Also by Oliver Daddow

BRITAIN AND EUROPE SINCE 1945: Historiographical Perspectives on Integration

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

NEW LABOUR AND THE EUROPEAN UNION: Blair and Brown's Logic of History

Also by Jamie Gaskarth

BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY: Crises, Conflicts and Future Challenges
British Foreign Policy
The New Labour Years

Edited by

Oliver Daddow
Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations, Department of Politics, History and International Relations, Loughborough University, UK

and

Jamie Gaskarth
Lecturer in International Relations, School of Management, University of Plymouth, UK
Bob, Karen and Ava, from Olly

For Ellie, love Jamie
# Contents

**List of Figure and Tables** ix  
**List of Contributors** x  
**Acknowledgements** xi  
**Foreword by Stephen Wall** xii  
**List of Abbreviations** xvi  

1 **Introduction: Blair, Brown and New Labour’s Foreign Policy, 1997–2010**  
   Oliver Daddow and Jamie Gaskarth  

**Part I Identity** 29  
2 **The New Labour Governments and Britain’s Role in the World**  
   David McCourt  
3 **New Labour, Devolution and British Identity: The Foreign Policy Consequences**  
   Pauline Schnapper  
4 **New Labour, Leadership, and Foreign Policy-making after 1997**  
   Stephen Benedict Dyson  
5 **Identity and New Labour's Strategic Foreign Policy Thinking**  
   Jamie Gaskarth  

**Part II Ethics** 101  
6 **From ‘Ethical Foreign Policy’ to National Security Strategy: Exporting Domestic Incoherence**  
   Tara McCormack  
7 **A Difficult Relationship: Britain’s ‘Doctrine of International Community’ and America’s ‘War on Terror’**  
   Jason Ralph
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>New Labour and Nuclear Weapons</td>
<td>David Allen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part III</td>
<td>Power</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Still ‘Leading from the Edge’? New Labour and the European Union</td>
<td>Patrick Holden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Britain’s Relations with China Under New Labour: Engagement and Repulsion?</td>
<td>Kerry Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>From Asset to Liability: Blair, Brown and the ‘Special Relationship’</td>
<td>Mark Phythian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>New Labour, Defence and the ‘War on Terror’</td>
<td>Max Taylor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Oliver Daddow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bibliography | 236 |
Index | 263 |
# List of Figure and Tables

## Figure

1.1 Three ‘new’ circles of British foreign policy 17

## Tables

4.1 The Blair and Brown identities 70

12.1 Proposed criteria for hubris syndrome, and their correspondence to features of cluster B personality disorders in DSM-IV 218
List of Contributors

Sir Stephen Wall is a former diplomat and special advisor to the United Kingdom Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

Oliver Daddow is Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations, Loughborough University.

Jamie Gaskarth is Lecturer in International Relations, University of Plymouth.

David McCourt is Visiting Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Center for British Studies, University of California-Berkeley.

Pauline Schnapper is Professeur de civilisation britannique contemporaine, Université Paris Sorbonne Nouvelle.

Stephen Benedict Dyson is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Connecticut.

Tara McCormack is Lecturer in International Politics, University of Leicester.

Jason Ralph is Professor of International Relations at the University of Leeds.

David Allen is Professor of European and International Politics, Loughborough University.

Patrick Holden is Lecturer in International Relations, University of Plymouth.

Kerry Brown is Senior Fellow, Asia Programme, Chatham House.

Mark Phythian is Head of the Department of Politics and International Relations and Professor, University of Leicester.

Max Taylor is Professor of International Relations, University of St Andrews.
This book originated from a BISA British foreign policy working group conference. The British Academy generously supported the project with a grant ref: CS090071 and we were hosted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The authors would like to thank both organizations for their kind cooperation and assistance. In particular, it would not have been possible without the encouragement and ‘on the ground’ help of Martin Williamson of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to whom we owe a debt of gratitude. Pauline Schnapper would like to thank Prof Anand Menon for reading earlier versions of her chapter. Jason Ralph wishes to acknowledge the support of the Economic and Social Research Council, grant number RES-000-22-3252. His chapter is part of an ongoing research project and we are grateful to the editors of the *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, especially Prof English of Queen’s University, Belfast, for allowing us to reproduce sections of Jason’s article entitled ‘After Chilcot: the “doctrine of international community” and the UK decision to invade Iraq’ (forthcoming 2011). The authors are also grateful to Nichola Harmer for expertly preparing the index, Shirley Tan for her invaluable proofreading and Liz Blackmore and Amber Stone-Galilee at Palgrave for their support.

In addition, Jamie Gaskarth would like to thank his wife Ellie for all the tea and loving sarcasm.
Foreword

Stephen Wall

Academic analysts of government policy have every right to feel that practitioners, with their noses to the grindstone of ministerial submissions and the nitty-gritty of negotiation, often fail to see the wood for the trees; the trees being all those minutiae of official life, and the wood being the patterns of behaviour and the trends in policy which subsist from one administration to the next and survive the efforts of those same administrations to shake the tree, or perhaps even to get it to grow in a different direction. Practitioners, for their part, think that academics tend to read too much method into the madness of government, to look for conspiracy, which is boringly rare, and to give inadequate weight to cock-up, which is disturbingly frequent. Of course, somewhere in between, lurks the truth, and this volume makes an informed, well-argued and intriguing effort to discern and describe it as far as the Blair and Brown years are concerned in British foreign policy.

We all know from family experience that each generation feels that it is the first to discover the meaning of life. In reality, the circumstances change, as do the artefacts at our disposal, but the basics do not. We look back at old photographs and realize, with a jolt, that our parents were actually once young and even trendy, according to the embarrassing fashion of their day. We look back at our own past and see that we have lived out our generic and cultural inheritance with less rebellion than we either claimed or aspired to. Throughout our lives, the parent in our head speaks to us of right and wrong. British foreign policy is much the same.

Although, as seen by civil servants, politicians sometimes behave like unruly teenagers, both civil servants and politicians carry in their genes an inherited view of what constitutes the national interest. Here was a British Foreign Secretary speaking in Cabinet: ‘The power of the US government and their ability to intervene decisively were essential to the preservation of order and democracy in many parts of the world’. This was recorded in the Cabinet minutes. And he continued: ‘But US policy was not always well judged and our best means of influencing it in critical situations was to preserve close relations with the US government, while retaining our freedom to express criticism or disagreement
when we thought it necessary to do so.’ The date was September 1965 and the speaker was Labour’s Michael Stewart, Foreign Secretary in a government elected to sweep away the old Tory establishment and to radicalize Britain in the ‘white heat’ of a technological revolution. And yet the words of this former schoolmaster could have been spoken by his Conservative predecessor, the erstwhile 13th Earl of Home and were spoken, near enough, by each of his successors for the next forty years.

The neat trick which Tony Blair executed in the New Labour project was to create a party which could reassure the electorate that it represented genetic continuity while, by his language and his looks, he made it look seductively different. He did not even make much effort to conceal the artifice. In his one foreign policy speech of the 1997 General Election campaign, he made a point of reciting all those issues where the policy of the Labour Party was identical to that of the Conservatives in order to reassure his audience that Labour would be sound guardians of an implicitly shared continuity. The one big difference was on the Euro, not on substance – for Blair was at pains to point out the identity of view – but as regards personality for, so Blair claimed, he was a leader while John Major was not. I would not want to imply that the view of JM was mine rather than Blair’s. So anxious was the new government not to appear flaky compared with the old government that, when Foreign Secretary Robin Cook announced his new ‘ethical foreign policy’, the first person to rubbish it was the Prime Minister’s spokesman, Alistair Campbell, lest people think that hard-headed British national interest was not going to be put first.

As many of the contributions in this collection point out, the notion of bringing ‘ethics’ to foreign policy was nothing new. David Owen, as Foreign Secretary, had published a book on the subject in 1978, although that book, Human Rights, was frank about the difficulties involved:

The British Government tries to promote greater respect for human rights in its bilateral relations with countries where the situation gives cause for concern. We shall go on trying. But this is not an ideal or a sufficient way of going about things, requiring as it does a balance between the need for a consistent moral position, on the one hand, and, on the other, a hard-headed but necessary calculation of national interest, of the likely effectiveness or otherwise of any action which we may take and of the strength of public feeling at home.

Robin Cook was quick to discover the truth of that. Tony Blair needed no such lesson, or so it seemed until, that is, the success of his Kosovo
policy led him astray. For an innate sense of the British interest, lodged in the British political DNA and reinforced by the hereditary caution of the civil service, does not safeguard a Prime Minister from making mistakes.

Two foreign policy disasters can be laid at Blair’s door. The first, the grave mismanagement of the British economy, owed much to the dysfunctional relationship between himself and his Chancellor. Blair gave unparalleled power over the economy to Gordon Brown and received, in exchange, distrust, contempt and an unprecedented withholding of cooperation between the Treasury and No 10 Downing Street. The second disaster, Iraq, was down to a number of factors: Blair’s unswerving belief in the rightness of his own judgement; a sense of hubris arising from his success in Kosovo; an erroneous belief that the British interest required him to be America’s uncritical friend, and disregard for the traditional processes of Cabinet government which might, had they been exercised, have allowed some of Blair’s colleagues to air questions and doubts about the proposed military action.

The fact that Blair got it wrong, as Eden did at Suez, seems to me to show errors of judgement, rather than a conscious shift of British foreign policy, in this sense. Eden feared that in Nasser he was seeing the resurgence of a dictator who, according to the lessons of Munich, should be stopped not appeased. In reality the threat was scarcely comparable and Eden paid a price for playing fast and loose both with the truth and with international law. Nearly five decades later, Blair misjudged the extent of the threat Saddam Hussein’s Iraq posed to British interests. He saw clearly the importance of being America’s friend, but not the equal importance of being a friend that might criticize or disagree. Even on issues of British commercial interest, such as illegal US punitive tariffs on Britain’s steel exports, Blair, in my experience, was loath to take on the US government.

One example from the Blair-Brown years stands out as warranting particular attention if we are tracing the New Labour ‘effect’ on British foreign policy. Tony Blair’s European policy was an almost perfect case study of continuity in British foreign policy and the differences with his predecessors were mostly confined to rhetoric. Even at that level, it was easy to find Blair speeches on Europe which were almost identical to those of Margaret Thatcher and John Major before him. Like Thatcher and Major, Blair championed economic reform, enlargement and rigorous enforcement of the single market. Like them, he was reticent about significant institutional change, simply because of the domestic political difficulties it provoked. Like all of his predecessors as Prime Minister he
was suspicious of the European Commission and the European Parliament and believed in a Europe run by the governments of the larger member states, notably France, Germany and Britain. As with all of his predecessors, how to make that triangle a harmonious one eluded him. Brown barely deviated from Blair’s position when he succeeded him in 2007.

European policy has probably been the one area of foreign affairs where the policy of successive governments – to cooperate positively with Britain’s European partners within the framework of the EU – is at odds with the sentiment of the British people. This is the main reason why, so often, political parties in opposition have been ‘Eurosceptic’ (in line with public opinion) but have embraced positive pragmatism once returned to power. Governments have to balance the factors which David Owen alluded to in his book by putting hard-headed national interest ahead of sentiment. In the case of Europe, however much a British government may dislike the institutional structure of the EU, there is no alternative to it as the only available instrument for the pursuit of a large range of British national interests. Perhaps, in so doing, British ministers roam around the overlapping concentric circles of ethics, power and identity postulated by Oliver Daddow and Jamie Gaskarth in the introduction to this volume. Do they know that that is what they are doing? They should read this book to find out.
# List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACP</td>
<td>African, Caribbean and Pacific countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APD</td>
<td>Anti-Social Personality Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWE</td>
<td>Atomic Weapons Establishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Common Agricultural Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCW</td>
<td>Certain Conventional Weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CND</td>
<td>Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTEST II</td>
<td>Strategy for Countering International Terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAC</td>
<td>Development Assistance Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DfID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoJ</td>
<td>Department of Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPRK</td>
<td>Democratic People’s Republic of Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSC</td>
<td>Defence Select Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDA</td>
<td>European Defence Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEC</td>
<td>European Economic Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESDP</td>
<td>European Security Defence Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAC</td>
<td>Foreign Affairs Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCO</td>
<td>Foreign and Commonwealth Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPD</td>
<td>Histrionic Personality Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICBM</td>
<td>intercontinental ballistic missile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Criminal Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>Identity, Ethics and Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPPR</td>
<td>Institute for Public Policy Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCHR</td>
<td>Joint Committee on Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEP</td>
<td>Member of the European Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoD</td>
<td>Ministry of Defence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>non-governmental organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPD</td>
<td>Narcissistic Personality Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPT</td>
<td>non-proliferation treaty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRR</td>
<td>National Risk Register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSS</td>
<td>National Security Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSS II</td>
<td>National Security Strategy II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSSa</td>
<td>National Security Update 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Overseas Development Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLC</td>
<td>Office of Legal Counsel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUSI</td>
<td>Royal United Services Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDR</td>
<td>Strategic Defence Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDSR</td>
<td>Strategic Defence and Security Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNP</td>
<td>Scottish Nationalist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSBN</td>
<td>Resolution class submarine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKIP</td>
<td>United Kingdom Independence Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKRep</td>
<td>UK representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WMD</td>
<td>Weapons of Mass Destruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1

Introduction: Blair, Brown and New Labour’s Foreign Policy, 1997–2010

Oliver Daddow and Jamie Gaskarth

Britain is once again a great place to be. It has new optimism, confidence and self-assurance about its future. What it needs now is to turn that spirit into a clear definition of national purpose, not just what we want for Britain in itself, but the direction of the nation and how it deals with the outside world.

(Blair 1997e)

Introduction

Hindsight rarely delivers definitive answers, but now New Labour’s period in government has drawn to a close it is an apt moment to step back and ask what the party achieved across its suite of domestic and foreign policies from 1997–2010. Any investigation into this topic needs to be stimulated by more than academic curiosity because it reaches to the heart of helping us understand both the ‘New Labour project’ and the painful realities of Britain’s position in the contemporary global arena. As the above words from Tony Blair in 1997 indicate, New Labour was rarely modest about its achievements or its potential to make Britain fit for life in the twenty-first century. Having been in power for just six months, Blair triumphantly proclaimed that the government had helped make Britain ‘great’ again after what he routinely depicted as years of drift, delay and decline during the John Major years, 1990–1997. His government pledged to build on that new-found confidence in the nation’s greatness to fashion a new understanding of Britain’s place in the world. This meant re-visioning everything from what it meant to be British to how Britain should deal with other nations and international organizations on the world stage. New
Labour’s thinking on how to achieve its lofty ambitions for British foreign policy was predicated on two overlapping concepts. The first was the notion of ‘interdependence’ in the international state system. Drawn from neoliberal theories of globalization and the porousness of national borders implied by that process, New Labour was firmly of the view that although globalization brought with it challenges – not least in security terms – it also brought opportunities to be seized. As Blair and Gordon Brown had it, if Britain could confidently come to terms with globalization the country could help direct the tides of global affairs, rather than be swept along by them. Obvious paradoxes aside, ‘leading’ in an era of complex interdependence came to be a major plank of New Labour’s ambitions on the external policy side. The second and supporting concept of New Labour’s foreign policy thinking was that the government wanted to help the British people become more confident about what it was to be British. Just as New Labour had risen from the ashes of ‘Old’ Labour in the 1980s, so Blair, Brown and their teams identified a similar opportunity to help Britain assume its place amongst the top echelon of global powers after 1997.

Domestic renewal, New Labour presupposed, would be the necessary staging post on the way to emboldening the nation on the international stage. The government’s worldview was in many crucial ways a classic case of politicians wanting to mould their country in their own image. The desirable personal qualities Blair and Brown saw in themselves (notably confidence, self assurance and pragmatism) had been imposed on the Labour Party and made it fit for government. After May 1997 they undertook the arguably more difficult and controversial task of mapping them onto the British nation as a way of helping the country take a proactive lead in global developments (for more on this see Dyson 2009). Enacting the domestic analogy on the world stage would have been more viable had New Labour come to power with firm plans in place to achieve its objectives, or at the very least a sense of how it could manipulate the Whitehall machine and public opinion to garner the diplomatic support to enact its grand designs.

Unfortunately, it does not seem as if that was the case. New Labour might have been wedded to the ideologies of neoliberalism and interdependence but it possessed little appreciation of how to exploit them effectively for Britain’s gain. As one of Blair’s foreign policy advisers later put it: ‘Blair’s foreign policy record developed as time passed. I don’t think he came in with a clear set of ideas that he then delivered’ (interview with John Sawers, cited in Daddow 2011). Perhaps, however,
this interpretation needs a touch of refinement. Blair and Brown certainly had ideas, but ideas were all they had; nor were they specific enough to provide for concrete enactments in foreign policy terms. Thus, a government obsessed with managing the UK by setting quantifiable targets for measuring progress towards its goals on education, health, welfare and so on, found to its chagrin that target-setting in the international arena was both more difficult and more dangerous. Trying to control developments in domestic politics and society was one thing. Working with a diverse and in many ways unknown array of states, international organizations and non-state actors to achieve New Labour’s ambitions for Britain necessitated a *modus operandi* that, if not alien to the government, certainly did not come naturally to it. Our book investigates these and other obstacles New Labour encountered in trying to realize its foreign policy designs. This opening chapter sets the context for the contributions that follow firstly by reviewing the contours of the literature on New Labour’s foreign policy to date, and secondly by proposing a new model of British foreign policy centring on Identity, Ethics and Power (IEP). This model reworks the classic Churchill ‘three circles’ model and subverts it, we hope, for theoretical and empirical gain. Our argument through the piece is that, normatively speaking, a critically informed appreciation of Britain’s place in the contemporary global arena demands a new approach to thinking about British foreign policy. Our alternative IEP model may not be the only answer to jolting British foreign policy thinking out of some rather staid traditions, but it provides us with one way of helping us think afresh about how to link foreign policy strategy to foreign policy practice.

**New Labour, new foreign policy?**

The passing of time has undoubtedly obscured the significance of some of New Labour’s innovations which might, had they been followed through, have helped the government achieve its lofty foreign policy ambitions. Three components of the New Labour foreign policy package deserve attention in this regard: the ‘ethical dimension’, its European policy and its effort to play the part of a ‘bridge’ between the European Union (EU) and the US. We have alighted on these issues because they were prominent from the inception of the New Labour years and could reasonably have formed the basis for a thorough overhaul of the conceptual basis on which British foreign policy is thought about and executed. In other words, they could have provided the genuine element of novelty and thereby the break from the past that Blair, Brown and
their teams so often promised as part of their ‘modernization’ agenda. Some of the government’s most memorable foreign policy adventures, such as the ‘wars’ on terror and global poverty rose to prominence later in their time in office. So, although we might in fact remember New Labour above all else for its wars and conflicts, they were not the mainstays of the original New Labour project in foreign policy. It is important to judge the governments against the benchmarks they initially set themselves, rather than those upon which they inadvertently stumbled towards the middle and end of the Blair-Brown years.

Arguably the most controversial – and supposedly novel – aspect of New Labour’s foreign policy from the outset was its assertion of an ‘ethical dimension’ to external policy-making. Within days of coming to power the new Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, argued that the UK ‘must support the demands of other peoples for the democratic rights on which we insist for ourselves’ and declared his intention to: ‘put human rights at the heart of our foreign policy’ (Cook 1997a). A series of organizational outcomes followed from this statement, including the launching of an Annual Human Rights Report outlining the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s (FCO’s) work in this regard, the ‘mainstreaming’ of human rights as a priority across the various missions, and the broadening of policy discussion to include members of the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) community (Gaskarth 2006a). However, the provocative language of the initiative’s announcement led to a backlash in the academic and policy communities. Cook asserted that ‘The Labour Government does not accept that political values can be left behind when we check in our passports’, clearly implying that this was a view held by previous governments, an impression underscored by its proximity to the phrase ‘Unlike the previous Conservative administration’, albeit referring to a different issue (Cook 1997). Former Foreign Secretaries lined up to criticize the notion that morality had not previously played a part in foreign policy-making and Cook himself later acknowledged that he was building on the work of his predecessors in government (FAC 1998). The ‘ethical dimension’ was only the fourth of the four goals of foreign policy addressed in the speech. However, it quickly gained notoriety and became condensed for public and journalistic consumption into the soundbite that New Labour was pursuing an ‘ethical foreign policy’ – a universal conception whereby policy-making should be motivated more by consideration of the needs of others globally than by the interests of the United Kingdom (Brown, C. 2001). Rather than a triumphant declaration of intent, the mission statement with its professed ‘ethical content’ would
ultimately haunt the first New Labour Government – most notably in controversies over arms sales to Zimbabwe, Indonesia and Sierra Leone (Cooper 2000).

There was more to the ethical turn in New Labour’s foreign policymaking than Cook’s mission statement. It has often been noted that Tony Blair adopted a moralistic, sometimes messianic, tone in his language that had not been seen to such an extent since William Gladstone in the nineteenth century (Hill 2005: 389), with clear conceptions of faith and morality framing his foreign policy discourse (Dyson 2009: 36–7). This led to some curious paradoxes. For example, whilst undermining Cook’s human rights-based attempts to curb British arms sales (Vasagar 2000), Blair nevertheless sought to advance the moral component of foreign policy through his idea of a ‘doctrine of international community’ as elaborated in his Chicago address in April 1999. At the height of the Kosovo crisis, Blair gave a speech suggesting that the coalition engaged in Operation Allied Force was fighting a ‘just war, based not on any territorial ambitions but on values’ (Blair 1999a). Underpinning this speech was a belief that globalization and the interconnectedness it brought with it had reached such a stage that it was no longer possible to draw a distinction between domestic and foreign policy problems, especially when it came to security. Blair argued: ‘We cannot turn our backs on conflicts and the violation of human rights within other countries if we want still to be secure’ (Blair 1999a). Whilst acknowledging that Britain cannot ‘right every wrong that we see in the modern world’, he proceeded to set out five criteria for engaging in armed intervention, which he asserted is ‘sometimes the only means of dealing with dictators’ (Blair 1999a).

On one hand, we can see that this belief in the utility of armed force as a means to achieve moral ends was an early foretaste of Blair’s later conflation of security, human rights and the values underpinning international order in his arguments for war with Iraq in 2003. Blair had already, in fact, involved British forces in operations with the Americans during the Operation Desert Fox bombing of Iraq in December 1998 and had come to admire the ‘can-do’ attitude of the military. Blair would not, it seems, shirk the difficult choices about whether to risk British lives on foreign soil. On the other hand, to categorize them all in a simple narrative of ‘Blair’s wars’ misses the crucial point that there was something distinct about New Labour’s early military interventions that would not be repeated in the post-9/11 security environment. New Labour took Britain to war a total of three times between 1997 and 2000, with two of these actions – despite some government arguments to the contrary – going far beyond protecting or advancing Britain’s strategic or security...
interests. The use of force in Kosovo and Sierra Leone was motivated by an ideological belief in Britain’s responsibility as an international actor to react where possible to human rights abuses (Bogdanor 2005: 448). They were costly in financial terms and, notwithstanding reservations about the means used in Kosovo, ultimately successful in bringing about outcomes that benefited the perceived victims in each case.

In contrast, the events of 11 September 2001 drastically altered the strategic environment. Particularly troublesome for Blair was that the influential ‘hawks’ in the George W. Bush administration became less and less prepared to subsume America’s perceived vital national security concerns to what they saw as the unwieldy and unnecessary constraints of multilateralism and working within international institutions such as the United Nations (UN). By 2002, Blair found himself in the awkward position of having less influence over a unilateral neoconservative administration while simultaneously needing to convince a sceptical domestic public of the case for indefinitely extending the ‘war on terror’ into the future (Dyson 2009: chapters 5 and 6). Britain’s substantial and controversial military commitments in Afghanistan and Iraq thus came to overshadow Blair’s reputation for pursuing pure and unselfish ‘ethical’ interventions. The corollary was that subsequent crises in Darfur, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo were handled at arm’s length, through diplomacy, despite their inherent seriousness and the viability of military action (Williams and Bellamy 2005). From the middle of New Labour’s second term in office the prominence afforded to human rights within the FCO would decline substantially, with the Human Rights department subsumed under a broader section entitled the ‘Global Issues Department’ and the Human Rights Project Fund renamed the ‘Global Opportunities Fund’. The Annual Report continued but came to focus more overtly on ‘hard’ security matters, with substantial sections on counter-terrorism, counter-proliferation and conflict prevention (FCO 2009c).

As noted in Chapters 5, 7, 11 and 12 of this volume, New Labour faced difficulties in reconciling its self-image as a champion of human rights with the moral support it had provided to the United States’ war on terror and the documented human rights abuses that occurred in the Guantanamo Bay detention camp and elsewhere (JCHR 2009). On this reading, the ‘ethical dimension’ of foreign policy-making became lost in the drive to emphasize the security threats that Britain faced from global terrorism.

Despite all this, as Christopher Hill has noted, Blair’s policies post-9/11 remained imbued with a moral fervour, with the Prime Minister insisting on ‘the moral dimension of the “war”’ (Hill 2005: 389). In his
address to the Labour Party conference a few weeks after 9/11, Blair asserted: ‘let there be no moral ambiguity about this: nothing could ever justify the events of 11 September, and it is to turn justice on its head to pretend it could’ (Blair 2001a). For Blair, the ideological challenge of Islamist terrorism required a determined response and the use of military force was symbolic of the ethical importance of defending key values (Blair 2006b, 2006d). Therefore, it would be wrong to suggest that the ‘ethical dimension’ to policy-making had disappeared entirely. Furthermore, for all the focus on the hard power issue of military intervention, New Labour did implement a range of policies that reflected Britain’s identity and ethics more than its relative power concerns. It increased overseas aid contributions annually and is on target to match the UN target of 0.7 per cent of GDP by 2013 (currently, overseas aid is budgeted at £9.1 billion for 2010/11). Britain was a leading advocate of the International Criminal Court and has pushed for treaties banning landmines and restricting the sale of small arms. It has also offered to reduce its nuclear stockpile and has been a leading advocate of debt reduction for developing countries (see Chapter 5).

To sum up, New Labour came to office with high flown rhetoric on the ethics of foreign policy and paid the price when its policies on arms sales and human rights conflicted. The government’s focus shifted from ‘humanitarian intervention’ in the first term to international and domestic security post-9/11 and that posed real and lasting challenges to executing a morally worthy foreign policy in a dramatically altered global strategic environment. More than a decade on, in the middle of a global financial crisis, we can look back on New Labour’s confidence as an actor in world politics and its willingness to intervene abroad and suggest it was enabled by the combination of a long period of economic growth and a receptive international environment still remaking itself after the Cold War. Whilst tensions occurred between the two ethics of foreign policy – particularly over Iraq – it is notable that the late Robin Cook’s desire to see Britain become ‘a leading partner in a world community of nations’ (Cook 1997a) and Blair’s profession of a ‘doctrine of international community’ (Blair 1999a) shared a sense that Britain can and should act as a ‘force for good in the world’. The question now arises whether this will be possible in any meaningful sense given the UK’s debt levels, international criticism over the legality of the Iraq War and the conduct of the ‘war on terror’ more broadly.

The ‘ethical turn’ was surely the most eye-catching and commented upon aspect of New Labour’s foreign policy innovations in its early years. However, the government’s attempt to alter the ‘awkward’ relationship
(George 1998) between Britain and the EU was no less prominent an objective after 1997 (for the history see also Young 1998; Young 2000). It is also interesting for what it says about foreign policy decision-making under New Labour because ‘Europe’ was very much Blair’s foreign policy issue area of choice in his first term in office. Not least among the reasons for this was that European Council summitry suited Blair’s predilection for personalized decision-making (‘leave Chirac and Schroeder to me’ was a familiar Blair refrain) and he believed he could achieve his European objectives by force of charisma and his persuasive skills as much as anything else. And lest we assume that the government’s Europhilia was confined to Blair’s small circle of advisers brainstorming in his ‘den’ at the back of Downing Street we should remember that, in the Treasury, Gordon Brown lent his full rhetorical support to Blair’s attempt to fashion a ‘new consensus’ about the British in Europe (Brown 1997c). The Chancellor might have willingly taken the Treasury line in being cautious to the point of obstructionism over the Euro, but in a very real sense the European project frequently exercised and unified the government’s two most influential figures. Blair was, albeit fleetingly, open about the place ‘Europe’ would occupy in his strategy in his victory address on the steps of Downing Street in May 1997: ‘it shall be a government, too, that gives this country strength and confidence in leadership both at home and abroad, particularly in respect of Europe’ (Blair 1997c). The Prime Minister mentioned later in the speech that it would be a government rooted in the ‘values of justice and progress and community’ but the ethical component of foreign policy was notably absent from his wider aspiration to repackage Britain’s image on the global stage. European relations, he intimated, would be both an end of that process and a means to it, and it was clearly important to New Labour that a ‘modern’ Britain should be an engaged and constructive actor inside the EU.

The government’s ‘new’ approach to Europe came in two parts. On the one hand it involved a change of policy, which Blair led; on the other hand it entailed changes in the discourse used to construct British-European relations, which Brown co-led by virtue of his considerable immersion in British history (Beckett 2007: 5–6). It was on the policy side that most of the eye-catching innovations were made, beginning with the ‘step change’ initiative of 1997 which led to a ‘significant thickening of the relationship’ between London and various EU member states (Smith, J. 2005: 709–10). Even though – as Blair’s European adviser later recounted – ‘step change’ did not deliver ‘dramatic results’ (Wall 2008: 176) it nonetheless signalled New Labour’s seriousness about adjusting the ways in which British diplomats and politicians not just dealt with their European
partners but thought about them. These setbacks on process never dented Blair’s belief that he had helped Britain dominate the EU in policy terms and by the time he stood down as Prime Minister he was sealing his legacy by pointing to a lengthy list of positive achievements in New Labour’s European policy. For example, in his February 2006 valedictory lecture on the future of Europe Blair trumpeted how:

We achieved enlargement. We took over, with France, the shaping of European defence. We formulated the economic reform programme from Lisbon onwards. Even where we divided from others, we did so with allies. Finally, we put through a Budget deal that most thought couldn’t be done (Blair 2006a).

Note here that Blair morphed even the divisive issue of Iraq into a European policy achievement. He might have added that the 1997 government signed the Social Chapter and reinvigorated thinking and action on Europe’s social model via the Hampton Court Agenda unveiled during the British Presidency of the EU from 2005 (Policy Network 2006). Whether or not they agree with the gloss Blair painted on his European policy, commentators have observed that New Labour vigorously set about changing the perception of the British as an ‘anti-European’ nation at least until the Iraq invasion of 2003 (Riddell 2005a: 150; Seldon 2007: 408 and 572). Even those stressing the negative side of the balance sheet, such as Britain’s failure to enter – or hold a referendum on – the single currency or to join the Schengen zone (Whitman 2005: 684) are compelled to suggest that significant advances were made and, further, that they could not have been made, nor even attempted, by a Conservative government or a different Labour administration.

On the language side, New Labour advocated collapsing the artificial barriers frequently erected in the domestic political debate between ‘Britain’ on one side of the English Channel and (a usually hostile) ‘Europe’ on the other. As New Labour saw it, the Conservative Party during the later Margaret Thatcher and John Major years had been seduced into believing the populist Eurosceptical mantra that being a part of ‘Europe’ was somehow antithetical to being ‘British’. The gist of this ‘either/or’ construction of British-European relations was encapsulated in a prominent theme of Eurosceptical press commentary that dogged Blair throughout his time as Prime Minister, that being pro-European meant a British leader was being treasonous and/or unpatriotic. Blair tried to head off these criticisms even before the 1997 election (Blair 1997b) but was unable to quell them entirely. Especially irksome for the premier was that they regularly
appeared in newspapers such as The Sun that nominally supported both himself as leader and New Labour as the party of government (Littlejohn 2003). His patience finally and publicly ran out during a passionate riposte to Nigel Farage, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) representing the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), following his criticism of the EU budget settlement in December 2005. ‘You sit there with our country’s flag’, Blair said, ‘but you do not represent our country’s interests. This is the year 2005, not 1945. We are not fighting each other anymore’ (cited in Watt 2005). Blair, Brown and the Europhiles from within New Labour took issue with a common predisposition amongst commentators and media pundits to construct Britain as being locked in an inimical relationship with the EU. New Labour’s thinking was partly inspired by the instinctive Europhilia of its architects; it also reflected their pragmatic belief that pursuing a Europeanist line would help modernize the party’s image, not least by providing a point of contrast with what it saw as the out-dated Euroscepticism of the Conservative Party (Mandelson 2002: 21–8).

After taking power, furthermore, New Labour used an active engagement with the EU and its leading member states to help the government modernize the British economy and its standing on the world stage (Daniels 1998: 76–8). Finally, and underlying all this, there was a basic calculation about the limits of the possible in contemporary British politics. New Labour politicians and advisers had witnessed at first-hand how a vocal rump of hard-line Eurosceptics on the back benches of the Conservative Party had more or less held the Major government’s legislative agenda to ransom after 1990 (Sowemimo 1999: 347). Major’s travails sharpened Blair and Brown’s awareness that they needed to stage manage the ‘Europe’ question above all others. European debates that ran out of control in parliament were perceived to have a debilitating impact not only on a government’s room for manoeuvre in achieving its foreign policy goals, but also on the execution of its business across the board. In sum, the Labour Party’s troubled history in terms of devising an electorally appealing policy towards the European Economic Community (EEC) in the 1980s and the EU in the 1990s reinforced the ‘new’ leadership’s belief that the Party’s image as an anti-European party had to be overhauled once and for all (Bulmer 2008: 598–9). Blair and Brown believed that turning to Europe could help them build ‘New Britain’.

Blair’s New Labour thus preached Euro-enthusiasm to a degree hitherto unknown by a governing party in the UK. Its narrative was multi-dimensional and encompassed themes such as Britishness, British national identity, Britain’s role in the world, Britain’s imperial legacy and Britain’s ever-European history and heritage. Here, we will concentrate on the last
one because it best illustrates the government’s way of thinking through the issues at stake. New Labour’s collapse of the ‘British versus European’ interpretation of the national past centred on putting a different meaning into a classic symbol of the supposed source of this separation of Britain from continental Europe: the English Channel. As the government saw it, the geography of the English Channel had too often been deployed as a defence against the forces of cosmopolitanism and globalization that New Labour wished to see sweeping through Britain. By contrast, Brown said:

... British history has never been marked by insularity. We are an island that has always looked outwards, been engaged in worldwide trade and been open to new influences – our British qualities that made us see, in David Cannadine’s words, the Channel not as a moat but as a highway. An island position that has made us internationalist and outward looking’ (Brown 2004).

Brown fell back on the moat/highway analogy in several speeches during his time as Chancellor (Brown 2005; Brown 2006c). On each occasion he used it to support his argument for Britain to be more open to exchanges of all kinds (especially trade) with its Continental neighbours and the EU bloc in particular. Brown’s discourse on the ever-European British by virtue of geography and history flags up three crucial points about New Labour’s foreign policy agenda. First, Blair and Brown used history creatively to inject new meaning into what they saw as stale interpretations of the national past. They did this to try and shift the cognitive framing of national political debates, in this case those surrounding Britain’s place in the world as a function of how the British see themselves as a people and a national community. Second, the government tightly enmeshed its European designs with its global ambitions for Britain, suggesting that it saw the constructive conduct of regional affairs in Europe as a necessary precursor to achieving power and influence on the world stage. As Brown observed, the highway of the English Channel flowed not just to the coast of France but to the wider world and ‘Britain will do best if it takes leadership in Europe’ (Brown 1997b). The third point raised by the moat/highway analogy is that it was proto-imperial, navigating a route to global leadership closed off to the British after decolonization destroyed the formal Empire after the Second World War. To build this Empire by stealth in the twenty-first century, the British would use their apparently genetic inventiveness to rediscover all the Victorian qualities of the ‘British
genius’ that had made the nation successful one hundred years previously – another leitmotif of Brown’s discourse as Chancellor (Brown 1997a; Brown 2001; Brown 2006a). It was on the back of this discovery of the ‘old’ in the supposedly ‘new’ approach to ethics and Europe that we decided to gather experts together who could comment on developments in other foreign policy sectors after 1997. In the next section we elaborate on the framework for the book by setting out an alternative way of modelling British foreign policy.

A new model of British foreign policy

This collection tests the validity of the proposition that New Labour promised a radical break from past British foreign policy but delivered relatively little in the way of new thinking or practice. We developed this on the back of our findings on the ‘ethical dimension’ and New Labour’s approach to the EU, which led us to reflect on the extent to which traditional patterns of thinking about British foreign policy shaped New Labour’s foreign policy, despite the government’s many claims to the contrary. Already in 2002 writers such as Anne Deighton were unpicking the conceptual basis of Tony Blair’s foreign policy by suggesting that the premier’s discourses on Britain’s place in the world were as out-dated as the supposedly retrograde discourses of his domestic opponents of closer integration with the EU (Deighton 2002). By 2005 Deighton was convinced that to adequately account for New Labour’s foreign policy trajectory we had to appreciate its synergies with Winston Churchill’s ‘three circles’ model of British foreign policy (Deighton 2005). Churchill set out his model in a speech to the 1948 Conservative Party conference, where he argued that Britain occupied a unique position in world affairs as part of the ‘three great circles among the free nations and democracies’. The former Prime Minister’s first circle, ‘naturally’, was the British Commonwealth and Empire which earlier in the speech he described as ‘the foundation of our Party’s political belief’. The second circle was ‘the English-speaking world in which we, Canada, and the other British Dominions play so important a part’. The third and apparently final circle was ‘United Europe’ (all from Churchill 1948: 153).

We posit here that the Churchill model, in one way or another, has been integral to the way British politicians, foreign policy-makers and diplomats have come to think about Britain’s place in the world since 1945. It has been similarly influential in the academic world and thereby to the way in which scholars co-construct the world of British foreign
policy by putting forward the Churchill model as the basis for thinking about Britain’s role in the contemporary world arena (Hill 2005: 387). We are not suggesting that the model is conclusively ‘wrong’ in an empirically provable sense. Rather, we want to invite reflections on the extent and the ways in which it needs adapting to make sense of a vastly different global political landscape in the twenty-first century. Such contemplation, we assert, has been sorely lacking in recent deliberations about British foreign policy, certainly as far as foreign policy-makers and many academics go, although some, such as Andrew Gamble, have tried to play around with the three circles model for the purposes of opening up new directions in thinking about Britain’s place in the world (Gamble 2003). We are not so much interested in the complex sets of reasons why the three circles model remains the touchstone, although we might point first to Churchill’s power, influence, reputation and standing within domestic and global politics; second, to organizational memory and learning among diplomatic elites in the UK which has seemingly been resistant to deviation from the three circles model; third, to teaching and learning about foreign policy in Britain’s universities and in foreign policy think tanks; and finally, to the ways in which a parsimonious model endures because it is so flexible it can apparently make sense of a complex reality over a long period of time. It is safe to say that an eleven-circle model would probably not have had the same longevity! The crux is that the Churchill model has given British foreign policy-makers and elite commentators a readily identifiable language of foreign policy; and so, one man’s assessment of the position of Britain in the post-war ‘rank’ of world powers – now over sixty years old – has, by dint of repetition, regurgitation and discursive reproduction become the accepted conceptual prism through which Britain’s external relations are thought about, deliberated upon and executed (see also Broad and Daddow 2010).

