

# Westminster: Bulldog, Not Poodle, for Best in Show

As of July 23, members of the United Kingdom's Conservative Party will have chosen a new leader. On July 24, Queen Elizabeth II will appoint a new prime minister, almost certainly that new party leader. The two remaining contenders for those jobs are former Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and current Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt.

The elephant in the UK's political room at the moment is, of course, Brexit. But another issue looms large as well, especially from across the Atlantic. That issue is foreign policy, particularly the UK's tendency to throw in with US military interventions in the Middle East.

On July 16, when asked about the prospect of the UK joining the US in a war on Iran, Johnson responded bluntly while Hunt prevaricated.

Johnson: "If you ask me if I think, were I prime minister now, would I be supporting military action against Iran, the answer is 'No.'"

Hunt: "The risk we have is something different, which is an accidental war, because something happens in a very tense and volatile situation."

On the one hand, it's naive to take any politician at his word, especially when that politician is lobbying for election to public office or a party leadership position. On the other, a seemingly straight answer is probably a more reliable indicator than a transparent dodge.

Johnson gave that seemingly straight answer — the answer of a bulldog relentlessly focused on his country's interests rather than on maintaining its "special relationship" with the United States.

Hunt's answer, unfortunately, immediately brought to mind former PM Tony Blair's unconvincing denial of accusations that he was US president George W. Bush's "poodle" in the run-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

"I choose my own way ..." Blair insisted. "[T]hat region of the world — most of all the people of Iraq — would be in a far better position without Saddam Hussein. Does that mean that military action is imminent or about to happen? No. We've never said that. We have said 'Here is an issue. It has to be dealt with. We will deal with it, but how we'll deal with it is an open question.'"

Blair ended up committing the UK to what turned out to be a ruinous project for pretty much everyone involved. An official inquiry into the fiasco, conducted by Sir John Chilcot, resulted in a 2016 report accurately characterized by *The Guardian's* Richard Norton-Taylor as "an unprecedented, devastating indictment of how a prime minister was allowed to

make decisions by discarding all pretence at cabinet government, subverting the intelligence agencies, and making exaggerated claims about threats to Britain's national security."

Johnson's seemingly firm position is no guarantee that as prime minister he would wisely refrain from joining in future US military adventures.

Hunt's decision to muddy the waters is virtually a guarantee that, like Blair, he would prioritize maintaining the "special relationship," no matter the cost in blood and treasure to the United Kingdom, and no matter the damage to the cause of world peace.

Choose wisely, Tories. It matters.