recount a period's key events or survey the state of play as a leader leaves the field. We want to understand the *long-term impact* on politics and government. Did the leader change the game itself, as well as winning his (or her) innings? Moreover, change matters whether it is for good or ill, well received or broadly unpopular. Prime ministers can leave just as indelible legacies through failure -- witness the decades-long reputation for incompetence Labour suffered because of the Callaghan Government's inability to deal with the 1970s economic crisis.⁴ Moreover, legacies result from inaction as well as radical reform. Without the Tories' acceptance of Keynesian macroeconomics, the welfare state and the mixed economy in the 1950s, what mark would the Attlee Government have left? Equally, issues that seem of great importance at the time often prove to be less compelling in retrospect. The politics of the 'poll tax' were crucial to the downfall of Margaret Thatcher; now it is little more than an historical footnote. Moreover, opinions change; Attlee's stock, for example, rose after a series of favorable biographies starting in the 1980s (Theakston and Gill, 2006, p. 210).⁵

In short, only the wisdom of time and competitive scholarship will provide a thorough and accurate understanding of how ten years of Blair changed Britain. But it is important to begin. Despite their close historical proximity to the events, contributors to this volume were urged to focus not only on Gordon Brown's 2007 inheritance, but to reflect more generally on the long-term legacy of the Blair decade.

Finally, perhaps the most important question to grapple with regarding legacy is: compared to what? Since all are dealing with a commonly known record, the greatest variation across authors is the *standard of comparison*. Bogdanor, Wilson, and Studlar rely on history – the performance of previous governments is the yardstick against which to measure Blair’s stature. Yet one can also gauge a legacy based on expectations. With the public’s over-inflated expectations of Blair at the start, he was bound to disappoint in the end (Morris, 2007).⁶ Peter Riddell portrays Blair as an ‘unfulfilled Prime Minister’ because he did not use his electoral and political advantages to secure more substantial changes in policy – a regret expressed by Blair himself (Riddell, 2006, p. 196). A similar point is made by Anthony Seldon, who argues that Blair’s agenda only began to crystallize as a coherent body of reform in 2006-07 (2007, p. 648). For both authors then the metric of Blair’s legacy is what he could have done. Like many left-wing critics, Stuart Hall (2007) sees New Labour as apostasy, a continuation of the long march of neoliberalism and the betrayal of social democracy. That Blair, Brown, or any other significant New Labour figure never suggested that they would do any such thing seems beside the point; for Hall and his ideological companions this is what they should have done and were thus found wanting. Prime Ministerial expectations are equally a function of the political climate in which they operate (Theakston and Gill, 2006, p. 212). The guru of the third way, Anthony Giddens (2007), contends that, given globalization⁷ and British political culture, New Labour was the only viable progressive program.

Given the wide variety of subjects covered in *The Blair Legacy*, no attempt was made to impose a uniform standard of comparison on the contributions below. Most naturally fall

into comparing the Blair years with previous British experience. Others make explicit cross-national comparisons. Some focus on the context in which decisions were made while others attempt to frame the questions in terms of theoretical concerns. Despite these variations, the commonality across all of the contributions (with the exception perhaps of the chapters on the Iraq War) is that they are not oriented to what could have been or should have been, but rather what did, in fact occur during the Blair years and the implication for future British politics.

In short, a valuable assessment of Blair's legacy requires a comprehensive review on the full range of public affairs with an eye on long-term implications. The focus should remain broadly objective, analytical, and should avoid fanciful alternative histories or normative critiques. We hope that, given the contributions of the many talented scholars gathered here, the reader will be better able to answer the 'big question': *How has Britain changed as a result of the Blair years?*

ORGANIZATION OF BOOK

The book's chapters are organized around the key themes of politics, policy, governance, and foreign affairs. Within their area of expertise, contributors were asked to address a common series of questions:

- What did New Labour face on gaining office? What were its stated aims?

