

# The Tony Blair Institute's filthy role in planning the ethnic cleansing and “reconstruction” of Gaza

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Earlier this month, the *Financial Times* revealed that two staff members from the Tony Blair Institute (TBI) took part in discussions with the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) about plans to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from Gaza and build a “Trump Riviera” and “Elon Musk Smart Manufacturing Zone”. A group of Israeli businessmen commissioned the plans.

The Right Honourable Sir Tony Blair KG set up the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, to give the organisation its full name, in 2016. He told the *Financial Times* he wanted it to be the go-to consultancy for world leaders, saying “I want [the institute] to be entrepreneurial, agile and give governments good solid advice”.

Its mission statement declares, “Under Tony’s direction, TBI works with political leaders around the world to create real change for their people by advising on strategy, policy and delivery—with technology as an enabler of all three.” The emphasis on technology reflects the interests of one of TBI’s major backers, Larry Ellison, the founder of the computer technology company Oracle. It seeks “to help build more open, inclusive and prosperous countries for people everywhere”.

What this means in practice can be seen from one document written by a TBI staffer submitted to BCG for consideration. It included a proposed “Gaza Riviera” with artificial islands off the coast similar to Dubai’s Palm Island, blockchain-based trade initiatives, a deep-water port that would provide a link in the India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor, and low-tax “special economic zones” that are synonymous with low-wage, exploitative labour conditions.

The document said the devastating war in Gaza had “created a once-in-a-century opportunity to rebuild Gaza from first principles … as a secure, modern prosperous society”—and, of course, one without any Palestinians.

Blair’s Institute at first tried to deny its involvement and then minimised its role in the proposal, pleading that it did not produce or endorse BCG’s final 30-page submission: *The Great Trust: From a Demolished Iranian Proxy to a Prosperous Abrahamic Ally*—“Great” is made an acronym for Gaza Reconstitution, Economic Acceleration and Transformation. BCG has shown the plan to the Trump administration as well as other Middle East governments.

The Boston Consulting Group had also helped establish the Israel- and US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) that delivers a trickle of aid to Gaza, accessible only at the risk of being shot, to legitimise the blocking of all other aid and the systematic starvation of the Palestinians.

The GHF has reportedly drawn up a proposal for establishing camps, which it calls “Humanitarian Transit Areas”, both inside and outside Gaza. From these concentration camps, the Palestinians will then be expelled from the country. The UN has described GHF as a “fig leaf” for Israeli war aims, while humanitarian groups have refused to work with it. Since GHF’s launch in May, Israeli forces have killed more than 800

Palestinians trying to reach its distribution sites.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has denounced the plans for a “humanitarian city”, saying it would be a concentration camp and that forcing Palestinians inside would be ethnic cleansing.

BCG’s work was commissioned as part of the broader, long-term plans of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s fascist government for the ethnic cleansing of Gaza, which used the events of 7 October 2023 as the pretext to implement this objective.

While the BCG, in an attempt to limit the damage to its reputation, announced that two of its senior partners were resigning over their role in the project, and GHF’s chief executive Jake Wood has also resigned, little has been said about the role of the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.

BCG’s proposal is one of several postwar Gaza plans from governments and independent groups that have included the Arab League’s \$53 billion reconstruction programme set out by Egypt in March, as well as those of think-tanks such as Rand.

Together, they shed light on the role of big business, hiding behind think tanks, consulting groups and the like, in the negotiations and discussions over Gaza’s future that masquerade as “peace talks” and are largely invisible to the general public.

## Tony Blair’s legacy as prime minister

Blair vies with his mentor Margaret Thatcher for the position of Britain’s most hated politician because of the crimes committed when he headed the New Labour government of 1997 to 2007, above all his support for the US “global war on terror” against Afghanistan and Iraq, his anti-democratic and authoritarian measures and open commitment to the “free market.”

