

What Difference Did He Make? Tony Blair and British Foreign Policy From
1997-2007.

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The Guardian columnist Peter Preston recently conjured from his imagination a hypothetical world where Tony Blair had not joined George Bush in Iraq:

It is March 2003 and the US has 100,000-plus crack troops poised in the zone. Australians, Poles and numerous small fry are there or thereabouts. But France and Russia and - now - Britain are staying out. The weapons inspectors need more time, they say. Resolution 1441 doesn't sanction invasion. (Lord Goldsmith is quite clear on that.) So what happens next? What was always going to happen. The Americans, too committed to permit delay, blast in anyway. Saddam folds. That toppling statue stars on TV screens around the world. "Mission accomplished!" cries George Bush. Freedom lives! And, at a subsequent press conference, he voices his sorrow over "what must be the end of our special relationship. Since Winston Churchill, Great Britain has been our staunchest friend. We gave it our bomb, our help in the Falklands. We came to its rescue in 1944. But now, in our own war after 9/11, that friend has turned its back. All Americans will be specially saddened and shocked"¹.

There follows an unfortunate tale of cancelled trade and Iraq reconstruction contracts, visa denials, mass deportation from the US of British citizens of Pakistani origin, and so forth. Nicholas Sarkozy, the new French president, is able to flamboyantly proclaim "Moi! Je suis le special relation maintenant". In this hypothetical world, Blair is hounded from office a broken figure, harangued for having failed to give the US the wise counsel it required at its time of greatest need, with every insurgent attack on US troops in Iraq evidence of the folly of leaving the United States alone to manage the postwar.

It is a fascinating speculation, and raises the perennial issue of how precisely individual choice shapes world historical events. I argue that Blair was in fact never likely to keep Britain out of Iraq, because his personality and worldview – vividly demonstrated in the pre-Iraq wars he fought – disposed him to become involved. Others who could have occupied the post of prime minister, however, might well have made a different choice. Indeed, the argument of this paper is that Blair has a distinctive worldview and leadership style, and that this shaped British foreign policy from 1997-

¹ Peter Preston, 'Let's Just Suppose', *The Guardian*, Monday May 7th 2007, available at <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/iraq/comment/0,,2073939,00.html>, accessed 7/19/2007.

2007, in particular in the three crises of Kosovo, 9/11, and Iraq. It follows, then, that the major foreign policy issues of that decade would have been dealt with differently had another person been prime minister.

As with Preston's scenario above, we cannot know for sure how history would have turned out if someone else had been in office and had faced those foreign policy challenges, but we can speculate in a more or less disciplined fashion by asking the counterfactual question: what would another prime minister, faced with these decisions, have chosen to do? There are two ways to ensure this is done in a reasonable fashion: to compare the choices made by different individuals faced with similar situations, and to consider the policies advocated by other individuals who could plausibly have been prime minister in Blair's place. Employing the first strategy, I compare John Major's Balkan strategy with that of Blair in Kosovo, and Harold Wilson's Vietnam choice with Blair's Iraq decisions. Both Major in the Balkans and Wilson in Vietnam faced similar situations to those that confronted Blair in Kosovo and Iraq but made very different choices, and this provides some evidence for the influence of Blair as an individual.

Employing the second strategy, I consider the views of prominent individuals from Blair's cabinet who could plausibly have been prime minister in his place as the choices on Iraq were made, in particular the views of Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and Chancellor (now prime minister) Gordon Brown². I suggest it is unlikely that either individual, had they been prime minister, would have made the same decisions as Blair, although we cannot, of course, know for certain. The overall goal is to isolate those

² This replicates Yuen Khong's strategy in his investigation of how closely Britain's appeasement choices were tied to the person of Neville Chamberlain: Yuen Foong Khong, 'Confronting Hitler and Its Consequences', in Phillip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin (eds) *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 95-118.

decisions made by Blair that were shaped by his distinctive individual characteristics in order to consider “what difference he made”. I conclude that the difference was rather large in Kosovo and Iraq, while after 9/11 Blair’s worldview shaped the detail, but probably not the broad outline, of the British response. The first step is to isolate the Blair worldview and approach to international politics.

