

Nov 04, 2016 by [Adam Clayton Powell, III](#)

Iraq: The Dog That Didn't Bark ^[1]

"Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

Holmes: "To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

"The dog did nothing in the night-time."

"That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes.

WASHINGTON -- Watching George Bush and Tony Blair tie up traffic in Georgetown last week and reading the wall-to-wall coverage of Bush, Blair and Iraq in the US media, Inspector Gregory's question to Holmes came to mind.

In "The Adventure of Silver Blaze" by Arthur Conan Doyle, the absence of a clue was itself the clue.

In the case of Tony Blair, it was the absence of a debate that was a clue, but not during Blair's visit to Washington: it was during the British election campaign.

On May 4, local elections were held throughout Britain. While in London on assignment, from reading and watching coverage of the campaign, watching BBC coverage on election night and then reading much of the coverage the next day, it was obvious there was extensive discussion of the major issues of the day - domestic issues.

The issues were immigration legal and illegal, government competence and, the perennial, a minister having an affair with his secretary. In this case it was Tony Blair's Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, dallying with his diary secretary. There will always be an England.

But Iraq was "the curious incident": it was never mentioned.

With British boots on the ground and British soldiers taking casualties, Iraq was way inside the daily newspapers and barely mentioned on television. In the hotly contested political campaign, it was a non-issue.

Instead, in the closing hours of the campaign, photos of an attractive young woman were splashed across front pages and television newscasts. Turns out she was a policewoman, murdered by a man who had entered Britain illegally, had been caught by the police -- and then, instead of being deported, was among a number of foreign nationals who were set free.

The case became an election-day cause both for critics declaiming Labour government incompetence and for those opposed to immigration -- especially immigration from Islamic countries. And on election day afternoon, the evening newspaper headlines became a countdown to Labour's collapse -- a countdown in easily enumerated numbers of illegal immigration:

"42 MISSING," blared one front page, noting the number of known criminals who had been set free by the government. An hour later, the headline was, "40 STILL MISSING." They didn't have to say who they were. By the time the polls closed, it was "38 STILL AT LARGE."

By the next morning, the election returns told the story: Blair's Labour Party fell from first to third place, losing control of constituencies the party had held for decades. One of them was the bellwether, Ealing, once best known as the production center for "Kind Hearts and Coronets" and other movie comedies, now famous for its an unbroken streak of predicting the next national election winner. Ealing went to the Conservatives.

Labour's rout was such that a little known splinter party, the British National Party, won almost every seat where they fielded a candidate. On election night, one NP leaders said his principal regret was not having fielded more candidates. The NP's platform: non-white immigrants should leave the UK. That was all voters needed to know.

But there was no mention of Iraq. Voters cared more about immigration, taxes, declining standards of the government health service and education. Or as The Economist put it,

"Rumbling scandals over the alleged sale of honors, hospital deficits, the sexual shenanigans of the deputy prime minister and the release by the Home Office of countless foreign prisoners who should have been up for deportation all took their toll."

And the "sexual shenanigans" turned into one of those stories story that, as journalists say, just keeps on giving: Blair reacted by endorsing the Deputy PM, refusing to ask Prescott to step down (more at <http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/politics/article622127.ece>). Eventually the Prime Minister did ask his deputy to move out of his government-supplied country estate. However, as the Independent newspaper reported "Mr Prescott refused, saying it was a place of relaxation for himself and his wife, Pauline." Just so: Prescott's secretary said their affair took place in his office and in his London residence (also provided by British taxpayers), but not in the country. Everything in its place.

With so many domestic affairs to follow, Iraq just wasn't a factor.

Three footnotes: First, Prescott has just relented and is vacating the country estate, after some accountants noted it could trigger ruinous taxes because he no longer used it for official duties and therefor its use represented taxable income.

Second, after writing these words, while double checking some of the information, this writer found The Economist used a similar reference after the election, saying Iraq was the dog that "barked only briefly" in the campaign. That newspaper (as it calls itself) has far more ears far better attuned to UK politics, so it is more than likely that some faint howls in the night were indeed there, but certainly no loud barking.

And finally, in the category of items that are just too good to omit, it should be noted that the district where the right-wing National Party did best, sweeping eleven local seats, was a constituency named... Barking.