Just as Deighton noticed the hold of the three circles model over British foreign policy thinking in 2002, so in 2010 Christopher Hill lamented that what he calls Churchill’s three circles ‘doctrine’ is ‘still operational if not formally subscribed to’ by the British foreign policy establishment. We would tend to agree with them both. How do we see the Churchill model featuring in Blair and Brown’s foreign policy thinking? Hill’s answer is that New Labour’s language of foreign policy gives them away: ‘New metaphors such as “bridge-building” and “pivotal power” have updated the language without altering the thinking’ (Hill 2010: 11). There is a good deal of evidence to support this claim. First, Blair regularly fell back on the ‘bridge’ analogy to describe Britain’s
location as the conduit between Europe/EU on the one hand and the US on the other. As he explained to American President Bill Clinton in May 1997: ‘a Britain that is leading in Europe is a Britain capable of ever closer relations also with the United States of America’ (Blair 1997d). The bridge idea in foreign policy fitted well with New Labour’s domestic project of reconciling the apparently irreconcilable (for example ‘old left’ and ‘new right’) as a means of garnering support from previously untapped points on the political compass. Depending upon Blair’s confidence and audience, the suggestion that Britain could play the part of an EU-US bridge was either an already acknowledged ‘fact’ of the international system – Britain is the bridge (Blair 1997e) – or it was presented as a viable aspiration – Britain can be the bridge (Blair 2003a). Brown happily encouraged the illusion by using the same metaphor to describe Britain’s position in the international financial system using his familiar rhetorical style of double repetition: ‘Britain is well placed as the bridge between America and Europe … We are indeed the bridgehead from which [American] companies trade in mainland Europe’ (Brown 1999b). In other speeches during the Blair premiership ‘bridge’ became ‘vital link’ (Brown, G. 2001), ‘pivot’ (Blair 2004) or ‘hub’ (Blair 2000). Nonetheless the Churchillian pretensions to global leadership in ideational and material terms remained the same: ‘British ideas can and will play a pivotal role’ (Brown 2003). Even when the nominal descriptor ‘bridge’ or one of its signifying equivalents was absent from a speech, the ambition to make Britain the privileged interlocutor between the US and its European partners remained in evidence. Take, for example, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw’s March 2005 speech on democracy in Iraq: ‘I am determined that the United Kingdom play our full part in uniting Europe and the United States in a single common purpose, supporting modernisation and reform in the Middle East’ (Straw 2005b). On assuming the premiership, Brown and his Foreign Secretary David Miliband tended to go with the ‘hub’ metaphor to continue this well established tradition of thinking in circles about British foreign policy (Brown 2007c; Miliband 2007). As Deighton concluded, ‘New Labour thought that the Third Way/Triangulation could be achieved between the three circles as much as Churchill did’ (Deighton 2005: 6). This went for both New Labour leaders and their ministerial acolytes.

Contrary to commentators who see Brown’s ‘hub’ metaphor as providing some sort of rupture from the Blair years in terms of foreign policy (BBC 2008), we do not detect much conceptual light between presenting Britain as a ‘bridge’ or presenting it as a ‘hub’, particularly when the underlying ideas remain the same. The signifier might have
altered but, we contend, the signified has not, because whether con-
structed as ‘hub’ or ‘bridge’, Miliband clearly believed in the logic of
triangulating between Europe and the US. It was, further, underpinned
by the same aspiration to global influence that dominated the govern-
ment’s foreign policy thinking after 1997, indicated by the Foreign
Secretary’s 2009 statement that: ‘The fact that Britain is at the heart of
the EU is good for the special relationship’ (Miliband 2009a). Des-
criptive nuances aside, therefore, we take the New Labour years to rep-
resent a continuation of the three circles tradition of thinking about
British foreign policy, which has come in for severe criticism on three
grounds. First, some have seen acting out the part of ‘bridge’ as an
undesirable goal for British foreign policy because it avoids making the
‘tough choices’ that have needed to be made for a number of years. For
example, Robin Cook, Blair’s Foreign Secretary 1997–2003, noted in
his diaries how ‘The concept of a bridge is perfectly tailored for New
Labour, as a bridge cannot make choices, but by definition is in the
middle’ (Cook 2003b: 133). Cook was supported by Peter Riddell who
observed that back to the Suez crisis in the 1950s British leaders avoided
facing up to the realities of Britain’s economic and geostrategic decline
after the Second World War: ‘It was the avoidance of a choice elevated
into a new national strategy’ (Riddell 2005a: 129). Even if it had paid
dividends, argued William Wallace, Blair and Brown’s ‘bridge’ strategy
was hardly novel (Wallace 2005).

The second point of critique, heard frequently since the Iraq invasion
of 2003, was that the ‘bridge’ strategy grossly over-estimated the gov-
ernment’s ability either to ‘lead’ in Europe or, more pertinently, to shape
American policy to suit the national interest. This line of attack points
to Blair’s inflated but ultimately unfounded confidence in his ability
to achieve his foreign policy objectives by ignoring diplomatic advice
– from the Foreign Office for example (see Daddow 2009) – and dealing
bilaterally with other national leaders. In this context, one man’s per-
sonal delusion of grandeur fed into, and took succour from, decades-
old delusions of national grandeur on the parts of generations of political
leaders. Former insiders such as Clare Short, former Minister for Inter-
national Development, have argued that the Iraq invasion exemplified
Blair’s unwillingness but more significantly his ‘total incapacity to act as
a bridge’ (Short 2005: 273). In similar fashion Blair’s Ambassador to the
US, Christopher Meyer, felt that by January 2003 ‘Transatlantic relations
were in a trough. Blair’s famous bridge between Europe and America was
sinking beneath the waves’ (Meyer 2006: 261). The third group of critics
question whether Blair even meant what he said about Britain being a
‘bridge’. They contend that Blair, seduced by the idea of the ‘special relationship’, devoted disproportionate amounts of time to Anglo-US relations over those between Britain and Europe. At heart, David Marquand commented in 1999, New Labour was an Atlanticist project. ‘Its rhetoric is American; and the influences which have shaped its project are American, as is its political style. When American and European interests diverge, New Labour can be relied on to show more tenderness to the former’ (Marquand 1999: 239). The bridge, they say, was in Blair’s head but not in his actions (see also Wall 2008: 215).

A decade later, on the back of reflections on the New Labour years in foreign policy by former diplomats and academics, the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) drew an identical conclusion to Marquand’s, that delusions about the reality and vitality of the ‘special relationship’ were hindering British foreign policy: ‘the use of the phrase “the special relationship” in its historical sense, to describe the totality of the ever-evolving UK-US relationship, is potentially misleading, and we recommend that its use should be avoided’. In particular, eschewing the idea of ‘specialness’ would help the UK say ‘no’ where the two countries’ interests and values diverge (FAC 2010: 3, 19).

We have taken all these criticisms on board to devise what we believe is a more realistic model of British foreign policy in the twenty-first century. We did not want to throw the baby out with the bath water, so our IEP model encourages tough choices to be made within a conceptual framework that allows for the influence of the legacy of the past in shaping Britain’s contemporary global relations. Each new metaphor discussed above, whether it be ‘bridge’, ‘pivot’ or ‘hub’, sets Britain centre stage internationally in a way that, it might be argued, no longer reflects the reality of Britain’s place in the world. A more practical model needs to be found that recognizes Britain has to make difficult choices and forge policy according to the resources and influence available to it. Contrary to a possible view that naked power concerns will prevail, we have structured this collection to demonstrate that policy-makers need to consider British identity and values even more than previously in order to make informed foreign policy decisions. The tripartite nature of this book seeks to open up new directions for British foreign policy thinking by recasting the three circles model for the twenty-first century. Rather than consider UK policy-making in terms of three longstanding alliance patterns, as Churchill did, we advocate constructing policy in terms of the issue at hand: taking into account British identity, the ethical choices available, and the power concerns that will shape outcomes.
When attempting to discern which policy is most appropriate, a policy-maker would be advised to consider questions of British identity (does the course of action fit in with Britain’s view of itself and how it wishes to be seen by other actors in world politics? Would the British people support and identify with the policy? Which communities that Britain belongs to are affected by the issue at hand?); British values (is the action in accordance with British, European and international law? Is it likely to help construct the kind of international society Britain favours? Does it support human rights, democracy, the rule of law and a just world order?); and British power (Will this course of action strengthen Britain’s soft and/or hard power vis-à-vis other actors internationally? Which actors are likely to be most influential in the success of this policy? What levers of power could the UK exercise to implement it?)

Each of these circles is informed by, and helps to constitute, the others. Thus, British identity is often defined in relation to British values such as respect for the rule of law, its democratic status and promotion of human rights; British values shape how and when it employs its power resources; and, its relative power affects the extent to which it can realize its self-identity as a major actor in world affairs.

Yet, as the above diagram suggests, there may be policy areas that lie more clearly in one circle than the others. Historically, British policymakers have had to ally themselves with states that do not share their
ethics or have a common identity for reasons of power politics. Some UK policy stances seem to reflect Britain’s identity over and above any ethical or power concerns (its attitude to the status of the Falkland Islands perhaps reflects this); others, arguably, are located more in the ethical circle: Britain’s costly actions to prevent the Atlantic slave trade in the nineteenth century could be an example here. The main strength of seeing foreign policy-making in such conceptual terms is that it seems far more applicable to many of the current global problems facing the UK. If policy-makers are going to pursue policies, from measures against climate change and global terrorism to preventing genocide and supporting economic development, they will have to cooperate with a range of actors beyond the Commonwealth, Europe and the Anglophone states. Some of these actors will have poor human rights records, a different conception of world order and society than the UK, and may be much more powerful than the UK, militarily, economically and politically. Incorporating identity, ethics and power into the foreign policy process will encourage the decision-maker to appreciate the full implications of policy both domestically and internationally. Each circle will interact to allow a larger sense of what the costs and benefits are of allying with powerful states that do not share Britain’s values, of pursuing ‘ethical’ interventions abroad, of constructing a role for the UK in the world that places it in a position of leadership and responsibility. Moreover, what is striking in building these three aspects of policy into a model is that they allow a greater appreciation of the precise nature of the relationships Britain engages in globally. Europe figures significantly in terms of British identity and ethics, and as such is a more vital aspect of the UK’s day to day foreign policy-making than press reporting might suggest. The US has been an important conduit and enabler for the UK to project its power globally in recent years. However, the invasion of Iraq, the way the war on terrorism has been conducted and the vacillating commitment of the US to international institutions and the Middle East Peace Process have all increased a strain of anti-Americanism in British society. The IEP model would encourage policy-makers to look afresh at such alliances and assess them for their real ideational and material worth.

The model conceivably has a weakness in that it does not centre Britain within a geopolitical framework. Churchill’s model identifies a UK role in the context of three specific political communities and in the process legitimates Britain as an international actor by virtue of its involvement in each circle. Our model would incorporate such frames within the identity sphere but also offer a more flexible frame
of reference to encourage policy coordination with other cultures and states beyond the European, postcolonial or Anglophone. There is also a potential weakness as well as strength in the flexibility that this offers, because it would mean British foreign policy-makers might be free to pursue a ‘manoeuvrist’ foreign policy of shifting alliances and fluctuating priorities. When Britain pursued a strategy like this in the 1830–40s in relation to its responses to various revolutions on the continent it led to charges of Britain being ‘perfidious’. In addition, it might enable policy-makers to shift the basis of accountability between each circle since most policies would fit within at least one. However, by providing a broader framework, foreign policy discussion is opened up to a wider range of influences and those emphasizing British identity and values are empowered by our model in a way that a dominant discourse of realpolitik might resist (Gaskarth 2006b). In this sense, whilst the model does give policy-makers a greater scope to justify policy it also offers academic and media commentators more opportunities to critique that policy from a conceptual and empirical perspective.

Outline of book

The book is divided into three parts which develop our proposed new way of thinking about British foreign policy: Identity, Ethics and Power. Part I – The Identity circle – explores a range of issues associated with the overlap between constructions of identity on the one hand and Britain’s foreign policy orientation on the other. In Chapter 2, David McCourt draws on social theory to interrogate a well worn idea that countries, in this case Britain, carve out ‘roles’ for themselves on the world stage. By problematizing the easy assumption that Britain acts out a ‘role’ (whether this be at the centre of three circles, or as an EU-US ‘bridge’), McCourt raises compelling questions about how appropriate it has been for governments to proclaim the role-based conception of foreign policy without serious consideration of the nature of the foreign policy challenges they have had to confront. The chapter ends by identifying the criteria by which we can measure the extent of the change New Labour made to the British ‘role’, arguing that the official rhetoric of a ‘new’ foreign policy exceeded the substantive or lasting policy alterations New Labour was able to make over its period in office.

The third chapter, by Pauline Schnapper, studies the interrelationship between constructions of Britain’s identity at the domestic level and its foreign policy outlook. Schnapper takes as her point of departure the Labour Party’s historically somewhat cautious approach to devolution,
comparing it to Blair and Brown’s more enthusiastic (but nonetheless pragmatic) embrace of devolution as a means of modernizing both the British constitution and domestic politics more generally. That said, Schnapper contends that there is a viable case to be made that New Labour neither thought through the end-state of the devolution process; nor, certainly, did the government consider the actual or potential foreign policy impact of devolution, no doubt because nominal ‘control’ over foreign policy remained in the hands of Westminster politicians. The ramifications of devolution for British foreign policy have been, she continues, threefold. First, in EU policy the Scottish nationalists in Edinburgh, but also the Welsh in Cardiff, have sought to carve out distinctive niches for their countries in Brussels (‘independence in Europe’), as distinct from that pursued by the government in London, particularly since the greater nationalist hold on power in Edinburgh since 2007. Second, and related, conflicts have emerged over how EU legislation is implemented, especially structural funds, and who represents the devolved parties in Brussels. These conflicts over policy process have had serious ramifications for policy content. Finally, Schnapper studies the variety of ways in which the devolved executives have made political capital out of often ideologically-charged critiques of some of New Labour’s more controversial foreign policy adventures, notably Iraq. In sum, Schnapper’s chapter reminds us that the politicization of national identity/ies in Britain has had – and will continue to have – a significant bearing on both the structures and substance of British foreign policy.

In Chapter 4 the identity theme is unpicked in a different direction, with Stephen Dyson studying the impact on British foreign policy of Blair and Brown’s personalities and foreign policy outlooks. Dyson makes the case for bringing the individual ‘back in’ to the study of state foreign policy activity and sets out a method of leadership trait analysis, using content analysis of what the two Prime Ministers said about foreign policy in Parliamentary answers to shed light on their worldviews in three crucial realms: conceptual complexity (in appreciating the nature of the international environment), belief in ability to control events, and the need for power. These factors are considered against empirical evidence on each leader’s attitudes to a range of issues, including humanitarian intervention, military conflict (Afghanistan and Iraq) and multilateral cooperation within international organizations. Dyson argues that while the leaders shared certain characteristics, Blair was much the more proactive, forward leaning of the two, his self-belief and lower degree of conceptual complexity leading him to adopt policy positions that were
somewhat at odds with Brown’s more cooperative approach to solving international problems and crises.

In the final chapter of the identity section, Jamie Gaskarth explores the range of political communities – and so identities – which New Labour sought to incorporate into its foreign policy strategy documents. Despite the professed attempts to introduce a more strategic approach to foreign policy from Robin Cook’s mission statement onwards, New Labour’s thinking on strategic matters can be seen as confused and the range of identities that informed and shaped British foreign policy were never subjected to rigorous thinking and re-evaluation. Domestic discontent over the direction of foreign policy was not acknowledged as implying plausible alternative identities for Britain as a global actor. Its European identity was always compromised by Euroscepticism and the failure both to capitalize on examples of British leadership and acknowledge the substantial level of agreement on the pursuance of ethical goals. The ‘global society’ evoked by all New Labour’s foreign secretaries could never be articulated in a coherent fashion and so was not capable of being strategized effectively. Most seriously, Blair’s over-identification with the United States in the post-9/11 era raised serious doubts over the ethical basis to British foreign policy as its closest ally transgressed a range of norms, including the prohibition against torture, and actively opposed its normative efforts to promote the International Criminal Court (ICC), treaties on small arms and landmines and campaigns against the death penalty. In this sense, it highlights the overt links between problems of identity, political community and the ethics of foreign policy.

What each of these authors reveals in different ways is that Identity issues such as those raised in Part I should have a higher profile than they currently do within academic and establishment thinking on the nature of British foreign policy.

The second part of the book covers developments within the Ethics circle, flagging up the difficulties New Labour encountered in two regards. First, in trying to generate what Robin Cook described as an ‘ethical dimension’ to foreign policy in the early years, the government’s lofty rhetoric was often unfavourably compared to the substance of its policy with regard to issues such as arms sales and engagement with states which had suspect human rights records. Second, Cook’s hyperbole aside, New Labour faced huge challenges in promoting a Blairite values-based foreign policy over its time in office. Making Britain a ‘force for good’ sounded appealing, but what did it mean in practice and how successful was the government in turning Britain into a ‘beacon’ for the world?
In Chapter 6, Tara McCormack approaches the topic of ‘ethical foreign policy’ similarly to Gaskarth by tracing the domestic political imperatives of pursuing a values-based external policy. Here, though, the explanation for its attractiveness to New Labour is less an identity-based than a rationalist one: the government calculated that it was easier to implement radical, radical-sounding and bold initiatives in the realm of foreign as opposed to domestic politics. Allied to Blair’s natural proclivity for the ‘big stage’, which grew along with his confidence during his years as Prime Minister, this perception drew him to the international realm where he could both carve out an image for himself and for a revitalized Britain, creating a ‘momentum’ abroad he believed was too often stifled at home on day to day business. McCormack thus presents a nuanced view of the evolution of the 2008 National Security Strategy (NSS), as a response to a rather haphazard series of initiatives in foreign policy that, before that time, had been pulled together under the heading of an ‘ethical’ foreign policy. In this light the NSS, far from being a radical new initiative, was in fact the culmination of everything that had held British foreign policy back during the New Labour years. In particular, the NSS’s ‘all risks’ approach betrayed muddled thinking on the government’s part about how to identify – much less resource – security threats to Britain in the twenty-first century. When everything is a threat, paradoxically, then arguably nothing is. The creation of the NSS therefore highlighted New Labour’s propensity (despite Blair Brown’s regular assertions to the contrary) to make the difficult foreign and security policy choices after 1997.

In the next chapter, Jason Ralph studies Blair’s fascination with the ‘doctrine of international community’, and how this shaped his interventionist foreign policy posture. In fact, argues Ralph, the concept was never as fully formed or coherently thought through as Blair tried to make it appear by designating it a ‘doctrine’. If a doctrine implies a set of logically connected principles that inform action, then the Blair doctrine was, in retrospect, anything but that. Blair’s foreign policy outlook, Ralph further suggests, was based on a series of problematic assumptions that hindered policy development first on Kosovo and later on Iraq: that airpower could act as a ‘silver bullet’ for prosecuting surgical military interventions; that the numbers of ground forces inserted into conflict zones (for war-fighting or peacekeeping) could be kept to a minimum; that the Blair doctrine was not actually applied by Blair in his foreign policy; and finally that the legitimacy of an intervention needed to be as watertight as the legal case in order to keep international and domestic opinion on side. In sum, Ralph suggests
that New Labour’s interventionism was based on a series of misleading lessons from recent international history, the government being condemned to prosecute the last war instead of the latest one. Blair’s simultaneous obsession with the ‘special relationship’ (another of New Labour’s historical ‘lessons’) further undermined the credibility of the Iraq adventure by allying Britain with a power that overrode human rights in the pursuit of national security. Legal challenges to the tactics the US used in Iraq have exposed the gap between the rhetoric and reality of Blair’s doctrine of international community.

In his chapter on New Labour’s policy on nuclear weapons, David Allen highlights a range of differing aspects of the government’s handling of this issue that could be seen to support the argument of this book that identity, ethics and power are fundamentally linked and need to be considered together to gain a full sense of the motives underlying policy-making. Possessing nuclear weapons means that the UK has at its disposal a major material power resource (power), the ultimate symbol of being a leading state in world politics (identity/power) as well as a real responsibility with significant normative implications (ethics/power). However, as in other chapters (for instance Gaskarth’s and McCourt’s), Allen identifies a lack of reflection on the UK’s role in the world and about whether its alliance patterns reflect its strategic interests among British policy-makers. This means that counter-arguments to decisions as momentous as the renewal of nuclear weapons receive scant attention in the media and a costly decision such as this is able to proceed almost as a formality. It is difficult to see this as a rational and exogenously-focussed form of policy-making. Indeed, an interesting point raised by Allen is the extent to which New Labour’s policy on Trident renewal is shaped more by the UK’s own self-identity and endogenous domestic pressures rather than the external environment. This is evinced by Blair’s admission in his memoirs that renewing Trident was more a matter of maintaining Britain’s national prestige and avoiding domestic criticism than a genuinely strategic move to improve national security.

Furthermore, just as Ralph and, later, Mark Phythian note in their chapters, the desire to maintain close relations with the US overrides all possible alternative alliance patterns and defence postures – such as accepting France’s offer to pool its nuclear capability with the UK. Only when the US under President Obama offered a lead in delaying Trident renewal and moving forward on counter-proliferation initiatives did the Brown administration feel able to offer up its own concessions. Despite massive financial constraints on the UK exchequer and public opinion
moving away from support for replacing the existing deterrent, Allen notes that New Labour never felt able to take a radical stance on its nuclear weapons policy and forge a position independent of Britain’s closest ally. For all the historical tensions between Labour and the US over defence, the story of New Labour’s decision to renew Trident is one of continuity with previous administrations, Conservative and Labour, when in government: the maintenance of a nuclear deterrent come what may as the ultimate symbol of Britain’s status in world affairs. Normative concerns – such as whether this fits with the UK’s commitment to the non-proliferation treaty (NPT), or its wider goals for international society, are neglected and rational calculation of the extent to which such weapons are useful in the exercise of power is, Allen argues, almost non-existent.

The third part of the book tackles the Power circle of British foreign policy – the one we more closely associate with the conduct of Britain’s external affairs. Here we had to make some pragmatic decisions about which of Britain’s bilateral relations to include and which to leave out to fit within the word limit given to us by the publishers. The UK’s relations with key powers such as France, Germany, Russia, India and Israel all had valid claims to be included, as did its approach to key international organizations such as the UN, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) – not least on development issues and the environment. We believe, however, that the bilateral relations we have included reflect Britain’s core relations as Blair and Brown saw them after 1997 and that we can draw valid generalizations about New Labour’s approach to diplomacy from these case studies. It was to the EU and the US, together with emerging powerhouses such as China, that New Labour most frequently turned to secure Britain’s prosperity, security and diplomatic objectives and it is these that feature in our Power circle.

In the first chapter of the Power section, Patrick Holden begins by setting New Labour’s attitude to the EU within the historical context of Britain’s uneasy relations with Europe. In doing so, he emphasizes the substantial areas of continuity with past foreign policy during the New Labour years. Whilst Blair did take the lead on further European cooperation on defence matters in his first term, his vision was firmly of a Europe of ‘nation states, cooperating … when it is in their interest to do so’ (Blair 2006a) – an attitude that Holden notes would not be out of place in a speech by Margaret Thatcher. When the UK did play a constructive role in European integration, it failed to capitalize on its efforts – as underlined by Brown’s absence at the signing of the Lisbon
Treaty in 2007, even though he had previously hailed it as a diplomatic success. Indicative of the UK’s lack of influence was its inability to gain significant reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) despite the fact that this aim supported both Britain’s neoliberal economic agenda and its goals on promoting development via reform of global markets and freer trade. Britain’s failure to join the Euro also impacted on its ability to be at the centre of Europe’s economic decision-making. Divisions over the Iraq war would create the impression that the UK would always choose the United States over the major European powers of France and Germany and Britain’s enthusiasm for the European Security Defence Policy (ESDP) initiatives it launched in the late 1990s waned in the new era of the ‘war on terror’.

Nevertheless, Holden suggests that Britain did play a major part in moves towards freer trade within Europe and in many areas, from defence to integration of the Eastern countries, to initiatives on development, the UK was able to adopt a leading role. Many prominent Britons (notably Peter Mandelson) held key posts in the EU’s policy and administrative bodies and shaped the European agenda in ways that broadly corresponded with British policy aims. The financial crisis, which could have severely embarrassed the UK since it seemed to contradict its economic ideology was cleverly turned into an opportunity for Europe, with Britain at the fore, to lead the global response. Holden reminds us that Gordon Brown moved from lecturing European states on the benefits of the neoliberal economic model to advocating a cohesive European attitude to regulation in place of the Washington consensus. Yet, whilst New Labour did adopt a more conciliatory tone towards Europe in its rhetoric, its lingering fear of a perceived Euroscepticism at home meant that it was never willing to make capital out of the many small but constructive ways in which the UK had been a positive player in Europe. As such, it was never able to mobilize the EU as a conduit of power in a systematic or sustained fashion. This in itself reminds us of the way identity can shape, and perhaps inhibit, the awareness and exploitation of power in Britain’s external relations. It also highlights the curious ambiguities surrounding the EU – a major normative actor in world affairs but one whose material resources do not straightforwardly translate into global power. If there is a lesson from New Labour’s policy towards Europe, it is perhaps that, where a political cost has been paid to support integration, future governments should try to use this to further their policy aims and remind other European partners of the UK’s positive influence – rather than downplay such initiatives for a domestic audience.
In Chapter 10, Kerry Brown appraises New Labour’s ‘engagement’ with China, rooting it in its deeper historical context and, further, in the Beijing leadership’s view of China’s identity and role in the world. The immediate context within which New Labour framed its China policy was provided first by the not altogether smooth negotiations that led to the handing back of Hong Kong to China shortly before Blair entered Downing Street and, second, by the gradual waning of international condemnation of the Chinese government’s action in Tiananmen Square after 1989. On both counts, prospects seemed favourable for a reinvigoration of British-Chinese relations. However, engagement with China proved problematic when set against Cook’s pronouncements on the ethical component of British foreign policy, and Blair only partially resolved the conundrum by insisting that only through engaging with Beijing could London hope to bring about the changes pressure groups desired, not least in Tibet and on its Taiwan policy. Ultimately, a greater willingness by China to work through multilateral organizations helped both its economy and foreign policy stance become more receptive to prevailing norms within the international community. Kerry Brown argues, therefore, that considerations of the British position on key issues such as climate change and the economy were relatively minor considerations for Beijing, where the leadership recognized them at all. Such convergence as was achieved was as much a product of international, and especially, US pressure than British diplomacy. This is evidence that, when dealing with large states, New Labour under both Blair and Brown might have over-estimated British ‘power’ and influence to alter the interests or behaviour of bigger states in London’s preferred direction.

Signs of New Labour’s over-confidence in its dealings with larger states in the international system were, likewise, evident in New Labour’s dealings with the US, and it is the British-US ‘special relationship’ that Mark Phythian unpicks in Chapter 11. Having been an ‘asset’ for the first few New Labour years, Phythian argues, like Ralph in Chapter 6, that in the end the ‘special relationship’ became a major ‘liability’ for New Labour. It was indeed a hindrance to the construction of a critically informed foreign policy approach to the twin problems of international terrorism and the Middle East Peace Process, with Blair and George W. Bush reinforcing the other’s obsession with the figure of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Phythian’s crux is that Blair, in particular, was blind to the ethical, political and strategic costs of the transatlantic relationship because he was seduced by his inner belief that he could shape Washington’s policy in directions amenable to London. Criticism behind closed doors, he believed, was more appropriate than public admonishment of some of
the more unilateral thinking of the ‘neoconservatives’ in the US government, who were influential over Bush’s thinking on the ‘war on terror’. Brown was simply quiet on most major issues Blair confronted, until pushed to express an opinion publicly. This could either be taken for acquiescence or cynicism, depending on one’s perspective. Phythian offers a subtler interpretation of Brown’s attitude towards the US, however, showing how he recalibrated Blair’s unquestioning attitude to the ‘special relationship’, especially through his policy on Britain’s military commitments within the ‘war on terror’ in Iraq and Afghanistan. This slightly cooler attitude was in part a response to British public opinion on Britain’s overseas entanglements and also a reflection of his more pragmatic Atlanticism. Ultimately, argues Phythian, the world might have changed since 1945, but official thinking on the ‘special relationship’ has, even now, barely begun to catch up with those realities.

In Chapter 12, Max Taylor adds to the material in the chapters by Dyson and Phythian to survey, from a psychological vantage point, how New Labour leaders processed information and came to key decisions in the ‘war on terror’ after 9/11. Like Dyson in particular, Taylor argues that to understand the foreign policy dynamics and the decisions arrived at on this issue, it is essential to appreciate the personality and character of Tony Blair, who was New Labour’s agenda setter in chief in those crucial weeks and months at the turn of 2001–2. New Labour certainly exhibited a degree of continuity with past patterns in UK defence policy. The shock of 9/11 might have jolted the political and diplomatic establishments to consider radical new departures; however, the relatively inexperienced team running British foreign policy at this time were compelled to fall back on the certainties of the past – such as the significance of the ‘special relationship’ – to navigate their way through present travails. When all was said and done, Taylor suggests, there were inherent ‘weaknesses in the crisis decision group, exacerbated by both psychological processes and Blair’s highly personalized leadership style’. This assessment acts as something as a leitmotif for the argument pursued through the various chapters in this book: first, the role of individuals (Prime Ministers mainly, aided by Foreign Secretaries) in shaping British foreign policy; second, the restricted circles of decision-making; and third, the essential continuities in British foreign policy both across the period 1997–2010 and when set against wider patterns in post-war British foreign policy and its view of itself on the world stage. In the Conclusion, Oliver Daddow reflects on these and the related themes that flow through the chapters in this volume.
Part I

Identity
This page intentionally left blank
Introduction

New Labour came to office in 1997 promising far-reaching change to every aspect of UK politics, including Britain’s role in the world (Blair 1997a). By extending the ‘third way’ domestic agenda to the international sphere (Wheeler and Dunne 1998; Vickers 2000), it was hoped that the damage done to Britain’s role under the Conservatives, primarily as a result of the UK’s part in the collective international failure in the former Yugoslavia (Simms 2000), could be swiftly repaired. Britain under New Labour was to be a ‘pivotal power,’ a ‘transatlantic bridge,’ and, infamously, its foreign policy was to contain an ‘ethical dimension’ (Cook 1997b). Yet while the New Labour years were nothing if not eventful in foreign policy terms, including five major military engagements (Kampfner 2003), it remains an open question as to whether the new government’s lofty rhetoric was matched by substantive change, or whether, as some commentators have argued, New Labour’s foreign policy was more an adaptation to a changed international context than a genuine transformation (Dryburgh 2010). This chapter therefore sets out to answer a deceptively simple question: Did New Labour really manage to alter Britain’s role in the world?

In keeping with the theme of the volume, it is argued below that the New Labour years were characterized more by continuity than far-reaching change when it came to an appreciation of Britain’s international role. This argument is advanced by unpacking the concept of Britain’s ‘role in the world’, which has been all too infrequently problematized by policymakers and academic commentators. The first section considers the theoretical perspectives underpinning the emphasis on Britain’s ‘role in the world,’ and thus establishes the benchmark by which we can judge the
extent – or otherwise – of any change to this role in the years from 1997. The focus of the second and third sections is on testing the empirical record against expectations from social theory about the nature of ‘role’ and ‘role playing’. If ‘role’ is defined as the set of expectations attached to the UK’s likely and appropriate behaviour in international politics, it quickly becomes clear that Britain’s role remained essentially unaltered over the period in question. Just as in 1997, Britain in 2010 was expected to align itself closely with Washington and to play out an ‘awkward’ partnership with the EU, whilst professing to be taking a ‘lead’ in many areas of international life. By tracing New Labour’s attempts to create a role for Britain that was closer to Europe in its early years, and which seemed to be bearing modest fruit until the Iraq war brought latent divisions between Europe and America to the surface, the chapter moves beyond mere assertion of continuity or change, towards a more fine-grained analysis of the ‘New Labour effect’ on UK foreign policy. The conclusion reflects on these matters and ends by discussing the potential of the editors’ alternative role for Britain – one based on identity, power, and ethics – to move thinking about UK foreign policy past the problematic geographical conceptions of Britain’s role in international affairs.

Britain’s ‘role in the world’

Ever since Dean Acheson (1963) famously quipped in December 1962 that Britain had ‘lost an empire and not yet found a role,’ a number of foreign policy-makers have explicitly tried to define a ‘role’ for the UK in international affairs (Shlaim 1975). Margaret Thatcher, for her part, favoured that of Britain acting as a ‘Middle Power’ (Sharp 1997). For Conservative Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, Britain’s role was as a power that ‘punched above its weight’ in international politics (Hurd 1993). Their linguistic conjuring echoed that of their predecessors, all of whom struggled to pin down a useable meaning for the term after 1945. For example, one of Hurd’s predecessors as Foreign Secretary, Labour’s Ernest Bevin, informed the House in 1947 that ‘His Majesty’s Government does not accept the view … that we have ceased to be a great power, or the contention that we have ceased to play that role … we still have an historic role to play’ (quoted in Diamond 2008: 129). Thus, Tony Blair’s depiction of Britain as a ‘pivotal power’ in the world during his first year in office followed a distinguished tradition in UK foreign policy of trying to articulate a clear role for Britain (Blair 1997e), as did Jack Straw’s vision of Britain as a ‘force for good in the world’ five years later (The Times 2002). Foreign Secretary David Miliband’s depiction of Britain as a ‘global hub’ was the
final New Labour attempt to recast a central role for Britain in the contemporary world arena (Miliband 2008a; on the Churchillian origins of Britain as a ‘pivot’ and ‘hub’ see the introduction to this volume).

A paradox at the heart of the assertion – contra Acheson – that Britain plays a distinct role in the world, is that the feeling persists that Britain’s place in contemporary world politics is, in fact, unclear, and that this represents a problem for UK foreign policy-makers. This trend was well in evidence at the end of Labour’s third term in 2010. Eighty-eight per cent of respondents to a Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) pre-election poll agreed with the statement that ‘The UK needs a radical reassessment of the position it wants, and is able, to play in the world’ (RUSI 2010). This result was picked up by the press as a sign of malaise in British foreign policy. For instance, the BBC headline over its report on the RUSI study was: ‘UK “needs to find a new world role”’ (BBC 2010b). For all of New Labour’s efforts to define a distinct role for Britain during its time in office these figures suggest that ‘Acheson’s ghost’ still haunts UK foreign policy (Barder 2001). The reason for this parlous state of affairs, according to RUSI, was that ‘although the “role in the world” question is the most fundamental [to British foreign policy],’ it is ‘not easy to frame, still less to generate a public debate around’ (RUSI 2010: 2). Although true, what such an explanation neglects is that this difficulty flows from the limits of the language through which UK foreign policy is constructed and enacted.

The phrase Britain’s ‘role in the world’ has been paradigmatic in this regard. The term is sometimes used as shorthand for Britain’s general foreign policy, the sum of its memberships in international institutions such as the EU and the UN, or what might be termed its ‘grand strategy’. However, as early as 1979 Christopher Hill pointed out that there had been little or no reflection on the underlying imagery invoked, even though its meaning was not altogether clear; nor were the implications of its use unproblematic (Hill 1979). Rather than facilitating a far-reaching re-examination of Britain’s external relations, the invocation of the term ‘role in the world’ has instead promoted a dangerous trend – namely to dissolve discussion about British foreign policy into clichés and soundbites, including the ‘three circles’ model, a ‘thousand years’ of British history and the idealized ‘special relationship’ with the US (Broad and Daddow 2010). There is little consideration, however, of how these soundbites themselves make change in UK foreign policy less likely by making consideration of Britain’s future more not less difficult. One particularly harmful result of this trend has been that future choices for UK foreign policy are usually collapsed into a limited number of seemingly
fundamental choices. In the case of the 2010 general election, for instance, debates revolved around the replacement of Trident, Britain’s reliance on the US, and Britain’s involvement with the EU, which, interestingly, is still considered a ‘foreign’ policy issue (BBC 2010c).

In asking whether New Labour changed British foreign policy it is therefore imperative to theorize its underpinnings by denaturalizing its predominant language – to make this language itself something deserving of consideration and critique, rather than viewing it as an objective description of Britain’s international relations. A useful place to start is with the meaning and implications of the use of the phrase Britain’s ‘role in the world’, and here we can take a cue from social theory. According to Hans Joas (1993: 26), a role is constituted by ‘the normative expectation of situationally specific meaningful behavior’. As such, roles structure situations such that although the specific participants in interactions may change, people know how to behave in a given instance because they understand what behaviours are expected of them on the basis of the role they are playing. When a student meets a professor, for example, the expectation of respect and deference of the former towards the latter is a function of an appreciation of their respective roles in and out of the lecture theatre. Roles have understandably been accepted by sociologists and social psychologists as one of the central elements of human interaction, and have thus become a key concept in social theory (for example Banton 1965; Biddle and Thomas 1966; Callero 1986). Individuals gain a sense of the expectations through what George Herbert Mead calls ‘role-taking’ – stepping into the shoes of the Other with whom one is interacting in order to assess the range of appropriate actions in light of the Self (Mead 1934: 152–64). From this perspective, roles are not simply sets of rights and duties individuals mechanistically play out in their interactions with one another, but are part of the very process by which people interpret the world around them.

The frequent use of the phrase ‘Britain’s role in the world’ in the language of UK foreign policy thus signifies that there are certain expectations about Britain’s likely and appropriate behaviour in international politics, expectations that have been relatively stable over time and across governments, and which together make up Britain’s international ‘role’. Beyond issues of institutional membership, alliance commitments, and the specific forms these take, the use of the word ‘role’ implies that there are fundamental orientating ideas about what Britain is and what it should do in international affairs, which have a strong impact on the practices of British foreign policy, regardless of
party colour. The expectations that make up Britain’s role are not held solely by decision-makers. Think-tanks, the media, and academic commentators are all repositories of ideas about what Britain’s role is, and they all have an impact on the way in which policy-makers will consider appropriate courses of action for the UK in particular circumstances by helping to define what those situations mean. Crucially, other states also hold certain expectations about what Britain is likely to do in international affairs, which become apparent in international diplomacy and political interactions. It is impossible for Britain, as for any country, to write its role into the script of world politics as it pleases.

The understandings which policy-makers hold about Britain’s role in the world become manifest in speeches and official documents. This is why soundbites like the ‘special relationship’ are so common: they not only describe Britain’s international role but constitute it as well. This means that supposedly neutral descriptions and normative appraisals of Britain’s international relations are as intimately related as they are difficult to separate. In trying to take cognizance of that fact, and to assess whether expectations about Britain in world affairs – what ‘role’ it plays – has changed over the period, our task therefore is to assess what the expectations about appropriate and thus likely British behaviour were under New Labour, how the Blair and Brown governments responded to such role-based expectations during their time in office, and the extent to which they actively tried to alter them. Beyond assertions that New Labour did or did not ‘change British foreign policy,’ from this perspective we gain a more clearly specified way of recognizing meaningful transformations from merely the most recent contingent events of contemporary foreign policy, and thereby have the ability to more accurately identify the source of any observed change.

The remainder of this chapter consequently discusses how New Labour tried to shift expectations about Britain’s likely behaviour in key areas of its foreign policy and how this process can be identified in the shifting language used to capture the essence of Britain’s international ‘role’. Crucially, the following sections study how other countries responded to Britain across the period 1997–2010 and measures the change evident in their reactions to Britain’s evolving ‘role’ in international politics. The New Labour years are divided into two broad periods for the purposes of analysis, which correspond to before and after Tony Blair’s fateful decision of summer 2002 to support the US invasion of Iraq – the choice which more than any other has had far-reaching consequences for New Labour’s attempt to remould Britain’s role in the world.
Bridges and pivots: UK foreign policy 1997–2002

The centrepiece of New Labour’s foreign policy strategy upon entering office was to construct a new ‘role’ for Britain on the international stage, as described by Blair in his only foreign policy speech of the entire 1997 election campaign. That role was as a country not ‘turning its back on the world – narrow, shy, uncertain. It is a Britain confident of its place in the world, sure of itself, able to negotiate with the world and provide leadership in the world’ (Blair 1997a). The substance of this purported new ‘role’ was overshadowed in the early months of New Labour by new Foreign Secretary Robin Cook’s stated intention to provide UK foreign policy with an ‘ethical dimension’ (Cook 1997a), which drew intense media scrutiny and raised significant doubts about the new government’s ability to deliver on such promises. Perhaps unsurprisingly, and despite successes related to the banning of landmines, the formation of the Department for International Development (DfID), and more prominent support for human rights (Gaskarth 2006a), commentary on New Labour’s so-called ‘ethical foreign policy’ had all but disappeared by 2002 at the very latest (Cooper 2000). So too had references in the academic literature to Britain as a prototypical ‘good international citizen’ (Wheeler and Dunne 1998). With Cook and the FCO sidelined, Blair’s attempt to create a new role for Britain in international affairs would be the enduring test of New Labour’s project as far as external relations went.