- What key policies, programs, or reforms were implemented?
- How did Labour's policy, positions, or approach change over the decade?
- How far were stated goals met? What is the government's broad legacy?

Beyond these questions, authors were encouraged to interpret and structure their responses at will. Their contributions are previewed in the following paragraphs.

Part I -- Politics

Certainly in terms of electoral results, Blair was triumphant. He easily managed what had eluded all previous Labour leaders – winning three straight General Elections. The 1997 and 2001 elections produced landslide majorities of 179 and 167 respectively. Even as the Iraq War eroded Blair's personal approval, Labour still managed a respectable majority of 66 in 2005. Neil Kinnock and John Smith may have banished the left, but it was Blair who cemented the party in the political center. If Margaret Thatcher sought to demolish the *policies* of socialism, producing a decisive victory for the market, Tony Blair sought to destroy the *politics* of class warfare, handing a decisive victory to Middle England (See Curtice, 2007 for a more detailed discussion of Blair's appeal to the middle class). The ultimate tribute to Blair's success is how much David Cameron seems to be aping of his political style as he attempts to restore Tory electability.

In office, the opposition never seriously threatened Labour's majority and, with a few notable exceptions, the majority of Labour MPs stayed loyal, albeit grudgingly. To be sure, there were large rebellions, not least over the Iraq War (when 139 Labour MPs voting against invasion), but the government did not lose a whipped vote until the Terrorism Bill in November 2005 (see Mark Stuart below for a more detailed discussion).⁸ And for all the rumor and innuendo regarding Blair's combative and dysfunctional relationship with his Chancellor, neither Brown nor any other credible player directly challenged Blair's leadership. He may not have had full freedom of action and the pressures to go were increasing. Yet in the end, neither voters, nor party, nor failing health actually drove him from office. Tony Blair did something rather unique among British Prime Ministers: he simply walked away from power.

For David Denver and Justin Fisher (Chapter 1) it was Blair's personal popularity, as much as policy positioning or ideology, which explains New Labour's electoral success. Even at the end the electorate preferred Blair as PM to the other party leaders. Not until the ascension of David Cameron was his lead seriously eroded. Still, his electoral magic was not infinite. Labour's share of the national vote fell with each successive contest and the party suffered defeats in many 'second-order' elections. Overall, though, the party's electoral record after 1992 was remarkable, and was grounded in the ideological and organizational changes initiated both by Kinnock and Smith. Florence Faucher-King (Chapter 2) argues further that the 'modernization' of Labour between 1994 and 2007 had dramatically changed the party. Its organization was more centralized, streamlined,

and organized along business lines, yet it also was increasingly disconnected from the grassroots and ill-prepared financially.

Blair had an equally dramatic impact on the opposition parties. As Tim Bale chronicles in Chapter 3, after unsuccessfully attempting to maximize the appeal to base voters under William Hague, Iain Duncan Smith, and Michael Howard, Tory fortunes were renewed by Cameron's 'valence' strategy, highlighting centrist policies and governing competence. David Cutts and Andrew Russell (Chapter 4) track the rather different trajectory of the Liberal Democrats, who benefited disproportionately from both anti-Conservative sentiment in the late 1990s and the unpopularity of New Labour in the 2000s, but now see their electoral prospects ebbing following turmoil in the leadership and the repositioning of the Conservatives.

Wyn Grant (Chapter 5) investigates the characteristics of the Blair Government's interaction with pressure groups, observing five themes: the turn toward business, but away from business associations; a decline in the role of trade unions; the emphasis on new consultation procedures; the emergence of the regulatory state; and the growth of direct action and single issue groups. The influence of pressure groups in policymaking was central to both governance and scholarship in the Seventies and Eighties, but New Labour's approach was largely *ad hoc*. Grant thus calls for a renewed consideration of the proper role of these groups in the modern British polity. This section is rounded out by Nick Randall's and James Sloam's analysis of the 'third way' (Chapter 6). Rather than attacking or defending it on normative terms, they look at how it was expressed in

manifesto commitments, translated into public policy, and how it compares to the governance of other European social democratic parties. New Labour is found to be not only ideologically coherent, but solidly within the social democratic tradition and comparatively favorable in practice to other governing center-left parties.

