

completion would tell the world that “Americans are cowards who can be attacked with impunity.” He further argued that “a U.S. surrender would turn al Qaeda into an Islamic superpower” and that “[i]f we run away from our enemies overseas, our enemies will make their way to us. Quit Iraq, and far more than 2,000 Americans are going to die.”

But on Nov. 2, 2006, Peters wrote a column in *USA Today* announcing, “Iraq is failing. No honest observer can conclude otherwise. . . . If they continue to revel in fratricidal slaughter, we must leave.” The same columnist who warned just a year ago in the most alarmist tone that withdrawal would gravely endanger the U.S., now claims that “Contrary to the prophets of doom, the United States wouldn’t be weakened by our withdrawal, should it come to that.”

All of these self-proclaimed super-patriots who spent the last three years shrieking that anyone who criticizes the war is a friend of the terrorists are now being forced to admit that the war is unwinnable. But rather than acknowledging their reversal, they seek to erase the public record, both to salvage their reputations and to obscure the intensity of their attacks against those who were right. Such vitriol against critics muted debate in the first place and ensured that we stayed in Iraq, pretending all along that things were going great.

There is nothing wrong with acknowledging one’s errors and changing one’s mind. When genuine, this should be encouraged. But these pundits are not doing that. They know that they were on the wrong side of the most vital issue of the last decade, and in trying to reverse their predictions reveal themselves to be deeply flawed not only in judgment but also in character. ■

*Glenn Greenwald is author of How Would a Patriot Act? Defending American Values From the Bush Administration.*

# Good-bye Poodle

Tony Blair staked his career on the Iraq War—and lost.

**By Geoffrey Wheatcroft**

LONDON—Six years ago, Bill Clinton spent his last days in the White House trying feverishly to establish a legacy for which posterity might remember him without sniggering. Now Tony Blair is also looking for a legacy, in fact the self-same one. In September he told the last Labour Party conference he will address as prime minister, “From now until I leave office I will dedicate myself to advancing peace between Israel and Palestine.”

A detached observer hearing that might have queried Blair’s sanity or at least his contact with reality. Despite the welcome ceasefire at the end of November between Israel and Palestinian groups, the outlook for real permanent settlement of that bitter and intractable conflict is in many ways less propitious now than for a long time past, and even if there were such a resolution, Blair would be about the last man on earth to act as honest broker. Our prime minister does not seem fully to have realized that as a consequence of Iraq, he is despised by Arabs and Muslims. One Beirut newspaper called him, “Washington’s international gofer.”

And yet Blair’s exalted words illustrate some of his salient characteristics. One is his propensity for willing the ends without willing the means. He shares that with another and far greater prime minister, although nothing Churchill did during the Second World War was as grievous a piece of wishful thinking as Iraq. Another is Blair’s love of lofty rhetoric. “I feel the hand of history on our shoulders.” “Let the day-to-day judgments come and go. Be prepared to be judged by history.” “When people look back on this time, I honestly believe they will see this”—the

fall of Baghdad in 2003—“as one of the finest moments of our century.” “The kaleidoscope has been shaken.”—after the Sept. 11 attacks—“The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again.”

A little more than three years ago, when it was already obvious that the Iraq enterprise was not prospering, he said, again to his party conference, “I can only go one way, I’ve not got a reverse gear.” This was a deliberate echo of Margaret Thatcher’s “The lady’s not for turning,”—not her own oratorical finest hour, in my view, but Blair’s soundbite was much more foolish. Most motor vehicles have a reverse gear, which is not so much useful as essential if you find yourself driving the wrong way up a one-way street.

But most salient of all is his chameleon quality, looking this way in one light and that way in another. Throughout his career, Tony Blair’s great gift has been his ability to speak to different audiences. He became leader of the Labour Party but won a landslide election in 1997 by appealing to many middle-of-the-road, middle-class people in conservative Middle England. He was for low taxes and high public spending, he was a European and an Atlanticist, he persuaded Irish republicans that he understood them and Ulster Unionists as well.

