



Alastair Campbell

The Blair Years

Throughout, *Random House* will be publishing *The Blair Years*, extracts from my diaries during the time I worked for Tony Blair. I have been writing about the book on this specially created website for the past few weeks, and would like to thank those people who have been visiting the site, and those friends and colleagues who have contributed their designs and reflections. Today I am publishing a small number of extracts from the book which I hope will give people a sense of the tone, the style and some of the scope of the book, alongside short notes which hopefully provide a little context. I begin with a call from a fellow diarist, someone well to the right of me on the political spectrum, but someone who was a good friend and a great support over many years.

Sunday, March 25, 1995
Alan Clark called and said they were going to go for the 'Tory Tony' tag. I said fine, all your voters will hear out of that is that he must have changed the Labour Party if they're calling him a Tory. It's what we call a strategic conundrum, I said. Mmmm, he said, maybe we're fucked.

Meeting Diana

As a journalist, I had often been critical of Princess Diana. The moment I met her, former negative thoughts were banished.

Thursday, May 4, 1995

Local elections. Terry picked me up to go to collect TB/CB to go to Walsworth Rd for the results coming in. They were at a dinner in Hyde Park Gardens that had been organised for them to meet Princess Diana. I rang the bell and said could you tell Mr Blair his car is here. I went back to the car and the next thing TB is tapping at the car window and he says: "Someone wants to meet you." I get out and she's walking towards me, and she says: "There he is, can I come over and say hello," and then she's standing there, absolutely, spellbindingly, drop-dead gorgeous, in a way that the millions of photos didn't quite get it. She said hello, held out her hand and said she was really pleased to meet me, so I

mumbled something back about me being more pleased and how I didn't expect when I left the house tonight that I'd end up standing in the middle of the road talking to her. "It would make a very funny picture if there were any paparazzi in those trees," she said. TB was standing back and Cherie was looking impatient and I was just enjoying flirting with her. I asked if he had behaved well and she said yes, very well. I said in that case I think you should come with us to Walsworth Road and create an almighty sensation. "I just might," she said.

The view from the left

Tuesday, July 2, 1996
MEC. Clare [Short] making endless minor points. She said she objected to the new document describing ourselves as a party of the centre. [Dennis] Skinner, his timing excellent as ever, said 'I'm just relieved it doesn't say we're a party of the right.'



Northern Ireland

In the introduction to the book I cite TB's optimism and resilience as two of his greatest qualities. Here, in his second week as Prime Minister, the optimism is on display after a weekend spent reflecting on Northern Ireland. The resilience would follow as, over the course of his Premiership, he secured progress towards peace.

Shall we appoint Ashdown?
Gordon Brown's recent overtures to Paddy Ashdown brought back memories. This extract from the final week of the '97 election campaign, shows why.

Saturday, April 26, 1997

We were holding up pretty well in the polls. Richard Branson [head of Virgin] was going to be the big thing today. Again, it would help in terms of mood, the sense of things going in our direction. My favourite story was 'Major takes charge of campaign'. Where the hell had he been up to now? Meanwhile, TB was getting stronger all the time. I got there just before 7 and he started me straight out with the boldest plan yet. "How would people feel if I gave Paddy a place in the Cabinet and started merger talks?" Fuck me. I loved the boldness of it, but doubted he could get it through the key players. He had the Clause 4 glint in his eye. He'd hinted at it a few times in the past, but this sounded like a plan. He was making a cup of tea, and chuckling. "We could put the Tories out of business for a generation."

Saturday, August 30, 1997

I got to bed, and at around two I was paged by media monitoring: 'Car crash in Paris. Dodi killed. Di hurt. This is not a joke.' Then TB came on. He had been called by Number 10 and told the same thing. He was really shocked. He said she was in a coma and the chances are she'd die. I don't think I'd ever heard him like this. He was full of pauses, then gibbling a little, but equally

"She's dead. The Prime Minister is being told now. Nick - Duty Clerk"

clear what we had to do. We started to prepare a statement. We talked through the things we would have to do tomorrow, if she died. By now the phones were starting from the press, and I didn't sleep. Then about an hour later Nick, the duty clerk, called and said simply 'She's dead. The Prime Minister is being told now.' I went through on the call. Angus Lapsley was duty private secretary and was taking him through what we knew. But it was hard to get beyond the single fact of her death. 'I can't believe this. I just can't believe it,' said TB. 'You just can't take it in, can you?' And yet, as ever with TB, he was straight onto the ramifications.