Part II -- Policy

Blair's policy record is a frustrating mix of great success and grave disappointment. The economy outperformed the major continental European economies on just about every macroeconomic indicator for the entire decade. The various New Deal programs were implemented to offer job training, improve skills, and tackle the problems of long-term unemployment. The National Health Service, seriously underfunded in 1997, saw a 50 per cent increase in spending in real terms from 2000-2007. The government successfully handled a massive terrorist attack on the London transport system in July 2005 as well as unsuccessful attacks in London and Glasgow in June 2007. Overall crime rates were down from when Labour entered office; educational attainment was up compared to other countries (see PISA). And while new arrivals may have grated at the sensibilities of nationalists, the flood of East European workers illustrated economic and social vibrancy. In short, by most measures the three New Labour Governments succeeded; people truly 'never had it so good'. Yet the mood of the country was distinctly uneasy when Blair stepped down ('On Hypochondria,' *The Economist*, 8 April 2007).

Nothing better encapsulates the paradoxes of Blair's policy record than developments in the National Health Service. Fixing the NHS was a top priority and, after two years of fiscal austerity, spending was increased dramatically. The government could fairly point to tangible improvements in performance, but the net results fell well short of public expectations and reasonable return on the increased investment. Calum Paton argues in Chapter 7 that the mixed record on the NHS was a combination of Labour's policy approach, plagued by top-down direction and 'initiativitis', and the structural limitations of trying to produce a high-quality taxpayer-funded healthcare system in a society with a center-right voting majority that would not tolerate vast tax increases. In social policy (Jerold Waltman, Chapter 8), New Labour's ambition was to re-engineer the welfare state around principles of work and responsibility. Their strategy was to get people into work via the New Deals and to make that work more lucrative through a minimum wage and a restructured tax and benefits system, especially the Working Families Tax Credit. These policies are well entrenched for the near term, yet Blair was not able to establish a new cross-party welfare orthodoxy (as did Attlee) that is invulnerable to the whims of a future government.

Perhaps the sharpest contrast with Labour's past came in the realm of economic management, as detailed by Terrence Casey and Alistair Howard in Chapter 9.

Establishing their *bona fides* as credible economic managers through fiscal and monetary constraint was seen by Blair and Brown as the prerequisite for expanding social welfare. In parallel, growth rates would be boosted through increased investment to improve productivity. The increased tax revenue from a growing economy could then be used to

expand social welfare spending. On one level this strategy was an enormous success. By nearly every measure the UK was European economic leader during the Blair years. Still, economic inequality remained a problem and absolute productivity lagged. This raises a conundrum at the heart of what is termed by Casey and Howard the ‘Anglo-Social’ model of political economy – can you replicate a Scandinavian-quality social welfare state in an economy that does not match American levels of productivity?

Sweeping changes were also initiated in regards to judicial reform and human rights (Mark Bevir and Richard Maiman, Chapter 10). The Blair Government passed the Human Rights Act (1998), incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights into British Law. The Constitutional Reform Act (2005) restructured the office of the Lord Chancellor, reformed the process of judicial appointments, and initiated the creation of a Supreme Court. Gordon Brown even raised the issue of producing a codified ‘Bill of Rights and Duties’. Bevir and Maiman contend that, even barring further reforms, the judiciary now enjoys an unprecedented level of independence and authority, which in turn opens questions about their appropriate role in Britain’s democratic system.

Part III -- Governance

Blair was at his most radical when it came to the institutions of British governance. Scotland was granted a devolved parliament, Wales got a National Assembly, and Northern Ireland gained an autonomous assembly and power-sharing executive.