*The ‘Blair Style’*³

If, as I contend, individuals matter in world politics, it is a worthwhile investment of our energies to develop some metrics by which to understand them. The subfield of political psychology has as one of its primary aims the application of insights concerning human cognition and personality to the special case of political leaders. This, of course, presents some challenges, but nonetheless substantial progress has been made in understanding the way in which the worldview and leadership style of political leaders impact upon their choices⁴.

Previous research on Blair’s personality, conducted by systematic content analysis of his House of Commons performances for patterns of speech associated with specific beliefs and personality traits, has found that he is distinctive in several major ways, two of which bear directly on his foreign policy choices⁵. Firstly, he has a very high *belief in*

³ This portrait of Blair is adapted from my book manuscript *The Blair Identity: Personality and Foreign Policy*, and is based upon the empirical measures of Blair’s personality traits explained there and in Stephen Benedict Dyson, ‘Personality and Foreign Policy: Tony Blair’s Iraq Decisions’, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2: 1.

⁴ Margaret G. Hermann, ‘Assessing Leadership Style: Trait Analysis’, in Jerrold M. Post ed, *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003; Mark Schafer, ‘Issues in Assessing Psychological Characteristics at a Distance: Symposium Lessons and Future Research Directions’, *Political Psychology* 21, 2000.

⁵ A third key aspect of his leadership style, his very high *need for power*, bears upon the restricted advisory system he preferred to operate through – a curious mix of a small inner circle with little documentation, the size and informality of which was aptly captured by Lord Butler’s coinage: the ‘sofa government’. This

his ability to control events, a perception of personal and national efficacy that has been linked to the pursuit of proactive and ambitious international policies. Secondly, he has a low *conceptual complexity*, an element of cognitive style linked to strongly held schema that are essentially dichotomous and unequivocal, and that has been observed in those with Manichean and absolutist foreign policy worldviews.

Colleagues and observers agree that Blair is an extremely proactive prime minister, with a propensity to discount the barriers to taking action and effecting change. “He’s got that sense of mission in his underlying psychology”, says a senior British career diplomat⁶. The core of his foreign policy, according to close ally and former Home Secretary David Blunkett, is that “he’s interventionist”⁷, while Chris Smith, another former cabinet minister, agrees that Blair’s philosophy can be “characterized as a duty to intervene, even when the direct interests of the UK are not being threatened”⁸. John Kampfner, a chronicler of Blair’s deeds, argues that he “acquired a passion for military intervention without precedent in modern British political history and without parallel internationally”⁹. Blair realizes, says Lord Guthrie, the head of the British armed forces from 1997-2001, “that the world is a dangerous place, that if you do absolutely nothing, it is likely to get more dangerous”¹⁰.

This sense of mission is underlined by a great degree of self-confidence and belief in his personal efficacy. “Tony is the great persuader”, a close aide comments. “He thinks he can convert people even when it might seem as if he doesn’t have a cat in hell’s

style had important consequences in limiting the expression of dissent and the collection of information and analysis, but was linked only indirectly to Blair’s choices in the episodes under examination, and so is not a major focus here.

⁶ Telephone Interview, 6/6/07

⁷ Telephone Interview with David Blunkett, 5/1/07

⁸ Telephone Interview with Chris Smith, 6/18/07.

⁹ John Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars*. London: Simon & Schuster, 2004.

