

The Brighton Bomb Kills Margaret Thatcher

Heseltine policy would become even worse under a high-spending, unreformed Labour government that was blackmailed back into a fixed-exchange-rate system, with its resulting inflexibilities.

A defeat in 1992 for the Tories could well have seen them back in power by 1996 or 1997. The two landslide defeats of 1997 and 2001 would probably never have happened. John Major would probably never have happened either, with the party looking at someone like Michael Portillo – then still ostensibly a right-wing Eurosceptic – to lead them after Heseltine's departure.

Yet the ultimate price paid for Mrs Thatcher's death in 1984 would have been the failure to complete her programme, and therefore the failure to impress upon the Labour Party that it needed to respect the new consensus she had forged. Britain would have been set as a highly taxed, inefficient country like modern France, Germany or Japan, inadequately using its human and capital resources. That, and the increasing failure of Britain to make its way in a world ruled by economic methods and political forces that a deep-seated Keynesian and European like Heseltine simply could not come to grips with, would have been his disastrous legacy.

The Chads Fall Off in Florida

David Frum

Presidential Emergency Operations Center,
Underneath the White House
11 September 2001, 11.43 a.m.

The voice of President Al Gore is heard through a speakerphone, over the noise of the engines of Air Force One.

President Gore: 'So what do we know?'

National Security Adviser Leon Fuerth: 'It's got al Qaeda's fingerprints all over it. Positive identification will have to wait for more information, but for now, we must assume that this is a bin Laden job.'

Gore: 'Like the Cole – and the embassy bombings in '98.'

Fuerth: 'Yes sir.'

Gore: 'I suppose this time we'll actually have to do something?'

Fuerth: 'I'm afraid so, sir.'

Gore: 'Kind of makes you feel bad that we dusted off Sudan's offer to finger him to the CIA.'

Fuerth: 'No sir, that was the right call. The Sudanese wanted us to come in guns blazing and scoop him up the way the French scooped up Carlos the Jackal. But what about bin Laden's wives and children? They could have been hurt. And besides, our evidence against him would not have stood up in a court of law. Intelligence materials are not admissible in criminal cases, and if we'd tried to change that rule, all the civil liberties organisations would have squawked. You pride yourself on your civil liberties record, Mr President. So what would you have done with the Sudanese information? Assassinate him? We discussed that again and again in the 1990s,

Mr President, and we agreed that while it was OK if bin Laden got killed in the course of military action, it was not OK to deliberately target him. We can't allow ourselves to stoop to French tactics, Mr President.'

Gore: 'No, I suppose not. So what are our options now?'

Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke: 'We've drafted a very tough resolution which we can send to the Security Council immediately. It condemns terrorism in unequivocal terms, and urges the government of Afghanistan immediately to surrender bin Laden and the leadership of al Qaeda to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.'

Gore: 'Good thing we ratified that treaty this spring – otherwise I don't know who'd have jurisdiction to try bin Laden. What's the maximum sentence the ICC can impose?'

Holbrooke: 'Twenty-five years – subject to time off for good behaviour of course. But I have to warn you sir, there may be some evidentiary problems.'

Gore: 'What kind of problems?'

Holbrooke: 'Well the Taliban say that they will only surrender bin Laden if we can assure them that his trial will be in accordance with the principles of Islamic law. That means non-Muslims will not be able to testify. Fortunately, Solicitor General Laurence Tribe has a keen interest in non-Western spirituality, and he has indicated he would be willing to convert to Islam in order to advance the case.'

Gore: 'Good man. But what if we can't win a conviction in the ICC? I mean, some of those Swedish judges – they can be kind of permissive.'

Secretary of Defense Wesley Clark: 'Yes sir. The Joint Chiefs are working on military options right now. I've asked them to work out a plan to capture bin Laden and his henchmen using non-lethal munitions. We're assembling a broad multi-lateral coalition to go into Afghanistan if need be. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has proposed some excellent candidates to command the expedition: he highly recommends Gen. Obasawo Okobogo of Senegal – Okobogo is

a devout Muslim, so we can count on him to respect local cultural sensitivities.'

Gore: 'How big a force would we need?'

Clark: 'Well sir, we don't want to take any chances. I think we can learn from our mistakes in Kosovo...'