(Although the latter was suspended for several years, it was back in business when Blair stepped down.) London was given an assembly and directly elected mayor, and regional development agencies were established throughout England. At Westminster, hereditary peers in the House of Lords were stripped of voting rights, although ministers dithered over whether they should be replaced by elected or appointed members, or some combination thereof. Yet in rather typically British fashion, these changes were haphazard, without an underlying vision of the proper balance of power and responsibilities between institutions. Within the confines of central government, moreover, Blair pursued a very personalized style of governance, centered on a small group of advisors in 10 Downing Street who sought relentlessly to control the political agenda and media. Extensive input from either cabinet or parliament was largely eschewed. Last but not least, New Labour altered the constitutional structure by incorporating the European Convention of Human rights into UK law and initiating the creation of a Supreme Court. In short, the institutions of government and constitutional arrangements of the UK underwent extensive tinkering during the Blair decade.

One of the criticisms of Blair, for which he was formally admonished in the Butler Report (see Mark Bennister, Chapter 11), was his penchant for centralized control, informal decision-making ('sofa government'), and bilateral relations with ministers that precluded collective decision-making through the Cabinet. Even the decision to invade Iraq -- arguably the most important taken during the Blair years -- was only superficially vetted by the Cabinet. From Blair's perspective, as Bennister reports, the ambitions of the New Labour project required centralization. He was not without constraint, especially

from Gordon Brown in Number 11 (who asserted control over greater swathes of public policy than previous Chancellors) and a lethargic bureaucratic structure. Nevertheless, Blair used his personal appeal to increase the power and capacities of office compared to previous incumbents. But it was a fleeting strength that faded with his approval ratings. Even after Blair executive power in Britain will continue to strengthen because, as Bennister explains, it is driven by modern government's complexity and the personalization of politics.

Contemporary observers also portrayed an overweening executive running roughshod over an increasingly supine Parliament. Mark Stuart (Chapter 12) contends that, despite the government's wishes, Parliament actually became slightly more responsive to a media-oriented culture; a more rebellious House of Commons emerged, alongside a more assertive House of Lords; the Commons became more representative of the country as a whole; and parliamentarians were given better resources with which to serve their constituents. Admittedly, legislative scrutiny remains less than desirable, but reports of the death of Parliament were highly exaggerated.

Moves to centralize control in Westminster and Whitehall seem contradicted by Labour's quite extensive giveaway of power to sub-national governance. Commitments to devolution preceded Blair's ascension to the leadership and it is far from clear that he was ever a convinced advocate. Still, Jonathan Bradbury (Chapter 13) contends that he bought into the formulation propounded by William Gladstone that 'power devolved is power retained at Westminster'. Bradbury contends the ease in which devolution was

implemented and finally achieving the long-sought peace in Northern Ireland showed Blair's regional policies largely to have succeeded. Alternately, Brown, as a Scot who strongly pushed for devolution, may face increasing difficulties in managing an asymmetrical system with an unresolved 'English Question'. At the local level, Labour also promised more decentralization to reverse the, from councilors' perspective, the authoritarian centralism of the Thatcher-Major years. In practice, the Blair years were noted for only moderate reforms that were still monitored through top-down control. Chris Game (Chapter 14) argues that local government gained neither substantial administrative or financial control, nor was local democracy enhanced during the three Blair Governments.

James Alt (Chapter 15) assesses the status of the British constitution post-Blair. It is easy to portray the above reforms in governance as representing a discontinuity in constitutional practice. Yet Alt contends the core elements of the constitution remain in place. It is largely still unwritten, even if more is written down than before (for example, the Human Rights Act 1998). The system is still parliamentary, lacking separation between executive and legislative. Parliament remains sovereign and constrained by the rule of law. Devolution is a modification rather than an abandonment of unitary government, covers only a minority of the population, is hardly unprecedented (for example, the Stormont Parliament that ruled Northern Ireland from 1921-72). A.V. Dicey argued a century prior that the rule of law was the essence of the constitution. The Blair reforms may have explicitly specified more of the rights so protected, but this fundamental principle is largely unchanged.