The role the New Labour government intended to carve out was based on a solution to the dilemma that had dominated British foreign policy from 1945: how to balance Britain’s relations with the US on the one hand with the project of European integration on the other (Gamble 2003). In his first major foreign policy speech as premier in November 1997, Blair stated that: ‘Britain cannot in these post-Empire days be a super-power in a military sense…But with our historic alliances, we can be pivotal’ (Blair 1997e). The implication of this ‘pivot’ conception was that New Labour would both repair relations with the US (which it believed to have been neglected during the John Major years 1990–97) and simultaneously promote stronger ties with the EU (and key member states within), which had remained a thorn in the previous government’s side throughout its time in office (see Dumbrell 2006; George 1998). More important was that in philosophical terms New Labour saw no fundamental contradiction or tension in this approach. As Blair said in the same speech: ‘Stronger with one means
stronger with the other’ (Blair 1997e). This was a clear reflection in the foreign policy sphere of New Labour’s general ‘third way’ attitude to governance (Blair 1998), based on avoiding stark choices and deploying pragmatic strategies that ‘work’, whatever their ideological baggage or apparent incompatibility.

Assessing the volume of change in Britain’s role in these years therefore hinges on the degree to which the Blair government could make talk of a ‘pivotal’ role for Britain – which by 1999 had morphed into the notion of Britain as a transatlantic ‘bridge’ (Blair 1999b) – genuinely meaningful. In other words, could New Labour effect a lasting transformation in the expectations about British foreign policy of the key others who made Britain’s role a reality – namely the US and Britain’s European partners? Looking back on his foreign policy achievements in his first term in 2001, Blair was confident the task had been achieved, stating that:

I hope we have buried the myth that Britain has to choose between being strong in Europe or strong with the United States. Afghanistan has shown vividly how the relationships reinforce each other; and that both the United States and our European partners value our role with the other. So let us play our full part in Europe not retreat to its margins; and let us proclaim our closeness to the United States and use it to bring Europe closer to America (Blair 2001b).

Blair’s judgement was bound to be favourable. A more useful measure, and one often missed if Britain’s rhetoric alone is focussed upon, is the attitudes of other key actors. From the perspective of Washington, Brussels, and a number of other European capitals, it would seem that – until 9/11 changed the international landscape – New Labour’s approach was indeed broadly successful, for two principal reasons. First, as had happened cyclically in the past, a period of cooler relations between London and Washington after Bill Clinton’s election in 1992 was followed after 1997 by markedly warmer ties between the two capitals, personified by genuine friendship between first Blair and Clinton, and then, more surprisingly perhaps given their politics, between Blair and Clinton’s successor, George W. Bush (Riddell 2003). Such firming up of US-UK relations, of course, was never likely to be difficult given the shared ideological positions between New Labour and the Clinton administration, not least because Blair and Brown had studiously lifted many of New Labour’s campaign strategies and much of their rhetoric directly from that of the ‘New Democrats’ (Smith 2005: 704). Secondly,
gone from the New Labour policy platform were traditional positions on disarmament and internationalism, thrown out in the headlong drive for ‘modernization,’ which might have served to dampen Britain’s enthusiasm for the ‘special relationship’ (Labour Party 1997). In their place was a robust ideological defence of the liberal internationalist *zeitgeist* and America’s role as the leader of the ‘international community’, which the Clinton administration increasingly grew to accept during its time in office. Indeed, in a display of intimate US-UK relations, unsurprisingly praised in the press as a high point in the ‘special relationship’, President Clinton addressed the British Cabinet soon after New Labour swept to power at the 1997 election (*The Times* 1997).

Importantly, such words of US-UK solidarity and the all-smiles personal summitry were backed up with deeds. The first major display of UK support for America’s new engaged international posture came in December 1998, in response to Saddam Hussein’s repeated violations of UN Security Council resolutions relating to weapons inspections. A three-day bombing campaign code-named ‘Operation Desert Fox’ was launched to ‘downgrade’ Iraq’s ability to develop chemical and biological weapons (Kampfner 2003: 18–35). Second, came renewed international concern over the situation in the Balkans; particularly over violence in the province of Kosovo. Here, New Labour inherited a legacy of deep British involvement, but also strong criticism of Britain’s conduct in the region (Simms 2000). However, unlike his predecessors, Blair held firm over his belief in the efficacy of intervention, proving to be the most determined of NATO’s leaders during Operation Allied Force from 23 March to 10 June 1999 (Bartlett 2000). On this score at least, Blair’s efforts to build such a ‘pivotal’ or ‘bridge’ role can be considered successful. Britain’s new close links to the US were best encapsulated by Blair’s ‘Doctrine of the International Community’ speech given at the Economic Club in Chicago in April 1999, in which the Prime Minister provided an eloquent defence of the conditional nature of sovereignty and laid out the terms under which the international community might reject it in the face of grave threats to humanity (Blair 1999a; critiqued in Daddow 2009). Although Blair was criticized by some in the White House for being overly focussed on publicity at a time when Clinton was under the cloud of the Lewinsky affair – one staffer dubbing him ‘Winston Blair’ (Rentoul 2001: 527) – Blair’s support for the President gained him and Britain much admiration in Washington once the ‘grand-standing’ jibes had subsided. Such pro-British sentiment reached its zenith in Blair’s heartfelt message in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Britain, he would steadfastly repeat, would stand
‘shoulder to shoulder’ with America and this included Britain’s full involvement in the invasion of Afghanistan from October 2001.

As usual, it was to be relations with continental Europe that would present a trickier problem for the new government (see also Holden’s chapter in this collection). Extending New Labour’s transatlantic bridge to Europe was nevertheless a fundamental part of its rhetoric: ‘We will give Britain leadership in Europe’ the Labour manifesto boldly stated (Labour Party 1997: 45). This British attempt to shift its role in a more pro-European direction was reciprocated, with Britain being called upon by a number of European and EU leaders to be a more proactive member of the organization. For example, a telegram sent to Blair the day after the election by European Commission President Jacques Santer called on the new British government to play a ‘leading role’ within the EU (Deutsche Presse-Agentur 1997), while the following day a number of European leaders used the opportunity of congratulating Blair on his victory to try to persuade him to play a more constructive role on Britain’s behalf (The Times 1997). Prospects for a real change in Britain’s European role therefore seemed good, and looking back at the end of his first term, Blair felt he had succeeded in changing expectations about Britain when it came to its relations with Europe, asserting, as previously noted, that both the US and the EU valued the role the UK had come to play (Blair 2001b). The Europhile press in Britain generally agreed throughout Blair’s first term that lasting change had been effected. For instance, the Guardian reported in June 1998 that Foreign Secretary Cook felt that the Europeans had finally ‘accepted Britain’ at the end of the latter’s six-month EU presidency (Guardian 1998a). Just a few months later, a headline in the same paper read: ‘Blair puts UK at heart of Europe’ (Guardian 1998b). Such glowing assessments reflected New Labour’s record during a period of intense activity within the European integration project during his first term, in which the UK was heavily involved. Notably, Britain took an active part in two major EU treaty revisions, at Amsterdam in October 1997 and at Nice in February 2001, and, although this is often discounted, it was one of the leading forces behind the ambitious goals the Union set for itself in the so-called Lisbon Strategy.

Arguably of greater import, New Labour also gave substance to its rhetoric of leadership by initiating a commitment to deeper cooperation within the domestically sensitive sphere of security and defence policy. A joint UK-French declaration at St Malo in December 1998 elaborated the intention to put the EU in a position to play its full international role – although the declaration itself predictably made little attempt to
define exactly what form that role was to take (see Hill and Smith 2000: 243–4). This was followed in December 1999 by the inclusion in the Helsinki Headline Goals of the provision of having 60,000 European troops, deployable for up to 60 days, by 2003 (Dover 2007). These agreements marked a shift in British foreign policy away from NATO-centred defence arrangements towards an acceptance of the EU as an equally legitimate actor in that sphere, even including the use of ambiguous language that could be interpreted as implying the ability to deploy without the involvement of the US. As Jolyon Howorth has remarked (2000: 33): ‘It is difficult to overstate the significance of recent developments in European security and defence policy (ESDP) … For the UK to accept a credible ESDP is conceptually compatible with a strengthened Alliance is indeed a “revolution in military affairs”’.

In sum, at the turn of the millennium it appeared that New Labour was genuinely on the way to constructing a progressive consensus around the idea of a role in the world based on a squaring of the traditional circles of British foreign policy. The ‘special relationship’ was firmly back on track; but equally importantly, also on track were Britain’s relations with Europe. As Julie Smith concludes: ‘For three or four years, Britain did indeed seem to be moving towards the heart of Europe, or at least towards shedding its image as the “awkward partner”’ (Smith 2005: 721).

Losing a role, again: 2002–2010

Five years is not a long time in which to entrench novel expectations about Britain in international affairs and to alter the practices, relationships and language that flow from them. Moreover, there remained identifiable tensions in the New Labour strategy, tensions that sooner or later had significant potential to diminish the meaningfulness of the government’s rhetoric about a pivotal/bridge role conception. These were clearest in the government’s approach to the EU. While convinced of the benefits of constructive engagement from within Europe rather than from the sidelines, traditional British preferences also featured prominently in New Labour’s European policy. As the 1997 election manifesto stated, Labour’s vision of Europe was as ‘an alliance of independent nations choosing to cooperate to achieve what we cannot achieve alone’ (Labour Party 1997: 45). Thus, at the very same time as asserting a purported shift in British priorities, traditional elements of Britain’s role in the world were reaffirmed. New Labour, the manifesto continued, would ‘oppose a European federal superstate’ an echo of Margaret Thatcher’s famous 1988 ‘Bruges Speech’ (Thatcher 1988). This
was the case even in the area of security and defence, a realm in which New Labour had made a genuine break from the past. Here, EU developments were designed to be complementary to those of NATO, not autonomous from it. As Howorth has put it (2003/4: 175): ‘For the UK, ESDP was an Alliance project involving European instruments. For France, it was a European project embracing Alliance capabilities. So long as the British and the French were content to live with the constructive ambiguity in the project, all was well.’

Thus, while lofty rhetoric was matched with at least the beginnings of a major shift in Britain’s role in the world between 1997 and 2001, the chances of it lasting were limited from the start. Whereas seemingly no limits were placed on Britain’s intention to curry favour with Washington, developments in Europe were only envisaged as occurring within tighter parameters – discursively as well as policy-wise. As such, the New Labour rhetoric of Britain being a ‘pivotal power’ and a ‘transatlantic bridge’ rested on the degree to which there was a harmony of interests between the EU and the US, or at least the sufficient appearance of such. In the pre-2002 period, New Labour rode its luck in this regard. Washington’s reaction to the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on 9/11 – namely to securitize them by launching the now infamous ‘war on terror’– made this anything but a feasible strategy. Britain would have to make the choice its self-defined role in the world was explicitly based on delaying or avoiding altogether. Thus, if the first five years of New Labour’s foreign policy were dominated by the attempt to construct a role for Britain as a ‘bridge’ between Europe and America, as a number of commentators have already noted (notably Riddell 2003: 225; see also Wallace 2005; The Times 2006), the remainder of Labour’s time in office was dominated by the transatlantic bridge’s collapse. This was not, to be sure, all of New Labour’s doing and the failure of its foreign policy project was at least in part a function of the changed international context following 9/11. But Blair’s decisions were vital, in particular, his determination to involve Britain in the controversial American-led invasion of Iraq (Coates and Krieger 2004; Kampfner 2003). Blair’s decision, as James Withers has perspicaciously observed, ‘thwarted his aspirations to re-brand the UK as a pivotal power, leaving his country with little alternative than to play its perennial role as America’s faithful ally’ (Wither 2003/4: 72).

Despite the fact that the challenges of Britain’s ‘pivotal’ role conception started to become apparent over the course of 2002, when the Bush administration began to home in on Iraq as the next target in the ‘war on terror’, and Britain remained at Washington’s side, the
Blair government maintained its rhetorical support for the image of Britain occupying a privileged or ‘special’ position between Europe and America. Even at the height of the war itself, Blair stood firm in his belief that there was no need to choose between the two, as a number of politicians and commentators publicly opined (for instance Clegg 2003). A common theme in foreign policy speeches at this time was that the invasion of Iraq had not destroyed Britain’s strong position between Europe and American at all, with Blair stating in November 2003 that although

... objective commentary takes some delight in seeing each pillar [Europe and America] becoming detached from the structure it is maintaining, with a Prime Minister caught underneath with tired arms ... I am here to tell you, somewhat counter-intuitively, that [transatlantic relations] are in good shape and with a bit of vision and hard work, will be a more solid foundation than ever before (Blair 2003b).

It was almost as if Blair was having to talk himself into believing his own rhetoric.

A year on he asserted that Britain should celebrate its position:

There is only one superpower in the world today and we are its strongest ally. The most powerful political grouping that has created the largest economic market in the world is the European Union – and we are a leading member. It’s a great position (Blair 2004).

Clinging desperately to the pre-2002 script, two years later he decried the notion that either relationship could or should be given up as ‘insane’ (Blair 2006e). Yet, attempts to reassert the role conception that had dominated before 9/11 could not hide the fact that the relationship between Europe and the US had indeed turned sour, with important consequences for how meaningful such rhetoric could be. The Bush administration’s willingness to ignore international pressure to continue arms inspection efforts was exactly the type of scenario that lay behind the ‘Gaullist consensus’ in French foreign policy, and particularly the tradition of trying to extend autonomous European capacities through the EU rather than relying on a US-dominated NATO. In the face of the growing realization that Bush was determined to overthrow Saddam, with or without international backing, French President Jacques Chirac blocked the much-hoped-for second UN Security Council
resolution endorsing the use of force against Iraq. Importantly, he did so by stating openly at the end of a two-day EU summit meeting that ‘France will not accept a resolution that would legitimize military intervention and give the belligerents, the US and the United Kingdom, the right to administer Iraq’ (Independent 2003, emphasis added), making clear the distance between France and the US-UK over the issue. In a situation of open hostility to Britain amongst some of its key EU partners, Britain’s claims to a privileged transatlantic role lost all credibility.

Once again, the government initially tried to resist facing up to this reality and continued as if its chosen role could yet be successfully enacted. This was aided by support for the war from several of the EU’s newer members, notably from Poland, which joined the ‘coalition of the willing’. This led US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to extol the virtues of ‘New Europe’ in contrast with the ‘Old’ (quoted in Riddell 2003: 224). Consequently, Britain attempted to cast key strategic partners such as France into the role of supportive ally to the US by suggesting that it would be standing in the way of transatlantic solidarity if it failed to do so. In just one example, Welsh Secretary Peter Hain stated: ‘We need to encourage the French government and President Chirac in particular to seek a role of partnership with the US, not a position of conflict ... And we are in a position to help him do that’ (quoted in Baker and Sherrington 2004: 347). In more desperate terms, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw called for loyalty from Europe by stating that: ‘We will reap a whirlwind if we push the Americans into a unilateralist position in which they are at the centre of this unipolar world’ (cited in Riddell 2003: 248). New Labour’s attempt to hold the ‘bridge’ in place was made more difficult because an ever-larger proportion of the British public viewed the decision to go to war as a betrayal of the role in the world Britain should in fact play. This included not only the one million protestors who took to the streets of London in February 2003, but also 139 Labour Members of Parliament who defied the government and voted against sending British troops into battle. The feeling that London should not be overly subservient to Washington became increasingly prevalent as the post-conflict situation in Iraq deteriorated, as a recent Foreign Affairs Select Committee Report has noted (FAC 2010). This view was vividly expressed in the popular 2003 British film Love Actually, where one scene showed the Prime Minister, played by Hugh Grant, stating triumphantly that Britain will no longer be ‘dictated to’ by the US (see also Dyson’s chapter in this collection). Many felt that the Iraq invasion had brought Britain little but increased threats of domestic terrorism, as shown on 7 and 22 July 2005. Perhaps, the same view holds, had Blair interpreted Britain’s role as a
constructively critical partner of the US, as did France, the Iraq debacle might have been avoided.

Iraq, therefore, was the key event in the history of New Labour’s efforts to construct Britain’s role in the world. By the time Blair finally left the domestic political stage in June 2007, Iraq had become a less prominent foreign policy issue, but the language of pivots and transatlantic bridges as descriptors of Britain’s role had also become noticeably absent from speeches by British foreign policy-makers. Attention had shifted instead to the growing insurgency in Afghanistan which evoked neither the same amount of discord internationally nor domestically as had Iraq. Subject to inquiries first into the use of intelligence to legitimize the case for intervention and second into the circumstances surrounding the death of Dr David Kelly, Iraq came to be seen, very publicly, as a test case of the appropriateness of Blair’s handling of UK foreign policy after 1997. The feverish pace of European integration had also slowed due to ‘no’ votes in France, the Netherlands and Ireland in referenda on the Constitutional Treaty, leading to a ‘period of reflection’ on what to do next. Within this context, Britain’s role in the world had come full circle. New Labour’s project of trying to bridge Europe and America had been abandoned. Britain’s role as America’s closest ally and an ‘awkward’ partner in Europe had been firmly re-established, with many of the usual tropes not far behind. For example, in December 2007 Gordon Brown decided that a routine domestic engagement was more important than the signing of the EU Constitutional Treaty. Almost out of habit, Brown’s government in its final years reached for the language of ‘taking a lead’ on the international issue that dominated 2008 and 2009: the global financial crisis. Finally, despite US President Barack Obama’s alleged mistrust of personal diplomacy (for instance *Telegraph* 2009a), he telephoned David Cameron within hours of the latter’s appointment as new Prime Minister to re-affirm the importance of the ‘special relationship’, whatever he believed behind closed doors.

**Conclusion: A ‘New Labour effect’ on foreign policy?**

The consensus, at least among popular commentators, is that New Labour changed Britain’s role in the world. This view is often bound up with the conviction that Blair personally had a particular impact on the conduct of Britain’s external relations during his tenure at Number Ten. For instance, Michael Clarke states that: ‘Tony Blair made a big difference to British foreign policy during his decade in Downing Street’ (2007: 593). Before 1997, he argues, the Major government had imple-
mented a small ‘c’ conservative foreign policy, reacting to international events with little sense as to how such events might be shaped for Britain’s benefit. Not so New Labour, which jumped on the liberal internationalist bandwagon and shaped international relations by gaining privileged access to the centre of global power: Washington. Importantly, much of this was down to the personality and inimitable style of Blair (see also Dyson and Taylor’s chapters in this volume). Not everyone, however, was convinced by the bluff and bluster of New Labour’s rhetoric. Commenting on the then ongoing Strategic Defence Review (SDR), Corelli Barnett observed in 1997 that the New Labour projected amounted:

… to what General de Gaulle would have called un projet ambitieux. It signifies that even today a new British government is repeating the mistake perpetrated by all its predecessors, Labour and Conservative, since the Second World War. And that mistake has been first of all to choose the kind of grand world roles that they rather fancied Britain playing; then deciding what size, shape and deployment of armed forces would be needed to sustain these roles … and calling it a defence budget’ (Barnett 1997).

This echoes the sentiments of those who suggest that, beyond the rhetoric, New Labour’s foreign policy did not confront but perpetuated certain deep-seated British traditions (Curtis 2003; Williams 2005; Daddow 2011).

This chapter has argued for the strength of the latter interpretation: that once the language of the UK’s role in the world is itself made an object of analysis, and what makes up a role recognized, New Labour’s foreign policy can be seen to have displayed more in the way of continuity than qualitative change. Stripped back to its fundamentals, Britain’s role remained the same under New Labour as it had done under many previous governments. Britain’s relations with Europe remained frosty, while Britain’s relations with the US remained strong. As the following argument by David Miliband in 2009 makes clear, certain notions remain absolutely axiomatic to the expectations about Britain’s proper behaviour in world politics: that Britain is strategically placed between Europe and America, and that this underpins an internationalist orientation. Anything less represents the end of the UK’s international role: ‘I think’, Miliband noted, ‘the choice for the UK is also simply stated: we can lead a strong European foreign policy or – lost in hubris, nostalgia or xenophobia – watch our influence in the world wane’. The notion he
went on, ‘that the UK can maintain its influence in Beijing or Washing-
ton or Delhi or Moscow if we marginalize ourselves in Europe is frankly fanciful’ (Miliband 2009c).

There was the odd element of novelty in New Labour’s foreign policy. Perhaps most markedly, the 1997–2010 New Labour governments had a different foreign policy style from their predecessors. The international prominence of Blair was in marked contrast to the previous Prime Min-
ister, John Major, and the extent to which Blair articulated and in some sense embodied the liberal interventionist spirit of the age was marked. It is also evident that Blair was unusually strong in his convictions, especially regarding his willingness to use armed force in support of his foreign policy goals. Such self-assurance bordered on the hubristic. As he professed in 2003: ‘Our very strengths, our history, equip us to play a role as a unifier around a consensus for achieving both our goals and those of the wider world’ (Blair 2003a). However, the expectations attached to Britain in world politics in 2010 remained consistent with those the party had inherited in May 1997. Thus, whatever other changes the ‘New Labour effect’, and indeed the ‘Blair effect’, brought to British politics in these years, it cannot be concluded that one of these was a fundamental change to the conception of Britain’s ‘role in the world’.

In light of all this, it is worthwhile finally assessing the merits of the alternative model of British foreign policy proposed by the editors of this volume. This recast role is not based on the Churchillian vision of Britain sitting astride three giant geographic circles, but it emerges from a consideration of Identity, Ethics and Power as more appropriate ‘circles’ of foreign policy-making. The main point to be made is that ‘identity’ and the playing of roles are themselves intimately related at a conceptual level (McCourt forthcoming). In social life, individuals affirm their identities by taking on particular social roles, and so do states, if we can abstract them as rational actors for the purposes of analysis. It is therefore important to assess what ‘identity’ was affirmed by Britain’s role in the world during the New Labour years, and how well this matched up to British society and culture at the turn of the twenty-first century. The answer, it seems safe to say, is not very well. Notwithstanding the groups unrepresented by a supposedly ‘British’ but in truth very ‘English’ international role – ethnic minorities and the other nations of the United Kingdom – a large proportion of Britons remain unsure about the direction of Britain’s international relations. In many ways, this is understandable. A lack of knowledge about what the EU is and how membership of it benefits the UK remains strong after 35 years of membership, a tacit expression perhaps of the
oft-cited ‘democratic deficit’ of European institutions (Marquand 1979).
Fear of America, conversely, in many ways stems from similar causes, most prominently the feeling, exemplified in the relationship between the Blair and Bush administrations, that Britain is dictated to by Washing-
ton without Britain’s point of view being sufficiently taken into account. In this interpretation London’s influence is marginal at best, when not overlooked altogether. By making this relationship between identity and Britain’s foreign policy roles explicit, what can be said is that creating a role for Britain in the world that is based solely on an attempt to bind together two relationships that many in the country are unsure about unsurprisingly fails to offer much in the way of positive-identity affirmation for the British polity on the international stage.

The editors’ attempt to re-direct the underpinnings of Britain’s role in the world away from a geographical conception of that role and towards different ends and means of foreign policy, and therefore also of the groups it is meant to represent, thus has much potential for cre-
ative change in the study of Britain in the world. Although this may not guarantee better foreign policy – Blair himself held a conception of foreign policy with marked similarities to Identity, Ethics and Power, one which focussed on values, power, and what was at stake (Clarke 2007: 597–8) – at least moving academic and Establishment discussion away from a narrowly geographic conception of Britain’s role in world politics represents an important beginning. From this perspective, Miliband’s starting point for reflection on British foreign policy, that a ‘Strong European foreign policy is ... an essential element in a strong British global role. It is possible in my view to argue against Britain having a global role; but it is not in my judgement possible to argue for a strong British global role without a strong commitment to the EU’ (Miliband 2009c) shows the ongoing tendencies to conduct UK foreign policy in a cliché-filled language that contains many unspoken assumptions about its proper aims that should not go unexamined.
New Labour, Devolution and British Identity: The Foreign Policy Consequences

Pauline Schnapper

It is time for Scotland to take more responsibility for the world we share and to offer the insight and leadership of a nation keen to embrace the immense possibility that working within an expanded European Union offers.

(Salmond 2007a)

Introduction

The last twenty years have seen a lot of agonizing – both in the academic literature and in the media – about what it means to be British, whether Britishness ever existed and, if so, when this national identity was formed and whether and when it ceased to exist (Crick 1991; Marr 2000; Redwood 1999; Colls 2002). A relative consensus has, however, emerged around Linda Colley’s interpretation that the Act of Union with Scotland, coupled with colonial expansion, enabled a cohesive British identity to develop in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and to flourish until the early twentieth century (Colley 1992). The Second World War, it is further argued, marked the end of the period when this cohesive sense of Britishness was unquestioningly accepted as a common civic identity, distinct from the English, Scottish or Welsh national identities (Robbins 1994; Reynolds 2000; McCrone and Kiely 2000). The loss of the Empire, which had acted as the glue between the different nations through their shared colonial experience, as well as the economic and political decline that Britain experienced after the war, weakened the links between England, Scotland and Wales. The ties binding the nation together were therefore loosened, leading to fears, and in some cases hopes, that Britain would break up. From then on, one can argue that the ‘politics of decline’ identified by Andrew
Gamble as having dominated the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s (Gamble 1990) was accompanied and then followed by discussion around the ‘politics of identity’. In recent decades the traditional left/right division failed to account for the fault lines in the public debate over issues such as devolution, immigration or the ‘Europe’ question. Outside Britain likewise, these issues related to national identity have taken centre stage in domestic political debates, notably across the Channel in France and the Netherlands, though obviously along slightly different lines. In France, a government-sponsored debate on national identity proved controversial in 2009 as it was seen as pandering to the extreme right, while in the Netherlands the murders of the populist anti-Islam activist Pym Fortuyn and later the film director Theo Van Gogh prompted a debate on the Dutch model of integration.

In Britain, one of the main issues opened up by the debate was that of decentralization in Scotland and Wales. Confronted with the rise of nationalism in Scotland and Wales from the 1960s, and particularly during the Thatcher years of the 1980s, the Labour party endorsed the principle of creating a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly in the early 1990s. Tony Blair as leader confirmed the pledge made by his predecessor, John Smith, and included devolution in a broader project aimed at modernizing the British constitution, itself part of his ambition to project a new image of ‘Cool Britannia’ to the outside world, a young and vibrant country which would be a hub for new ideas, people and cultures (Leonard 1997). More immediately, his ambition was to maintain the unity of the kingdom in the face of separatist forces and thereby to reinforce a sense of British national identity, seemingly under threat (Blair 1996). Devolution was therefore only loosely connected at first to New Labour’s vision of European and foreign policy and the goals the government would be attempting to achieve in each realm. This chapter, however, will argue that New Labour’s constitutional reform had a critical impact beyond domestic politics, influencing both conceptions of the national identity and Britain’s image of its place in the world. Devolution, a dynamic process, the end result of which is still open, challenges a number of assumptions not just about what Britain is and what being British means, but also about the conduct of foreign policy and the role Britain can expect to play in Europe and the wider world. New Labour, it can be suggested, might well have unwittingly opened a Pandora’s box by delivering devolution. Blair and his successor Gordon Brown apparently believed it would positively affect the balance of the British
constitution and modernize domestic policy and politics in the process, but they overlooked its potential side-effects on foreign policy.

To advance this argument the chapter is divided into three parts. The first will briefly recall the issues at stake in the debate about devolution since the 1960s and the settlement reached by New Labour in 1997–1999. The second section will examine the attempts by both Scotland and, to a lesser extent, Wales to establish a distinctive voice on the European and international stages, focussing in particular on developments during the New Labour years. Finally, the chapter will draw tentative conclusions about the effects of devolution on the conduct of British foreign policy and sketch some possible scenarios for the coming years.

Devolution and Britishness

The revival of Scottish and Welsh nationalism from the mid-1960s, illustrated in a series of encouraging results in a number of by-elections and in the two 1974 general elections, was a challenge to British political elites. It led to a heated debate about whether Britain could remain as both a unitary and multinational state, with commentators like Tom Nairn already forecasting the end of Britain in 1977, long before the recent flurry of books on the subject (Nairn 1977; Nairn 2000; Redwood 1999; Scruton 2000; Marr 2000). The Labour Party in power between 1974 and 1979 was directly confronted with the nationalist issue, especially as both Scotland and Wales were powerful electoral bases for the party. James Callaghan’s government devised the first significant plan for devolution in 1976, proposing the creation of assemblies in Scotland and Wales. But the Labour Party was divided, the Conservatives opposed the bill and the referendum which eventually took place in 1979 in Scotland and Wales failed to give a positive vote from over 40 per cent of the electorate, as had been stipulated in an amendment to the bill (Bogdanor 1999). At that point, the politics of identity seemed to be receding and territorial issues becoming less salient as the debate focussed mostly on economic difficulties and Margaret Thatcher’s challenge to the post-war consensus.

The growing unpopularity of the Thatcher governments in Scotland and Wales in the 1980s reinvigorated attention to the question of devolution and boosted support for the two most prominent nationalist parties, the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) and Plaid Cymru in Wales. Again, it was the Labour leadership, and to a lesser extent the Liberal Democrats, that found itself under pressure to adopt a stance on decentralization and autonomous government. Having taken part in the Constitutional Convention that was set up in 1988 in Scotland, together with the Liberal Democrats and a number of other Scottish organizations of the civil
society (trade unions, local authorities and NGOs), the party finally agreed on a policy of devolution under the impetus of its Scottish leader, John Smith, after 1992. It then became, under Blair, part of a wider programme of constitutional reform aimed at modernizing the British constitution and adapting it to a changed world (Blair 1996). In Scotland, the White Paper published in the summer of 1997 envisaged a Scottish Parliament with legislative powers on a wide number of local issues, including key sectors of the Scottish economy such as agriculture, fisheries and tourism, with an executive led by a First Minister. Matters reserved for Westminster would cover mostly macro-economic, foreign and defence policies. In Wales, the new assembly in Cardiff would only have powers over secondary legislation, since the momentum there for devolution was weaker and its economy already more integrated with that of England.

Prime Minister Blair argued that devolution was the best way to avoid the break-up of Britain. He rejected both separatism, which he said the Scots and the Welsh did not want, and federalism, which he believed would be unsuitable in the British case because of the disparity in size and population between its component parts: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Blair 1996). He hoped that devolution, as a response to Scottish and Welsh demands for greater autonomy, would actually reinforce a coherent sense of British identity while recognizing its multinational nature. Gordon Brown, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, proudly talked of Britain in Colley-esque terms as one day becoming ‘the first successful multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-national country in the world’ (Brown 1999a). Brown’s interest in the issue was obvious in the number of speeches and statements he devoted to Britishness over the years when he was Chancellor, in which he stated his aim to ‘reclaim patriotism’. In his view, Britishness was ‘bigger than the sum of its parts’ and was to be defined by the sharing of common values such as liberty, responsibility and fairness, not by unchanging institutions. Devolution was one of the reforms, he said, that would enable these values to flourish:

So the British way forward must be to break up in the name of liberty, centralised institutions that are too remote and insensitive and so devolve power; to encourage in the name of responsibility the creation of strong local institutions; and, in new ways in the name of liberty, responsibility and fairness, to seek to engage the British people in decisions that affect their lives’ (Brown 2006a).

By contrast, Conservative and nationalist voices were quick to underline the dynamic nature of sub-national autonomy, whether they looked forward to eventual independence for Scotland or mourned the end of
Britain. The Conservatives denounced the ‘slippery slope’ towards independence for Scotland that devolution entailed, as demands for more power to Scotland would follow one other. John Redwood was one of the most vocal opponents of devolution, in which he saw the seeds being sown of ‘the end of Britain’ (Redwood 1999). Other Conservative MPs, such as Michael Ancram, were less pessimistic but raised alarms about the possible consequences of the so-called ‘West Lothian’ question – the imbalance between Scottish and English MPs in Westminster – which might fuel English nationalism (Hansard 1998a). Similarly, but approaching it from a radically different perspective, the Scottish nationalists hoped that, indeed, devolution would pave the way to full independence as Scottish voters came to realize that their needs could not be answered by the limited autonomy they would be enjoying. Against these chorus of disapprovals, successful referendums were held in Scotland and Wales in September 1997, and the New Labour government introduced two bills which became the Scotland Act and the Government of Wales Act 1998. It established a Scottish Parliament and a Scottish executive led by a First Minister with extensive devolved powers and a Welsh Assembly with more limited secondary powers over legislation voted in Westminster. In the Scottish case ‘reserved’ matters kept by Westminster included mostly macro-economic policy and foreign affairs, whereas the rest, including agriculture, fisheries, local transport, health, housing, education and so on were devolved.

What assessment of Britishness in the context of devolution can be made after eleven years of devolution? The UK has not broken up and, at least until 2006–2007 as we will see below, it could be argued that the new settlement found its place in the British political system, with the two devolved institutions functioning reasonably well, delivering to their respective voters and avoiding any major conflict with London. That said, recent events have shown that devolution remains an ongoing process and that no one can be sure of what the future of the UK will be. In Wales there has been recurring pressure from different political actors from all parties, not just the nationalists, to increase the remit of the Welsh assembly to the level of the Scottish Parliament – that is, providing it with full legislative powers. This was partly granted by the Government of Wales Act 2006 which created a complex mechanism by which Westminster can delegate powers to the Assembly by creating ‘Assembly measures’ (Government of Wales Act 2006). It also paved the way for a future referendum in Wales about whether to grant legislative powers to the Assembly, due to take place in 2011. In 2007, after the third election to the Welsh Assembly did not provide a majority, Plaid Cymru joined
Labour in a coalition, enabling it to take part in the government of Wales for the first time. The nationalists immediately insisted on a more drastic law about the Welsh language which would force private utilities to write all their documents in both English and Welsh (Labour Party and Plaid Cymru 2007). Plaid Cymru’s long-term goal remains ‘self-government’ as an independent member of the European Union (EU), contradicting its coalition partner’s unionist agenda, though it has not prevented constructive collaboration within the Assembly so far.

The debate about the future of the Union was raised again and even more dramatically in Scotland in 2007, when the SNP won the Holyrood election with 47 seats against Labour’s 46. This was a far cry from George Robertson’s oft-repeated prediction in 1995, when he was Shadow Scottish Secretary, that devolution would be ‘killing Nationalism stone dead’. On the contrary, the SNP has thrived under devolution and taken full advantage of the new institutions and the local political and media scenes. Its result did not give it an overall majority, nor did any of the unionist parties agree to enter into a coalition with it, but the party was able to govern as a minority government in Scotland. Indeed, once in power the SNP lost no time in trying to advance its distinctive agenda. For example, in the summer of 2007 the new Executive published a White Paper aimed at launching a two-year consultation, which they called a ‘national conversation’ on the future of Scotland (Scottish Executive 2007). In August 2009, a Referendum Bill was announced with a view to organizing a vote at the end of 2010 – that is after the general election and once the Conservative party was back in power. Obviously they had not anticipated that the Liberal Democrats would be part of the new coalition government, which could mitigate Scottish resentment toward an ‘alien’ UK government. This put the three unionist parties, and especially Labour, in an awkward position. On the one hand, between them they had a majority in Holyrood if they joined forces and could defeat the bill. This would reflect public opinion in Scotland where only a minority of between 25 per cent and 30 per cent favoured independence, according to opinion polls (see for example Johnson, S. 2009). On the other hand, some politicians, such as Wendy Alexander when she was leader of Scottish Labour party (September 2007 to June 2008), advocated ‘calling the SNP’s bluff’ and effectively burying independence by getting a clear ‘no’ vote in a referendum.

Gordon Brown, when he was Prime Minister, came to adopt an ambiguous position on the issue, accepting the referendum as a possibility in the future, after the recession was over, but rejecting it in the short-term. As for the Liberal Democrats, they defended the idea of a multi-option
Referendum, where the voters could choose between: first, the status quo; second, enhanced devolution (which they supported); and finally, full independence. The Calman report endorsed by Labour, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats in June 2009 called for a significant increase in the powers of the Scottish Parliament, especially on taxation (Commission on Scottish Devolution 2009). The most likely outcome, with the Conservatives now in government in London, is the implementation of the Calman report conclusions, especially on budgetary powers for Scotland. But whatever happens there is little doubt, first, that the issue of independence will remain in the limelight, and, second, that unionist parties have been pushed into abandoning the status quo and supporting further decentralization, testing the strength of the ties that bind Britain together. The idea that devolution would be a one-off decision which would solve the problem of the unity of the UK once and for all proved unduly optimistic. The constitutional landscape post-devolution instead resembles what Ron Davies, the former leader of the Welsh Labour party and shadow Welsh Secretary, referred to as, ‘a process, not an event’ (Davies 1999).

**Attempting to develop a distinctive foreign policy**

It is evident that devolution was *not* part of a project to redefine the UK’s external action or its foreign policy priorities. For example, in the case of Scottish devolution, neither European nor foreign affairs were devolved to Edinburgh. In his foreword to the 1997 White Paper, ‘Scotland’s Parliament’, Donald Dewar, then Secretary of State for Scotland, stressed that: ‘Scotland will remain firmly part of the United Kingdom. Westminster will continue to be responsible for those areas of policy best run on a United Kingdom basis. These include foreign affairs, defence and national security and macro-economic and fiscal matters’ (Scottish Office 1997). A narrow perspective on devolution might therefore imply that these developments were only of relevance to the UK constitution rather than more generally to its foreign policy orientation. However, the evolving definition of Britain and the uncertainty about its future described in the previous section appear to have had considerable consequences for the conduct of British foreign policy in two regards. First, devolution entailed the diffusion of power between different political communities frequently aiming at conflicting goals, and this led British governments to rethink the way foreign policy was made. Second, devolution put new constraints on the UK government, though in theory it was not meant to have a dramatic
impact on British foreign policy. Indeed, the whole devolution settlement of 1999 was based on the principle that the sovereignty of Westminster would be unchallenged and therefore its foreign policy would remain unitary. This tension within the settlement has caused a number of cracks to appear in the idea of a unitary British foreign policy and it is on them that this section concentrates: foreign policy-making, foreign policy implementation and the representation of the devolved nations at EU level.

Although foreign affairs belong to the reserved matters over which Westminster remains a single actor, there have been several instances where the distinction between devolved and reserved matters has been blurred, jeopardizing the coherence of British foreign policy. The first and most obvious example is in the realm of European policy (for more on which see Holden’s chapter in this book), over which Scotland has a clear interest which does not necessarily overlap with the UK interest as a whole. The divergence is particularly marked in agriculture and fisheries which are more crucial sectors of the Scotland’s economy than they are England’s. The 1997 White Paper tried to define the responsibilities of the different bodies. It acknowledged that ‘relations with Europe are the responsibility of the United Kingdom Parliament and Government. But the Scottish Parliament and Executive will have an important role in those aspects of European Union business which affect devolved areas’. The policy-making process was to be affected, as ‘it is part of the Government’s intention that Scottish Executive Ministers and officials should be fully involved in discussions within the UK Government about the formulation of the UK’s policy position on all issues which touch on devolved matters.’ But it was also made clear that there would be limits to the input that the devolved institutions could expect to make in defining the British position:

The Government also propose that Ministers and officials of the Scottish Executive should have a role to play in relevant Council meetings and other negotiations with our EU partners ... The role of Scottish Ministers and officials will be to support and advance the single UK negotiating line which they have played a part in developing (Scottish Office 1997: Chapter 5).

Scottish ministers would, however, be able to participate in relevant European Council of Ministers’ meetings or even represent the British government as a whole. In October 1999 a Memorandum of Understanding was agreed upon by the UK government and the devolved
administrations in order to facilitate co-ordination between the two levels when competence was effectively shared, or when there was a spillover from reserved to devolved matters. A concordat on EU policy was also agreed upon which established procedures for joint policy-making, although the last word clearly stayed with London (Bulmer et al. 2002: 37). The Scottish Secretary’s role, as well as that of the Welsh Secretary, has become that of representing Scottish interests in the Cabinet and its committees when decisions are made. This proved to run quite smoothly after 1999 in that no tension was aired publicly.

