

Tony Blair to advise Egyptian dictator al-Sisi

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Former UK Labour Party Prime Minister and Middle East peace envoy Tony Blair has agreed to advise the Egyptian president and military dictator, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

According to reports in *The Guardian*, Blair will be an advisor on economic reform to the regime in a programme funded by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and run by a subsidiary of the management consultancy PricewaterhouseCoopers.

A former close political associate complained to the paper that Blair's new project would cause "terrible damage to him, the rest of us and New Labour's legacy.

"Tony Blair has become Sisi's éminence grise and is working on the economic plan that the UAE is paying for. For him, it combines both an existential battle against Islamism and mouth-watering business opportunities in return for the kind of persuasive advocacy he provided George Bush over Iraq."

"It's a very lucrative business model," the associate added, "but he shouldn't be doing it. He's putting himself in hock to a regime that imprisons journalists. He's digging a deeper and deeper hole for himself and everyone associated with him."

A spokeswoman for Blair downplayed the *Guardian* story telling *Channel 4 News*, "The story is nonsense... What is true, and we have made categorically clear, is that there is no commercial interest in, and absolutely no intention to make money from, Egypt."

If Blair has no intention of making money out of Egypt, it would be a first. Since he resigned as prime minister in 2007 and was appointed Middle East peace envoy of the Quartet of the United Nations, United States, European Union, and Russia, Blair has amassed a fortune thought to be around £70 million.

Almost immediately after leaving office, Blair had six face-to-face meetings with Libya's Colonel Gaddafi at

a time when Blair's employer, JPMorgan, was trying to broker a deal between the Gaddafi regime and Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska.

More work soon followed for Tony Blair Associates: for Kazakhstan dictator Nursultan Nazarbayev, making him £7.6 million (\$13 million) as the regime cracked down on civil liberties; with the dictatorship in Kuwait to produce a "review" of its economy, rumoured to be worth £27 million; and as £1 million a year consultants in the UAE. Blair has also been accused of using his post to promote contracts in Palestine that raise serious conflict of interest issues, championing the development of a £6 billion gas field operated by British Gas off the coast of Gaza, and brokering a deal with Israel for it to supply the enclave.

Whether or not Blair makes any financial gains out of the Egypt venture is secondary to the fact that he is giving his seal of approval to a blood-soaked military dictatorship.

After taking power in a coup last year against the elected President Mohamed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood, the al-Sisi junta has sought to restore the military-police state as it existed under Hosni Mubarak, before the Egyptian revolution began in 2011.

In launching the coup, al-Sisi sought to pre-empt the development of a mass movement after the eruption of the class struggle in early 2013. This was expressed in the June protest when millions went onto the streets to express their anger at Mursi's free-market policies and his support for Israel's assault on Gaza and the US-led proxy war in Syria.

The Muslim Brotherhood was declared a "terrorist organization," thousands of protestors killed, at least 20,000 political prisoners jailed and over 2,000 political opponents sentenced to death in drumhead trials.

To drive home the point that he intends to continue to rule Egypt with force, al-Sisi declared at his inauguration as President on June 8, 2014 "I will not

allow the creation of a parallel leadership to be in conflict with the state powers and prestige,” repeating three times, “Egypt has only one leadership.”

This bloody record is of no concern to Blair, the self-styled “man of peace” who cavorts with oligarchs, autocrats and dictators around the world. He openly defended al-Sisi, declaring, “The Muslim Brotherhood government was not simply a bad government. It was systematically taking over the traditions and institutions of the country. The revolt of 30 June 2013 was not an ordinary protest. It was the absolutely necessary rescue of a nation.”

There are increasing calls for Blair to be sacked as Middle East envoy. Last week, a group of former British ambassadors including Sir Richard Dalton (Iran), Oliver Miles (Libya) and Christopher Long (Egypt) and political figures published a letter condemning Blair for his “negligible” achievements as envoy.

The letter continued, “We, like many, are appalled by Iraq’s descent into a sectarian conflict that threatens its very existence as a nation, as well as the security of its neighbours. We are also dismayed, however, at Tony Blair’s recent attempts to absolve himself of any responsibility for the current crisis by isolating it from the legacy of the Iraq war.

“In reality, the invasion and occupation of Iraq had been a disaster long before the recent gains made by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Isis). The sectarian conflict responsible for much of the war’s reprehensible human cost was caused in part by the occupying forces’ division of the country’s political system along sectarian lines.”

It added, “In order to justify the invasion, Tony Blair misled the British people by claiming that Saddam had links to al-Qaida. In the wake of recent events it is a cruel irony for the people of Iraq that perhaps the invasion’s most enduring legacy has been the rise of fundamentalist terrorism in a land where none existed previously. We believe that Mr Blair, as a vociferous advocate of the invasion, must accept a degree of responsibility for its consequences.”

Also last week, the longest-serving Member of Parliament (the Father of the House), Conservative Sir Peter Tapsell, said there was a “growing sentiment” to impeach Blair for misleading MPs over the 2003 invasion of Iraq. In response, Prime Minister David

Cameron said it was important to wait for the publication of the long-delayed Chilcot Inquiry into the war. The inquiry was due to have been published three years ago and according to the *Guardian* is now “unlikely to be published until next year.”

The angry denunciations of Blair across the political establishment and the media seek to conceal their own responsibility for events in the Middle East. In addition, their concern is that by refusing to accept that the Iraq war was a “mistake” and brazenly profiting from his contacts with dictators, Blair is undermining the very cause both he and they consider vital—the pursuit of further imperialist intervention.



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