

# Tony Blair: 'I Cried For Iraq War Victims'

BY JILL LAWLESS  
Associated Press Writer

LONDON — Tony Blair regrets banning fox hunting, but not invading Iraq. He was captivated by Princess Diana, intimidated by Queen Elizabeth II. He heaps praise on President George W. Bush but calls his close colleague Gordon Brown a man of "zero" emotional intelligence. He acknowledges that some find him delusional, and says he possibly drank a bit too much.

Blair's long-awaited memoir hit bookstores Wednesday, and the revealing, self-justifying 700-page volume provides plenty of fodder for the former British leader's supporters — and detractors.

The former British prime minister was paid a 4 million pound (\$7 million) advance for "A Journey," which recounts his voyage from political neophyte to youthful prime minister to admired, and then reviled, statesman.

Iraq is his most divisive legacy, but Blair says he is not sorry for his decision to enter the U.S.-led war — although he wept for his victims. He is donating all proceeds from the book to a charity for wounded troops.

"I ... regret with every fiber of my being the loss of those who died," Blair writes. "Tears, though there have been many, do not encompass it."

But, he adds, "on the basis of what we do know now, I still believe that leaving Saddam in power was a bigger risk to our security than removing him."

"I can't regret the decision to go to war," he says, although he admits that "never did I guess the nightmare that unfolded" once Saddam was gone.

He knows his position is unpopular: "Friends opposed to the war think I'm being obstinate; others, less friendly, think I'm delusional."

The book was selling briskly in British stores Wednesday and was No. 1 on Amazon's British best-seller list, though it was struggling to break the top 100 in the United States.

It also drew a protest by peace activists outside a London store. Lindsey German of the Stop The War Coalition branded Blair a war criminal and said the book was "trying to justify the unjustifiable."

Blair, 57, stepped down in June 2007 after a decade that included a historic peace accord in Northern Ireland, the deeply unpopular war in Iraq and the continuing conflict in Afghanistan.

For many Americans, he remains a valued ally who stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the U.S. in the fight against international terrorism. He's scheduled to receive the 2010 Liberty Medal from former President Bill

Clinton in Philadelphia on Sept. 13.

At home, he is a more polarizing figure. Swept to power in 1997 on a wave of popular enthusiasm, Blair left office a decade later condemned by many over Iraq and viewed as a liability by much of his own Labour Party.

"A Journey" gives a strong defense of his policies. One of the few Blair says he regrets is the ban on fox hunting, which caused outrage among many people in the countryside.

"I didn't feel how, for fox hunters, this was part of their way of life," he says. "The passions aroused by the issue were primeval."

In Britain, the book's most analyzed sections concern Blair's relationship with Gordon Brown, who was his partner in the Labour Party's 1990s modernization, served as Treasury chief and then succeeded Blair as prime minister. Brown was leader for three years before losing an election in May that brought a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition to power.

Blair says he felt that the prickly Brown "was going to be a disaster" as leader.

"Gordon is a strange guy," Blair writes — "strong, capable and brilliant," but also "difficult, at times maddening."

"Political calculation, yes. Political feelings, no. Analytical intelligence, absolutely. Emotional intelligence, zero."

In contrast, former President George W. Bush is praised as intelligent, a friend and "a true idealist."

"I was asked recently which of the political leaders I had met had most integrity: I listed George near the top," Blair says.

Blair compares the fight against Islamist extremism to the Cold War and says the struggle in Afghanistan and elsewhere must go on for "as long as is necessary" — possibly decades.

He calls the Guantanamo bay detention camp for terrorist suspects — condemned by civil libertarians — "a policy that was both understandable and, done in a different way, justifiable," although he says it was handled "almost in the most provocative way possible."

"A Journey" offers insights into the famous and powerful, including the observation that Nelson Mandela is not a saint and could be mischievous and blunt on occasion.

Blair said Mandela can be "as fly as hell when the occasion demands," using youthful slang to describe the elderly leader.

Blair recounts awkward interactions with the queen in the aftermath of Diana's death, when support for the British monarchy was at a low ebb. Blair

said he tried to get the queen to make a public statement and worried that she found him "presumptuous." For his part, he said the queen "assumed a certain hauteur."

