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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Tony's here to help — at a price

The former PM has built a fortune, but his methods lack transparency

Jon Ungeod-Thomas and Mark Hollingsworth Published: 7 March 2015



Tony Blair is a regular guest at the Emirates Palace Hotel Photograph: Lonely Planet Images - Getty

FOUR weeks after he stood down as prime minister in June 2007, Tony Blair flew into the searing temperatures of Abu Dhabi in his new role as Middle East special envoy. A dinner was hosted by the ruling family to mark his prestigious and crucial new diplomatic role.

Blair appeared in relaxed mood and among those he met was Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan, the country's foreign minister. The pair have since spoken on several occasions on the Middle East crisis.

A document obtained by The Sunday Times, however, reveals a significant, previously undisclosed potential conflict of interest: al-Nahyan was also a potential client.

[To read the documents click here](#)

In the document Blair's private consultancy, Tony Blair Associates (TBA), proposes a five-year commercial partnership with the foreign affairs ministry with the "explicit intention" to extend it.

In a personal appeal, Blair writes: "As with any country, there are from time to time issues or problems that arise and require fixing. These could be diplomatic or commercial or even relational challenges. We stand ready to offer our help in solving these issues."

It is help that comes at a price. A well-informed source said the value of the proposed contract would have been between £25m and £35m, potentially TBA's biggest deal.

Blair has amassed the biggest fortune of any previous prime minister and his commercial and philanthropic interests — dubbed Blair Inc — stretch from the United States to China. Blair says he devotes most of his time to his Middle East role and his philanthropic work, which includes the African Governance Initiative and the Tony Blair Faith Foundation.

He faces calls, however, to stand down as the representative of the Quartet — comprising the United Nations, the European Union, the United States and Russia — because of his private interests in the region and potential conflicts of interest.



Meeting the foreign minister, heikh Abdullah bin ayed Al ahyan Photograph:Emirates ews Agency

Andrew Bridgen, the Conservative MP who tabled a parliamentary motion in January calling for former prime ministers to be bound by the principles of public life, known as the Nolan principles, which include transparency and accountability, said: “The Middle East is on fire and he is relentlessly cashing in on his contacts. This is damaging to Britain’s reputation and he should now stand down as the Middle East envoy.”

Blair’s office said yesterday that the document obtained by the Sunday Times — dated September 2014 — was “out of date” and had not been cleared by Blair. It said there are separate discussions about Blair’s work with the country, but he would never take any paid work which conflicted with his Quartet role.

Abu Dhabi has been a profitable destination for Blair. He already has a contract with Mubadala, the state-owned investment fund, and has been a regular guest at the Emirates Palace Hotel, which serves £16 cappuccinos with a topping of gold flakes. He offered to spend between two and three days a week in Abu Dhabi as part of the proposed deal.

Blair’s commercial activities are usually conducted in strict secrecy. The complex corporate structure of his organisation — a small network of companies and

partnerships called Firerush and Windrush — restrict public scrutiny of his clients and earnings.

The confidential 25-page document is extraordinary because it details the global reach and ambition of Blair’s empire and reveals his willingness to exploit his unrivalled network of contacts and even his philanthropic activities for commercial ends.

In a foreword to the letter of proposal, Blair states: “There is virtually nowhere in the world right now where we could not work or provide the necessary contacts either politically or commercially, should we want to.”

“All my various organisations are based on the belief that the world today basically works through connectivity. So we’re building a series of deep business and government connections round the world. We do both business and philanthropy.”



An extract from Blair’s proposed five-year commercial deal

“We are present in around 25 different countries. We have teams of people on the ground working with governments, in 10 African countries and 10 outside Africa. We have offers to work in around 10 more. If we add in the Faith Foundation work, it would be over 50.”

The document says a five-year contract would involve strategic advice; sponsored projects in other countries, including Colombia and Vietnam; and linking United Arab Emirates (UAE) investors and companies to business opportunities overseas. It says the work could help to consolidate relations with China, where Blair has a wide range of contacts.

It continues: “Achieving these high aspirations will require significant commitment, including the intense direct involvement of Tony Blair, a local team (and office) based in Abu Dhabi, additional support from our London-based teams and full use of our global network.”

