



TONY BLAIR'S TANGLED WEB: THE QUARTET REPRESENTATIVE AND THE PEACE PROCESS

JONATHAN COOK

Tony Blair stepped down as British prime minister in 2007 and immediately assumed the position of representative to the Quartet, the international body overseeing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Against the background of mounting criticism at home over his role in the 2003 Iraq war, this profile examines the record of Blair's activities in the Middle East over the past five years. The picture that emerges is one of rapid self-enrichment through murky consultancies and opaque business deals with Middle East dictators, and an official role (formally dedicated to Palestinian state-building) whose main results appear to be a disgruntled Palestinian Authority and the perpetuation of the status quo.

ON 27 JUNE 2007, Tony Blair resigned as Britain's prime minister after ten years in office. That very same day, he was appointed to the vaguely defined and unsalaried role of representative to the Quartet, the international body comprising the United States, European Union (EU), United Nations (UN), and Russia that was established in 2002 to oversee the diplomatic process between Israel and the Palestinians.

Blair had won three elections in a row in the United Kingdom, a record equaled in the modern era only by Margaret Thatcher. But by the time of his departure, his Labour Party was beset by internal divisions and rocked by scandals, and his popularity was waning. Blair's talent for "media spin" had begun to grate on much of the British electorate, which found it increasingly hard to believe that their prime minister really was the man of principle he claimed to be.¹ Blair could not shake off a public perception both that he had used deception in promoting the case for war against Iraq in 2003 and that, in relation to those same events, his government had subordinated its foreign policy priorities to the goals of the U.S. administration of George W. Bush.

Nonetheless, the questions over his part in the Iraq war had done little to dent his reputation with the international community as a global

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statesman and political heavyweight, the very reasons he was offered the Quartet post. Public figures had avoided raising suspicions about his conduct, even while his public appearances in Britain invariably attracted a posse of protesters demanding that he be tried for war crimes.² In the years following the invasion of Iraq, the evidence against Blair slowly mounted, particularly with Britain's official investigation of the Iraq war, the Chilcot inquiry, whose hearings ended in early 2011. Publication of the final report has been repeatedly delayed because British officials have blocked access to official records of the conversations between Bush and Blair in the run-up to the invasion. Still, Sir John Chilcot has indicated that he is likely to be heavily critical of Blair, particularly over the misuse of intelligence.³

It was not until summer 2012, however, that the general air of deference toward Blair was punctured. Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, the South African Nobel peace laureate and opponent of apartheid, publicly refused to share a platform with Blair at a leadership summit in Johannesburg. In an op-ed justifying his decision, Tutu excoriated Blair as a war criminal who should be in the dock at the International Criminal Court in the Hague for invading Iraq. "[I]n a consistent world, those responsible for this suffering and loss of life should be treading the same path as some of their African and Asian peers who have been made to answer for their actions in the Hague."⁴ Tutu assigned Blair responsibility not only for past war crimes. He also argued that the U.S.- and U.K.-led invasion of Iraq had created the backdrop for further suffering in the Middle East, especially in clearing a path to the current civil war in Syria and in freeing Israel to issue endless menaces to strike Iran in a bid to stop its alleged nuclear weapons program. Bush and Blair, Tutu wrote, "have driven us to the edge of a precipice where we now stand—with the specter of Syria and Iran before us."⁵

A SHEEP IN WOLFENSOHN'S CLOTHING

In many ways, Blair seemed a natural choice for the post of Quartet Representative. He already had a proven track record in peacemaking, having negotiated an agreement between another pair of long-feuding communities divided by sectarian and nationalist differences. The 1998 Good Friday Agreement brought a formal end to hostilities between the Protestant "Loyalists" and the Catholic "Republicans" in Northern Ireland, leading to a power-sharing government. Some observers intimated that this might provide a model for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Blair also had great standing with the White House, an invaluable asset when the United States was the only real mediator between the two parties. Finally, Blair had long emphasized the importance of a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, which he saw as a vital element in reducing frustration and extremism in the Middle East that, in his view, threatened the West. But from the outset, there were doubts about how

much impact Blair would have. The experiences of his predecessor were a warning of the likely limitations of the job. James Wolfensohn, a former president of the World Bank, was appointed in April 2005 as Special Envoy to the Middle East by then U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Alvaro de Soto, a former UN envoy to the Quartet, says Wolfensohn was lured with a proposed job description that would have given him a writ “essentially covering the entire peace process.” But his final terms of reference were much narrower and were quickly whittled down further still, according to de Soto.⁶

Wolfensohn lasted in the job only eleven months, resigning when it became clear that he had been almost entirely boxed in by the United States and Israel. “I was stupid for not reading the small print,” he told the Israeli daily *Ha’Aretz* in an interview a year later.⁷ It had soon become apparent to him that his role would be limited to mitigating the worst effects of the occupation and trying to revive the Palestinian economy, chiefly through high-level fund-raising.

According to Wolfensohn, his attempts to expand his mandate quickly made him enemies in the State Department, most notably with the neoconservative official Elliot Abrams, as well as with Israeli leaders. His staff was fired “and I knew less and less what was happening.” He added: “The basic problem was that I didn’t have the authority. The Quartet had the authority, and within the Quartet it was the Americans who had the authority. . . . I would doubt that in the eyes of Elliot Abrams and the State Department team, I was ever anything but a nuisance.”⁸

The *Ha’Aretz* interview took place shortly before Blair was due to take up his appointment. Wolfensohn observed: “My worry for Tony Blair is that if you read the mandate he has—it’s exactly the same as mine. It talks about helping both sides, helping the Palestinians, but there’s nothing there about negotiating peace.”⁹

Blair’s formal mandate, like Wolfensohn’s, was to help the Quartet pave a path back to peace negotiations, chiefly through the promotion of improved conditions for Palestinians in relation to the local economy, security coordination with Israel, humanitarian issues, and institution-building. This was supposed to reduce violence (in practice, the Quartet’s concern is almost exclusively confined to Palestinian violence) and therefore build trust. Officially at least, the goal is Palestinian statehood as envisioned in the 2003 document known as the Road Map.

