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[TheTonyBlairStoryPart1 1.mp3](#)

Transcript

Some say you were his Lady Macbeth.

If anyone thinks Tony's my puppet, they just don't understand the nature of the man. Right.

He could always, as we say at home, he could always talk an owl out of a tree.

When you think of Tony Blair, what words spring to mind?

I think he's a man in denial, actually.

Tony Blair, a prime minister who never lost a general election. He is, without doubt, both one of the most successful and one of the most controversial leaders Britain has ever had.

One way of looking at him is of thinking of him as an explorer. His whole story The life story of Tony Blair is one of exploration of the world to see how far he can get.

If you're giving an interview, you've got to be pretty disciplined about it. I've been pretty frank with you, actually, most of the time. I think you should be relatively pleased.

Not all the time.

Well, as much as you, as much as you deserve.

Is it a real bore to have to answer questions?

No, it's not. But as I said to you when you started doing this program, I don't even know why anyone would be interested in doing a program on me, but since you are, that's fine, and you know, let's see.

These are Tony Blair's parents, Hazel and Leo Blair. Leo's story is remarkable. He was born the son of travelling performers and put into the foster care of a Mr. and Mrs. Blair in a poor part of Glasgow. Tony's father joined the army and then the Conservative Party. He had dreams of becoming prime minister.

My dad was a remarkable man. He was chairman of the local Conservative Party. He was a very successful barrister, great speaker. By the way, I think he could have been a prime minister, but anyway.

Tony's father sent his son to this boarding school at the age of 13.

We were inside those railings, and we were pretty well cut off. At Fetty's, there was ***** there was beating, there was the church. There was still that feeling you were being prepared to run an empire, to be sent off to Burma or to India or somewhere to run a tea plantation. Tony was very self-confident. He was very clever, too, and I think he knew he was clever.

Tony arrived at Fetty's on the back of a family tragedy. His father had a massive stroke from which he never fully recovered. And any dreams his father had of being Prime Minister were over. I want to take you back to July 1964. You will remember that that's when your dad had a stroke. Tell me what happened.

Well, I guess I was 10, 11 years old.

How did it impact you, do you think?

I don't spend a lot of time psychoanalysing myself, but I think when I look back in it, it must have had an impact on my thinking about the world and life. You know, it was such a traumatic event. I remember the event of that night and that day and the next day and the days that followed so vividly that I get, of course, it makes an impact in your life. And I guess it teaches you that life is fragile.

Tony's father's speech never fully recovered. But at school, Tony kept this to himself.

Who never had any sense of how his father's stroke might have affected him.

No, not really. No, we never really discussed it. No, it's bizarre, yeah.

What do you think Fety taught Tony Blair about himself?

The school teaches you to survive. It knocks a lot of the emotion out of you. become very insular. He was strong and didn't really show much in the way of emotion. I never saw it. was a bad thing to show emotion when you were at these schools?

After Fetty's, Blair goes up to Oxford. He studies law and sings in a rock band. Also in Oxford is his childhood friend, Angie Hunter, who would go on to become one of his closest political advisors?

So he arrived, fresh-faced, fun. He was good-looking. He was fun to be with, articulate. And he looked like every other guy that came to Oxford in 1972, which basically was long hair, and he had a big fur coat. We just became great friends.

I want to touch on something else that happened while you were at university, which is a good friend of yours took his own life. Ewan.

Yes. So Ewan had been my dearest friend at school. There was a group of us. And he was a great guy. He was a wonderful, wonderful young man. And unfortunately, he got

into, he got into drugs, I think. And he became sort of mentally unstable and then took his own life and it had a big impact on me. Because he, first of all, because obviously he was a very, very dear friend. And secondly, because I, you know, I just, I felt what a waste it was because he had such talent. He was such a clever young man with such a strong personality. He would have done great things. And when my first son was born, you know, I named him after him.

You and suicide had a big impact on Tony and He came back, it was at the end of the summer term, and I remember he came back the following term with his haircut, and he wasn't wearing the fur coat. He straightened up a lot after that.

Tony makes his way at Oxford, doing well enough to plan for a career as a lawyer.

In those days, of course, you made a telephone call from a... telephone box with putting the coins in the box, and therefore you weren't every day in contact with your family as you are today. My mother had been ill. I knew she had cancer, and the family didn't want to tell me because I was doing my final exams at Oxford. They didn't want to tell me how serious it was. But I remember when I got off the train and my dad picked me up at the station, he said to me, look, you know, you should just prepare yourself. And I said, but you're not seriously telling me she's going to die? And he said, well, no, I'm telling you that. She is. She's in hospital and she's going to die soon. So that was, you know, yeah, of course. The thing that experience teaches you when you have an experience like this and your parent dies when you're very young is you just realize, well, if you've got something to do with your life, you better get on and do it because who knows what happens.

Hey, everybody, take a look at me. I've got st credibility. I may not have a job, but I have a good time with the boys that I'm in town on the line. It's DHSS. This manner rhythm that the given is the very best. I said B1, B2, make a claim, sign your name, so you have to do.

It's 1982. Mrs. Thatcher is in power. And the Falklands War is raging. The Conservatives have captured the mood of the 80s. Meanwhile, the Labour Party is in the doldrums. We've had a very long day.

OK, you get annoyed if you like, but I need a credential to get to the conference.

And this is their leader.

How have you found your day here at the Beaconsfield by-election?

Well, I think it's been a pretty good day. First of all, we've got a wonderful candidate. Everybody agrees that Tony Blair is one of the very best possible candidates there could be.

It's rather a large majority, isn't it?

Against.

Itself. After leaving Oxford, Blair became a barrister. But now he has political ambitions. Running to be a Labour MP in a seat he can't win.

Oh, that's good. Nice smell, I love it.

Anthony Charles Linton, 3,886.

As expected, Blair loses.

When I first met Tony, we were co-pupils and rivals. We then became friends, and we were vaguely flirting with each other. It was about 18 months after his mother had died, and I think he was still very much coming to terms with that. The first thing we really sort of talked about was religion. Both of us in different ways had a religious faith.

Was he romantic in his courtship?

No, not very. Tony's not very romantic. Really? Yes. He's never bought me flowers, for example. And now he says, well, if I bought you flowers, you'd be very suspicious, which is probably true.

Tony is desperate to become a Labour MP, but first he has to be chosen as a candidate by a constituency Labour Party. He travels up and down the country, telling them all what they don't want to hear, that the Labour Party needs radical reform. He tries ten constituencies, all say no, and Tony's on the brink of giving up.

I've always been interested in politics. I was interested in politics when I was 14 and class. I announced that I was going to be the first female prime minister.

Cherie does get selected to fight a seat for Labour. So how did he cope with that?

Badly. He felt that he had missed his chance. I was going to go and fight a hopeless seat, but at least I was fighting a seat. there was one seat left in the country.

With just four weeks to go before the general election, Sedgefield in County Durham is the only seat not yet to have selected its Labour candidate.

I remember sitting in my house in Hackney and she really saying to me, I mean, you might as well go. I mean, why not? There's nothing you can lose.

The members of the Sedgefield Labour Party will have to be convinced.

I was very nervous. But by then, you know, I got quite used to the process of rejection. I've been in many constituencies, tried many different things. usually I'd get a long way, and the moment I showed my colours, I would be out.

John said, oh, there's a guy from London coming up. He wants to be our next MP. Yeah, champion, but we're watching the football. Of course, there's a long way to go yet, but it is a night where.

There will be a positive result, because at the end of 90 minutes of its level, we have extra time.

Of course, the trouble was this match went on forever. Extra time was played, it was a draw, by which time we were quite happy and merry, you know. So after that we said, right, we're going to ask you some questions.

We gave him the best drilling that we could.

He spoke with an awfully posh voice. I mean, we'd always had a miners union MP. And here we had this public school boy who went to Oxford and was a barrister. But we knew that night. I said to them, the lads, I said, you know, you can never say somebody will be Prime Minister, but you can say somebody is Cabinet material. And I said, he's Cabinet material. And Paul agreed, they all agreed.

Well, I saw he was different. You know, I was young, I wanted someone younger than your average Labour MP. I wanted someone with a bit to go about them and there he was sitting on the set. So why not give the young lad a go?

Wow. Tony jumped up and, you know, had a couple more drinks.

Blair successfully charms the Sedgefield Labour Party and becomes their MP. But nationally, Labour suffer a devastating defeat. Still, by entering Parliament, Blair fulfills his father's dream.

Westminster's best-known watering places were opening up for some new customers this evening. At one of them, I met some of the 150 new Commons faces. The image of the Labour Party has got to be an image that's more dynamic, more modern, more suited to the 1980s. I don't actually think it's nearly so much a matter of right and left as people make it out. What I do think is that it's a matter of style. The truth is, we live in a different world now. We live in a world where over 50% of the population in this country are owner-occupiers. We live in a population where there are... Large numbers of people now employed in the service industries rather than manufacturing industries, and that means a change in attitude and a change in attitude that we've got to catch up to.

The party elects a new leader, Neil Kinnock.

Okay, thanks for coming in.

Who spots the potential of the new backbench MP for Sedgefield?

I asked him if he would fulfil this role in the Treasury team. He was ecstatically pleased and made no secret of it. Do you really mean it? Do you really mean it? I don't think I've

ever encountered, before or afterwards, anyone who was so manifestly delighted. at what he saw as a promotion.

Blair befriends Gordon Brown. They share a room at the House of Commons.

Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, didn't they do well? He did even better. Got 50,000 votes more, didn't you, than he got, but both of you did extremely well indeed.

They become a pair with contrasting personalities.

I want to see a wider membership, I want to see better attention to the regional organisation, and I want to give more attention to the policy-making process. So these are things that we want to see happen.

Did you have to... He talked of a platform once he stood, made it sound like a real election. Did you have to scheme, organise, assemble votes for this?

No, because it's done in a fairly democratic way with one... Well, a fairly democratic way. I mean, very democratic. I'm just being unusually modest.

Gordon made a huge impression on Tony because he was a much more experienced political creature. And I think Gordon got used to the idea that Tony was there to support him by bouncing ideas off him, by discussing ideas, yes, helping him develop. But at the same time, the fact was, that Tony was also learning from Gordon and developing his ideas, and they weren't always the same as Gordon's ideas.

By 1992, almost everyone expects Labour to win the upcoming election of that year.

We're all right.

We're all right! I first met Tony Blair in March 1992, just before the general election of that year. I got a call from his office saying, Tony, we'd like to meet you. It's the only time, I think, that a politician's actually asked to see me. So I booked a restaurant and we met. Of course, like everyone, I was overwhelmed by his charm. Blair was a radical, transformative politician, there's no doubt about that. The Labour equivalent of Margaret Thatcher and his determination to pull the Labour Party into a completely different mode of thinking. I said, well anyway, it looks like you'll be in government in a couple of months because that's what everyone thought. And he said, oh no, we're going to lose.

Labour do in fact lose, and Tony now hopes that Gordon will put his hat into the ring to be the new leader. But Gordon throws his support behind his fellow Scot, John Smith.

I therefore declare that John Smith is elected the leader of the Labour Party.

And Tony's hopes that he and Gordon will transform the party are derailed.

That was a crucial moment for Blair. That was the moment when the iron entered his soul.

John Smith looks like a Labour leader who can win power. He's a popular and skilled political operator, but he has a heart condition. In April 1994, Tony and his wife Cherie go for a weekend in Paris. And it's here that Blair wakes suddenly with a premonition that John Smith is about to die.

It was a rather extraordinary thing. I actually did wake up in the morning and I remember I woke up and I thought, you've got to prepare yourself for this. I think it's going to happen. I remember saying to Sri, I feel it's possible this heart condition could come back. And I've got to think then about what happens if it does. And whether it really is the moment that I would go for the leadership, but that did happen. And that was the first time we'd really properly discussed it.

You said to her, if John dies, I will be leader, not Gordon. And somehow I think this will happen. I just think it will.