Part IV -- Foreign Affairs

The most viscerally negative feelings are aroused by Blair's foreign policy. September 11 changed everything for the British prime-minister as much as for the American President. From the very beginning Blair made clear that he backed the United States in a strong, aggressive prosecution of the War on Terror. This not only drew British troops into Afghanistan, but also into Iraq – and millions of Britons turned onto the street to oppose the wars. That no weapons of mass destruction were found once Saddam Hussein's regime was decapitated only emboldened critics. Blair and colleagues were accused of 'sexing up' the evidence leading Britain into war. And despite the Butler Review and Hutton Inquiry's favorable findings the public remained skeptical (hence 'Tony BLiar'). The perception of him as 'Bush's poodle' further undercut his support with both the public and the party, a condition that only deepened as Iraq become bogged down in sectarian violence. By the time of his departure, four years after the invasion, Iraq was still far from establishing a stable, democratic government. Mr. Blair's political career may have begun along the banks of the Thames, but his legacy will ultimately be shaped on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates.

Would Blair's legacy be substantially different if he had not gone to war in Iraq? Perhaps, but Stephen Benedict Dyson (Chapter 16) argues that this was never likely; Blair's personality and worldview – vividly demonstrated in the pre-Iraq wars he fought – disposed him to become involved. Yet this result was not predetermined by geopolitics or

the imperatives of national interest. Dyson examines the choices made by leaders facing similar crises in the past, as well the views of those who could have plausibly replaced Blair as premier, to make the case that, while the broad outlines of British foreign policy from 1997-2007 might have been the same with a different Prime Minister, Blair's personality and leadership style made a significant difference in explaining British policy toward both Kosovo and Iraq. John Dumbrell (Chapter 19) comes to a similar conclusion in his review of the 'Special Relationship' with the United States. Structural factors -- not only common interests and culture, but the institutionalized linkages of diplomatic and military cooperation across the Atlantic -- inclined London to stand squarely behind Washington. But it was Blair's personal beliefs about international politics and the opportunities and obligations of the Special Relationship that was key. For many British observers, Blair's subsequent experience demonstrated the dangers of being too close to the US. Hence it was not surprising that Brown rhetorically distanced himself in his early days as premier. At the same time, Dumbrell notes, he showed no inclination to dismantle the structures of Anglo-American relations (for example, close defense cooperation) and the rhetoric warmed in due course. It is thus unlikely that Brown or any future Prime Minister will radically reconfigure relations with the US, whatever Blair's experience. Blair's mistake, in Dumbrell's view, was not in maintaining the Special Relationship; it was in deluding himself that he was an equal partner.

Given the centrality of Iraq to Blair's legacy, two additional contributions were invited specifically on the decision to go to war. David Coates and Joel Kreiger (Chapter 17) argue that Blair blundered into the Iraq War, signing on early to the Bush Doctrine,

choosing to believe faulty intelligence, and justifying the invasion on that premise.

Politically his strategy was to lead from the front, assuming his persuasive powers would attract followers at home and abroad. When they demurred he was caught out and backed into a war that he could have and should have avoided. For Coates and Krieger, the foray into Mesopotamia is less the result of the Prime Minister's unique foreign policy views as a revival of outdated imperial impulses. In contrast, Ted R. Bromund (Chapter 18) argues the invasion was a just war intended to uphold the principles of collective security.

Backing the US effort was neither a sycophantic reflex nor imperialistic nostalgia; it was the logical application of a liberal interventionist strategy – clearly elaborated by Blair in a speech in Chicago in 1999 – against a legitimate threat. Nor was this strategy alien to the foreign policy traditions of either the UK or US, having antecedents in both Gladstonian and Wilsonian thinking. Rather, it was the Labour left, as well as continental European leaders, who abandoned the principles they had previously supported rather than face military conflict, undercutting the *casus foederis* of the United Nations. Ironically, it was the very forces of 'political modernization' that Blair sought to advance at home that undermined his foreign policy.