But despite the similarities in their mandates, the two men have differed strikingly in their approaches to the job. Wolfensohn, a former World Bank president with no background in politics, was determined to play a strong diplomatic role. Blair, meanwhile, the quintessential politician, has rarely strayed from his narrow economic mandate, even though it is a realm in which he had no expertise.

Upon his appointment in 2007, Blair was implored in an open letter from ten European foreign ministers to expand his mandate and to take

a lead in reviving the peace process. The ministers said it was clear that the status quo was “leading nowhere,” and assured him that he could “rely on our unfailing support and commitment.”¹⁰ Blair has shown no inclination to take their advice or their offer of assistance.

A QUARTER JOB AT THE QUARTET

The representative’s office is the Quartet’s only formal structure. Blair has an imposing—and high-security—compound in East Jerusalem,¹¹ dozens of staff, and a substantial budget.¹² The mission team includes about fifteen professional diplomats who oversee issues such as “governance,” “rule of law,” “donor coordination,” “movement and access,” “infrastructure,” and the “political and security sector.” In short, Blair’s chief task has been to help build Palestinian institutions and the occupied territories’ economy in preparation for an elusive statehood, the likelihood of which continues to diminish.

Although the Quartet’s establishment appeared to satisfy Palestinian demands for wider international involvement in the process, in reality all decisions were still subject to Washington’s—and therefore Israel’s—approval.

But while Wolfensohn had found the role so difficult to carry out that he resigned within months, Blair has thrived in his Quartet post for more than five years. Blair’s stamina may reflect, in part, his more leisurely pace. Wolfensohn worked nearly full-time; Blair dedicates a week each month in Jerusalem to the job. “But often that’s an exaggeration,” a diplomat reported. “He’ll arrive on a Monday evening and leave Thursday morning.”¹³

Many of Blair’s limitations in his role reflect the wider problems embodied in the Quartet. The idea for the contact group that ultimately became the Quartet was first proposed by UN and EU officials as a way to bring the White House under George W. Bush back into active engagement with the peace process. Indeed, Blair as prime minister had a major hand in pressuring a reluctant Bush to publish the Road Map, which set down the conditions for creating an independent Palestinian state by 2005. Although the inclusion of the EU, the UN, and Russia appeared to satisfy Palestinian demands for wider involvement by the international community, in reality all decisions were still subject to Washington’s—and therefore Israel’s—approval.¹⁴

As the representative to the Quartet, Blair has devoted most of his energy on the Israeli-Palestinian front to the technical, chiefly economic, elements of Palestinian state-building, keeping a wary distance—except when asked by the Americans to intervene on behalf of Israel—from the more significant political and diplomatic aspects. But during his time as representative, and as the mound of embarrassing revelations about Britain’s role in the buildup to the 2003 invasion of Iraq has grown, questions about his role in the Middle East have gained momentum.

In particular, allegations of activities unrelated to his Quartet duties have proliferated, fixing in the public mind the impression that Blair has not played straight in the Middle East. According to critics, he has used his position as Quartet envoy to open doors in the region not only to raise funds for Palestinian state-building but also to line his own pockets.

Even trivial issues such as Blair's perpetual tan became the subject of snide comment, having come to signify for news analysts all that is suspect about his continuing involvement with the Middle East, hinting at the vanity and self-aggrandizement of a man nominally charged with selling a peace process long past its sell-by date.¹⁵ Rumors of unsavory business dealings grew into indignation at the rapid self-enrichment that has been an all-too-visible dividend of his unpaid work as Quartet envoy; by June 2012, the *Financial Times* was estimating his annual income at £20 million.¹⁶ Increasingly, questions were being asked about accountability: who, exactly, was Blair accountable to, when his days in the Middle East are spent mostly closeted from the public, shuttling between meetings in air-conditioned offices, hotels, and restaurants, his circle of acquaintances limited to business leaders, diplomats, politicians, royalty, and their advisers.

Increasingly, the British media have started to pick away at the complex and opaque web of business interests, foundations, and consultancies that Blair has built up over the past five years, whose clients include some of the most unsavory leaders in the region.¹⁷ At the heart of his business empire, known as the Office of Tony Blair and employing more than 150 staff, is a consultancy he established in February 2009 called Tony Blair Associates—modeled, it seems, on Henry Kissinger Associates—which offers “strategic advice [on] political and economic trends and government reform.”¹⁸ Zbigniew Brzezinski, a former U.S. national security adviser, has expressed his “visceral contempt” for Blair over his moneymaking activities and his sermonizing.¹⁹

WHO BENEFITS: PALESTINE OR JP MORGAN?

Blair's involvement in pursuing business opportunities in the occupied Palestinian territories dates in part to his time as British prime minister, well before his appointment as Quartet Representative. In those days, he could plausibly claim to be batting for British business. But as the world's envoy to the region, his behind-the-scenes business dealings have led to much criticism. In Israel and the Palestinian territories, where Blair has an official and high-profile role, concerns have been raised about where his public duties end and private interests begin. Prominent among these concerns have been his dealings with the investment bank JP Morgan.

In January 2008, seven months after Blair's appointment as Quartet Representative, JP Morgan confirmed that he would be joining them in a “senior advisory capacity.” Blair reportedly has been handsomely

rewarded for his post on JP Morgan's advisory board, but the specifics of the allegations about Blair's relations with the bank are much harder to assess. The *Financial Times* has suggested that JP Morgan pays him about \$4 million a year.²⁰ Several secretive business relationships he developed after his appointment to the Quartet job have involved JP Morgan.