Yeah, I just, I felt this, I felt this strong premonition. And I don't quite know, who knows how these things come into your mind like that, but it came into my mind with a degree of certainty that both surprised me and made me think, okay, who knows whether it's right or wrong, but you're going to have to think now, and you're going to have to think about the decision, because you know in your own mind you want to do it, and you're going to have to think how you handle Gordon, because it's going to be a huge problem for you and your relationship, and I hadn't really discussed it with him, because I was thinking, well, what's the point? You know, it may never happen, and therefore there's no point in ending up, because I knew it would be a difficult conversation, because it'd always been assumed that he would be the leader. But I thought, no, you've got to prepare yourself for this and for the conversation that will come.

Good evening.

The leader of the Labour Party, John Smith, died this morning in hospital after suffering a massive heart attack at his London home.

It was a very extraordinary situation at the funeral because you got the absolute grief of his family and then the grief of the party. And then on the other hand, there was the inevitable thoughts of, well, what's going to happen to the party now?

It was an incredibly intense day. Everybody was thinking about the succession.

Everybody's looking around thinking, is he going to run for it? Who's going to support him? Is it going to be Gordon or is it going to be Tony?

I was determined that he wasn't going to let his decency, thinking he should defer to Gordon, get in the way of what I thought was best for him. and best for the country. I said to him, you've got to go for it. It's got to be you.

When I met Tony, I said, of course, we'd have to think about this very carefully and work out which of them would gather the most support. You know, who would be the best modernizers candidate? He just looked at me and said, Peter, I'm going to do this. I said, oh, yes, but we'll consider how, you know, now who you said. I'm going to do this. It really was as if his time had come. He had a sense of destiny.

Blair and Brown engage in a series of fraught negotiations over which one of them will run for leader.

They were such close, good, intimate friends. It was like a married couple deciding whose career should come first. I mean, Gordon would have been thinking I've been betrayed by my best friend. I was always going to be the leader. I thought that was the deal. I'm only talking about the European elections. Okay. Is that okay? Can I just put one question to you about the leadership?

Not at all. We're talking about the European elections today. Okay.

What do you plan to do today, sir?

Thanks.

Tony was feeling absolutely 100% determined. I'm going to persuade him. I'm going to persuade him. I'm going to persuade him.

As they try to thrash out a deal, they have at least 10 secret meetings that culminate in a dinner at a North London restaurant called Granita. What's your understanding of his agreement with Gordon?

Well, first of all, there was never an agreement. And... There were a number of meetings. Some of them were in my sister's house. And really, the deed was done before they had that meal in the granola or what it was called. Granita. Yes, Granola. Granita, that's right. It became a thing of legends. It was all sorted out there, but it was much more drawn out than that.

But what was it, in essence?

That Gordon would stand down for Tony, that Gordon would be Chancellor, and he would have... control over the economic policy. And that at some point when Tony stood down, he would support Gordon to be his successor.

The details of what was agreed are contested to this day. Many in Brown's camp claim Blair set a limit on the time he would serve as leader.

But there was never, to my mind, in fact, I said to him before he went, don't promise to set any kind of date. But Tony, being a very charming person, I think can often make people think they hear what they want to hear. So I think that Gordon may well have spoken of a time limit, and Tony may not have strongly disabused him of that.

Did any part of you feel a little bit sorry for Gordon?

No. It's... that in politics, there comes a point when you have to make a choice.

I don't love having a confrontation. It's not my natural way. Contrary to, I think, sometimes the image of sort of, you know, he's messianic and all of that. No, I'm not like that. If I can avoid having a big fight on Rao, I'll happily avoid it. But I always know there comes a point when, you know, if it's something that really, really matters, you're going to have to... you've got to confront it. If I thought he was going to do the things I thought were necessary for the Labour Party, I really would have been happy to have been number two. But I think he found that incredibly difficult for understandable reasons. And we resolved it in the end. But when something like that happens, it changes the nature of the relationship. And to be honest, you never fully resolve it. So it had to be done.

This morning, I'm announcing my candidature for the position of leader of the Labour Party.

Well, Tony was always a smoothie. His weakness was the lack of deep thinking, knowledge of history. And I think he wants to be a big thinker. But that's not what he is. I mean, maybe we're all the same, whatever our strength is, we want the other strength. His strength was certainly the personal charm and the communications. I don't think he's a great leader.

Mr Blair, good morning. Good morning. The other two contenders for the leadership are prepared to serve as deputy. Why aren't you? Because I don't wish to be deputy. Why not? You're the youngest of the three with the least experience. Because I don't desire to be deputy leader, it's a very, very good post. I think that both of my colleagues will make excellent deputy leaders, but it's not a post I desire for myself.

Have you really thought through the effect of the job you're about to take on, assuming you get it, upon yourself and your family?

I've reflected upon it a great deal.

And you've decided that the effect is worth living with, assuming that you can become Prime Minister.

Yes, I have. It is not an easy decision, and I am well aware of what is about to fall upon me.

He was steely, clear. He had real energy and restlessness that was, you know, politically exciting. I do remember asking him whether he thought he was really tough enough for what was coming. Do you think you were tough enough to cope with the sort of media onslaught that Neil Kinnock, for example, had to endure?

I think it comes with the territory, and I am entirely prepared for it, indeed expect it.

Blair wins, and now he's leader of the Labour Party.

The blueprint for New Labour, he had it in his head right from the start. The idea that he was just some sort of, you know, line of least resistance, pretty front guy, could not be further from the truth.

He assembles a formidable team of political operators and spin doctors.

There were this curious combination of Tony being Mr. Good Guy, and then around him, you have these absolutely ruthless *****.

Richard, you want anything? Tomorrow, any other day, get out.

I was being quite robust, and I remember Tony looking, And I think part of him thinking, am I going over the top, but part of him thinking, that's what we need to do from time to time.

Tiffany was quite smart in leaving the brutality to others.

Together, they set about rebranding the party. And in the face of staunch resistance, they rip up decades of Labour Party convention.

The historic goal of another Labour government. Our party, New Labour. Our mission, New Britain. New Labour, New Britain.

Blair was the revolution in his own person. It was like he was laying the party at his father's feet. He'd changed it so much that his father would now vote for it.

It's July 1995, and Blair's just flown 10,000 miles to a tropical island in Australia to meet the most powerful man in the British media, Rupert Murdoch.

We knew there would be terrible controversy. We were accused of supping with the devil. You take a long spoon with you. That was the sort of general gist from our colleagues.

We're helping from ABC Television. How are you going? You've come halfway around the world to talk to Rupert Murdoch and his men. Why is that?

You're impersonating Dame Edna, aren't you?

Do you expect Mr Rupert Murdoch's papers to support you in the upcoming election?

No, I mean, I've made it clear right from the very start, I'm not here to trade policy for editorial support. What Mr Murdoch's papers do is up to him, what the Labor Party does is up to us. Okay, thank you. Okay.

Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

Okay, thanks.

Thank you.

Nice to meet you. Bye-bye. Quite a lot of people, Jeremy Corbyn in the Labour Party, I mean, people like Roy Hutton would say, this is the move of a shrewd political operator. I think this smacks too much to me of an endorsement, and almost a craven endorsement of the Murdoch empire. I think it's a great mistake.

My point was that he was therefore accepting the way in which Murdoch ran his papers. There was no sense of standing up to what Murdoch was doing to our media. Blair had this ability to separate himself from the political, philosophical debate around an issue and go into it in a totally transactional way.

Tony Blair said to me, how we treat Rupert Murdoch in power will depend on how he treats Labour in the run-up to the election. It's pretty simple.

You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. That's what it came down to.

Having charmed the media mogul, Blair seems equally at ease getting gushing endorsements from rock stars.

There are seven people in this room tonight who are giving a little bit of hope to young people in this country. That is me, Aki, Bonehead, Quigsey, Alan White, Alan McGee and Tony Blair. And if you don't got anything about you, get up there and you say, Tony Blair's hand, man, is a man. Power to the people.

I like you, Tony. And I like you for a very specific reason, which is that you seem to me to be like a real person. But if it's not an overly pretentious question, I mean, are you as real as you appear? Because it seems to be that people worry. They see you surrounded by what they call spin doctors, and they think that perhaps this realness is kind of manufactured. What do you think?

Well, you can't manufacture the realness in the end. I mean, people have got to make a judgment on it. But we run a professional show in the Labour Party today.

Yeah.

We do things in a professional way, but it doesn't mean to say you're not real or you can't be a human being at the same time. Dad! Dad! Dad! If you don't make the time for your family, then I think your politics actually becomes much less effective, because they keep your feet in the ground, they may drive you mad, but they keep you sane.

The first time I went to see Tony Blair at his home, it was almost like arriving on a film set. You felt that everybody, whether it was Cherie Blair and the children and the coffee maker and all the rest of it, you felt you were seeing a brilliantly orchestrated performance of what they thought that a new Labour leader, how he ought to live and what his children ought to look like and what his wife ought to look like. Tony and the family, they did a brilliant imposture of being normal human beings. Now, actually, anybody who was on his way to becoming Prime Minister is not a normal human being, but they played the game brilliantly.

You have obviously also had to think through the possibility of being a number 10 Downing Street.

Both of you.

Take it stage by stage, actually.

I'm a great believer in the old Mrs Beeton recipe for rabbits. Do you first catch your rabbits?

Sherry, do you have...

Sort of daunting feelings about that.

I've never even been near Downing Street. I've got no idea.

I've never even stood outside the door. Well, it's got to cross your mind that it might end that way. Well, I'm sure that there will be space somewhere for the children.

The thing you have to understand about Cherie is that she had strong political views, strong sense of ambition. If not Tony, it could have been Cherie. It was Cherie who was the, in a sense, the sort of Labour Party animal, the person, who wanted to run as a candidate and to join the leadership of the Labour Party. And she took a very profound, and it must have been quite a difficult personal decision, in a sense, to step back and to be his support. There.

Was about a six-month period, no more, when I was a candidate and Tony was still looking for a seat.

And so he had to...

Trail behind me.

It probably didn't do any harm, did it? It probably didn't do any harm, but I certainly at the time felt it didn't do me any good.

The marriage was so strong, not smooth, not easy, lots of gyrations, lots of sort of shouting in the background, but my word, it was the rock. That marriage was the rock on which Tony's political career...

There was an idea that I would write one of those sort of campaign diaries or the story of an election campaign, and Tony Blair was keen that I did it, and I really got an astonishing first-hand insight into that whole election. and really witnessed a politician at the top of their game. He loved campaigning.

I can change a note.

On the battle bus, he'd go and sit at the front next to the driver so that he could see cars coming towards him or people down the street. He sought a connection. Hello, Northampton! I think that he just grew in confidence as the campaign went on. And the crowds became much bigger and the enthusiasm for him was much greater. And it was like watching a flower blossom in the sunlight. Can you give him a kiss again?

Can you give him a kiss again?

I'm coming back to Basildon. Definitely.

It was very interesting to me during the '97 election that he wore a lot of makeup. There were not one but two make-up people traveling with him, and he liked that. It was like he was putting on the war paint every day before he went out. I got the impression talking to people who knew him, like his old house master at school, that he was quite a difficult, rebellious, long-haired, tricky boy to have in the house and that this all changed when the house put on a production of Julius Caesar and he played Mark Antony and he said to me for the I saw him visibly swell when he went on stage for the first time as if he had found his calling It's a clue to Tony's character that he saw being a party leader as a 24-hour day performance. He always needed to perform.

Please welcome the Leader of the Opposition, the Right Honourable Tony Blair.

It was on television, really, that politicians meet their electorate. And he has this ability to separate his inner self from the public persona.

Sitting on that couch last week were the Spice Girls. Right. Mrs. Thatcher, they thought, was the first Spice Girl. No, you were... You did. They said they didn't tell them. Well, I've actually... I did meet the Spice Girls. They have sort of bare midribs, short skirts, sort of earrings and through various parts, pins and things, and tattoos. I can't really see Margaret Thatcher like that. You did go on Chris Evans' show, apparently, and said that Bowie, this is David Bowie, his wife, Iman, was your dream girl.

Did you actually say that?

I did. Well, he asked me the question, and I broke the first rule of politics and lapsed into total honesty. There's nothing wrong with that.

On the 1st of May, 1997, after 18 years of Tory rule, Britain goes to the polls.