Holbrooke: 'Your mistakes...'

Clark: '... and send ample ground forces. The Joint Chiefs have prepared a plan to send five divisions into Afghanistan, backed by combat aircraft, tanks, self-propelled howitzers and lots and lots of supplies. The earliest it could arrive would be about February 2002. That's the middle of the dreaded Afghan winter, so I recommend we wait until early April, just to be on the safe side.'

Environmental Protection Agency head Carol Browner: 'Mr President, if I may –'

Gore: 'Yes, Carol.'

Browner: 'Sir, you issued an executive order the day after your Inaugural requiring that all proposed military operations undergo environmental review. If we put a force of five divisions into the field in Afghanistan, not to mention all that heavy equipment, we are going to way, way exceed our CO₂ limits for the year.'

Gore: 'That's a serious problem.'

Secretary of the Treasury George Soros: 'Not necessarily, Mr President – we just have to cut back on CO₂ emissions here at home. Before this attack, we were talking about a seventy-five-cent a gallon hike in the gasoline tax. Make it a dollar instead. That will force a drastic reduction in emissions – and we can always use the cash.'

Gore: 'Excellent George, thank you. Listen up everybody: whatever we do, I want this to be the first environmentally sensitive war in history. Wes, you make sure our troops know: they're to watch out for migratory birds when they march. And no littering!'

Clark: 'Yes sir.'

Gore: 'What about the home front? What are we doing to

find if there are any other al Qaeda cells on our soil?’

Attorney General Vernon Jordan: ‘Everything we can, sir, within the limits of your executive order banning the use of ethnic, religious, racial, or national origins profiling. We’ve got 15,000 FBI agents at work; they’re starting with everybody in the country whose last name begins with “A” and working downward through the alphabet.’

Gore: ‘That’s good. But I worry that there are a lot of Arabic names that begin with A – you know, Abu this and that. Could have an unintended differential impact. Why don’t we start with the Zs and work our way up?’

Jordan: ‘Yes, sir.’

Gore: ‘Now, these are bold actions: We’re going to need to keep Congress informed and involved. Donna – are you lining up the congressional leaders?’

Donna Brazile, Chief of Staff: ‘Yes, sir. Leaders of both parties have offered their full support. They’re ready to do whatever you ask.’

Gore: ‘Great. Tell them we’ll be sending up our plan for universal health insurance next week.’

Brazile: ‘Sir? Um, I’m not sure that’s exactly the kind of request Congress is expecting. They were thinking more along the lines of, you know, increases to the defence budget...’

Gore: ‘Arms are for hugging. We can’t let this historic moment lapse into just another bonanza for the military-industrial complex. Besides, thousands of people have probably been injured or wounded today. Many thousands more have suffered psychological trauma. I can’t think of a better way to respond to these terrorists than by assuring all those wounded – and all those traumatised – that their government is ready to take care of them, and everyone else who is ill, frightened or unhappy.’

Brazile: ‘Sir, I agree – but the votes just won’t be there in Congress.’

Gore: ‘The votes will be there after I address the nation

tonight. You know the effect I have on the American people. When I speak, they will rally. I’ll be back in Washington by nightfall. Book time on the networks; I’ll need about an hour. I’ll talk about national security and health security and environmental security – how they’re really all one issue. Get my writers on the job.’

Brazile: ‘There’s another problem.’

Gore: ‘Jeez, Donna, I pay you to solve problems.’

Brazile: ‘Sir, if you can find somebody who can solve this problem, you fire me and hire her. It’s Clinton.’

Gore: ‘That bitch. What’s she done now?’

Brazile: ‘Not her – her husband. He’s up in New York City – and he’s been on TV all day. Explaining how hard he worked to prevent this kind of terrorist attack, how focused he was on terrorism through his Administration, how he tried to advise you, how you’re doing your best, how much confidence he has that you’ll rise to this crisis...’

Gore: ‘Fuck him too. So what’s the problem?’

Brazile: ‘Well the networks kind of feel ... that after so many hours of Clinton, maybe people will feel they have heard enough from...’

Gore: ‘He’s not the President – I am the President.’

