# Tony Blair’s climate influence raises alarm amid COP27 and Gulf ties



In late 2022, amid the opulence of the Four Seasons hotel in Sharm el-Sheikh, the former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair engaged in discreet yet influential discussions during the Cop27 UN climate conference. Surrounded by the lush greenery and luxury of the venue, his interactions with political and business leaders raised significant concerns among climate policy experts. Critics began to express unease about Blair's growing involvement in climate negotiations, fearing it could pose a threat to established climate policies.

Blair’s participation in the summit followed two years of apprehension amongst climate insiders about his influence, particularly following the release of a paper by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (TBI) which suggested a “reset” of global climate policy. In this paper, Blair argued that voters in developed countries are resistant to making sacrifices regarding climate, as their contributions to global emissions are perceived as minimal. He posited that political leaders are hesitant to acknowledge this due to fears of being labelled as “climate deniers”.

The immediate backlash to Blair's assertions was palpable. Nicholas Stern, a renowned economist whose previous work under Blair’s government has shaped modern climate economics, described the report as “muddled and misleading,” emphasising the significant progress made globally towards decarbonisation. Meanwhile, Bob Ward, policy director at the Grantham Research Institute, condemned the analysis provided in the report, asserting it underplayed the urgency of achieving net zero emissions, warning that delay could only exacerbate climate impacts that are already being felt.

Shaun Spiers, executive director of the Green Alliance, interpreted Blair's positioning as a deviation from grassroots climate activism, suggesting that it erodes popular support for necessary climate action by implying that solutions should come from elites rather than the general populace.

In response to the criticism, TBI sought to clarify that their report supported net zero targets, asserting that their conclusions had been misconstrued. However, the portrayal of Blair as a sceptic of net zero ignited enthusiasm within the Conservative Party, particularly as its leader, Kemi Badenoch, distanced her party from longstanding commitments to net zero targets.

The trajectory of Blair's climate policy discussions seems increasingly aligned with the interests of the Middle Eastern nations he has collaborated with since his tenure as Prime Minister. Following his resignation, Blair transitioned to roles related to Middle Eastern peace and advisory positions, most notably with the Saudi Arabian government, which has sparked concerns about his potential bias in climate discussions.

At Cop27, while Blair emphasised projects the TBI was undertaking in Africa, he also maintained a keen interest in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), particularly in light of its decision to host the upcoming Cop28 climate conference. His relationship with Sultan Al Jaber, CEO of the UAE’s national oil company and a key figure in the UAE government, has drawn scrutiny. While TBI clarified that Blair was not remunerated for advising Al Jaber before the conference, his frequent communications during the summit preparations raised questions about the nature and influence of their interactions.

Despite the inclusion of language to address fossil fuels in the outcomes of Cop28, some critics argue that the commitments made contradicted the interests of both Al Jaber and the UAE. The conference resulted in a significant shift, marking the first time fossil fuels were directly addressed in climate talks. However, subsequent events indicated a retreat from these commitments, especially at the following Cop in Azerbaijan, where discussions on fossil fuel transitions were sidelined.

Blair's recent statements suggest a reluctance to pursue aggressive fossil fuel phase-outs, instead advocating for a broader policy mix including advancements in technology and market solutions. TBI has asserted that its approach focuses not just on high-income oil-producing countries but also on addressing the needs of developing nations reliant on fossil fuels for economic stability.

Experts have expressed concerns that Blair's perspective appears antiquated, failing to account for the rapid advancements and cost reductions associated with renewable energy technologies. David King, a former chief scientific adviser, noted the importance of advancing both emissions reductions and technological development concurrently.

In the political landscape of the UK, Blair's influence seems to be waning amid a resurgence of progressive voices. Prime Minister Keir Starmer affirmed his government’s commitment to climate action at a recent international conference, aiming to create a robust industrial policy that capitalises on low-carbon technologies to boost investment and competitiveness.

This shift may point to a broader disconnect between Blair's climate strategies and the current priorities within the UK government, suggesting that while his role in Middle Eastern discussions may be welcomed, his standing among progressive climate advocates is increasingly challenged. As the political dynamics continue to evolve, the implications of Blair’s recent contributions to climate discourse remain to be seen, particularly in the context of the impending Cop30 summit in Brazil and the ongoing global efforts to combat climate change.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

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* <https://www.ft.com/content/20f43bdf-313c-4f3f-a3ba-80f1f585f6b3> - Professor Julian Allwood critiques Tony Blair's reliance on new technologies for climate action, arguing that it continues a false hope that has hindered mitigation efforts since the 2005 Stern Review.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_United_Nations_Climate_Change_Conference> - This Wikipedia page provides detailed information about the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27), including its location in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, and the participation of over 90 heads of state and representatives from more than 190 countries.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stern_Review> - The Stern Review, released in 2006, discusses the economic impacts of climate change and emphasizes the need for strong, early action, which is relevant to the critiques of Tony Blair's recent climate policy positions.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/6d443344-c492-49f1-a888-759a5afc4e48> - This article discusses Prime Minister Keir Starmer's defense of the UK's net zero policy following criticisms from former Prime Minister Tony Blair, highlighting the political fragmentation over climate strategy.
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