

(The National Interest, March 22, 2011)



David Cameron and the Libya intervention. Looking an awful lot like Blair and the Iraq adventure

Just before Tony Blair left Downing Street in the summer of 2007, he was interviewed in the *Guardian* by Timothy Garton Ash, the transatlantic writer on international affairs. At a time when Blair's stock had fallen low, and when his own party was desperate to see the back of him, he was presented with glowing enthusiasm: "Tony Blair bounds into the garden of 10 Downing Street, looking as if he's ready for another 10 years there ..." And, "The outgoing prime minister seems full of energy, mental vigour and that almost compulsive passion to convince which he shares with Nicolas Sarkozy." When asked what his legacy was—"What is the essence of Blairism?"—he gave an answer that "could not be clearer: 'It is liberal interventionism'."

A little more than two years later, at the Labour party conference in September 2009, another journalist found that party not surprisingly bedraggled and demoralised even before the calamitous defeat Labour would suffer at the general election the following spring, and not sure what they stood for or could agree on -- except for one thing. The entire party from left to right was at any rate united in the view that "Blair's doctrine of 'liberal interventionism' is one part of the inheritance that should be dumped." Even by those who were beguiled by that doctrine at one time recognized that it was finished, dead and buried in the sands of Iraq.

But lo, here it comes again, back from the dead! Western countries are intervening in Libya, on ostensibly liberal and humanitarian grounds. British aircraft turned back rather than risk killing civilians, but French jets have already bombed Muammar Gaddafi's ground troops, on orders from the compulsively passionate President Sarkozy.