My parents were very superstitious. We could not say, Dad's going to win the election, because it might not happen. And I was only nine. I didn't know what an election meant. I didn't know what him being Prime Minister meant. And so I did not know, and we hadn't packed anything.

Thank you.

It was exciting and a little bit scary. Press are not very child-friendly. This way.

Everybody this way, all right. This way, please.

There were just so many press there and 100 cameras in your face, shouting your name, wanting you to look at them and smile, smile, do this. And we're just like, what is going on? I remember it being very terrifying. And I was just holding my dad's hand thinking, What are we doing? Why are all these people here?

Mr Blair, this way, please. This way, Mr Blair.

There it is, 10 o'clock, and we say Tony Blair is to be Prime Minister and a landslide is likely.

On election night, I arrived at his house, and the first thing I noticed, of course, was there were now men with machine guns standing around in the garden. You know, he was about to become Prime Minister, clearly.

Anthony Charles Linton Blair, the Labour Party candidate, 33,526.

At the Count, I was a few miles from where I'd been brought up. My dad was there. My mum wasn't. My dad had really, all his ambitions in the end, had failed because of his illness, but here was his son about to become the British Prime Minister, and he was so proud and happy, and I was happy for him. And, yeah, it was And I will, sir. I miss my mum.

So off goes Tony Blair. The engines of his jets will soon be starting. The door will close. And he will be down amongst even more admirers.

Got my notes, sir. Got my notes. OK, John.

Get used to this. We went on the plane and... Everyone was very excited, and Alistair was constantly saying, We've just won this, and we've just won that. And Tony was just very still and very quiet, and sat up at the front. And I was just holding his hand. And, you know, he did say, What have we done? I think it was more about the weight of it.

There's Tony Blair smiling, again greeting, shaking hands with party workers. They all want to shake his hand. He'll take one or two of them.

Everyone was sort of cheering and shouting. You know, people were saying to me, Oh, it's all fantastic. And I was just sitting there thinking, Yeah, well, we're now going to be running the country. So, you know, no more words. I'm not going to do it anymore.

What about fear?

Yeah, some fear. Yeah, some fear, I think. Because are you going to be up to it? Can you do it? What's going to happen?

Did you enjoy it a bit? Those first 24 hours.

You know, if I'm really honest about it, I'm not sure I did enjoy it that much, just because I was... I was just thinking, you know, here you are. You know, you're in your early 40s, you're Prime Minister. And rather than thinking, You're Prime Minister, wow, I was like, You're Prime Minister, so you better do a good job, because now what happens to this country and its people depends on you. I was.

Blind Now I can see.

I remember being stunned at the amount of people there were. There were all these flags everywhere. Everyone seemed really happy. Even as a 13-year-old, and right in the middle of it, there was a genuine sense of excitement. It was kind of nice to think, wow. People really liked that, of course, then. As it developed and you'd read the papers and everything else, you'd realise that not everyone liked it.

Blair comes to power with uncharted levels of popularity. He pushes through a blizzard of bold's new policies that change the way Britain works.

This is a government in a hurry.

The Bank of England is to be made independent. Scotland and Wales are to have their own parliaments. For the first time, there'll be a minimum wage. And to improve education, class sizes will be reduced.

One of the things I think he was drawn to, as it were, almost irresistibly, was his belief to solve problems which had defeated everybody else. He was drawn to making labour electable by inventing new labour and then delivering it. And I think he was drawn to Northern Ireland. It had defeated everyone else. He could do it.

Northern Ireland's Catholic and Protestant communities have been deeply divided for decades, and are caught in a seemingly never-ending cycle of sectarian violence.

Tony came back from Chequers, and he came in Monday morning, sort of, all bouncy and what have you, and he said, I've worked out how to do Normal Ireland. I've worked it out. Oh, okay, you've worked it out? Have you done that? And he did become pretty obsessed with it.

Blair sets the goal of getting a peace agreement within a year.

The stakes were enormous on Northern Ireland, and I was alarmed that he would be out of his depth. And I said to him, Prime Minister, I've got to say to you, I am worried you're going to be moving in with people who have huge, sensitive issues, a lot of history, a lot of anger. Are you going to be ready for it? And he said, look, Richard, I don't need to know about the history. I'm better off if I don't know the history. I'm going to focus on the people. You watch, it'll work.

He takes the highly controversial step of inviting the Irish Republican leaders of Sinn Fein to Downing Street.

Tony invested a huge amount of time in meeting Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley and other Northern Irish politicians. And we bring them into Downing Street and particularly when we had the DUP and Paisley's party involved, they would not meet Sinn Fein, they would not be in the same building as Sinn Fein. But when I was with Paisley in the Cabinet Office, I noticed looking out of the window, to my horror, that Adams and McGuinness had escaped from Number 10 into the Rose Garden and were playing with Blair children with their skateboard.

They go out for a break, right, through these very intense sessions. And they see me and my brother skateboarding in the garden. And we sort of said to them, hey, do you want to try? Because they were sort of watching us. And so you're in the farcical situation of kind of trying to teach Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness how to skateboard against the backdrop of something incredibly serious and solemn and historic. And I remember telling dad afterwards, and he was just Thank God they didn't injure themselves.

It's the 7th of April, 1998. Blair arrives in Belfast with most of the key players around the negotiating table, but the talks are on the brink of collapse, and there's a deadline looming just days away.

Morning. We're here to do a job of work, and we've got to get it done, and we've got complete determination to do it.

We were in this awful building, and he could get incredibly frustrated. He was saying, like, if this, if we could just sort this out without all the other people, we could do it right now, right? But we have to deal with all this ***** this and ***** that. He's not a table slammer, but I saw him at one point slamming the table, and he just went, **** like that.

Tony Bill is one of the most successful and most skillful negotiators I ever came across. He can play with a whole range of emotions, but he's always in control. I do remember one negotiation we had and he said to me, never lose your temper except on purpose. And it came home to me quite how he managed negotiations.

The problem is now you're into this day, it's not that you can't reach it, it's just making sure that you drive the thing forward as quickly as possible.

Machiavelli talks about needing the skill of the fox, but also the courage of the lion. And Tony had both. He had the... ability on issues of principle to be really brave, really firm, but he also had a very sinuous way to charm people into things. Roy Jenkins said that Tony Blair had a second-class intellect with a first-class temperament. And actually, there's something in that that's really a compliment, which is that he had the most remarkable EQ. His ability to understand people, to relate to people, to empathise was his superpower.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, you will have heard that Senator Mitchell's announcement has been made that an agreement has been reached.

Mrs Thatcher didn't believe Northern Ireland could be solved. John Major believed Northern Ireland could be solved, but he couldn't do it. Tony Blair believed both, that it could be done and he could do it. And he really drove it through.

Today we have just a sense of the prize that is before us.

He believed it was kind of his destiny to fulfill this. Somewhere written in the stars was for him to achieve this great thing for the country.

The work to win that prize goes on. We cannot, we must not, let it slip from our grasp. Thank you.

Said to me that Tony succeeded because he thought he was ***** Jesus.

Less than two years into Blair's time as Prime Minister, a war is escalating on the edge of Europe.

You're not looking bad for a man who doesn't sleep. God almighty, it's an el-musty day.

Serbian forces led by Slobodan Milosevic have driven 800,000 people from their homes in Kosovo. Ethnic cleansing is taking place. Blair is under pressure to act.

I went in to see Tony and I said, It looks like war in Kosovo because the diplomatic process has completely failed. And we've got this commitment to intervene. And I was surprised at how calmly he took it, because I could see this was going to be the dominant issue over the next few months. When a prime minister sends his forces into military action, nothing else competes with it for attention.

It was obvious to me that what was happening in Kosovo was effectively ethnic cleansing. There was murder, there was rape, there was a displacement of a civilian population, and I felt this was happening right on the doorstep of Europe. We should act, and we can act, and therefore we're going to.

On the 24th of March, 1999, Blair takes a leading role as NATO planes are scrambled to bomb targets in Serbia.

You are fighting a just war and a just cause, and I believe we are fighting for the values of civilization.

Blair becomes convinced that the only way to beat Milosevic is to threaten boots on the ground. But other world leaders are set against it, and Blair is isolated.

This was the one situation I remember, Tony, saying, if this is the last thing I do as Prime Minister, if I'm hounded out as a result of this, if it somehow goes belly up, so be it. I'm going for it.

Blair starts a campaign to persuade A reluctant US President, Bill Clinton, to back his plans.

First of all, it was the only real policy disagreement I think we had of any magnitude. The whole time we worked together. I argued that we would have fewer casualties and that we might be able to win with air power. I said, I think we are morally obliged to win and to win it by killing the fewest number of people.

The New York Times splashed a headline saying that Tony Blair was trying to toughen up Clinton and make him agree to ground troops. And Clinton went absolutely ape. He called Tony from Air Force One. I remember being on the call and he was so angry. He really lost it. He really shouted and yelled, I know what you're doing. You're trying to make me look weak and you're trying to make yourself look strong. And Tony said, no, honestly, it wasn't us. We didn't do that. It's not in our interest to do that.

I believe there was a phone call between the two of you and it got a little bit heated.

It did. I was mad because his guys were trying to make him look good in the New York Times, at my expense, when we should have been united in fighting this war. I was always totally honest with him. I didn't ever pull any punches.

How did the Prime Minister bring the President down from that anger?

His method was to stay calm, not to sort of panic, as people sometimes do when you face anger like that. But to the calm and say, no, it honestly wasn't us. We don't want to do that. It's not an interest to do that. and gradually talked him down until they're able to end the call.

He could always, as we say at home, he could always talk an owl out of a tree.

Under pressure from Blair, Clinton softens his stance on ground troops. And in the face of a united front, Milosevic backs down.

The logic of the campaign came through to Tony much quicker than it did to other leaders. And I don't think we would have got anything like the outcome had it not been for that personal commitment that he made.

Blair's standing up to Milosevic helped end the conflict in Kosovo, saving thousands of lives.

Dolly, Dolly, Dolly, Dolly, Dolly, Dolly, Dolly, Dolly, Dolly, Dolly.

Whenever something in politics looks at its zenith, the termites are at work on the base. That is a sort of cyclical, almost natural rule of politics. And people that I've spoken to who know him very well, they all point to Kosovo. At that point, for the first time, maybe a slight parting from reality began to take place. The moment that he appeared rather like, you know, Christ walking through the Holy Land with people hailing him as if he had worked a miracle, A friend of mine, a friend of Tony's, said to me he thought he could walk on water. And in that triumph, the seeds of tragedy were sown.

This is not a battle for NATO. This is not a battle for territory. This is a battle for humanity. It is a just cause. It is a rightful cause. And we will make sure that these people here are returned to their homes. That is our commitment to them. Practical help, practical commitment, and above all else, a determination that all this suffering and all this misery and everything that has been created by the brutality of Milosevic shall not last, but shall be reversed, shall be defeated, so these people can once again become symbols of hope, humanity, and peace. Thank you.

He was at his best. He really felt deeply it had to be done. We had a moral responsibility to act. The international politics were difficult, but he showed genuine leadership in moving the dial on it.

My concerns were the alacrity with which he wanted to take military action, his very quick decision, we'll go in, we're going to get involved, we're going to do this militarily. It had been, in those terms, successful, but I think he then realized that he had the power to do this, and we then descended, in my view, into the horrors of the post-2001 situation.

Well, one of the things you learn in politics is they can be chanting your name one day in praise, and they can be chanting it the next day in condemnation. You've got to be strong enough both to withstand the praise and the condemnation. Once you come to the view that what you should do is what you think is right, then you've got to stand by that. Some people will hate it, some people will love it, and that you shouldn't-- it shouldn't propel you one way or the other.

But how did it propel the former Prime Minister? The Tony Blair story continues tomorrow at 9, or if you can't wait, all episodes are streaming now. Brand new next, nature's power and Fukushima often collide, but never like this. 15 years on, we hear first-hand accounts of the day that shocked the world after the strike of a Magnite wrecking ball.

Audio file

[TheTonyBlairStoryPart2.mp3](#)

Transcript

I read somewhere that there's one film that had more of an influence on you than any other.

Yeah.

Schindler's List. Can you tell me about that and the impact it had on you?