¹⁰ Telephone Interview with General Charles Guthrie, 6/20/07.

chance of succeeding. Call him naïve, call it what you will, but he never gives up. He would say things like ‘I can get Jacques (Chirac) to do this’ or ‘leave Putin to me’. A French official, noting the same tendency, suggests that “there is not a single problem that Blair thinks he cannot solve with his own personal engagement – it could be Russia, it could be Africa”. This high belief in personal efficacy does come with the risk of overreach, however: “the trouble is, the world is a little more complicated than that”¹¹. For Blair, though, success is merely a matter of personal investment in a problem. As Matthew D’Ancona puts it, “Blair is a natural participator. He sees a line and he runs towards it. He sees a club and he wants to join it. He sees a campaign and he wants to be a part of it”¹². He has, his biographer Anthony Seldon says, an “almost limitless belief in his ability to persuade”, but these are powers he has tended to “exaggerate greatly”¹³.

Allied to this proactive and highly interventionist posture is a worldview of stark clarity. Blair has a pronounced tendency to see issues in black and white that is so vivid as to have been termed ‘Manichean’. “You have to remember”, a Downing Street insider comments, “that the PM is a conviction politician”. Seldon agrees: “his very certainty often militated against him seeing other truths and perspectives”¹⁴. Seldon continues: “He conceptualizes the world as a struggle between good and evil in which his particular vocation is to advance the former”¹⁵. Lord Guthrie judges that Blair “believed in making the world a better place. He thinks if good men do nothing, bad men prevail. He is driven by that”¹⁶.

¹¹ Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars*, p. 127-128.

¹² *Frontline* Interview with Matthew D’Ancona, March 11th 2003. Available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/blair/interviews/dancona.html>, accessed 7/3/2007.

¹³ Anthony Seldon, *Blair*, London: Free Press, 2004: 698-699.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 599

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 700

¹⁶ Telephone Interview with General Charles Guthrie, 6/20/07.

This tendency toward the drawing of stark alternatives has led, say colleagues and observers, to a comfort with the division of the world into ‘them and us’ categories with strong moralistic underpinnings. “No European leader of his generation”, Danchev notes “speaks so unblushingly of good and evil”¹⁷. His worldview, according to Blunkett, is about “doing the right thing and doing good, and not tolerating evil”¹⁸. His one time political mentor, the former Labor Home Secretary Roy Jenkins, said of him “My view is that the prime minister, far from lacking conviction, has almost too much, particularly when dealing with the world beyond Britain. He is a little too Manichean for my perhaps now jaded taste, seeing matters in stark terms of good and evil, black and white”¹⁹. He has, judges an eminent British diplomat who worked very closely with Blair, “a very strong sense of sticking to his guns when he thinks he’s got the right approach”²⁰.

Perhaps as a consequence of this tendency to see the world in clear-cut, broad-brush terms, Blair has been said to be disinterested in policy detail, and to dislike engagement in minutiae or struggling with the complexities of an issue²¹. As Clare Short notes, “he’s read very little history, or very little on recent politics. He’s not stupid, but he doesn’t do detail on policy either”²². For James Naughtie, a biographer and observer, it is

¹⁷ Alex Danchev, ‘I’m with you: Tony Blair and the obligations of alliance: Anglo-American relations in historical perspective’, in *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam*, Edited by Lloyd C. Gardner and Marilyn B. Young: New York: The New Press, 2007, p. 48

¹⁸ Telephone Interview with David Blunkett, 5/1/2007

¹⁹ Naughtie, *The Accidental American*, p. 135

²⁰ Telephone Interview, 6/6/07

²¹ Peter Riddell, ‘Blair as prime minister’ in Anthony Seldon (ed) *The Blair Effect*. London: Little, Brown, 2001, p.35. This linkage between lower conceptual complexity and lack of interest in policy detail is not determinate – individuals with very stark worldviews can be interested in detail, but they tend to process it in a manner heavily biased toward their pre-existing conclusions. Margaret Thatcher, whom research reveals to score similarly to Blair on this personality trait, was of course very interested in policy detail and exerted great efforts – far more than Blair – to ensure that she was impeccably briefed. See Stephen Benedict Dyson, ‘Conceptual Complexity and World Politics: Margaret Thatcher’s Black and White Thinking’, prepared for the 2007 Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL: August 30th- September 2nd 2007.