Among the papers unearthed in the ruins of Muammar Gaddafi's palace after his gruesome death at the hands of Libyan rebel forces in October 2011 was a letter dated February 2008, written by Blair on notepaper headed the "Office of the Quartet Representative."²¹ In it, Blair told Gaddafi that he was "very interested to hear from you of the progress that is being made and the great opportunities there are for the future." He added that he was "particularly interested in what you said about the funds that will be dedicated to projects in Africa, since you know I am doing a lot of work there and know of good, worthwhile projects for investments."²²

According to an anonymous official in the Libyan Investment Authority (LIA), a \$70 billion fund to invest the country's oil wealth abroad, Blair's subsequent regular visits to Tripoli—often on a jet provided by Gaddafi—were unrelated to Middle East peacemaking or fund-raising for the Palestinians. Instead, Blair met Gaddafi's British-educated son, Saif al-Islam, who oversaw the investment fund. "Tony Blair's visits were purely lobby visits for banking deals with JP Morgan," the source was quoted as saying.²³

Support for the official's account was provided by a leaked email sent to the LIA from Lord Renwick, JP Morgan's vice-chairman, in December 2008, a month before Blair was due to visit Libya. The global banking and investment giant was hoping to persuade the LIA to invest in a Russian aluminum producer, RUSAL, whose owner was close to Peter Mandelson, a former Labor Party government minister and long-time adviser to Blair. Renwick's email said he wanted to "finalize the terms of the mandate concerning RUSAL before Mr. Blair's visit to Tripoli."²⁴

Some insight into the kinds of linkages involved in these dealings can be gleaned from information unearthed by the British media. According to an investigation carried out by the *Daily Telegraph*, Blair developed close ties with a U.S. public affairs consultancy firm, Monitor Group, which was paid millions of dollars by Libya to improve Gaddafi's image in the West. Blair is reported to have employed three Monitor Group staff as senior advisers when he was putting together multi-million dollar deals with Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).²⁵

With regard to the Kuwait deal, Blair's lucrative contract was secured in 2009, reportedly during a visit when he was introduced to the country's emir as the Quartet Representative.²⁶ The emir is said to have wished to show his gratitude to the former prime minister for the prominent role he had played in the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, whose 1990 invasion of Kuwait triggered the first Gulf War. Blair was reportedly remunerated for his advice on the future of Kuwait's economy in a deal exempted from local regulatory oversight because, unusually, the money was paid through

the emir's personal office. A Kuwaiti democracy activist told a British newspaper that the sum involved was £27 million.²⁷

Blair is also reported to be close to Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince, Shaykh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, and has praised the UAE for donating millions to Palestinian projects. But Blair has his own business interests there as well, including a consultancy with Mubadala, a sovereign wealth fund linked to the royal family (which, incidentally, has interests in oil exploration contracts in Libya).²⁸

Blair has few achievements to show for his years as Quartet Representative, but he likes to trumpet one in particular: his success in 2009 in securing radio frequencies from Israel to allow the creation of a second Palestinian cell phone operator, Wataniya Mobile, in the West Bank. Wataniya has lavishly praised Blair for breaking the Palestinian telecom monopoly. By 2011, the company claimed to have won almost a quarter of the West Bank cell phone market.²⁹

The deal, however, had a high political cost for the Palestinians. Israel agreed to release some frequencies—though far from the number needed for proper coverage of the West Bank—in return for the Palestinian leadership dropping its attempt to pursue, in the UN, evidence of Israeli war crimes committed in Gaza during its 2008–2009 Operation Cast Lead (OCL), as documented in the Goldstone Report.³⁰

But equally problematic was the fact that Blair had private business interests in negotiating the deal. Wataniya is owned by a telecom company, Q-Tel, based in Qatar. Q-Tel is a major client of JP Morgan. It was JP Morgan that in 2007 loaned Q-Tel \$2 billion to buy Wataniya International, Wataniya Mobile's parent company.³¹ Not only Wataniya but also JP Morgan stood to profit massively from the opening up of the West Bank's airwaves.

Questions have been raised, too, over Blair's efforts to help a British-led consortium drill for natural gas in Palestinian territorial waters off Gaza. Blair's involvement dates to his time as prime minister: in 2003, he began lobbying then Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon to allow the consortium, led by the British Gas Group, to develop an enormous gas field 20 miles off Gaza's coast. The deal was reported to be worth more than \$6 billion.³²

After his appointment as Quartet Representative, Blair championed the project again, this time arguing that it would provide an enormous boost to the beleaguered Palestinian economy. His lobbying efforts have so far run up against an Israeli brick wall. Israel has used the takeover of Gaza by Hamas as a pretext for denying the go-ahead, claiming that the Islamist movement would use the profits to fund terrorism.

However, Blair's suggestion that his only interest in the project was to benefit the Palestinians is open to doubt, for at least two reasons. First, by refusing to consult with Gaza's Hamas government and instead expending his energies on lobbying Israel, Blair sought a deal that, according to reports, overwhelmingly favored Israel. The agreement, it is said, would have ensured that Israel controlled the supply and value of gas, with

a pipeline built to the Israeli port of Ashkelon. The Palestinians, meanwhile, would have been refused access to the open market, leaving Israel as the sole customer and free to dictate the price.³³ The second reason is that Blair's efforts on behalf of the British Gas Group were again dedicated to helping a client of JP Morgan.

Though Blair had a clear conflict of interest in both these cases, he and JP Morgan have strenuously denied any impropriety. When these matters were aired in a TV documentary, JP Morgan issued a statement saying: "We have never raised or discussed with him [Blair] the two projects you mention. Any suggestion of a conflict of interest is baseless."³⁴ Blair, meanwhile, claimed that he was unaware that JP Morgan had any connection with either Wataniya or the British Gas Group.³⁵

What is glaring in these instances is that Blair's conduct appears to have been subject to no rules, oversight, or sanction. Asked what code of conduct Blair followed, Anis Nacrou, a French diplomat who worked for Tony Blair at the Quartet's office in Jerusalem for three years, replied: "I think he makes his own rules depending on the experience he has as a former prime minister for over ten years."³⁶

"PROUD TO BE A FRIEND OF ISRAEL"

Blair may play by his own rules when it comes to his business interests, but he appears far more constrained by external pressures—particularly the wishes of the United States and Israel—with regard to his public role as Quartet Representative. In analyzing this role, Khaled Elgindy of the Brookings Institute pointed out: "Whereas Wolfensohn antagonized US officials and had his mission unceremoniously shut down after one year, Blair . . . has had the full backing of two US administrations."³⁷ Critics suspect that the reason for this support is that, as Quartet Representative, Blair has never strayed far from U.S. or Israeli positions. According to this view, his time as the Quartet envoy has been only a continuation of the agenda he adopted during his time as Britain's prime minister.³⁸

