William J. Clinton
Presidential History Project

Briefing Materials

Tony Blair

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MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED OR CIRCULATED

1975 Blair gets his law degree from Oxford.


1988 Blair is elected to Neil Kinnock’s shadow cabinet.

July Blair and Gordon Brown visit the Democratic convention in Atlanta. (Seldon, p. 120)

1991 December Blair and Gordon make a third visit to the U.S. (Seldon, p. 121)

1992 April During the New York primary, Democratic candidate Bill Clinton attends an Irish forum and promises that, if elected, he will send a peace envoy to Ireland, support a visa for Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams, and endorse the MacBride Principles on fair employment. (Conor O’Clery, Daring Diplomacy, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1997, pp. 15-16)

1993 January Blair and Brown visit the U.S. to meet with key Clinton campaign officials such as Stan Greenberg, Al From, and Elaine Kamarck. They also go to a one-day conference on Clinton economics. (Seldon, p. 122)

November Blair visits the U.S. to examine policies in preparation for becoming shadow Home Secretary. He is invited to a dinner party and meets Congressional Democrats including Speaker Tom Foley (D-WA). (Seldon, pp. 124-125)

July  After the sudden death of Labour leader John Smith, Blair is elected party leader.

1995


The Clintons visit England and Northern Ireland.  Clinton meets Blair for the first time.  Clinton states Blair “was in the process of reviving the Labour Party with an approach remarkably similar to what we had tried to do with the DLC.”  (Bill Clinton, *My Life*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004, p. 686)

1996


April  On the 12th, Blair visits Clinton at the White House for over an hour.  Clinton encourages Blair to take the opportunity to make progress in Northern Ireland.  (Seldon, pp. 125, 351)

June  After the elections to select representatives for a forum, all-party talks begin in Northern Ireland.  Mitchell is appointed to be chairman of the plenary sessions of the negotiations along with Harri Holkeri and John de Chastelain.  Two unionist parties, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the United Kingdom Unionist Party (UKUP), protest Mitchell’s appointment.  The demise of the ceasefire also leads to the exclusion of Sinn Féin.  (George Mitchell, *Making Peace*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999, pp. 46-53)

Mid-Oct.  The plenary session develops an agenda for talks.  It includes discussions on decommissioning and three topics or Strands: political structures in Northern Ireland, developing councils between Ireland and Northern Ireland, and Irish-British relations.  (Mitchell, p. 85)

1997

May  The Labour party wins a majority in Westminster and Blair becomes the Prime Minister.  Blair brings on Mo Mowlam as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.
Mowlam and Jonathan Powell, Blair’s senior advisor, begin regular discussions with Clinton’s National Security Advisor Nancy Soderberg. The new government abandons the prerequisite of decommissioning, works to bring Sinn Féin into talks, and sets May 1998 as a deadline for concluding negotiations. (Seldon, p. 351; Loughlin, p. 172; Mac Ginty and Darby, p. 36)

The Clintons meet with Blair and his wife, Cherie, in London for five hours. (Clinton, p. 756; Taylor Branch, The Clinton Tapes: Wrestling History with the President New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009, p. 449)

**June**

Fianna Fail leader Bertie Ahern becomes Taoiseach. (Loughlin, p. 172)

**September**

On the 6th, Hillary Clinton attends Princess Diana’s funeral. (Clinton, p. 765)

Sinn Féin agrees to the Mitchell principles and enters the peace talks. (Mitchell, pp. 115-116)

**Oct.-Nov.**

On the 31st, Hillary Clinton visits the Blairs the day before a Third Way conference. The Third Way is a collective term for the methods and policies of bringing leftist parties more to the political center, which was made popular by the elections of Clinton and Blair. Brown, From, Dr. Joseph Nye, Sidney Blumenthal, and Peter Mandelson are among the guest speakers. (Seldon, pp. 371-372)

**1998**

**Jan.-Feb.**

A new round of peace talks begin on January 12th. The biggest hurdle for the next two months is the issue of violence leading to the temporary expulsion of Sinn Féin and the Ulster Unionist Party (UDP) from the talks due to the breech of the Mitchell principles. Blair keeps regular touch with Clinton, Ahern, and Northern Ireland party leaders to keep the talks on track. (Seldon, p. 357; Mitchell, pp. 134-142)

**January**

Britain begins to serve as president of the European Union for a six-month term.

**February**

From the 5th-6th, the Blairs come to the U.S. for a state visit. Clinton and Blair continue to work on building world support for air strikes against Iraq and bring Sinn Féin back to the table. They also hold a Third Way policy seminar. (Clinton, p. 778; Seldon, p. 374)

**March**

On the 25th, Mitchell announces a schedule of March 30 to April 9 for a final agreement. (Mitchell, pp. 143-145)

**April**

On the 10th, the landmark Good Friday Agreement is signed, which establishes a new government in Northern Ireland based on the principle of self-determination. To reach this point, Mitchell, Clinton, Blair, and Ahern intervene repeatedly in the

**May**

Clinton visits London for the G-8 summit and holds joint press conferences with Blair for the BBC and CNN supporting the Good Friday Agreement referendum. On the 22nd, 71% of Northern Ireland’s voters support the agreement with unionists evenly split and 94% of voters within the Republic of Ireland favoring it. (Loughlin, p. 194; Mac Ginty and Darby, p. 44; Clinton, p. 787)

**September**

Clinton makes his second trip to Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Clintons join the Blairs, Mitchell, and Mowlan to meet the victims of a Real IRA bomb that exploded at Omagh in August. They go to Armagh to attend a Gathering for Peace ceremony. (Clinton, p. 808; *The Irish Times*, 09/04/1998)