²² Telephone Interview with Clare Short, 4/30/2007

clear that he “prefers the sweep of a broad canvas to the politics of detail”²³. Derek Scott, a former advisor, notes that Blair “focuses on the big picture, and in pursuit of his longer-term goals he may be less fastidious than some with narrower preoccupations”²⁴.

These key aspects of Blair’s worldview are, I suggest, central to his foreign policy choices. Individuals less sure of their command over events, and with a more nuanced cognitive style, would not have made the same choices had they been prime minister. Can we provide some evidence to this effect? Lacking a TARDIS with which to re-run history with someone else in charge, we find ourselves here drawn toward the realm of counterfactual thought experiments.

What Difference Did Blair Make? Counterfactuals and Comparisons.

Analyses that focus upon the influence of a single individual upon macro-level events inevitably implicate a series of logical and methodological questions. Can individual choices, even in principle, shape major historical events? Did the specific circumstances of the time permit individual latitude in response? Would other individuals who could plausibly have been in a position to make the decisions have acted in the same way?

Such considerations are inevitably counterfactual: as noted above we cannot rerun the events of 1997-2007 with a different prime minister in post and see what changes, and so must engage in a thought experiment. Strenuous efforts should be made to minimize the fantastical nature of these experiments – thought experiments of the “if Napoleon had a stealth bomber” type involve such a series of implausible leaps as to render the analysis silly. To be useful, the thought experiment must be logically possible, and involve a

²³ Naughtie, *The Accidental American*, p. xv

²⁴ Derek Scott, *Off Whitehall: A View from Downing Street by Tony Blair’s Adviser*, New York: I.B. Tauris 2004, 20

minimal re-write of actual history²⁵. The broader, macro level environment should not be changed, so a counterfactual along the lines of “would Britain have invaded Iraq if it, and not the US, was the superpower?” is also none too useful. The essence of the individual-level counterfactual is expressed in Fred Greenstein’s famous question: Would a different individual, faced with the same circumstances, have acted differently?²⁶ If, after careful consideration, we cannot make a reasonable case to that effect, then we have to conclude that circumstances, and not individuals, were the drivers of policy. If circumstances drive policy, then giving attention to issues of individual personality and style is more of an interesting parlor game than serious social science. On the other hand, major foreign policy events such as crises and war, with their chaotic, nonroutine, and highly contingent nature, often do seem to turn on a few key decisions made by prominent individuals. Considering, then, three of the major foreign policy events during Blair’s tenure - Kosovo, the response to 9/11, and the choice in Iraq - what would have been different had another individual, with a different style and worldview, been in power?

One way to make counterfactuals as reasonable as possible is to consider an issue with a policy history, where other individuals made decisions about essentially similar actors and under comparable circumstances. The example par excellence of this is the cold war, wherein eight US presidents elaborated a strategy for dealing with an ideologically hostile Soviet Union in a bipolar international system. Given the similarity

²⁵ Criteria explained in detail in Phillip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin, ‘Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological, and Psychological Perspectives’, in Phillip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin (eds) *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 1-38.

²⁶ See Fred I. Greenstein, ‘The Impact of Personality on the End of the Cold War: A Counterfactual Analysis’, *Political Psychology*, 1998: 1-16.

in circumstances, differences in that strategy are then plausible candidates, at least in part, for individual-level explanation²⁷.