Well, Schindler's List is a remarkable and important film in many different respects, but the thing that impacted me most was this concept of the camp commandant and the normality that in one sense he was living with his girlfriend and all of that, and then just the sheer brutality that was being visited upon the people. As this awful thing is happening, there are people just standing about. They're looking at it. They're knowing it happens, and they're not doing anything about it. You cannot be a bystander. That has been a very important part of my politics, and it can lead you to right judgments and wrong judgments, but it's it's not just your job to look after your country, to look after the people around you. It's also you have some responsibility to the bigger world.

He's coming.

It's June 2001. Tony Blair has just won a second massive general election victory.

Prime Minister, are you pleased to be back in Downing Street?

How does it feel? How does it feel?

Public opinion loved him. The press loved him. The unions were quiet. There were very few constraints on his ability to do what he wanted. I was the most senior civil servant available to him. And inside, I was bearing the briefs for incoming Prime Minister Blair. And I said to him, Prime Minister, Congratulations on this amazing victory. You should be very proud of it. You've worked for it for years and you've done well. You are now at the moment of your greatest moment of power. It's going to be up to you to decide how to use your power and what to do with it. And he said, gosh, OK, right. The point I was making to him is you will never be this strong again. And he took it in.

The new US president, George Bush, arrives at Chequers with congratulations for Blair's latest victory. Blair is determined to build a close relationship with the most powerful man in the world.

Tell me about Tony's relationship with him and what you perceived of that. How did it work?

I can remember when we, because obviously we knew Bill and Hillary. even before Tony became Prime Minister, from when he became Leader of the Opposition. And obviously, we have similar views in many ways. Then, you know, the Republicans come in with George Bush, who we know nothing about. And when I didn't know them, I was very apprehensive about... Did we have anything in common? What I did know, and what Tony made perfectly clear to me, is that it was my duty to make sure that we got on.

Over dinner, they discussed the biggest threats to the world. Bush outlines his plans for a nuclear missile shield to protect the United States of America. Though Cherie can't help but point out a flaw in his plan.

I simply express the view that it didn't really matter how, what you had, if you had an individual who was determined, an individual terrorist who's determined to blow themselves up, you know, a nuclear shield or a, cannot really protect you.

Two months on, Blair is in Brighton, preparing to make a major speech in support of the Euro at the TUC conference.

We're in the Grand Hotel, and we're in a room where Tony was writing his speech. We were quiet, we were just getting on with our own work, because he didn't want any noise, but we had the TV on over there.

There's some very, very sketchy details reaching us here at Sky Centre.

That happened within the last few moments.

He said, turn it off, Alistair. He said, don't you go down, keep an eye on it.

And as you can see, I don't know, you just saw the plane flying.

There's another explosion. Another plane.

We just saw a plane flying.

And we see the second plane go in. and our Special Branch jump up out of their chairs because they know this is not an accident anymore.

Bill, Congress, as Bill has just informed you, there have been the most terrible, shocking events taking place in the United States of America. Delegates, I hope you will understand. I will now return to London.

They're deciding how we should travel back to London. And they decided in the end that it would be safer for us to go on a train. Because if we were travelling in our normal convoy, that's easily spotted from the air. And I can remember Tony just sitting there

with that look on his face, that look I know so well, and just staring out the window. He had spent that summer reading the Quran. His mind would have been going at 5,000 miles an hour.

Tony wrote this long, list of things that we were going to need to do when we got back. Protection around buildings, airspace. Dozens and dozens and dozens of things that we had to do. When to speak to Bush, say that they'll be feeling like Pearl Harbor. Because they're not used to being attacked like this. They'll be feeling like that. Bush will be under enormous pressure to do things very, very quickly. And we'll be under pressure to use this to take out all sorts of different enemies around the world.

You're nice and calmly out at the front now, ladies and gents, please. Can you tell me why we've been elected? Has there been a security load? I can't tell you at this time, Faye.

We got Hilda Blair. He said, well, how are the Americans going to react? His immediate reaction without blinking. How do we stop the Americans doing anything stupid immediately?

I was number 10 and the prime minister arrived back from Brighton. And I saw this figure stride very purposefully. And there was something in the stride in the gate that said that he recognized the world had changed. And He is a figure who I think always wanted to change history.

This mass terrorism is the new evil in our world. We, therefore, here in Britain, stand shoulder to shoulder with our American friends in this hour of tragedy. And we, like them, will not rest until this evil is driven from our world.

The number of people missing in the rubble of the World Trade Center has jumped to 6,333. No one has emerged alive in more than a week.

Days after 9/11, Blair is in New York, heading to a service paying respect to British victims.

It's important to recognize 9/11 at the time was this dramatic event. It was obvious America was going to act, and it was obvious they were going to act with a lot of force. If we weren't prepared to stand with them at that moment, and in what they thought was their moment of immense national peril, then if we ever had a moment of national peril, why should they stand with us? It wasn't just a moral question, it was primarily a question of It was fundamentally in Britain's national interest to be with America at this point.

I can only imagine what it must have been like for people in New York, but my father's generation knew what it was like. They went through the Blitz. They know what it's like to suffer this type of tragedy and attack. And there was one country and one people that

stood by us at that time. And that country was America, and those people were the American people. And as you stood side by side with us then, we stand side by side with you now.

As it's established that the mastermind behind the attacks, Osama bin Laden, is operating in Afghanistan, President Bush prepares to reveal his response to the world.

The president was going to give an address to the nation, and Prime Minister Blair said, I'm coming. And the president said, Tony, you don't have to do that. He said, No, I have to do that. I'm coming. And then the president said, Do you want to speak? Do you want? And he said, No. I just want to be there. And he came. And I told the Prime Minister that that was a moment when the special relationship really felt special.

And on behalf of the American people, I thank the world for its outpouring of support. America will never forget the sounds of our national anthem playing at Buckingham Palace. America has no truer friend than Great Britain. Thank you for coming, friend. Our war on terror begins with Al Qaeda, but it does not end there. Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.

After we'd been to America, it had been agreed that Tony would go on a sort of world tour, making sure that everybody was on board for taking on Bin Laden.

Tony Blair was the first European leader to arrive in Brussels straight from his session in Washington. The key tonight, a message of unwavering support for America for whatever she does to strike back.

He did have a very strong sense of his own mission in the world. And he wanted to reconcile his ambition with what was morally right.

We flew to Moscow, where he went off on his own, much to our concern. because he didn't like him going off by himself to see Putin, and they played billiards in Putin's stature.

When we're battling something like the issue of international terrorism, but also on many other issues too, we need Russia there as a partner and a friend.

Blair travels nearly 50,000 miles on more than 30 flights. He meets more than 50 world leaders, each time trying to persuade them to stand shoulder to shoulder with America.

Some Arab countries, they are quite apprehensive. No Western leader is on record to say that no Arab countries will be targeted.

Well, I think there are two different phases to this action. The first phase is to deal with Osama bin Laden, his network, the al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan, and these camps that are there, where they're training literally thousands of people to go out and export terror right around the world, including, incidentally, in the Middle East. But then the

second phase is to say, well, what are the aspects of international terrorism that we need to deal with?

Again, you've raised the question. You're not telling me whether an Arab country is targeted, whether it's Iraq, Syria, or even Iran.

Or Sudan in the future. What I'm saying to you is that no country is going to be targeted unless there is evidence that it is doing something wrong.

Well, with 9/11, two things collided. One was his closeness to America. And secondly, this Manichaeian view of the world as a struggle between good and evil. And these two hit. These were two very, very strongly Christian-believing leaders in a way that I can't think that we've had before. And the fact that they were going to launch what is described in the Middle East as a crusade is a curious coincidence.

Does the fact that George Bush and you are both Christians make it easier for you to view these conflicts in terms of good and evil.

I don't think so, no. I think that whether you're a Christian or not a Christian, you can try and perceive what is good and what is evil.

You don't pray together, for example.

No, we don't pray together, Jeremy, no.

Why do you smile?

Because... Why do you ask me the question?

Because I'm trying to find out how you feel about it, I mean...

Possibly.

To understand Tony Blair's Christianity, you have to go back to Oxford University in the early 1970s.

Tony came up to Oxford. He immediately made friends. And I remember being in his room once, and there was a Bible lying on the table. And I said, oh, are you reading that? He said, yes, I am. Are you going... to church. I think I'd predict like that. Are you going to check? He said yes. And I didn't really discuss it with him. I'd always known that he, there was a part of him, a spiritual side to Tony.

In his second year at Oxford, Blair is confirmed into the church after meeting an older student, Peter Thompson, an Australian priest.

We used to have these marvellous discussions that would go for hours, cigarettes and coffee. And we'd get into religion and politics as one. He could have easily gone into the church. People often say that he speaks in a kind of messianic way. How do you feel about that? He tends to preach a little bit. I can understand what people are saying

about that. In fact, I don't see it that way. I think he speaks in a more prophetic way rather than a philosophical or analytical way. And it's about time politicians start to do that.

Peter was probably the single biggest influence in my life, I should think. And I still think about him virtually every day. That meant that my... Christianity and my politics were linked, not in the way, because whenever you talk about religion and politics, people can confuse it, not in the sense that I felt some political mission about Christianity, as it were, but if you're going to do politics, do it for a reason that's bigger than you, that's got something to do with belief. Yes, I have, darling. Yes.

Meeting Peter really inspired Tony. Talking to him about Christ as a radical, who fought for the poor, who was engaged with the poor, who fought for what was right, I think was very much something that appealed to Tony. I mean, I think if you are a person of faith, it does shape your world of view.

The idea of Your beliefs being something that resulted in action was what he brought to my philosophy. In other words, your religious belief wasn't something that shut you away from the world, but something that meant that you had to go out and act.

Within a month of 9/11, Blair sends British troops to join the American-led war in Afghanistan and lays out his vision for a new world order.

Out of the shadow of this evil, should emerge lasting good. Whatever the dangers of the action we take, the dangers of inaction are far, far greater. To the Afghan people, we make this commitment. We will not walk away as the outside world has done so many times before there. And I want to make it a fight for justice, too. Justice not only to punish the guilty, but just as to bring those same values of democracy and freedom to people around the world.

There was a sense that he was an instrument of God for goodness on the earth, that there was a battle between good and evil. This seems to me a dangerous way for any individual to live their life, but for a politician, it's quite dangerous, because the world doesn't really divide in that Manichaean way.

The war in Afghanistan begins.

Once again, American bombs rain down on the Taliban front line near Kabul.

The Taliban is quickly toppled, but bin Laden escapes. One month on, Blair flies into Afghanistan under cover of darkness so as to avoid potential missile fire. As he greets the new Afghan leader, Blair is told to stay on the red carpet as the airport hasn't yet been fully cleared of landmines.

Many people were saying this action was a mistake, would be opposed by people in Afghanistan, that we would make the situation worse, that the whole of the region

would be destabilized. Who would have guessed that today we have come a far greater distance than many might have anticipated? Thank you very much. Handshake? Well, yes, plenty of that. Is that fine now?

And I think at that stage we all thought, this is great, Tony, you're keeping everyone together. We were proud of him and he did the right thing. And then Blair came out and said, we're going to eliminate opium. It's the cause of all the heroin addicts on the streets of Britain. You can't just tell people who they grow that because that's the only way to make a living. that you're just going to eliminate it. You have to offer them a better life and an alternative way. And of course, then he volunteered that Britain would take on Helmand, the most dangerous place in Afghanistan. And a lot of our soldiers lost their limbs and so on. And that was him being brave with other people's bodies in a not very well thought out way. So this Blair that was constraining America Being sensible about post-9/11, about Afghanistan, then became the sort of gung-ho, militarist Blair that didn't think things through and made announcements that weren't sensible.

And you began to lose faith.

Well, I mean, it's not faith, you know. He's not the Pope, you don't say, you know... But I became critical in my own head. He was making mistakes that it was going wrong.

It's April 2002. Blair arrives at Crawford, President Bush's ranch in Texas, to discuss the next phase in the war on terror. Bush has plans to get rid of the Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein.

