

From “Blair Doctrine” to Cameron: There’s no Safety in a Neocon World

By [Nick Matthews](#)

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When terror struck New York in September 2001, what should have been a police operation to arrest Bin Laden instead became a new Thirty Years’ War.

None of us are any more secure for it, argues Nick Matthews.

Following Tony Blair’s non-apology over Iraq recently I thought back to when I first realised that he was mad.

It was at the Labour Party conference in Brighton in 2001 after the September 11 attacks and the speech when he said:

“This is a moment to seize. The kaleidoscope has been shaken.

“The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us reorder this world around us.”

When I heard this I thought this bloke is a megalomaniac and my legs refused to draw me into an upright position and I was left the only person in my row not joining in the standing ovation.

Upon leaving the hall I was asked by a journalist what I thought about the speech. I said that it reminded of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, written in the 11th century and brought to Victorian English readers by Edward Fitzgerald.

“AH, LOVE! Could thou and I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire!
Would not we shatter it to bits-and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart’s Desire!”

—The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

The speech had a similar rhythm to its quatrains and it contained the same moral ambiguity. Needless to say he gave me a funny look.

This speech was essentially a version of one Blair had given in Chicago in 1999, labelled the “Blair Doctrine” by US commentators. It was as Gore Vidal so clearly articulated the case of “perpetual war for perpetual peace.”

That speech in Chicago was a game-changer because it completely cut the ground from under the Democrats in opposing George W Bush and his later adventures in Afghanistan and Iraq. Blair gave Bush the language he himself did not have.

Brighton was Blair at the very peak of his oratorical powers. In the previous paragraph, he had said:

“The starving, the wretched, the dispossessed, the ignorant, those living in want and squalor from the deserts of northern Africa to the slums of Gaza, to the mountain ranges of Afghanistan: they too are our cause.”

Nowadays his follower David Cameron is not so keen on welcoming those huddled masses to our shores.

What should have been a job for the police to arrest Bin Laden — who it now appears was hiding in plain sight — has turned in to a Thirty Years’ War that covers the entire area Blair so poetically described.

What amazes me about many contemporary politicians especially those who talk about “abroad” is how ignorant they are. Something has gone badly wrong here.

We used to govern a fair chunk of the world’s surface and yes it may well have been for the wrong reasons but we knew what was going on in the world.

Now we hear politicians of all colours talking complete nonsense about international relations in a way that is symptomatic of the neoconservative world view: international relations should not be decided upon using mere facts. We must first shape the facts and then the world, to our heart’s desire.

The greatest exponent of this shape-shifting before Blair and the dodgy dossier was George W Bush’s head of Strategy Karl Rove.

In an interview with Ron Suskind of the New York Times he said that guys like Ron were “in what we call the reality-based community,” which he defined as people who “believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.

“That’s not the way the world really works anymore,” he continued.

“We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality — judiciously, as you will—we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out.

“We’re history’s actors ... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”

Initially David Cameron was not a neocon. He was from an earlier school of conservative political realism.

He had been a reluctant supporter of the Iraq war and had been critical of Israel.

On achieving the top job however it did not take long. He too became a neocon, and with former French president Nicolas Sarkozy led the way in the intervention in Libya. Only two years ago he would have intervened militarily against President Bashar al-Assad if Parliament had not stopped him.

Mr Cameron regularly seeks advice from Blair who was one of those urging him to bomb Libya. In foreign policy Cameron can be seen as Blair's protege.

They are both solid supporters of the Gulf dictatorships, of Benjamin Netanyahu's Israel and are totally hostile to democratic movements within Islam, in particular the Muslim Brotherhood.

Now not a week seems to go by without some dictator crossing the No 10 threshold.

Then there is Chilcot — Cameron has clearly protected Tony Blair. This inquiry was meant to publish its conclusions within 18 months of the British withdrawal from Iraq in 2007 and we are still waiting. And what happened to the investigation into British complicity in torture and extraordinary rendition during the Blair premiership?

Listening to many Labour MPs including, sad to say, Mike Gapes and John Woodcock, recently they have clearly been bitten by the neocon bug.

To his credit Ed Miliband was trying to move Labour away from this position. By opposing intervention in Syria and by whipping Labour MPs in support of a Palestinian state.

In a foreign policy speech before the election he made the case for the rule of law, international institutions and diplomatic engagement, and against the idea of US exceptionalism.

This work is now being carried on by Jeremy Corbyn who is now Britain's finest advocate for human rights and we must not let him stand alone against this empire of lies.

On hearing Tony Blair back in 1999, that old hawk Henry Kissinger had said he "felt a little bit uneasy" about the implication that this was a good moment to solve every problem in the world.

We should all be uneasy if the world continues to be shaped by people with a wanton lack of concern for the truth, human rights and life itself.

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