

The mistake heard around the world: a legacy spoiled by a single mistake?
Understanding Tony Blair's Foreign Policy

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“My choice is for armed forces that are prepared to engage in this difficult, tough, challenging campaign, to be war fighters as well as peacekeepers; for a British foreign policy [that] keeps our American alliance strong and is prepared to project hard as well as soft power; and for us as a nation to be as willing to fight terrorism and to pay the cost of that fight wherever it may be, as we are to be proud champions of the causes of peace in the Middle East, action against poverty, or the struggle to halt to degradation of our environment.”¹

I

For a man who took such a long time to resign, Tony Blair’s record has so far attracted only the briefest of periods of popular assessment. It is as though the length of the resignation process wore out any general interest in the man and his policies: except that is, for his policy in Iraq. On that at least, and for perfectly understandable reasons, the assessment came quickly and in predictable forms.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the critics of Blair’s foreign policy were ferocious in their evaluation. They condemned the man for craven subordination to a neo-con agenda, and castigated the agenda as an unmitigated disaster and a threat to world peace. From the many responses in this vein, this from Avi Shlaim, Professor of International Relations at St. Antony’s College, Oxford, is typical:

Blair came to office with no experience of, and virtually no interest in, foreign affairs, and ended by taking this country to war five times. Blair boasts that his foreign policy was guided by the doctrine of liberal interventionism. But the war in Iraq is the antithesis of liberal intervention. It is an illegal, immoral and unnecessary war, a war undertaken on a false prospectus and without sanction from the UN. Blair’s entire record in the Middle East is one of catastrophic failure.²

In the United States and among his more conservative supporters however, a kinder, gentler orthodoxy was immediately on offer to counter such critics. As the Blair premiership came to its inglorious end, shipwrecked on the shoals of an Iraq adventure about whose dangers so many had warned, commentators sympathetic to either the

¹ Tony Blair, speaking on HMS Albion, Plymouth, January 12 2007

² In *The Guardian*, May 14 2007.

adventure or the man began to roll out a smokescreen of retrospective justification. It was a justification with two quite different faces.

- Primarily this conservative retrospective justification labeled Blair as New Labour's lost and discarded leader. It treated him as "Blair the misunderstood", Blair the "victim of a single error", Blair the "global humanitarian led astray", Blair the "tragic hero",³ Blair the kind of man who still has a huge role to play for good in the central trouble spots of the world. "He has been a friend", Colin Powell told James Robbins: "you never had to worry about him walking away from you. He has been steadfast. In the face of negative public opinion he has stood steady."⁴ Steady, but at a price: "the bitter end is near for Tony Blair", Paisley Dodds reported for *The Associated Press*, a politician "whose decade of achievements have faded into the shadows of the Iraq war."⁵
- Not that this semi-apologetic "shadows" view went unchallenged on the right. It did not. David Brooks in *The New York Times*, for one, would have none of it. The conventional view of a talented leader "sadly overshadowed by Iraq is absurd", he wrote the day Blair stood down as party leader, "It's like saying that an elephant is a talented animal whose virtues are sadly overshadowed by the fact that it's big and has a trunk." Blair's "decision to support the invasion of Iraq grew out of the essence of who he was". He was the antithesis of Samuel Huntington, and properly so. Not for Blair, according to Brooks, a clash of cultures that denies our common humanity: but instead a commitment to the view that "the process of globalization compels us to be interdependent, and that the world will flourish only if the international community enforces shared, universal values". Iraq for Blair was simply a moment, not in a clash between civilizations

³ The judgment of Constance Stelzenmüller, Berlin director of the German Marshall fund, cited in Quentin Peel, "Led astray: How Iraq cast a shadow over Blair's foreign policy successes", *The Financial Times*, May 11 2007, p.7

⁴ Quoted in James Robbins, "Assessing Blair's foreign policy", *BBC News*, May 10 2007

⁵ *Winston-Salem Journal*, May 13 2007

as Huntington would have it, but in a struggle to protect the future of civilization itself. In the age-old battle between “progress and reaction,” Brooks wrote, “Blair concluded that Britain had to combat those who would divide the human community, even without the support of the multilateral institutions that he cherished”.⁶

There were echoes of this pattern of judgment and justification in the British media too – the same glorification in Blair’s steadfastness, and the same disagreement about whether invading Iraq was a departure from Blair’s global humanitarianism or its apotheosis. “The great performer leaves the stage”, *The Economist* told us in May, and “posterity will look more kindly on [him] than Britons do today”.⁷ He had been “led astray”, *The Financial Times* decided, a great prime minister who would be “remembered more for one fateful mistake than for a decade of principled humanitarian intervention and energetic European diplomacy”.⁸ Blair’s friend Will Hutton put it differently.

