



# Heir to Blair

Such was David Cameron's poor showing in the polls at the beginning of March that irresponsible elements here began to suggest that Boris Johnson might make a

better leader of the Tory Party.

You know the guy I mean: Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson, Old Etonian mayor of London, former editor of the *Spectator*, former Tory MP for Henley, and Britain's most reckless, anarchic, and entertaining politician.

He is also ... well, take your pick. He describes himself as "a one-man melting pot." His forebears include Turks, Russians, Frenchmen, and Germans; also Englishmen. His faith background is Protestant and Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim. He is an American citizen, moreover, having had the foresight to be born in New York City in June 1964. Through his father's maternal grandmother, Marie Louise de Pfeffel, he is a descendant of George II, grandfather of the rather more famous George III.

With that pedigree, as you might expect, the mayor of London has a keen sense of the absurd and once promised, "If you vote for the Conservatives, your wife will get bigger breasts and your chances of driving a BMW M3 will increase." But there is one thing he won't be frivolous about: his career or, as he might see it, his destiny. Being mayor of the greatest city on earth is by no means the summit of his ambition. He wants not just to lead his party but to lead it into No. 10 Downing Street; to become prime minister.

First, however, David Cameron must lose May's general election, and I am not sure that he can be relied on to do that. Many now talk of a hung Parliament,

even of a Tory defeat, but my hunch is that Cameron will win outright. After all, his beautiful wife Samantha is expecting a baby in September. Given the state of the nation after 13 years of Labor rule, however, Cameron should be able to walk it, even without a baby. We are in the middle of the worst recession in living memory; we are fighting an unpopular and unwinnable war in Afghanistan, having lost an equally unwinnable and unpopular war in Iraq; and we have brooding over us the bulky figure of Gordon Brown, perhaps the least charismatic prime minister in history. At the beginning of last year, the Tories were 20 points ahead in the polls, but for a couple of days in March this year, that lead dropped to two points.

Why? There are signs of economic recovery, and Brown and his Chancellor Alastair Darling have, rightly, been given some of the credit. Bottom line, though, is that the Tories are still not trusted. They are still seen in too many quarters as the "nasty party"—the party of hangers and bashers, the party that in 1964 gave us Peter Griffiths, who won Smethwick, in Birmingham, after campaigning on the slogan "If you want a nigger for a neighbor, vote Labor."

At the Tory spring conference in Brighton, Cameron sought to decontaminate the brand once and for all when he declared, "We can now look the British people in the eye and say: this country, our country, this tolerant, compassionate, brilliant, multi-racial country, we are

with you, we are like you, we are for you, we are ready to serve you; this modern Conservative party made its choice and it's never going back."

That sort of talk does not convince skeptics, but it does drive away conservatives. Dave is sounding like Tony Blair in 1997, and indeed has described himself as the "heir to Blair." His education spokesman and star performer, Michael Gove, is another Blairite. In mid-March he said that the Tories now embodied "Blairism at its best." The party, he said, was offering what Labor offered in 1997—the "message that politics could be different, that fairness and wealth could go hand-in-hand."

What can you say? Only that Cameron and the Tories do not deserve to win the election. Their policies—not least their social policies—are virtually indistinguishable from Labor's. In an interview in the March issue of the glossy gay magazine *Attitude*, Cameron said that if "our Lord Jesus" were alive today he would support gay rights. I am not making this up.

Not that Boris Johnson would take the party in a more conservative direction—he is a libertarian. But he would at least avoid some of Dave's pious drivel and would, most importantly, be able to cash in on the public's great dislike of the Iraq War. As a Tory MP, Boris voted for the war, but he has not joined those on the Right who rationalize their support by saying that war was right in principle even if it was wrong in execution. Boris simply says that the war was wrong and that he was wrong. "If I had my time over again, I certainly would not vote for it," he now says. "I regret it. It was a colossal mistake." ■

# Graceful Decline

The end of Pax Americana

By Christopher Layne

THE UNITED STATES emerged from World War II in a position of global dominance. From this unparalleled military and economic power came a Pax Americana that has endured for more than six decades. It seemed the sun would never set on the U.S. empire.

But America is increasingly unable to play the hegemon's assigned role. Militarily, a hegemon is responsible for stabilizing key regions and guarding the global commons. Economically, it offers public goods by opening its domestic market to other states, supplying liquidity for the world economy, and providing the reserve currency. A hegemon is supposed to solve international crises, not cause them. It is supposed to be the lender of last resort, not the biggest borrower. Faced with wars it cannot win or quit and an economy begging rescue, the United States no longer fits the part.

Still, many in the mainstream foreign-policy community see these as temporary setbacks and believe that U.S. primacy will endure for years to come. The American people are awakening to a new reality more quickly than the academy. According to a December 2009 Pew survey, 41 percent of the public believes that the U.S. plays a less important and powerful role as a world leader than it did a decade ago.

The epoch of American dominance is drawing to a close, and international politics is entering a period of transition: no longer unipolar but not yet fully multipolar. President Barack Obama's November 2009 trip to China provided both substantive and emblematic evi-

dence of the shift. As the *Financial Times* observed, "Coming at a moment when Chinese prestige is growing and the U.S. is facing enormous difficulties, Mr. Obama's trip has symbolized the advent of a more multi-polar world where U.S. leadership has to co-exist with several rising powers, most notably China." In the same Pew study, 44 percent of Americans polled said that China was the leading economic power; just 27 percent chose the United States.

Much of America's decline can be attributed to its own self-defeating policies, but as the U.S. stumbles, others—notably China, India, and Russia—are rising. This shift in the global balance of power will dramatically affect international politics: the likelihood of intense great-power security competitions—and even war—will increase; the current era of globalization will end; and the post-1945 Pax Americana will be replaced by an international order that reflects the interests, values, and norms of emerging powers.

China's economy has been growing much more rapidly than the United States' over the last two decades and continues to do so, maintaining audacious 8 percent growth projections in the midst of a global recession. Leading economic forecasters predict that it will overtake the U.S. as the world's largest economy, measured by overall GDP, sometime around 2020. Already in 2008, China passed the U.S. as the world's leading manufacturing nation—a title the United States had enjoyed for over a century—and this year China will displace Japan as

the world's second-largest economy. Everything we know about the trajectories of rising great powers tells us that China will use its increasing wealth to build formidable military power and that it will seek to become the dominant power in East Asia.

Optimists contend that once the U.S. recovers from what historian Niall Ferguson calls the "Great Depression"—not quite a depression but more than a recession—we'll be able to answer the Chinese challenge. The country, they remind us, faced a larger debt-GDP ratio after World War II yet embarked on an era of sustained growth. They forget that the postwar era was a golden age of U.S. industrial and financial dominance, trade surpluses, and persistent high growth rates. Those days are gone. The United States of 2010 and the world in which it lives are far different from those of 1945.

Weaknesses in the fundamentals of the American economy have been accumulating for more than three decades. In the 1980s, these problems were acutely diagnosed by a number of writers—notably David Calleo, Paul Kennedy, Robert Gilpin, Samuel Huntington, and James Chace—who predicted that these structural ills would ultimately erode the economic foundations of America's global preeminence. A spirited late-1980s debate was cut short, when, in quick succession, the Soviet Union collapsed, Japan's economic bubble burst, and the U.S. experienced an apparent economic revival during the Clinton administration. Now the delayed day of reckoning is fast approaching.