Ironies also abounded in European policy. Blair committed to 'putting Britain at the center of Europe', yet as Scott James and Kai Oppermann (Chapter 20) show, his approach was inconsistent. The government showed leadership in some areas, such as European defense cooperation through the St. Malo agreement. In other important policy areas they either kicked the ball down the field (Economic and Monetary Union) or intentionally obfuscated their position (the Constitutional Treaty). The irony is that in

doing so they negated Europe as a political issue, even though it was so corrosive to the Major Government. In 1997, EU policy loomed large as potential legacy issues, particularly the question of whether to join the single currency. By 2007, through a combination of governing tactics and fortuitous events, the salience of Europe to British voters declined. This was electorally beneficial to Labour, but at a larger price. It prevented the government from formulating a coherent strategy and further reinforced the innate Euroskepticism of the populace. Paradoxically, support for the EU declined over the decade even though the integration process has actually aligned with UK preferences.

UNIQUE FEATURES OF *THE BLAIR LEGACY*

Much has already been written about the Blair years, and there will doubtless be much more. There are several scholarly biographies (Seldon, 2005 and 2008 foremost among them), insider accounts (Cook 2007; Prescott, 2008; Campbell, 2007; Blair, 2008), and journalistic appraisals (Stothard, 2003; Riddell, 2006; Coughlin, 2006). Nor is this the first or only academic anthology. There are quality volumes edited by Beech and Lee (2008) and the series under the tutelage of Anthony (2001; with Dennis Kavanagh, 2005; 2007). Why, then, another collaboration, and why should readers consult this over (or at least prior to) others?

The Blair Legacy has, of course, the great benefit of being a thorough, comprehensive book by some of the premier scholars of British politics on both sides of the Atlantic.

Beyond this, two other traits warrant serious attention. First, the authors have integrated theoretical insights, historical comparisons, or cross-national analysis into their chapters. Retrospective anthologies are too often mere chronologies of the events and issues of the period; several examples suggest the greater depth offered in this volume. Faucher-King, for example, applies neo-institutional analysis to elucidate the relationship between external and internal stimuli in Labour's transformation. Randall and Sloam illuminate third way ideology by comparing it to its continental cousins. And rather than merely review economic performance, Casey and Howard reflect on the ways Britain's 'variety of capitalism' changed over the era. The concept of 'skill in context' developed by Theakston and Gill is used by Bennister to assess Blair as Prime Minister. Dyson uses the tools of political psychology to understand 'the Blair effect' on UK foreign policy, results Dumbrell interprets via the influences of structure and agency in the Anglo-American relations.

The latter examples highlight the second unique feature of this book: its encompassing view of foreign policy. Tony Blair's international legacy was just as important as his impact on the United Kingdom. The book emphasizes the Iraq War, including arguments both for and against invasion, and pays special attention to the US-UK relationship. This should widen the appeal to students of international relations and British domestic politics alike.

CONCLUSION

In 1997, Tony Blair and his New Labor Party set out on a campaign of national renewal - a campaign no less ambitious than that launched by Margaret Thatcher two decades prior. The chapters presented here chronicle the successes, failures, and long-term implications of this project. Of course, writing political history is itself a long-term project, and what follows is a beginning rather than the end. Some of our conclusions will withstand the test of time while others, no doubt, will seem myopic or uninformed in retrospect. Nevertheless, they are an excellent first effort.