The ideological momentum for the U.S. invasion of Iraq that Blair so enthusiastically embraced is widely attributed to the neoconservatives who came to dominate the Bush administration and who were openly close to Israel. Later, in summer 2006 when Israel bombarded Lebanon, Blair was vocally supportive of Israel when many other world leaders recoiled in horror. He joined the United States in opposing a UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire, believing that Israel needed to be given time to destroy Hizballah.³⁹

It is therefore not surprising that during his premiership Blair won glowing praise not only from Israeli leaders⁴⁰ but also from the Israeli public. In 2006, for example, he was judged "a true friend of Israel" by nearly two-thirds of Israelis.⁴¹ Though Israel's leaders have been a little more circumspect in their admiration since his appointment as Quartet

Representative, the post has done nothing to dent his support there. In 2008, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said of their relationship: "We see eye to eye."⁴² And two years later, a Foreign Ministry official told *Ha'Aretz*: "When in another 100 years they write a book about the history of the Middle East, Blair's name will proudly appear in it."⁴³

When Tel Aviv University awarded him a Dan David Prize in 2009, describing him as an "outstanding statesman," the event passed off without dissension.⁴⁴ The \$1 million prize took its place alongside three honors he had received from the United States, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, awarded by George W. Bush as he was leaving office in January 2009.⁴⁵

Blair had indicated a lack of even-handedness in other, less noted ways before his Quartet posting. As prime minister, he was publicly close to the Labour Friends of Israel, a faction of the parliamentary caucus dedicated to supporting Israel. At a reception in 2006, he told the attendees: "I have never actually found it hard to be a friend of Israel, I am proud to be a friend of Israel."⁴⁶

Before winning office in 1997, Blair had also cultivated close ties to Michael Levy, a former board member of the Jewish Agency who became the Labour Party's chief fundraiser. Levy was known for his personal connections to Israel (he owned a home there) and for his links to leading Israeli politicians. Shortly after his election as prime minister, Blair, somewhat controversially, appointed Levy as his personal envoy to the Middle East, a position Levy kept until Blair left office. In 2001, *The Guardian* reported: "Lord Levy has helped to develop a strongly pro-Israel line from No 10 against the traditionally pro-Arab Foreign Office."⁴⁷

More substantial grounds for objecting to Blair's appointment to such a sensitive role in the Middle East was his active participation in two wars of aggression in the region, in Iraq and Afghanistan. Among ordinary Palestinians, he was widely reviled even before his appointment. His standing would only sink as the evidence he helped to supply about Saddam Hussein's possession of weapons of mass destruction was discredited, and as it became clearer that he had used his influence at the UN to win allies to Bush's cause on the grounds that the Iraqi people deserved to be liberated. In this regard, Kofi Annan, the former UN secretary general, remarked in an interview to launch his memoirs that Blair, who had "the potential to be one of the most brilliant politicians of his time," had chosen not to use his influence with Bush to divert him from war. "I will forever wonder what would have happened if, without a second [UN] resolution . . . Blair had said 'George, this is where we part company. You're on your own.' I really think it could have stopped the war."⁴⁸

From a Palestinian point of view, the only possible upside of the appointment was Blair's argument, made before and after the Iraq invasion, that the birth of a "new Middle East"—which in his view sanctioned intervention in countries like Iraq—also required a solution to the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was this linkage that some saw as providing a moral dimension to his argument for toppling Saddam Hussein.

POLITICS AND PEACE TAKE A BACK SEAT

Unable or unwilling to challenge the very restricted role of Quartet Representative set down by Washington, Blair has focused his efforts on Palestinian economic development. The argument is that Palestinian civil society and state institutions must first be built from the ground up before the Palestinians are ready to discuss with Israel core final-status issues, such as borders, refugees, and Jerusalem.

In light of the position Blair adopted as prime minister in advancing the Northern Ireland peace talks, when he brought the IRA into the process early on, his refusal to have dealings with Hamas, which had been democratically elected in 2006, could be seen as surprising.⁴⁹

While Blair, as prime minister, brought the IRA into the Northern Ireland peace talks early on, as Quartet envoy he refused to have dealings with the democratically elected Hamas, thereby giving tacit blessing to the blockade.

His boycott extended even to his rare visits to Gaza: on his first visit, he publicly refused to meet representatives of the Hamas government that rules the Strip.⁵⁰ He has thereby given his tacit blessing to Israel's blockade, even while officially saying he opposes it.⁵¹ Similarly, when Israel waged its OCL assault on Gaza in late 2008/early 2009, Blair stood on the sidelines, mute. What efforts he has made to help Gaza—chiefly on water sanitation and exports—have been conducted through lobbying Israel, Egypt, or donor agencies in an approach that

can only have the effect of weakening institutions within Gaza. As Israel intensified its blockade policy through much of Blair's time with the Quartet, he was forced to trumpet minor individual successes, such as an order for 2,000 sweaters exported to Britain in summer 2012.⁵²

Despite Blair's greater engagement with the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank, he has been similarly ineffectual with respect to the two issues of critical importance to rebuilding the West Bank's economy, his ostensible focus: settlement expansion and freedom of movement. Beyond the mildest rebukes, he has not even tried to press Israel to stop either its settlement expansion or its ongoing takeover of the Oslo-designated Area C—the 62 percent of the West Bank under full Israeli control. Nor has he pressed Israel to free up Palestinian movement between the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Blair has tried to bring in donor money for the PA and has requested that Israel remove the more unjustifiable of the hundreds of checkpoints and roadblocks that litter the West Bank. His success with regard to the former can be measured by the parlous state of Palestinian finances, with the PA permanently on the verge of bankruptcy. Blair can perhaps argue that he has been more successful in reducing the number of checkpoints,⁵³

but even there, as one senior analyst noted, “that’s Netanyahu’s doing, not Blair’s. Netanyahu’s only policy towards the Palestinians is ‘economic peace,’ and that requires removing some checkpoints as a minimal step to help the Palestinian economy.”⁵⁴ Palestinian officials have also shown irritation at Blair’s attempts to take credit for helping the PA develop institutions and implement reforms, attributing success in these areas to Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, not the Quartet Representative.⁵⁵

In fact, in an indication of Blair’s ineffectiveness even within his extremely limited mandate, his efforts to boost the Palestinian economy by lobbying Israel to allow the building of half a dozen industrial zones around the West Bank financed by international donors have fallen flat. It is difficult to see what threat these zones could pose to Israel. In fact, previous Israeli leaders, such as Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, helped build other industrial zones and saw them as a way to keep the Palestinian population economically pacified.