Even across the Atlantic, he managed to excite conservative Republicans at one moment and liberal Democrats at another. It was an astonishing performance, and what is remarkable is how long this political conjuror got away with it. As Blair now runs down the clock at Downing Street, that skill may at last have deserted him, or it may have come home to roost.

In September, there was something like a coup mounted against him by Gordon Brown, his Chancellor of the Exchequer and ostensibly his closest colleague, though in reality a man with whom Blair has scarcely been on speaking terms. The coup was carried out with characteristic ineptitude by Brown, but Blair could only calm his turbulent party by saying that he would have resigned the prime ministership within a year. The betting here is that he will go some time between May and July. Some Westminster-watchers reckon that Blair will choose the date that will cause the greatest possible difficulty for Brown.

Although the details of the long-standing enmity between Blair and Brown are too complex and tedious to relate, its origins lie in yet another of Blair's failings, which is his knack of saying something and then forgetting it. If a politician maintains something, let's say insisting that he did not have sexual relations with "that woman," if he persuades his colleagues to agree with him, and if he then suddenly admits that he did after all have an "inappropriate" relationship, then those colleagues are, in the hallowed phrase of Irish politics, left with their arses hanging out the window.

Hard as it is to believe, Blair has an even greater gift than Clinton for selective amnesia. In 1994, he gave Brown to understand—over dinner in a London restaurant called Granita, whose name has entered the topographical dictionary of British politics—that Brown would one day succeed him. No date was fixed, but Brown understandably thought that meant sooner than 13 years.

Then Blair did the same trick with the late Roy Jenkins, over electoral reform; with Paddy Ashdown, then leader of the Liberal Democrats, over a form of coalition; and most grievously with David Trimble, then the leader of the Ulster Unionists. In order to secure Trimble's assent to the Belfast agreement of 1998,

Blair promised that, if IRA violence continued, Sinn Fein would be excluded.

The violence continued, and far from being dropped Sinn Fein were granted even more concessions, and Trimble's career was ended. His party has been swept aside and replaced by Ian Paisley and his much more intransigent Democratic Unionists, an outcome that, regardless of any other rights or wrongs, was not what Blair originally had in mind.

For years that charge of being all things to all men dogged Blair, and even his admirers would ruefully admit that there was truth in it. Then came Iraq, and even some of Blair's detractors said that this charge for once did not apply. Whatever you thought of the war, whether or not you approved Blair's position, this time he had stood up to be counted.

But to the contrary, Iraq was the supreme and most disastrous demonstration of that very propensity on Blair's part. The crucial fact was that he told Parliament publicly something different from what he had told President Bush privately at Crawford when he committed Great Britain to war in April 2002.

For nearly a year afterward, Blair kept up the pretence that he was still "doing everything I can to work for peace," when it was clear even then that he was doing everything he could to work for war. We can now agree that there might have been good reasons for the war, but the reasons that Blair gave could not have been good because they weren't true. As Churchill more than once pointed out in 1939-40, a war that is fought for the wrong reasons when it was not absolutely necessary is morally compromised from the start.

Whatever view is taken of the Iraq enterprise—Talleyrand's "worse than a crime, a mistake" seems the most lenient verdict—Blair does not come out of it well. For a time he may have impressed Americans with his lofty rhetoric: "how-ever tough" it might be, he would fight

alongside the United States with "no grandstanding, no offering implausible and impractical advice from the touch-line. ... We will stay with you to the last."

Looking back, a little well-considered advice—about the need for enough troops to secure Iraq after the military campaign and for a plausible political plan—might not have gone amiss. It was the least Blair could have offered in friendship.

He still wills the ends but not the means, and still talks with a forked tongue. His Labour MPs ardently want a Palestinian state more or less in the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. His American allies—notably the Washington neoconservatives and evangelical voters—just as ardently do not want that. Who is right is neither here nor there; they can't both be.

And everything Blair does in his last month as prime minister will only serve to confirm what Kendall Myers, a senior State Department analyst, said in his lecture in Washington at the end of November entitled "How Special is the United States-United Kingdom Relationship After Iraq?" He observed, as many of us have long since, that Blair staked his career on supporting President Bush's war, and has received absolutely nothing in return: "We typically ignore them and take no notice."

