

Calamity in the Cabinet



By [Oscar Bentley](#), Editor (2018)
Wednesday 22 November 2017



Image: Zoe Norfolk

Prime Minister Theresa May's already fatally unstable government has been rocked by a series of scandals over the past weeks which has forced the resignation from government of two of the cabinet's big hitters, the now former Defence Secretary Michael Fallon and former International Development Secretary Priti Patel.

As the Harvey Weinstein scandal spreads to Westminster, Fallon's demise came as he chose to fall on his sword after realising that years old accusations about his alleged sexual misconduct towards women were now not going to go away. There's no denying that Fallon's resignation will hit May hard, as with his return to the backbenches the cabinet has lost one of its most competent and consistent media performers.

Patel's demise however came as a consequence of a string of secret meetings she had with Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, of which she had failed to inform the Foreign Office, and was accused of conducting "freelance foreign policy". Crucially however, this is not the actual reason she was forced to resign, but rather for not confessing all initially. When May hauled Patel into Number 10 on Monday 6th November to give her a dressing down, the International Development Secretary kept secret from her boss some of the meetings, and, when they came to light the following day, it was this lack of transparency that led to her forced resignation.

After packing off Patel along with International Trade Secretary Liam Fox (himself forced to resign from Cameron's frontbench back in 2011 due to breaching Ministerial code) on a trip to Africa in an attempt to show everything was running as normal, May then called back Patel from the trip on Wednesday in an

attempt to show strength by sacking her.

These scandals show that, despite the election slogans, strong and stable government is just not what we have at the moment. May built an image and fought a leadership campaign and subsequent election on being a journeywoman politician, a Prime Minister who might not be flashy and charming like Blair or Cameron, but rather one that just gets along with the job.

The problem is that she can't really do that either. The keeping her head down and getting along with the job strategy is really not working (as the election campaign showed all too well), and she simply doesn't have the flair to respond to the constant issues and scandals that beseech her shaky government.

May needs to try and restore an air of competence to her government after weeks of chaos, and, in her defence, she had no choice but to let go disobedient Ministers to even remain the illusion that she has any authority left. Allowing Patel to resign however arguably also showed just how weak a position May is in, as resigning rather than being outright sacked allows Patel a path back to cabinet one day, and as a rising star of the Tory party and keen Brexiteer, you can be sure Patel won't stay on the backbenches for long or quietly.

The cabinet is also a careful balance of those who supported Leave and those who supported Remain in last year's referendum, which means both sides allow May to have the casting vote, so keeping that careful balance is crucial to keeping her grip on power. Remain supporting Fallon was replaced by former chief whip Gavin Williamson, previously of Cameron's remain supporting camp, while Patel was replaced by Brexiteer Penny Mordaunt, preserving the equilibrium that preserves the Prime Minister, and provides her with just about the only political strength she has left.

Williamson's appointment arguably also shows her weakness. He essentially was the puppet master here, and, after running her successful leadership campaign, May just simply did not have the political capital to stop Williamson snakeing his way into running a Whitehall department.

Theresa May may be a weak leader who has simply failed to keep an orderly and stable government. However, so far, she has proved competency at politicking, and through sheer practicality has managed to clinch on to the top job. Ultimately however, the Prime Minister may prove to only be a pawn in the game of puppet masters.



Most Read

Discussed

1. [What is the difference between tax evasion and tax avoidance?](#)
2. [Review: Little Mix - LM5](#)
3. [Penalty for submitting work up to an hour late halved](#)
4. [UK government in contempt of Parliament ahead of key Brexit vote](#)
5. [How to depose a Conservative leader](#)
6. [Led Astray - The Case Against Greta Van Fleet](#)

Write for Nouse Politics

[Get in touch with the editors](#)

[Join the Facebook group](#)

More in Politics

[UK government in contempt of Parliament ahead of key Brexit vote](#)

[How to depose a Conservative leader](#)

[Aufwiedersehen: Merkel plans her departure](#)

[US turnout surges in Midterms](#)

[Trans-Atlantic spats overshadow Centenary](#)

[Up to a million Muslims imprisoned by China](#)

- [About Nouse](#)
- [Who's Nouse](#)
- [Website Credits](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Advertising](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Student Discounts](#)
- [Print Editions](#)
- [Mini-Sites](#)
- [Nouse on Twitter](#)
- [Nouse on Facebook](#)
- [Nouse on Google+](#)