Indicative of the true priorities governing the Quartet’s agenda is the fact that the United States has invested far more energy in developing the Palestinian security services in the West Bank—a way to ensure the PA’s effectiveness as security contractor for Israel—than it has to other sectors.

Today, most observers acknowledge that the Quartet’s diplomatic function has all but ended, with the peace process effectively killed by the physical and political separation of the West Bank and Gaza. In this regard, Blair has remained publicly sanguine. He stated in 2011: “Our work is based on the belief that economic progress helps the politics work—it is not a substitute. And when the politics is stuck, this is a way to move forward.”⁵⁶

But the reality is the reverse. A narrow focus on development has actually been a way to keep the politics stuck. Thus, the United States has been able, through the creation of the post of Quartet Representative, to decouple the technical aspects of the peace process from its failed political aspects. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Blair’s task of overseeing Palestinian development and institution-building has found its rationale just at the moment when the once-interminable political peace process instituted by the Oslo Accords finally ran aground. Blair’s responsibility appears to be to draw out the technical preconditions for the peace process in a similarly protracted manner.

Anis Nacrou, the French diplomat who worked for Blair at his Jerusalem office, told Britain’s TV station Channel 4 that the Quartet was “a smokescreen for the action of the Americans and the tandem between Americans and Israelis. At the end of the day, all this was buying time for allowing the Israeli government to do whatever it wanted to do.”⁵⁷

The focus on preparing the ground for talks—Blair’s task—offers a key benefit for Israel. It removes mutuality from the process. Now attention is restricted to the behavior and capacities of the Palestinians. Or, as one senior Palestinian official observed, “there are no Israeli obligations. The road map is being used as a carrot and stick, and only on the Palestinian side.”⁵⁸

If Blair has had a decisive impact, it has been in helping to implement a Quartet policy that has deepened Palestinian division by, as Elgindy notes, “promoting prosperity in the West Bank while tolerating—if not openly endorsing—the ongoing blockade of Gaza. . . . As a result, Palestinians were forced to choose between national unity, an essential component of any ‘state-building’ exercise, and international assistance, without which no state could come into being.” In short, according to Elgindy, the Quartet used its influence to condition “the resumption of a political process on the continuation of Palestinian division.”⁵⁹

On the few occasions that Blair has played a diplomatic role, it has been at the bidding of Washington and in ways designed to benefit Israel. He helped to ease Israel’s blockade of Gaza so as to dampen the international outrage that followed Israel’s lethal naval attack on the Mavi Marmara aid flotilla in international waters in May 2010.⁶⁰ Even more significantly, in the absence of a dedicated U.S. envoy to the region, Blair stepped in to exert great pressure on Palestinian officials to abandon their strategy at the UN, both in 2011 when they appealed to the Security Council for statehood⁶¹ and, to a lesser extent, in late 2012 when they won a vote in the General Assembly for an upgrade to observer status.

In line with the U.S. position, Blair has continued to demand of the Palestinians that they concentrate instead on a return to peace talks, even though Israel has refused to freeze settlement growth and Netanyahu has shown no desire to negotiate meaningfully.

It is for this reason that the Palestinian leadership has grown increasingly frustrated and resentful of Blair’s role. Nabil Shaath, a trusted adviser to Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas, was among those giving vent to Palestinian anger shortly after Blair’s intervention in the Palestinian application for statehood at the Security Council in 2011. “Lately, he [Blair] talks like an Israeli diplomat, selling their policies. Therefore, he is useless to us.”⁶² Although the Palestinian leadership, apparently fearful of upsetting the United States, quickly discounted suggestions that they might request Blair’s removal from the post,⁶³ a year later an official in Ramallah said that the PA had “minimal involvement” with Blair, who was seen as “an obstacle to the realization of statehood.”⁶⁴

There are indications that Blair’s public optimism about his Quartet role may be a smoke screen as well. In a spate of interviews in summer 2012, he spoke longingly of wanting the presidency of the European Council, the EU’s public face. He had been passed over for this post when it was established in 2009, in part because of the mounting controversy surrounding his involvement in the Iraq war.⁶⁵ He is also said to be interested in heading the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, or the International Monetary Fund. Less realistically, he has refused to rule out running for the British premiership again, inevitably fuelling speculation about his intentions.⁶⁶ In whatever event, this frenetic activity does not suggest that Blair sees much of a future either for himself remaining as the Quartet

envoy or for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process he is supposed to reinvigorate.

BLAIR ON A MISSION

In reflecting on Blair's role, it is useful to study what he himself has said about his motivations in the Middle East. In his more reflective speeches, he sounds much like the U.S. neoconservatives with whom he allied himself before the invasion of Iraq—though he laces their “clash of civilizations” thesis with a dash of Christian Zionism. In his philosophy, the global forces of light are arrayed against the global forces of darkness in a battle with stakes of potentially catastrophic proportions.

In Blair's view, the threat derives from a modern “Islamic extremism” that has contaminated the Muslim and Arab mind, blocking progress and preventing the emergence of the enlightenment values exemplified by democratic Western states. “Now, that warped mind has grown out of a global movement based on a perversion of Islam which we have to confront, and we have to confront it globally. That's part of the trouble: We don't yet really understand this is a global movement and it requires a global strategy to beat it.”⁶⁷ In the grand colonial tradition—refashioned for the modern era by the neoconservatives—Blair believes that it falls to him to shoulder the white man's burden.