Turning to the Blair decade, this is a line of reasoning at least partly possible in the case of Kosovo. The Kosovo conflict was one of a sequence of clashes between the constituent entities of the former Yugoslavia, and several of these clashes took place on the watch of Blair's predecessor John Major. There is agreement that the advent of the Blair premiership brought about a profound British strategy change in the Balkans. Moreover, this change in policy was in a direction consistent with Blair's style: proactive and moralistic. Lord Guthrie, who served as the senior UK military officer under both Major and Blair and so is uniquely qualified to speak to this comparison, suggests that Blair took a "much more forward leaning role" than his predecessor, and was, even prior to the Kosovo conflagration, "prepared and anxious that we should send our special forces out and capture war criminals who were actually being a malign influence on society". Blair, Guthrie confirms, was "prepared to go in unilaterally", and was frustrated both by the caution of the Americans and the torturous processes inherent in NATO decision making. He took bold decisions, and took them quickly, and so "as far as I'm concerned, he was certainly a much easier prime minister to work for than his predecessor John Major"²⁸.

This change was also noticed by the Americans. "The British no longer had to be dragged along to confront the Serbs" once Blair was in charge, said a senior State

²⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. The argument could also be made, of course, that basic continuities in US-Soviet interactions during this period are strong evidence that much of the broad outline of international relations is impervious to variation at the individual level.

²⁸ Telephone Interview with General Charles Guthrie, 6/20/07.

Department official. “We saw a completely different attitude”²⁹. Indeed, a close advisor to Blair confirms that the new prime minister wanted to follow a very different strategy than his predecessor. ““Frankly, we were appalled at the cowardice of the Tories”. This advisor also locates the source of the different policies followed by the new Labour government in Blair as an individual: “It was a moral thing with Tony. He believed very strongly that Britain should be a force for good in the world”³⁰.

In the Kosovo case, counterfactual speculation can be disciplined by a systematic comparison of Blair’s choices in relation to those of his predecessor who, while not facing *exactly* the same circumstances, did make policy choices on precursor conflicts involving many of the same actors. There is agreement that not only did Blair follow a very different strategy than John Major, but also that the difference was in the direction we would expect given Blair’s worldview and leadership style: more proactive and interventionist, and leavened with a strong dose of moralism.

What about 9/11? Would another prime minister have acted differently in the aftermath of the attacks on the United States? The unprecedented nature of the attacks makes it particularly difficult to find appropriate historical parallels with which to discipline a counterfactual. Within the United States the comparison is often made to Pearl Harbor, but here the circumstances of the British, hanging on grimly for national survival against Hitler’s Germany, were very different, somewhat spoiling the comparison.

Perhaps, however, we do not need a close historical referent. An oft-quoted aphorism of individual-level analysis is that ‘if the room is on fire, *everyone* will make

²⁹ Seldon, *Blair*, p. 393

³⁰ Con Coughlin, *American Ally*, London: Ecco, 2006, p. 76

for the exit'. This is to say that on many occasions circumstances will be so overwhelming as to preclude individual variation in response. On September 11th, civilian citizens of the hegemonic power in the international system were killed en masse by a terrorist group with a transnational capacity and agenda, and an identifiable 'home base' of operations in Afghanistan. The policy response of the United States, in invading Afghanistan and removing the Taliban, was easily deducible from the circumstances. Indeed, the widespread sympathy and support for the United States in the aftermath of the attacks is testimony to the clarity of imperatives inherent in the circumstances. This is to say that it is possible to explain Blair's solidarity with the US and his pledge of support without reference to his political psychology – any mainstream individual in the post of British prime minister would almost certainly have responded in basically this way.

However, once we move beyond the broad outline of policy and look at the detail, individual-level influences become more apparent. Blair's response to 9/11 did not stop with the expression of solidarity, but encompassed an incredibly ambitious agenda to eradicate the causes of terrorism – poverty, oppression, squalor – worldwide. This was seen among colleagues as Blair promising to single-handedly 'solve all of the world's problems', an impression enhanced when he launched himself on a diplomatic whirlwind tour in order to rally support for the United States. Moreover, Blair accepted the Bush administration's framing of the situation as a 'war on terror' to be fought primarily through military means and on a global scale. Not everyone in the UK government felt the same way. Clare Short noted that "all of us were horrified by the events of September 11 but most decent people are very worried by the bellicose statements from Bush and fearful of the US lashing out and killing lots of innocent Afghans and making things

worse”³¹. While the broad structure of Blair’s response seems to be a ‘room on fire’ instance of situation overwhelming individual, the detail of Blair’s response, in terms of its ambition and the acceptance of the Bush administration’s stark framing of events, does seem more individually-determined.