Here, he placed his loyalty to an idea of a united West before the politics of international legitimacy and feasible politics of regime change, a judgment call that was and is wrong. But his motives were not dishonorable. Blair believes in the West of the Christian Enlightenment. Any global initiative, whether it's action against climate change or the fight against terror, requires the West to stand collectively together, even when the US is wrong. It is why he is simultaneously pro-European and pro-American; he sees Britain's responsibility to be in the inner councils of both Washington and Brussels. Factor in his belief that a Good Samaritan should help the stricken suffering from despotism, the core of his so-called liberal internationalism, and his engagement in Iraq was inevitable.

So in which way is Blair’s foreign policy performance best to be understood? Is it to be understood as the story of a big man of noble vision, a genuine global humanitarian with an impressive track record up to and including Afghanistan, who then made one fatal error of judgment: an isolated decision from whose consequences neither he nor his reputation can immediately be salvaged? Or is it rather, as Brooks and Hutton would

⁶ David Brooks, ‘The Human Community’, *New York Times*, May 11 2007

⁷ *The Economist*, May 12 2007, pp. 57 & 11

⁸ *The Financial Times*, May 11 2007, p.7

have it, that given the nobility and altruism of Blair's worldview, his engagement in Iraq was in some measure pre-determined? Was the invasion of Iraq an error, an aberration: or was it, on the contrary, pure continuity in action – the logical outcome of Blair's noble global vision?

We will argue in this paper that there was both error *and* continuity in the foreign policy of Tony Blair. There was *error* – the decision to invade Iraq was made on false premises and inadequate grounds. It took him into new territory – both literally and ethically. It was not just Kosovo all over again. But there was *continuity* too: the errors that were made had origins that were of long standing. They were errors that were rooted, as both Brooks and Hutton correctly argued, in Blair's more general world view. We don't agree with either Brooks or Hutton on the content or the desirability of the view in which Blair's key foreign policy error was rooted. Nor do we view Blair's decision to invade Iraq in quite such personal terms as they apparently do. It is true that the decision was largely his – the invasion of Iraq was Blair's war alone, and not the result of collective responsibility and cabinet leadership. (The Campbell diaries are quite clear on the severity of the cabinet's doubts on the invasion.⁹) But the decision to go to war had deeper roots than personality alone. It was also the product of the continuing impact on British foreign policy of a mindset of imperialism and Atlanticism to which the entire British political class, including successive generations of the Labour Party leadership, have long clung. Indeed we will argue that, in Labour's case, that clinging has been almost desperate at times, reflecting the party leadership's willingness to prove themselves worthy as a party of government, by being ready and willing to defend and advance Britain's great power aspirations and global role.

II

There was definitely *error* in the decision to invade Iraq in the manner, and with the timing, that Blair and Bush agreed. That much is now unambiguously clear – and

⁹ On the degree of unease in John Reid, John Prescott and other leading figures, see the report by Will Woodward on Alistair Campbell's dairies in *The Guardian*, July 9 2009.

indeed has been conceded as such by Blair himself. There was error in the evidence used to justify invasion. Saddam Hussein had no weapons of mass destruction. He also, of course, had no connection to the events of 9/11: though to his credit, Blair was always clear that Hussein did not. The Bush Administration invaded Iraq for a myriad of real and imaginary reasons, but the Blair Government would not have gone along for the ride had they not been convinced by the WMD claim¹⁰: so the failure to find any WMD underscores the scale of the error made. Blair, like Bush, now uses the defense that he made policy based on the best intelligence available at the time: but Blair, unlike Bush, was told ahead of time that the intelligence which drove him to war was highly problematic. Blair chose to ignore that warning.¹¹ He was even accused of ‘sexing up’ the data by which mobilization for war was justified at the time; and he was certainly warned of the dangers inherent in the rush to war on which the White House was insisting in the early months of 2003. There were therefore errors of timing too: errors about when and how to invade that were not made in a moment, but errors that were seen coming, warned against, argued about, but made nonetheless. Blair may now look like a hero tarnished, or a man led astray – but in the run up to the invasion he strode the world like a Colossus, persistently refusing to be turned off course by the force of any of the counter-claims on substance, timing and consequences that subsequently have been so powerfully vindicated.

So why did the error occur? Was it a mistake, as Quentin Peel would have us believe? Or was it a consequence of Blair’s Christian-inspired Enlightenment-fueled world view, as Hutton would argue? In our view, it was neither. In the most immediate sense, Blair took the UK into war because by the time the decision was finalized, he was trapped by the logic of his own earlier positions. He took the UK to war because he had talked himself (and the coalition of the willing) into a corner from which they not escape without an intolerable loss of face. Blair *talked* the UK into a premature war with the

¹⁰ This is critical. For the evidence, see *Blair’s War*, pp. 128-9

¹¹ The latest to confirm this is Sir Stephen Wall, a former foreign policy adviser. See Ned Temko, “Blair ‘ignored Chirac on Iraq’”, *The Observer*, February 25 2007

Iraqi dictatorship, and held to his position because, at the 11th hour, *hubris* overtook judgment.