This unindicted war criminal will go down in history as the man who justified the illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 on the basis of lies and defied mass popular opposition to the war.

His New Labour government did not repeal the Tories’ vicious anti-trade-union legislation; failed to replace the council housing stock sold under Thatcher; kept key public utilities such as rail, energy and water in private ownership; brought in the private sector to finance and run public services; developed a highly punitive welfare system; and further deregulated the financial sector ahead of the 2008 financial crisis.

It set out to complete Thatcher’s counter-revolution, dismantling the post-war welfare state, so long associated with the 1945 Labour government, and moving away from universal welfare provision to means-tested benefits.

Blair oversaw a huge transfer of wealth from working people to big business, with the richest 1,000 people in Britain more than trebling their wealth during his premiership. His right-hand man, Peter Mandelson, now the Starmer government's ambassador to the US, notoriously boasted that the government was “intensely relaxed” about “people getting filthy rich”.

Blair worked closely with the trade union bureaucracy to impose his right-wing economic agenda, including the growth of low-paid employment and casualisation and the evisceration of the welfare state, and to stifle opposition to war.

He boasted about getting the Conservatives' Private Finance Initiative up and running, rebranding it as Public Private Partnerships, handing over much of Britain's public services, including the National Health Service, education, social care and prisons, as well as public infrastructure, to the private sector, providing newly minted corporations with a steady income courtesy of taxpayers' funds. He welcomed overseas oligarchs to tax-haven London, made a playground for the rich and the world's laundromat for dirty money.

There was no challenge to his rule from the “left wing” of the party. He was forced out of office for purely pragmatic reasons after the elections in May 2007 sharply reduced Labour's majority as opposition to the ongoing occupation of Iraq amid mounting casualties soared. He handed over the reins to Gordon Brown, his chancellor for 10 years.

### **Blair's post-Downing Street career: business under the guise of peace envoy**

Following a long line of former prime ministers, Blair went on to build a lucrative new career outside politics—as a peace negotiator, highly paid celebrity speaker and consultant to American, European and Middle Eastern banks and financial houses—accumulating around £60 million in personal wealth. Despite his wealth, Blair and his wife were able to avoid paying £312,000 in tax on London property by acquiring an offshore firm, as revealed in the Pandora Papers in 2021.

On leaving No. 10, he was immediately shoe-horned—with the support of his partner in crime US President George W Bush—into the position of Middle East envoy for the United Nations, European Union, United States and Russia. He was given the task of helping develop the Palestinian economy under Israeli occupation and “improv[ing] governance”, but from the start was seen as too close to the Israeli government.

Crucially, this role allowed him to hobnob with despots throughout the region and in the process cultivate lucrative business contacts.

Blair joined J. P. Morgan in 2008, one of Wall Street's best-known banks, on a salary said to exceed \$1 million a year. He told the *Financial Times* he expected to agree a “small handful” of similar appointments with other companies in different sectors. He said, “I have always been interested in commerce and the impact of globalisation. Nowadays, the intersection between politics and the economy in different parts of the world, including emerging markets, is very strong”.

This, and his other advisory posts which included at Zurich Financial Services on climate change, brought him very handsome financial rewards. His lectures to investment banks, private equity firms and chambers of commerce, reportedly yielding \$250,000 for a 90-minute speech, made him the highest paid speaker in the world in 2008 and enriched his bank balance by £12 million, a sum equal to more than six times his lifetime earnings to that point.

Blair's memoirs, *Tony Blair: A Journey*, published in 2010, became a bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic. In it, he shamelessly defended his support for the Iraq war and said he would do it again.

He defended Dick Cheney, who served as Bush's Vice President from 2001-09 and was the driving force behind the Iraq war. If Cheney had had his way, after the US had brought down Saddam Hussein, they would have gone after the leaders of Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, North Korea, and the whole “Axis of Evil.”