But the monarch had her domestic side. Blair recounts how during a week-end barbecue at the royal family's Balmoral estate — "a vivid combination of the intriguing, the surreal and the utterly freaky" — Prince Philip did the cooking while the queen donned rubber gloves and washed the dishes.

Diana was easier to get along with, an "extraordinarily captivating" woman. Blair says he warned her he had bad feelings about her boyfriend, Dodi Fayed. "Dodi Fayed was a problem," he says, though he admits he was at a loss to say exactly why. "I felt uneasy."

Diana and Dodi were killed in a Paris car crash in August 1997. Blair's memorial speech, calling her the "people's princess," caught the public mood perfectly and helped cement his popularity at the time.

Elsewhere, Blair speaks of his relationship with alcohol, saying he drank a whisky or a gin and tonic before dinner, and a "couple of glasses of wine or even half a bottle with it."

"I had a limit," he says. "But I was aware it had become a prop" — though, on balance, he thinks booze did him more good than harm.

## Cambodia Boasts Plans For Asia's Tallest Building

BY SOPHENG CHEANG  
Associated Press Writer

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Impoverished Cambodia plans to build a 1,820-foot (555-meter) skyscraper, its prime minister said Wednesday, a feat that would give one of the region's least-developed capitals the tallest building in Asia.

Prime Minister Hun Sen said he had approved a master plan for the skyscraper, which would be located about half a mile (one kilometer) from the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh — a dusty city of colonial villas, slums and one standout skyscraper, the recently completed Cambodia Tower that is about 377 feet (115 meters) high.

Hun Sen did not say when construction would start, how much it would cost or give any other details, except that it would be built by a Cambodian company, Overseas Cambodia

Investment Corp., owned by tycoon Pung Khiev Se.

The company's project manager, Touch Samnang, said preliminary estimates suggest the building would cost \$200 million, but the project was being studied by experts and government ministries. He said it would include a shopping mall, hotel, apartments and an entertainment center.

That figure is dwarfed by the sum for what is currently Asia's tallest building, the Taipei 101 in Taiwan. Rising 1,667 feet (508 meters), it cost about \$1.6 billion. It had been the world's tallest since 2004 but was overtaken in January when Dubai unveiled the Burj Khalifa, which rises 2,717 feet (828 meters) from the desert.

Cambodia, whose commerce is tiny by international standards, has been experiencing a real estate bubble for the past few years, but several ambitious construction projects have been delayed or suspended.

## Polish Leader: War Costs Slow Army's Modernization

BY SLOBODAN LEKIC  
Associated Press Writer

BRUSSELS — Poland's president said Wednesday the rising cost of the war in Afghanistan is hampering a program to modernize the military.

Bronislaw Komorowski reiterated that Poland remains committed to the NATO-led war effort in Afghanistan, but also called on the allies to set an exit strategy for the military campaign there.

Poland spends some \$1 billion annually — or about 10 percent of its defense budgets — to finance its 2,600-member contingent that serves in Afghanistan. This comes at a time when the 100,000-strong Polish armed

forces are in the midst of a wide-ranging program designed to replace aging Soviet-made equipment.

"The costs of out-of-area operations are so significant, that they are having an effect on the process of technical modernization of the armed forces," Komorowski said after a meeting with NATO's Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

The program includes the purchase of new armored personnel carriers and multiple-rocket launchers for the army, corvettes for the navy, and unmanned drones and C-130 Hercules transport planes for the air force.

Other NATO members also have been forced to juggle their budget priorities because of the war. Defense budgets in nearly all nations of the military alliance are being slashed as part of public spending cuts and other austerity measures designed to deal with the impact of the economic crisis.

Many governments are also facing public opposition to the war in Afghanistan.

"We should define clearly a strategy of putting an end to the military engagement in Afghanistan," Komorowski said.

Fogh Rasmussen praised the Polish contribution in Afghanistan, and noted that Polish troops serve in one of the

most dangerous parts of the country. Twenty Polish soldiers have died so far in the war.

Fogh Rasmussen said he hopes NATO-led troops can start transferring responsibility for security to the Afghan security forces next year.

"We have endorsed (Afghan President Hamid) Karzai's ambition that Afghan security forces should take over lead responsibility for security all over Afghanistan by the end of 2014, and I hope this process will start next year," he said.

"We will stay committed as long as it takes to finish our job (but) obviously that is not forever," Fogh Rasmussen said.



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