

History: the Contemporary Age



Blair's second mandate 2001-2007

During his second mandate, Blair committed a terrible mistake and his popularity decreased. In 2003, he followed the Americans in the Iraq War without the United Nations participation

Brown 2007-2010

The Labour Prime Minister, Gordon Brown took a series of measures to contrast the 2008 economic and financial crisis, such as fiscal policies, tax cuts and capital injection to overcome stagnation. However, the situation remained difficult.

Cameron 2010-2016

In 2010 the Conservatives failed to achieve a majority and a hung parliament was formed with the Liberal Democrats. It was the first coalition government after the end of World War Two and David Cameron took measures to reduce public expenditure and revitalise the economy. In the 2014 referendum, Scottish people voted to remain in the UK. Cameron resigned after the Referendum in June 2016 about Brexit, when Britain chose to leave the European Union.

May 2016-2019

The new Conservative Prime Minister, Theresa May, had to face all the problems related to the exit of the UK from the European Union. New elections were held on 8th June 2017, but May did not get the majority in Parliament and she had to form a coalition with the Ulster Unionists.

Johnson 2019-

May eventually resigned in 2019 and she was succeeded by former Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson. In the same year, Johnson led the Conservative Party to its biggest parliamentary victory since 1987. In the Brexit affair, he also negotiated the final step of England's complicated withdrawal from the EU. Since February 2020 Johnson has had to cope with the issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.



Bush Jr. 2001-2009

On 11th September 2001, a terrorist attack of Al Qaeda destroyed the Twin Towers in New York and part of the Pentagon in Washington. About 3,000 people were killed.

George W. Bush Jr. announced a War of Terror and started a campaign with the British and the support of the NATO against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in early October 2001.

In 2003, America declared war (Iraq War) against Saddam Hussein who was thought to possess weapons of mass destruction.

The 2008 crisis produced recession and in the same year Barack Obama was elected.

Obama 2009-2016

Barack Obama, the first Afro-American president, took office in January 2009.

He immediately took steps to encourage private investments and in 2010 signed the Wall Street Reform Act to modify the financial system.

His program included health care reform, education, social security, energy policy, investments in renewable energy and foreign policy. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009 and the title of his speech was "A Just and Lasting Peace". Health Care Reform passed in 2010 with some amendments.

In the mid-term elections of 2014, the Republicans gained control of the Congress and Obama had to face a hostile Congress for the last two years of his mandate.

However, he ended his mandate on a grand scale with the Nuclear Deal with Iran (2015) to ensure a peaceful nuclear program and the end of the Cuban Embargo (2016).

Trump 2017-2020

After a very strong 2016 campaign, Republican Donald Trump became the new president of the USA. He took the country out of the Kyoto Environment Protocol and tried to destroy some of the reforms made by Obama.

Biden 2020-

Democratic Joe Biden defeated Republican Trump and became the 46th president of the USA in November 2020, during the Covid pandemia.

Trump initially refused to transfer his power, declaring the elections had not been run legally. Kamala Harris was appointed as the first Afro-Asian-American female vice-president. After Trump's presidency marked by economic turmoil and social unrest, Biden means to write a new history page for the USA.



President Obama's Nobel Peace Prize



Donald Trump and Theresa May



1 Read some reasons given by businesses in favour or against Brexit and put them in the correct column.

Pros	Cons

1. Certain EU trade regulations are seen as burdening British businesses with red tape, especially in areas like food. Leaving the EU would free the UK Government to liberalise these regulations, which often impact SMEs disproportionately.
2. For British businesses that trade in other European countries, the potential erosion of the UK's position within Europe may reduce their expansion on the continent, as cost and complexity of trade could gradually rise if tariff changes are made against UK goods and services.
3. Lack of import taxes within the EU means British businesses compete on a level playing field with businesses across the continent. Leaving the EU would create significant uncertainty, which may be enough to cause them to cut back on investment in the UK.
4. No contributions to the EU budget will mean an immediate cost reduction of around €180 per person in the UK, with consequent tax reductions that could benefit businesses.
5. Some argue that membership of the European Economic Area but not the EU – in the same way as Iceland – brings all the key benefits of Europe, such as access to the internal market, without having to deal with red tape.
6. The loss of EU farming subsidies would be extremely difficult and costly for the agricultural sector in the UK to absorb.
7. The UK benefits from a number of free trade agreements with non-EU countries. If the UK leaves, these would have to be renegotiated, likely on less favourable terms as a smaller individual trading partner.

(adapted from: <http://www.ldf.co.uk/blog/brexit-the-pros-and-cons/>)



2 Read an extract from B. Obama's Nobel Peace Prize (2009) speech "A just and lasting peace" and identify the three proposals for peace. Discuss with your classmates: do you agree with them?



We must begin by acknowledging the hard truth: we will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes. There will be times when nations – acting individually or in concert – will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified.

I make this statement mindful of what Martin Luther King Jr. said in this same ceremony years ago: "Violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem: it merely creates new and more complicated ones." [.....]

So yes, the instruments of war do have a role to play in preserving the peace. And yet this truth must coexist with another – that no matter how justified, war promises human tragedy. [.....]

But let me now turn to our effort to avoid such tragic choices, and speak of three ways that we can build a just and lasting peace.

First, in dealing with those nations that break rules and laws, I believe that we must develop alternatives to violence that are tough enough to actually change behavior – for if we want a lasting peace, then the words of the international community must mean something. Those regimes that break the rules must be held accountable. Sanctions must exact a real price. [.....]

✦ This brings me to a second point – the nature of the peace that we seek. For peace is not merely the absence of visible conflict. Only a just peace based on the inherent rights and dignity of every individual can truly be lasting. [.....]

Third, a just peace includes not only civil and political rights – it must encompass economic security and opportunity. For true peace is not just freedom from fear, but freedom from want. [.....]

We can acknowledge that oppression will always be with us, and still strive for justice. We can admit the intractability of depravation, and still strive for dignity. Clear-eyed, we can understand that there will be war, and still strive for peace. [.....]