If policy-making at EU level has been the first way in which devolution has affected British foreign policy, the second has been the implementation of EU legislation, especially the management of structural funds. This is a regional responsibility where the devolved Holyrood executive and Parliament are in charge, initially requiring them to negotiate with London but then giving them some leverage in the implementation of the policy, both towards their own population and with regard to the UK government. Although structural funds for Scotland have been halved for the 2007–2013 period compared to the previous settlement following the 2004 round of EU enlargement, they still represent €645 million, which is managed by Scotland and evaluated by the EU, in line with the 1997 White Paper which stated that ‘the Scottish Executive will have an obligation to ensure the implementation in Scotland of EU obligations which concern devolved matters’. Yet immediately after this, the White Paper added that ‘it is implicit in the sovereignty of the UK Parliament that it will continue to have the ability to legislate to give effect to EU obligations in Scotland’ (Scottish Office 1997: Chapter 5). Is London then not effectively excluded? In a way, this reflects a more general ambiguity in the creation of a Parliament in Scotland, which in theory can be abolished at any time by Westminster but which in practice has been acquiring a legitimacy of its own which would make abolition politically impossible and constitutionally almost unworkable. In Wales, EU structural funding amounts to over two billion euros for 2007–2013, although the government’s role in implementation is more modest:

The policy competences exercised by the Welsh Assembly Government are determined by UK legislation, and Welsh Ministers can be designated to implement European Directives through subordinate legislation. The Assembly Government has responsibility for a wide range of domestic policies including economic development, agri-
culture, education, health, culture and environment (Welsh Assembly Government 2009: 12).

Even in this case, the precise sharing of tasks between London and Cardiff when it comes to implementation of the programmes is not as clear-cut as legal documents imply.

The third impact devolution appears to have had on foreign policy has been that competition has arisen over which body legitimately represents Scottish interests in the EU, causing no small amount of political tension between London and Edinburgh. In practice, the Scottish Parliament and executive have tried to extend their lobbying and influence on European policy both in London and Brussels. In London, access to the European policy-making process is through the Scottish Office and Scottish Secretary, but also via the First Minister and executive. In Brussels, representation of Scottish interests has grown since the creation of Scotland Europa by the Scottish Office in 1999, incorporating a relatively large number of staff (twelve people) relative to other European regions or countries of a similar size. They represent both private Scottish companies and the Scottish executive and Parliament and lobby in favour of Scottish interests. As a result, Scotland is one of the European regions which has opened the highest number of offices abroad, after Belgium (Blatter et al. 2008: 476). This is in addition to cooperation with the permanent UK representation in Brussels, UKRep, which defends all UK interests, including those of the Scottish and Welsh, in the EU. Scottish and Welsh Ministers can take part in Council meetings on behalf of the UK as a whole. The Welsh representation in Brussels is now equally important, at least in terms of the number of staff, although it has not achieved the same political leverage because of the smaller size of the population. Within the Scottish executive, a Minister, Fiona Hyslop in 2010, is in charge of Europe, External Affairs and Culture. The Scottish Parliament has established a European and External Relations Committee whose remit is to consider and report on ‘any European Union issue’ and ‘the coordination of the international activities of the Scottish Administration’ (Scottish Parliament 2009).

The Committee of the Regions set up following the Maastricht Treaty in 1994, with its eight Scottish and four Welsh delegates, provides another forum in which to address specific needs or grievances and to increase lobbying and networking at the European level. This remains limited, however, because the Committee’s power is limited to an advisory role and has very little policy input; the European Commission and the Council are required to seek the Committee’s opinion
before any new legislation, but are not constrained to follow its ‘opinions’ (Cole 2005). Most of the benefits for Scotland and Wales have come from establishing links with other European regions with legislative powers such as Catalonia and Bavaria. The Welsh Assembly Government has obtained the right to speak Welsh during those meetings, as well as in the Councils of Ministers, which was hailed as a great success by the Labour/PC coalition (Welsh Assembly Government 2009).

The preceding analysis of the impact of devolution on the formation and execution of foreign policy suggests that Britain is now home to a ‘multi-level’ system of governance which includes Edinburgh, London and to some extent Cardiff. Foreign policy is the product of networks of policy input and negotiations which both precedes, and runs in parallel with, the existing dialogue between London and Brussels. The British policy-making process has become much more complex as a result. Of these three cracks that devolution has opened up in a unified British foreign policy, the widest has opened over the conduct of EU policy and a case study will now illuminate the practical impact of the above considerations.

EU policy was relatively unproblematic for as long as the party in power in London, New Labour, was the same one as in Edinburgh (although the Liberal Democrats participated in the coalition there). Indeed, successful cooperation between the central and regional levels in European matters was officially praised, and in a few instances the UK government was represented by a Scottish minister on the Council of Ministers. But things changed with the SNP in power in Edinburgh since 2007. First Minister Alex Salmond and his party have been keen to exploit alleged differences between Scottish and English interests, implicitly denying that there could be a single overarching European policy defending the whole spectrum of British interests. For example, Salmond claimed that the London government failed to defend Scottish interests in fishing and regional aid, arguing that full independence was needed to ensure the successful defence of Scottish interests, especially on fisheries and energy (Salmond 2007b; Leydier 2007). With its claim for ‘independence in Europe’, the party’s strategy also included playing the European card against London, using the EU as a tool to reinforce its own legitimacy and credibility as well as Scotland’s claim to be a small independent country within a bigger regional body. The SNP has continually underscored its claim to be a serious, modern, outward-looking party engaged in its regional environment, as opposed to a narrow-minded nationalist movement such as may exist in other countries. For example, in April 2008 the SNP executive published a document called ‘Action Plan on European Engagement’ which was as much about domestic politics as about European policy. It stressed that Scotland was presently ‘inadequately’ repre-
presented as a ‘region’ in the EU and that instead it could flourish as an independent member of the EU, following examples from the so-called ‘arc of prosperity’ of small nations within and without the EU: Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Finland (although these examples look less attractive since the global economic crisis hit home, at least as far as Ireland and Iceland are concerned). Although the SNP government pledged ‘active engagement with the UK government in the EU policy-making process’, it regretted that ‘we are unable to represent Scotland’s interests directly in Brussels without the explicit consent of UK Government Ministers or through the machinery of the UK Government’ (Scottish Government 2008a: 11).

Away from specifically EU affairs, the SNP has attempted to voice a distinct foreign policy which has contained a number of dimensions. First, Salmond has articulated a more left-wing oriented foreign policy than that espoused by New Labour for the UK as a whole, taking advantage of the unpopularity of some of New Labour’s policies in Scotland, notably the invasion of Iraq. This was, secondly, reflected in the decision to stop talking about the Scottish ‘executive’ and instead call it Scottish ‘government’, a symbolic challenge to the sovereignty of Westminster (Nicoll 2007). Third, Salmond rejected the controversial choice of updating the Trident missiles nuclear programme (on which see Allen’s chapter in this collection). With the submarines based in Scotland, this provided him with an easy tool to criticize the Westminster government and he was able to underscore a distinctive Scottish policy as a result. In so doing he fuelled tension between two of his opposing parties, Labour and the Liberal Democrats, which had diverging views on the subject but which were coalition partners north of the border. Fourthly, the Scottish government proactively tried to develop bilateral relations with a number of important countries like the US and China. On the latter, for instance, there is a ‘China Plan’ detailing targets for Scottish engagement with China on the Scottish government’s website (Scottish Government 2008b). These offices are, however, hosted by the British embassies in Washington and Beijing, which shows something of the complexity involved in carving a distinctive niche for Scottish agendas in this field of foreign policy. Salmond also tried to boost his international standing by visiting a number of countries and meeting foreign leaders and ministers, mostly in the EU (French Foreign Affairs Ministry 2010).

Fifthly, and more importantly, the present First Minister has been a vocal critic of key New Labour foreign and security policy adventures. For example, he attacked the British government over its involvement in Operation Allied Force in Kosovo in 1999, calling it ‘unpardonable folly’
at a time when the war was popular in the UK (Black 2010). Salmond opposed the 2003 war in Iraq from very early on and relentlessly attacked Tony Blair, playing no doubt to opinion polls in Scotland which showed even more opposition to the invasion than in the rest of the UK (Johnson 2008). In 2004, the SNP and Plaid Cymru even attempted to launch a procedure of impeachment against the Prime Minister (BBC 2004). Salmond also called for the withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan in 2009, stressing among other things the fact that many Scottish soldiers were fighting because of ill-conceived decisions made in London. In so doing, he was implicitly questioning the legitimacy of London to conduct a foreign policy on behalf of Scotland. Bringing all this together, the SNP agenda for an independent Scotland includes, as we have seen, membership of the EU but not of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which would prove extremely controversial if independence became a realistic option in the years to come. This could provoke tension with both London and Washington, as well as potentially other NATO members, and is not necessarily a policy popular with the Scottish electorate. Perhaps revealingly, the 2010 SNP general election manifesto was silent on the issue.

Until the summer of 2009, these differences on foreign policy remained rhetorical, and the UK government could on the whole choose to ignore them. However, the controversial release in August 2009 of the Libyan Lockerbie bomber, Abdelbaset Al-Megrahi, by the Scottish Justice Minister, Kenny MacAskill, showed that this was not just talk. MacAskill took this decision under a specific provision of Scottish law that allows prisoners to be released on ‘compassionate grounds’ if they are terminally ill and have less than three months to live, which was supposedly the prognosis for the Libyan bomber. Interestingly, MacAskill took pride in this Scottish specificity, by stating: ‘In Scotland, we are a people who pride ourselves on our humanity. It is viewed as a defining characteristic of Scotland and the Scottish people … Compassion and mercy are about upholding the beliefs that we seek to live by, remaining true to our values as a people’ (quoted in Telegraph 2009c). The decision could be taken by the Scottish executive because justice is a devolved matter but it had an obvious impact on the foreign policy of the UK, and was criticized in Scotland and Britain as a whole (Telegraph 2009b; Watt 2009; Carrell 2009b). Indeed it had repercussions well beyond the UK because it was followed by a public outcry across the Atlantic, especially by the relatives of the victims. The US administration showed anger at the Brown government and President Obama called the decision a ‘mistake’ (Carrell 2009a). The Americans’ attitude was not due to a misunderstanding of the subtleties of devolution, but because they knew the SNP government had talked to
the British government. Indeed, Salmond managed to create a rift in the ‘special relationship’ with the United States and embarrass the British government not because his government had taken a decision that the Foreign Office opposed, but because it was assumed, and indeed acknowledged, that the British government wanted the release to improve diplomatic relations with Libya. This was therefore a political-judicial decision with an international impact on the relationship between Britain and the US on the one hand and the UK and Libya on the other.

This incident sharply illustrated the arrival of Scotland as an international actor with a distinct agenda which could destabilize the idea of a coherent ‘British’ foreign policy. At the same time, this kind of situation was extraordinary and it is difficult to generalize from events pertaining to the presence of a foreign national convict bomber released from a Scottish prison, because the plane was blown up over Scotland. The day-to-day conduct of British foreign – as opposed to European – policy does not normally include the regular possibility of tension with Scotland, but it cannot be ruled out completely. However, there is an argument to be made that in the aftermath of the May 2010 UK general election the potential for tension between London and Edinburgh seems likely to increase with the return of the Conservative Party in power, even if in a coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Tensions run especially deep over Europe, which has been a dividing line between the Scottish, Welsh and English polities since 1999. Scottish and Welsh public opinion has generally been more pro-European than the English in the past, though the gap has narrowed somewhat in recent years (Scottish Government 2010). The Scottish government and parliament might be uncomfortable with the strongly Eurosceptic line likely to be followed by British Foreign Secretary William Hague, considering it contrary to Scottish interests. The SNP is no longer as enthusiastic about the euro as it used to be in the 1990s, but the Scottish Europe minister was quoted as saying that ‘sympathy was there’ – not quite the same rhetoric as the Conservatives, or even their more moderate coalition partners the Liberal Democrats (Euractiv 2009).

Conclusion

The politicization of identity in the UK has been an important development in British politics in the 1990s and 2000s, with issues such as devolution, multiculturalism and European integration coming to occupy centre stage. Devolution was seen by the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats as a response to the increasing unease of the Scottish and Welsh
population about being governed from London, as well as the opportunity to renew and modernize the British constitution. But rather than reinforcing the nation-state, as New Labour had hoped, developments in Scotland and Wales led to renewed questions about the future of the Union. Both Scottish, and to a lesser extent Welsh, political actors have taken advantage of the room for manoeuvre afforded by their newly-gained autonomy to assert themselves on the European and international stages. However uncertain and limited their initial steps have been, this new direction may have an impact not just on the definition of national identity but also on Britain’s position in Europe and beyond.

What effects could devolution have on British foreign policy in the future? Several scenarios are possible. One is that devolution might lead to a different, more horizontal style of foreign policy decision-making involving national as well as sub-national authorities, but without significant changes in terms of policy outcomes. In other words, devolution may not fundamentally alter the main tenets of British foreign policy, its interests and alliances, merely requiring technical re-arrangements in the process of policy formulation. In this case decision-making would become more complex internally. A second scenario sees differences growing between Edinburgh (more than Cardiff) and London on crucial aspects of foreign policy, especially European policy, possibly whipped up by parties keen to differentiate themselves from Westminster parties for electoral reasons. This could lead to real tension and problems in the conduct of British external affairs and an undermining of the authority of the Foreign Office. A third scenario is that, even if independence now seems a remote possibility according to opinion polls, there is at the very least a momentum towards further devolved powers in Scotland. This is even accepted by the Conservative Party and will raise new questions for foreign policy. Should independence appeal to a majority of Scottish voters in the future this would have obvious and profound consequences for Britain’s standing on the world stage. A United Kingdom reduced to England, Wales and Northern Ireland would automatically see its role diminished, even if the Scottish population only represents about 10 per cent of the UK population as a whole. Lots of questions about the nuclear deterrent, the British seat on the UN Security Council and the size of British armed forces might then arise. As a result Britain could well find it even harder to continue to ‘punch above its weight’ on the international stage.
New Labour, Leadership, and Foreign Policy-making after 1997

Stephen Benedict Dyson

Introduction

How did Tony Blair and Gordon Brown see the world, and how many of their actions were driven by their personal constructions of the reality of foreign affairs? Was British foreign policy from 1997–2010 decisively shaped by the belief systems of the two Prime Ministers? The two were from the same political party, shared an ideological construct – ‘New Labour’ – and dealt with many of the same international issues, particularly the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq bequeathed by Blair to Brown. A comparison of Blair and Brown comes tantalizingly close, then, to a natural experiment in which many factors potentially significant in shaping foreign policy (notably political party, ideology and external situation) are held within a tight range of variation, while the key variable of interest (the identity of the Prime Minister) changes. On that basis, this chapter tests the hypothesis that British foreign policy across the Blair and Brown eras can be at least partly explained with reference to their subjective internal representations of reality and the manner in which this shaped what they believed to be possible and desirable.

The chapter investigates the worldviews of Blair and Brown – and attempts to test the strength of the above claim – in three parts. First, it discusses the role leaders play in shaping state foreign policy. I strongly support the editors’ framework of ‘identity, ethics and power’ (IEP, see Chapter 1) as a means of understanding UK foreign policy, but would offer an advance upon it: identity, ethics, and power are ‘free-floating’
ideas (or, in the case of the latter, an idea with a strong material underpinning) that are given motive force in political action by the interpretations and reformulations of statesmen. These leaders act, I argue, as the ‘locus of integration’ of the material and ideational impulses which bear upon a state. Crucially, the shape of that integration is decisively determined by what the leaders themselves bring to the mix in terms of pre-existing cognitive frameworks, characteristic approaches to problems of political action, and baseline personality traits. Thus, each leader will perceive the imperatives of identity, ethics, and power in a unique fashion, and will process these inputs in idiosyncratic ways to produce a worldview. This worldview is then the basis for the foreign policy choices leaders make.

The second part elaborates a method of measuring the worldviews and belief systems of political leaders through content analysis of their verbal output on foreign affairs. Through analysis of the entirety of their responses to foreign policy questions in the House of Commons, this mode of investigation allows us to pinpoint the subjective conceptions of reality that formed the basis of Blair and Brown’s engagement with the world. In the third and fourth parts, the impact upon British foreign policy of the Prime Ministers’ respective beliefs is reconstructed. I find that Blair held a subjective view of the world as one driven by conflict and believed that Britain had to respond in kind. Blair’s view of political life was stark and based around blunt, black-and-white representations of other actors, and he believed himself and the UK to be both efficacious in international affairs and best-suited to a proactive, engaged stance. In the nomenclature of the IEP framework developed in this book, Blair believed Britain’s identity demanded an engaged, proactive approach to the world; his ethics were those of a Manichean moralist; and his views on power were that one needed it in a dangerous world and, since the Americans had the most of it, it was a good idea to be friends with them and do most of what they say. These proclivities helped mould his policies toward Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Brown cleaved to a very different worldview. He saw the world as much more driven by cooperation than conflict, and as a more complicated place than Blair. His worldview stressed not power politics but interconnectedness and complexity. He shared with Blair, though, a belief that the UK was an important state in global terms and that British interests were best served through a proactive, engaged foreign policy. In terms of the IEP framework, he saw Britain’s identity as that of a hub for and facilitator of globalization and global development; his
ethics were driven by a commitment to poverty reduction in Africa and elsewhere; and his concern was more with financial than with military power. This worldview was linked to his view of the ‘special relationship’ with the US, his commitment to international development, his handling of the global financial crisis, and his reluctant prosecution of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Leaders and identity, ethics, and power

The IEP framework, with its focus on ideational factors, parallels much recent research in International Relations (especially in the US) focussed upon a state’s subjective conceptualizations of ‘self’ (the state) and ‘other’ (the rest of the world). This research, often termed ‘constructivist’, suggests that material factors of state power and position are indeterminate causes of behaviour. Instead, states ‘construct’ an identity for themselves based upon their values, conceptions of their proper national role, and the gamut of relationships they have or would like to have with other states (see McCourt’s chapter in this collection). Once so constructed, this identity becomes a key independent variable predicting state action. This line of thinking was animated by Soviet behaviour at the end of the Cold War. The ‘new thinking’ appeared to be driven by a change in Soviet conceptions of their country’s place in the world under Gorbachev much more than by a change in their objective circumstances, and so was used by critics of the dominant realist paradigm to impugn that school’s explanatory power (Larson and Shevchenko 2003). If the behaviour of one pole of the famed bipolar system could change radically in ways that realists considered foolish (unilateral withdrawal from an empire, radical cuts in strategic arms) and in the absence of much change in their key independent variable of material power, then was it perhaps time to re-think realism’s position atop the discipline? Many believed that it was, and so ‘constructivism’ is now perhaps the dominant theoretical approach to the explanation of state’s foreign policies, containing an essential truth: states’ conceptions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ condition their actions. While in most cases these conceptions are somewhat bounded by material factors – Liechtenstein not being on the verge of declaring the goal of total global domination – most states in most situations in fact have a relatively wide menu of identities that can be adopted.

Constructivism, with its emphasis on the indeterminacy of material factors and the importance of ideational forces, has thereby provided a much needed corrective to the dominance (at least in US International
Relations scholarship) of the economic school of material-based rational choice (Brown and Ainley 2009: 40–8). However, as Andrew Moravcsik (1999) has pointed out with an invigorating directness, the constructivist argument that ‘identity matters’ is true but trivial. As the label has proliferated, the sheer scope of arguments termed ‘constructivist’ has expanded almost to the point that a decent working definition of the school would be ‘anything contra Kenneth Waltz’. It has become, in this view, what Brown and Ainley (2009: 48) call ‘a bumper-sticker term’, its principal use being to enhance the perceived theoretical respectability – and hence publication prospects – of average-quality work. Key questions of casual sequencing, the nature of identity formation, and the link between self/other conceptions and political action have been bracketed off (though see Klotz and Lynch 2007: 77–85. Notably, however, their answers to these questions come not from constructivism but from social psychology which, as I argue below, both predates and supersedes the constructivist approach to questions of self/other conceptions). The core questions posed by Moravcsik more than ten years ago have gone largely un-answered namely: where do identities come from? And how can we explain identity change?

An answer to these questions – and a fuller and more precise understanding of state identity formation – comes from studies of cognitive factors in foreign policy, variously termed the ‘decision-making’ approach to foreign policy or ‘foreign policy analysis’. From at least 1962 with the publication of R. Snyder, H.W. Bruck and B. Sapin’s Foreign Policy Decision-Making, research in this tradition was based upon largely the same opening gambit later adopted by constructivism: material circumstances provide some boundaries on state action, but the variety of possibilities remaining is vast and so material circumstances are indeterminate predictors of a state’s foreign policy. The key, according to the cognitive approach, is to focus upon the individual statesmen at the core of the decision-making system. Statesmen in this rendering act as the ‘locus of integration’ for both material and ideational factors in a state’s milieu (Snyder et al. 2002: 59). The manner – and the result – of this integration is shaped by the beliefs, predispositions, personality, and past experiences of these statesmen, who translate material, ideational, and personal inputs into a state’s goals and identity. This approach preserves, and in fact preceded by several decades, the essential constructivist insight into the importance of ideational factors, while providing a superior account of state identity formation and variation. State identities come from the unique integration of inputs that occurs, ultimately, in the heads of statesmen. States
‘shift’ identities because different leaders of these states perform this integrative task differently.

Accessing leaders’ worldviews

This establishes a theoretical basis for taking leaders seriously. But there exists a looming difficulty: how can we isolate and understand the identities leaders generate? One could suggest that we cannot, arguing that individual psychology is unknowable, politicians are skilled in hiding the true bases for their actions, and many actions taken for what seem to be idiosyncratic reasons are in fact rooted in deeper structural imperatives. In this chapter, the basis for exploration is quite different. If we take seriously the argument that states’ identities are found in the heads of their statesmen, then the next stage is to appreciate that knowledge of what is in leaders’ heads comes from careful study of what comes out of their mouths. The assumption on which this interpretation rests is that the verbal output of political leaders is related to underlying thoughts and beliefs, and that systematic analysis of this verbal output can give us information that helps explain and predict elite – and thereby state – actions. Simply put, what people say is related to what they think (Schafer 2000; Suedfeld et al. 2003). Far from being inscrutable, politicians in fact leave hundreds of thousands of data-points (words) which gives clues as to the way they view the world. Given the politician’s characteristic approach to the presence of a microphone, the challenge is closer to having too much rather than too little information. It is incumbent, then, upon the political scientist to find a way to make use of these data.

Two major research programs resting on these predicates have emerged and are combined in this study of Blair and Brown. The operational code framework (Schafer and Walker 2006a) analyses the power imagery manifest in a leader’s policy speeches, coding verbs referring to ‘self’ and ‘other’ for the causal linkages asserted and the intensity with which they are stated. The goal is to represent the ‘cognitive map’ the leader has of the political universe and their perception of the best strategy they can adopt in order to achieve their goals. This chapter utilizes the two key ‘questions’ of the operational code menu: the core ‘philosophical’ question of the individual’s view of the political world (is it benign or hostile in nature?) and the core ‘instrumental’ question of whether the individuals themselves perceive that their optimum strategic approach is one of conflict or of cooperation.
These variables are supplemented by two variables taken from a research program termed ‘leader trait analysis’ (Hermann 1999). First, ‘Conceptual complexity’ refers to the sophistication of a leader’s underlying cognitive architecture. Individuals higher in complexity have a differentiated view of the world, with multiple schemata at different levels of generality that are integrated into a complex information processing system. These individuals prefer inductive information processing, tend to require more information prior to making a decision, and often revisit previous decisions and the premises upon which they were made. Individuals who score lower on this measure, by contrast, tend toward more definitive, black-and-white cognitive styles. Lower scoring leaders rely heavily on a few core beliefs and principles at a high level of generality and process incoming information deductively, selectively perceiving or modifying new information so that it remains consistent with their existing cognitive predispositions. Lower complexity leaders have a tendency to divide the outside world into relatively straightforward categories such as ‘friend and enemy’, ‘good and evil’, and rarely revisit past decisions in making fresh ones. Second, ‘Belief in ability to control events’ represents the degree to which leaders understand themselves and the state they lead to be influential actors in world politics. Leaders who score higher on this measure have an internal locus of control, perceive the world as amenable to their influence and tend to discount barriers to the achievement of goals. Consequently, they have been found to prefer proactive, forward-leaning foreign policies in the service of ambitious goals. Leaders who score lower, by contrast, perceive broader forces – material, historical and social – as determinate, and so have an external locus of control. These individuals tend to be reactive to events and favour foreign policies that minimize risk.

Three issues of research design arise. First, the specific protocols for measuring each of the variables are based upon coding dictionaries of words and phrases tagged as indicative of positive or negative manifestations of each trait, with the overall score for a coded passage of text being the ratio of positive coding ‘hits’ to all coding decisions. The ‘philosophical’ question of the nature of the political world is a simple ratio of verbs in the individual’s speech describing others in the political universe. These verbs are coded as hostile or friendly attributions to others, and the ratio yields a score between –1 (most hostile view of world) to +1 (most friendly). The ‘instrumental’ counterpart to this belief – the leader’s view of their best strategic posture – repeats this process for verbs describing the leader’s self or nation state, with a ratio
score between –1 and +1 again the result. The ‘Belief in ability to control events’ category tags the proportion of verbs related to action taken by the leader or their state as a percentage of the total verbs (verbs related to action by self + verbs related to action by others) in a text sample. ‘Conceptual complexity’ tags words related to higher complexity (approximately, possibility, trend) and lower complexity (absolutely, certainly, definitely), and reports the balance. Scores on these latter two variables range from 0 (low belief in ability to control events/low complexity) to 1 (absolute belief in ability to control events/very high complexity).

Second, the dataset used in this chapter is drawn from responses to parliamentary questions on the topic of foreign policy collected from Hansard, the verbatim record of proceedings in the British House of Commons. This is a fertile source of material because it is only lightly filtered, reflects relatively spontaneous answers (thus reducing the potential problems of having speechwriters dictating the words a leader uses), and eliminates some of the audience effects that would be present in a design reliant on a heterogeneous collection of interviews and speeches. A dedicated software coding engine, Profiler Plus, has been developed and is in wide usage (see http://socialscience.net/tech/ProfilerPlus.aspx). Automation of the coding has the tremendous practical benefit of eliminating intercoder reliability concerns: the computer codes the same piece of text the same way on every single coding run. Automation is also a huge labour-saving advance, meaning that vastly greater amounts of text can be processed than was the case when hand-coding was necessary. While computer-coding makes more ‘errors’ on matters of nuance and interpretation than hand-coding, the errors will be evenly distributed, resulting in unbiased results, and overwhelmed by the sheer volume of coding decisions made possible by automation. Taking advantage of this, every answer Blair and Brown gave to a foreign policy question throughout their time in office was collected, and the results compared to an existing data set generated through analysis of every answer to a foreign policy question given by all British Prime Ministers from 1945 onwards.

The final key research design issue is that of the unit of analysis. Following past precedent (Mahdasian 2002), the text material has been divided into quarter-year segments. This allows us to check for changes in scores over time but also provides a sufficient volume of text so that each measure is based upon a substantial number of coding decisions.
Numerical entries in the above table represent the average scores across the total number of quarter-year units. Two t-tests for significance of the difference of means were performed. The first was a comparison between Blair/Brown and the post-1945 Prime Ministers, with stars in the Blair and Brown columns denoting significant differences between each New Labour Prime Minister and the 1945–1997 reference group of Prime Ministers. The second, reported in the final column, reports the difference in means on each variable between Blair and Brown themselves.

On the ‘philosophical’ question of the individual’s diagnosis of the nature of political life, we find that Blair’s low score (indicating a conflictual view of international life) and Brown’s high score (indicating a cooperative view of political life) is almost exactly bisected by the score of the average post-1945 Prime Minister. On the perception of the self’s strategic orientation, we find Blair perceived his approach...
as more conflictual than both the average Prime Minister and his successor, and these differences are again significant. Blair scored lower than the average British Prime Minister on conceptual complexity; Brown marginally higher. The comparison of Blair and Brown shows that the difference between the two is statistically significant. From this, we would expect Brown to show a more complex and contingent worldview than Blair. Finally, both New Labour Prime Ministers scored significantly higher than the average post-1945 Prime Minister on the question of perceived control over events, indicating a proactive orientation to international affairs. Blair’s score on this variable is markedly extreme and exceeds Brown’s to such an extent that the difference is statistically significant. In sum, these results show Blair and Brown differing in statistically significant ways on each key measure of international worldview, lending strong support to the judgement of Andrew Turnbull, the former Cabinet Secretary, that Blair and Brown ‘were almost the exact opposite of each other in terms of personality types’ (quoted in Rawnsley 2010: 57). The next part will explore how these belief systems translated into the foreign policies of the New Labour Prime Ministers.

The Blair years

To summarize the data above: Blair saw the world as a dangerous and threatening place; he cleaved to a simple worldview in which good battled evil; and he believed strongly in his capacity to shape global events, often feeling it appropriate to respond to the threats he perceived with strategies of conflict.

Blair’s score on the nature of the political universe variable indicates a view of the world as a dangerous and threatening place. Blair was in many ways an idealist but underpinned this with steel and was quick to perceive threats. All of Blair’s wars had a strong security rationale – at least as he explained them. Kosovo, while remembered as being predominantly a humanitarian intervention in service of preventing ethnic cleansing, was for Blair also about the dangers of instability in the Balkans. Moreover, Blair was convinced that if NATO was shown to be unable to police even its own backyard, it would have no credibility as an alliance into the future. Finally, Blair’s acceptance of power politics was apparent in his understanding that any successful policy against Serbia required the full engagement of US military might.
After 9/11 and into Afghanistan, Blair again cast his policies in security terms. As he put it regarding the new mass terrorism: ‘September 11th was for me a revelation. They killed 3,000, which was a lot. But if they could have killed 30,000, they would have’ (quoted in Rawnsley 2010: 24). He had wanted to do something about the Taliban in Afghanistan even prior to 9/11, and his perception of the security threat after 9/11 was central to his policies: ‘If terrorism is the threat of the twenty-first century, Britain should be in there helping to confront it, not because we are America’s poodle, but because dealing with it will make Britain safer’ (cited in Dyson 2009: 76). Blair’s policies became themed around the perception of an apocalyptic security threat, namely the potential axis of rogue states with terrorist groups: ‘The two coming together is the security threat of the twenty-first century. We’ve got to root them out because they are incredibly dangerous, because they know no limits to the destruction they will cause’ (quoted in Rawnsley 2010: 89).

This perception of threat, and of the perceived need to act to eliminate threats, became a core pillar of Blair’s Iraq policies. As early as 1998, Blair expressed his fears on Iraq to Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown: ‘I have now seen some of the stuff [intelligence] on this. It really is pretty scary. He [Saddam] is very close to some appalling weapons of mass destruction. I don’t understand why the French and others don’t understand this’ (cited in Ashdown 2001: 127). He never wavered from this core analysis of Saddam. Seeking to cut through the debate about why Blair joined the Americans in Iraq, Blair’s foreign affairs advisor David Manning explained: ‘Tony Blair took Britain to war because he was convinced that the multilateral option was finally exhausted after twelve years, and he believed Iraq under Saddam posed a serious threat that now had to be confronted. It was as simple as that’ (quoted in Seldon 2007: 168).

Blair’s low score on conceptual complexity produced a worldview of stark divisions: good and evil, right and wrong. Strong moralism, and intolerance of ambiguity, was a recurrent theme in Blair’s wars. During Kosovo, Blair framed the issue in terms of moral right and wrong (Daddow 2009: 551). Blair saw Milosevic as simply a ‘bully and a deeply evil man’ (Seldon 2004: 392), and suggested that once refugees started pouring out of Kosovo, it was ‘no longer just a military conflict. It is a battle between good and evil, between civilization and barbarity’, a framing of the situation that was almost ‘biblical’ in its dichotomous construction (Kampfner 2003: 57). Visiting Kosovar refugees, Blair raised the stakes further: ‘This is not a battle for NATO, this is not a battle for
territory, this is a battle for humanity’ (Kampfner 2003: 54). He drew comparisons between Serbian ethnic cleansing and that of Nazi Germany. Where others saw ambiguity in NATO’s somewhat confused stance and aims early in the conflict, Blair argued they were ‘crystal clear’. The action was ‘simply the right thing to do, to defend our fellow human beings’ (cited in Rawnsley 2001: 261).

This black and white view of the moral stakes involved led Blair to a further behaviour characteristic of lower complexity leaders: an unwillingness to consider any compromise or partial settlement. ‘There are no half-measures about Milosevic’s brutality’, he reasoned. ‘There can be no half-measures about how we deal with it. No compromise, no fudge, no half-baked deals’ (quoted in Rawnsley 2001: 283). Many of the NATO allies would have found a deal, along the lines of previous negotiated settlements of post-Yugoslavia conflicts, to be the most sensible course of action, and indeed a close advisor counselled him to consider a negotiated solution. ‘If there is going to be a fudge, I’m not going to be part of it’, he responded (cited in Coughlin 2006: 83). As part of his advice about Blair’s over-exposed position, and given US President Bill Clinton’s reluctance to commit ground forces, Cabinet Secretary Richard Wilson urged him to consider the diplomatic options: ‘I will not do it’, he stated flatly (Riddell 2004: 109).

After the 9/11 attacks Blair’s lower conceptual complexity again led him to frame the situation as one of a confrontation with evil, necessitating war. Blair’s immediate response on the day of 9/11 was couched in heavily moralistic terms: ‘This mass terrorism is the new evil in our world today’ (quoted in Seldon 2004: 484). Consistent with the tendency of lower complexity individuals to view the world in absolutist categories, Blair stated that the conflict was ‘not a battle between the United States of America and terrorism, but between the free and democratic world and terrorism … we, like them, will not rest until this evil is driven from the world’ (quoted in Seldon 2004: 488). Further, Blair was quick to describe the situation as one of war, suggesting on 16 September 2001 that ‘Whatever the technical or legal issues about a declaration of war, the fact of the matter is that we are at war with terrorism’, a war which would be not limited but ‘systematic’ and aimed at ‘the whole machinery of terrorism’ (Wintour 2001). There could be ‘no diplomacy with bin Laden or the Taliban regime’.

A related way in which Blair’s lower complexity score seems to have shaped his policy response to 9/11 relates to the certainty with which he viewed events. The Prime Minister suggested that: ‘Sometimes things happen in politics, an event that is so cataclysmic that, in a curious
way, all the doubt is removed. You are very certain as to what has to be said and done. From the outset, I really felt a great sense of that certainty’ (PBS 2002). An aide noted that ‘he gave out a sense of having truly found himself’ (cited in Seldon 2004: 498). For Blair, the issues engaged by terrorism were quite straightforward: ‘There is no compromise possible with such people, no meeting of minds … just a choice: defeat it or be defeated by it. And defeat it we must’ (quoted in Williams 2005: 45).

In Iraq, Blair again evidenced a strong streak of black-and-white moralism. His close aide Sally Morgan recalls that ‘Tony thought Saddam was an atrocious dictator, the Pol Pot of the Middle East. He could never fathom why so many on the left could not see a moral imperative to act against such a tyrant when opportunity presented itself’ (cited in Rawnsley 2010: 91). Dictators like Saddam, Blair reasoned, were ‘not people like us … They are not people who obey the normal norms of human behaviour’ (quoted in Parker 2002). His close alliance with President George Bush was also facilitated by Blair’s moral clarity. The Prime Minister recognized that this was a key feature of the President’s worldview: ‘You’re either with him or against him. That’s how he divides people. It’s very black-and-white with Bush’ (quoted in Rawnsley 2010: 95). Blair’s framing of the alliance was without nuance: commitments, once made, were unequivocal and irrevocable. A more differentiated policy of political support without commitment of troops, suggested to Blair by Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and offered to him by President Bush, was rejected: ‘I’m with you, I mean it … I absolutely believe in this too … I’m there to the very end’ (cited in Dyson 2009: 104–5).

The third feature of the Blair identity was his high score for belief in his ability to control events, bespeaking a strong perception of himself and the UK as a shaper of events and portending an activist foreign policy posture. These were key features of all Blair’s wars. In Kosovo, Blair was the most aggressive of the NATO leaders which, as Oliver Daddow points out, was quite a shock given that his domestic career to that point had involved a great deal of caution and the hoarding of political capital (Daddow 2009). Blair became convinced not only that action was necessary, but that ‘his own leadership was vital’ (Seldon 2004: 394). He was most aggressive on the issue of ground troops. He faced stern resistance from other NATO governments, in particular from US President Clinton, who saw insufficient gravity in the conflict to justify risking many casualties. When doubts surfaced about the course of the campaign, Blair remained convinced that the intervention would
be a success. The key, he said, was to stay ‘rock solid’ and ‘hold our nerve’, while he bolstered President Clinton’s resolve with the reminder that ‘we had started it, and we had to see it through and finish it’ (Riddell 2004: 107).

After 9/11, Blair’s proactive stance was stunningly apparent. Speaking to the Labour Party conference three weeks after the attacks on the US, Blair talked in terms of the opportunities presented for fundamental change in international affairs: ‘This is a moment to seize. The kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again, before they do, let us re-order this world around us.’ He proposed to root out the causes of terrorism in ‘the starving, the wretched, the dispossessed, the ignorant, those living in want and squalor from the desserts of Northern Africa to the slums of Gaza, to the mountain ranges of Afghanistan’. These problems could be solved so that ‘people everywhere can see the chance of a better future through hard work and the creative power of the free citizen, not the violence and savagery of the fanatic’ (Blair 2001a). To those who saw this as an overly ambitious agenda, Blair responded that ‘some say it’s utopian; others that it’s dangerous to think that we can resolve all these problems by ourselves ... (but) ... the fact that we can’t solve everything doesn’t mean that we try to solve nothing. What is clear is that 11 September has not just given impetus and urgency to such solutions, it has opened the world up’ (quoted in Riddell 2004: 166).

Above all, Blair was in tune with the desire of George Bush to get onto the front foot as quickly as possible: ‘If you’re the American President, and you lost 3,000 people in the attack on the World Trade Center, what are you expected to do? Sit there and just wait for the next one?’ (quoted in Rawnsley 2010: 90). Iraq, perhaps above all, displayed Blair’s self-perception as a history-shaping leader able to bend the environment to his will. His policy was based around a belief that he could play a role in convincing the Americans to seek UN-backing, convincing the UN to give that backing, and convincing the British people to support going to war. Some of Blair’s colleagues reported later that they were bemused by his faith in his ability to shape events. As the prospects for diplomacy began to look grim in January 2003, Blair told a colleague: ‘We’ll get UN cover under all conceivable circumstances. Trust me; I know my way through this’. Ministers later recalled being ‘united in their slightly nervous wonderment at his certainty’. While Blair was successful in getting the US to attempt to secure a second UN resolution, the former Foreign Secretary
Robin Cook felt he over-estimated his ability to shape US actions in all other respects. The second resolution attempt was, he wrote at the time in his diary, ‘the only point in the whole saga where it is possible to pinpoint a clear instance where British influence made any difference to US policy on Iraq’ (quotations in Dyson 2009: 113–14).

The Brown years

The contrast between Brown and Blair on the core beliefs – is the world cooperative or conflictual? Should I behave in a cooperative or conflictual manner? – was stark. Brown saw the world as a less hostile place than did Blair, and saw his own best strategy as behaving in essentially cooperative ways in response.