It is, however, in Iraq that we find the most interesting fodder for a counterfactual. Was Iraq a ‘room on fire’ case? Certainly, aspects of the circumstances surrounding the conflict would have pushed any British prime minister in a westward-leaning direction. The determination of the Bush administration to go to war did force a difficult choice upon the UK leadership – with little chance of persuading the Americans not to attack, the choice was to go along or risk the alliance – a dilemma that drives Preston’s counterfactual at the beginning of this essay. Staying out would have been far from the cost-free paradise critics of the decision often seem to have in mind. However, the aspects of the environment pushing the UK toward war were balanced by the restraints on commitment – the hostile domestic political environment and the absence of international support. Other European states with security relationships with the US, most prominently France and Germany, took note of these difficulties and refused to become involved. There does seem to have been some latitude for a different response to that chosen by Blair. Would others have chosen a different course, allowing us to attribute Britain’s Iraq choices, at least in part, to the style and worldview of the prime minister? We have a number of ways to discipline such an analysis.

Firstly, we have available the example of a different individual faced with a comparable situation, yet making a very different choice. Blair’s Iraq decisions, and the

³¹ Clare Short, *An Honourable Deception? New Labour, Iraq, and the Misuse of Power*, Free Press: London, 2004, p. 109.

increasingly eerie parallels between that conflict and Vietnam, have revived interest in Harold Wilson's relationship with Lyndon Johnson. LBJ applied much more direct pressure upon Wilson for a UK troop contribution than Bush's quite gentle advances toward Blair, and yet Wilson stood firm in refusing. Wilson's stance cannot necessarily be attributed to prescience concerning the wisdom of the war and had rather a lot to do with his unwillingness to take domestic political risks, given the war's unpopularity, but nonetheless the two situations were broadly comparable and the choice made by the prime ministers was very different³². Why, when faced with a senior ally requesting a force contribution for an unpopular war, did Wilson refuse and Blair enthusiastically agree? It seems reasonable to suggest that Blair's proactive foreign policy, sense of personal efficacy, and clear cut framing of issues are at least part of the explanation. Had the prime ministers been switched around, would Harold Wilson have kept Britain out of Iraq, and Tony Blair gone into Vietnam? It is an interesting premise, and I have argued that the answer may well be 'yes' in both cases.

However, perhaps we are being unnecessarily ambitious in reaching back into history for clues as to how a different prime minister would have dealt with Iraq. There is, after all, substantial evidence that members of Blair's cabinet *at the time* were uneasy with his policy choices. The distress of Robin Cook and Clare Short has been well documented³³, and it is safe to assume that neither would have made the choices on Iraq

³² For an extended examination of this comparison, and evidence that the different choices of Wilson and Blair were rooted in their different leadership styles and political worldviews, see Stephen Benedict Dyson, 'Alliances, Domestic Politics, and Leader Psychology: Why did Britain Stay out of Vietnam and go Into Iraq?' *Political Psychology*, forthcoming in December 2007. See also Professor Dumbrell's excellent paper for this conference.

³³ Although, interestingly, Clare Short says that Robin Cook was rather less vocal in setting out his doubts than retrospective accounts suggest, and that the two ministers did not coordinate their opposition in cabinet because Short did not know the extent of Cook's unease until very late in the day: Telephone interview, 4/30/07

that Blair did. It is also, however, true to say that such an extensive rewriting of history would be necessary to place either figure in the prime minister's chair that the counterfactual is of limited utility.