Brazile: ‘Absolutely, sir, no question about that sir, everyone knows that sir. He says he is just trying to be helpful, to fill in until you decide it is safe for you to return to the capital, because your top priority has to be your personal safety.’

Gore (incredulous, furious): ‘He said that to you?’

Brazile (anxious): ‘Yes sir. And to NBC, ABC, CBS, CNN, MSNBC, BBC, al-Jazeera, German TV, French TV – not Fox though. He says he won’t talk to just anybody.’

Gore: ‘Vernon?’

Jordan: ‘Yes, Mr President?’

Gore: ‘Have we got anything on the books that would allow us to lock up former president Clinton for a week or two? Maybe a month?’

Jordan: ‘I’ll look into it.’

Fuerth: 'Sir, if I may: there are some other issues to think about as well. We can't rule out that Saddam Hussein may use the six or seven months till our expeditionary force lands in Afghanistan to make mischief. Would you like me to prepare some options?'

Gore: 'No. Leave Iraq out of it. You know how Chirac feels about Iraq. Just the last time I talked with him he said Iraq was indispensable to economic security.'

Clark: 'France's economic security?'

Gore: 'No, *his* economic security – and this is no moment to start alienating good friends like Jacques Chirac. We've got to bring them along gradually. Let's leave Iraq for Hillary in '09. She's welcome to it.'

Laughter.

Gore: 'OK. What else?'

Brazile: 'We're placing calls to Mayor Giuliani and Governor Pataki – they'll talk as soon as they are able. Alan Greenspan tells us that he's pumping plenty of liquidity into the financial system now – he's confident that the markets and the dollar can weather this blow, but he's keeping a careful eye on Japan and Europe.'

Gore: 'We're going to do everything we can for New York City. This is no time to count pennies. Just make sure that Senator Schumers gets credit for everything. We don't want a certain junior senator grabbing the spotlight. Then I want to talk to the allies: Blair, Chirac, Schroeder, Putin, line them all up for me. Anything else?'

Brazile: 'Tipper's waiting to talk to you – she wants you to know she's safe.'

Gore: 'Thank God. Kiss her for me.'

Brazile: 'Sir, I think that's your department.'

Fuerth: 'Sir, have you thought about what you will say to the allies?'

Gore: 'Yes. I'm going to assure them that we're going to act boldly – but that we're not going to take any crazy risks. They all know me. They know what to expect from me. No

surprises. No adventures. Steady as she goes.'

Fuerth: 'They'll like that. I'll get it set up. Next: what about Iran? They've left fingerprints on almost every major anti-American terrorist attack since the early 1980s. We can't make any assumptions about their role here. A lot of our people think that the reason the Iranians are working so hard to develop nuclear missiles is to buy themselves impunity if they're caught in terrorist acts like this one.'

Gore: 'I'm not saying Iran is not a problem. We just have to wait for the threat to become imminent – the way we waited for the threat from bin Laden to become imminent before we took action against him.'

Clark: 'Strictly speaking, sir, the threat from bin Laden is a little bit more than imminent now.'

Gore: 'Fair point. You can't time these things precisely. But I think we can all agree – and I know our European allies will agree – that when it comes to Iraq and Iran, and all the rest, it's better to be a little too late than a little too early. I'll explain that in my speech too. I want to stress the complexities of the situation. I want to tell the nations of the world that they can be with us, or they can be with the terrorists, or they can be somewhere in between. I want to say that we regard these acts as wrong, but we understand that others may take a different view. By the way, can anybody think of a less harsh word than "wrong"? You know how moralistic language upsets the Europeans.'

Vice President Joe Lieberman: 'Mr President, I don't think we should be shy about using the word "wrong". There is a moral dimension to this problem.'

Gore: 'Absolutely. You're right. And I'm not shy. But Joe, remember, we have to make our case convincing to the whole world. To people with many different value systems. While of course expressing our own severe condemnation. Perhaps we could say that we regard these attacks as ... "inappropriate".'

Lieberman: 'Inappropriate?'

Gore: (musingly): 'Yeah. We'll want to get the speech-writers on it, but we could say something like, "We urge all the nations of the world to join us in expressing their firm disapproval of these inappropriate acts. These inappropriate acts didn't just harm America; they threaten the peace and security of the whole world." This isn't just America's fight; it's everybody's fight. We want everybody in – and we're prepared to do what everybody says.'