First, on the signature issues of Blair’s foreign policy – his wars – Brown is best characterized as a very reluctant warrior. He was hesitant about Kosovo, eventually supporting the war but only with ‘grave reservations’ (Seldon 2004: 676). After 9/11, Brown took no interest whatsoever in Blair’s international efforts at coalition building nor the subsequent war in Afghanistan (Seldon 2004: 680). In the run-up to Iraq, Brown withheld comment until the last possible moment, although in private he apparently did enjoy one or two happy moments at the sight of Blair’s travails. According to Anthony Seldon, Brown had ‘serious misgivings about the war. He thought Blair had signed up too early for the Bush agenda, and was critical of Blair for not consulting him or his colleagues properly’ (Seldon 2004: 682). Later, Brown pursued the two wars he inherited from Blair with less than absolute vigour. On Iraq, Blair had already announced British withdrawal and so all that was left for Brown was to oversee it. On Afghanistan, Brown harboured significant doubts about sending additional British troops. He made manoeuvres, even during the period of his courtship of the new Barack Obama administration, to signal to the Americans that he would prefer not to be asked for more forces (Coates and Evans 2008). In the end, Brown, under heavy US pressure for additional contributions from NATO member countries, sent 300 additional UK troops – far below the 1,500–2,000 the Americans preferred (Coates 2009).

Brown’s beliefs indicate a greater interest in cooperation than the conflict at the core of the Blair identity. It is in this context that his focus on the related issues of multilateralism, international institutions, and the interconnectedness of the economy – particularly world
finance – is best understood (Penketh 2007). Brown saw four key issues as requiring cooperation in a context of connectedness:

We have global financial flows, but we do not have any form of early-warning system for the world economy. We have environmental catastrophe, but we have no capacity to plan, finance and act globally. We have failed states and terrorism but we’ve got no organizational ability to deal with reconstruction, stability, peacekeeping and humanitarian work. And we’ve got a growing popular participation in the big issues of the day, but we don’t have any forum for dialogue that even brings the different faiths of the world together (quoted in Mayer 2008).

On conceptual complexity Gordon Brown scored dramatically higher than Blair, indicating a more nuanced and contingent view of the world. Indeed, comparisons of the two made by associates indicate that from an early stage Brown was regarded as the more substantial figure in terms of interest in the ‘ballast’ behind policy ideas. Sir Christopher Meyer, the former UK Ambassador to the US, states that ‘on attention to detail, he [Brown] was the polar opposite to Blair. I have never encountered two politicians who are more different’ (quoted in Glover and MacAskill 2005). The former Cabinet Secretary Sir Richard Wilson said that ‘Brown was the exact opposite of Blair. He had a capacious brain and an impressive intellect. He did do detail. He really does read Annex E’ (cited in Rawnsley 2001: 58). Commentators agree that whereas Blair was effective at finding fundamental themes and big pictures, Brown was more comfortable with the detail and nuance of a situation (White 2007: 7). As the Independent put it, comparing the two men:

Tony Blair never passed up an opportunity to offer a grand moral justification for his foreign policy. But the style of his successor, Gordon Brown, has so far been quite different ... Mr. Brown has resisted the urge to articulate an overarching rationale for his decision-making on international affairs’ (Independent 2007).

Hence, Brown disavowed the framing – embraced by Blair – of the current era as a ‘war on terror’. During his first meeting with President Bush, Brown signalled that this frame was, for the UK, no longer operative. The Manichean rhetoric of Blair – who had spoken readily of a battle of good and evil – was gone. Terrorism, for Brown, was ‘not
a cause, it is a crime’. The target of anti-terrorism operations was no longer ‘evil’ or ‘terror’, but was the much more specific ‘al Qaeda-inspired terrorism’. The British presence in Iraq and Afghanistan was a matter not of the crusade which Blair had described, but of prosaic ‘duties to discharge and responsibilities to keep’. Blair and Bush had become focussed somewhat monochromatically on the coming together of rogue regimes with terrorist groups. For Brown, by contrast, the battle was more cultural than military, for the ‘hearts and minds’ of the Muslim world (Freedland 2007).

As Matthew D’Ancona noted, Brown wanted to move counter-terrorism ‘away from invasions, crusades, and “shock and awe”, and towards something that owes much more to a Cold War theorist such as George Kennan than it does to Donald Rumsfeld or, indeed, to Tony Blair’ (D’Ancona 2007: 30). Brown replaced the notion of a war on terror with that of a cultural Cold War. He did not draw the link, criticized by some as facile, between the war on terror and the war against fascism, which always carries the Munich baggage and implies a ‘no retreat’ policy. Brown instead focussed upon the long-term, counter-ideological aspect of the Cold War, sticking to the line that that economic development was at the core of reducing international terrorism (Leonard 2006).

This re-framing did not go unnoticed in the dog-day Bush administration. The first meeting between Brown and Bush was profoundly awkward, and a far cry from the chummy Bush-Blair summits. At this meeting Brown, conscious of the damage done to his predecessor by the appearance of servility to the American President, was pointedly stingy with praise for his host, and instead spoke of having ‘full and frank discussions’, a Britishism for ‘having a huge row’. As commentator Jonathon Freedland observed: ‘It’s not quite Hugh Grant sticking it to Billy Bob Thornton in Love, Actually, but this is about as far as a British Prime Minister could reasonably be expected to go in putting an American President at arm’s length’ (Freedland 2007). Was this Brown’s intention? Was his view of the US-UK alliance similar to Blair’s – that it must be protected at all costs? Brown was at least as great an Americophile as Blair, although, like Blair, the America he knows and understands is that of the East Coast, Kennedy-wing of the Democratic establishment. ‘Gordon is an Atlanticist too’, comments Clare Short, ‘he is very sort of pro – the special relationship and all that’ (interview with Short). David Blunkett agrees that ‘Gordon’s instincts have always been Atlantic and I think will remain so’ (interview with Blunkett).
However, Brown was slightly less absolutist about the alliance than Blair, and this was consistent with his overall more nuanced cognitive architecture (see also Phythian’s chapter in this collection). While Brown and his Foreign Secretary David Miliband were careful to repeat the mantra that the alliance with the US is the ‘single most important bilateral relationship’ the UK has, and that the alliance is strong as it is not based on realpolitik but on ‘values’ (Wintour 2007a), his more junior appointments were not prevented from putting some distance between the UK and the US. In particular, the former UN Deputy Secretary General Mark Malloch-Brown, appointed as a Foreign Office Minister, was a long-standing and vocal critic of the Iraq war. His 2006 speech accusing the US of using the UN ‘by stealth’ while engaging in public ‘UN bashing’ was identified by the US Ambassador to the UN John Bolton as the ‘worst mistake by a UN official in two decades’ (Addley et al. 2007). Malloch-Brown stated after his appointment that his view was that UK foreign policy should not in the future be so ‘dependent’ on the US (Lee 2007: 231), and that Brown should not be ‘joined at the hip’ with the American President (Hencke and MacAskill 2007). In a similar view, Douglas Alexander, Brown’s new Secretary of State for International Development, made much in his early speeches of multilateralism, the need to rebuild credibility and alliances damaged over Iraq, and the importance of soft power. The alliance with the US thus remained close due to the inescapable power realities as well as the pro-Atlantic instincts of Brown. However, some of the absolutism of the alliance, and in particular the willingness to accept the stark ‘war on terror’ script which Blair had bought into, was less congruent with the cognitive style of Brown.

The final component of the Brown identity is his score for belief in his ability to control events. Like Blair, Brown scores higher than the average British Prime Minister on this core component of identity, indicating the degree of perceived control the individual feels in relation to his or her environment. Brown was proactive in international affairs, but was interested in a different set of issues from Blair. In particular, Brown has a personal and long-standing interest in issues of international development (Lee 2007: 181). During the Blair administration, Brown forged a close alliance with the international development secretary Clare Short, to whom he was not obviously similar in terms of temperament, protecting her budget and championing her issues in cabinet. Chris Smith confirms that, in his judgement, the key plank of a Brown foreign policy was that ‘he’s passionate about
overseas aid, and he’s genuinely interested in Africa’ (interview with Smith). As James Naughtie also noted, Brown’s long-standing espousal of international development issues was hard to explain as a vote-grabbing exercise: ‘It is a part of his job that confers no political benefits directly, either to Brown or to Labour. Elections are not won and lost over arguments about Third World debt’ (Naughtie 2001: 270).

Simon Lee suggests that Brown’s ambitions in this area were vast: ‘He wants to make globalization work for all, to assist the developing world through a global new deal that will tackle poverty in a modern Marshall Plan of multilateral cooperation’ (Lee 2007: 160). A friend of Brown commented that ‘Gordon, more than anyone else, recognizes the extraordinary impact that trade can have in places like Africa. That comes both from his experience as a finance Minister but also from the impact of trade on the poor in [his home town of] Kirkcaldy’ (Leonard 2006). Reviewing Brown’s early foreign policy, the Guardian newspaper agreed that ‘[t]he real core of Brown’s foreign policy lies in Britain’s relationship with the developing world. The commitment to social justice, which many claim has waned at home, remains a unifying theme for the Prime Minister on the world stage’ (quoted in Borger 2008).

Coupled with this desire to play a role in international development was his recognition of the importance of international engagement through multilateral institutions. Brown’s stated goal, an ambitious one that reflects his internal locus of control, was to bring the international community together to ‘reshape the international institutions, to make them fit-for-purpose for the decade that we are in, rather than the 1940s’ (Wintour 2007b). This was the opposite of the later Blair’s moral fervour and simplicity, as Time Magazine noted:

... the medicine he’s proposing for the international community – a reinvigorated multilateralism in which nations work together through institutions like the United Nations, NATO, the IMF and the World Bank coupled with radical reform of those bodies to make them fit for 21st century purposes – isn’t simple to explain. Or sexy’ (Mayer 2008).

Blair’s interventionism was the result of a combination of factors, but one of the key drivers was the internal locus of control that Brown shared. Brown’s higher conceptual complexity, however, determined that he was not well-disposed to the moral crusading that so captured Blair, both for good and ill. Indeed, Brown’s foreign policy doctrine, by his own description, shared something in common with Blair’s, but
with greater attention to the detail of what happens once the moral battle has been joined:

We now rightly recognize our responsibility to protect behind borders when there are crimes against humanity. But if we are to honour that responsibility to protect we urgently need a new framework to assist reconstruction ... In future [UN] Security Council peacekeeping resolutions the UN envoys should make stabilization, reconstruction and development an equal priority’ (Mayer 2008).

Brown tied this to the view that interconnectedness was the defining feature of modern international politics and had rendered some of the traditional features of the state system – like the doctrine of non-interference in the internal problems of other states – obsolete: ‘the old distinction between ‘over there’ and ‘over here’ no longer applies ... We must contemplate ourselves within a global society’ (Mayer 2008).

Brown’s identity, in particular his high belief in the ability to control events and his perception of the world as based on cooperation and interconnectedness, was most to the fore in his handling of the 2008 global financial crisis. This was an episode that engaged Brown’s skills, fitted into his worldview, and saw him acting in a bold and confident fashion. In many ways, the financial crisis was to Brown what 9/11 was to Blair. As he later described the period in language eerily echoing Blair’s ‘kaleidoscope has been shaken’ speech after 9/11 (see p. 75 above), Brown said this was ‘the week the world was spun on its axis, the old certainties turned on their heads’ (quoted in Rawnsley 2010: 571). As the economic crisis spread to UK banks like Northern Rock and later the Royal Bank of Scotland, Brown’s distinctive contribution was to recognize that in an environment of tight interconnectedness big financial institutions could not fail without creating a domino effect that would spread system-wide. Moreover, national governments were the only actors with the wherewithal to recapitalize the banks in order to prevent this. This involved plunging huge sums of public money into unpopular financial institutions with no guarantee of success.

Brown was the first world leader to take this action, effectively pioneering a program that was then widely emulated. As James Purnell, a Cabinet Minister and no great ally of the Prime Minister put it, Brown was ‘acting faster, more comprehensively, more boldly than anybody else. The financial world was caught in the headlights and Gordon came forward with the right plan which was then broadly followed around the world’. Business Secretary Peter Mandelson saw that Brown
‘did immediately what others couldn’t, wouldn’t, or didn’t have the nerve to do so. He was the market leader in taking action which others have followed. Nothing will detract from his place in history in taking that action’ (quoted in Rawnsley 2010: 622). Brown knew that for the approach to work it had to be replicated internationally. His worldview heightened his awareness of the fact that a single government bailing out only its native banks would do little to stem a global financial crisis. His big fear was that ‘w[e] hadn’t yet persuaded other countries that it was a necessary thing to do. No one had talked in these sorts of figures before. It could have been an initiative that went entirely wrong because no other country was prepared to support us’ (Rawnsley 2010: 588). In late September Brown undertook a frenzy of diplomacy, travelling to the US for an ‘emergency summit’ with Bush and meeting with ‘dozens of world leaders, businessmen, and regulators’. Brown was pushing not just for ad hoc bail-out but a reformulation of the global financial system with greater regulation and transparency, and a large increase in funding of the IMF so that that organization could intervene on the side of stability in future crises (Coates 2008).

Many of these achievements were codified within six months at a summit of the G-20 largest world economies, hosted by Brown in London (Elliott et al. 2009: 6–7). For this he received high praise, including that Holy Grail for British politicians – a write-up in the US press. Paul Krugman, economics columnist of the New York Times, wrote that ‘Brown and Darling have defined the character of the worldwide rescue effort, with other wealthy nations playing catch-up. The Brown government has shown itself willing to think clearly about the financial crisis, and act quickly on its conclusions’ (cited in Rawnsley 2010: 593). Brown, Andrew Rawnsley concluded, ‘palpably enjoyed being Chancellor of the World. He looked much more comfortable in that role than he ever did when he was Prime Minister of Britain’ (Rawnsley 2010: 634).

Conclusion

British foreign policy during the New Labour years was decisively shaped by the beliefs, personalities, and predispositions of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Blair, with a diagnosis of international life as riven by conflict, a stark black-and-white worldview, and a high belief in his ability to shape events, followed a steely, moralistic and interventionist course in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. In terms of the IEP framework
at the centre of this volume, Blair defined Britain’s identity as that of a liberal interventionist state, his ethics were of the messianic, almost Biblical variety, and his view on power was that his goals required the force of US backing. Brown brought to the position a quite different view of the international environment: that it was characterized by complexity, inter-connectedness, and cooperation, and fashioned a foreign policy focussed on globalization, international development, and sound international finance. He identified Britain as a core state in the global economy and part of a transnational web of institutions, his ethics were focussed upon making that system work for under-developed regions of the world, and he appreciated more than did Blair the power of financial flows as much as the military side of things.

An obvious concern of this volume is to consider the extent to which the New Labour era marked a distinctive change in UK foreign policy. The analysis in this chapter suggests that the two New Labour Prime Ministers pursued foreign policies that saw Britain as a proactive, central part of the international system, with a big role to play. This is reflected in the high score on belief in ability to control events of both Blair and Brown in comparison to other post-1945 Prime Ministers. Beyond that, Blair and Brown were so different in their approach to international affairs that I am hesitant to endorse a ‘New Labour effect’. Instead, the Blair and Brown cases seem to indicate the paramount importance of ‘bringing the statesman back in’, and keeping him at the centre of our inquiries. That two Prime Ministers of the same state from a shared ideological construct – New Labour – at a shared moment in its history would construct very different identities indicates the vital importance of studying the statesman as the locus of definition, integration, and articulation of a state’s approach to international life. The subjective representation of the world in the head of the Prime Minister was a key influence on the course of British foreign policy during the New Labour years.
Identity and New Labour’s Strategic Foreign Policy Thinking

Jamie Gaskarth

Introduction

One of the major innovations of New Labour’s foreign policy-making was its attempt to strategize policy in public documents. Whilst the previous administration did produce Annual Departmental Reports for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and make references to foreign policy strategies in speeches, it did not reflect on the purpose and goals of this activity in a self-conscious fashion. Indeed, one prominent pair of commentators suggests that: ‘In the preceding fifty years, there had been no public articulation of a conceptual framework for understanding the means and ends of foreign policy’ (Wheeler and Dunne 1998: 847). Within two weeks of taking office, New Labour had produced a mission statement for the FCO that set out Britain’s main policy priorities and linked these with the values of the UK at the end of the twentieth century (Cook 1997a). In 1998, there followed the Strategic Defence Review, a consultative exercise designed to restructure Britain’s armed forces for the challenges it would face in the next century (MoD 1998). Importantly, this would be ‘foreign-policy led’ and so also entailed a substantial degree of discussion around Britain’s foreign policy aims. Subsequently, a series of documents were produced on defence, international development, and foreign policy that sought to strategize the UK’s external relations (e.g. FCO 2006; MoD 2001a; DfID 2006).

Intuitively, one would expect such foreign policy strategies to consider what kind of community British foreign policy is seeking to represent (its identity and ethics), what goals follow from this (its interests), and how they are best achieved (its policies). However, despite the plethora of strategy documents since 1997, none sought to consider the first of these – British identity – in any depth. This was despite the
truisms expressed by Keith Robbins that: ‘few would contest that the foreign policy of any country must necessarily, in some sense, be a reflection of its own sense of its identity. Foreign Secretaries and their advisors must have some notion of ‘Britain’ and ‘Britishness’ even if they are not very explicit about it’ (Robbins 1997). As Robert Cooper notes, strategic questions are fundamentally about: ‘the kind of world you want to live in and the kind of country you want to be’ (Cooper 2004: 131). In this sense, strategies need to follow from an understanding of the community in question – and how it relates to its wider context.

The nature of British identity may seem self-evident. Yet, the domestic debate over Britishness – to which Prime Minister Gordon Brown was himself a key contributor – suggests that it is a site of contest (see Schnapper in this volume). For example, there is a notable lack of agreement over Britain’s role and identity in relation to Europe (Daddow 2011). In addition, Britain’s identity as part of a ‘special relationship’ and an ‘Atlantic power’ have also been criticized over their implications for the UK’s moral authority (Cooper 2004; Gamble and Kearns 2007; Wallace and Philips 2009). What this latter point highlights is that consideration of identity is paramount in any formulation of an ethical position in foreign policy. Ethics only make sense in relation to a definite political community in which identities and values are constructed and then operationalized through political institutions.

However, this chapter argues that New Labour did not pay sufficient attention to the conflicts and tensions within British identity, nor did it engage with the problem of the range of communities – and so differing ethical frames – in which Britain operates. As a result, it failed to provide a unified foreign policy strategy. To analyse the self-understanding of British foreign policy-makers, this chapter looks at the Annual Departmental Reports of the FCO, and DfID, the range of strategy documents issued by the FCO, MoD and DfID along with thirty seven key foreign policy speeches by FCO Ministers and senior officials purporting to outline the strategic framework of British foreign policy. It does so in relation to the most prominent frames of identity – domestic, European, transatlantic and finally international – in this sphere in order to tease out the inconsistencies and tensions in New Labour’s strategic thinking.

The ‘British’ in British foreign policy

It is notable how rarely New Labour invoked British identity in its various documents and speeches on foreign policy between 1997 and
2010. Where such an identity was called upon, it was generally in the form of a brief aside designed to justify a particular policy stance. The most common practice was to represent Britain as a trading nation. Thus, Foreign Secretary Robin Cook (Foreign Secretary 1997–2001) asserted in 2000 that: ‘Britain has more to gain than any other single state from an orderly international framework for the global economy. We are dependent for our living on trade’ (Cook 2000a). A year later, Jack Straw (Foreign Secretary 2001–2006) emphasized that ‘We are the world’s fourth largest trading nation’ (Straw 2001a); Gordon Brown consistently defined Britain as ‘shapers of an open, free trade, flexible globalization’ (Brown 2008a) through his periods as Chancellor and Prime Minister. It was axiomatic for New Labour politicians that Britain’s reliance on global patterns of trade necessitated substantial engagement with international affairs and they made frequent reference to Britain’s outward facing foreign policy, coupled with a resistance to protectionism (Straw 2001b; Blair 1999a). This free market orientation was, naturally, likely to move the UK closer to the Anglo-Saxon economic model of the US and so implied a material justification for US-UK cooperation.

In addition to global free trade, New Labour advanced a conception of Britain as defined by its values, as in the National Security Strategy (NSS)’s declaration that: ‘human rights, the rule of law, legitimate and accountable government, justice, freedom, tolerance and opportunity for all. Those define who we are and what we do’ (Cabinet Office 2008a. For more on the NSS see MacCormack’s chapter in this collection). Yet, these concepts were so broad as to tell us little about the distinctive identity of Britain and how this shapes its foreign policy. After all, which government would not choose to identify itself with these values?

Crucially, references were also made to Britain being an ‘open’ society (Blair 2006b) and one that has a reputation for being ‘ethnically diverse’ (Amos 2002). Indeed, Brown dubbed Britain the ‘first multinational state’ (Brown 2007c). However, it was apparent that identities which may reflect such ethnic diversity – especially those relating to Britain’s imperial past such as the Commonwealth – were either marginalized or for the most part ignored. It is surprising that more effort was not made to think through the implications of foreign policy with regard to domestic national, ethnic and religious groups, not least since controversial foreign policy decisions, such as on Iraq, clearly had a negative effect on social cohesion within Britain. Reading leaked documents on the impact of UK foreign policy on the Muslim community, the overriding impression is of a need for this group to understand and
accept the rationale for UK foreign policy. New Labour did not seem to consider that dissatisfaction over foreign policy was not confined to this religious group and that – extremists aside – underlying their arguments may actually be a valid alternative view of how Britain should behave in the world and so a different identity for Britain as a global actor (Morris 2005; Home Office 2006).

Engaging with such communities would, if genuinely intentioned, perhaps have offered the possibility of change in UK foreign policy. Yet, New Labour’s attempts to incorporate minority communities into policy-making appeared to be a monologue rather than a dialogue. Extensive efforts were made to reach out to the Muslim community in the UK, with the FCO Website noting that it staged twenty-five events in 2008 designed to promote dialogue between ministers and the Muslim community. However, the site offered no substantial evidence of this having any effect on strategic policy thinking or decision-making. The ‘Bringing foreign policy back home’ initiative of 2009 highlighted links between domestic communities and foreign policy issues but did not lead to any substantial rethink about the strategies and policies adopted towards countries – such as China – that were a focus of these efforts.

The key point here is that there was little indication in official foreign policy literature and ministerial speeches during the New Labour years of any sustained endeavour to consider what ‘Britain’ is and who the ‘British’ were at the turn of the twenty-first century. As a result of this lack of reflection on the British community’s attitudes, it is not clear whether foreign policy was representative of the desires of the population. The recognition in the SDR that: ‘We could of course as a country, choose to take a narrow view of our role and responsibilities which did not require a significant military capability. This is indeed a real choice, but not one the Government could recommend for Britain’ (MoD 1998: 23) was a rare acknowledgement that an alternative identity for Britain as an international actor may have existed. That said, even as widely consultative document as the SDR made no systematic or sustained consideration of the attitudes of the wider British populace. Later reviews were criticized for failing to take into account defence issues on the mainland – some of which would flow from dissatisfaction with British foreign policy abroad (DSC 2004: 19–20; Manningham-Buller 2010: 19–21).

In short, a specifically British identity that accounted for the demographics and social attitudes of the citizens of Britain was never delineated by any of the strategy documents put out by the primary organs of foreign policy-making – namely, FCO, MoD and DfID. This
is important as refusing to acknowledge and address the differing British identities that might inform policy-making leaves a potential legitimacy gap. Important aspects of foreign policy, from Britain’s military involvement in Afghanistan to its international aid commitments, rely on the implicit support of the public and are underpinned by popular willingness to identify with their goals and the image of Britain that these project abroad.

**The European character of British foreign policy**

Rather than isolating a specifically British conception of foreign policy, many of the official texts constructed a sense of UK identity via its relations with other states and multilateral organizations. A prominent expression of identity in this way came in the form of allusions to Britain’s status as a ‘European nation’. Policy-makers advanced the historical foundation to this identity by citing the European roots of the royal family. As Jack Straw argued: ‘We are a European nation, and always have been. Our monarchy was Danish, then Norman, then Dutch, then German’ (Straw 2001a); Peter Hain echoed this sentiment by suggesting that: ‘We always were Europeans. Our monarchs interbred. Our people mixed and traded and travelled and lived across Europe’ (Hain 2001a). The conflation of British and European identities popularized during the Blair years was promoted under Brown by Foreign Secretary David Miliband, who in a range of speeches decried an ‘ambivalent relationship with Europe, suggesting Europe was a bilateral relationship rather than an institution of which we are a party’ (Miliband 2008b). Closer cooperation with the institutions and countries of the EU was justified as the continuation of an historical identity and in keeping with a tradition of UK engagement with the continent.

However, inspection of the FCO’s publications highlights ambiguity over the extent to which policy-makers were truly committed to this European identity. On the one hand, there were clear and repeated assertions of the EU as a major conduit for attempts by the UK to further its ethical goals. Thus, the Human Rights Report of 2007 stated that: ‘the UK, through the EU, has taken a lead in promoting an inclusive globalisation’ (FCO 2008a: 21). It went on: ‘Of equal importance to the UK’s efforts to improve human rights globally is the work we do within the EU’ (FCO 2008a: 45) and this organization is described as a ‘driving force on human rights’ (FCO 2008a: 62). Repeated references were also made to combined EU efforts on human rights issues, such as the death penalty, human rights defenders, a prospective arms treaty and in voting on reso-
olutions in the UN Human Rights Council (FCO 2009b: 58–9, 90; FCO 2008a: 117). The strategy document ‘Active Diplomacy for a Changing World’ described the EU as ‘the UK’s single most important multilateral commitment’ and stated: ‘only through a strong EU...can we meet many of our international and domestic objectives’ (FCO 2006: 23). Such support for, and identification with, a European character to British identity seemed unequivocal.

However, the extent to which a European identity was truly embedded within UK foreign policy thinking is questionable. In the ‘priority themes’ outlined in the FCO’s public diplomacy strategy for the period 2003–2006, EU membership was not conveyed as an attribute (Carter 2005: 64–5). Indeed, in the strategy as a whole it was referred to only fleetingly as evidence of Britain’s ‘global engagement’ or in terms of the EU accession states and the need to convey to them that the UK should be their ‘business, political and governance partner of choice’ (Carter 2005: 64–5). Despite 21 per cent of DfID’s overall budget going to the EU, via the EU Commission and the EU Development fund for African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP), DfID’s Annual Development Reports described this in a manner indistinguishable from support for UN bodies: as a matter of policy, with identity in the background. With regard to defence, the EU was acknowledged as ‘a significant actor on the world stage’ (MoD 2001b: 12) but references to Europe most frequently emphasized the lack of capabilities, something that created a sense of distance between the UK and its lower spending and less bellicose continental neighbours (MoD 2001b: 3).

Most surprisingly, especially for a document produced by a diplomatic service, the FCO’s departmental report for 2007–2008 quoted a BBC journalist’s assertion that Britain had managed to limit the terms of a French-sponsored attempt to consider challenges to the European Union in 2030: ‘I know “Britain wins battle in Europe” is not exactly a brilliant headline but this does look like a Foreign Office victory to me with all the UK concerns highlighted and the original purpose emasculated’ (FCO 2008b: 76) – and this under a section entitled ‘Develop effective institutions’. The approving representation of Europe as a battleground where Britain ‘emasculates’ the intentions of its partners and ‘wins’ was no doubt designed to construct a positive sense of the UK’s ability to shape the European agenda and promote its own vision of the EU of the future. However, it also serves to remind the reader of divisions within Europe. Indeed, the notion of a European endeavour ‘emasculated’ seems to resonate with a Eurosceptic conception of the EU as an expansionary zone breeding new forms of
regulation. Arguably, New Labour’s commitment to work with its European partners was also undermined by its decision, towards the end of its tenure in office, to relocate 30 per cent of its staff away from European posts towards alternative postings in the Middle East and Asia. Despite some softening of criticism of the EU in the Annual Report of 2009 – and the need to be more positive about British-EU relations to promote the passage of the Lisbon Treaty – New Labour arguably displayed a deep unease about conveying the extent to which its foreign policies were in fact deeply entwined with those of fellow EU member states.

Looking back at New Labour’s period in office, then, it is clear that despite the UK’s extensive cooperation and coordination of foreign policy with other European states government ministers never allowed rhetoric about Britain’s European identity to become a significant part of their strategizing over foreign policy. The trend was always in favour of criticizing or downplaying this relationship rather than integrating it into their strategic thinking.

A transatlantic British foreign policy

British foreign policy-makers’ unwillingness to identify with their European partners in strategic terms stood in marked contrast to the deliberate attempts to construct a sense of identity with the United States. New Labour politicians made considerable references to the transatlantic relationship in explicitly value-laden and identity-rich terms. The link between the two states was variously described as based on the values of ‘liberty, the rule of law, human rights and an open society’ (Blair 1999a); on a ‘partnership of values and capabilities’ (Straw 2003); on belief in ‘the strengthening of multilateral institutions ... support [for] NATO and its expansion ... and ... a strong leadership role in the world’ (Straw 2002); ‘democracy and the rule of law; also justice, the engine of effective multilateralism’ (Brown 2008a) and the values of ‘democracy, human rights and personal freedom’ (Miliband 2008d). In this sense, New Labour asserted an explicitly normative basis to Britain’s relations with the US. Indeed, the importance of the relationship was accentuated in every single major strategic document produced by the FCO and the MoD, including repeated assertions that the US is the UK’s most important bilateral partner (e.g. FCO 2006; MoD 1998). Moreover, it was often argued that US support was essential both in achieving international action and making progress on international reform (Blair 2006b). For instance, in 2008 David
Miliband maintained that: ‘It is difficult to imagine how the major challenges facing the world in the next decade can be addressed without US engagement’ (Miliband 2008b).

At the same time, however, New Labour had to ignore the fact that many of the normative goals it promoted as examples of UK leadership in world affairs were either ignored or actively opposed by the US. For example, Robin Cook’s (2000b) summary of UK efforts to ‘promote British values of democracy and freedom’ included the following:

- We have launched a global programme to challenge torture and to help its victims.
- We have dropped the previous government’s refusal to lobby against the use of the death penalty. We now consistently oppose its use.
- We have turned the UK into a leading advocate for the International Criminal Court.
- We have introduced tough new criteria on arms sales.

If we explore each of these priorities as they were pursued throughout the New Labour years, it is clear that they were the source of significant tensions between the UK and the US. In the first place, after this list was formulated the US officially endorsed a number of practices which by any widely accepted definition would constitute torture – including waterboarding, sleep deprivation, and the use of stress positions (Sands 2008; Senate Armed Services Committee 2008). Its practice of rendition caused considerable embarrassment to the UK government and was widely seen as undermining British claims to oppose torture and human rights abuses (JCHR 2009). It is one thing for the UK to have as its closest ally a state that is alleged to practice torture and export individuals to third parties to extract intelligence by even more violent means than is allowed within the parameters of US Directives. Worse still, in February 2008 Foreign Secretary Miliband was forced to apologize to Parliament for having made false assurances that these individuals did not pass through UK territory (FCO 2008a: 16). On two occasions the US had rendered detainees through the US facility of British Indian Ocean Territory in Diego Garcia, UK sovereign territory. The government tried to defuse criticism of its involvement by offering a guarantee that flights through the UK would only be permitted ‘if we are satisfied that the rendition would accord with UK law and our international obligations’ (FCO 2008a: 16). However, criticism of the UK’s apparent tacit support for the US’s activities would continue (FAC 2005; JCHR 2009).
With regard to Cook’s second objective – lobbying against the death penalty – the Human Rights Report of 2007 made reference to attempts by the UK to work with the EU to oppose the death penalty, noting that on seven occasions it intervened in the US to appeal for sentences to be commuted to life imprisonment (FCO 2008a: 117). Nevertheless, according to Amnesty International (2009), thirty-seven individuals were executed in the US in 2008. In the UN General Assembly Resolutions co-sponsored by the UK in 2007 and 2008, the US voted against abolition. The story was similar with regard to Cook’s other priorities. Despite taking part in the negotiations that established the ICC and signing it in 2000, the US subsequently withdrew from the Treaty and abrogated President Clinton’s signature in 2002 (BBC 2002). Indeed, in the early years of the ICC’s existence the US actively campaigned against the activities of the court, tying defence cooperation with EU accession states and major allies such as Jordan to their refusal to cooperate with its activities (Ralph 2007).

Lastly, in the case of regulation of the small arms trade, the UK proudly announced in 2009 that it had actively campaigned to promote a new treaty through the UN and received considerable support from other countries (FCO 2008b: 22). Something of its importance can be gleaned from the fact that the initiative was discussed by the Prime Minister in his Lord Mayor’s Banquet speech of 2008, as well as in Human Rights and Annual Departmental Reports (Brown 2008a; FCO 2009b). Although this was seen as another example of Britain taking a ‘leading role’ it failed to gain US support. This difference of opinion was relayed in a very diplomatic fashion, with the Human Rights Report 2007 noting that: ‘the 2006 resolution was overwhelmingly supported at the UN General Assembly, with 153 countries voting in favour, and only one against’. It is interesting that the US was not mentioned as the one against (FCO 2008a: 18). In a new resolution in November 2008, the US was in the dubious company of Zimbabwe in opposing the vote. Elsewhere on small arms, Brown praised the fact that ‘I am pleased that one hundred countries have joined us in banning cluster bombs’ (Brown 2008a) and the FCO’s Annual Departmental Report of 2008 noted: ‘The UK (FCO, MoD, and DfID) is addressing the humanitarian impact of cluster munitions, both through the framework of the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and through the Oslo Process’ (FCO 2008b: 60). The US was not part of the Oslo process attempting to ban cluster weapons, arguing that: ‘Cluster munitions are lawful weapons under existing international humanitarian law, they have significant military utility,
and they are a critical capability in many countries’ defense planning’ (CCW Treaty 2008). An earlier example of this contrary attitude to arms control was apparent in the case of the Ottawa Treaty banning landmines, loudly presented as an example of the kind of ‘ethical dimension’ to foreign policy Robin Cook was seeking to introduce and also ultimately not supported by the US under President Clinton. Underlying these differences in policy was a fundamentally different attitude to the regulation of state action by international institutions. Yet, this was never openly acknowledged by New Labour ministers or in official documents.

From this evidence, it would seem that the US and the UK held diametrically opposed ethical goals during the New Labour years. But in some areas the UK and US cooperated on objectives which could be considered normative, illustrated in 2005 when Jack Straw approvingly cited a statement by Condoleezza Rice that: ‘if we look at the record of the West towards the Middle East and other countries, for decades the US – for which also read Western Europe – had placed stability as a higher priority than democracy, and it ended up by getting neither ... we are now ... committed to democracy’ (Straw 2006). The US and UK are prominent in encouraging processes of democratization and good governance, pushing a neoliberal economic agenda, countering proliferation and – as they saw it – acting to preserve international peace and security. Straw’s view was reflected in most official documents related to Britain’s foreign and development policies, usually framed in terms of a commitment to the rule of law and seen as underpinning the UK’s furtherance of human rights (Miliband 2008b). The so-called ‘Washington consensus’ was also apparent in the many assertions that the UK supported free markets, deregulation of economies and the kind of governance arrangements that would support a liberal market economy.

The UK and US also worked together on development policy, with the US supporting the UK’s attempts to prioritize African issues at the G8 summit at Gleneagles. According to the Washington Post, the US elected to increase its Aid to Africa from $1.4 billion in 2001 to $9 billion by 2010 (Fletcher 2006). Here too, however, there were divisions, with Bush administrations supporting abstinence programmes to combat Aids, a policy considered ineffective by UK officials. It was perhaps telling that the 2006 DfID strategy document ‘Making Governance Work for the Poor’ contained only one reference to the US, in the context of its efforts along with the UK and Norway to promote conflict resolution in the Sudan (DfID 2006). The same document contained sixty-eight references to the
EU. Similarly, DfID’s 2008 Annual Report ‘Development: Making it Happen’ included only sporadic references to DfID’s links with USAID (DfID 2008: 36 and 144) and avoided any significant mention of US-UK cooperation on development policy, except to acknowledge that the US, as a member of the G8, had agreed to increase aid spending. Indeed, the only time the US was singled out as an actor with regard to development in this document was in the statement that ‘the US [was] the world’s largest emitter of Greenhouse Gases in 2008’ (DfID 2008: 169) – hardly a positive endorsement of US policy.

With regard to counter-proliferation, US and UK policy ran in parallel during the New Labour years, most starkly demonstrated by UK involvement in the Iraq campaign which was justified by Blair as countering the threat from the spread of WMD in the Middle East. Brown pledged in 2007 that ‘We will continue to be a leading nation in negotiating nuclear arms reductions’ (Brown 2007c) and UK initiatives to promote talks on arms levels received support from the US. The US-UK relationship has been described as essentially a security one and – on the basis of the evidence in this chapter – this seems to have been the one consistent area of agreement between them. The interventionist stance of US foreign policy during the Bush years received intellectual and diplomatic support from UK assertions of an ‘international community’ whereby the sovereignty of states could be compromised in the case of countries with poor human rights records. The US and UK engaged in humanitarian interventions in the Balkans as well as large scale military action in Afghanistan and Iraq, closely sharing intelligence and cooperating on devising military strategy.

Nevertheless, surveying the examples of ethical leadership offered by New Labour politicians, it is striking how often, on balance, the UK’s initiatives were opposed by the US. Moreover, the fact that the UK pursued a normative agenda in the face of US opposition indicates that US leadership, or at least cooperation, was not necessary to the establishment of international consensus or action on these normative goals. It may have been desirable but it was clearly not essential or these achievements would not have been possible. In addition, that the EU was, and remains, so central to many of the milieu goals of foreign policy suggests that New Labour should have been placing much greater emphasis on Britain’s relations with its European partners. Good relations with the US may be the UK’s most important bilateral priority when it comes to security; however, good relations with France or Germany may be far more influential when it comes to promoting the kind of international structure and norms the UK desires for the
international community as a whole. Failure to address this fact was perhaps typical of New Labour’s general failure to confront difficult truths and so to strategize Britain’s foreign policy in a rigorous fashion.

**An internationalist foreign policy?**

A further community that was often evoked by British foreign policymakers in the New Labour years was that of the international community or, as it is later outlined, the ‘global society’. Robin Cook asserted in 1997 that: ‘My starting point is that in the modern world all nations belong to the same international community’ (Cook 1997b). From this premise, Cook advanced the notion that ‘it is reasonable to require every government to abide by its rules of membership’, most importantly, in honouring the human rights of their citizens. However, the problem in Cook’s representation of such a community was the reality of considerable differences in opinion worldwide about exactly what the ‘rules of membership’ should be and how they should be enforced. For example, Russia and China issued double vetoes in the UN Security Council in 2007 and 2008 in the face of British efforts to hold the Burmese and Zimbabwean regimes accountable for their abuses of human rights. Furthermore, considerable divisions arose in Europe over the appropriate course of action to take in response to Iraq’s failure to comply with UN Security Council Resolutions. Indeed, even within the New Labour administration, there was disagreement between Prime Minister Blair and Foreign Secretary Cook over the extent to which the human rights records of trading partners should affect arms sales (Vasagar 2000). Blair attempted to assert a ‘doctrine of international community’ in 1999 to provoke worldwide debate on when intervention by the major powers should be legitimized. However, this was arguably only a discussion between the ‘Anglo’ powers of the UK, Canada, the US and Australia.

Nevertheless, New Labour never tired of proclaiming the existence of a global community and constructing it through its foreign policy discourse. Its values were defined as: ‘liberty, democracy, tolerance, justice’ (Blair 2006c) and patterns of cooperation as ‘a coalition of conscience’ (Brown 2007b). The vagueness of such declarations compels us to question their political reality. UK foreign policy has been described as ‘committed to a multilateral, rules-based international system’ (Cabinet Office 2008a: 47) and in *Active Diplomacy for a Changing World*, the FCO suggested that: ‘an international system based on effective multilateral institutions and shared values has long been a cornerstone of
British foreign policy’ (FCO 2006: 6). However, as we have seen above, even Britain’s closest ally did not share its vision of the ‘rules’ upon which this society should be founded. The question here is whether international society has a sufficiently clear identity and set of common values around which foreign policy could cohere. As a corollary of this, one might also question whether ethics can be operationalized in as indistinct community as that of ‘humanity’ or the ‘global society’. Clearly, there is a considerable amount of international law underpinning the notion of human rights, as embodied in the UN Charter, the UN Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenants on Civil and Political and Economic and Social Rights and the Genocide Convention. However, the theoretical and practical challenge arises when such aspirational universalist ethical commitments intersect with the particular ethical understandings of state and regional communities. Put another way, the problem lies when foreign policy-makers have to decide between communities. In such a situation, identity is crucial in defining which community’s ethics are to be privileged and when. In his interesting thesis on moral choice in foreign policy, *Thick and Thin: Moral Action at Home and Abroad*, Michael Walzer (1996) suggests that political communities such as states have a ‘thick’ morality bonding citizens within a state in mutual relations of responsibility and duty whereas our ethical commitment to individuals from other states is a ‘thin’ one of opportunism rather than rigid obligation. Yet, when New Labour policy-makers discussed global society they tended to conflate its goals and interests with the UK, refusing to acknowledge the choices that were implicitly being made which privileged one community over another.