As we argued, in *Blair's War*, what seems to have happened to the New Labour Government, as the events leading to the invasion of Iraq unfolded, was that in part the leading players – Jack Straw no less than Tony Blair – became victims of their own prior rhetoric. They both signed on to the Bush formulation of the post 9/11 problem – that the world faced a war on terrorism. They both signed on to the “axis of evil” formulation of the world’s current dangers. Indeed Blair argued publicly in April 2002 (at Crawford in Texas, of all places – you can’t get closer to Bush-land than that) that there were certain regimes in the world that were just too dangerous to be left in place, and that it was essential that the international community take action to contain or remove them. By early 2003 Blair then reached the moment he spent the rest of 2002 trying to avoid or postpone. He reached the moment at which the dilemma written into the linkage he established at Crawford could be avoided no longer – the moment, that is, when the condemned regimes were still in existence but the multilateral coalition to remove them was not. How then to jump? Had the status of the regime been changed by the absence of an international will to remove it? No, it had not. Was the regime too dangerous to leave in place? Blair was on record as saying so. So the case for unilateral action won, as it were, by default. Blair did not want to act without UN backing, but he couldn’t get that backing; and he had argued himself into a corner in which inaction against the regimes being criticized was no longer a possibility. Jack Straw saw the danger too, and threatened resignation when invasion was proposed but UN backing was blocked by the prospect of a French veto. But he too in the end chose to bite the bullet, locked into a military adventure he didn’t want by the saber rattling he and his leader had done so effectively in the months preceding the invasion.

The UK went to war against Iraq alongside the US in 2003 because its Prime Minister had attempted to recreate the anti-Taliban coalition against a different enemy – Saddam Hussein – and had failed. Tony Blair took the UK to war because by then his public statements had locked him into a confrontation with Iraq from which he could not

escape without cost. He could not escape without loss of face. He could not escape without bolstering the self-confidence of the Iraqi regime that both he and Bush claimed was so dangerous. He could not escape without imperiling the ‘special relationship’ with the US to which, after 9/11, he had given unique priority. In that sense, the UK went to war in a comedy of errors, locked into a sequence of events that its prime minister had worked hard to avoid. Blair ended up where he had no particular wish to be: second-in-command of a ragbag coalition of third-rate nations. Such a view is fully in line with Robin Cook’s suggestion, in his diaries, that by the time war became inevitable, Blair was ‘genuinely puzzled as to how he had got himself into his present dilemma’. It was Cook’s judgment that Blair ‘had never expected to find himself ordering British troops into war without UN backing’, particularly given that by then – again in Cook’s judgment, the Prime Minister did not believe any longer in the veracity of the claim, made by his own government as late as September 2002, in a much maligned dossier, that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction that could be deployed within 45 minutes.¹² ‘I am certain,’ Cook wrote, that ‘the real reason he went to war was that he found it easier to resist the public opinion of Britain than he did the request of the President of the United States’.¹³

III

So with the invasion of Iraq we have a comedy of errors that turns into a tragedy of epochal proportions: with Blair less the tragic hero than either the knave or the fool In *Blair’s War*, we put it this way:

As the evidence mounted that the war was being over-sold, time and again Labour supporters in the UK said to each other ‘Tony Blair must know something that he can’t tell us, for reasons of intelligence and security’: but apparently he did not. All the New Labour leader had to guide him was the very intelligence information that is now being exposed as far more conditional and tentative than we were told prior to the invasion. So the question comes to this. Did Tony Blair know that the data was problematic, but went on nonetheless: because having started on the Bush bandwagon, he could not get off without personal loss of face? Or did he not know: was he actually bushwhacked, bamboozled by the overselling of the intelligence data by the Bush team? It

¹² Cited in P. Wintour, ‘Ministers round on Cook over diaries serialization’, *The Guardian*, October 6 2003

¹³ cited in W. Hoge, ‘Blair Doubted Iraq had Arms, Ex-Aide Says’, *New York Times*, October 6 2003

is some choice. The UK went to war when it should not have done so, led by a prime minister who was either misleading us or being misled himself.¹⁴

But comedies and tragedies, knaves and fools, have also to be explained. Labeling the invasion as a tragedy evaluates it, but it does not explain it. Labeling is only ever the first stage of any analysis, one that requires for its completeness further stages that probe beneath the surface of politics in search of its underlying causes. In this case and in our view, that explanatory journey needs first to examine the person and office of the prime minister, and then to explore the global roles and mindsets that UK twentieth-century prime ministers have characteristically chosen to play and to deploy.

Following David Runciman, we can see a space for a *psychological* element in the overall explanation of why Blair went to war; and following Steve Kettell, we can also see a space for a *constitutional* dimension to the explanation.