Only that regime had actually used weapons of mass destruction, and the link for the U.S. was these terrorist groups, if they managed to get hold of weapons of mass destruction, then instead of 3,000 people dying, it would be 30 or 300,000, and therefore we've got to deal with this issue. And so much had been written and talked about it, but it really did start with that. And for me, there were two considerations. One, Was it better to leave Saddam or remove him for the security of the world? And #2, being with America or not?

The situation with Saddam Hussein and his weapons is complex and murky. It's known that previously he'd gassed his own people.

The family living here had fled to their cellar when they heard the first explosion. they would have been unaware that the lethal gases would penetrate every part of their home.

Bush and Blair now fear his weapons of mass destruction could end up in the hands of terrorists. He claims he no longer has these weapons, but is he lying?

We'll see everybody tomorrow.

Mr. President, will the Secretary...

As I said, we'll see you tomorrow. I know you can't wait, and neither can I. Okay. Neither can the Prime Minister, for that matter. How you doing, Ari? You're looking just like a cowboy.

President George Bush himself, Iraq, was not just a sort of global issue, but a personal issue, because they'd tried to kill his father. George Bush is someone who holds a grudge, takes things personally. And President Bush is someone who puts an awful lot of weight on personal relationships. The Prime Minister recognized that, and therefore the best strategy in influencing President Bush's response was being seen to be supportive to President Bush.

We used to sit there, and Tony and George Bush used to go for a walk. And you could see Bush's people hated it. They hated it. Because, well, because they'd come back an hour later or whatever, or having wandered around the woods, they'd come back, and... You know, President Bush would say, so this is where Tony and I have got to, and Cheney and Roosevelt were always horrified, probably. You know, they were just like, but that wasn't the plan. That's not where this is supposed to be. So an awful lot of politics in the end is about people and relationships. And ultimately, that's the way that you get movement from leaders.

Good morning. We appreciate the rain that the Prime Minister brought with him. And so do the other farmers and ranchers in the area. Prime Minister, thanks for bringing it. My pleasure is yours. The Prime Minister and I, of course, talked about Iraq. I explained that the policy of my government is the removal of Saddam and that all options are on the table.

If I can say that any sensible person looking at the position of Saddam Hussein and asking the question, would the region, the world, and not least the ordinary Iraqi people, be better off without the regime of Saddam Hussein? The only answer anyone could give to that question would be yes. John Sargeant, ITN.

John Sargeant, ITN. Fine Land.

Prime Minister, we've heard the President say what his policy is directly about Saddam Hussein, which is to remove him. That is the policy of the American administration. Could I ask you whether that is now the policy of the British government?

Well, John, you know, it has always been our policy that Iraq would be a better place without Saddam Hussein.

Maybe I should be a little less direct and be a little more nuanced and say we support regime change. It's certainly the policy of my administration. And I think regime change sounds a lot more civil, doesn't it? Yeah.

What Europeans have a problem with about expanding any war on terror to Iraq is linkage. They can see a linkage between Al-Qaeda and Afghanistan. They can't see a direct linkage to Saddam Hussein. Would you... except that there isn't a direct linkage and how they're putting...

Of course I wouldn't accept that, but can't they see linkage between somebody who's willing to murder his own people and the danger of him possessing weapons of mass destruction? The thing I admire about this Prime Minister is he doesn't need a poll or a focus group to convince him the difference between right and wrong. Thank you all. Thank you. Good job.

So, after Crawford, Blair writes Bush a letter, which begins, I will.

Be with you whatever.

What's it say?

I will be with you whatever. A story, I'm a story that the day it went, yeah. It was not his best moment. And I don't know quite to this day why he sent it. The ambiguity in his relationships, which could be brilliantly used to good effect, as he did over the Good Friday Agreement, could also lead people to drawing from what he was saying, what they wanted to hear. And my anxiety was that this would be seen as a kind of blank check by the United States, and that the consequence of that would be that our leverage would be reduced.

You know, people just put far too much emphasis on the precise wording. Oh, hang on.

You're a lawyer. You know the importance of words.

Yeah, of course, the importance of words...

Didn't that commit you to a slippery slope that you couldn't get off?

No, of course not. I was actually trying to persuade the Americans to do something different, right? I wanted us to go through a UN process. I wanted to try and rally the world as far as possible. I thought it was possible that we might get Saddam to agree to the conditions that we wanted. And... I knew it was important that President Bush felt I was with him on the essential issue.

Would there have been anything that the Americans had proposed or even done that would have made you withdraw that support?

Well, if they hadn't gone through the UN process, it would have been extremely difficult for us, but they did. Was that a commitment that we were going to do whatever the Americans wanted? Of course not. But I was going to be with them in dealing with Suddan because I believed that was necessary and I still do.

Blair persuades Bush not to invade Iraq straight away.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honor to welcome to the United Nations, Mr. George W. Bush.

But to use the UN, to give Saddam an ultimatum. Give up any weapons of mass destruction you have and let inspectors in to look for them or face the consequences.

We've accomplished much in the last year in Afghanistan and beyond. We have much yet to do in Afghanistan and beyond.

Back home, Blair is under growing pressure to show that Iraq is an imminent threat to the world.

Can you here today offer one piece of evidence that action is necessary?

Off one piece of evidence is that they're in breach of 23 of them. the demands that the UN has made in respect of their weapons, chemical, biological, nuclear weapons. The Americans in raising this issue are not wrong, and the reason why our place is beside them is not because of some misplaced allegiance or because of blind loyalty. It's because it's the right thing to do.

His commitment to America and to being with America was much stronger than I had understood. And I went to see him, and I said to him, I'm very worried about what you're doing on Iraq. My advice to you is you should only go into Iraq if you have evidence of the weapons and support of the United Nations. Oh, Richard, he said, don't worry. I'm not going to do anything stupid. We can buy off the Russians. They need money. The Germans will be onside. The French will be difficult at the last minute, but they'll give in. It'll be all right. I think he wanted to carry the dream further in Iraq. I think he thought he would end up with a very popular invasion, the fall of a much hated tyrant. People throwing flowers over the troops. He could go back to the issue which still was absolutely in his mind and which he wanted, which is membership of the Euro. that we would enter the Euro, we would have a bridge across the Atlantic to Bush, who would be grateful to him, and he'd be in a very powerful position in the world. That was the ambition, that was the dream, that was the inner vision.

Blair is seeing MI6 intelligence that suggests that Saddam Hussein does have weapons of mass destruction. Blair now gets his director of communications, Alastair Campbell, to go to MI6 and the spies to help them present their evidence.

What about the criticism, though, that it was presented with a certainty that it didn't warrant?

Well, listen, I understand lots of people made that criticism. What some people in the intelligence community will say is that you can never be certain, but I would argue there was an ultra caution to the whole thing. To have the chief spin doctor of a government helping to edit and tinker with an intelligence dossier, I think, is just beyond the pill. The

whole Blairite obsession with spin, of which Alistair Campbell was the prima donna, led to a dossier that was false, hyped up, and inaccurate. Yes, you can set it against what's followed and the failure to find the weapons of mass destruction programme and say, well, that was *****. But based upon the intelligence and the assessment of the intelligence that was going into that document, I certainly don't accept the child of deception and I don't accept even that we exaggerated.

Long delayed, much anticipated, the dossier had journalists sprinting to deliver its message. Iraq's weapons threaten the world's stability. His missiles could hit Cyprus. An attack could be 45 minutes away.

I think he made-up his mind early on that he was going with America, and it was a question of how to manipulate his way through. I'm sure he thought he was doing it for a good cause. But, you know, Human frailty says we can all do that, convince ourselves that we did it for the right reasons. Are we going to war, Prime Minister?

We didn't have black and white evidence to present to the public. So what we had to present was our judgement. Not just the material contained in the dossier, but also the material he'd seen over years. But he himself said, that his views were based on a conviction, a belief that was the case.

Ark Royal heads the biggest task force deployed since the Falklands War.

It's January 2003 and British forces are headed to the Middle East.

I'm a bit worried and nervous about the dad and hope he's going to be all right.

In the last two months, UN inspectors have found no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. But Blair is convinced Saddam Hussein is giving them the runaround. And now Blair's facing growing opposition to the prospect of war.

I was in a speaking tour of Muslim countries about why we all needed to sort of come together. The reaction I got was pretty darn strong. People questioned our motives. I came back. We sat on the outside on the terrace at #10, and I said, look, I'm worried here that the Arab world, the Muslim world, will feel that this is some sort of fresh sort of crusaders that we're embarking on here. You know, there could be, if we played it wrongly, quite a backlash. He was not really convinced. Said I'd been spending far too long with the wrong people. Sometimes with Tony, He thinks that leadership is so important and being decisive is so important that he sometimes becomes a little tin-eared, to what other people are saying, careful here, think of that, bring this into the balance a bit more. And that's what I felt at the time.

Marching through the streets of London, sending a message to Tony Blair and George W. Bush, not in my name.

When you think of Tony Blair, what words spring to mind?

I think he's a man in denial, actually. On the day of the march, it was quite emotional. I thought, wow, we've mobilized these people. Can the political establishment ignore this? They just felt so angry that their country was going to war without their approval. It's the scale of the protest that is unprecedented. Million people. It's the biggest rally ever on British soil.

Thousands more deaths. in Iraq will set off a spiral of conflict, of hate, of misery, of desperation that will fuel the wars, the conflict, the terrorism, the depression, and the misery of future generations.

You could hear the protests in 10 Downing Street... It's a very strange time. I think it was hard for my children to come in every day, and people were standing there calling their father a murderer and a liar. I don't know what I would have felt if I was out there rather than in 10 Downing Street, but what I did know was that when Tony said, as he absolutely believed that Saddam Hussein had these weapons of mass destruction. He told me that was the case. I absolutely know that that's what he thought was true.

The morning of the big protests, we were in Scotland. He said that morning he'd not slept. He said that he was feeling Worried. I think he felt frustrated. A lot of the things that Saddam Hussein had done in the past were just sort of being pushed aside. Not least his use of chemical weapons, not least the torture chambers, not least the executions, all the stuff that he did. That didn't really have a big enough space within the public debate. And I do remember meetings that he had with Iraqis who were really pushing him, saying, look, I know how difficult it is, you've got to keep going. What we have lived with is an abomination.

Ridding the world of Sudan would be an act of humanity. It is leaving him there that is inhumane.

Did anything, though, give you pause for thought, a million people on the streets, Nelson Mandela...

No, of course, all of the... But you see, in the end, the problem, and it's one of the things you learn about leaders and leadership, is that ultimately, you sit in the seat, you've got to take the decision, and, you know, you've got to stand by it.

How did it affect him? I think it made him more conscious. of the need to keep trying to explain why he was doing it.

Did it ever cause him to doubt the doing it?

Not that I saw. Not that I saw.

Blair doesn't waver, but he agrees with his team to embark on a new media strategy.

Well, I mean, the massacrism strategy, I would say that was the period when he was most... fed up with the team, because we were sending him forth to see largely kind of mothers of service people who'd lost their lives or lost their limbs or whatever. And it was grim, and it was really grim. But we felt he had to talk to them. He had to be seen to talk to them.

You said that you were really keen to go down the UN route, but quite clearly, you don't give a stuff. We're going to go to war anyway. That's what we all feel.

Well, why did I go through the United Nations last year then?

I don't know, a fig leaf, perhaps?

Well, but how is it a fig leaf? I've got to get the agreement of those other countries.

But you're not going to now, are you? You're going to do it anyway.

No, I'm not saying I'm going to do it anyway.

Still prepared to risk all the good work that you've done on this one issue.

In the days before the invasion, he's questioned by a mother whose son was killed on 9/11.

I lost my only child in the World Trade Center. Now, for the last 18 months, my pain has been unbearable. You are a man that has come across as a genuine man, a family-orientated man. A man who's not only a Christian, but a church-going Christian. Now, to me, Mr Blair, what you're going to do, and I'm sure you're going to do it, you and Mr Bush, you're going to go and now bomb Iraq. You don't know how many. People like me that's going to suffer so much. How many innocent victims are you going to kill and how many people are going to suffer like I've suffered? No, Mr. Blair, don't do it.

I'm doing it because I think it's the right thing to do. And I hope, even at this stage, we can avoid conflict, actually. But if this goes badly, you're finished, really, aren't you? Well, let's wait and see, Trevor, shall we, about that, as to whether it goes badly?