Blair wrote, “He thought the world had to be made anew... by force and with urgency.” He added, “To those on the left, he is an uncomplicated figure of loathing. His attitude terrified and repelled people. But I didn't think it was as fantastical as conventional wisdom opined.” He wrote that you can't just “dismiss” Cheney's view—that the world had to be remade after 9/11.

As well as cashing in on his links with big business, in July 2009 he launched his Faith and Globalisation Initiative with Yale University in the US, Durham University in the UK, the National University of Singapore in Asia and McGill University, Montreal, Canada, to foster globalisation and “greater understanding” between the three “Abrahamic faiths” of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. One of its financial backers was the Milken Family Foundation, set up by Michael Milken, the junk bond king sentenced to 10 years in prison for fraud, which also gave substantial funds to Friends of the Israel Defence Forces and settlements in the West Bank.

### **Blair, the Egyptian revolution and support for al-Sisi**

In the same year, he set up Tony Blair Associates (TBA), modelled on Henry Kissinger Associates, to “allow him to provide, in partnership with others, strategic advice on a commercial and pro bono basis, on political and economic trends and governmental reform”, with the profits from the firm supporting Blair's “work on faith, Africa and climate change”. TBA won a raft of multimillion consultancy contracts with some of the world's most repressive regimes, including Kazakhstan, Kuwait, the UAE and Colombia.

One of his clients was Kazakhstan's notoriously corrupt dictator, Nursultan Nazarbayev. In 2012, he gave damage-limitation advice to Nazarbayev on how to handle criticism following the police killing of 14 and injuring 86 protesting workers in Kazakhstan's oil-producing town of Zhanaozen in December 2011, leading to protests in the eastern Caspian region.

His most controversial client was Egypt's blood-soaked dictator President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi who overthrew Egypt's first democratically elected president, the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Mohammed Morsi, in 2013. The United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia reportedly picked up TBA's tab for proffering advice on how to attract inward investment into Egypt. Blair was reportedly considering opening an office in Abu Dhabi, capital of the UAE, to strengthen his links with the Gulf despots.

According to Blair, “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.”

Al-Sisi's military coup ushered in a brutal dictatorship responsible for the deaths of more than one thousand civilians in the weeks that followed in what became known as the Raba'a massacre in central Cairo, as well as military courts that handed down death sentences to hundreds of prisoners in mass trials that lasted just minutes. Al-Sisi's military junta restored the military-police state as it existed under Hosni Mubarak prior to the 2011 Egyptian revolution, expanded the military's grip on the economy and imprisoned some 60,000 political activists and opponents.

When al-Sisi won the presidency in May 2014 with a 96 percent

majority in a dictator-style election tainted by irregularities, repression of his political opponents and suppression of free speech, Blair was quick to congratulate him on “winning the support of the people.” He said al-Sisi deserved the support of the whole international community.

In his role as Middle East envoy, Blair criticised what he saw as reluctance to engage in Libya following the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime in 2011. He attacked the decision by US President Barack Obama to abandon plans in September 2013 to intervene in Syria directly on the side of Islamist rebels supported by the Gulf states, Turkey, the CIA and Israel, against the Assad government, following the surprise vote against such a move in the British parliament.

After emphasising the role of the West in funding opposition groups with well-documented links to Al Qaida, he lamented bitterly, “We call for the regime to change, we encourage the opposition to rise up, but then when Iran activates Hezbollah on the side of the Assad government, we refrain even from air intervention to give the opposition a chance.”

Despite his supposed mission to help bring about peace between Israel and the Palestinians, he had little to say about Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and its role in spawning conflict throughout the region. In January 2014, he paid tribute to Ariel Sharon—reviled as a war criminal by Palestinians and human rights groups—as “a giant of this land” at the state memorial service for the former Israeli prime minister, the man who bore “personal responsibility” for the massacre of 3,000 Palestinian refugees in the refugee camp of Sabra and Shatila, Beirut, for which he was never held accountable.