A more plausible premise, and hence more useful counterfactual, concerns Jack Straw, who as Blair's foreign secretary cannot be considered a marginal figure. Would Straw have made the same decisions had he been left alone to direct Britain's foreign policy? He did remain in post and publicly argue for the policy, so is bound to the decisions of the time, but there is a fair amount of evidence that he harbored, at the very least, some doubt about the wisdom of going to war. The infamous "Downing Street memo" has Straw, in early 2002, as very cautious about the enterprise even in principle. The case against Saddam was "thin". He was "not threatening his neighbors, and his WMD (weapons of mass destruction) capability was less than that of Libya, North Korea or Iran"³⁴. As 2002 progressed, the Foreign Secretary made public statements that seemed to be designed to slow down the progress toward war, arguing at the time of Hussein's agreement to readmit UN weapons inspectors, that the chance of conflict had now receded to "60-40 against".

Most interestingly in the present context, Straw outlined a plausible alternative policy for the UK as war rapidly approached in March 2003. Noting that a second UN resolution was now unobtainable and the British public and parliamentary Labour party were far from persuaded as to the merits of war, Straw wrote a carefully reasoned memo to Blair. Perhaps, the Foreign Secretary suggested, Britain could continue to offer the US the maximum in terms of diplomatic support, but UK troops should not engage in combat

³⁴ Memorandum from Matthew Rycroft to Sir David Manning, *Iraq: Prime Minister's Meeting*, 6/23/2002. Available at <<http://www.timesonline.co.U.K./newspaper/0,,176-1593607,00.html>> Accessed May 2nd 2005.

operations, and enter Iraq only as peacekeepers, with a UN mandate, after the conclusion of the fighting³⁵.

This is a fascinating point of choice. Straw was effectively recommending to Blair that he follow Harold Wilson's Vietnam strategy. There was no need to break from the Americans in public, but there were options short of fighting alongside them as well. The prime minister, of course, rejected this option as soon as he was presented with it, and called Straw in for a personal conference to stress that he either got on board or left the government. Straw was far from prepared to fall on his sword and had been careful merely to raise, rather than advocate, the "Wilson Option". Straw therefore aped Colin Powell's performance in the US administration, and loyally fell into line. It had not, however, gone unnoticed that the Foreign Secretary, while perfectly loyal in public, had not been an enthusiastic supporter of the Iraq policy, and he was replaced by Margaret Beckett after the 2005 election with the provenance of the decision, so the rumors go, in Washington as much as London. The combination of the Wilson precedent and Straw's contemporary elucidation of it do indicate that other options were available to Blair and, given that the prime minister chose the most clear-cut and proactive of the available options, lend additional support to contentions about the causal importance of Blair's personality to the decisions.

Finally, but perhaps most interestingly as a spur for a counterfactual thought experiment, are the views of Gordon Brown. His is an especially important case as the re-write of history necessary to make him prime minister is not too severe – he was for several years the senior of the Blair-Brown partnership and assumed to be John Smith's heir apparent. Further, of course, Brown's views are especially relevant given that he has

³⁵ Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p. 303.

now succeeded Blair. Had Brown been prime minister in early 2003, would the UK have gone to war in Iraq?

Brown played quite a careful game in public over Iraq, avoiding saying anything at all on the matter until the point when Blair, facing an enormously difficult parliamentary vote on the war in mid-March 2003, required of him a commitment to the policy. What of his private views? Clare Short, who met with Brown in private throughout this period, told me that, perhaps surprisingly, Brown was not preoccupied with the Iraq question. He was “watching closely, was not strongly critical of the policy...but he wasn’t saying he was solidly for it” either. Brown’s main concern in relation to Iraq was apparently that Blair would use a “Baghdad bounce” from a successful campaign to force him out of his job³⁶. David Blunkett, a close Blair ally, agrees that the Chancellor was careful on the Iraq issue. “I never heard Gordon resile from the decisions that were being taken...but it was rather late in the day when he joined in publicly”³⁷. It seems that Brown was very cautious, even in private, in expressing either support or opposition to Blair’s policy. This was probably a logical strategy – if the Iraq gamble worked, Blair would have been strengthened and Brown could not afford to have opposed him; if it failed, a damaged Blair would eventually make way and Brown would have gained nothing through his disloyalty³⁸.