Thank you. Thank you. While the diplomats discuss deadlines, the American and British troops are ready and waiting for war.

With America ready to attack, Blair is on a mission. He wants world leaders to sign another UN resolution. giving a clearer authorization for war.

I remember talking to President Mubarak at the time. He said, I trained as an Air Force pilot in Baghdad. I know what the Iraqis are like, and your invasion of Iraq will create not one, but 100 bin Ladens. What surprised me even more was my American counterpart, who was a good friend, obviously, David Welch, saying to me very privately, John, your service and our services have been looking for this WMD for the last 10 years. The

Russians and the French, we've all been looking for it and we haven't found it. Maybe there isn't any.

Everyone agrees Sudan is the threat. Everyone agrees that he must be disarmed, otherwise he poses a...

But it soon becomes clear that Jacques Chirac, the French president, is a problem. Privately, he had given Blair some personal advice. He said, if you go to war in Iraq, in the future, you will not be able to look your baby son Leo in the eye. With Chirac against, the UN resolution cannot pass. So Blair has to decide whether to go ahead with America, or change course. Before taking the decision, he has a secret meeting with an old friend at his country retreat, Checkers.

Oh, I felt terrible for him because he had established a good relationship with Bush. He realized that he couldn't get what he tried to do. which is a brief extension of the deadline, so that all the inspections could be completed. The Bush administration was ready to go to war and thought it was important, and the rest of the world disagreed with them. Almost everybody did. So, when you're caught in the middle, and you want to maintain your unique relationship with the United States, and you want to support European unity, not take it apart, you wind up taking the best of two unattractive alternatives. I didn't believe it was critical to our position in the world, our credibility in the world on terror, all that kind of stuff. I didn't believe that. So he was in a pickle. And... he did what he thought was right. And I think he still thinks he did the right thing.

Do you?

I don't know what I would have done under the circumstances if I'd been Prime Minister of The UK.

I think he was incredibly disappointed because he really had fought for a second resolution. But in the end, he still felt he had to take the decision. And he said, I am going to press ahead with this. But if you're not you, Sally, you, any number of people don't think that's right and don't, you know, don't want to do that, I would completely understand that.

There's so many decisions as Prime Minister of 50/50. You have to choose. But once Tony has chosen, he's very skilled at making people think that obviously it was never 50/50. That was the obvious choice. And it stems from his strength of character and his belief in himself.

Is there sometimes, though, a danger of overconfidence?

I'm a great believer in confidence.

Blair now stakes everything on a vote on the war in Parliament. If he loses, he'll resign.

We had the final meeting of those of us who were strongly opposed to military action in Iraq. I said, very short, very simple, Tony. Why are we doing this? Jeremy, understand this. We're doing this because it's the right thing to do. And then left the room. I think he invested so much in it. There'd been such a buildup of troops in the area. He felt at that point he couldn't just back off. I think he'd got himself into a messianic trench. He was going to do it.

The stakes could barely be high, the Prime Minister warning his party he will not want to lead it if they do not back the war.

There was the concern that maybe Blair's government would go down. The calls at that point with the President became about whether or not it was worth it for Prime Minister Blair to take a vote and possibly collapse his government. Or would there be some other way for Britain to be involved?

He was very conscious that this could mean that he would no longer be prime minister, and that it would mean a huge disruption for our family. And so he did sit down the three oldest ones who had been affected by, at school, and 'cause they're teenagers by now, And obviously, in our home, because they were aware of the debate that was going on, that we might all have to move out by the end of the week if you lost the vote.

The decision you made to join them in war in Iraq, did you have any doubts about it?

Look, I knew it was going to be immensely difficult. And that's why I tried to... avoid it for a long time. Even up until the very last minute, I was trying to find a way that we could maybe secure the removal of Saddam, a different way that you could organise it differently, do it differently. But in the end, it was impossible. And so you come to the crunch point, and it's this or it's that. You've got to decide where you stand, and that's where I stood.

Blair is about to face the biggest parliamentary vote of his life.

We now come to the main business, the Prime Minister.

This is a tough choice indeed. To stand British troops down now and turn back, or to hold firm to the course that we have set. And I believe passionately we must hold firm to that course. Confidence is the key to prosperity. and insecurity spreads like contagion. The key today is stability and order. The threat is chaos and disorder.

I've written quite a lot of novels about prime ministers and wartime. British prime ministers traditionally try to keep us out of wars. This is the only time that I can think of that we've had a very articulate former lawyer advocating a war, trying, in effect, to sell it to the House of Commons, his party, and the country. This is extraordinary and unprecedented, and all the talents one observed in Tony Blair that one warmed to and admired were turned into what seems to me to have been a much darker purpose.

I beg to move the motion.

Blair wins, and in less than 36 hours, the war will begin.

Robert Harris told us that Iraq was the only time he could think of that a British Prime Minister had persuaded the House of Commons to go to war. What do you think about that?

Well, it hadn't always been the tradition that you put these things to a vote in the House of Commons, but we did.

But it was-- the essence is that it was a war of choice, not of necessity.

Well, that's a matter of opinion. You know, it depends on what you think is necessary at the time. I mean, all wars are wars of choice, in a sense. You can say, I choose to do it, I choose not to do it, but--.

Well, Churchill didn't have a choice.

Well, there would have been people at the time who said he did, but unfortunately, he made the right choice.

After he did it. You can't fool around with this. If you send troops in the hardened way, you've got to win. And so a lot of people were offended that he seemed so determined during the course of the Iraq conflict. But if you're going to do something like that, you have to try to win.

And Bush broadcast directly to the Iraqi people.

This is George W. Bush. At this moment, the regime of Saddam Hussein is being removed from power, and the future of your country will soon belong to you.

Our enemy is Saddam and his regime, not the Iraqi people. Our forces are friends, and liberators of the Iraqi people, not your conquerors. So it is in the spirit of friendship and goodwill that we now offer our help. Thank you.

I was in Cairo and number 10 called me and said, we need someone on the ground in Baghdad. The Prime Minister's concerned about the level of grip on the ground. Could you please go there? I arrived in complete disorder.

Saddam is swiftly removed from power. But in Baghdad, Crime and looting become widespread. Revenge attacks between Iraqis are common.

It was total chaos. No real planning had gone into the aftermath. The Americans were sitting hunkered down in their tanks and armored vehicles with reflective sunglasses and heavy helmets on, with no engagement with the Iraqi people at all. They just assumed that once American forces had toppled Saddam, then the Iraqi exiles would

come and take over, and everything would be hunky-dory. Well, it turned out to be completely different from that.

Soon after Saddam is removed from power, Blair arrives in the Iraqi city of Basra, where British troops are in control.

The streets of Basra may be filled with rubbish, but it's in the water that the real problem lies. Doctors here have identified the symptoms of cholera in at least 17 people. I wonder what you are of... .

Obviously, Blair wanted to come to Iraq because he's invested so much in it. Thank you. Of course, Basra was not Baghdad. It was in much better shape than Baghdad was. But the military briefings we had at the time were worrying, because there was a clear rise of violence, even in Basra, let alone in the rest of the country. We're trying to get some police training going, which would take sort of six months to get sort of thousands of policemen back on the streets again. And you get a sense of a rising panic on the side of Tony Blair. We couldn't wait six months for thousands of police. We needed them there in six days. And that made him realize just the sheer scale of the task that he'd taken on, and the Americans were making a bit of a hash of. The reconstruction was of a scale and a level of difficulty which was simply unprecedented.

It's clear British troops will be needed in Iraq for the long haul. Before flying back, Blair gives them a speech at one of Saddam's old palaces.

I know there were a lot of disagreements in the country about the wisdom of my decision. I honestly believe When people look back on this conflict, they will see this as one of the defining moments of our century. And you did it. was your courage and your professionalism that did it. And thank you.

An insurgency against the occupation in Iraq turns into a civil war and lengthy sectarian conflicts. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis are killed and 136 British service personnel. From the ashes of al-Qaeda rose ISIS, and no weapons of mass destruction were ever found. A shaky democracy now holds in Iraq, and Tony Blair has always publicly denied that his decision to invade Iraq was a mistake.

I think you're going to his grave genuinely thinking it was the right thing to do.

Do you?

Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Why the no? You wouldn't be human if you didn't think, well, look, it didn't work out as planned. You've got to accept that.

We should be criticized. for the mistakes we did make, and we did make mistakes. We didn't know Iraq. We didn't understand the dynamics between Sunnis and Shias in Iraq. Didn't quite understand the depth of the dysfunctionality in the George Bush presidency.

It had seriously damaged the reputation of Britain across the region. It was a mistake that we went into Iraq in the first place. He was personally, politically, mentally one of the best-equipped people we've had as Prime Minister of the last 70 years, but his passion and his commitment to The alliance with the Americans led him down a road in Iraq where, basically, he overreached, we as a country overreached, and strategically, it has not been a success.

What advice would you give me as to what question to ask him on Iraq?

I would focus on telling him the truth, because he finds it very hard to dodge the truth and say to him, Prime Minister, I know you think you've done well on Iraq and you did the right thing and you had no choice, but the evidence is against you. Do you accept that? And he'll say, no, Michael, the evidence is not so. There are all sorts of other factors that came into play which I could not possibly have known about. And actually, on the base of the evidence we had, I did the right thing. That's the sort of language he'll use. You won't get anywhere.

Do you ever feel that, in the end, Iraq was the biggest mistake of your career?

Look, most people would say that Iraq was the biggest mistake of my career, of course, and it will always be put. Although, history goes on a long time, right? And I often say to people, you know, if you actually look at Iraq today, would it be better if Saddam and his two sons had still remained in power? People sometimes want to have this debate with me over and over again until I finally say, No, I tell you what, I shouldn't have gone with America. I should have taken a different decision, and I'm really sorry. Right? I can be sorry about lots of things in relation to it, but there's no point in carrying on trying to get me to see, you know, a different point of view from the one I had at the time, or for me to accept this was the only thing we did.

Be honest with me. What would you say are your flaws, or were your flaws, as Prime Minister?

You know, sometimes I think that's for other people to judge, really. I mean, I...

History will judge you. But sometime in the deep of night, you might think about such things.

You might, but on the other hand, you might decide that it's... What you think about deep in the middle of the night is not what you want to start declaring on camera, which would be very wise for a politician.

Why not? You're no longer a politician.

You're always a politician. If people want the honest truth, don't ask a political leader to go and make a judgment about themselves, because you're going to get a version of it, OK? I mean, let's just be honest about it. Whereas, frankly, it's just going to be a

political answer. I'm being honest, right? That's what it's going to be, so make your own judgment. How did his legacy live on beyond politics? The Tony Blair story concludes tomorrow at 9pm, or you can stream all episodes right now.

Starting Monday night at 9, exposing the rotting stench that flooded our waterways, David Theulis and Jason Watkins uncover the sick truth behind Britain's sewage scandal and dirty business. A new factual drama. Fukushima, Days That Shocked the World is next.

Audio file

[TheTonyBlairStoryPart3.mp3](#)

Transcript

I remember there was one time when I went up to the flat, just before I was going home, about 11 o'clock at night, and I said, right, I'm off now. And I wish I'd done dozens of times before, and I've got no idea why. But I walked to the door over here, and I got to the door, which was open. And I stood at the door, and I turned around, and I looked at him, and I think he thought I'd gone. And I can just remember thinking it was an absolute picture of isolation. And he just, you had a sense of burden and weight. And because at that stage, so many people saw him in the way that they did, Tony Blair, all that stuff. I actually, it was one of those moments when I wished I could paint. It was an absolute portrait in... the kind of isolation of power.

Did you feel any urge to either say something or put an arm around it?

No, I didn't. I just walked out. . After the fall of Saddam, we got a message from the Russians saying Putin would like Tony to go out. One-on-one, oh, interesting, almost out of the blue. We get on the plane, we get picked up by a helicopter, we get taken to this place, God knows where. Amazing sort of luxury that he's living in right now. And we had a dinner where Putin absolutely laid into it. Okay, where are the Americans going next, though? Where are they going to war next? Oh, they haven't told you yet. They'll tell you, and then you'll do it. And it was nasty, it was cynical. He didn't use the phrase Bush's poodle, but that was kind of what he was saying. It was really quite vicious.