An example of this was apparent in the realm of defence, and Britain’s contribution to UN peacekeeping. The Defence Select Committee (DSC) expressed concern in 2004 that the White Paper *Delivering Security in a Changing World* (2003) failed to recognize either the UN’s role in this area or UK support for its activities (DSC 2004: 10). Furthermore, the United Nations Association noted a decline in NATO personnel offered to the UN and the fact that no reference was made in the White Paper to UK contributions to UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DSC 2004: 10). Typically, the New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review in 2002 is said to have ‘made explicit reference to the United Nations and its evolving role in international security, but did not offer any view of UK thinking about it’ (DSC 2004: 10). The most plausible reason for this oversight was that Britain’s forces were heavily committed to actions to defend their own particular community. Its substantial deployments in
Iraq and Afghanistan meant that the UK, even if it had wished to, would have been unable to make significant troop contributions to intervention forces in any international police action. The SDR expressed the belief that ‘No state threatens the United Kingdom directly’ and so it went on to suggest: ‘the Ministry of Defence and our Armed Forces should not only defend the UK and its interests, but also be a force for good in the world’ (MoD 2001a: 2). However, the lack of serious consideration of identity made the nature or extent of Britain’s efforts to be a ‘force for good in the world’ difficult to ascertain.

One area of activity that might have supported the advancement of the values and interests of a global community was that of Aid policy. DfID’s Aid strategy was defined by the Millennium Development Goals, described in a recent UN Report as: ‘a global collective effort that is unsurpassed in 50 years of development experience’ (UN 2008: 4). In keeping with this internationalist approach, the former Development Secretary Hilary Benn, in his introduction to Eliminating Poverty: Making Governance Work for the Poor, made reference to ‘six billion members of the human family … A human family that is more interdependent than at any other point in history’ (DfID 2006: 5). The ethical community motivating this policy was that of ‘humanity’. Under the 2002 International Development Act, UK aid is not allowed to be tied to the provision of British goods and services and for much of its early life the department was said to be reluctant for political reasons to contribute to British public diplomacy efforts, presumably in case it was seen to be promoting British interests rather than those of humanity (Carter 2005). In seeing all individuals as belonging to the global community, this strategy actually could paradoxically be said to have excluded itself from the very concept of foreign policy since there were apparently no ‘foreigners’ to engage with any more, a point conceded by Peter Hain in his pamphlet The End of Foreign Policy? (Hain 2001b). Despite this conceit, the reality was that DfID did have to make choices about the deployment of its resources and this was based not only on need but also the political context. If the department was simply allocating funds according to need then ration­ally its entire budget would have been spent in the Democratic Republic of Congo which witnessed the direst human emergency of the last two decades. The only logic for spreading aid over a range of countries and programmes was that this would increase the influence of the UK via a favourable perception of the UK’s engagement globally.

In short, strategy documents that invoked notions of the international community or global society provided very little rationale for decision-making and did not link policy choices with Britain’s other identities.
Indeed, the very idea of constructing an identity in separation from the broader conception of humanity was apparently anathema to policymakers such as Clare Short (Development Secretary 1997–2003). Although overseas aid was clearly an important part of Britain’s foreign policy, the rhetoric of official documents seemed to imply both that such external engagement was not undertaken with ‘foreigners’ but our fellow humans and that it was in response to need rather than to further Britain’s interests. As such, it was not a ‘policy’ in an instrumental sense. With regard to the latter point, it is perhaps not overdoing it to suggest that a vacuum of strategic thinking lay in DfID’s attempts to realize the Millennium goals. Official texts continually eulogized the variety of projects funded by British money but I have discussed no material indicating how the department adjudicated between competing claims, how it ordered and prioritized the Millennium goals and why, nor how it reconciled the contradictions inherent in the complex and contested identity of ‘global society’.

Conclusion

In his speech on Foreign Policy in a Recession: Making Multilateralism Work, David Miliband noted that: ‘Free thinking, changes of approach, the big play, have a chance of working when we find the right partners’ (Miliband 2009a). Furthermore, he asserted that ‘As Britain’s representatives abroad’ the FCO’s role was ‘in part to project a coherent national story’ (Ibid). Both of these objectives required a far more rigorous analysis of British identity and its future role in the world than New Labour’s strategic policy documents undertook. To achieve this in the future, it is arguable that what is required is a foreign policy review as exhaustive as the Strategic Defence Review of 1998, incorporating substantial opportunities to discuss British identity and consult the public on the kind of foreign policy they wish to represent them in the twenty-first century. During the New Labour years, identities were neither rationalized nor prioritized and the government did not make clear in an intellectually coherent fashion why they favoured some political communities in certain situations and not in others. This would seem to be a minimum requirement for any genuinely strategic approach to policy-making.

Moreover, to think strategically is also necessarily to think ethically: that is, to consider the relevant political communities, their values and value-laden interests, and to set out the framework for making a choice between them. As we have seen, many of New Labour’s early normative
goals were undermined by the UK’s closest strategic partner. At the same time, the stronger support for these objectives from European partners was unsung. Future strategy documents that wish to be intellectually honest, as well as practical, may wish to acknowledge this fact when seeking to link policy priorities – especially ethical ones – to the UK’s patterns of bilateral and multilateral relationships.

A final point worth raising is over the utility of unified strategic thinking across government. New Labour put considerable emphasis on establishing ‘joined-up government’ and the variety of strategy documents and speeches analysed above were often designed to create the impression of coordination across departments – even where this was palpably not working. It is possible to observe that different government departments tended to privilege different identities and shape their strategies accordingly. Thus, the MoD favoured a transatlantic identity as a result of its experience in defence cooperation with the United States; the FCO acknowledged the EU and to a lesser extent the Commonwealth as communities to which British identity might relate; and DfID favoured the global society. In this sense, New Labour’s artificial attempt to construct a British foreign policy might be replaced by an acknowledgement of the pluralism inherent in the identities and communities favoured by different government departments. This alternative might involve acceptance of the current reality of a series of British foreign policies, overlapping and perhaps contradictory at times. However, this can – indeed does – have serious implications for Britain’s effectiveness as a global actor. One need only explore the wealth of evidence of confused and failing policy coordination over the post-war reconstruction of Iraq offered at the 2010 Iraq Inquiry to suggest this is not a desirable state of affairs. A more unified British foreign policy that takes greater account of identity and community seems much more preferable.
This page intentionally left blank
Part II
Ethics
From ‘Ethical Foreign Policy’ to National Security Strategy: Exporting Domestic Incoherence

Tara McCormack

Introduction

Foreign policy under New Labour took many twists and turns. In its first year in office the New Labour team launched a supposedly new kind of foreign policy agenda, one with an ‘ethical dimension’, in which then Foreign Secretary Robin Cook promised that Britain would be a ‘force for good’ in the world (for an overview see Little and Wickham-Jones 2000). Two years on, Prime Minister Tony Blair proclaimed that NATO’s military intervention in Kosovo was a demonstration of a war for values rather than narrow national interests (Blair 1999a). However, in the early 2000s we witnessed an apparent return to a more traditional, Realist foreign policy dynamic in which national interests and hard security concerns seemed to reassert themselves in Afghanistan, Iraq and the so-called ‘war on terror’. The apparent return to a security and interest-based foreign policy agenda continued into the later years of the New Labour government, culminating in the development of an official National Security Strategy. In 2008 New Labour published Britain’s first codified national security strategy document, The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Security in an Interdependent World (Cabinet Office 2008a), releasing subsequent updates and related documents, for example the National Risk Register (NRR) (Cabinet Office 2008b), The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering International Terrorism (Home Office 2009) and the National Security Update 2009 (NSSa) (Cabinet Office 2009).

Two key aspects of this trend in British foreign policy during the New Labour years have been criticized by scholars and commentators. First, detractors of ‘ethical foreign policy’ tended to measure the behaviour of the government on the ground against its ambitious rhetorical intentions
(for an overview see Chandler 2003). Second, the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq were argued to be examples of old-fashioned power politics or neo-imperialist adventures, discrediting the West as a force for good in the world (for example Clark 2009; Toynbee and Walker 2005: 194). These are both now well established areas for discussion and debate about New Labour’s conduct of British foreign policy. To date, however, little attention has been paid to the National Security Strategy (hereafter NSS). This oversight is strange because the NSS is a far cry from the altruistic focus of New Labour’s initial foray into foreign policy, with its strong ethical rhetoric. Such critical accounts as there have been, have argued that the more extensive notion of an ethical foreign policy revealed a very specific domestic dynamic at work, one in which an absence of a clear sense of domestic policy direction, or a clear ideological program, rendered the international sphere of foreign policy an attractive place to operate because it was one in which a sense of dynamism and momentum could be achieved (Vickers 2000: 37; Chandler 2003). This chapter will argue that this critical account of ethical foreign can be expanded to explain New Labour foreign policy more comprehensively by covering the later as well as the early years.

To pick up on one of the central questions this book seeks to explore, the chapter will contend that the principle feature of British foreign policy during the New Labour era was the absence of any clear or consistent notion of identity or values it wanted to pursue through its external policy. Far from representing a series of disparate foreign policy initiatives, it will be argued in this chapter that there has been a trend in British foreign policy in which the absence of a strong political centre renders the international realm an attractive place, one of potential action and direction. This dynamic has taken slightly different forms with changing international circumstances. Whilst ethical foreign policy and the intervention in Kosovo and the ensuing Afghanistan and Iraq interventions were used as an attempt to create a strong moral framework for New Labour, the aim of the NSS has been to create some kind of clear direction for foreign and security policy. This underlying dynamic and continuity in British foreign policy is represented in the idea of a ‘foreign policy led’ strategy. This was an idea first introduced by then Secretary for Defence, George Robertson, in his launch of the 1998 SDR (Bellamy 1997). A ‘foreign policy led’ defence strategy seems to have been a logical way into thinking about Britain’s international role and obligations (on the problematic notion of a British ‘world role’ see McCourt’s chapter in this collection). However, ultimately it was a problematic approach which fundamentally
misunderstood the relationship between the domestic and international policy spheres. It is not the external environment that imposes a coherent foreign policy but a specific domestic order, that being a particular set of economic and political interests. It is the domestic order that leads to the identification of threats and the appropriate foreign policy tools to mitigate them. The idea of a ‘foreign policy led’ foreign and defence policy reveals a vacuum at the heart of New Labour, at least until the 2008 NSS, if not beyond.

The chapter proceeds in three parts. First, it provides vital context for assessing the domestic sources of foreign policy by reflecting on what was ‘new’ about New Labour. Here, the focus is on New Labour as a ‘post-ideological’ political party and its approach to foreign policy and the foreign policy implications of an absence of a clear sense of the national interest based upon the protection of a certain set of political and economic interests. The second part explores, chronologically, the two main foreign policy initiatives launched by New Labour prior to the NSS: its ‘ethical foreign policy’ and the Afghanistan and Iraq interventions. These two later military interventions seemed to overturn the promises of ethical foreign policy in a reversion to a ‘hard’ security agenda. The third part studies the drivers behind New Labour’s production of the NSS, which would appear to be a continuation of the ‘hard’ security agenda initiated in the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. The chapter will argue, however, that despite the ostensibly wide political and moral gap between ethical foreign policy and the later developments of intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan and the NSS, these policies in fact stemmed from the same domestic dynamic. In conclusion, the chapter will argue that British foreign policy under New Labour possessed an underlying continuity deriving from a specific domestic context in which the international sphere seemed to present opportunities for action the government lacked domestically.

**New Labour, new approach to foreign policy?**

As argued in the introduction to this collection, the orthodox approach to British foreign policy in which it was assumed that Britain occupied a ‘pivotal’ global role needs to be reassessed in the twenty-first century. As former Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd famously observed in the early 1990s, Britain ‘punched above its weight’ in global affairs during the Cold War. Yet by 1998, Ministry of Defence figures published in New Labour’s much heralded SDR showed that defence expenditure had fallen by 23 per cent in real terms since the end of the Cold War.
With the end of the Cold War broader geopolitical alliances that had their raison d’être in the years 1945–1989, in particular between America and Europe, came into question, leading to much academic and policy discussion about the future of the transatlantic alliance as represented by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (for example, NATO 1994). Concurrently the ‘rise of the rest’, as Fareed Zakaria has termed it (2009), together with the emergence of previously hostile or non-aligned states such as India and China during the 1990s, also promised to change international structures of alliances and power.

It was not just the international realm that was changing as New Labour came to power, but the terrain of domestic politics in Britain. New Labour represented a post-ideological government and although the term ‘third way’ has fallen out of favour with academics it is still a useful term that was coined to describe the phenomena of postpolitical or post-ideological parties such as the Clinton Administration (1993–2001) and the Blair governments 1997–2007 (Giddens 1998). The broader context for this was an erosion of the collective social and political institutions which structured much of life in the developed world during the twentieth century, for example political parties, trade unions, the church, a decline in domestic political contestation in the West, falling voter turnout and a weakening of class-based politics (Skidelsky 2002; Putnam 2001; see also Maier 1994). It was against this backdrop that New Labour abandoned key political commitments that had defined the Labour Party as a party that ostensibly represented the British working class, for example Clause IV of the party constitution, seeking to move towards a policy centre ground and a more technocratic and managerial political programme (Skidelsky 2002). Crucially, New Labour’s third way thinking was not confined to the domestic arena, it had potentially radical implications for foreign policy. Historically, foreign policy and related thinking about how to safeguard national security has been understood to be concerned with the defence or pursuit of the national interest. However, the term ‘national interest’ is really so vague as to be as meaningful or as meaningless as politicians need it to be. As Arnold Wolfers pointed out at the beginning of the Cold War, the definition of the national interest is something that changes with time, as the state and society changes: it is highly context dependent (Wolfers 1952: 418–82). The fluidity and multidimensionality of the concept make it a highly problematic guide to understanding or explaining state behaviour, although paradoxically that might be why it is so appealing to politicians – it can be put to many purposes.
each state’s national interest might be, and how it might protect and pursue its national interests, must derive from the social, economic and political content of the state itself (Bull 2002: 63).

Thus, while the ‘national interest’ appears to be a neutral and self-evident term, it has historically been linked with protecting and/or advancing a specific political and economic programme. Foreign and security policy which protects or pursues the national interest has therefore also had a specifically ideological role related to the protection and legitimation of a certain political and social order. As David Campbell has pointed out, security and foreign policies linked to this invocation have had certain performative functions (Campbell 1998). Appeals to the national interest have played a specific ideological role in legitimating the domestic political sphere (Campbell 1998; Gourevitch 2007). Even if this is a debate largely premised upon events in twentieth century politics, the implications of post-ideological managerial governments for foreign policy are apparent both as opportunities and problems. Opportunities, because foreign policy can be freed from the narrow pursuit or protection of specific national interests and used more creatively, for example (as will be argued below) to demonstrate leadership and political purpose. Problems, because without that underlying set of prior political and economic interests to be defended or pursued, there is little of substance to guide policy.

New Labour, then, found itself in a new kind of domestic political context – one in which the traditional domestic political pressures that had served to structure both domestic and international policies for much of the twentieth century had faded away. The consequences of this were to have implications for foreign policy. In order to illustrate this problem, we turn now to the two major foreign policy initiatives under New Labour prior to the publication of the NSS: ‘ethical foreign policy’ and the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

**New Labour: From ethics to Iraq**

Beginning with the 1998 SDR, New Labour argued that the post-Cold War world presented very different challenges from those of the Cold War (MoD 1998). New Labour stressed that its approach to foreign and defence policy was to be consciously distinct from the foreign policy of previous governments. At the launch of the SDR Secretary of State for Defence George Robertson remarked that: ‘The Review is radical,
reflecting a changing world, in which the confrontation of the Cold War has been replaced by a complex mixture of uncertainty and instability’ (MoD 1998: 4). The stated aims of the SDR were to provide the defence forces with ‘clarity, coherence and consensus’ (Robertson 1998). Part of the rationale was to ensure that there was a ‘shared vision’ (Robertson 1998) about defence bringing together different government departments. Robertson made the further point of emphasizing that this defence review was foreign policy led (Bellamy 1997; McInnes 1998: 823). Throughout the SDR it was stressed that the British armed forces would be recalibrated in order to proactively meet new foreign policy challenges that arose (MoD 1998: 5). A foreign policy led defence policy meant that Britain would act in the world in a way which did not depend upon the strictures of the Treasury but would be based upon an interpretation of the exigencies of external events (Bellamy 1997; McInnes 1998: 833). In this new, uncertain and insecure world, Robertson argued that Britain could be an active ‘force for good’ in the world (MoD 1998: 7).

The SDR was accompanied by the launch of what became known as New Labour’s ‘ethical foreign policy’ (Little and Wickham-Jones 2000; Smith and Light 2001). As Foreign Secretary Robin Cook explained:

Our foreign policy must have an ethical dimension and must support the demands of other peoples for the democratic rights on which we insist for ourselves. The Labour Government will put human rights at the heart of our foreign policy ... (cited in Wheeler and Dunne 1998: 851).

In retrospect, the 1999 Kosovo intervention can be argued to represent the high point of New Labour’s ethical foreign policy, even though it was Blair and not Cook that set the tone for British involvement in NATO’s Operation Allied Force. The Kosovo conflict entailed a humanitarian intervention, understood to be an intervention not based upon narrow material or strategic interests but one undertaken for the sake of others. J.L. Holzgrefe defines such action as: ‘... the use of force across state borders by a state aimed at preventing or ending widespread and grave violations of the fundamental human rights of individuals other than its own citizens ...’ (2003: 18). Humanitarian intervention was ethical foreign policy in action and Blair forcefully rested the case for operation Allied Force on the idea that the intervention was being conducted for ethical reasons, to protect the human rights of others rather than for self-interest. In search of this new
ethical policy, he suggested, the old barriers of sovereignty and non-intervention in other countries were no longer relevant:

This is a just war, based not on any territorial ambitions but on values. We cannot let the evil of ethnic cleansing stand ... We are all internationalists now, whether we like it or not ... We cannot turn our backs on conflicts and the violation of human rights within other countries if we want still to be secure (Blair 1999a).

Whilst supporters of ethical foreign policy argued that a more ethically orientated way of thinking about foreign policy was the result of a gradual development of a more moral approach to foreign policy in which human rights abuses and intrastate war were no longer ignored or subordinated to power politics (for an overview see Chandler 2003) critics tended to compare and contrast the behaviour of the government in comparison with its stated ethical intentions. John Pilger, for example, pointed out that two years after the launch of a supposedly more ethically orientated foreign policy Britain continued to be a major seller of arms to Indonesia (Pilger 1999).

That said, neither supporters nor critics engaged with the underlying domestic political context in which ethical foreign policy emerged. Critical accounts of ethical foreign policy have argued that foreign policy under New Labour played a particular role of compensating for an absence of a clear domestic political programme. The international sphere, on this reading of events, represented a sphere of activism and forward momentum in the absence of any domestic political project – an empty zone free from the difficulties and limitations of domestic policymaking in a post-ideological context (Vickers 2000; Chandler 2003; Daddow 2009). Crucially, Blair had little interest in foreign policy prior to assuming the premiership and Robin Cook had been sorely disappointed at his own appointment as Foreign Secretary (Vickers 2000: 37; Williams 2005: 168). However, as with the Clinton administration, foreign policy appeared to offer an opportunity for decisive action and leadership to so-called third-way governments lacking a strategic political vision and framework for policy. As Vickers has argued, foreign policy has stepped into the breach by providing some kind of intellectual purpose and moral grounding, as well as an outlet for Blair’s energy and proactive, forward-leaning and personalized approach to policy-making (Vickers 2000: 36–7). Discussing Blair, Mark Phythian argues:

... it was here [foreign policy] that he found he could act with a freedom that his and Chancellor Gordon Brown’s caution had made
impossible in domestic policy. Spin doctor Lance Price noted in his diary as early as 1999 that: ‘There’s a feeling about the place that TB is losing touch with ordinary people and what matters to them. He seems almost bored with the ordinary stuff and interested only in all the foreign leaders, Clinton, wars, etc’ (Phythian 2007: 131).

Thus, foreign policy occupied a central place in the New Labour project because it gave moral clarity and a forward dynamic to the party itself: ‘... foreign policy is important because of its potential impact on domestic politics and the New Labour project, rather than in itself’ (Vickers 2000: 37).

Writers on the domestic stimuli behind foreign policy take New Labour’s approach to have been a way of constructing both an identity for the party and a clear moral framework for action. In this light, ethical foreign policy indicated the absence of a clear identity and political programme, and an attempt to generate them through action in the international sphere. Using the language of ethical foreign policy, New Labour attempted to construct a clear identity for itself, using the powerful moral language of acting as a force for good in the world. Thus New Labour presented the Kosovo conflict, which in comparison to other conflicts occurring around the globe during the 1990s (for example the wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo or East Timor) was in fact a comparatively minor conflict about self-determination and an ensuing brutal government counter-insurgency campaign, as a re-run of the Holocaust. Clare Short for example, then International Development Secretary, argued that the Kosovo conflict reminded her and other colleagues of the Nazis and Hitler and she compared Labour Members of Parliament who objected to the military intervention in Serbia (including Tony Benn and Tam Dalyell) to those who had appeased Hitler in 1939 (BBC 1999).

Drawing upon this analysis we can understand the idea of a ‘foreign policy led’ strategy in a different light. In the context of a post-ideological and pragmatic approach to government, New Labour viewed foreign policy to be an opportunity which allowed governments to act and be engaged through the pressure of events. Foreign policy was an outlet in which the government, beset by domestic policy incoherence and an inability to communicate dramatic results, could be dynamic and demonstrate its ‘values’ which would generate some internal coherence and forward momentum. Here the international realm promised a clarity in which simple conflicts of good and evil, ‘good guys’ and ‘bad guys’ could be played out without all the messy compromise and political
problems of domestic politics. However, the thornier question – which Blair only partially addressed in his 1999 Chicago speech – was this: how should medium sized powers such as Britain decide when and where to intervene? Without a guiding sense of strong interests it is difficult to make a judgement about what should be engaged with and what should not be; in the absence of guiding principles it is problematic to choose how to act, what to do and which diplomatic or military tools to bring to bear on the problem. Moreover, the New Labour government, despite Robertson’s promises to the contrary, was constrained by the shrinking military budget and so was compelled to pick and choose. Ethical foreign policy therefore had a rather arbitrary character and seemed to wither away under accusations of hypocrisy from vocal media critics such as Pilger, noted above (see Little and Wickham-Jones 2000 for an overview). The major foreign policy initiatives overseen by Blair in the early years of the following decade, in Afghanistan and Iraq, appear to have undermined the government’s ‘ethical’ agenda. However, as we shall now see, the same dynamic and hopes for the cohering power of foreign policy were present.

The 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon and the subsequent British involvement in the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq and the ‘war on terror’, ostensibly prompted a discernible shift from the ethical agenda of the 1990s. These actions in the early 2000s appeared to herald a return to hard security concerns and the national interest, with ethical concerns slipping down the list (Roth 2004; Weiss 2004). Given this, some former advocates of ethical foreign policy came to the conclusion that the events of the early 2000s tarnished the ideals and objectives of New Labour’s ‘ethical’ approach. In particular, the idea that Western states acted altruistically was increasingly called into question, creating the suspicion that under the cover of ethical language, Western states were simply pursuing their own agendas. For example, David Clark, advisor to Robin Cook and a key figure in the construction of ethical foreign has reflected ruefully on:

... the effect of the Iraq war in sowing doubt about the legitimacy and efficacy of western military power. In departing from the principle of non-intervention and lacking a U.N. mandate, Kosovo is often regarded as the original sin that made Iraq possible. Even Russia’s invasion and recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been characterised as blowback from Kosovo’s declaration of independence a few months before. Comparisons of this kind
confuse more than they clarify. The war in Kosovo was a response to a humanitarian emergency, not a geopolitical power play’ (Clark 2009).

Radical intellectuals such as Jurgen Habermas, who had been highly supportive of the Kosovo intervention as heralding a new cosmopolitan order, argued that the Iraq intervention was a dangerous shift back towards the pursuit of narrow national interests (Habermas 2002). Closer to home, Clare Short, who had been so supportive of the Kosovo intervention, famously resigned after the invasion of Iraq, criticizing the illegality of the action (although of course the Kosovo intervention had also taken place without a Security Council Resolution) (BBC 2010a).

However, despite the ostensible shift back to a ‘hard’ security agenda driven by national interests, a closer consideration of the post-9/11 interventions in which New Labour participated reveals far from clear-cut cases of ‘neo-imperialism’ as critics such as Clark and Short have implied. These critics have assumed clear agendas and assertions of ‘hard’ security concerns but such claims do not stand up well to scrutiny. What is striking about the interventions in both Iraq and Afghanistan is the extent to which both interventions were marked by shifting justifications and a lack of any clear strategy. In both cases there was attention to the moral and ethical case for intervention in which Britain (and the West) would act morally rather than on the basis of security needs.

In both cases, therefore, the shifting policy justifications, the focus on moral reasons and lack of overall strategy suggest that alternative explanations are needed to understand these policies. In light of the changing justifications for the interventions and the now well known lack of strategy apparent in both interventions it is viable to suggest that an alternative explanation for the interventions can be found by extending the arguments presented above about the underlying domestic dynamic behind ethical foreign policy to these policies. It will not be asserted that the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan were a direct continuation of ethical foreign policy; rather that the policies derived from a continuing hope that activity in the international sphere would have some kind of positive domestic impact in terms of allowing New Labour the opportunity to look decisive and generate a moral leadership role – for itself domestically and for Britain internationally.

In both Afghanistan and Iraq the British government presented several and constantly shifting objectives and rationales to justify the
conflicts. Both interventions were initially justified in terms of immediate ‘hard’ security concerns: in Afghanistan in order to capture Osama Bin Laden and topple the Taliban, as in Blair’s statement following the launch of the attack on Afghanistan on October 7 2001 (CNN 2001b); and in Iraq because of the (now assumed to be) mythical Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), as in the now infamous dossier in which New Labour claimed that Iraq possessed WMD which could reach UK sovereign territory in forty-five minutes (UK Government 2002). However, in both cases justification shifted to a second, ethically based set of reasons such as promoting women’s rights, democracy, the rule of law and so on. Moral justifications for the intervention in Afghanistan, for example, began almost immediately. In his 2001 speech to the Labour Party conference, Blair stressed the inequities of the Taliban regime:

There is no sport allowed, or television or photography. No art or culture is permitted. All other faiths, all other interpretations of Islam are ruthlessly suppressed. Those who practice their faith are imprisoned. Women are treated in a way almost too revolting to be credible. First driven out of university; girls not allowed to go to school; no legal rights; unable to go out of doors without a man. Those that disobey are stoned (Blair 2001a).

An example of the significance the ethical dimension came to play within public legitimation for the intervention in Afghanistan was the 2009 argument over a proposed new law in Afghanistan that would allow aspects of Sharia law to govern the relationship between husbands and wives. The proposal caused outrage in the West, with Lord Malloch-Brown, Britain’s Foreign Office Minister for Africa, Asia and the UN complaining: ‘There is dismay. The rights of women was [sic] one of the reasons the UK and many in the West threw ourselves into the struggle in Afghanistan. It matters greatly to us and our public opinion’ (quoted in Borger 2009). US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton also stressed that women’s rights were a key plank of American foreign policy in Afghanistan (Borger 2009).

What was remarkable was the extent to which Tony Blair came to rely upon moral reasons for the invasion of Iraq, framing it in a similar fashion as he had the Kosovo intervention. In particular Blair stressed the nature of the despotic regime the coalition had overthrown. He argued that he had taken Britain into Iraq for moral reasons and had used the claims about WMD as a justification, citing broader concerns.
about the better future of the region without Saddam Hussein in power and suggesting that the world was a better place with the Iraqi leader gone (Butt and Norton-Taylor 2009). Blair further suggested that Hussein was ‘uniquely evil’ (Miles 2009). For the former Prime Minister, the invasion of Iraq was a mission to help the Middle East and free it from an evil dictator. Speaking about the Iraq elections, Blair argued that the toppling of Saddam Hussein had laid the foundations for a democratic state and argued that the forthcoming elections (2010) were the most important thing that had happened in the region for years (Chu 2009). Despite frequent claims that Blair was simply following President Bush in Iraq, it is of note that Blair and then President Clinton had been bombing Iraq regularly since 1998 (for a discussion of these actions see Arnove 2003).

Now, critics were quick to challenge the validity of ethically-based explanations for Blair’s later foreign policy adventures. For example, Thomas Weiss has argued that ‘Iraq involved nothing more than a humanitarian veneer applied after no evidence was found of either the purported WMDs or links to Al-Qaeda’ (Weiss 2004: 149).

However, it is certainly no secret that the intervention in Iraq suffered from a severe lack of planning (BBC 2009a) and this poses a challenge to assumptions that the Afghanistan and Iraq interventions were strategic interventions in pursuit of national interests.

This was strikingly revealed in the argument within the American policy elite during 2009, in which it emerged that Afghanistan was a conflict without any clear strategic imperative. General Stanley McChrystal, the US and NATO Commander in Afghanistan, stated that NATO was failing in Afghanistan due to a lack of resources, but crucially that it was in need of an entirely new strategy (McChrystal 2009) In turn, President Barack Obama announced that he would not decide whether to send more troops until he had ‘absolute clarity about what the strategy is going to be’ (Woodward 2009). Debates have taken place about what would constitute victory or success in Afghanistan, leading to US Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke to claim that ‘we’ll know it when we see it’ (Tiedemann 2009), a surprising comment on a campaign that had already lasted eight years and that President Obama had stressed was a war of necessity rather than choice (Haas 2009).

Arguments that Iraq and Afghanistan represented a return to ‘hard’ security policies and, for critics such as Clark and Short, the pursuit of ‘neo-imperial’ goals or geopolitical power plays are hard to maintain after consideration of the shifting justifications and lack of strategy
that characterized both interventions. One could go so far as to suggest that both of these interventions have the appearance of being policies in search of a justification rather than the assertion or pursuit of strategic national or power interests. The inflation of the nature of the threats from Afghanistan and Iraq and the rapid introduction of moral and ethical justifications were very similar to the justifications for the Kosovo intervention. Rather than interpreting the humanitarian rhetoric as a cunning gloss over blunt strategic interests, the dearth of strategy and shifting justifications suggests that the actions in Iraq and Afghanistan were certainly less clear-cut than critics such as Clark contend.

Drawing upon the previous arguments about ethical foreign policy, one can suggest a viable alternative explanation for these policies which can account for the ad-hoc and unstrategic nature of the interventions. They stemmed from the same dynamic that the Kosovo intervention did, one in which actions in the international sphere were more about constructing a sense of moral purpose and dynamism than actually resolving an external problem. In the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, unpleasant regimes were cast as sites of grand battles for the values of the West (for example women’s rights, democracy and so on) necessitating intervention and allowing the New Labour government to attempt to construct both a clear moral framework for action and a clear sense of Britain’s own values, through comparison with the regimes within Afghanistan and Iraq.

However, as with ethical foreign policy, both Iraq and Afghanistan have come in for a great deal of criticism. As we discussed at the beginning of the chapter, whilst New Labour has viewed the international sphere as a realm of opportunity and attempted to achieve a sense of moral clarity and purpose unavailable in the international sphere, foreign policy action guided by domestic considerations is also problematic because it is not actually about resolving the external problems. In the first place it is difficult to define what ‘victory’ or ‘success’ might actually be. British forces officially withdrew from Southern Iraq in the spring of 2009, the UK government claiming that their job was done, yet the area was certainly not ‘pacified’ and simply passed over to control of American troops (BBC 2009b). As the occupation dragged on, Afghanistan became increasingly unpopular, and with a rising number of British casualties, the government suggested that ultimately negotiations with the Taliban would be necessary (Swaine 2010). This clearly raised questions about the original purpose of the invasion if the end result were to be recognition of the
group that America and Britain ostensibly sought to vanquish in the first place.

Despite the ostensible gulf between New Labour’s first foray into foreign policy as represented by ethical foreign policy and the military interventions in the early 2000s, it is the contention of this chapter that these foreign policy initiatives stemmed from the same domestic dynamic in which New Labour has looked to action in the international sphere to resolve a domestic lack of clarity and purpose. In the following section we turn to New Labour’s National Security Strategy and argue that we can see the same dynamic at work here also. Although the NSS clearly signalled a different kind of approach from the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, it can be argued that a close consideration of the NSS reveals that it is difficult to understand in the way we might have traditionally understood a security strategy. Rather there are very specific features of the NSS which make sense if understood as part of the same dynamic that gave rise to ethical foreign policy and the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The National Security Strategy

In this final section we turn to the most recent foreign policy initiative launched by New Labour: the NSS. At first glance, there seems to be a vast gulf between a national security policy and the idea of an ethical foreign policy. The NSS appeared to be a continuity of the ‘hard’ security agenda represented by Iraq and Afghanistan, with an apparent focus on protecting and pursuing Britain’s national interests. In a sense this is understandable because national security policies have always played a small ‘c’ conservative role in foreign and defence policy thinking. However, they have equally been used to protect and promote a specific set of political and economic interests, in Wolfers’ terms the ‘acquired values’ of the national community (Wolfers 1952). For example, in his ground breaking work on Cold War US foreign and security policy, David Campbell analysed US Cold War security strategy documents and contends that their central concerns were with American identity and values, drawing upon the Communist Soviet Union as a way of counterposing its ‘alien’ and threatening system in order to articulate a capitalist, free American identity (Campbell 1998). ‘Speaking security’ according to this understanding has been a depoliticizing move. That is to say, invoking national security and the related concept of the national interest has been a way of taking things out of the realm of public contestation and debate by arguing that a threat
presents such an existential problem for a state that the normal rules of democratic debate on policy must be suspended (for example Gourevitch 2007). An example of this was Britain’s complex Cold War security architecture, hidden from public discussion, as Peter Hennessy illustrates in his book on Britain’s Cold War defence, *The Secret State* (Hennessy 2003). What was depoliticized was of course precisely the political and social contexts that gave rise to specific security policies, the ‘values’ of a given society, or to be more precise the underlying social, political and economic frameworks within which the security architecture was discussed and constructed, ideationally and materially.

That said, a consideration of some of the key aspects of the NSS reveals that it does not make sense if viewed in this way. Rather, the NSS can be explained by setting it against the way in which New Labour has viewed the international realm as a place in which a domestic lack of clarity and purpose could be compensated for – it shares the essential dynamic of the previous policies considered. Through the NSS, New Labour sought to gain a sense of what a British security strategy should be: it was both completed document but unfinished discourse – as New Labour’s foreign policy rhetoric was wont to be. The NSS aimed to provide the government with a clear strategy for foreign policy and to draw together various government departments to give them a sense of policy coherence.

Emerging from a process of planning and discussion initiated by Home Secretary John Reid in 2006, and involving a lengthy period of consultation with the influential UK think tanks Demos and the Institute for Public Policy Research, the NSS was the first ever published British national security strategy. The resulting NSS of 2008 was swiftly followed by a number of important associated documents, the NRR (Cabinet Office 2008b), the United Kingdom’s ‘Strategy for Countering International Terrorism’ (Home Office 2009) – known as CONTEST II – and the ‘National Security Update 2009’ (NSSa) (Cabinet Office 2009). Before it lost the general election New Labour had also been preparing a National Security Strategy II (NSS II) which would have developed themes from the NSS and was to have been released in 2010. The NSS and related documents provide a comprehensive review of what are argued to be the threats and security risks facing Britain and an explanation of how the government proposed to plan for, and respond to, these threats and security risks.

Several themes recur across the NSS and related documents, which cast light on the consistencies in New Labour’s foreign policy thinking over its time in office. Prime amongst them, in common with the 1998
SDR, was that the NSS stressed that the security environment was one of great fluidity, complexity and uncertainty. This rapidly evolving security landscape meant the traditional conception of national security as simply a focus on the protection of the vital interests of the state from military attacks by other states was regarded as anachronistic. National security, the government suggested, had to be conceived in broader terms that encompassed threats to citizens as well as the nation as a whole (Cabinet Office 2008a: 3). Therefore, rather than a specific focus on, for example, military threats to key interests of the state, the NSS framework followed an ‘all risks’ approach, entailing expansive monitoring of all potential threats, including threats to individuals as well as state structures. In place of the overwhelming threat of nuclear war that Britain faced during the Cold War years, the NSS security threats were constructed as heterogeneous, increasingly complex and unpredictable (Cabinet Office 2008a: 3). The ‘all risks’ approach was apparent in the long and detailed list of security threats presented within the NSS – including terrorism, nuclear weapons, organized crime, global instability and failed states, civil emergencies (which includes flu and other infectious disease pandemics, extreme weather events and so on) (Cabinet Office 2008a: 10–16). In addition, the NSS identified an extensive list of ‘drivers of insecurity’, which both connected the threats to each other and to Britain. These drivers included climate change, poverty and bad governance, competition for energy and increasing population and economic and technical challenges, for example increased ease of communication via the internet (Cabinet Office 2008a: 16–21).

In this supposedly new, ‘all risks’ security environment, the traditional division between the domestic and international spheres was no longer relevant. Echoing Blair’s Chicago Speech (Blair 1999a), Gordon Brown argued at the launch of the NSS:

Today, no country is in the old sense far away when the consequences of regional instability and terrorism – and then also climate change, poverty, mass population movements and even organised crime – reverberate quickly round the globe’ (Brown 2008b).

Second, the stated aim of the NSS and related documents was that the framework it provided would assist the government in both appreciating the nature of external threats and responding to them in a coherent and comprehensive way. It was this fluid and interconnected
security environment (compounded by the classically New Labour emphasis on interdependence between nation states and the technological drivers of ‘globalization’) that the government argued was driving the need for a new security strategy (Cabinet Office 2008a: 3). Already in 2006, when Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown identified the new security environment that was serving to drive a reconfiguration of government itself:

We used to think national security was about Home Office policy, international security about defence policy and foreign affairs. Now we find that national and international action for security is inextricably linked, and security issues dominate decisions in transport, energy, immigration and extend to social security and health, and of course in the Treasury ... (Brown 2006b: 12).

The NSS thus sought to provide a framework for the reconfiguration of government against the backdrop of this supposedly changing security environment:

This is the first time the Government has published a single, overarching strategy bringing together the objectives and plans of all departments, agencies and forces involved in protecting our national security. It is a significant step, and the latest in a series of reforms bringing greater focus and integration to our approach’ (Cabinet Office 2008a: 4).

There was an unprecedentedly open and public discussion about what threats and problems the government was monitoring along with extensive details on how it planned to counter them. One of the striking aspects of the NSS framework, and a continuity with the SDR, was indeed the open and public nature of the discussion of both the threats and the ways in which the government planned to deal with them. In the NSS framework potential threats and risks, and their origin, were discussed at great length, as was the way in which the Government was addressing them. The NSS framework also discussed in detail what citizens could do about the security threats and challenges the country was facing. Thus, a key stated aim of the NSS framework was to communicate to citizens what the government was doing and to bring citizens into a joint framework of understanding with government (Cabinet Office 2008a: 60) – it was a form of consensus building around the ‘all risks’ approach.
Of course the NSS and related documents did not disclose everything that the government was doing in the security arena. For example, the Home Office still does not publish details of ongoing investigations into suspected cases of terrorist plans. Nonetheless, the extraordinary discussion about everything down to the technical mechanisms by which the government was dealing with security threats was quite remarkable by the conventional standards of British government secrecy. As Hennessy has argued, during the height of the Cold War the British Government denied that the Secret Intelligence Service even existed, let alone discussed how it worked (Hennessy 2007: 8). The NRR offered a comparable amount of in-depth information about how the government was responding to threats and risks and what organizations and individuals could do to help themselves and the country. Whilst the example of supposed terrorist threats and secret service architecture was most apparent, the amount of discussion and detail about non-terrorist related threats was also striking. Once again, this is information that was previously not put up for public discussion (Cabinet Office 2008b: 3).