There is room for a little psychology here – some sense of Blair the man.¹⁵ By 2003 Blair the world statesman clearly expected to play big leadership roles, and actively enjoyed the playing. He had practiced such a role on the world stage at least twice already, in Kosovo and in Afghanistan. He had also practiced it at home endlessly, both before and after 1997, taking and winning one political gamble after another. Iraq was, from this perspective, simply more of the same. Blair imposed himself on the Bush people in 2001 because he wanted a leadership role post 9/11, and though they had initially not known what to do with him, by 2003 they had drawn him into their inner circle, using him as their main global commercial traveler. After all, Blair did “sincerity” well – far better than Bush – persuading others with the fluency of his argument because of his capacity, in the moment, to persuade himself. Then, when more traditional Labourites threw up their hands in horror at New Labour’s intimacy with so conservative a Republican Administration, Blair’s own hubris kicked in, reinforcing his commitment to the relationship and the invasion the more that both were challenged. He had shown

¹⁴ (David Coates and Joel Krieger (with Rhiannon Vickers), *Blair’s War*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2004, p. 129)

¹⁵ David Runciman, *The Politics of Good Intentions*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006

people before. He would show them again. Leadership was about getting ahead of the curve. Iraq was simply the next curve. A different prime minister, with the same options, would have played it more cautiously, but Blair did not. It is not simply that he became trapped by the logic of what he had already said. It is also that he was trapped by a logic of his own choosing.

There was an arrogance here, an arrogance on which many of Blair's critics have subsequently commented at length. David Hare, for example:

...most egregious mistakes flowed from Tony Blair's conviction that he did not need to take notice of his own natural supporters – that he was somehow living his life in some far higher atmosphere, at some mature level of reality where tough decisions had to be made on the basis of largely confidential evidence....Blair, clearly, had never much liked the Labour party. He had never thought very highly of those who gave him power. But as time went on, he came to see the popular hostility to his 'higher view' as a mark of his virility, a sign that he must be facing up to the 'difficult' decisions that we, the lazy and the feckless, spend our lives shirking....in detaching himself from the wisdom of the crowd – the common wisdom, the correct wisdom that could not understand why a mission against al-Qaeda had to be taken into a country where [there] was no trace of al-Qaeda – Blair turned himself into an ungovernable Coriolanus."¹⁶

Once trapped in a logic of his own making, Blair could then not easily be blocked in the pursuit of the policy to which that logic gave rise. Steve Kettell is entirely correct to argue this: given the patronage and power that modern Prime Ministers now enjoy, once Blair had set his Iraq policy in train, it was very hard/close to impossible for anyone to stop him.¹⁷ The UK state does have a democratic deficit, especially in relation to foreign policy: too few checks and balances, too limited a notion of representation, too great an enthusiasm for strong leadership. And yet in this case Parliament did vote – it actually voted twice in the run-up to war – and on each occasion the vote was in favor of Blair's chosen path. It was in favor because Labour placemen/women in government voted with the Conservatives against the Labour Left. Leading figures in the Brown government are now promising constitutional reform, to give Parliament the decision on war and peace, as though Parliament did not decide war and peace on this occasion. But it

¹⁶ David Hare, "Iraq and the apocalypse", *New Statesman*, May 4 2007

¹⁷ Steve Kettell, *Dirty Politics: New Labour, British Democracy and the Invasion of Iraq*, London, Zed Books, 2006)

did. The responsibility for agenda setting may have been Blair's alone; but the responsibility for the fact that the Blair agenda setting prevailed, was not solely his. That responsibility lay too with the Parliamentary Labour Party itself, and with his cabinet colleagues. Too many Labour MPs swallowed their doubts, and no doubt their consciences, to keep their jobs. Only Robin Cook resigned. Even Clare Short initially bit the bullet. The invasion of Iraq tells us about more than Blair. It tells us about the mindset and careerism of vast sections of a whole parliamentary party, significant numbers of whom are still in power as we write.

IV

So still we need to ask: why did Tony Blair find it so easy to lock himself into this role as point man for the Bush Administration, and why did his "need for leadership", if that is what it was, manifest itself in so aggressive and unilateral an invasion of a country whose leadership was anathema to the very people who had organized the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 9/11. There is both an immediate and a deeper answer to those questions.

The immediate answer is that Blair decided that UK national interests required that he stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with the United States in a context in which the US and UK were already standing 'shoulder to shoulder' in the policing of Iraq's no-fly zones. He just went on doing what he had done when Clinton was President, and what an earlier Conservative Prime Minister had agreed with an earlier Bush President. What Blair added was his own determination to "hug them close".¹⁸ This is how we put it in *Blair's War*.

The clearest documentation of that set of concerns appears in Peter Stothard's *30 days*, where he reports the existence of a list of points on the London-Washington-Baghdad interplay, drawn up in September 2002 by the Prime Minister, 'to which he and his aides would regularly return'. The list is worth reproducing in full.