How did Tony respond?

He sort of sat there. took it than just explained to why I thought he was wrong.

No doubt there will be discussions ahead of us in order to make sure that we can resolve any remaining difficulties or issues that there are in the international community. But I would like to thank the President once again for the constructive and immensely friendly atmosphere in which these talks were conducted. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you.

The conference is open.

Back home, Tony Blair has a problem. He wants to move on from the Iraq War, continue his reforms to the United Kingdom, and win another general election.

I want us to win a third term, not so that we can go in the history books, but so that we can consign Britain's failings to the history books. That's why we want it.

But moving on from the war is proving to be difficult.

That's fine, sir. You can make your protests. Just thank goodness we live in a democracy and you can.

The Iraq war shattered the Blair coalition, so it was never a glad, confident morning again. We'd gone through a long period where Tony Blair was a very trusted individual. And once that trust was lost, A lot of people lost faith in what government was telling them.

As the war on terror continues and stories keep on emerging from Iraq, it proves impossible to draw a line under it.

American television network has shown disturbing photographs taken by one U.S. soldier, which appear to show others abusing Iraqi prisoners. Just tell me what you felt when you saw those images of footed prisoners in Abu Ghraib.

No, of course, I was appalled whenever you see... appalled by the fact of it and appalled by the stupidity of it. In war, bad things are going to happen. But our... attempt there to stabilize the country, that's an ambition that was a perfectly good one.

What about the fact that it was official US policy to have a form of torture?

Well, I never agreed with torture. And at any point in time where it was ever raised with me, I always said, I'm opposed to this, I'm opposed to it on moral grounds, I'm opposed to it on grounds of effectiveness. I have never been in favor of it, and I never was at the time, and I made it clear that we should say to the Americans, we were not in favor of it.

Blair's also having problems with Gordon Brown, a decade after Brown agreed to support Blair's bid to become Labour leader.

Tony was increasingly exasperated with the impatience that Gordon Brown had to be Prime Minister. obviously wanting to take over when Tony stood down, but when was Tony going to stand down? And a lot of those people who were supporting Gordon Brown were getting increasingly impatient. Ten years is a very long time in any job. Has there been any point when you've thought about moving on?

No.

So there you are.

Did you ever see him sort of crack or crumble a little bit in the privacy of, I don't know, your bedroom or the flat?

There were plenty of times, I think, when he would feel, have I done the right thing? He wouldn't be human if he didn't find that difficult and the constant drip, drip, drip of Gordon's pressure. There was a point when he thought, you know, maybe I should stand down.

What did you say?

No. I was absolutely... Against that, I said to him, of course, if you want to stand down, you must stand down. But do you really think that Gordon is the right person to take over from you? Because I don't think you do. And therefore, don't do it.

People say there's always tension between number 10 and the Chancellor, but there was this extra dimension in this case. The deal was supposed to be that they wouldn't fight each other and that Tony would hand over to Gordon. And that became a sort of despoiling element in the government as Tony went on and on and on.

It was not an easy campaign. The days of sort of standing on a soapbox and just talking to an adoring gathering had gone.

We've had Mr. Kennedy in that chair, we've had Mr. Howard in that chair. Why wouldn't you debate directly, face-to-face, with them in the...

I debate every week in the House of Commons with Michael Howard. I'm here to answer questions tonight, and... All right. I probably do more... Discussions not just with audiences like this, but with with people when we talk about the issues than any politician before me.

All right, Mr. Blair, Mr. Blair. Thank you.

What got to Tony, however, was when people who were really close to him Started saying to him, you know, trust is draining away People don't believe you in the way that they did all this being fostered generated by people who wanted him to go. I told him, just get up off your knees. Don't be apologetic. Stop being a supplicant. Be a leader. Go out there and be confident and fight.

After years of bad blood and distrust, Tony Blair, since last week, has rarely ventured a few yards from the Chancellor's side.

Despite the ongoing tensions between the two men, Blair and Brown put on a united front during the campaign.

I must have seen more of him in the last five days than in the last five years.

I think that's a bit of an exaggeration.

Your wives must be beginning to wonder something's going on.

When we are together, it emphasises the importance, not just the unity of the government, but also the importance of the unity of that message. You get my fist, did you?

Well, Tony Blair is a trusted leader internationally, respected around the world, and he has led the major reforms that have been brought about in this country, including the reforms in economic policy that we're talking about today.

Britain has decided, and we are predicting, that Tony Blair has won a third term, but with a sharply reduced majority of 66, making the Prime Minister the first ever Labour leader to win three elections in a row.

It felt a much more tense night. He wasn't joyous in the same way.

Did he feel vulnerable? I mean, he's still Prime Minister, he wins, but...

No, he felt vulnerable. He felt vulnerable. I think he felt that things were turning. I think he felt, you know, and they were.

On these results, I would have thought.

Not Gordon Brown himself, but the Brown supporters will be wondering how quickly they can move Tony Blair out of Downing Street. He is clearly a liability, and I fear for the future unless he ceases to be the leader of the party.

After the 2005 election, there was a kind of soundness amongst Labour MPs, as if to say, well, Tony's won, that's what you expect of Tony. Whereas, in fact, it was, this guy's a genius. It may be other things as well, but absolute genius. Brilliant at winning elections.

I think hubris kicked in. Ego is the disease of politics. I mean, that's why you have to change, you know, presidents and leaders and not hang on forever. You know, if you have absolute power, it goes to your head and you think you're the fount of all wisdom. They all say you're brilliant and you start thinking you're brilliant.

After Iraq, 'cause it was such a difficult decision and the aftermath was so traumatic in many ways. there was bound to be a reduction in my capacity to persuade people. What there wasn't was a reduction in my ability to do the things I really wanted to do. You know, the irony is you start as a politician at your most popular but least capable, and then you end at your most capable but least popular. So yes, I was conscious of the fact I was much less able to persuade people, but I was also much more confident about the direction I was taking the country in.

With power slipping away, Blair wants to use what time he has to make as much difference as possible. And when the G8 comes to the UK, he gets to choose the

agenda for the leaders of the world to discuss. Blair chooses, cancelling the debt of the world's poorest countries, and for them all to admit the truth of climate change.

It was probably the most extraordinary 48 hours I had in politics. We tried to do something completely different with what was then the G8. And I really used every bit of last credibility and influence with the Americans in order to do it. was very tense because First of all, I don't think the Americans really wanted that agenda. And secondly, because Russia was there, and already things were becoming somewhat fractured with the Russian leadership. So it was going to be a very, very tall ask.

If we cancel debt, we will save thousands of lives every day and millions of lives in the future.

With the summit underway, Blair is hoping for another boost.

Right, good morning everyone. You know the issues that are there, Africa and climate change. Thank you for your leadership. This is going to be a successful summit.

Thousands of people have gathered in central London to hear the result of the 2012 Olympic bid.

The games of the 30th Olympiad in 2012 are awarded to the city of London.

The Prime Minister, Trafalgar Square is listening right now. Is there anything you have to say to the people of London at this moment? Well done. Make 2020 the greatest games the world's ever seen.

Blair arrives to put the finishing touches to a deal that writes off the debt of the world's poorest countries and properly recognizes climate change.

Go away from this road, please. Thank you.

Thank you. Four Islamist terrorists have detonated suicide bombs in London, killing 52 people.

I always remember he took a moment to go outside by himself and stand and reflect.

There seems to be a link between the invasion of Iraq and a greater risk of terrorist activity in Britain.

The fact is what they're doing is utterly evil, and you can't compromise with it. You've got to pull it up by its roots.

You could see that... There were moments of extreme pressure, especially when he was making momentous decisions, especially ones involving human lives. Dad's always had this habit of you'd be talking to him about something, and he'll zone out and think about something completely different, and you would see the kind of zone out moments

ratchet up as Moore was on his shoulders. You know, he really cared if he saw it affecting us as well, so I think we were quite careful to make sure it didn't affect us.

Or at least not show it.

Right, There was almost this shared mutual understanding that... We would never let him see it affect us too much, and he would never let us see it affect him too much.

Blair knows that there are Labour MPs who want him to stand down, but there's still fight left in him as he takes on a little-known UKIP MEP.

I thought, crikey, perhaps Blair's going to do it. Perhaps he really is going to reform and change. But no, under your presidency, there have been 3,350 new legislative acts. Total failure on economic reform.

Let me just tell you, sir, and your colleagues, you sit with our country's flag. You do not represent our country's interests. This This is the year 2005, not 1945. We're not fighting each other anymore. These are our partners, they're our colleagues, and our future lies in Europe.

But Blair is finally about to lose power. And it's not the British electorate who force him out. It's his own party.

The polling was saying that with Tony Blair as Prime Minister, we were in trouble.

Gordon was the most popular politician in Britain for about a decade. People really respected him, and he had almost single-handedly turned around Labour's long-standing reputation for screwing up the economy.

Many of those plotting Blair's downfall are allies of the Chancellor.

I was saying to him, you need to make space for others and Gordon to come forward. And he would always say to me, I cannot choose my successor. And I would say, By not doing that, you are effectively choosing Gordon.

Do you think he made a mistake?

I do.

What did you make of the accusation that you were a sort of Lady Macbeth figure?

I think, really? I thought that was a joke. I thought it was Gordon who described me as Lady Macbeth. If anyone thinks Tony's my puppet, they just don't understand the nature of the man.

He's on a visit to York when an advisor pulls him aside. They tell him that MPs are coming forward with letters calling for him to resign.

Who are the people who owe you their career and want you to resign? What's your response to them?

He brought his closest people together and worked out what he needed to do to respond, who were his allies, where were the people that he could activate on his behalf, who was going to do that. So it became a sort of a mini sort of war plan. There were people saying, Ride it out. But in the end, there was a realization that he couldn't fight it anymore.

His head recognized that he had run out of road. I'm not sure his heart ever accepted that.

As for my timing and date of departure, I would have preferred to do this in my own way, but as has been pretty obvious from what many of my cabinet colleagues have said earlier in the week, the next party conference in a couple of weeks will be my last party conference as party leader.

Tell me a bit about you and Gordon Brown.

We were much more than just friends, right? We were deep political partners. And for the best part of ten years, it was quite a long time. We would be talking several times a day. And then you put all the stresses and strains of government. I mean, if you think about it, it was a miracle we lasted ten years, but we did. And I always say to people, because people often say to me, you know, would it not have been better to have got rid of Gordon and so on? And, you know, you can make an argument for that, but I think those three election victories, which were the only time Labour ever won three consecutive election victories with a full functioning majority, I think they were because we were New Labour, but I also think in part they were because that partnership was there with him.

Blair has overseen 10 years of economic prosperity, while at the same time transforming many aspects of British society.

There's a huge legacy and it covers many, many, many different areas. Bank of England Independence, New Deal, schools and hospitals investment, gay rights, Scottish Parliament, minimum wage.

Now, just as he leaves office, he is confronting this the reality of life without power.

By the time he was leaving Number Ten, he really finally understood how to make the whole thing work. And at that point, when perhaps he felt he could do even more, he had to stand back.

The Prime Minister's private staff had organised a sort of do, which was meant as a sort of thank you stroke celebration.

With Blair's leaving drinks underway upstairs, Blair and Brown meet downstairs in the corridor. It's finally time for Blair to hand over the role of Prime Minister, and he can't help but give Gordon's speech the once-over.

It's been an honour to serve, a privilege to work in this building. Thank you very much indeed. It didn't really work. He suddenly realised it's over. And that hurt. And then we made our way downstairs and we gathered our stuff as Gordon Brown's people came in that way, passing us.

Okay, I'll see you later. Matthew, come down.

Ten years in power, your dad leaves office. Did you get a sense that was difficult for him?

Yes, and definitely a sense of... unfinished business.

There you are, a seven-year-old.

Yeah.

Do you remember anything about that day?

I remember being very sad. I wasn't just leaving the house I was in. I was leaving everybody else who I'd grown up with who was there, right? All the people that worked there who had been like, you know, kind of raised me collectively. I know it might sound a bit weird, but it is really like that when you see people every day from a very young age.