The UAE can, says the document, extend its network by “introductions via Tony Blair and Tony Blair Associates’ network”. It says a four-person team based in the country will be supported by a “corporate and institutional team” in London. This team, it adds, has extensive contacts in the financial industry and “works with multinational corporations from both mature and emerging economies as they look to expand into new territories”.

In return, the UAE would be expected to provide “an

office for Mr Blair”, as well as multiple visas for his team and “appropriate catering”.

According to the document, the work would be overseen by Dr Andreas Baumgartner, a former McKinsey consultant and senior TBA partner who is based in Abu Dhabi.

While the proposal states that Blair and his consultancy have enjoyed “close co-operation” with the UAE foreign affairs ministry in the past, it is not clear in what capacity as it does not detail any previous commercial arrangements. It is known, however, that Blair’s role as an adviser to the Serbian government is being paid for by the UAE government.

The proposal also lays bare the strict secrecy under which TBA operates. It is marked “confidential” on every page and states that it cannot be “photocopied, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form” without TBA’s prior consent.

Surprisingly, there is no reference in the documents to improving the UAE's human rights record, despite criticism from organisations such as Human Rights Watch. It says in one report: "The [UAE] has continued to arbitrarily detain individuals it perceives as threats to national security. UAE security forces continued to torture detainees in pre-trial detention."

The UAE has been keen to improve its image and is supportive of the Global Network for Rights and Development (GNRD), which is based in Norway and has an office in Dubai. It says it always treats detainees according to the law. In October 2013 GNRD published a controversial human rights index that ranked the UAE 14th globally for respecting human rights, putting it above America. The organisation has faced questions over its funding, but yesterday denied it has received money from the UAE government.

One of Blair's biggest contracts to date was a four-year project with Kuwait, reported to be worth £27m although this is disputed by Blair's organisation. One of his most controversial has been advising the government of Kazakhstan, but Blair's office has said the money from that is used to cover business costs and does not go directly to him.

A spokesman for Blair said it was "simply false" to suggest any conflict of interest and that TBA had no contract with the UAE foreign affairs ministry.

The spokesman said: "The document you have is out of date, was not cleared by Tony Blair and not agreed. There is ongoing discussion on a different basis but around work similar to that being undertaken in Serbia and potentially elsewhere."

"Any future contract would not be with the ministry of foreign affairs. This has nothing to do with Tony Blair's unpaid role as Quartet representative."

"There is absolutely no conflict between giving general geopolitical advice, which is what TBA offers outside of the Israel/Palestine issue, and the work he does on that issue. This is work TBA does worldwide. The UAE is not a member of the Quartet. Tony Blair has undertaken other work in the Gulf, but not in respect of anything that is linked to what he does unpaid for the Quartet."

He said it was stipulated in contracts that any paid role Blair accepted could not affect his work as representative of the Quartet. He said Blair was "completely entitled" to speak of his knowledge of countries he works in, but would never mix the work of his African Governance Initiative with commercial work.

Following the money from Kazakhstan to Kuwait

Since leaving office at the age of just 54, Tony Blair has created what has been described as 'a government in exile', with interests spanning the globe.

He has a 200-strong staff and his headquarters are housed in a five-storey building in Grosvenor Square, central London.

Blair says he devotes most of his time to pro bono work, but it is his commercial interests that have attracted controversy.

After leaving Downing Street he accepted advisory roles with the American bank JP Morgan, a role reportedly worth more than £1m a year, and Zurich International, an insurance giant.

He expanded his commercial operations with the creation of Tony Blair Associates (TBA), which has worked on projects around the world, including in Kazakhstan and Kuwait.

Blair often works in a private capacity in the Middle East, where TBA has a contract with Mubadala, the Abu Dhabi state fund.

As one friend observed soon after the launch of TBA: "There's a focus on the Middle East because that's where the money is."

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Loathsome, grabbing individual, he was always more interested in self aggrandisement and personal gain when he was PM. Amaes me that anyone would pay him for advice considering the state he and the rest of ew Labour left the country in. These people obviously hae more money than sense.

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