Blair’s contract with al-Sisi provoked a storm of protest, with a group of former British ambassadors and political figures joining a campaign for his sacking as Middle East envoy. They cited his defence of military intervention in Iraq and Syria and the conflict of interest between his public position as envoy and his private business dealings in the Middle East.

Under Blair’s watch, the so-called two-state solution became a dead letter; exploration and negotiations with the oil and gas majors over the offshore energy resources and the associated pipelines in the waters opposite Israel and Gaza took place; Israel launched three murderous assaults on Gaza. In the West Bank, the settlements and the number of roadblocks and checkpoints expanded. As criticism increased, Blair finally stepped down in May 2015.

In 2016, Blair folded all his business interests—the Africa Governance Initiative, the Tony Blair Faith Foundation and his Initiative for the Middle East—into a new venture, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (TBI), which now boasts a staff of 900 plus. TBI’s clients have included Azerbaijan, Rwanda and Saudi Arabia, which TBI continued to advise even after the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018.

Blair told the *Financial Times*, “If we don’t work in any country where there are problems of human rights, you’re going to be working with a small list of countries.” TBI has received donations from the US Department of State and Saudi Arabia.

### **Blair, British imperialism and Starmer’s Labour Party**

Blair’s record both during and after his premiership is not simply that of an individual, but of a leader of the Labour Party, whose policies and actions at home and abroad have been shaped for nearly 120 years by its pro-capitalist programme and decades-long history of defending the interests of British imperialism—its corporations and financial institutions.

In October 2015, warning against illusory claims that Jeremy Corbyn’s recently becoming leader of the Labour Party heralded its “left” transformation, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned

It was Labour, and not simply Blair, which backed the second war in Iraq, just as it did the first in 1990, and as it did in Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. Labour MPs did so not because they believed the threat posed by [weapons of mass destruction] WMDs—millions of people saw through Blair’s lies—but because the party has been shaped by its pro-capitalist programme and decades-long history of defending the interests of British imperialism.

MPs voted with Blair because they shared his central aim of securing the global interests of the British bourgeoisie through a military alliance with Washington. Indeed, the issue remains so politically sensitive that in 2012, then Attorney General Dominic Grieve upheld the 2009 veto by then Justice Secretary Jack Straw of any disclosure of Cabinet meeting minutes from 2003 when Iraq was discussed.

In 2011, just 11 Labour MPs voted against participation in the war against Libya, with supporters employing identical “humanitarian” rhetoric as was used to justify the devastating assault on Iraq.

The election of Corbyn changes nothing fundamental in this regard.

History records that any leader who is seen to conflict with Labour’s fundamental imperialist orientation either faces being replaced, as was George Lansbury in 1935 at the instigation of the Trades Union Congress, or will be obliged to abandon their pacifist pretensions as did Michael Foot in 1982 over the Falklands/Malvinas.”

This warning was confirmed, with Corbyn betraying all those who entrusted him with waging a political struggle against the Blairites and instead preparing the way for their return to power under Keir Starmer.

Less than a year after he became Labour Party leader, on August 5, 2021, Starmer told the *Financial Times* of his vow to “turn the Labour party inside out,” and “urging activists to embrace Tony Blair’s political legacy to help the UK’s main opposition party win the next election. He said it was vital to demonstrate that Labour was not a party of protest but was serious about winning power—and that meant being ‘very proud’ of what it achieved under Blair and his successor as prime minister Gordon Brown when it was last in office.” He did so because he was “acutely aware that among my first tasks is rebuilding the relationship between the Labour party and business.”

Today, as grotesque as is Blair’s involvement in the filthy work of drawing up plans for a post-genocide Gaza, it is more than matched by his disciple Starmer, who is deploying Britain’s military and intelligence resources to facilitate the ethnic cleansing necessary for the realisation of Blair’s vision and mobilising the state apparatus to repress domestic opposition in a way that Blair could only dream of.



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