- 'Saddam Hussein's past aggression, present support for terrorism and future ambitions made him a clear threat to his enemies. He was not the only goal, but he was a threat nonetheless.'

¹⁸ The title of a fascinating insider account of the build up to war written by Peter Riddell

- The United States and Britain were among his enemies.
- The people of the United States, still angered by the 11 September attacks, still sensing unfinished business from the first Gulf War twelve years before, would support a war on Iraq.
- Gulf War 2 – President George W Bush vs Saddam Hussein – would happen whatever anyone else said or did.
- The people of Britain, continental Europe and most of the rest of the world would not even begin to support a war unless they had a say through the United Nations.
- It would be more damaging to long-term world peace and security if the Americans alone defeated Saddam Hussein than if they had international support to do so.’

The list is a truly remarkable one. If true, it tells us that even in September 2002 Tony Blair was resigned to the inevitability of war. Claire Short may not have been right to claim that the decision to go to war was agreed between Bush and Blair in September: but she seems to have been right in sensing Blair’s willingness to go along with an American military move even that early in the struggle for a UN resolution. The list also demonstrates the Blair determination to stay with the Americans, and to hold them to a multilateral politics. But if that was the Blair intention, it singularly failed: and then the list also indicates the choice that the Prime Minister had eventually to face. Which point in the list was to be the breaker for Blair: the penultimate one or the final one. Events proved that it was the final one that prevailed. As Martin Kettle put it, the list shows that in the end Britain ‘went to war to keep on the right side of Washington’.¹⁹

That Blair was writing lists of this kind, in the midst of a growing international crisis in which he was a major player, then tells us something else. It tells us that Blair, like Labour Prime Ministers before him, found himself comfortable playing this inflated global role, maintaining a world position as close in position to that enjoyed by previous prime ministers in the heyday of the UK’s imperial past. Blair often described the invasion of Iraq as the new century’s first ‘third way’ war; but in truth, for the UK at least, it was not. It was a throwback to an older – actually Old Labour as well as old Conservative – imperial use of UK military power. It was the shadow of imperialism that made it easy for Blair to invade Iraq. Rearranging other people’s political furniture is what imperialist powers do best, and what British arms have done many times. Understanding why Blair went into Iraq also involves understanding why New Labour in power had not made a fundamental rupture with ways of thinking that stretch back more than a century. As we said in *Blair’s War*, “if the speed and ease with which New Labour went to war in Iraq without a UN mandate makes one thing clear, it is this: that the intellectual furniture of Victorian imperialism still remains a presence in the mindset of

¹⁹ *Blair’s War*, op.cit, p. 96

the existing leadership of the Labour party...a furniture that,” in our view, ‘long ago should have been thrown out and burnt.’²⁰ That New Labour did not burn it holds the ultimate key, in our view, to why Blair sent UK troops to war and why, as we write, they remain there.

V

Like the verdict by a coroner’s inquest in a murder mystery—where “death by misadventure” puts to rest embarrassing inquiries about what really happened—it is easy to contribute multiple psychological or contextual motives to Blair’s decision to take Britain to war in Iraq. But if we want fully to grasp Blair’s relationship with the Bush Administration we need to go further. We need to explore what it was about New Labour in general, and Tony Blair in particular, that kept this imperial posturing alive, and so facilitated Blair’s road to war? We need to see the importance of the way in which Blair brought together a New Labour understanding of globalization with sets of foreign policy models within the UK Labour Party that predate New Labour by several generations. We need to see how Blair’s shifting allegiance to alternative foreign policy legacies within the Labour Party (the *push factors*) conditioned him to be particularly receptive to the new and assertive national security strategy of the U.S and the well-documented personal entreaties of the American president at Crawford, Texas (the *pull factors*).

We have already discussed the impact of the pull factors: how Blair, trapped by his rhetoric and circumstances, chose war over the humiliation of a climb-down from promises he made to Bush and what he viewed as irrevocable commitments to go to war. Now, we must turn to the push factors: to those legacies of past Labour party foreign policy thinking that threw Blair into Bush’s arms. For as with Labour leaders in the past, Blair’s foreign policy orientation was ultimately anchored in the overall worldview that he brought to the totality of his policy agenda. Tony Blair’s role in the Iraqi story can be explained in part by looking outwards to the pulling force of Washington, to the quite reasonable judgment that British interests are often served by powerful strategic ties to

²⁰ *ibid*, p. 124

the United States as hegemonic power. But that role was also the product of powerful internal forces within the Labour Party itself, and must be understood as such.