Historic day with Sinn Féin

There were many important milestones on the road to the Good Friday Agreement, which was perhaps the greatest high of my entire time with TB, elections included. This extract relates to one such milestone, the first visit to Downing Street by Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, two men crucial to the peace process.

Thursday, December 11, 1997

Gerry Adams and his team arrived 15 minutes early, and he did a little number in the street, where the media numbers were huge. This was a big moment, potentially historic in the progress it could lead to. They came inside and we kept them waiting while we went over what TB was due to say. Mo Mowlam and Paul Murphy were both there and Mo was pretty fed up, feeling she was getting shit from all sides. They were hovering around the lifts and were summoned down to the

Monday, May 12, 1997

TB said he reckoned he could see a way of sorting the Northern Ireland problem. I loved the way he said it, like nobody had thought of it before. I said what makes you think you can do it when nobody else could?

Death of Diana

The events following the death of Diana are recorded in some detail in the book. Here is a short extract which records how I heard the news, and how TB initially reacted.

The Blair Years Extracts



Cabinet room. We had agreed TB should be positive but firm. He actually came over as friendly, welcoming, then individually as they came in. I shook McGuinness by the hand, who as he sat down said, fairly loudly, "So this is the room where all the damage was done." It was a classic moment where the different histories played out. Everyone on our side thought he was referring to the mortar attack on Major, and we were shocked. Yet it became obvious from their surprise at our shock that he was referring to policymaking done the years, and Britain's involvement in Ireland. "No, no, I meant 1921," he said. I found McGuinness more impressive than Adams, who did the big statesman bit, and talked in grand historical sweeps, but McGuinness just made a point and battered it, and forced you to take it on board. Of the women, I could not work out whether they really mattered, or whether they just took them round with them to

look a bit less hard. They were tough as boots all three of them. TB was good in the use of language and captured well the

“Adams said the prize of a lasting peace justifies the risks.”

sense of history and occasion. He said we faced a choice of history – violence and despair, or peace and progress. We were all taking risks, but they are risks worth taking. He said to Adams he wanted to be able to look him in the eye, hear him say he was committed to peaceful means, and he wanted to believe him. I was eying their reaction to TB the whole time, and both Adams and McG regularly let a little smile cross their lips. Martin Ferris (Sinn Féin negotiator) was the one who just stared. Mo got pissed off, volubly, when they said she wasn't doing enough. TB was maybe not as

firm as we had planned, but he did ask – which I decided not to brief, and knew they wouldn't – whether they would be able to sign up to a settlement that did not explicitly commit to a united Ireland. Adams was OK, but McGuinness was not. Adams said the prize of a lasting peace justifies the risks. Lloyd George, Balfour, Gladstone, Cromwell, they all thought they had answers of sorts. We want our answers to be the endgame. A cobbled-together agreement will not stand the test of time. He pushed hard on prisoners being released, and the aim of total demilitarisation, and TB just listened. TB said he would not be a persuader for a united Ireland. The principle of consent was central to the process. Adams said if TB could not be a persuader, he could be a facilitator. He said we would be dead in 40 years, but in the meantime this was the biggest test of TB's time in office, how he deals with the displaced citizens in a divided territory.

they could. Boris Johnson had a piece today suggesting we had a deliberate strategy to make TB look good alongside BC. They would be getting all this played back to them. Joe Lockhart [White House press secretary] called and said they were getting sick and tired of reading that Robin Cook was flying out to stiffen their resolve. I said these things happened, we understood why they were pissed off, but I would be very pissed off too if I thought they thought we had done this deliberately.

Parts of Thatcherism were Right

TB was always pushing at the outer edges of moderation, and sometimes even his closest advisers couldn't keep up.