Blair and Clinton attend a Third Way conference at New York University. (Seldon, pp. 376-377)

**Oct.-Nov.**

Saddam Hussein bides time through the U.N. while Clinton and Blair develop a plan for an air attack. By November 14th, they postpone the attack after Hussein offers cooperation with weapons inspectors. (Seldon, p. 389)

**December**

On the 16th, U.S. and British forces launch air strikes against Iraq after Hussein still refuses access to weapons inspectors. (Clinton, p. 833; http://news.bbc.co.uk)

**1999**

**February**

Clinton and Blair meet while in Jordan for King Hussein’s funeral. (Clinton, p. 844)

**March**

The tenth deadline for devolving power to the Northern Ireland-Stormont Executive passes without breaking the impasse in negotiations. One of the most divisive issues remains decommissioning, as the IRA refuses to comply and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) will not form a “government before guns.” (Loughlin, p. 202; Mac Ginty and Darby, p. 48)

On the 24th, NATO forces largely supplied by the British and U.S. begin to bomb Yugoslavian air and ground forces to pressure President Slobodan Milosevic out of Kosovo. (http://news.bbc.co.u)

**April**

NATO begins to hit targets in downtown Belgrade. Concerned about refugees and Milosevic’s failure to back down, Blair tells Clinton in a letter on the 16th that ground troops are a necessary motivation. On the 21st, Blair tries to convince Clinton in person to use ground troops. However, Clinton holds out in hope the air strikes will be effective and does not commit to troops, yet does not dismiss
the possibility. The Blair administration continues to pressure Clinton through May. (Seldon, pp. 393-403; Clinton, p. 851)

On the 25th, Clinton, Blair, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok, and Italian Prime Minister Massimo D’Alema hold a Third Way conference. It focuses on the efforts of center-left political parties in Europe and the U.S. to deal with rapid economic and social trends. (http://www.dlc.org)

**Sept.-Nov.** In a desperate attempt to salvage the stalled peace process, Mitchell is recalled to Northern Ireland in order to review the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. The Mitchell review is released in November, and advises that the UUP concede to the formation of a power sharing executive in return for the IRA sending a representative to the Independent International Decommissioning Council led by de Chastelain. If decommission or devolution fails to take place, the institutions will be suspended. (Loughlin, pp. 203-204; Mac Ginty and Darby, pp. 49-50)

**November** Clinton, Blair, D’Alema, Schroeder, EU president Romano Prodi, French Prime Minister Lionel Jopsin, and Brazilian President Henrique Cardoso hold a Third Way conference in Florence, Italy. (Clinton, pp. 878-879)

**December** Northern Ireland devolution takes place on the 2nd.

**2000**

**February** Britain reinstitutes direct rule of Northern Ireland in response to the Chastelain commission report that the IRA has not set a date to begin decommissioning. Clinton tells interviewer Taylor Branch that he is unfazed and that self-government will happen. (Branch, p. 585; Loughlin, p. 206; Mac Ginty and Darby, p. 52)

**June** On the 25th, Blair joins Clinton via satellite to announce the completion of the first survey of the entire human genome by the Human Genome Project. Blair calls Clinton back later that day to say the IRA has moved closer to decommissioning its weapons. (Clinton, p. 910; Branch, p. 609)

**December** While in Belfast, Clinton meets with the Blairs, Mitchell, and Ahern at the Odyssey Arena. The Clintons stay with the Blairs in London after the event. Clinton gives a speech at the University of Warwick about globalization and Third Way, and publicly thanks Blair for his friendship and partnership. (Clinton, pp. 932-934)
SELECTED WRITINGS AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY TONY BLAIR


KEY ISSUES AND EVENTS AS BRITISH PRIME MINISTER

Blair-Clinton Relationship

Northern Ireland
- Seldon, pp. 348-363.
- Clinton, pp. 784-785.

Iraq (1998)
- Seldon, pp. 385-392.

Kosovo
- Riddell, pp. 99-118.
- Seldon, pp. 392-407.

Third Way
Origins of your relationship with Clinton

- When did you first take notice of Bill Clinton’s methods to get elected and move the Democratic Party to the center?
- How did you come to meet Bill Clinton? What were your early impressions of him?

Third Way

- Discuss the influence President Clinton had on changing the Labour Party? How did he influence you as a campaigner?
- How successful were the Third Way conferences you and President Clinton developed?

Iraq

- Tell us about how you worked together leading up to the 1998 air attacks. What are your impressions of working with the Clinton Administration in your first major crisis using force?

Kosovo

- You were an advocate for using ground troops. What was President Clinton’s reaction to this position, and how effective were you in trying to get President Clinton to commit? Did your relationship change with President Clinton coming out of this crisis?

Northern Ireland

- What role did President Clinton serve leading up the Good Friday Agreement and its final hours to help make it successful? What did the media not report about the Administration’s meetings with key political leaders in Britain, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland?

The Clinton Presidency in Retrospect

- What do you consider your greatest accomplishment together?
- How did your relationship change over time?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Clinton Administration in the realm of foreign affairs? How would you rate the President as a strategic thinker?
- What features of the Clinton Administration were missed or overlooked by the press?
- Evaluate President Clinton as a foreign policy leader and a world leader. How did foreign diplomats and heads of state view Clinton? Were there any common misconceptions?
- How should the Clinton Administration be viewed by future historians? What is the legacy of President Clinton’s U.S.-Anglo policy?