We are forced, then, to speculate about Brown’s likely choice had he been prime minister. Brown is at least as much of an Atlanticist as Blair, and perhaps instinctively more cautious of Europe. It is hard to imagine him turning his back on the United States

³⁶ Telephone Interview with Clare Short, 4/30/2007.

³⁷ Telephone Interview with David Blunkett, 5/1/2007.

³⁸ Students of the Suez-era cabinet might hear distant echoes of Rab Butler and Harold Macmillan’s relations with Anthony Eden. Indeed, the strategies of both Chancellor Macmillan and Chancellor Brown did of course work in both instances, although for Macmillan a little more rapidly than for Brown.

and joining with Chirac and Schroeder in open opposition to Bush. By the same token, there is little evidence in Brown's worldview and style of either the sense of mission and feeling of control Blair has in regard to international affairs, nor of the black and white framing of events to which Blair is drawn. Clare Short suggests this line of analysis is about right: "Gordon would have looked to nuance it more", she judges. "He's much more a detail man, he would look for cleverer ways through. Whether he would've found them is another question. But...he wouldn't have been as reckless as Blair was"³⁹. Chris Smith, another former cabinet minister who worked with both Brown and Blair, says that Brown "probably wouldn't have done it", and that Brown would have fashioned a relationship with the Bush administration that was "cordial, but a little more candid". However, Smith is quick to add, this is "pure speculation"⁴⁰.

Conclusion

What difference did Blair make to British foreign policy from 1997-2007? The question requires us to take full account of those factors of personality and worldview that condition the choices made by political leaders. Blair, with a proactive, self-confident approach to international issues overlaid with a stark, black and white cognitive style, fashioned policy responses to the major crises he faced that accorded with his individual characteristics. In Kosovo, 9/11, and Iraq, Blair was consistently in the forward end of the troupe, arguing in favor of the more ambitious of the available policy options. His view of these events tended to revolve around a demonized enemy – Milosevic, Al Qaeda, Saddam Hussein – and a virtuous US-UK alliance with pure motives and right on their side.

³⁹ Telephone Interview with Clare Short, 4/30/2007.

⁴⁰ Telephone Interview with Chris Smith, 6/18/2007.

Certainly in Kosovo and Iraq, the cumulative weight of the counterfactual thought experiments – disciplined by consideration of the choices made by different individuals in similar situations and the expressed attitudes of contemporaneous figures who might instead have been prime minister – point strongly toward a substantial causal relationship between Blair as an individual and British foreign policy. Would John Major have been as aggressive in Kosovo? Would Harold Wilson, or Jack Straw, or Gordon Brown, have followed a similar course to Blair over Iraq? If, as an observer of political affairs, one thinks not, then the case for a political psychology approach to individuals and foreign policy has been made.

The need for caution is also illustrated by the Blair case. We can say the evidence is highly suggestive that much would have been different in Kosovo and Iraq without Blair, but cannot know for sure and so this will not satisfy those who believe individual personality to be either irrelevant or epiphenomenal. Indeed, I have argued that Blair's response to 9/11 was, at least in its broad outlines, situationally-determined and that his personality was responsible only for the largely rhetorical (as it turns out) features of a pledge to address the root causes of terrorism and for a lot of talk about good and evil. When making the case for the importance of individuals, one must not get carried away and forget the environmental imperatives that would bear on anyone in a given situation.

Taken as a whole, Blair's choices over his decade in office demonstrate and illuminate the ways in which strong-willed individuals, holding distinctive beliefs concerning international affairs, can shape the direction of events. Britain, it seems fair to conclude, would have been a different actor on the international stage had someone else been prime minister for those ten years.