Holbrooke: 'Very eloquent sir!'

Gore: 'Thanks. But as we think about how we're going to present our case to the world, there's a sensitive issue we have to deal with. We're going to need the goodwill and support of the Islamic world. It's vitally important that we respect Muslim sensitivities. And Joe ...'

Lieberman: 'Yes, Mr President?'

Gore: 'There are a lot of Muslims who think my administration is, well, too Jewish. There's you, there's Leon, there's George, there's Wes ...'

Clark: 'Only half, Mr President!'

Gore: 'Try telling that to the Saudis, Wes. And of course there's Holbrooke ...'

Holbrooke (outraged): 'Mr President!'

Gore: 'Don't worry, Richard, your secret is safe with me. But Joe: I'm going to have to ask you to lie low for a little while. We're going to send you to an undisclosed location – not for long, just a few weeks, maybe a couple of months. Just until I've regained the trust of our Muslim friends.'

Lieberman: 'Mr President, shouldn't we worry a little more about their need to regain our trust?'

Gore: 'I understand how you feel, Joe. But this is no time for jingoism. It's a time for healing. Our top priority right now is to understand why these people are so angry at us – and maybe find some way to assuage that anger. We're going to go to work right away on a plan to create a Palestinian state – maybe also to return East Timor to Indonesia and Spain back to Syria. We may have forgotten that Spain used

to be ruled from Damascus – but they haven't. And they're still humiliated by the loss.'

Browner: 'Mr President, may I interject here? If I hear you correctly, you're saying there's a crucial psychological dimension to this attack.'

Gore: 'That's right.'

Browner: 'It's kind of like the point you make in your book *Earth in the Balance* about the trauma of the gifted child –'

Holbrooke (rapidly, over-eagerly): 'On page 228.'

Browner: 'You begin life with all this potential and all these expectations –'

Gore: 'Yes, yes, that's exactly right.'

Browner: 'that you inwardly feel you can never live up to –'

Gore: 'This is good.'

Browner: 'and yet you are terrified of letting down your parents –'

Gore: 'Yes! Yes!'

Browner: 'And so you suffer all these doubts, feelings of unworthiness. You act out in unacceptable ways – to try to defy those expectations – but that only intensifies your feelings of unworthiness. Maybe the whole Muslim world is feeling like they have somehow not lived up to their potential and they have to lash out at us. And maybe the most important thing we can do right now is show them that our love and support are unconditional – that they don't have to behave in these unacceptable ways to get our attention – and then help them work through these feelings.'

Gore: 'Carol, if I hear you right, you're saying that this all really comes down to communications issues?'

Browner: 'Yes sir.'

Gore: 'That's really really interesting. People, isn't that interesting?'

All: 'Yes sir! Very interesting sir!'

Gore: 'So where do we take this?'

Browner: 'Well sir, I remember during the campaign that

you once said that you thought that just as we had a National Security Council and a National Economic Council, perhaps we also needed a National Psychological Council that could bring together experts in emotional and gender issues. Maybe this is the right time to get it going. This is a moment when we're going to have to help the American people get past their – justified – feelings of anger and vengefulness. We're going to have to help Islamic people get past their feelings – and we're going to need the best brains out there to tell us how to do it.'

Gore: 'Carol, I love this. I think this is exactly the message the country needs to hear now. Not lashing out – reaching out. Not blaming – understanding. You know I'm not a religious man. But after I won the recount, I thought – this election was so close – it could have gone either way – I didn't get here on my own. God wanted me in this job. But why? I kept turning and turning the question over in my mind. And now I know: I'm here to give our generation a second chance to stand up for our principles – to wage peace, to show understanding, to be the kind of America the world wants us to be.

All right, I think that wraps things up. Anything else you need to tell me before I talk to Tipper?'

Brazile: 'Oh yes – Governor Bush called. He wants you to know that he's praying for you.'

Gore: 'I bet he is. Jesus. Bush. I wonder if he can even find Afghanistan on the map. Can't you just imagine the mess he'd make if he were sitting in this chair right now?'

Brazile: 'Yeah. Thank God for Florida.'

All: 'Amen.'

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