Both my mum and I were trying to hold back tears. I think my mum made a sarcastic comment as she left, didn't she? To the press? To the press.

What did you think of the press?

I hated the press. They were particularly horrible to my mum. They obviously don't like strong women. Really, I think if someone today told me they worked for the Daily Mail, I'd probably turn around and walk in the other direction.

Your skill as a politician is about knowing about the people and living with the people and understanding what the people want. Ten years in living in the goldfish bowl, you kind of lose contact with reality.

He didn't really bring on a generation to carry on his revolution. He was singular in that sense. It was just him. And the way that he left gave one an impression that it had always really just been about him. That being Prime Minister was merely a stage on his career journey. And he left a void in politics that was never really filled. That is the problem with charismatic politicians. Once the charisma is gone, there's just a bit of smoke left and a faint memory of light. And the stage is empty.

So you were forced out, as you've put it, of the biggest job in your life when you were 54. How did that feel?

I knew I was going to go. I'd had more than 10 years in the job. I was literally thinking about what's the future. I mean, some people said to me, you should take six months off, you should go and, you know, go and sit somewhere, read books, and, you know, contemplate life. I was literally not interested in that for a moment.

On his first afternoon, not being prime minister, he takes the train up to the northeast of England, back to Sedgefield. And he arrives back at Darlington train station. And there's no one there. So the official car has gone. All of that he has got used to over the previous 10 years. The British state just turns it off. He has left on Darlington train station, waiting. And I think that sort of certain jolting change to your power and status is sort of captured in that moment.

It's quite a frightening thing to know that you're going from having one of the most important jobs in the country to walking out into the world and nothing.

But no red box this morning.

No red box, yes, that was strange.

This will be a new government with new priorities, and now let the work of change begin. Thank you.

Not only has he given up being Prime Minister, he's giving up his seat in the House of Commons. It's time to pack up his constituency house.

This is just, I mean, the thing is.

It's one thing to change a job, but then you change a job, you move house at the same time. There's apparently the two most stressful things you ever do. And I'm doing both at the same time.

An American politician said that losing high office is like the end of a love affair. And the thing about a love affair is when you're out of one, you shouldn't go too quickly into the next one. And I think Tony was... Scared is the wrong word, but worried at the idea that he'd have an empty diary.

With the help of the Americans, Blair gets the job as envoy to the Middle East. He wants to improve the situation between Israel and the Palestinians.

So, Mr. Blair, what's it feel like being pitched into one of the most intractable conflicts in the world? It's hugely challenging, but there's nothing more important in the world today than to get this issue sorted out in a different place. Hello there.

He was a genuine statesman, which is more than going to be said for most of his successors. But on the other hand, what he could not see was how grievously he was

morally compromised by the Iraq War, about all the fallout from that. Hello, good morning. Yeah, good to see you. This is Yuval Steinitz, who is the head of office. Hello there. He's never been good at seeing himself as others see him.

So where would you like to sit down here? Do you want me to take my tie off then, if you...

Would.

But Blair is a statesman without a state, and alongside his role in the Middle East, he establishes several foundations for which he starts raising money.

No previous Labour Prime Minister has ever gone after money like he did, and he went to some very disreputable countries. I think it was all because he wanted to be left with a big legacy and a big reputation, and he didn't want to finish with Iraq. Iraq was failure, but then he wanted to build another story of him as a great leader and thinker, and that's why he threw himself into raising all this money.

The amount of money that Prime Minister has paid is ludicrous in this country, to pay them quite so little. And if you had a political career as an MP, etc., by comparison with an ordinary person, yes, you're paid well. But by comparison with their contemporaries from university, the people they compare themselves with, they feel very poor. It's the same with civil servants. So when they come out, they want to make money. And that's, I think, Tony is just very competitive. He wants to make more money in a while.

In office, Blair tried to persuade some of the world's most controversial regimes to move closer to the West. and he still believes he can. Which takes him to Kazakhstan, advising President Nazarbayev, a dictator known to have repressed his own people.

You advised some pretty unsavoury characters. Do you think that was a mistake?

So, the advisory work we were doing For example, in Kazakhstan. It was a virus that was completely in line with what the World Bank was doing there, other consultancies and foundations were doing there. But anyway, it was a complete mistake because to do the for-profit in that way, because it looked like it was all to do with personal gain, when actually it really wasn't. It was to do with creating enough funding that we could start the Institute. And if you want to do something, you've got to raise money.

But money is never pure.

Well, money's money. It just allows you to do things. If you leave office and you're in your early 50s, and many people will now, and you've got maybe, I don't know, maybe 20, 30 years of active life in front of you, what are you going to do? If you're the sort of person that became prime minister, you're not going to want to go off and play rounds of golf all day. And certainly, that's not what I would ever want to do. So, you know,

you're going to want to create something, but if you want to create something, I'm afraid you need money.

When Blair publishes his autobiography, he donates the 4.6 million pound advance to the Royal British Legion. But even the launch of his book proves controversial. The first stop on his book tour is Dublin. He then cancels his book launch in London, and it looks like he may never shake off the legacy of the Iraq War.

You will remember a portrait that was painted of you by Jonathan Yeo, I believe, where the only real bit of color is the poppy. What did you think when you saw that?

I thought it was a good painting.

Significance of the poppy.

Yeah, of course. I mean, it was bound to be seen in the context of the war and so on, but I thought it was a good picture.

A portrait is in some ways meant to summarise someone. Did it do that with you?

Decide whether... I mean, I... I'm not interested in that. type of stuff. I mean, if people want to say that's all it was about, and there would be plenty of people on the right and plenty of people on the left who want to say that, was all he ever did was take the country to war post-9-11, then fine, they can say that. It really doesn't worry me. You've got to understand, I have enough belief in what I've done and what I'm doing now that if people want to do that, which by the way is for political reasons, Because I can't think of another British prime minister that wouldn't have also wanted to be with America post-9/11. But anyway, leave that to one side. If people want to make that the only thing they think about when they think about me, that's up to them. You have to understand it's not going to determine my view of what I've done or what I'm doing now. I will have that debate with people. I'm very happy to have it with people. But, you know, there's no point in. keeping asking me the same thing around, you know, someone paints a portrait of you, you know, what do you feel when you look at it? And I actually felt it was a really good portrait. It was the most important thing, I thought.

This series is going to reflect the successes of your project. But it has to touch on these things.

Yeah, no, I understand that, Michael. I'm not, I'm not... The reason I push back hard is because... I feel it's got to be pushed back hard against because, of course, it's what a lot of people say, and this is a program about me, and so I'm entitled to my view, and I want to express my view. You asked me a lot about Iraq and everything, but I always say to people, look, we did immense amount of good things, and this country, on the day I left in June 2007, was a strong, capable country. And in my view, and I'm entitled to it, as people are entitled to their view, if we'd stuck with that strong, center-ground

government, And we haven't got into the mess we have got into as a country, we would be in a much more powerful position today.

Ten years after losing power, and Blair's aims for the Labour Party, Britain and the world seem to be collapsing. Jeremy Corbyn, who campaigned against the Iraq War, is Labour leader.

Don't let those people who wish us ill divide us. Stay together, strong and united for the kind of world we want to live in.

Thank you very much. Nigel Farage, the once minor MEP, helps take Britain out of Europe.

Let June the 23rd go down in our history as our Independence Day.

I mean, if you told me that Nigel Farage was going to be a key player in British politics and Jeremy Corbyn was going to lead the Labour Party, I would have said, that's never going to happen. But I was wrong. Both did happen.

And the new world order is crumbling. Putin will later cite the Iraq War as one of the justifications for his invasion of Ukraine.

Tell me about your perspective on Putin's character.

The question you always ask yourself is, was he always as he became when I just didn't see it, or did he change? And my view is that he did change, but, you know, who knows?

A huge part of what you fought for has, frankly, crumbled since you left power. Has that been difficult to watch?

Look, people in these last years have moved against some of the things I stood for. belief that globalization was basically a positive process that we needed to manage. Britain being in Europe, liberal interventionism, yeah, we should all just disengage. Yeah, people have moved against it. But, you know, I remain committed to those things. And I think, again, you've got to thinking, you know, history's not static, it changes. And people will, I think, come in time to realize there's, you know, there are merits in the position that I took.

His sense of himself is that he is a man of the future. He believes that progress is real and that history is moving in a direction from bad to good, from dark to light. Do you mind just giving me some level, please?

Right, my name's Tony Blair. I'll speak round about this level. Thank you.

I think there is a sense of him being this kind of tragic character. but in the kind of original, kind of Greek tragic sense of battling against a fate, trying to shape the world into the kind of world that he wants, into a liberal, international, democratic world order. This was what Blairite Britain represented. Britain was going to be the beacon of

this world, and it just kind of collapses into something that is completely different to that world that he imagined. But yet he still holds on to the idea that he can see the future.

But just at that low point, things start to turn around for Blair. He sets up a new organization, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.

We speak every morning, sometime between half past five and half past six. We're trying to grow something that's going to outlive him.

Blair personally advises world leaders, and his institute pumps out policy papers coming to prominence during the pandemic.

When COVID first hit, Tony and I decided we were going to pivot the entire organization to work on COVID because we knew every single leader we worked with across the world was going to be grappling with this issue. Good morning.

How are you doing?

Blair becomes an early proponent of mass testing. And his strategy for vaccinations is adopted by governments across the world.

It was the Tony Blair Institute which seemed to be ahead of the government. You suddenly started to see Prime Ministers... going to see Tony Blair or asking Tony Blair to come in to Number Ten. Liz Truss saw him. Boris Johnson saw him. Keir Starmer certainly saw him before he became Prime Minister. This is the kind of influence that he has managed to build for himself.

Blair's institute employs over 900 people, working in more than 40 countries.

Do you have as much power and influence now as you did in Number Ten?

So I don't have as much power as I did when I was Prime Minister, but influence, yeah, to a degree.

Many of Blair's old allies found their way back to power. His chief of staff, Jonathan Powell, is Britain's national security advisor. And until recently, Peter Mandelson was Britain's ambassador to the United States.

And thank you very much indeed also for that very typical 11th hour intervention by you with your phone call to the president.

Do you think there's a small part of him that would rather like your job?

I'm not sure that Tony Blair is quite ready to become a mere ambassador, but he'd certainly want to exercise influence over the person who was actually doing it.

And Blair is still in the frame when it comes to trying to bring peace to the Middle East. Even 18 years after leaving power, Tony Blair still provokes A kaleidoscopic range of opinions.

As we sit here with all that's going on, I look back. I think he was an integral part of a golden age in Britain, which I think a lot of people would wish we were now back on, because we sure ain't in a golden age today. There are still many people who hate him, often the people who used to love him most.

He was a formidable figure, brought down by some of the very qualities that had taken him to the top. The tragedy for Tony Blair, if there is to be one, may well be that his achievements are blotted out by the mistake that's unacknowledged. That is a tragedy.

I know there are some people who absolutely despise the guy. There are some people who celebrate the day he dies. But I think Northern Ireland alone puts him in the top rank of British prime ministers. He's a big historic figure.

His strength is all the communication and charm, and he's brilliant, brilliant, brilliant at that. And he wants to be the big thinker, which he isn't. But that's what he's trying to play out.

There will be those who will never forgive him for Iraq, but you ask me, I think he did a good job.

What would you say are his flaws?

He is an amazing politician. As a husband and as a human being, that's a different matter, but that's really between me and him.

He doesn't stop. I think he's busier than he was then.

Why do you think that is?

Because he's just not finished. He wants to do the work that he set out to do, and so he won't stop.

And also, it's very important to understand about me, I'm not into psychoanalysis, right? I think there's far too much of it. I think people spend far too long constantly analysing themselves. I know why I do what I do, because I believe in it. If people want to accept that, they can accept it. If they don't accept it, I'll just get on with doing it.

A strong smell of dirty business in a new factual drama starting Monday night at 9 on Channel 4, David Thewlis and Jason Watkins both star. Next tonight, how the trophy killing of Africa's biggest lion by a wealthy tourist sparked global controversy and complex moral questions. Cecil, the lion and the dentist in a mall.