TIMELINE OF THE BLAIR YEARS

- 12 May 1994* Labour leader John Smith dies of a heart attack at 55.
- 31 May 1994* Tony Blair and Gordon Brown meet at Granita restaurant and reportedly agree that Blair would lead a future Government, with Brown as a powerful chancellor and only later gaining the leadership.
- 21 July 1994* Tony Blair beats John Prescott and Margaret Beckett to become leader of the Labour Party with 57 percent of the vote.
- 29 April 1995* In a crucial symbol of New Labour, Blair convinces the Party to abandon Clause IV of its Constitution, which had urged ‘the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange.’
- 1 May 1997* After 18 years in Opposition, Labour wins the General Election by a landslide of 419 seats to the Conservatives 165, a Commons majority of 179.
- 6 May 1997* Chancellor Gordon Brown gives the Bank of England operational independence to set interest rates.
- 19 June 1997* William Hague is elected Conservative leader.
- 31 August 1997* Tony Blair captures the nation’s mood on the death of Diana Princess of Wales by dubbing her the ‘peoples’ princess’.
- 12 September 1997* A referendum in Scotland backs devolution; Wales follows a

- week later.
- 27 October 1997* Gordon Brown establishes five test for adopting the euro; rules out British entry until they have been met.
- 11 November 1997* A £1m donation from Formula One boss Bernie Ecclestone is returned by Labour when it is revealed that ministers exempted Formula One from a proposed tobacco sponsorship ban.
- 10 April 1998* The Good Friday Agreement establishing a power-sharing devolved government in Northern Ireland is signed. Although the Northern Ireland Assembly would be suspended three times during Blair's tenure, it was finally restored in May 2007.
- 16 December 1998* The UK and US launch air strikes against Iraq after Saddam Hussein's failure to comply with weapons inspections.
- 23 December 1998* Blair confidant Peter Mandelson forced to resign over a home loan scandal.
- 24 March 1999* NATO air strikes begin against Serbia to halt 'ethnic cleansing' in Kosovo; strikes continue for more nearly two months until Belgrade agrees to withdraw.
- 9 August 1999* The Liberal Democrats elect Charles Kennedy to replace Paddy Ashdown.
- 11 October 1999* Peter Mandelson returns to the Cabinet as Northern Ireland Secretary.

<i>4 May 2000</i>	Ken Livingstone wins inaugural London Mayoral election.
<i>20 May 2000</i>	Leo Blair is born, the first child born to a sitting PM for more than 150 years.
<i>24 January 2001</i>	Peter Mandelson resigns (again) over allegations of improperly arranging for a passport for a wealthy Millennium Dome sponsor.
<i>20 February 2001</i>	Foot and mouth outbreak begins; general election is delayed for a month.
<i>7 June 2001</i>	Labour wins historic second term with a majority of 165.
<i>11 September 2001</i>	Blair cancels planned speech to TUC to express shock at the attack on American and promises to stand shoulder to shoulder with the US in tracking down the perpetrators.
<i>13 September 2001</i>	Iain Duncan Smith elected as Conservative leader.
<i>1 January 2002</i>	Euro becomes the currency for 11 EU countries.
<i>8 November 2002</i>	UN Security Council unanimously passes Resolution 1441, offering Iraq a 'final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations'.
<i>December 2002-March 2003</i>	Intensive negotiations are undertaken by Britain and America to secure a 'second' UN Security Council resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq. They are mainly opposed by France, Germany, and Russia.
<i>15 February, 2003</i>	An estimated one million people protest the war against Iraq in London.

10 March 2003 In a television interview, French President Jacques Chirac says that France will veto any resolution authorizing force against Iraq ‘regardless of the circumstances’.

17 March 2003 Leader of the House of Commons Robin Cook resigns in opposition to the invasion.

18 March 2003 139 Labour MPs vote against decision to go to war with Iraq.

20 March 2003 The invasion of Iraq begins.

12 May 2003 Clare Short resigns from the Cabinet, claiming that Blair broke promises over Iraq’s future.

29 May 2003 Andrew Gilligan on BBC *Today* program reports allegations that the government ‘sexed up’ its dossier on Iraq’s WMD

9 July 2003 The Ministry of Defense names weapons expert Dr. David Kelly as source for Andrew Gilligan’s report.

18 July 2003 David Kelly is found dead in woods near his home after having committed suicide.

19 October 2003 Blair suffers an irregular heartbeat and spends a few hours in hospital, fueling speculation of his resignation.

