

National Interest or Personal Interest: Theresa May's "War of Words" with Tony Blair

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The war of words between Tony Blair and Theresa May over the last few days is quite revealing – not of Blair's known position regarding the Brexit mess, but because the Prime Minister's rant showed her weakness. Her position is unsustainable and the last thing she wanted was unwelcome comments from an ex-Prime Minister.

She had, after all, just come back from Brussels yet again, carrying no hope from the EU negotiators, but then she had offered no new ideas to put on the table. The agreed withdrawal text was 'the best deal' she could get, and Parliament had been refused the chance to vote against it – a vote she had promised then [taken away](#).

The spat started with Tony Blair [speaking](#) on BBC's Today programme* prior to a speech he was due to make later that day. His predecessor John Major, had already publicly given his support for 2 options: [another referendum](#) (the Peoples Vote) and [revoking](#) the Article 50 withdrawal. Blair had also [backed](#) the People's Vote.

Blair claims May's deal not in national interest amid public Brexit spat

Former PM says May has 'heavy burden' but the course she is pursuing will not work



▲ Tony Blair said 'neither the British people nor their parliament will unite' behind Theresa May's deal. Photograph: PA

Screengrab from The Guardian

There is currently no majority in Parliament for May's deal or any other, including crashing out of the EU with no deal at all, Blair said there could be majority support among MPs for a new EU poll if Parliament ended up "gridlocked", and certainly more MPs are saying so. He added that

"he admired Mrs May's determination but suggested that, with so many MPs opposed to the backstop and other parts of the deal, this was becoming a weakness and she must realise she was "in a hole... and there is literally no point in carrying on digging".

All very reasonable but this did not please Theresa May. She issued an explosive [statement](#), demonstrating just how touchy and vulnerable she's feeling. She said the ex-PM's backing for a second referendum was deliberately sabotaging her bid to make EU leaders compromise on the Irish backstop. To quote:

"There are too many people who want to subvert the process for their own political interests rather than act in the national interest. For Tony Blair to go to Brussels and seek to undermine our negotiations by advocating a second referendum is an insult to the office he once held and the people he once

served. We cannot, as he would, abdicate responsibility for this decision.”

There are three points to note here. First, ‘her bid to *make* EU leaders compromise...’ After all this time and months of negotiation, her government has not abandoned its arrogant and self-important attitude towards the EU, something many of us find embarrassing. How many more times does the EU have to say ‘no more negotiations’ before they will be believed?

Secondly, her government’s ‘responsibility for this decision’. The decision is no decision. Brexit MPs and supporters have never produced a genuine plan for Brexit. It has been about nothing but leave the EU and its regulations. What happens then is not their problem. On May’s side there has been a complete failure to enable Parliament to come up with any ‘decision’. That is her problem, and indeed her responsibility.

Thirdly, according to [the Independent](#), ‘*Mr Blair is understood not to have visited Brussels for several months, and it is unclear what prompted the timing of Ms May’s attack.*’ Blair, of course, defended his position, being somewhat better at that than May (he’s had a lot of practice), saying that if Parliament cannot come to a clear decision, it is logical to go back to the people.

May suggests that Blair’s latest comments are in his own interests. It is true that Blair has relentlessly popped up to pontificate about the current state of affairs, and that most of those occasions could be seen as self-advertisement and very much in his personal interest. (On the other hand, the Prime Minister may not be doing all this in *her* personal interest, but it’s certainly focussed on the interests of the Conservative Party and its survival.)

Blair ignored the people and the national interest when he joined President Bush’s military games. I and millions of others will find it difficult to ever forgive him for the damage done to Afghanistan and Iraq and their citizens** (and, Mr Blair, please don’t forget that somewhere in the dusty back rooms of the International Criminal Court is a case still to be heard against you for war crimes).

Word has it that whenever he criticises Jeremy Corbyn or suggests a more ‘centrist’ party, Labour membership increases. Sadly, that is now probably balanced by the number of members leaving because of Labour’s very weak position on Brexit. People joined Labour because of the social reforms promised in the Labour manifesto. They saw an end to the disastrous Tory ‘austerity’ ideology. How on earth Labour thinks it can deal with Brexit *and* deliver on its pledges is beyond me – and anyone else. Nor would the EU be willing to start negotiations all over again, regardless of Corbyn’s internationalism and negotiating skills.

So, where Brexit and the national interest are concerned, I have to admit Blair is right, and I never thought I would say that. But then, over the last two years I have had to revise my opinion about several, mostly rightwing, MPs who are doing their best to protect the UK from Brexit and the chaos that May’s predecessor David Cameron and her government have caused.

Blair and *his* predecessor John Major (who sensibly kept out of politics until Brexit reared its head) were largely responsible for the Good Friday Agreement, which not only brought an end to most of the violence in Northern Ireland; it resulted in the open border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. For trade, traffic and people that border has

become almost invisible. It is in the national interests of both the UK and the RoI to keep it that way, regardless of what Brexiters and Northern Ireland's DUP MPs claim. The border issue is the very large and unavoidable hole in the Brexit road.

For Blair and Major, their legacy will include the Good Friday Agreement. For the politicians of that time, it is something to be proud of, something worth protecting. And if the negotiators could achieve that, then surely peace could be made between Leavers and Remainers without trashing the UK in the process.

Theresa May's legacy, on the other hand, will be '[the hostile environment](#)', a policy that shames this nation and its people. And the last two years under her leadership, with her ministers' inability to negotiate in any real sense with the EU, is also deeply shaming. Even worse, they have blamed the EU for their failures, accusing them of bullying (Brexit Minister No. 1, [David Davis](#), and blackmailing and bullying (Brexit Minister No. 2, [Dominic Raab](#)) while Foreign Secretary [Jeremy Hunt](#) likened the EU to the Soviet Union. This is no way to negotiate your way out of one of the biggest threats to this country's stability.

Shame, embarrassment, humiliation and unwise rants against a former Prime Minister – what more could Theresa May add to her 'legacy' and its place in our history?

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Notes

*You can hear the whole interview [here](#), starting at 2:19:52

**An estimate of [2.4 million](#) Iraqi deaths from the invasion and the following years of violence and unrest.

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