Where Blair appears to part ways with the neoconservatives who surrounded Bush is in the emphasis he puts on the need for more than military solutions to defeat the global enemy.⁶⁸ “This is an ideological battle. It's got to be taken out to the enemy. And that's why I say it's important for us always to be the ones who have got a political strategy running alongside the military strategy.”⁶⁹

Like other neoconservatives, Blair places Israel at the center of the global struggle—geographically, militarily, ideologically, and politically. But for Blair, Israel also appears to represent a spiritual and ineffable ideal. As he explained to the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Britain's Jewish establishment, in a 2010 speech to mark the Board's 250th anniversary,

[T]he thing that ultimately motivates those who built the State of Israel and sustain it still, and those from the outside like me who are prepared to stand up resolutely and defend Israel, is the ideal that lay behind the creation of the State of Israel. Because those people struggled and fought but, above all, they built and they built something remarkable. They built it with a lot of opposition from a lot of people.⁷⁰

Leading the forces of opposition today is Iran. “Regime change in Tehran would immediately make me significantly more optimistic about the whole of the region,” Blair has said.⁷¹ Israel is the bulwark against the spread of

Iranian influence, and that, in his imaginings, is the reason Israel inspires such hostility from Iran's leaders, and why defending Israel's interests is a supreme moral duty: "The security of Israel is non-negotiable in my view—and that is for a very simple reason. The security of Israel is not just about Israel; it is in our strategic interest too—that of the UK, that of the West, that of the world."⁷²

The centrality of Israel in Blair's worldview becomes particularly evident with regard to the Arab Spring. One might assume that a man who believes that "democracy is not just a way of voting, it's a way of thinking" would wholeheartedly welcome the revolutionary movements in the Middle East trying to release their populations from the toxic grip of their tyrants. But Blair's chief fear seems to be that "reduced stability in the region . . . can pose problems for Israel."⁷³ As he explained to CNN, "when you lift the lid off these very repressive regimes, out comes religious, tribal, ethnic influences that are very difficult, that require enormous amount of management."⁷⁴

Healing the "warped" Arab mind, it often seems in Blair's thinking, will come only with unconditional acceptance by the Arab world of the superior values embodied by Israel. Solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he has often remarked, is the key to transforming the region since that is "the one issue where even quite moderate Muslims just feel frustration and anger."⁷⁵ Thus, the Palestinians have become for Blair, it seems, a microcosm of the global struggle. If "moderate" Palestinians can be persuaded to spurn the extremists among them, live in peace with Israel, and aspire to adopt its ways as their own, then maybe other Arabs across the region will follow suit. Blair appears blind to the primacy of other issues for Palestinians, and the rest of the Arab world, such as occupation, imperialism, and colonialism.

Blair even echoes the notorious view of a senior Bush adviser, who observed after the invasion of Iraq that "when we act, we create our own reality."⁷⁶ According to Blair, "There are reality creators and reality managers. And for much of the post-war period those who have managed reality have been absolutely adequate. I think we are embarking on a period both in the economy and foreign policy where we are going to have to create reality."⁷⁷

Blair is on a historic mission. And the forces of darkness—led by Iran, Syria, Hizballah, Hamas—are all that stand in the way of a glorious new dawn.

END NOTES

1. Blair has made much of the religious principles that underpin his political outlook, culminating in his establishing a Tony Blair Faith Foundation in 2008.

2. An example was Blair's appearance in summer 2012 when called to give

evidence to a televised session of the Leveson inquiry into media malpractice in Britain. During his questioning, a protester interrupted the proceedings by calling for Blair's prosecution for "war crimes" and accusing him of promoting the interests of U.S. investment bank

JP Morgan in Iraq. Blair, clearly nettled, felt compelled to enter a not guilty plea: "Can I just say, actually, on the record: what he said about Iraq and JP Morgan is completely and totally untrue. I've never had a discussion with them about that [Iraq]." Esther Addley, Peter Walker, and Lisa O'Carroll. "Tony Blair accused of war crimes by protester at Leveson inquiry," *The Guardian*, 28 May 2012.

3. Chilcot described Blair's claim that MI6, the British security service, had established "beyond doubt" that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction as "not possible to make on the basis of intelligence." Richard Norton-Taylor, "Chilcot report into Iraq delayed by Whitehall refusal to release evidence," *The Guardian*, 16 July 2012. Blair's unrepentant air while testifying to the inquiry appeared to some as being "gung-ho." Rosa Prince, "Chilcot Inquiry: Gung-ho Tony Blair unbowed by evidence," *Daily Telegraph*, 21 January 2011.

4. Desmond Tutu, "Why I had no choice but to spurn Tony Blair," *The Observer*, 2 September 2012. In his defense, Blair responded: "Iraq today has an economy three times or more in size, with the child mortality rate cut by a third of what it was." Toby Helm, "Tony Blair should face trial over Iraq war, says Desmond Tutu," *The Guardian*, 2 September 2012. He failed to mention that the cause of Iraq's dire economic situation and high child mortality rate under Saddam Hussein were chiefly due to more than a decade of UN-imposed sanctions on Iraq, as demanded by the United States and Britain.

5. Desmond Tutu, "Why I had no choice but to spurn Tony Blair," *The Observer*, 2 September 2012.

6. Alvaro de Soto, "End of Mission Report," May 2007.

7. Shahar Smooha, "All the dreams we had are now gone," *Ha'Aretz*, 19 July 2007.

8. Smooha, "All the dreams," *Ha'Aretz*, 19 July 2007.

9. Smooha, "All the dreams," *Ha'Aretz*, 19 July 2007.

10. "Open letter to Tony Blair," *Le Monde*, 10 July 2007.

11. The four-story compound, specifically built to house the Quartet office, is just over the Green Line in East

Jerusalem's Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood, frequently in the news for evictions of Palestinian families by Israeli courts in favor of Jewish settlers. Before moving to the new compound in spring 2011, the Quartet Office was located in a suite of rooms at the American Colony Hotel not far away.