Wednesday, August 10, 2009
TB said it was important I understood why parts of Thatcherism were right. Later in the day he came up with another better when Peter Hynan [strategist and speechwriter], trying to get him to be more progressive and radical, asked what gave him real edge as a politician and TB said 'What gives me real edge is that I'm not as Labour as you lot.' I pointed out that was a rather discomfiting observation. He said it was true. He felt he was in the same position he had always been and we were the people who had changed to adapt.

9/11

September 11 was meant to be another fairly routine day. It came to be a defining moment in the Blair years and would ensure foreign policy dominated his second term. As with Diana's death, once the initial shock subsided, he was straight onto the ramifications.

Tuesday, September 11, 2001
I woke up to the usual blah on the radio about TB and the TUC speech, all the old BBC clichés about us and the unions, the only new thing GMB ads asking if you trust TB not to privatise the NHS. Peter H and I went up to the flat. TB had done a good section on public-private, an effective hit back at the Edmonds line. With the economy, public services, Europe/euro and a bit on asylum, we had a proper speech. We sharpened it and honed it a bit.



Clinton's anger over Kosovo

I think Bill Clinton emerges from the book as one of the most impressive and attractive characters of recent history. He and TB had a close and important relationship. But there were difficult moments amid the friendship and the bonhomie. Perhaps the most difficult came amid an international debate about whether ground troops would be required to deliver victory in the war to reverse Milosevic's ethnic cleansing policy in Kosovo. TB was pushing hard for a commitment to use ground troops if necessary, and Clinton suspected we were briefing against him. Though the effect was not lasting, it led to a very tense few days.

Tuesday, May 18, 1999
Just before midnight, John Savers [foreign policy adviser] woke me up to fill me in on a 'very difficult' BC-TB phone call. They had spoken for over an hour, and the first five to ten minutes was taken up with Bill in a total rage. He had seen the UK reports and the stuff in the US and he 'knew what was going on, it was deliberate and it had to stop'. He said it may play well with the UK media and public but 'there is a price to pay and you will pay it'. John said he was clearly suggesting I had been briefing deliberately to build up TB at his expense. TB protested as best he could, said he was appalled they would think we would undermine him when he was leading the whole thing, to which BC said in which

case it is happening without you knowing – the implied notion being that was even worse. John said he didn't name names but it was obvious who he meant. He had never heard him so angry and TB was taken aback. On the substance, however, BC appeared to be moving. He shared TB's view that the d'Almeida option could be a way of getting the ground force option out there. TB put it in terms – we have a 48-hour pause while we agree a new UNSCR, then if Milosevic does not comply, based on the 5 NATO demands, we bomb again and plan for ground forces. Bill kept at it.

Wednesday, May 19, 1999
TB said BC's outburst was 'real, red-hot anger'. He felt he was just getting a lot out of his system, and TB was the only one he could really let rip with. He claimed that he had always been basically in favour of ground troops, but it had to be understood he could not be briefed against like this. All that was happening was that people were picking up the obvious differences of tone and emphasis. Our right wing of course, which hates a Labour government and a Democrat White House running a military situation, was stirring as best

He was furious at the GMB ads, said he intended to give Edmonds a real hammering. We finished it on the train to Brighton, were met and driven to the hotel.

We were there, up at the top of the hotel putting the finishing touches to the speech, when the attacks on the New York Twin Towers began. Godric was watching in the little room where the Garden Room girl had set up, came up to the top of the little staircase leading to the bit where TB and I were working, and signalled for me to go down. It was all a bit chaotic, with the TV people going into their usual breathless breaking-news mode, but it was clearly something way out of the ordinary. I went upstairs, turned on the TV and said to TB he ought to watch it. It was now even clearer than just a few moments ago just how massive an event this was. It was also one that was going to have pretty immediate implications for us too. We didn't watch the TV that long, but long enough for TB to reach the judgement about just how massive an event this was in its impact and implications. It's possible we were talking about thousands dead. We would also have to make immediate judgements about buildings and institutions to protect here. TB was straight onto the diplomatic side as well, said that we had to help the US, that they could not go it all on their own, that they felt beleaguered and that this would be tantamount to a military attack in their minds. We had to decide whether we should cancel the speech. There was always a moment in these terrorist outrages where governments said we must not let the terrorists change what we do, but it was meaningless. Of course they changed what we did. At first, we felt it best to go ahead with the speech but by the time we were leaving for the venue, the Towers were actually collapsing. The scale of the horror and the damage was increasing all the time and it was perfectly obvious he couldn't do the speech. We went over to the conference centre, where TB broke the news to John Monks [TUC general secretary] and Brendan Barber that he intended to go on, say a few words, but then we would have to head back to London. We would issue the text but he would not deliver

