

press release

THE BLAIR DECADE (W.T.), A DEFINITIVE DOCUMENTARY ON A STAUNCH U.S. ALLY, PROVIDES TELLING INSIGHT INTO A POPULAR AND CONTROVERSIAL PRIME MINISTER AS TONY BLAIR'S TENURE AT 10 DOWNING STREET WINDS TO A CLOSE, PREMIERING MAY 23 ON PBS

Includes Interviews With Former White House Chief Of Staff Andrew Card, Former Defense Secretary William Cohen, Democratic Pollster Stan Greenberg, Former British Conservative Party Leader William Hague, British Ambassador Sir David Manning, Former U.S. Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, Secretary Of State Condoleezza Rice, And Former British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw

As he's done time and again during nearly a decade in office, British Prime Minister Tony Blair commanded the world's attention during the recent diplomatic tug of war with Iran over the safe return of British sailors and marines captured in contested waterways. With the captives heading home, a tough-talking Blair amended his generally conciliatory tone, telling reporters, "...there are elements, at least, of the Iranian regime that are backing, financing, arming, supporting terrorism in Iraq." Once again, Blair – international statesman – seized the moment.

This May marks the 10th anniversary of Blair's election as Britain's prime minister. As he prepares to depart 10 Downing Street, ***THE BLAIR DECADE*** tells the story of a controversial premiership and an extraordinary personal journey, of great battles, political rivalries and moral dilemmas. The two-hour program, which premieres Wednesday, May 23 at 9 p.m. (ET) on PBS (8 p.m. in New York; check local listings), provides the first authoritative television analysis of Blair's decade in office and the legacy he leaves to his presumptive successor – and longtime rival – Chancellor Gordon Brown.

"On Tony Blair's 10th anniversary as prime minister, this documentary looks back on a

rollercoaster record of political successes and public controversies. While he's unpopular at home, Blair is hailed for his courage and leadership abroad," says executive producer Stephen Segaller. "We tell the inside story of how Blair led the most successful Labour Party government in history through interviews with some of the leading figures in British and U.S. politics – the people who were in the room as decisions were debated, arguments thrashed out, and careers made or broken."

THE BLAIR DECADE details the prime minister's relationship with two U.S. presidents – Bill Clinton and George W. Bush – his foreign policy accomplishments and his most controversial decisions.

In his first year as prime minister, Blair helped secure the historic and long-sought 1998 Good Friday peace accord that largely ended three decades of violence in Northern Ireland. As the 10th year of his premiership ends, the Northern Ireland Assembly will meet, capping the peace process in the province.

A proponent of "humanitarian intervention," Blair ordered British troops into battle a record number of five times in his first six years at Number 10. Blair committed British troops to Kosovo because it was "the right thing to do" – persuading Clinton along the way. In the face of the largest street demonstrations in his country's history, he nonetheless supported Bush's 2003 invasion of Iraq and continues to defend Britain's costly involvement.

In *THE BLAIR DECADE*, numerous past and present American and British leaders discuss Blair's strong personal and political beliefs. According to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, President Bush himself cautioned Blair against sacrificing his premiership to back the Iraq war. "I remember a phone conversation that they had," Rice says in the film. "And Prime Minister Blair saying, 'No, I told you that I'm with you, and I'm going to be with you.'"

By sacrificing much of his domestic agenda for an unpopular U.S. ally and a war that grinds on, Tony Blair, international statesman, became more lauded than Tony Blair, prime minister.

THE BLAIR DECADE also covers Blair's formative years, his entrance into politics and the role of his powerful barrister wife Cherie Booth, while providing a chronological narrative of his 10 years in power.

In 1997, the revamped New Labour Party won the general election by a landslide, breaking 18 years of Conservative rule. At 43, Blair – credited with coining the term “New Labour” and completing his party's shift towards the political center – became the youngest prime minister since Lord Liverpool in 1812. He was in power barely three months when Princess Diana, “the people's princess,” died in a car accident in Paris. At a time of profound national mourning, Blair secured his reputation for being in tune with the popular mood.

Blair was elected to a second easy victory a few months before 9/11 and he is credited in the film with understanding the geo-political significance of the terrorist act and of forming a tight bond with Bush, despite their profound differences of underlying political vision.

The film also addresses the July 7, 2005 terrorist attacks on London's public transportation system, which occurred a day after the city was awarded the 2012 Olympics and as the G-8 summit was getting underway in Scotland. Many Britons blamed Blair for the attacks, which they suggested were in retaliation for the country's involvement in Iraq. The on-going debate over flawed intelligence on WMDs has contributed to a growing distrust of Blair in his homeland as his political reign draws to an end.

THE BLAIR DECADE premieres in May, as Blair marks the 10-year anniversary of his first election as prime minister. The film closes on the remaining questions over his impending resignation – and his ultimate legacy.

THE BLAIR DECADE is a co-production of Brook Lapping and Thirteen/WNET New York in association with Channel 4 UK. Anne Lapping is executive producer, Rob Coldstream is series director and Sally Brindle is series producer. For Thirteen/WNET, Stephen Segaller is executive producer, and Paul Mitchell of Wilton Films is writer and producer.

.....

Thirteen/WNET New York is one of the key program providers for public television, bringing such acclaimed series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *American Masters*, *Charlie Rose*, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, *Wide Angle*, *Secrets of the Dead*, *NOW With David Brancaccio*, and *Cyberchase* – as well as the work of Bill Moyers – to audiences nationwide. As the flagship public broadcaster in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut metro area, Thirteen reaches millions of viewers each week, airing the best of American public television along with its own local productions such as *The Ethnic Heritage Specials*, *The Thirteen Walking Tours*, *New York Voices*, and *Reel New York*. Thirteen extends the impact of its television productions through educational and community outreach projects – including the *Celebration of Teaching and Learning* – as well as Web sites and other digital media platforms. More information can be found at: www.thirteen.org.

.....

Press Contact:

Kellie Specter

Thirteen/WNET New York
212.560.3009
specter@thirteen.org

Deirdre Branley

Thirteen/WNET New York
212.560.3130
branley@thirteen.org