12. "In 2007, the UN Development Programme's 'Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People' spent over \$400,000 on three armoured cars for Blair." Ali Abunimah, "Why the UN must abolish the 'Quartet,'" *Al-Jazeera English*, 5 October 2011. The UNDP also foots the rent on his office compound, to the tune, some estimate, of \$1.2 million a year. The British taxpayer, meanwhile, funds the security detail that shadows Blair's every move in the region at an annual cost, according to one report, of £250,000. Kirsty Walker, "Blair's £400,000-a-year bill to taxpayers: Multi-millionaire ex-PM enjoys perks and pension," *Daily Mail*, 23 August 2012.

13. David Rose, "Gas from Gaza, mobile phones in Palestine and a \$1m peace prize . . . Tony Blair and the Middle Eastern Eldorado," *Daily Mail*, 31 October 2009.

14. For example, U.S. officials threatened to cut U.S. support for the UN in order to get its way on conditioning aid to the Palestinians on the 2006 Quartet Principles, which required the Palestinians to commit to non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements. Alvaro de Soto, "End of Mission Report," May 2007, p. 18.

15. For example, in one fairly standard profile of Blair, he was described as "tall, gym-toned, lightly tanned." Sarah Sands, "What Tony Blair did next," *Evening Standard*, 27 June 2012.

16. Lionel Barber, "Tony Blair: an exclusive interview," *Financial Times*, 29 June 2012. Questions about how Blair might have accumulated such enormous wealth in the few years since his resignation as prime minister have been raised with increasing frequency since a documentary, titled "Dispatches: The Wonderful World of Tony Blair," was aired on Britain's Channel 4 on 26 September 2011.

17. One the most controversial consultancies has been for Nursultan

Nazarbayev, president of Kazakhstan, who is suspected of widespread human rights abuses, including the assassination of political opponents. Blair is said to have been paid £13 million for advice on how to improve the regime's image. An hour-long promotional video released in early 2012 featured extended clips from an interview with Blair in which he extols the country for its "progress" and its "extraordinary economic potential." "Tony Blair's star turn in Kazakhstan video," BBC, 24 April 2012.

18. Sam Greenhill, "Blair Inc: Former PM accused of cashing in after launching new business offering political advice to wealthy clients," *Daily Mail*, 22 February 2009.

19. Edward Luce, "Lunch with the FT: Zbigniew Brzezinski," *Financial Times*, 13 January 2012.

20. Lionel Barber, "Tony Blair: an exclusive interview," *Financial Times*, 29 June 2012. Blair also has jobs advising the insurance services group Zurich Financial and the luxury goods firm LVMH.

21. Jason Lewis, "Tony Blair's Byzantine world of advisers and lucrative deals," *Daily Telegraph*, 24 September 2011.

22. Andy Bloxham, "Tony Blair wrote to Gaddafi 'to suggest investment projects,'" *Daily Telegraph*, 20 September 2011.

23. Richard Spencer, "Tony Blair 'visited Libya to lobby for JP Morgan.'" *Daily Telegraph*, 18 September 2011. Some have speculated that Blair's use to JP Morgan in Libya may have been increased because of his established contacts with Mohammed Rashid, a Kurdish businessman who was a financial adviser to both Saif al-Islam and the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. David Rose, "Gas from Gaza, mobile phones in Palestine and a \$1m peace prize . . . Tony Blair and the Middle Eastern Eldorado," *Daily Mail*, 31 October 2009.

24. Robert Mendick, "Tony Blair's six secret visits to Col Gaddafi," *Daily Telegraph*, 24 September 2011. U.S. Treasury officials told the *New York Post* newspaper in 2011 that JP Morgan managed more than half a billion dollars on behalf of the Libyan Investment Authority; Isabel Vincent and Melissa Klein, "\$1.1 billion in Khadafy-

government assets stashed in Manhattan-based banks," *New York Post*, 28 August 2011.

25. Jason Lewis, "Tony Blair's Byzantine world of advisers and lucrative deals," *Daily Telegraph*, 24 September 2011.

26. Lewis, "Tony Blair's Byzantine world," *Daily Telegraph*, 24 September 2011.

27. Peter Osborne, "On the desert trail of Tony Blair's millions," *Daily Telegraph*, 23 September 2011.

28. Jason Lewis, "Tony Blair's Byzantine world of advisers and lucrative deals," *Daily Telegraph*, 24 September 2011.

29. "Blair role in Palestine contracts gives rise to conflicts of interest," Channel 4, 26 September 2011.

30. Ben Lynfield, "Palestinians cry 'blackmail' over Israel phone service threat," *The Independent*, 1 October 2009.

31. Peter Osborne, "On the desert trail of Tony Blair's millions," *Daily Telegraph*, 23 September 2011.

32. "Blair role in Palestine contracts gives rise to conflicts of interest," Channel 4, 26 September 2011.

33. David Rose, "Gas from Gaza, mobile phones in Palestine and a \$1m peace prize," *Daily Mail*, 31 October 2009.

34. "Blair role in Palestine contracts gives rise to conflicts of interest," Channel 4, 26 September 2011.

35. "Palestinian official reiterates call to replace Tony Blair as Quartet Mideast envoy," *Ha'Aretz*, 9 October 2011.

36. "Blair role in Palestine contracts gives rise to conflicts of interest," Channel 4, 26 September 2011.

37. "The Middle East Quartet: A Post-Mortem," Analysis Paper, no. 25, February 2012, p. 29.

38. Noticeably, Bush was reported to have pushed for Blair to get the Quartet post. "US 'wants Blair' for Mid-East job," BBC, 21 June 2007.

39. Andy McSmith, "Blair hit by Lebanon backlash as minister admits ceasefire 'mistake,'" *The Independent*, 14 September 2006.

40. Dan Murphy, "Mixed response to Tony Blair as special envoy for Middle East," *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 June 2007.