Blair's role, and that of his ministers, has to be grasped as the natural outgrowth of their general understanding of the world, a general understanding that gives a unity to the thrust of their domestic and their foreign policy. It has also to be grasped as the outgrowth of legacies left in the mindsets of contemporary Labour leaders by the worldviews prevalent in the minds of previous generations of Labour Party leaders. New Labour is not as new as it likes to claim. Its general analysis of the world, and of the role of the use of force in advancing UK interests, has new emphases and inflections, but it also carries within it large elements of imperialism and Atlanticism left behind by the thinking and practice of Labour leaders in the past. It is the fusion of those new inflections and old legacies that holds the key to why Blair made Bush's war his war despite the large moral and geopolitical divide that separated them.

VI

Students of British Labour (ourselves included) have too often in the past separated domestic and foreign policy as objects of analysis. To understand Blair's move to Basra, we have to bring those separate studies together by developing some general models of Labour politics through which to isolate the manner in which foreign and domestic policy necessarily originate together.

In *Blair's War* we developed four such models, organized in a 2-by-2 matrix. To understand how New Labour took the UK to the invasion of Iraq, it is necessary to see how (1) a *Traditional Labour* model was challenged historically by (2) a *Left-Labour* alternative, and how the legacies of that political confrontation left Blair with a new choice: between (3) New Labour's post-1997, pre-9/11 adherence to an expansive view of global interdependence, humanitarian intervention and debt relief (what we call *Offensive Multilateralism*) and (4) a post-9/11 *New Labour* understanding of the world that generates a foreign policy scarred by residues of imperialism and Atlanticism, and

yet still insists on resolute multilateralism, now recast by Blair's new post-9/11 mentality – what we call *Defiant Internationalism*. The four frameworks may be summarized as follows:

Framework #1. *British Labourism: Traditional Foreign Policy*

Promote the British state and its national interests, above class and party, by an active defense of imperial and commercial interests, and the effective management of a balance of power in Europe. Britain's role as an offshore balancer of Europe and as a Great Power to be enhanced by a dedicated commitment to an Atlantic Alliance and a robust participation in NATO. Britain's international status and security require the commitment to a global military capability and the willingness to use force, backed by the full triad of conventional, tactical nuclear, and strategic nuclear weapons.

Framework #2. *British Labourism: The Socialist Foreign Policy Critique*

Promote the advance of socialism and the advance of the left within the Labour Party by insisting that foreign and domestic policy are integrally and organically connected by a set of core principles: internationalism; international-working class solidarity, anti-capitalism, and anti-militarism. Britain's foreign policy and security interests to be best advanced by the projection abroad of clear ethical principles for the conduct of foreign policy, a commitment to third force neutralism and the building of multilateral institutions, a rejection of nuclear options and support for unilateral nuclear disarmament.

Framework #3: *New Labour I: Offensive Multilateralism.*

Harness the forces of globalization and the practical realities of interdependence to advance internationalism, multilateralism, and cooperation in the economic, environmental, and security dimensions of foreign affairs. When necessary, advance humanitarian policy through resolute military means consonant with the doctrine of international community and to advance the strategic goal of enhancing Britain's global power and prestige. Engage the questions of debt reduction and institutional reform that are required to secure the aims of human rights, democratic governance, and security.

Framework #4 *New Labour II: Defiant Internationalism.*

Rewrite foreign policy to meet the security threats of the post 9/11 order. The democratic preferences of nation and party—and the commitment to strengthen and reform the United Nations and especially the Security Council—must give way to the “war on terrorism”. Whatever differences that may develop between the UK and US (regarding the role of the Security Council, the linkage of the Israeli-Palestine conflict to the War in Iraq, the best mix of instruments to be used in fighting terrorism, the role of the United Nations in post-war “nation-building,” and so on) all must be subordinated to the Anglo-American alliance. War in Iraq is justified by the WMD threats of the Saddam Hussein regime as well as its record of horrific human rights abuses and defiance of the United Nations. British national interests and values are best advanced by its unique partnership with the United States.

Pre 9/11 foreign policy thinking within the Labour Party had settled at Framework 3. There seemed to be general recognition that the great power unilateralism of Framework 1 was to be abandoned, and that the ethical concerns of Framework 2 were now best pursued through multilateral institutions set in a globalized world. New Labour,

pre 9/11, was big on globalization. Globalization justified (and made necessary) the abandonment of old-style Labourism both domestically and abroad. Interdependence was the order of the day; and Blair was in the forefront of the design of new principles of foreign policy appropriate to it. His much-cited Chicago speech in the midst of the Kosovo crisis is entirely germane here: containing as it did his argument on pre-emptive multilateral interventionism. As we said in *Blair's War*, in Chicago

