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Political Science

The Accidental American: Tony Blair and the Presidency
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Not since Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill have an American president and a British prime minister shared such a close and important partnership, says the author in this first-rate investigation of the Blair-Bush nexus with its far-reaching ramifications for the post-9/11 world. Naughtie is a highly regarded British political commentator has contributed to many newspapers and magazines, and was Laurence M. Stern Fellow at *The Washington Post*. Having studied at Syracuse University, he is a frequent visitor to the United States who now hosts the BBC's *Today Show* and is the author of *The Rivals*, an exposé of the Blair government.

Blair and Bush would appear to be strange political bedfellows, because the prime minister is a member of the leftist Labour Party and a good friend of former President Clinton, while Bush is a committed conservative. The author notes that Blair became an "accidental American" because of the circumstances of Bush's razor-thin 2000 election and the tragic events of September 11, 2001, in which Blair became a staunch supporter of America, a nation that symbolically adopted Blair as one of its own.

Naughtie presents a convincing case that Blair is not Bush's lapdog, as some American and British media have portrayed him. Blair is much like Bush in that he operates on his own instincts; he adopts a position and remains committed to it. Indeed, two years before 9/11 the prime minister presented the Blair Doctrine, which justified intervention into Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Blair believes that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction and that the Iraqi war is morally just.

In addition to his fine analysis of the Bush-Blair connection, the author provides an excellent overview of British government for those who are BBC'd (Bewildered, Befuddled, and Confused) by the parliamentary system. Naughtie demonstrates how Blair has become isolated from his own party because of his "presidentalism," a pejorative description of a prime minister who tends to make policies without the assistance of his or her cabinet and Party.

Blair's support of Bush has cost the prime minister the backing of many of his former supporters and other European leaders who, along with Blair, were working toward a European Union.

This book is a timely appraisal of what the author calls the Bush-Blair "axis of friendship." It is a lucid and informed study of the consequences of leadership and concludes that even if Blair were proven correct about the weapons of mass destruction and the need for the Iraqi war, "he might never be forgiven for it" by the British citizenry.

Karl Helicher