To sum up, the NSS contained several interlinked assertions – that the contemporary security environment is fluid, complex, and ever-expanding (the ‘all risks’ approach); that the NSS would serve to reconfigure government itself and finally, all this on the back of an unprecedented and open discussion about the nature of the threats facing the state. These elements mean that the NSS cannot readily be understood in terms of a security strategy as such. For example, consider the ‘all risks’ approach. If everything is a security threat, the logic goes, then nothing is. As Paul Cornish has pointed out, an essential part of any strategic security policy must be a hierarchy of the threats to be countered (Cornish 2008). On a purely practical level, it is irrational to try and comprehend or deal with pandemic flu, weapons of mass destruction and flooding as one continuum of threats or, indeed, to build resilience to all of the above (a concern of the NSS and NRR). The ‘all risks’ approach suggests an inability on the government’s part to differentiate or construct a security hierarchy. Everything is taken to be a potential threat because of New Labour’s incapacity to judge between threats, and this goes back to our critique of the essential absence of a clear political and economic programme and accompanying ideology on the government’s part. It meant that there was an absence of an underlying and coherent set of values that would have enabled the writers of the NSS and related documents to judge what it was that ‘we’, the Labour government and the British, wished to protect. We
can therefore see similarities between New Labour’s approach to NSS and its earlier forays into an ‘ethical foreign policy’ and Afghanistan and Iraq.

New Labour stated that the NSS would assist the government in developing a clear and coherent strategy and serve as a focus for reconfiguring government around a clear set of external objectives. Through the NSS New Labour sought to gain a sense of what a security strategy needed to be. Thus the NSS appears to be aimed much more at resolving problems within the government itself rather than the external security problems it was notionally guarding against. The unprecedented focus on making public government thoughts and plans, together with the lengthy consultation period, can also be understood as part of this process. Security as a form of policing a certain social order ultimately depoliticized the specific social and political order. Yet, conversely, through the public nature of the NSS framework, New Labour sought to portray to the public a sense of activism and dynamism.

The problem is that the international realm cannot in itself generate foreign policy. New Labour’s hopes that the NSS framework would help forge a clear and coherent strategy for the government were doomed to fail. Through the NSS and related documents the government assumed that a list of external problems and threats could impose some kind of internal structure or dynamic that could then be communicated to citizens. However, the external situation could not itself impose an internal programme on the government; this could only emerge from a domestic order that would establish what the threats were and which would rank them accordingly. Only from there could the necessary resources be allocated and legislation be designed to meet the most serious challenges first. A security strategy could not be created simply through listing everything that could possibly pose a threat or challenge to the country, because only a prior political and ideological commitment to a certain social and political order could give direction to the strategy. With no political core that provided order and hierarchy, the NSS became little more than a large and undifferentiated list of threats and potential security problems.

Conclusion

New Labour was a post-ideological political party with a political programme that sought to shift to the centre ground and away from the old class basis for (‘old’) Labour policies. Critical accounts of ethical
foreign policy suggested that its appeal to New Labour can be attributed to these domestic political changes. In this context foreign policy appeared attractive as it represented an opportunity for apparently decisive action and leadership that was difficult to generate in the domestic sphere. This chapter has argued that the dynamic identified in critical accounts of ethical foreign policy can be expanded to explain the course of New Labour foreign policy more comprehensively. The New Labour foreign policy initiatives of the early 2000s, specifically the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, appeared to be a return to a hard security agenda or a ruthless pursuit of national interests. However, a closer inspection of these policies reveals that they too were driven by a conceptual vacuum at the heart of New Labour.

Finally, the chapter considered the most recent foreign policy initiative of New Labour, the NSS. On the surface this appeared to be a continuation of the hard security agenda of Afghanistan and Iraq. However, closer consideration of the NSS reveals a security strategy that did not really constitute a security strategy as we might have traditionally thought of it. The NSS too can be understood as part of the continuing vacuum at the heart of the New Labour project. New Labour was marked by an absence of any clear sense of identity or values. In place of this or as compensation for it, the international sphere, in different ways, presented an attractive forum for New Labour as a place in which it was hoped a clear set of values or a clear foreign policy could be generated. This was represented by the idea, discussed in the introduction, of a ‘foreign policy led’ strategy. Initially this appeared as an opportunity; as has been stressed, the international realm appears to be a place in which a domestic absence can be compensated for. However, the problem for New Labour was that foreign policy and national security cannot ultimately be constructed upon the basis of what is ‘out there’. Of course, what is ‘out there’ must be engaged with, but it is only a coherent domestic political project that can actually guide foreign policy. Without this, foreign policy and security policy become a series of arbitrary moves, liable to change and hard to defend. Thus the idea of a ‘foreign policy led’ strategy is fundamentally misguided and demonstrates a dearth of clear strategic thinking at the heart of New Labour.
A Difficult Relationship: Britain’s ‘Doctrine of International Community’ and America’s ‘War on Terror’

Jason Ralph

Introduction

In the UK, the sense of hope and expectation that greeted the Barack Obama presidency was testament to the continuing international appeal of the ‘American dream’. By being the first black African-American to enter the White House, Obama immediately renewed faith in those values that most UK citizens hold dear. American popular culture may have a tendency to portray the British people as being sore about losing their Empire (think of Lord Marbury in The West Wing) and of being jealous that the former colonies have achieved superpower status. Yet, the identity and the role that the Empire created for the British as a nation is more than a generation removed from the concerns of most people in the UK today, even if Empire-as-memory continues to exert an influence on the establishment and popular consciousness (see the introduction to this collection). Many continue to embrace US leadership not simply because it is believed to be necessary to secure British national interests or because ‘playing Greece to America’s Rome’ enables the UK to ‘punch above its weight’ on the world stage while remaining aloof from Europe. Rather, the appeal of American leadership for many in the UK is based on ideas about America itself and the values it notionally represents. The principle that all men are created equal, together with the idea that government can guarantee and reflect that principle while also facilitating the pursuit of happiness through the rule of law, is as much a British aspiration as it is an American dream. When the US fails to live up to these founding principles the sense of disappointment is felt beyond America’s borders; and when, with the election of the first black African-American President, the US made another step toward
perfecting its Union, it generated renewed hope that someday the UK will be in a position to imitate America’s example (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2009).

One of the most important questions confronting British foreign policy-makers past and present is: what should the UK do when US foreign policy fails to uphold international law? This is, in part, why the Iraq War was so controversial. In addition to a *casus belli* based on faulty intelligence and then poor post-war planning, critics argue the invasion was illegal (Sands 2005). This was a particular disappointment for supporters of New Labour because it had seemingly committed the UK to a foreign policy guided by an international community where international law played a significant if not determining role. Tony Blair, of course, rejects the argument that the decision to invade Iraq was a betrayal of that commitment. He insists that the UK supported the invasion because it was ‘the right thing to do’ despite the lack of support at the United Nations Security Council (Blair 2010a: 129). It is argued in the first part of this chapter, however, that his reasoning rests uneasily on a strained legal argument and an unconvincing claim to legitimacy. More to the point, it is difficult to see how the seemingly unconditional commitment to follow the US lead was ever in the British national interest. This is particularly the case when viewed with the benefit of hindsight. British support for a war that Obama opposed took on a whole new meaning after November 2008. The point being made in this chapter is that America is a pluralistic society, often with very different views on how the US should conduct itself in international affairs. Disagreeing with the White House should not therefore be seen as, or allowed to be portrayed as, anti-Americanism. In fact, what makes the relationship special is the way it has roots beyond the White House and that it can survive serious disagreements between its political classes. As the first half of the chapter demonstrates, opposition to illegal American action may not be as costly to the ‘special relationship’ as it may first appear.

There were occasions when it seemed as if foreign policy-makers during the Gordon Brown premiership from June 2007 had learned this lesson. As the second part of the chapter demonstrates, Foreign Secretary David Miliband was not shy in calling the ‘war on terror’ ‘mistaken and misleading’. Yet David Miliband also infuriated human rights groups when he argued that the release of documents relating to the alleged abuse of Binyam Mohamed would damage transatlantic relations. What Miliband meant, of course, was that it would damage relations with certain sections of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).
He could have reached a different conclusion. The release of the documents in question, which happened following court rulings on both sides of the Atlantic, could be seen as enhancing the ‘special relationship’ given the fact that Americans were advocating investigations into CIA interrogation activities (Human Rights Watch 2010). The point again is clear: disagreeing with the US government is not, and should not, be seen as anti-Americanism. In this respect, Brown’s attempt during the 2010 election campaign to cast a Liberal Democrat foreign policy as anti-American was itself mistaken and misleading. The question that progressives committed to a concept of good international citizenship should now be asking is whether the Liberal Democrat willingness to oppose irresponsible US action will be maintained now the party is in government, or whether it will have to bow to the traditionally Atlanticist Conservative Party. The purpose of this chapter is to provide some context to that question by outlining what it means to act as a ‘good citizen’ of international society and why both Tony Blair and David Miliband betrayed that vision with the decision to go to war against Iraq, as well as their reluctance to fully disclose evidence of human rights abuse.

The ‘doctrine of international community’ and the invasion of Iraq

The concept of community, and the balance between a citizen’s rights and responsibilities that it demands, drove the New Labour project as articulated by Blair (1996). In contrast to the extremes of Thatcherite individualism and socialist communitarianism the so-called ‘third way’ envisioned a society whose members have rights and responsibilities. There were academics in the late 1990s (Wheeler and Dunne 1998) who saw the connection between this new emphasis on community and the criteria for good international citizenship articulated most obviously by theorists of the English School of International Relations which took seriously the idea of international community. This tradition suggests that states do not need to sacrifice vital national interests out of fidelity to the processes, norms and rules of international society; however, membership of the international community does require that they put the common interest ahead of minimal national advantage (Linklater 1992). This general idea entered British foreign policy discourse as the ‘ethical dimension’ and it was during the Kosovo intervention of 1999 that Blair developed his ‘new doctrine of international community’. For Blair, Operation Allied Force was an example of states
responding to humanitarian needs where a narrow conception of the national interest might have dictated otherwise. ‘We cannot let the evil of ethnic cleansing stand. We must not rest until it is reversed’, Blair told his audience in Chicago in April that year. In a globalizing world, he went on, foreign policy had to be ‘guided by a more subtle blend of mutual and self-interest and moral purpose in defending the values we cherish.’ He insisted that ‘in the end values and interests merge. If we can establish and spread the values of liberty, the rule of law, human rights and an open society, then that is in our interests too. The spread of our values makes us safer’ (Blair 1999a).

There were two problems with Blair’s conceptualization of the good state’s responsibility to international community and like the protagonist in a Shakespearean tragedy Blair seemed unaware of how these flaws could lead inexorably to his downfall. The first concerned the match between political ends and military capabilities. Like NATO’s Kosovo operation, which sought to achieve its objectives by airpower alone (Booth 2001), the objective of the Iraq War seemed beyond the military that was deployed. This was not simply a question of poorly equipped soldiers, appalling though that was; it was caused by the apparent reliance on the US to get the post-war planning right. Of course, Washington knew it had to secure a leaderless Iraq and protect the civilian population in a way that gave reconstruction efforts a fair chance of success. It is clear however that they underestimated the difficulty of such a task and did not commit enough forces on the ground to win the peace. The historical evidence suggests that concerns were expressed to this effect at a time early enough to change course (Cross 2009). Failure to do so led to a power vacuum that was occupied by the various violent factions that made reconstruction and democracy promotion impossible for several bloody years. To go to war under these circumstances was a betrayal of the original doctrine of international community as set by Blair in his Chicago speech (Blair 1999a).

Indeed, Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman, who helped author Blair’s speech (Freedman 2010; Daddow 2009), implied this much in his questioning of Sir David Manning at the Iraq Inquiry. Freedman had set out five conditions for the legitimate use of force. These were: are we sure of our case? Have we exhausted all options? Is the proposed action workable? Are we committed to the region for the long term? Are national interests involved? In response to Freedman, Manning stated that on Iraq the Prime Minister had made no attempt to systematically apply these questions to the decision-making before the invasion.
Freedman’s response was telling: ‘Perhaps it is a shame he didn’t’ (Manning 2010: 70).

The second flaw in Blair’s conceptualization of the good state acting on behalf of international community has less to do with the question of how to deploy military force. It deals instead with the question of who exactly speaks for the international community. Had Blair applied Freedman’s five tests it is still not certain that he would have reached appropriate conclusions. This is because, as Andrew Linklater (2000) has pointed out, Blair’s doctrine should have included a sixth test: are others sure of the case for war, certain that peaceful options have been exhausted and so on. The ‘we’ in Freedman’s list of questions, in other words, should not have been interpreted to mean simply the transatlantic alliance, the British government, the Cabinet or even Blair himself. The claim to be acting on behalf of the international community could only be grounded on the answers to Freedman’s questions given by global institutions such as the UN Security Council. Moreover, Freedman has hinted that Blair purposely wanted to avoid the Foreign Office inserting a sixth test so that he would not be constrained during Kosovo and into the future (Daddow 2009: 556). In that sense, Blair’s decision to go to war in Iraq without the all important ‘second resolution’ suggests that he failed to make the case at the Security Council. This makes him vulnerable to the accusation that he and George W. Bush were guilty of the crime of aggression. This is usually understood in the post-1945 international legal context to mean the invasion of another state in non-exceptional circumstances; that is, a war that is not in self-defence, is not a humanitarian intervention or does not have Security Council backing. Blair, though, believed the Iraq War had been authorized by the Security Council and that it was lawful and consistent with the doctrine of international community. This stands on an interpretation of Resolution 1441, which had been passed by the Security Council in November 2002. Yet that was a moot point even at the time. Blair’s inability to make the case for war, as evidenced by the balance of votes in March 2003, should have altered his view that America was acting in the interests of international society. The fact that he did not change his view was a consequence of an incorrect lesson drawn from Kosovo.

The term ‘Kosovo precedent’ usually refers to the claim that the Iraq War could have been legitimised as a humanitarian intervention. It did not matter in this regard that the Security Council had not authorized military force because states may use force unilaterally to prevent massive human rights abuses. There is no denying that Saddam
Hussein’s regime was brutal and no one should regret its demise. But, human rights groups generally opposed the Iraq War and on no occasion did British government lawyers accept that the human rights situation in Iraq was so grave that it could authorize military intervention (Roth 2004; Goldsmith 2010: 17–18). Rather, the legal defence of the Kosovo campaign had a different impact on British decision-making immediately prior to the invasion of Iraq. The UK had argued in 1999–2000 that the lack of a Security Council resolution explicitly authorizing NATO’s use of force in the Balkans was insignificant. This was because the use of force had been ‘implied’ in previous resolutions and any attempt to make that authority explicit would have been vetoed by Russia. Of course, it was Moscow’s right as a permanent member of the Security Council to veto a proposed resolution. Yet the British argument was that Russia’s opposition to NATO’s humanitarianism was unreasonable. It was not just Blair who argued this. Those who would later argue that the Iraq campaign was unlawful and illegitimate defended the Kosovo campaign on these grounds. For instance, Robin Cook argued shortly after NATO’s action that the UK

... would act on the principle that a UN member state should not be able to plead its sovereign rights to shield conduct which is inconsistent with its obligations as a member of the UN ... . Just such circumstances arose in Kosovo. Regrettably, the threat of the veto by two of the Permanent Members made Security Council action impossible despite majority support for our cause. But under these exceptional circumstances, we were still justified, in every respect, in intervening as we did (Cook 2000b, emphasis added).

The italicized words are crucial. In 1999 Cook had helped to convince a majority of states on the Security Council that military action was necessary. This was revealed when that majority voted against the proposed Russian resolution condemning NATO’s actions. According to Sir Adam Roberts (1999), this vote gave the UK and NATO ‘at least a crumb of legal comfort’. The ‘Kosovo precedent’ in this instance refers therefore to the idea that states can be in varying degrees of compliance with international law when they claim to have a UN mandate. The ideal position is to have a resolution explicitly authorizing the use of force. Lacking that, however, states can still claim to be acting on behalf of the international community if they command the support of a majority on the Security Council.
This understanding of what it means to be a good state was invoked on various occasions in the lead up to the Iraq War. For example, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw told Vice-President Dick Cheney in January 2003 that the UK preferred a second resolution but ‘[w]e would be OK if we tried and failed (à la Kosovo)’ (quoted in Wood 2003). To be certain, Foreign Office lawyers had warned the Straw that ‘the “Kosovo model” is no authority for a proposition that action would be legally justified if authority from the Security Council had been sought but without success’ (Wood 2002). They held fast to the argument that a vetoed resolution had absolutely no legal standing (Wood 2010). Yet it is clear that the Kosovo model did inform government strategy. The idea of an ‘unreasonable veto’ was on the Prime Minister’s mind before French President Jacques Chirac said he would veto any resolution authorizing force. More than a month before Chirac’s statement, Blair refused to rule out going to war without a second resolution:

Supposing in circumstances where there was a clear breach of Resolution 1441 and everyone else wished to take action, one put down a veto. In those circumstances it would be unreasonable. Then it would be wrong because otherwise you couldn’t uphold the UN. Because you’d have passed your resolution and then you’d have failed to act on it (BBC 2003).

In fact, senior policy-makers considered invoking the idea of an ‘unreasonable veto’ as far back in the diplomatic process as 12 November 2002. The UK Attorney General scotched the argument that a resolution could be adopted even after a veto. The fact, however, that this was in a telephone conversation with Jack Straw again indicates the influence Kosovo was having on the political and diplomatic strategy (Brummell 2002). Key policy-makers in New Labour, in other words, held the view that the UK could support the US invasion of Iraq without explicit Security Council authorization and believed that the Kosovo precedent enabled them to square this support with the doctrine of international community.

The problem for these policy-makers was that ‘the Kosovo model’ simply did not apply to the situation at the Security Council in March 2003. This was illustrated powerfully by the actions of Robin Cook. As noted, he had been prepared to defend the Kosovo campaign without explicit Security Council authorization. Yet on Iraq he resigned his position in government because the UK was considering going to war without Security Council backing. The difference for Cook was that the
French were not being unreasonable and the evidence for this was the distribution of votes at the UN:

It is not France alone that wants more time for inspections. Germany wants more time for inspection; Russia wants more time for inspection; indeed, at no time have we signed up even the minimum necessary to carry a second resolution. We delude ourselves if we think that the degree of international hostility is all the result of President Chirac. The reality is that Britain is being asked to embark on a war without agreement in any of the international bodies of which we are a leading partner – not NATO, not the European Union and, now, not the Security Council (Cook 2003a).

Cook’s analysis is supported by the fact that the UK delegation in New York was not willing to put the resolution to the vote. It knew it did not have the votes to expose France as unreasonable (Greenstock 2010: 71). Any vote would have revealed that the US and the UK were in a minority position and acting against international opinion. Of course, the UK Attorney General provided a legal justification for military action based on an interpretation of Resolution 1441. This hung on what that resolution meant when it said the Security Council would convene immediately upon receipt of a report from the weapons inspector, ‘in order to consider the situation and the need for full compliance with all the relevant Council resolutions’ (UN 2002, emphasis added). The fact that the Security Council had convened and considered what to do, was, from the Attorney General’s perspective, enough to authorize the ‘serious consequences’ that 1441 had threatened. For the Foreign Office lawyers, however, this was a strained legal argument contrary to international law (Wood 2010). The Security Council not only had to meet, it had to at least vote on another resolution. The fact that it did not do this was for them a sign of the invasion’s illegality. The more significant point can however be made on the back of a textual analysis of 1441. The British government tried to convince others of the case for war by going back to the Security Council because it was necessary for the good state to get majority support if not a resolution. The fact that it went to war having failed so obviously to do this suggests the UK’s actions were illegitimate by its own standards.

There is, however, one final way the UK decision could have been squared with the doctrine of international community. As noted, the good international citizen need not risk its vital interests for the sake of international law (Linklater 1992). It could be argued that the reason
the UK had to fight alongside the US was because its national security was threatened either by Saddam’s alleged possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) or by the break with the Bush administration that would inevitably follow. Neither scenario was credible. The Security Council was not convinced by the argument that Saddam had WMD, and even if one accepts that Blair was convinced that Iraqi WMD threatened UK security, the Attorney General had ruled out using force on the grounds of pre-emptive self-defence on more than one occasion (Goldsmith 2002 and 2010). As for the costs to the ‘special relationship’, Blair hinted that leaving America’s side on the eve of the invasion would have been costly. ‘[Y]ou can distance yourself from America, if you want to’, he told the Iraq Inquiry (Blair 2010a), ‘but you will find it is a long way back’. It was not long after the war, however, that Bush’s policy became deeply unpopular in the US and retrospective accounts of the pre-war diplomacy began to recast perceptions of the good ally. Consider for instance the following statement from Anne-Marie Slaughter (2009), which is added to in the squared brackets for effect:

Woodrow Wilson believed in what he called ‘common counsel.’ … The idea was that people can come together and deliberate collectively, and they will produce a better outcome. It wasn’t about including everybody just for the sake of inclusion; it was a genuine belief that you would get better outcomes. … If you apply that principle internationally, it argues that we should work through international institutions, not just because that’s the law or because we think other countries will like us more if we do, although the legitimacy part is important, but because we will actually get better outcomes. We would have gotten a better outcome in Iraq if we had really listened to other countries in the United Nations [and not the UK]. There were many countries, many of them our allies [apart from the UK], telling us that there were not weapons of mass destruction, or at least that we should look much harder before we decided that there were. In fact, if you go back and look at the debates, it is striking just how accurate many of the opponents from other countries were [and how wrong the UK was].

The significance of this is magnified by the fact that Slaughter made this statement as she was about to enter the State Department as Director of the Policy Planning Staff. The point is that fidelity to international law and organization may have seemed costly while the Bush
Administration was in office. But, that reflected an extremely narrow conception of the British national interest and the American political elite, as well as an inability to consider the changeable character of Washington politics. There may be occasions when vital national interests and fidelity to international law and organization clash. That was not the case in March 2003. The UK could have withdrawn from the planned invasion of Iraq without harming its long term national interest. The argument here is that this would also have been in line with a doctrine of international community properly conceived. The only way to square the decision to invade with a respect for international community is to suggest that it is the US and UK that decides what is in that community’s best interest. That is fundamentally undemocratic and the decision to go to war on that basis would ultimately be a betrayal of the ideal.

**Torture and the intelligence-sharing relationship**

The Iraq war continued to divide the Labour Party in the post-Blair era, while Gordon Brown had barely left Downing Street before the issue was raised by those seeking to replace him as party leader. Ed Balls and Ed Miliband had the advantage of being outside Parliament at the time MPs voted for war and it would not be unreasonable to suggest their position may have changed had circumstances been different. Yet it was clear that in 2010 they saw their reservations about the war to be to their political advantage. Ed Miliband argued the UK had gone to war without fully exploring other options and Balls simply described the invasion as a ‘mistake’ (Stratton 2010; Riddell and Porter 2010). Brown’s Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, on the other hand, defended his vote for the war and urged the party to move on (Batty 2010). The dangers in David Miliband’s position were twofold. Firstly, the party and country could not properly ‘move on’ all the time the Iraq Inquiry was ongoing. It was surprising in this respect that he did not make use of the opportunity of being in opposition to at least pause and wait for the Inquiry’s findings. The second danger was that David Miliband’s vote on the Iraq War and some of his actions as Foreign Secretary suggested that he, like Blair, valued the ‘special relationship’ even when it clashed with the principles of good international citizenship. As Foreign Secretary in the Brown government, Miliband did, along with International Development Secretary Douglas Alexander, deliver speeches that distanced the UK from the more hardline aspects of US counter-terrorist policy (Miliband 2009d; Alexander 2007). Yet
on the question of how much British intelligence knew of the CIA torture programme Miliband adopted a position that was problematic for a state supposedly committed to observing and enforcing the rules and norms of international society. This was illustrated by the case of Binyam Mohamed.

Mohamed is an Ethiopian national who holds resident status in the UK. He was arrested at Karachi airport on 10 April 2002 for attempting to travel back to the UK on a false passport. After being interrogated by Pakistani and British officials he was handed over to the US who transferred him to Rabat, Morocco on 21 July. While he was there he is said to have endured further inhuman and degrading treatment for four months. He was then transferred to Guantanamo Bay via Afghanistan where he remained until his release without charge in February 2009 (Norton-Taylor 2009a). While he was at Guantanamo, Mohamed was facing a trial by military commission and the prospect of the death penalty for his alleged involvement in terrorist activities. His lawyers argued that the British government would be able to prove that Mohamed had been tortured and that the evidence against him was therefore inadmissible. They insisted that the British government release what they knew about Mohamed’s interrogation. Through 2008 and 2009 the Foreign Secretary was able to persuade the Courts that the ‘control principle’ should be respected. This stated that the intelligence provided by one state to another should never be disclosed. Publishing such information, Miliband argued, would:

... introduce a new, and in the mind of our US partners, uncertain dimension into a set of practices which rely on certainty. The inhibition which this would place on the sharing of information would in my judgment be profound. We would have the same concerns. There is also a risk of wider repercussions to the international relations of the UK more generally and to liaison relationships with third parties (Mohamed v. FCO 2010: para. 75).

The importance of good intelligence to fighting terrorism is beyond doubt. However, three questions were being asked of the Foreign Secretary. Firstly, was he willing to overlook torture for the sake of the US-UK intelligence relationship? Secondly, was his judgement on the costs to the national interest a sound one? And thirdly, how much credibility did he give to the evidence gleaned from torture?

These legal proceedings took place against the background of an American debate on whether the CIA interrogators, and the lawyers
and politicians that authorized their actions, should be prosecuted for violations of laws prohibiting torture. Of course, conservative opinion dismissed the idea as imprudent and unjust. For instance, former Vice-President Cheney (2009) defied convention to speak out against those advocating prosecutions. Cheney was not exactly a disinterested observer given the allegations that his office was involved in pushing the CIA and the Department of Justice (DoJ) to adopt and authorize what became known as ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’. Yet his argument against prosecutions was also a typical defence of Machiavellian virtues, which hold that even the most shocking means can be justified in pursuit of the national interest. The liberal commitment to the absolute prohibition on all aggressive interrogation techniques was, he argued, ‘recklessness cloaked in righteousness’; and to prosecute those who had sacrificed their own moral scruples to do what was necessary in the immediate post-9/11 period would be ‘a serious injustice’. From the other side of the political spectrum, the injustice lay in not prosecuting those guilty of conspiring to commit acts that were prohibited ‘under all circumstances’ (Human Rights Watch 2010). President Obama may have issued an executive order banning unlawful practices but there were, liberals argued, costs to his preferred stance, which was to move on and not start divisive prosecutions. A failure to lay blame for the past rendered the rule of law subject to the rule of the executive office, which was exactly what lawyers for the Bush administration had claimed (Crocker 2009). From this perspective, Obama had done nothing to stop the next administration reversing course again and reinstating the Bush administration positions. The question of whether the US could use torture, in other words, would become a matter of political judgement and partisan politics.

It is true that President Obama did not completely rule out accountability for past crimes in this area. The decision was ultimately Eric Holder’s, the US Attorney General, and the President stressed that there should be prosecutions where obvious violations of the law had taken place. The problem was that it was not entirely clear where responsibility lay for the use of torture. The CIA had sought advice on the legality of enhanced techniques, the Bush administration had authorized the techniques contingent on them being lawful, and the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) had stated they were lawful. The OLC may have been wrong but a wrong interpretation of the law does not necessarily equate to conspiracy to violate it. Then again, the OLC may have been under so much pressure from the CIA and the politicians to intentionally misinterpret the law that the whole scenario amounted
to conspiracy. Unwilling to investigate this possibility, Holder limited investigations to those cases where interrogations had been conducted using techniques not discussed in the OLC memos. The DoJ had already appointed a special prosecutor, John Durham, to investigate the destruction of videotapes that allegedly showed the CIA using enhanced interrogation techniques prior to the OLC approval in August 2002. In July 2009, his remit was extended to investigate whether criminal prosecutions could be bought against CIA interrogators for acts not authorized in the OLC memos. On this basis waterboarding would not be prosecuted but placing a drill to a suspect’s head would (Johnson, C. 2009).

The point here is not to determine whether prosecutions were necessary in these cases. The point instead is that David Miliband’s decision to protect the intelligence sharing relationship by preventing the release of certain documents came at a moment when there were many in the US arguing for an open and proper accounting of CIA practices. Indeed, the Obama administration may have frustrated liberals by invoking the state secrets doctrine in the Mohamed case, but it had also released in April 2009 other OLC documents hoping that the court of public opinion would placate the calls for criminal accountability. It might also be suggested that the Obama administration was merely postponing criminal prosecutions to its second term, after, that is, it had achieved the political priorities of economic recovery and healthcare reform. Against this background, David Miliband’s stance on the release of national security documents looks conservative. To be certain, British intelligence had received a letter from the CIA in late April 2009 warning that public disclosure of the information in question ‘could be expected to cause serious damage to the [UK’s] national security’, a message that was reinforced when David Miliband met Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on May 12 2009 (Mohamed v. FCO 2010: paras 91–102). There is no doubting that in this respect the Foreign Secretary was in a difficult position. What was particularly worrying from a progressive point of view, however, was Miliband’s argument that the control principle was ‘inviolable’ and that governments should protect it ‘at all costs’ (Mohamed v. FCO 2010: para. 45; Slack and Groves 2010). This sounds more like the Realist view of Vice President Cheney because it suggests that national security can justify a resort to any and all means, and also because it highlights an area of executive activity that is not governed by laws that are applied by Courts.

The political scientist and foreign policy expert Morton Halperin, who had served in various American administrations, offered the Court
of Appeals an interesting perspective that might cause us to see David Miliband’s stance in a different light. He said that:

... while the US government would expect the UK government to resist disclosure of classified information ... a respect for the rule of law would prevent the US government from taking umbrage at a reasoned decision by a UK court finding that public interest demands disclosure of information regarding [Mr Mohamed] (cited in Mohamed v. FCO 2010: para. 93).

In this respect, David Miliband may have been simply playing the role of the politician while he fully expected the Court to do the right thing. Yet this is not the impression Lord Neuberger took. Summarizing his judgement that the intelligence should be published he wrote that he had:

... been unable to eradicate the impression that we are being invited to accept that once the Foreign Secretary has made his judgment of all the relevant considerations, including the interests of justice, and notwithstanding that in law the control principle is not absolute, so far as the court is concerned, as a matter of practical reality, that should be that. However although in the context of public safety it is axiomatic that his views are entitled to the utmost respect, they cannot command the unquestioning acquiescence of the court (Mohamed v. FCO 2010: para. 46, emphasis added).

This formulation is interesting because it could very well epitomize the flaw in New Labour’s approach to Iraq. As noted above, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the Security Council had been invited to accept that once the Prime Minister had made his judgment ‘that should be that’. If Miliband sincerely believed that the control principle was absolute, that the intelligence sharing relationship can take priority over a commitment to preventing torture and that the executive branch alone should decide when that is the case, then he, like Blair, is guilty of trading the rule of law for a misconstrued perception of national security. The parallels do not end there. Just as Blair’s approach to Iraq was uncovered by the changeable winds of Washington politics, so David Miliband’s stance was soon exposed as being on the wrong side of events. In December 2009, while he was still trying to prevent publication of the evidence, a US District Court ruled that Binyam Mohamed’s claims of mistreatment were credible (Mohammed
v. Obama 2009). This judgement demonstrated that Americans did not in fact consider intelligence sharing norms to be inviolable, something the British Court of Appeals noted in February 2010 when it ordered the disclosure of the document revealing what was known about Mohamed’s treatment (Mohamed v. FCO 2010). The new information showed that British intelligence had indeed cooperated with the interrogation knowing that it ‘could readily be contended to be at the very least cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment by the United States authorities’ (Norton-Taylor 2010).

Delivering the Court’s judgement, Lord Neuberger stated that he was ‘acutely conscious’ of the arguments advanced by the Foreign Secretary. He found, however, that there was no public interest for suppressing the information any longer. ‘Publication of the redacted paragraphs’ he stated ‘would not reveal information which would be of interest to a terrorist or criminal or provide any potential material of value to a terrorist or a criminal’ (Mohamed v. FCO 2010: para. 52). On the supposed ‘threat’ to UK national security Lord May’s summary of early rulings best articulates the issue. The redacted paragraphs, he noted, contained information that related to interrogation techniques carried out by officials of the US which were no different from those President Obama had put in the public domain in April 2009. The President had stated that the release of those documents was required by the rule of law. It was ‘impossible therefore to believe that he would take action against the [UK], the [US’s] closest ally, when the release of similar information is required to uphold the rule of law in the UK’ (Mohamed v. FCO 2010: para. 108). In short, the Court concluded that because ‘the public interest in making the paragraphs public is overwhelming, and the risk to national security not a serious one’ the government should release the evidence it was suppressing (Mohamed v. FCO 2010: para. 111).

Conclusion: Is good international citizenship ConDemned?

One does not have to be a liberal to oppose the use of torture. Many Realists, not least those in the FBI and State Department, disagreed with the Bush administration and concluded that the use of torture is contrary to the national interest because it produces bad intelligence (Armitage 2008; Soufan 2009). This is an issue on which a commitment to values (the anti-torture norm) and interests (good intelligence) do not clash. President Obama arguably articulates this better than anyone. In his insistence that values and interests merge he echoes the
exact same principles as Blair did in his 1999 Chicago speech (Obama 2009a; Obama 2009b; Obama 2009c). One might have expected, therefore, that a Blairite such as David Miliband would have held Obama to his word by *leading* the calls for a new approach to counter-terrorism, starting with the release of information that could help the accountability process. However, like Blair, David Miliband’s approach was seemingly corrupted by a narrow view of the ‘special relationship’, one that emphasized the ties between a community of national security and intelligence elites with very different views on the relationship between power and principle. What made David Miliband’s stance doubly disappointing is that it was made, as the Appeals Court pointed out, at a time when a new US administration had decreased the risk of acting on principle. The responsibilities of office frequently demand a compromise of principles but the fact that David Miliband was happy to play the Realist when the opportunity to be a Liberal presented itself is significant. If the Labour Party wishes to recover the mantle of liberal internationalism it would do well to stress this lesson to all the prospective party leaders.

Liberal internationalists have been disappointed by New Labour for some time and they have, certainly since 2003, looked to the Liberal Democrats to represent them in Parliament. In 2010, this party entered coalition government with the Conservatives – traditionally the most Atlanticist of all the main parties. It is appropriate to ask whether the coalition is destined to repeat New Labour’s mistakes. It is too early to make any serious assessment, but the first few months of the ConDem government do suggest that lessons have been learned. The coalition government has, it appears, responded to the reasonable demand that the UK qualifies its support for US foreign policy. Steering clear of the much worn ‘poodle’ metaphor, for instance, David Cameron has continued to voice his pre-election opinion that the UK had a solid but not ‘slavish’ relationship with the US (Brogan 2006; McGreal 2010). This was reflected also in the announcement of an investigation into the practices that the former Foreign Secretary had tried to cover up (Wintour et al. 2010). Not only that, but the commitment to compensate individuals where British intelligence had been complicit in their torture, was an unexpected attempt to restore the British image as a good international citizen committed to the anti-torture norm. The prospects, therefore, are encouraging. The doctrine of international community may have been damaged by its authors in New Labour but that does not mean it cannot properly inform British foreign policy.
New Labour and Nuclear Weapons

David Allen

Introduction

Tony Blair and Gordon Brown were first elected to the UK parliament in 1983 as members of a Labour Party whose manifesto called for Polaris to be included in disarmament negotiations to bring about a non-nuclear defence policy for the UK within the lifetime of the 1983 parliament. They were both re-elected in 1987 supporting a manifesto which called for the decommissioning of Polaris and the cancellation of Trident. In 1982, standing for Labour in the Beaconsfield by-election, Tony Blair’s campaigners issued leaflets stating that Labour was ‘the only political party pledged to end the nuclear madness’ and in 1984, Gordon Brown speaking in a Commons debate called the Trident programme ‘unacceptably expensive, economically wasteful and militarily unsound’ (Webster 2006). Of course, as Peter Mandelson argues in his own recent memoirs, Labour’s unilateralist stance was one of the core targets for the founders of New Labour as they sought to make the party electable once more. Nuclear disarmament had been ‘part of the glue that held Old Labour together’ (Mandelson 2010: 75); although, Mandelson recalls that his own family never actually marched from Aldermaston to London, instead taking a picnic to watch others do so. Those who sought to reform Labour saw support for unilateral disarmament, which Mandelson described as ‘one of our most entrenched and electorally perverse policies’ (Mandelson 2010: 117), as a substantial barrier to Labour’s return to office. When Neil Kinnock, as Labour leader, visited Washington just before the 1987 election (having been snubbed by President Reagan during a visit in 1986), he was publicly dressed down by the same President for his continuing support for unilateral nuclear disarmament despite his efforts to demonstrate that the
savings to be made by abandoning nuclear weapons would be diverted towards a strengthening of the UK’s conventional forces – an argument that would resurface before and after the 2010 UK general election as the parlous state of the UK’s public finances became clear.

After the humiliation of the 1987 election defeat and when even the Soviet leadership demonstrated disinterest in Labour’s commitment to unilateral disarmament, where previously it had intimated that it would match Polaris decommissioning with like for like cuts in its own missile capability, it became one of the few Old Labour policies that Kinnock was able to dispense with before the 1992 election. This required Kinnock himself to change his mind about unilateral nuclear disarmament in favour of multilateral negotiations, assisted by the improving international situation as the cold war came to an end, but primarily driven by a determination to achieve electoral success (Scott 2006: 697–8).

By the time that Tony Blair’s New Labour party finally regained power in 1997, with a manifesto commitment to retain Trident, the outgoing Conservative government had already begun the process of making a small reduction in the UK’s nuclear delivery capability and Blair was able to announce the end of the RAF’s mission to deliver nuclear weapons from land-based bombers soon after taking office. Blair therefore became Prime Minister of a United Kingdom that was a declared nuclear weapon state and a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. After the decision to terminate the RAF nuclear mission, the British nuclear deterrent remained solely in the hands of the Royal Navy. It consisted of American-designed, British-assembled nuclear warheads that would be delivered on American-built and leased Trident intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). These were deployed on and would be launched from four British designed and built nuclear-powered ballistic missile firing Resolution class submarines (SSBNs) (Clarke 2004: 50–4).

Rawnsley (2010: 174) reports that Blair’s childhood pacifism and his early support for unilateralism and membership of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) had long gone by the time that he came to power but that he nevertheless had his ‘eyes opened’ and went ‘rather quiet’ at one of his first briefings on becoming Prime Minister. It was on the UK deterrent described above and it came from Charles Guthrie, the Chief of the Defence Staff.

The Trident renewal decision

The Labour government held a defence review immediately after it came to power in 1997 (McInnes 1998) but as Scott (2006: 699) points
out, the case for maintaining and eventually replacing Britain’s nuclear capability was not considered at all nor did the final report in 1998 (MoD 1998) question the ongoing deployment of Trident missiles. The decision to replace the Polaris missile and the submarines that carried it with the Trident missile and new submarines had been taken by Mrs Thatcher in 1980 after much of the groundwork, including on an upgrade of the warheads, had been undertaken by the Callaghan government. The first Trident submarine had been commissioned in 1994 and the fourth and final boat was commissioned in 1999. The 1998 Review did suggest a number of parallel policies that could be made to meet the pledge by the nuclear weapons states that have signed the NPT that they will pursue in good faith the ultimate objective of nuclear disarmament. For the United Kingdom it was argued that a reduction in warhead numbers and the elimination of free fall air launched nuclear bombs would indicate compliance with this objective and the Blair government did both of these things as well as reducing the alert status of the submarines, ‘detargeting’ the Trident missiles and reducing their explosive yield but not their destructive capability as, in comparison to Polaris, the Trident missiles were fitted with multiple independently targeted warheads (Scott 2006: 699).