the speech. Monks said to me that it's on days like this that you realise just how big his job is. TB's mind was whirling with it. His brief statement to the TUC went down well, far better than his speech would have done. We walked back to the hotel, both of us conscious there seemed to be

“...by the time we were leaving for the venue, the Towers were actually collapsing.

a lot more security around. We arranged a series of conference calls through Jonathan with Jack Straw, Geoff Hoon, David Blunkett. We asked Richard Wilson to fix a Cobra meeting as soon as we got back.

We set off for Brighton station. He said the consequences of this were enormous. On the train he was subdued, though we did raise a smile when someone said it was the first and last time he would get a standing ovation from the TUC. Robert Hill was listening to the radio on his carphone and filling us in every now and then. TB asked for a pad and started to write down some of the issues we would have to address when we got back. He said the big fear was terrorists capable of this getting in league with rogue states that would help them. He'd been going on about bin Laden for a while because there had been so much intelligence about him and al-Qaeda.



Crucial talks with Bush
The Blair-Clinton relationship was easy for people to understand, his close relationship with President Bush less so. TB was determined to

He wanted to commission proper reports on OBL and all the other terror groups. He made a note of the need to reach out to the British Muslim community, who would face a backlash if this was bin Laden. Everyone seemed convinced it couldn't be anyone else.

Bowing out early

On July 11, 2002, TB asked a group of his advisers if we thought he should announce publicly that he would not lead Labour into the next election. It was something we discussed on and off over the next few weeks.

Thursday, July 11, 2002

TB called me through and we went out for a chat on the terrace. Philip [Gould] had briefed him on how his trust ratings had really dipped. He said 'In truth I've never really wanted to do more than two full terms.' It was pretty clear to me

“In truth I've never really wanted to do more than two full terms.
Tony Blair

that he had just about settled his view, that he would sometime announce it, say that he was going to stay for the full term, but not go into the election as leader. The big question was the same as before – does it give him an authority of sorts, or does it erode that authority, and do people just move automatically towards GB?

Saturday, September 7, 2002

When TB came back in, GWB said he'd decided to go to the UN and put down a new UNSCR, challenge the UN to deal with the problems for its own sake. He could not stand by. He would say OK, what will you do? Earlier, not too convincingly, Karen [Hughes, GWB's communications adviser] had claimed GWB was always going to go down the UN route. Cheney looked very sour throughout, and after dinner, when TB and Bush walked alone to the chopper, Bush was open with him that Cheney was in a different position. Earlier, when we had said that the international community was pressing for some direction but that in the US there would be people saying 'Why are you going to the UN, why aren't you doing it now?' Cheney smiled across the table, making it pretty

“Why are you going to the UN, why aren't you doing it now?

clear that was where he was. The mood was good. As we left, Bush joked to me 'I suppose you can tell the story of how Tony flew in and pulled the crazed unilateralist back from the brink.' He was very clear on the threat, and the need of the UN to deal with it. He said he would get something on the Middle East. 'That's a promise.' He was, as Sally Morgan [director of political and government relations] said, far more impressive close up.

Four percent support in Spain

As well as his optimism and resilience, a sharp sense of humour was an important part of the Blair armoury. As well as being a reasonable comic, he often came up with good one liners.