Blair argued that isolationism was no longer an option once financial insecurity in Asia destroyed jobs from Chicago to his own constituency in County Durham, and conflict in the Balkans caused refugees in Germany as well as the United States. He extolled the 'impulse towards interdependence' and the 'new doctrine of international community' which he characterized as 'the explicit recognition that today more than ever before, we are mutually dependent, that national interest is to a significant extent governed by international collaboration and that we need a clear and coherent debate as to the direction this doctrine takes us in each field of international endeavor.' Above all, Blair made very clear that New Labour's governing model—as well as its guiding ethical principles—cut both ways, in domestic as well as foreign affairs. In fact, it seems clear that in narratives of community it finds its moral voice and locates a comfortable 'third way' ethos to guide institutional and policy innovation. 'Community' is the normative glue that holds together the domestic and foreign policy components of New Labour, capturing the salutary blend of individuality (recast in the international realm as national interest), balanced by the interdependence that he considers the core of socialism. So, in Chicago, Blair was able to insist that: "Just as within domestic politics, the notion of community—the belief that partnership and co-operation are essential to advance self-interest—is coming into its own...so it needs to find its international echo. Global financial markets, the global environment, global security and disarmament issues: none of these can be solved without intense co-operation."

When in Chicago, Blair noted the 'danger of letting wherever CNN roves be the cattle prod to take a global conflict seriously,' and argued instead for the sustained effort to advance 'the principles of the doctrine of international community and...the institutions that deliver them.' Without specifying the relevant principles much further, Blair called in Chicago for NATO to give serious focus to the lessons of Kosovo, for a review of the decision making process in the United Nations (and in the Security Council in particular), and for the serious consideration of third world debt.²¹ For Blair, globalization - as a set of imperatives that mandate the historic Labour Party rupture with social democracy - is indistinguishable from its ethical mission to build community at home and to build international collaboration abroad. Before 9/11 shifted Blair's perspective, and his commitment to Bush's war in Iraq subverted New Labour's heady post-1997 foreign policy vision, its guiding principles were clear.

They were clearly Framework 3 principles. But 9-11 (or rather, his hyper-active response to it) – changed all that. It took Blair back to his own version of Framework 1, and so on to Framework 4. Again, from *Blair's War*

²¹ "Doctrine of the International Community," Speech by the prime minister, Tony Blair, to the Economic Club of Chicago, Hilton Hotel, Chicago, USA, Thursday 22 April 1999. In that speech, Blair laid out 5 tests against which to decide whether or not to intervene: 'first, are we sure of our case...second, have we exhausted all diplomatic options...third...are there military operations we can sensibly and prudently undertake...fourth, are we prepared for the long term...And finally, do we have national interests involved?' The speech is available at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/globaliz/olitics/blair.htm>

What in consequence has become of Tony Blair's commitments to global community and the reform of global governance? As far as we can tell, they have been sacrificed to a new mindset that we might call defiant internationalism. It is a mindset characterized by a 'go for broke' risk-taking strategy to advance British interests and maximize national power, and paradoxically to do so in a world where nation-states are seen as having far less power than before. And it is a mindset that has enabled Tony Blair to enthusiastically join America's unilaterally designed and implemented war in Iraq, while simultaneously justifying that war by appeals to the international community, to the demands of interdependence, and to a commitment to multilateral institutions, all of which have been damaged, perhaps irretrievably, by the actions thus justified. For now, whatever the cost, Blair is content to play Robin to Bush's Batman, fighting masked villains as loyal underling in the dynamic duo: defying the international community, the nation, and the party as he does so. His defiance is the product, we believe, of this fourth mind-set.

In interpreting the evolution of British foreign policy, it seems reasonable to suppose a degree of path-dependency in the construction of new Labour's post-9/11 foreign policy orientation under Blair: the first three models help shed light on the fourth – Blair's startling embrace of a unilateral military intervention that divided the Labour Party, vastly complicated and constrained his ability to serve as an interlocutor between the US and the EU, and defied his own core principles of interdependence and cooperation. Analyzing these models shows how the selective appropriation of diverse Labour Party legacies critically shaped Blair's moral sensibilities and strategic worldview, and how significantly Blair broke with Labour's heritage once he had set his sights on war.

VI

Now, by way of conclusion, a little self-reflection and policy advocacy. This is a daunting age in which to conduct an effective, ethically sound, and progressive foreign policy. It is one plagued by endemic human rights abuses that warrant intervention, and by horrific security threats in the UK and elsewhere that require concerted responses on many fronts, including the use of force. International law as well as the institutions for global governance can be no more effective than the most powerful states will allow; and this is a particularly grave problem when, as now, the leading hegemonic power exhibits little interest in truly collective or multilateral measures. And the UK must operate in this context constrained both by resource limits and a diminished capacity to fundamentally change the course set by the United States.

So the challenges are profound; but this does not mean that a Labour Government should allow itself to be trapped by unconditional support for the US, or to shrink from its responsibilities to conduct an ethical foreign policy with consistency and clarity, not selectively—as if determination to pursue progressive agendas on debt relief or global warming absolve the government for its failure to exercise due diligence on the war in Iraq.