The one real legacy of Blair's prime-ministership may have been to demonstrate that this special relationship was special mainly in that only one side knew it existed. As an Englishman I don't think this has done my country much good, but has it done America much either? ■

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*Geoffrey Wheatcroft is an English author. His books include The Controversy of Zion, which won a National Jewish Book Award, and The Strange Death of Tory England. Yo, Blair! will be published in February.*

# Not By Politics Alone

Conservatives must initiate their own long march through the institutions of culture.

**By Claes G. Ryn**

THAT LEADING POLITICIANS wield great power nobody will deny. What is not so well understood is how limited that power is. Over time, especially, politicians are superceded by forces largely beyond their control. They must yield to those who mold the fundamental ideas and sensibilities of a people, those who affect their hopes and fears, direct their attention, and select and define the issues of the day.

Society's long-term evolution is profoundly affected by those who shape the mind and imagination of a people. They set the tone in the arts, the entertainment industry, the publishing houses, the electronic media, the press, and academia. When these are pulling in the same direction, not even a landslide political victor can overcome them. For real and lasting change to be possible, first the culture has to change.

In the following discussion, American and Western civilization will be described, for brevity's sake, as torn between traditionalists—those who stress humanity's dependence on the achievements of previous generations—and radicals—those who turn their backs on history and want to realize visions bearing no resemblance to actual human experience. That this is a simplified picture of our predicament hardly needs saying. Human beings do not fall into neat categories. Also, traditionalists, for example, could not hope to preserve the ancient heritage that they claim to cherish without restating and developing it in new circumstances. Indeed, at a time of profound dislocation, attempts to preserve and protect

traditional insights and patterns of life may, to those who embrace dominant beliefs and practices, look like radical departures.

The power that may be ultimately decisive in setting society's direction is found in what will strike many as an unlikely place, in the arts and humanities broadly understood: in the arts—from dramatists, novelists, and movie-makers to composers and painters—and in academic disciplines—from philosophy, history, and English to politics and psychology. In these fields, trendsetters have long been chipping away at the moral and spiritual core of what can loosely be called traditional Western civilization. Hence the basic orientation of our society. Putatively conservative political victories here and there have made little difference to the fundamental trends of Western society.

To take up first the role of intellectuals, consider the late 1960s and early '70s when the New Left and the counter-culture attacked not only the military-industrial complex but all traditional civilization. This rebellion could trace its roots at least as far back as Rousseau. These were the radical children of indulgent liberal parents who had already done their part to undermine traditional beliefs by rejecting moral universality and making abstract, "scientific" rationality the arbiter of truth. The new campus radicalism soon spread into the larger society, partly through sympathetic coverage in the media.

Because the turbulence on the campuses and elsewhere subsided, many wanted to believe that radicalism was

petering out. The opposite was true. The campus radicals and their less radical-looking sympathizers did not disappear. Many of them found permanent, congenial homes in the colleges and universities. They stayed—as faculty. Since their days on the ramparts they have, whether as unreconstructed or somewhat chastened radicals, taught millions of students. They or their students are now senior tenured professors, department chairmen, deans, provosts, and presidents. They sit on curriculum and personnel committees. They select new faculty. They influence the criteria for promotion and tenure. They pass judgment on which books will be published or rejected by university presses, which articles will be published or rejected by academic journals. They have profoundly affected standards of scholarship and truth and even define intelligence. By designing SAT, LSAT, GRE, and other tests, they bias admissions.

People do not inquire deeply into what their children or grandchildren will be taught in college. They are more concerned about the relative prestige of a school. And that ranking, too, is determined by the same trendsetters.

Perhaps the most telling sign of the state of academia is that even those most widely reputed to be the defenders of traditional beliefs are also helping to subvert them. The Straussians, for instance, have long sought to persuade unsuspecting traditionalists that philosophy is incompatible with convention and "the ancestral." To celebrate the American founding, says Harry Jaffa, is to "celebrate revolution." America, he asserts,