6 November 2003 Michael Howard becomes leader of the Conservative Party, replacing the ineffective Duncan Smith.

14 December 2003 US forces capture Saddam Hussein hiding in a hole near Tikrit.

27 January 2004 Government narrowly wins vote on university top-up fees, despite rebellion by seventy-two Labour backbenchers.

28 January 2004 Hutton Report absolves the government of blame in death of David Kelly, criticizing instead BBC reporting.

14 July 2004 The Butler Report finds that some intelligence on Iraq's WMDs was unreliable, but Blair had acted in good faith.

30 September 2004 At Labour's annual conference, Blair announces he will run for third term but not stand for fourth.

18 November 2004 Parliament Act invoked to secure passage of Hunting Act 2004, banning fox hunting with dogs.

15 December 2004 Home Secretary David Blunkett resigns over visa row.

6 February 2005 Blair becomes longest serving Labour PM.

5 May 2005 Labour wins third term with majority reduced to 66.

29 May 2005 French voters reject EU Constitution; Dutch voters follow three days later. Plans for UK referendum on Constitution are scrapped shortly thereafter.

6 July 2005 London wins bid to host 2012 Olympic Games.

7 July 2005 Suicide bombers kill 52 people in London Underground and bus bombings.

8 July 2005 G8 summit hosted by Blair in Gleneagles, Scotland ends with an agreement to boost aid for developing countries.

21 July 2005 Second wave of attempted bombings on London transport fails.

9 November 2005 Blair suffers his first Commons defeat on the Terrorism Act, which would have allowed suspected terrorists to be held for

- 90 without charge. A 28-day period is later approved.
- 6 December 2005* David Cameron is elected as new Conservative leader.
- 6 January 2006* Charles Kennedy is forced by colleagues to resign as Liberal Democrat leader after publicly admitting to a drinking problem. Menzies (Ming) Campbell is elected leader.
- 16 March 2006* It is revealed that the Labour Party had secretly borrowed millions of pounds, launching the 'cash for honors' scandal.
- 6 September 2006* Tensions between Brown and Blair reach boiling point, sparking resignation of a junior minister and seven government aides, who demand a timetable for Blair's resignation.
- 14 December 2006* Blair interviewed by police in cash for honors affair.
- 10 May 2007* Tony Blair announces he will step down as prime minister on 27 June 2007.
- 27 June 2007* Blair appears for his final Prime Minister's Questions; Gordon Brown takes over as Prime Minister.

¹ *The Observer*, 8 April 2007

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2007/apr/08/tonyblair.labour3>). Accessed on 3 April 2008.

² Changes in foreign affairs were equally significant. The Attlee Government began the process of decolonization and dismantling the British Empire, reinforced the US-led the Western alliance by joining NATO, and initiated Britain's nuclear program.

³ Although there was a substantial shift from direct to indirect taxation.

⁴ Labour's travails stemmed from the collapse of its supposed special relationship with the trade unions amid the strikes and industrial unrest of the 1978-9 Winter of Discontent, a legacy as much of the Wilson as Callaghan Government.

⁵ The same is true for Harry Truman in the US. George W. Bush and Tony Blair may be hoping for a similar 'historian's bounce'.

⁶ Morris further makes the point that the decline in Blair's numbers occurred mostly before the Iraq War.

⁷ Acceptance of globalization as a 'given' was one of the hallmarks of New Labour.

⁸ Resistance centered on the government's desire to hold suspects without charge for 90 days. In the end they got 28. Gordon Brown faced renewed resistance when he pushed to up the period to 42 days in June 2008 – a vote he narrowly won.