It is far too early to consecrate a new framework to distil the foreign policy orientation of the Brown government, but exactly the right time to begin an immanent analysis of its broad contours. We expect that the push factors of foreign policy legacies and Atlanticist and imperialist mindsets—the “Traditional Foreign Policy” great power politics – is likely to be a driving force as ever, but we anticipate that the emphasis on the use of force will be more muted than with Blair, with the result being more a “Developmental Multilateralism” (with a strain of the Socialist Foreign Policy’s commitment to internationalism and multilateralism, but not a trace of its anti-capitalist critique). We do not expect to see Defiant Internationalism, Blair’s signature foreign policy orientation in Gordon Brown’s premiership. As Philip Stephens put it so aptly in *The Financial Times* in July, at the very least we can expect, from a Brown premiership a preference for the soft power over strong: in effect “no more wars”.²²

A change in leadership at the top inevitably creates an opening for new thinking and we know that Gordon Brown, David Miliband, Mark Malloch Brown, and others who will forge Britain’s foreign policy in the years ahead are committed to serious reflection on the lessons of the Blair years, starting with the war in Iraq. It is in Gordon Brown’s interest, as well as his temperament and mindset, to distinguish his premiership from Blair’s in this regard; and in his early days as prime minister, he began to do just that—not by providing an accelerated schedule for withdrawing British troops from Iraq or by any explicit criticism of American policy, but through his key foreign policy appointments.

²² Philip Stephens, “Ties that bind: Bush, Brown and a different relationship”, *The Financial Times*, July 27, 2007

As noted above, Brown appointed Mark Malloch Brown, former United Nations Deputy Secretary-General under Kofi Annan and a vociferous critic of the UK's role in the war in Iraq, as a minister with broad international affairs responsibilities. Malloch Brown is an experienced figure with strong views, extensive international credibility, and hugely significant UN experience and influence; and he has close ties to Gordon Brown, who backed him for his appointment as head of the UNDP (he was Administrator from 1999 to 2005), even though Malloch Brown was not the official EU candidate for that very important development post. It is a good bet that Malloch Brown will be in a small circle of the prime minister's foreign policy confidants, pressing to effectively institutionalize the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and advance a far-reaching international aid-financing agenda, while pressing to bring together and mobilize an international coalition for UN system reform. In the short term, Malloch Brown will likely set his sights on efforts to revitalize the UN's capacity to respond to humanitarian crises and emerging violent conflicts, a capacity which was significantly degraded by the war in Iraq and the erosion of multilateral institutions by the Bush administration. Gordon Brown feels deeply about all these development and institutional reform goals—indeed, that is why Malloch Brown was appointed.²³

Brown's appointment of David Miliband as foreign minister—someone who was neither directly tainted by the decision to go to war in Iraq or privately in favor of that decision, and someone who strenuously argued against unqualified British support for the Israel in the war in Lebanon in summer 2006—indicates clearly the new prime minister's design. With the appointment of Miliband, formerly a Blairite and an instinctive European, despite his partly American upbringing, Brown artfully turned the page on Blair's bombastic no-holds-barred support for the use of force at America's beck and call. Miliband was quick to pledge his commitment to "patient as well as purposeful diplomacy," a signal that issues of development and climate change will be very high on the agenda and recourse to use of force genuinely a last resort. Brown immediately made

²³ We are indebted to Craig Murphy for his insights about the likely directions of UK development, international aid, and institutional reform goals.

clear that useful lessons could be learned from the experience of the war in Iraq, leaving few in doubt that he would be reluctant to repeat such an exercise anytime soon.

Brown and Miliband have been quick to counter any impression that the US and UK are drifting apart – both spoke warmly of the relationship when Douglas Alexander’s defense of multilateralism was taken as a subtle critique of the Blair-Bush Alliance. But Brown has been equally quick to appoint his own Middle East envoy, declining to leave the key hot spot of contemporary international politics in Blair’s hands alone (as ambassador for the Quartet). So things are more fluid now in the realm of UK foreign policy than for a decade past. Which makes this precisely the time for the Government to consider the adoption of an alternative foreign policy: one grounded in the historic mission of the Labour Party, mindful of both the strategic and the ethical lessons that can be drawn from the war in Iraq, cognizant of the dangers of unrivaled American power, and willing to reconsider the principles and policies that should orient Britain’s global role.

If this process is occurring, as it appears to be, then there is reason for cautious optimism that, in time, Blair’s war in Iraq may more legitimately be viewed as a mistake. We’ll know this is the case, if and when Labour’s traditional imperialist predilections and great power yearnings have been sufficiently downsized and reformed that development goals, climate change, and patient and purposeful diplomacy drive the foreign policy agenda—and UK-US relations remain close, but subject to public and private disagreement, and not quite so special. That Brown knows US politics and political elites well and is the rare European political leader who is inoculated from accusations of anti-Americanism augurs well for a close and productive US-UK relationship, but one that would benefit from critical distance.