Friday, February 28, 2003

In Spain there was 4 per cent support for action without a second UNSCR, 23 per cent with it. TB said to Aznar that 4 per cent was roughly the number you could get in a poll for people who believed Elvis was alive, so he had a struggle!

got on with him, and believed in his public support, particularly post September 11, led to increased private influence, including on the efforts to resolve Iraq through the UN.

Robin Cook's resignation and Commons debate over Iraq

The day before the defining Commons vote on Iraq, Robin Cook resigned, adding to a sense of crisis and a Prime Minister's future on the line as he sought to persuade Parliament to support military action.

Monday, March 17, 2003

TB started Cabinet, introduced Goldsmith, then Clare came in and asked Sally where Robin was. 'He's gone,' said Sal. 'Oh my God.' TB's only reference to Robin was to say that he had resigned. Peter Goldsmith went through the answer on legal authority to use force. One by one, a succession of colleagues expressed support for TB, then Clare said she owed them 'a short statement', that she intended to reflect overnight. She said publication of the Roadmap was significant but we shouldn't kid ourselves that it means it is going to happen. She said she admired the effort and energy that had gone into getting a second resolution but there had been errors of presentation. 'I'm going to have my little agonising overnight. I owe it to you.' JP, John Reid and one or two others looked physically sick. JR spoke next, said never underestimate the instincts for unity and **understand** that we will be judged by the Iraq that replaces Saddam's Iraq, and by the Middle East. Derry said he felt we would have got a second resolution if the French hadn't been determined to scupper it, and said we had made so much effort to get a second resolution that it had led to people thinking we actually needed one. Paul Murphy was just back from America and said what an amazing feeling there was **towards** us there. 'It's not quite the same here,' said TB.

Tuesday, March 18, 2003

Debate day dominant. GWB's statement overnight had come out fine. They had taken in all our changes, the ultimatum was calm and strong, the tone towards Iraqi people compassionate, the commitment to the Middle East peace process



was in there strong, and all the bellicose stuff either taken out or conditional. So to be fair, they had delivered big-time for us. The Robin resignation speech, and the standing ovation in parts of the House, was still getting a lot of play but I sensed that was the high point of the rebellion. TB was on the phone to Blunkett who was warning him that John Denham would resign. Also Philip Hunt [Lords minister] went on the radio to resign. That **seemed** to be about it at the moment. TB was in a pretty calm mood. He felt we were winning some people over on the arguments, but we had a problem in that there were a lot of our MPs who had promised **their** local parties that they wouldn't support without a second resolution. This was the unintended effect of the point Derry made yesterday, that we fought so hard to get one that people assumed we needed one **before** action. Clare was making a complete fool of herself. Rogee was on to it, had an absolutely brilliant line in the debate, how TB had 'taken his revenge and kept her'. TB's speech in the House was one of

his best. Very serious, full of real argument, confronting the points of difficulty and we felt it moving our way. He did a brilliant put-down to the Lib Dems, which helped the mood behind him. I did another secure call with Dan [Bartlett]. It looked like Wednesday late, special forces. It was one of those days when people out in the country were actually following what was going on. IDS and Charles Kennedy had **both** been poor. There had been some excellent backbench speeches but though the interventions didn't really zing, TB had definitely come out on top. There were a lot of protesters outside, so I faced a bit of abuse going in, then up to JP's office to agree the line that we push from the moment the vote was over, that we won the vote, because we won the argument, and now the country should unite. We ended up **having** a very friendly chat, then going down to wait for the vote, which for the government motion was 412 for and 149 against, and for the rebel motion 396 voting against and 217 for. 139 Labour MPs rebelled.

I called Dan with the result as it came through. I was in the front office of TB's Commons office, MPs coming and going, the staff all pretty relieved. TB came back and called everyone in to say thanks. He said we had **pulled** out the stops and we had to. His own performance today had been superb. All of us, I think, had had pretty severe moments of doubt but he hadn't really, or if he had he had hidden them even from us. Now there **was** no going back at all. He had to give authority for our forces to go in and by tomorrow night it would be underway. Everyone was assuming the Americans would start a massive bombing whereas in fact the first action **would** be some of our forces acting to prevent an ecological disaster.



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