41. "Poll: Blair is 'true friend' of Israel," *Jerusalem Post*, 28 September 2006.
42. Barak Ravid, "'Gaza is not staying still'" *Ha'Aretz*, 18 December 2008.
43. Adar Primor, "Blair to Haaretz: Global terror is one battle, one struggle," *Ha'Aretz*, 7 January 2010.
44. Rory McCarthy, "Blair awarded \$1m prize for international relations work," *The Guardian*, 18 May 2009.
45. Alex Spillius, "Bill Clinton defends Blair ahead of award ceremony," *Daily Telegraph*, 13 September 2010.
46. Arjan El Fassed, "Tony Blair: A True Friend Of Israel," *Electronic Intifada*, 30 June 2007.
47. Kevin Maguire and Ewen MacAskill, "Fundraiser's role as envoy under attack," *The Guardian*, 30 September 2001.
48. Jo Adetunji, "Kofi Annan: Tony Blair could ultimately have stopped Iraq war," *The Guardian*, 29 September 2012.
49. With regard to the distinction, Blair explained in an interview that "we only did that [talked to the IRA] once they accepted that the solution will only be through peaceful means," apparently dismissing the fact that Hamas leaders in recent years had frequently expressed their readiness for a long-term *budna*. Continuing in the same vein, he stated: "If you would ask most of the people in Northern Ireland, will you ever get a deal with [Protestant leader] Ian Paisley, they would say 'absolutely and totally impossible,' and in the end he was the one who did it. I am not applying this analogy to Netanyahu or anybody else—I am simply saying you don't prejudge these things." Yet, Blair showed no hesitation in prejudging Hamas. Barak Ravid, "'Gaza is not staying still,'" *Ha'Aretz*, 18 December 2008.
50. Blair required Israel's permission to visit Gaza, and did so on two occasions, in March and June 2009. For the public snub in March, see Reuters, "Quartet envoy Tony Blair visits Gaza Strip for first time," *Ha'Aretz*, 1 March 2009.
51. Chris McGreal, "Tony Blair: Israel must reassure Palestinians that statehood is possible," *The Guardian*, 22 December 2010.
52. Amira Hass, "Keeping Brits warm and 25 Gazans employed," *Ha'Aretz*, 25 June 2012.
53. Adar Primor, "Blair to Haaretz: Global terror is one battle, one struggle." *Ha'Aretz*, 9 January 2010.
54. Author interview, September 2012.
55. Author interview, September 2012.
56. Elka Looks and Alona Ferber, "Quartet envoy Blair: Rationality can prevail, even in the Middle East," *Ha'Aretz*, 4 September 2011.
57. Peter Osborne, "Tony Blair: a liability in Britain and the Middle East?" *Daily Telegraph*, 30 September 2011.
58. Khaled Elgindy, "The Middle East Quartet: A Post-Mortem," Analysis Paper, no. 25, Brookings Institution, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, February 2012, p. 16.
59. Elgindy, "The Middle East Quartet," p. 25.
60. Donald Macintyre, "Tony Blair: Former PM urges Israel to ease Gaza blockade," *The Independent*, 4 June 2010, and "Remarks by PM Netanyahu and Tony Blair, Quartet Envoy to the Middle East," Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs policy statement, 20 June 2010. Although Blair tried to take credit for persuading Israel to ease the blockade following the deaths of nine humanitarian activists, doing something to stop the buildup of international pressure for a complete lifting of the blockade had become a political necessity both for Israel and the Quartet. Blair implicitly recognized this when he said, "I hope we can get significant movement on this because otherwise I think the pressure will build up." Reuters and DPA, "Tony Blair: I hope to see Gaza blockade eased in next few days," *Ha'Aretz*, 13 June 2010.
61. Daniel Bentley, "Tony Blair warns over Palestinian statehood bid," *The Independent*, 23 September 2011.
62. "Palestinian official: Mideast Quartet envoy Tony Blair 'useless,'" *Ha'Aretz*, 1 October 2011. That view was echoed by Mohammed Ishtayeh, another Abbas confidant, who said Blair "has developed a large bias in favor of the Israeli side and he has lost a lot of his credibility." "After criticism, Palestinians say will cooperate with Quartet envoy Tony Blair," *Ha'Aretz*, 5 October 2011.
63. "Palestinians deny bid to remove Tony Blair from Quartet," BBC Online, 29 September 2011.
64. Author interview, October 2012. Another Palestinian official said relations

were so bad it could sometimes “take weeks” before Abbas would agree to meet Blair. Author interview, September 2012.

65. Lionel Barber, “Tony Blair: an exclusive interview,” *Financial Times*, 29 June 2012.

66. John Rentoul, “Blair on CNN,” *The Independent blog*, 18 July 2012, <http://blogs.independent.co.uk/2012/07/18/blair-on-cnn/>.

67. Aluf Benn, David Landau and *Ha’Aretz* correspondents, “Blair tells Haaretz: Folly to ignore Iran’s threats to Israel,” *Ha’Aretz*, 10 September 2006.

68. In his autobiography, *A Journey*, Blair observes that U.S. vice president Dick Cheney “would have worked through the whole lot, Iraq, Syria, Iran, dealing with all their surrogates in the course of it—Hizballah, Hamas, etc. In other words, he thought the whole world had to be made anew, and that after September 11, it had to be done by force and with urgency.” Cited in Phil Sands, “Blair reveals Syria’s fears were well-founded,” *The National*, 3 September 2010.

69. Aluf Benn, David Landau and *Ha’Aretz* correspondents, “Blair tells Haaretz: Folly to ignore Iran’s threats to Israel,” *Ha’Aretz*, 10 September 2006.

70. “Speech by Rt Hon Tony Blair.” The Board of Deputies of British Jews’ website, accessed 5 February 2013, <http://www.bod.org.uk>.

71. “Blair Backs Regime Change in Iran and Syria,” Sky News Online, 9 September 2011.

72. “Speech by Rt Hon Tony Blair.” The Board of Deputies of British Jews, accessed 3 December 2012.

73. Tom Pfeiffer, “Arab Spring may endanger Mideast peace: Tony Blair,” Reuters, 23 October 2011.

74. John Rentoul, “Blair on CNN,” *The Independent* (blog), 18 July 2012.

75. Aluf Benn, David Landau and *Ha’Aretz* correspondents, “Blair tells Haaretz: Folly to ignore Iran’s threats to Israel,” *Ha’Aretz*, 10 September 2010.

76. Ron Suskind, “Without a doubt,” *New York Times*, 17 October 2004.

77. Patrick Wintour, “Tony Blair: I would be prime minister again,” *The Guardian*, 27 June 2012.