



THE SUNDAY TIMES



Cabinet coup to ditch May for emergency PM

■ She has gone haywire, says minister

■ Deputy lined up to take over

Tim Shipman
Political Editor

Theresa May was at the mercy of a full-blown cabinet coup last night as senior ministers moved to oust the prime minister and replace her with her deputy, David Lidington.

In a frantic series of private telephone calls, senior ministers agreed the prime minister must announce she is standing down, warning that she has become a toxic and “erratic” figure whose judgment has “gone haywire”.

As up to 1m people marched on the streets of London against Brexit yesterday, May’s fate was being decided elsewhere.

The Sunday Times spoke to 11 cabinet ministers who confirmed that they wanted the prime minister to make way for someone else.

The plotters plan to confront May at a cabinet meeting tomorrow and demand that she announces she is quitting. If she refuses, they will threaten mass resignations or publicly demand her head.

Last night, the conspirators were locked in talks to try to reach a consensus deal on a new prime minister so there does not have to be a protracted leadership contest.

At least six ministers are supportive of installing Lidington, the de facto deputy prime minister, as a caretaker in No 10 to deliver Brexit and then make way for a full leadership contest in the autumn.

Lidington’s supporters include cabinet remainers Greg Clark, Amber Rudd and David Gauke. The chancellor, Philip Hammond, also believes Lidington should take over if May refuses this week to seek a new consensus deal on Brexit.

Crucially, the home secretary, Sajid Javid, has agreed to put his own leadership ambitions on hold until the autumn to clear the way

WHEN THINGS FALL APART

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for Lidington – as long as his main rivals do the same.

Lidington is understood not to be pressing for the top job but is prepared to take over if that is the will of cabinet. He would agree not to stand in the contest to find a permanent leader.

A cabinet source said: “David’s job would be to secure an extension with the EU, find a consensus for a new Brexit policy and then arrange an orderly transition to a new leader.”

However, others called for Michael Gove or Jeremy Hunt to take charge instead. The foreign secretary does not support Lidington because he believes he would do a deal with Labour to take Britain into a permanent customs union with the EU, although he has lost confidence in May’s ability to take advice or deliver the deal.

Lidington’s friends want him to pledge to allow the cabinet decide Brexit policy in order to get Hunt and Gove on board, urging the three cabinet heavyweights to work together to take control of the government.

Gove, the environment secretary, has a leadership team in place and a raft of supporters who have been recruited in a series of secret dinners hosted by Mel Stride, the Treasury minister. Gove is pre-



Theresa May with David Lidington, who some ministers want to see installed as a caretaker prime minister until a leadership contest

pared to support Lidington if others do but is sceptical that agreement will be reached.

The coup erupted after a week of mistakes by May, who delivered a television statement that alienated the MPs whose support she needs for her Brexit deal and then flirted with backing a no deal before performing a U-turn.

One cabinet minister said: “The end is nigh. She won’t be prime minister in 10 days’ time.”

A second said: “Her judgment has started to go haywire. You can’t be a member of the cabinet who just puts your head in the sand.”

Concerns about May’s mental and physical resilience are widely shared. Officials in parliament

were so concerned about May’s welfare they drew up a protocol to extract her from the Commons if she collapsed at the dispatch box.

Downing Street sources say May has not yet come to the conclusion that she should resign and is still being encouraged by her husband Philip to fight on.

But she has also lost the confi-

dence of key allies whose job it is to maintain party discipline. Julian Smith, the chief whip, believes there is no prospect of the prime minister winning support for her deal unless she announces that she is standing down so the second phase of Brexit negotiations can be conducted by a new leader.

He told May last week that she

CABINET MINISTER 1
“Her judgment has started to go haywire. You can’t be a member of the cabinet who just puts your head in the sand”

CABINET MINISTER 2
“People need to feel that the second phase of the negotiations will be run very differently, and that means different leadership”

CABINET MINISTER 3
“Things are inherently volatile but I think they will settle when there is a change in prime minister”

CABINET MINISTER 4
“The end is nigh. She won’t be prime minister in 10 days time”

CABINET MINISTER 5
“A growing number will vote for the deal if the prime minister agrees to go. David is someone who could command credibility and trust, and constitutionally he is the deputy”

should offer to go in the summer. May last night won the backing of Gisela Stuart, the most high-profile Labour supporter of the Vote Leave campaign. Writing in the Sunday Times, Stuart said: “It’s not the deal we want but it is the only deal we have.”

But Smith and other senior
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Revealed: Isis plan for attacks in Europe as ‘caliphate’ falls

EXCLUSIVE

Louise Callaghan Northern Iraq

Documents seized after a shootout with Isis fighters reveal that the “caliphate” is plotting attacks in Europe after the loss of its last sliver of territory in Syria yesterday.

The Isis files, which have been obtained by The Sunday Times, show chilling plans for a “department of operations in Europe” supporting Isis members already

there. The files refer to targets “far away from the Islamic State” and “crocodile cell” assassination squads whose role will be to “kill the enemies of God”.

A senior militant writes to an Isis leader: “Every person who forms a threat to the Islamic State or to our Caliph or his deputy, you only need to send us his photo, the place he lives and his number. Then wait for us to send you the video of his killing, by the will of God.”

The documents are from a hard drive dropped during a firefight

between an Isis sleeper cell and local forces a month ago in the Syrian desert.

As celebrations began in northern Syria after the fall of the last Isis bolthole in the town of Baghuz, it emerged that Isis brides – some of them armed – had rioted in a refugee camp three days ago.

The incident highlighted the danger in northern Syria presented by the tens of thousands of surrendered Isis fanatics in the camps.

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Loo seats and Corbyn’s calendar – MPs’ expenses hit new high

Tom Calver, Caroline Wheeler and Rosamund Urwin

MPs are claiming 22% more in taxpayer-funded expenses than they did a decade ago when the scandal was first exposed.

A Sunday Times investigation reveals that the total claimed by MPs has risen by more than a fifth to £116m since details first emerged about parliament’s corrupt expenses regime. The latest claims submitted by MPs reveal that:

● Britain’s richest MP, Richard Benyon, bought a £6.80 lavatory

seat for his constituency office from Wilko in August 2017, only to buy another one a month later for £10.87

● The Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn spent £180 in March last year on artwork for a “Jeremy Corbyn MP calendar”.

Claims have returned to pre-scandal levels when inflation is taken into account. The 2009 crisis led to a collapse of public faith in politicians, which some critics argue was a catalyst for Brexit.

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