The 1998 defence review was meant to be foreign policy-led and its clear assumption was that Britain’s significant role in the post-Cold War international system would be enhanced by the continued possession of nuclear weapons, which would also provide security against the uncertainties of that post-Cold War world. Thus, as Scott (2006: 700) points out in his comprehensive history of Labour’s experience with Britain’s nuclear weapons, despite the strong role of support for unilateral nuclear disarmament in opposition, Labour in office maintained a record of support for the UK’s retention of nuclear weapons, from Atlee who approved the continuation of their development via Wilson and Callaghan to Blair and Brown – none of whom came close to challenging their continued existence in the UK armoury.

In 2003 the UK Ministry of Defence published a White Paper in which it stated that:

Decisions on whether to replace Trident [by which they meant the submarines that carried the Trident missiles] are not needed in this Parliament but are likely to be required in the next one. We will therefore continue to take appropriate steps to ensure that the range of options for maintaining a nuclear
In 2004 plans to increase funding were announced for the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) at Aldermaston where the UK’s nuclear warheads were developed (with the active cooperation of the United States) and manufactured. This is also where, it is rumoured, work is undertaken for the United States, for which Congress has denied funds for inside the United States (Guardian 2009b). Subsequently in 2005, John Reid (who had replaced Geoff Hoon as Secretary of State for Defence) announced a £350 million a year increase to the AWE budget to be maintained for the next three years. This was to fund the Reliable Replacement Warhead project as well as to further plans to design single warheads with a lower radioactive yield and a higher accuracy – leading one commentator to argue that the decision to maintain the UK nuclear deterrent had already been taken (Norton-Taylor 2006).

This view was also put forward by Robin Cook in an article in The Guardian in 2005 (Cook 2005) who argued strongly that the increased expenditure at the AWE indicated that the decision to continue with the Trident nuclear system had in effect already been taken. Cook suggested in 2005, before the Trident debate got fully under way, that the Trident replacement decision was ‘an excellent opportunity for Blair to prove that he is a real moderniser’. Cook characterized Wilson’s decision to procure Polaris and Callaghan’s decision to instigate the procurement of Trident as Old Labour decisions (as opposed to different Old Labour decisions to advocate unilateral nuclear disarmament!) and that Blair now had the chance to make the case that ‘nuclear weapons now have no relevance to Britain’s defences in the modern world’ (ibid). Cook went on to state that nuclear weapons had not won any wars for Britain nor had any of the enemies that Britain had fought been deterred by them. He argued that nuclear weapons were unusable even in the face of an attack, that the opportunity costs of the conventional systems that would not be purchased were too high and that, in any case, the deterrent was no longer independent as the missiles were leased from the Pentagon – what Denis Healey once referred to as ‘rent-a-rocket’. It was, he said, ‘against Britain’s national interests to replace the Trident launch vehicles’ (ibid). Cook also linked his opposition to maintaining Trident to the non proliferation argument praising New Labour for its record in office of scrapping the airborne weapons and reducing the alert status of the SSBNs. He also argued that Britain claiming that it must maintain nuclear weapons to...
guarantee its safety whilst at the same time lecturing Iran and others that the safety of the world would be compromised if they behaved in the same way was ‘indefensibly illogical’. Cook noted that despite ongoing fears about nuclear weapons proliferation, more states had given up nuclear weapons recently than had developed them – citing Brazil and Argentina’s reciprocal treaty that had terminated their respective nuclear programmes as well as Ukraine, Kazakhstan and South Africa, all of whom had renounced the nuclear capability they had inherited from predecessor regimes.

After the 2005 election, in which its manifesto stated that ‘We are also committed to retaining the independent nuclear deterrent and we will continue to work, both bilaterally and through the UN, to urge states not yet party to non-proliferation treaties, notably the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to join’ (Labour Party 2005: 88), the New Labour government made it clear that a decision would need to be taken within the lifetime of the next parliament about whether or not to commit funding for the design and eventual replacement of the nuclear submarines that carried Trident missiles. Blair surprised observers with his determination to rapidly resolve the issue of whether Britain should remain as a nuclear weapons state and many questioned why it had to be decided so soon and so quickly. Blair was about to resign it is true, but his likely successor Gordon Brown had always made it clear that he too supported maintaining the British nuclear capability so there was no question of Blair seeking to tie Brown’s hands. It may well be that Blair was concerned to enhance what he clearly saw as his legacy both as a close ally of the United States and as a realist statesman who understood and continued to believe in the efficacy of military power in the evolving international system.

Blair’s argument was that the nuclear submarines that carried Trident missiles had an operational life of between twenty-five and thirty years, which would begin to expire sometime around 2024. Given that it would take at least fifteen years to design and build replacement submarines, Blair argued that a decision to procure replacements would need to be taken by 2009 at the very latest. This scenario was, and continues to be, contested by those who believed that the life of the present submarines could be extended. The United States is doing precisely this with its own fleet of ballistic missile firing nuclear submarines, which is of some consequence for the British as it means that the American procurement process for both new missiles and new submarines is now significantly out of sync with that of the United
Kingdom. This potentially increases the chances of incompatibility in the future. It was also argued by some that, in the post-Cold War era, it was not necessary to have four operational boats in order to always maintain one at sea.

In 2005 a small group of senior officials began to meet as the Official Group on the Future of the Deterrent but the Ministry of Defence refused to discuss nuclear weapons with the Commons’ Defence Committee until after June 27 2006, when the Prime Minister’s Group on the Future of the Deterrent (consisting of Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, the Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett and the Defence Secretary, Des Browne plus some senior officials) was established. Blair’s Ministerial Group first met on 27 June but, in one sense, they were upstaged by Gordon Brown, who announced in his Mansion House speech a few days earlier on 22 June that he supported the retention of the UK nuclear deterrent.

Thus, it was Brown who first publicly raised the nuclear renewal issue in 2006 and many people interpreted his intervention as part of his campaign to become Labour Party leader once Blair resigned as he was expected to do sometime into the 2005–2010 Parliament. Was Brown seeking to reassure the UK establishment that rumours that he would be more left wing than Tony Blair were nothing to concern itself about or was he trying, in Andrew Rawnsley’s words (2010: 437), to ‘get in early with his disappointment of left-wing supporters’? In the case of Claire Short, a former close ally of Gordon Brown, this clearly backfired as she announced that she could no longer support him for the Labour leadership after his ‘outrageous’ promise to renew Britain’s nuclear deterrent. Rawnsley claims that Brown’s main motivation ‘was to pre-empt Blair so that his rival could not use the future of Trident as an excuse to delay his departure’ (Rawnsley 2010: 437–8).

Following the June announcements, the two Groups on the Future of the Deterrent (Official and Ministerial) continued to meet throughout the summer and autumn of 2006 and on December 4th the full Cabinet met and decided to authorize construction of a new generation of missile firing submarines to maintain the operability of the Trident missile and any replacement for Trident that the US might develop. This decision on the 4th December was, according to Hennessy (2007: 331) taken ‘with no dissenting voices’ but Seldon suggests that earlier, on November 23rd, when the Cabinet was first consulted, three members voiced their concerns, Margaret Beckett, Peter Hain and Hilary Benn ‘whilst the majority of the Cabinet were either quiet or spoke in favour’ (Seldon 2007: 535).
Once the decision was taken at Cabinet level the government published its White Paper on the Future of the United Kingdom’s Nuclear Deterrent (House of Commons 2006) and the House of Commons Defence Committee announced an inquiry into the White Paper which the Government greeted with enthusiasm stating that it wanted a full and extensive debate on the matter in advance of a final debate in parliament that was anticipated for March 2007. Immediately after the Cabinet decision, President Bush confirmed in an exchange of letters with Tony Blair (Hennessy 2007: 333–7) that the United States would continue to honour its commitment under the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement to support the missile system and associated equipment deployed by the United Kingdom and that it would ensure that, in the future, Britain will have the option to sustain an effective nuclear delivery system for at least the life of any successor submarine force. This was designed to provide reassurance to the UK that, when the United States carried out its plans towards the end of the 2020s to design and deploy its own new submarines (to replace the Ohio class) and new submarine-launched missiles (to replace the Trident 11s currently leased by the UK), the new US missiles would be made available to the UK and would be capable of being fired from the new UK submarines. If nothing else, this exchange gave an interesting take on the notion that the United Kingdom has an independent nuclear deterrent and served also as a reminder that, in the past, the UK’s nuclear plans had been upset by subsequent US procurement decisions.

There was a sense of déjà vu about this Trident renewal process which almost exactly matched that nearly thirty years earlier when the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher (building on preparations already made by the Callaghan government) decided to replace Polaris ballistic missiles with Trident missiles (both purchased from the United States) after the Callaghan government had itself taken secret decisions to upgrade Britain’s warhead capacity by developing the Chevaline multiple warhead capability. David Owen, the former British Foreign Secretary, has recently (Owen 2010) drawn attention to the fact that the British government still remains unwilling to release all the relevant papers covering this earlier period, despite their obvious relevance to the specific current debate about the UK nuclear deterrent and the more general one about UK defence examined by the 2010 UK defence review.

It is just under fifty years since the United Kingdom abandoned its own nuclear weapon missile (Blue Streak) and settled for the purchase of, first of all, Skybolt and then Polaris from the United States. Since
then, Britain has been dependent on the United States to supply and service its ICBMs. Although it is generally accepted that Britain has retained its independent capacity to fire its nuclear weapons without consulting the United States, there are those who contest this and who say that the United Kingdom remains dependent on the United States to communicate with its submarines, to fix their positions accurately and to target their warheads.

In early 2007, the Blair government pushed ahead defending a White Paper that rejected alternative delivery systems, such as the use of nuclear-armed cruise missiles fired either from aircraft or hunter-killer submarines or the use of land-based Trident missiles. These alternatives had been costed in such a way as to render the decision to stick with Trident fired from ballistic missile firing submarines almost inevitable but this did not prevent others from continuing to advocate them. The risk of future incompatibility with US equipment nevertheless remained a concern for those who attempted to challenge the government in the spring of 2007 as did the long term affordability of the proposed replacement force given the MoD’s track record of hugely under-estimating long term procurement costs, the impact on global attempts to get all nuclear weapons states and potential nuclear weapons states to abide by the restraints of the Test Ban and Non Proliferation Treaties, the moral arguments about nuclear use and, in particular, nuclear first use as well as the concerns of the representatives of the armed forces that the planned future expenditure on the nuclear deterrent would deny them funds for much needed conventional equipment. The announcement that the government was anxious for there to be a full debate on the question of Trident replacement was greeted with some scepticism by those in the know and with what seemed like indifference by the general public.

The debate, such as it was, was short and uncontroversial in the media, Parliament, and specialist academic and military circles. The press ran stories about Labour backbenchers, who were threatening to revolt (as indeed ninety-five of them did on the day with eighty-eight Labour members voting against and seven abstaining), but it was always clear that the government would win a vote in the House of Commons because the Conservative opposition was, at that time, fully in support.

Blair did make some further ‘concessions’ about the number of warheads that would be deployed, but the decision to deploy fewer warheads on each Trident missile could be seen either as a concession to those who support enhanced arms control or as a move to make the
missiles more accurate over a longer range and more flexible in their employment although the fact remains that Trident warheads, because of their size, are probably still best considered as counter-city or counter-people weapons rather than counter-force weapons. As counter-force weapons their utility is, in any case, questionable against most of the unconventional threats that Britain now faces. When President Chirac made a similar announcement about deploying a reduced number of warheads several years earlier it was seen as provocative and aimed specifically at Iran – that is, not a concession to arms reduction at all (Financial Times 2006). President Sarkozy’s decision further to reduce the number of available French warheads has also been perceived not as a significant act of arms control, but as a refinement of the French nuclear capability specifically designed to threaten Iran and probably in conflict with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (Guardian 2008).

The vote in the United Kingdom parliament was nevertheless assured and the government’s recommendations were carried by 409–161 on the 14th March. Interestingly the Scottish National Party voted against Trident renewal and declared that an Independent Scotland would sever all links with the British nuclear deterrent that is based and maintained in Scotland. With the vote won it was presumably assumed by the Blair government that the issue would once again disappear from the political agenda for another twenty-five to thirty years just as it had done when the first Trident decision was taken in the early 1980s. In the academic world there was a brief flurry of arguments – for instance, in special issues of The World Today (2006) and of International Affairs (2006), partly for and partly against British possession of nuclear weapons, but mainly focussed on future deterrence and deployment scenarios as well as procurement debates. Nevertheless, there has been little indication of any long-term academic interest other than the considerable body of work that has been generated by the Oxford Research Group (2006) and Dr Nick Ritchie at the Bradford Disarmament Research Centre (Ritchie 2008a, 2008b, 2010a, 2010b).

From Blair to Brown

However, as the Blair government gave way to the Brown government and as a general election loomed in 2010, the context in which any ongoing British debate about nuclear weapons might continue dramatically changed in two distinct ways. The election of Barack Obama as President of the United States in 2008 and the policies he has pursued
since taking office indicate that, in direct contradiction of his predecessor George Bush, he is a very serious proponent of the desirability of taking significant steps towards the ultimate objective of a nuclear-free world. The Obama administration is committed to achieving an American signature of the Test Ban Treaty and by abandoning the Bush Ballistic Missile Defence fantasy in Europe, the new President has succeeded in bringing Russia back to the arms control negotiating table with the result that a replacement for the START Treaty has been agreed involving a substantial reduction in the number of warheads possessed by both Russia and the United States. This, combined with President Obama’s activity at the UN in 2009 in search of greater multilateral control of nuclear materials and his positive approach to the recent NPT review conference, as well as his adjustments to the US nuclear force posture, gave the Brown government reason to reconsider the view that the future of the United Kingdom’s ‘special’ or otherwise relationship with the United States is dependent in some way on the maintenance of a British nuclear capability.

In announcing a new American nuclear posture that guaranteed that the United States would never use its nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear weapons state, the Obama administration stole a foreign policy lead at the NPT review talks that would have been available for the United Kingdom had it chosen to underpin a more active disarmament diplomacy by reconsidering its own nuclear weapons stance. Although it would be unpopular within the increasingly far right-leaning American Republican party, it is hard to imagine that the current presidential administration would be anything other than positive in its response to a British initiative, possibly even at the head of a collective EU initiative, to inject further dynamism into a step-by-step movement towards the nuclear-free world ideal.

The second major change in circumstance since the 2007 Trident renewal decision is the dramatic impact on Britain’s public finances of the global financial crisis and the measures taken by the British government to manage that crisis. On top of the enormous sums of money pumped into the British economy and into British banks by the government as the crisis evolved in 2008, we should note that in just one week in 2009, a further £35 billion was committed to just two banks – a sum of money which is the equivalent of Britain’s entire annual defence budget. Since 2008 it has become clear, if it was not already the case before, that there is a huge hole in the UK defence budget which is over committed to a number of very expensive hi-tech procurement projects including the development and purchase of two
new super aircraft carriers, two different high-speed fighter aircraft and, of course, replacement nuclear submarines for Trident. All this at a time when the British government was under continuous pressure from the US to provide more troops fighting first of all in Iraq but later predominately in Afghanistan, with adequate equipment and resources. If there is one thing that the Obama administration did look to the United Kingdom and the rest of the EU (all of whom claimed to welcome the Obama victory in 2008) to provide it is the support of well-equipped troops on the ground in Afghanistan. One suspects that President Obama would gladly swap a nuclear-armed United Kingdom for a more effective and better conventionally-armed United Kingdom.

One consequence of this difficult present and long-term future financial environment was that by 2009 the then two main UK opposition parties, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, were both questioning the Trident renewal programme (the Liberal Democrats were prepared under Clegg to question the continuation of the British deterrent altogether whilst the Conservatives began to question whether the expensive Trident replacement programme was indeed the only viable nuclear ‘game in town’). Both opposition parties were prepared to at least contemplate a third alternative position between Trident renewal and unilateral nuclear disarmament, which is to develop a cheaper version of the British deterrent, possibly by placing nuclear-armed cruise missiles on British hunter killer nuclear submarines.

Towards the 2010 election

In response to this growing unease about its nuclear posture, the Brown government in 2009 indicated a willingness to contemplate a possible reduction in the proposed new fleet of submarines from four to three, accepting implicitly by so doing that the necessity to keep a boat constantly on patrol might be worth reconsidering. However, the Brown government was not prepared to go as far as to respond positively to the possibly mischievous suggestion from President Sarkozy of France that the United Kingdom and France might consider pooling their nuclear deterrent resources together in the name of the EU in these straightened times. Such a solution, which raises multiple questions of sovereignty and independence, not to mention issues that would arise from the two countries’ very different nuclear relationship with the United States, is even less likely to appeal to Britain’s new coalition government, for whom questions about the future of the nuclear deterrent and of the United Kingdom’s relationship with EU defence
measures are potentially fatally divisive. In September 2009, the Brown government broke with the timetable laid down by Blair in 2007 when it postponed the necessary decisions to initiate the design contracts for the new Trident submarines until after the conclusion of the NPT review in New York by which time of course the UK general election intervened and New Labour were removed from power. In October 2009 Brown, keen to keep in step with President Obama’s nuclear non-proliferation conference at the UN Security Council went further and announced that Britain would only build three rather than the four planned replacement submarines.

Nevertheless, and despite the efforts of both the Blair and Brown governments to avoid any serious public debate about the future of the British deterrent, it has been opened up again over the past few years in ways that suggest that consideration of the issue has not been, as planned, stifled for the next 25–30 years. Increasingly, the language of the nuclear discourse is of minimal deterrence, which would mean less than the Labour government signed up for with Trident like-for-like replacement in 2007. Thus, in 2009, the influential Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) published the report from its Commission on National Security in the 21st Century (IPPR 2009). This report questioned many of the planned high-value defence projects mentioned above, arguing that the United Kingdom could no longer afford to deliver a ‘full spectrum’ of defence capabilities and that it should aim only to deliver a ‘minimum credible independent nuclear deterrent’. In addition, the report argued that, contrary to Blair’s assertion back in 2005, decisions about the replacement of the existing nuclear missile launching submarine fleet did not in fact need to be taken until 2014, rather than 2009 as Blair had argued. The IPPR report argued that the nuclear debate should be reopened and that it should be an integral part of the 2010 defence review and a search for an alternative system to Trident that might be ‘better suited’ for today’s world. It also called for the 2010 defence review to recalculate both the actual and opportunity costs of maintaining Trident, including the not insignificant decommissioning costs that would be incurred should Trident not be continued. Although the Blair government had estimated the costs of Trident renewal as around £20bn, others from CND to the Liberal Democrats reckoned the likely final cost to be more like £100bn.

The IPPR report also called for a more active and positive British input into the non-proliferation process, stating that the United Kingdom should vigorously pursue the objective of a nuclear-free world by supporting the strengthening of NPT monitoring (this would require
Britain to be prepared to open up its own facilities to greater inspection not just to be transparent, as it has been recently, about the number and quality of its warheads), by ensuring that the new NATO strategic concept is NPT-compliant and by extending the NPT dialogue to include the non-NPT nuclear weapons states such as India, Israel and Pakistan (no mention of North Korea or of a future nuclear-armed Iran).

When the IPPR report was published, the then Defence Secretary, Des Browne, who had pushed the Trident replacement decision through, stated that whilst it was right to update the deterrent system, possible alternatives were now emerging and that he never thought that the Trident decision closed the debate down, although this is clearly what Tony Blair had wished for. Later in 2009, Des Browne showed the distance that his own thinking had travelled when he joined forces with such luminaries as Sir Malcolm Rifkind, former Foreign Secretary, Lord George Robertson, former Secretary-General of NATO, Charles Clarke and Shirley Williams to launch the Top Level Group of politicians to promote the cause of nuclear disarmament. Another member of this group, Lord Guthrie, the now former Chief of the Defence staff who, in 1997, had ‘opened Blair’s eyes’ to the realities of the nuclear forces he now commanded, stated just over a decade later that ‘nuclear weapons, after climate change, are the greatest threat to the human race’ (Norton-Taylor 2009b). Thus 2009 became the year of doubt about the Trident replacement decision which became more controversial and less ‘safe’ as the year progressed. The Liberal Democrats went into the 2010 election firmly opposed to like-for-like Trident renewal, with some Conservatives like James Arbuthnot (former chair of the Commons Defence Committee), Nicholas Soames (former defence minister) and David Davis (a former shadow minister and influential back bencher) also in favour of a reconsideration of Trident renewal, but with others like Foreign Secretary William Hague and, in particular, Defence Secretary Liam Fox firmly opposed to any such reconsideration.

Finally, British public opinion would seem to be also ready to at least consider alternative nuclear futures for the United Kingdom and certainly more ready than it was in 2007. A Guardian/ICM poll in 2009 found a sharp turnaround in public opinion with 54 per cent of all voters showing a preference for the abandonment of British nuclear weapons rather than investing in the Trident replacement (Guardian 2009a). In July 2006, just after the Trident renewal decision, 51 per cent backed it with just 39 per cent opposed, whereas by 2009 only 42 per cent of all voters backed it. The poll showed that just before the 2010 general election, 59 per cent of Labour voters and a majority of Liberal Democrat
voters wanted to scrap nuclear weapons and that even 41 per cent of Conservative voters would prefer unilateral nuclear disarmament to a new generation of weapons.

Both the domestic and the international context have changed significantly since the House of Commons decided at New Labour’s bidding in 2007 that Britain should design and build replacement nuclear-powered submarines to maintain Trident. These significant changes – most notably the US commitment to a nuclear arms reduction agenda and Britain’s precarious financial position – seem to make it possible to revisit and closely evaluate the commitment to an independent nuclear deterrent based on Trident. Indeed, it might well be impossible not to do so, given these factors, and the supplementary evidence that, while arguments can be made both ways, old certainties might now be subjects of doubt.

The aftermath: Blair’s memoirs

In his memoirs, Tony Blair’s first reference to nuclear weapons comes in a section on Iraq where he claims that 9/11 made it obvious to him that ‘our attitude towards the trade, transfer and development of such weapons (nuclear, chemical and biological) had to be of a wholly different kind’ (Blair 2010b: 357). However, when it came to the question of developing the UK’s nuclear deterrent, Blair’s attitude was no different from those of his predecessors in that he decided to maintain the capability by developing replacement submarines to deliver it. In 2006–2007, Blair had appeared to be unequivocal in his support for the rapid decision to maintain the UK’s nuclear weapons capability but in his memoirs we learn that he was in fact hesitant and understanding of the ‘common sense and practical arguments against Trident’ but that in the end they were outweighed by his concern that giving it up was ‘too big a downgrading of our status as a nation and, in an uncertain world, too big a risk for our defence’ (Blair 2010b: 636). The notion that possession of nuclear weapons confers a general global status on Britain in particular vis-à-vis the US, the UN and NATO continues to be commonly held as is the view that nuclear weapons make a vital contribution to national security. In similar vein Nick Ritchie (2008a) argues: that nuclear weapons underpin Britain’s core self-identity as a major power; that possession of nuclear weapons is perceived to be very important to Britain’s credibility in Washington (an argument that President Obama might well refute); that Britain’s regional self identity requires it not to leave ‘irresponsible’ France as the EU’s sole
nuclear power and that ‘New Labour’s identity required it to be strong on defence, including supporting Trident and Britain’s status as a nuclear weapons state’ (Ritchie 2008a: 1). Blair in his brief reflections on the Trident renewal decision only specifically mentions his concerns about the loss of Britain’s international status but it seems likely that most of the factors that Ritchie highlights influenced his decision to renew Trident.

Puzzlingly, in A Journey, Blair makes a stronger case against the maintenance of the UK’s nuclear capability than he makes for it. He agrees that the ‘expense is huge and that the utility in a post-Cold War world is less in terms of deterrence and non-existent in terms of military use’ adding that ‘it is frankly inconceivable we would use our nuclear deterrent alone, without the US’ (Blair 2010b: 636). What Blair makes no attempt to do in his memoirs is present a moral justification for maintaining the UK deterrent. Seldon however argues that Tony Blair was unequivocal in his commitment to renew Trident (he states that Blair almost rejoiced in standing up to his party on this issue) and cites Chief of the Defence Staff, Jock Stirrup, that ‘there was no sense that Blair was trimming in the internal debates: he is a man who sees right and wrong very strongly and was convinced of the moral case for the new deterrent’ (Seldon 2007: 534)

Blair’s decision to maintain the Trident capability was also taken apparently after a ‘perfectly good and sensible discussion about it with Gordon’ (Blair 2010b: 636) who was ‘similarly torn’ and who, according to Blair, understood and shared his horror at the thought of ‘standing up in the House of Commons and saying I’ve decided to scrap it’ so that ‘in this instance, caution, costly as it was won the day’ (ibid). The caution thus was the result not so much of the fear of an uncertain world nor of a specific potential threat to the UK but more the fear of the domestic political consequences. Tony Blair, when he reflects in 2010 that a contrary decision not to renew Trident ‘would not have been stupid’ (Blair 2010b: 636), seems now almost prepared to accept the arguments that he so vehemently opposed in 2005 when Robin Cook put them forward at the very start of the Trident debate.
Part III
Power
This page intentionally left blank
Introduction

New Labour’s time in office coincided with a period of considerable activity within the European Union (EU). Four major Treaties were agreed (three ratified), an enlargement of unprecedented scale was managed, a European Security and Defence Policy was agreed upon, the single currency was launched and, towards the end of the New Labour government, the EU was struck by an unprecedented financial, economic and political crisis. This chapter analyses how the particular tensions between Britain and the EU have been navigated and articulated by the New Labour leadership. These tensions have already been comprehensively outlined, especially in Hugo Young’s masterful history of Britain and the EU (Young 1998), but the time is ripe for an account of the New Labour period in its totality. The primary aim here is to consider the extent to which the New Labour government offered a different approach to Europe from its Conservative predecessor by outlining the defining characteristics of that approach. Sir Stephen Wall states in the forward to this book that New Labour’s European policy represented ‘an almost perfect case study of continuity in British foreign policy’. It is difficult to argue that there was not substantial commonality in regard to the positions taken on key policy issues. New Labour continued to support a more liberal EU economic system and also sought to constrain the supranational dimension of Europe. Such continuity is based on the long term balance between Britain’s cultural, ideological and strategic tendencies towards autonomy from Europe (and the UK’s proclivity for a transatlantic-focused foreign policy) and the structural economic and legal power which the EU as an institution exerts over its members. One distinctive feature of New
Labour was its enthusiasm for using the weight of the EU to exert influence over global socio-economic policy issues such as international trade and development policy. This is rooted in the fact that the EU embodies much of the ‘third way’ New Labour approach to mixing markets and regulation. Another distinctive feature was its willingness to adopt a more proactive approach to other areas of European cooperation (whilst generally resisting integration). The chapter begins with an account of the New Labour government’s approach to integration within Europe and then focuses on its role in the EU’s external relations and foreign and defence policy matters.

New Labour and European integration

The troubled history of the UK’s involvement with the European Union has been well told (Young 1998; Daddow 2004; Wall 2008). Some basic facts, about which there is considerable consensus, need to be reiterated here. The UK did not join in European integration in its initial stages for several reasons, amongst which were its Atlantic and Commonwealth connections, as well as a dislike of the supranational dimension of the institutions. Considerations of strategy and political economy later compelled it to join. In essence the critical mass of the then EC, member states and their common market drew the UK into its orbit as its leaders feared the consequences of exclusion from this integrating bloc. The experience of joining the EC at a late stage, and being forced to accept its rules, structures and policies as a fait accompli, further convinced most UK elites that it is better to be involved in rule-making than on the sidelines. At the same time, they maintained deep reservations about aspects of European integration, including the tendency to regulate the economy and the potential constraints it put on Britain’s all-important ‘special relationship’ with the US. This has led to it playing a role that is both vigorous and strangely peripheral. Such a situation led to the UK earning the moniker of the ‘awkward partner’ (George 1998). Young offered a more acidic characterization of the UK’s self-image as ‘leading from the edge’ (Young 1998: 472). The contradictions in the British approach to Europe reached boiling point in the late 1980s and early 1990s as the pressures of European integration helped instigate Margaret Thatcher’s downfall and the Conservative party descended into near civil war over the ratification of the Maastricht treaty in 1993. The Labour party had also experienced acute tensions over the EC/EU. In the 1980s it turned from a strongly Eurosceptic to a moderately pro-European line. When Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and
the New Labour modernizers took charge, they maintained and accentuated this posture, which contrasted neatly with the right wing elements of the Tory party.

New Labour came to office in the midst of the negotiations that eventually led to the Amsterdam Treaty and soon had an opportunity to show its pro-European credentials. The famous social chapter had been rejected by the Conservatives in the Maastricht negotiations. It was portrayed as a form of interventionist Euro-socialism whose stipulations on employee rights would hamper the flexibility and dynamism of the private sector. Blair's acceptance of the social chapter symbolized a more emollient British attitude and also helped boost New Labour's progressive credentials. The main theme of the Amsterdam negotiations (apart from rules on government of the Eurozone) was to fill in the Maastricht Treaty and reform the institutions in preparation for enlargement to the East. In this it was clearly unsuccessful and several more treaties were felt necessary. New Labour continued the previous government's resolute support for enlargement, which would lead to new Atlanticist, free-market leaning and anti-federalist member states. Yet the enlargement process presented difficulties as it required institutional reform and more treaty changes which opened the door to further efforts at deepening integration and kept the debate over Europe simmering at home.

Under Blair the UK took the lead in promoting integration and cooperation on military issues (see below) but its attitude to the more traditional constitutional questions was more in line with its predecessors than is sometimes acknowledged. Blair was, after all, as well as a declared pro-European a Prime Minister committed to staying in with the Eurosceptic, Murdoch dominated, British press (see Daddow 2011: chapter 7). Before coming to office he had declared that he would ‘slay the dragon’ of a European superstate (Wall 2008: 163) in the unlikely event that this came into view. The Conservative Party’s strongly anti-European election campaign of 2001 floundered badly but the potency of anti-European feeling was significant. Blair’s many emollient speeches about Europe usually contained nuggets that would not have been out of place in Margaret Thatcher’s ‘infamous’ Bruges speech (in which she dismissed European federalist objectives). In Oxford in 2006 he reaffirmed his vision of a Europe ‘of nation states, cooperating, as of sovereign right, when it is in their interests to do so’ (Blair 2006a; also cited in Wall 2008). Such a vision is quite distinct from what most understand by the EU’s objective of ‘ever closer union’, or indeed from the reality of integration (notably the single currency). His government determinedly
prevented the appointment of the federalist Guy Verhofstadt to the position of European Commission President in 2004. While they rejected the ‘game set and match’ rhetoric of the Tories and their zero-sum depiction of EU negotiations, New Labour fought hard to resist integrationist impulses in the negotiations first on the Constitutional Treaty and later the Lisbon Treaty and produced its own ‘opt-outs’ and ‘red lines’ with an eye firmly on Britain’s Eurosceptic press (Nugent and Phinnemore 2010: 76–7). Blair pushed for the new role of President of the European Council which far from being ‘president of Europe’ was viewed as means to further reinforce the power of national leaders vis-à-vis the supranational institutions (Fella 2006: 631). Blair agreed to have a referendum on the Constitutional Treaty in 2004 and a politician of his acumen could hardly have been unaware that the odds on it being approved were slim. Such a vote never came to pass as the French and Dutch voters rejected the treaty. What appeared to its critics as New Labour’s schizophrenic attitude towards Europe was brilliantly illustrated when the new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, neglected to attend the signing ceremony of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2007. Not so much the awkward as the absent partner. Non-attendance at the signature of a treaty which his own party had negotiated, and presented as a triumph for Britain, was eccentric at best. Yet Brown, like many other Prime Ministers before him, was drawn closer to Europe by global forces. He would find his own use for, and arguably the best moments of his premiership in, the European Union.

Regarding the substance of European socio-economic integration, there was again substantial continuity from the Conservative years. The EU’s economic philosophy has always been ambivalent, or, at least, open to multiple interpretations (Van der Pijl 2006). On the one hand, the core principles of the single market are entirely in line with liberal/neoliberal economic policy: it involves a removal of barriers to trade and it legally enshrines market economy principles (based on private sector competition with a limited role for the state). On the other hand, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), an enthusiasm for regulation and the various redistributive aid packages signify a more interventionist, dirigiste, social democratic approach to the economy. Such tensions explain why in some parts of Europe the EU has come to be viewed as a vehicle of neoliberal capitalism while in some parts (notably Britain) the EU is perceived as a vaguely left-wing project. What was and is clear is that Britain’s economy is embedded within the rules of the EU’s single market and its economic development strategy rests on that market, both as a means of attracting investment and as a source of trade. On the domestic front, New Labour, firmly
ensconced in the ‘centre ground’, opened itself to ambiguous interpretations (not entirely dissimilar to the EU) but Blair’s government tacked firmly to the right on economic issues within Europe throughout his time in office (this was entirely in line with global trends). The UK was one of the major supporters of the Lisbon economic reform agenda in 2000 which sought to modernize the European economies by introducing more flexibility for the private sector on many levels. Gordon Brown gained a reputation for lecturing his European colleagues on the benefits of a more liberal economic approach. As an element of its support for global free trade, the New Labour government led the charge for further reform of the CAP. The cause of reforming this most dirigiste and controversial of policies combined New Labour’s support for private enterprise with its self-styled role as champion of the developing world. A modest degree of success was achieved here, at considerable diplomatic effort.

The Eastern enlargement of the EU in 2004 gave a substantial boost to the free market tendencies within the EU. The UK still sought to be the champion of these countries, which had been insensitively treated by France. Britain was the only large country which immediately allowed free movement (a basic single market principle) to workers from these countries. Theoretically, with the backing of the Central and Eastern European countries, the UK could have assumed a genuine leadership role in the EU but its own economic and nationalist inclinations dented this ambition. The subject was a familiarly painful one for the UK and its partners: the EU budget. The major negotiations on the seven-year budgetary framework occurred under the British presidency in 2005. For obvious reasons the British government sought to retain its budgetary rebate won by Margaret Thatcher. However, in the new context, defending the British interest meant forcing the much poorer new member states to contribute to its rebate. The original British proposal along these lines provoked an angry response. Eventually Blair conceded some ground and agreed a reduction in Britain’s refund. As he put it ‘we had championed enlargement. The Central and East Europeans were and are our allies. They were desperate for a deal; their economic progress depended on it. We would have alienated them not temporarily, but permanently by refusing one’ (Blair 2006a). Even with the eventual compromise, considerable damage was done to the UK’s image as a champion of the East.

The question of membership of the Euro was undoubtedly the single most important European issue for most of Blair’s premiership. The Euro was the zenith of European economic integration and would, it
was hoped, consolidate the powerful position of the EU within the
global economic and financial system (McCormick 2007: 91–2). Blair
had made his support for joining known (Seldon 2004: 316–17). The
second term was to have been the occasion for a sustained campaign
for British membership. Yet Blair’s reasons for joining were never com-
prehensively or consistently articulated (Daddow 2011). Vague notions
about the need to be ‘at the heart of Europe’ were never going to
be sufficient to win over the strong opposition to membership in all
major strands of British politics and society. Within the Labour party,
Euro-sceptic elements solidified in opposition to joining what was, in
many respects, a rigorously neoliberal single currency system. The
independent European Central Bank which has the sole objective of
price stability, is closer to monetarist neoliberal ideals than, for exam-
ple, the US Federal Reserve. In this case the more personal divisions
within the New Labour movement prevented any determined push. Gor-
don Brown and, crucially his advisory team and economists at the
Treasury, were more sceptical on single currency membership although
still in favour in principle (it was noteworthy that even the Tories in
the 1997–2001 period could only promise to stay out of the Euro for
ten years). Once Brown had established his five conditions for joining
the Euro – convergence between the UK and Euro-zone economies, a
sufficient degree of ‘flexibility’ in the UK to react to a new currency
regime, a positive impact on jobs, investment and the UK financial ser-
vices industry – Britain’s membership was put on the back foot (Seldon
2004: 326–7). This was especially true given that he as Chancellor
would decide if these had been met. Blair also insisted that the decision
would be made on purely economic grounds but this was slightly dis-
ingenuous as decisions on such fundamental economic and financial
questions are inherently political.

Eventually, arguments over whether Britain should join the Euro
became subsumed by other events during Blair’s premiership, such as
the Iraq War. Gordon Brown’s premiership was dominated by the global
financial crisis. This severely discredited the US model of neoliberal
capitalism and moved Brown closer to his European partners. Brown’s
core policy response (recapitalization of the banks and stimulus) was
adopted by many EU states, and he found himself able to play a star-
ing role. Brown in his last years in power began to speak the language
of Europe with some enthusiasm. In a 2009 speech to the Euro-
pean Parliament he criticized globalization which had ‘crossed moral
boundaries’ and advocated a leadership role for Europe in replacing
the Washington Consensus (Brown 2009). He repeated the familiar argu-
ment that Europe’s experience in balanced integration (blending free trade with social protection) made it uniquely well-placed to lead the international response to the challenges of globalization. Contemporary Britain he declared was ‘not in Europe’s slipstream but firmly in its mainstream’ (Ibid). This late flowering of love for Europe was not unqualified however. Brown’s government was still eager to try to preserve the freedoms of the City of London when the EU moved to strengthen regulation of the financial sector in the wake of the financial crisis. In addition, the troubles of the Eurozone made Britain’s decision to stay out seem economically sound.

A power multiplier? New Labour, the EU and globalization

One of the major functions of the EU, according to New Labour and other European elites, is that the combined economic weight of its members enables them to exploit and shape the process of globalization. As David Miliband put it in 2009, ‘the single market gives decisive clout in negotiations over trade, regulatory regimes and environmental standards’ (Miliband 2009b). In regard to global socio-economic issues and institutions the EU embodied many New Labour principles and approaches as it strongly supported neoliberal globalization balanced by aid, regulation and other forms of intervention where appropriate. It has acted, in other words, to carve out a global third way, or as supporting ‘embedded liberalism’, free markets cushioned by public policy to ameliorate their negative effects (Ruggie 1982). From a more critical perspective such policies can also be understood as an effort to gain consensus for an economic system which privileges its interests (Cox 1983). It should be noted that this EU approach was by no means a product of New Labour influence; it is the product of the long-term balance of socio-economic and political forces within Europe. However, the UK under Tony Blair embraced, encouraged and developed this characteristic of the EU.

Climate change was one issue where there was common ground between the UK and the rest of the EU and clear blue water between them and the US. The Clinton administration had signed the Kyoto Protocol in 1998 but insisted on watering down many of its provisions and was ultimately unable to get it through Congress. The administrations of George W. Bush were linked to recidivist elements of the hydrocarbons industry, flirting with the more extreme wing of climate change sceptics before finally accepting the reality of man-made climate change towards the end of his tenure. New Labour on the other hand
quickly embraced the challenge of climate change as an element of its progressive, but non-redistributive, approach to socio-economic issues. In this the government was at one with its EU partners, whose regulatory instincts (and relative energy efficiency) made them much more willing to accept and, to an extent, act on the climate change threat. When George W. Bush rejected the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 it was the EU which led the process of ratification (Vogler 2005: 839–41). Eventually in 2005 the Protocol came into effect. For all its faults the European Emission Trading scheme was the first serious effort to integrate environmental externalities into the market system. None of this has been enough to develop a strong international framework and it was noticeable that the EU was a bit player at the major Copenhagen climate summit in 2009. However, the environment became an important element of the EU’s normative power (Manners 2002) as well as a post-hoc justification for European integration.

The UK has been, all things considered, one of the most consistently pro-free trade of all the major states. In the New Labour period it fully supported the EU’s push to further develop the global free trade regime via a further round of trade concessions in the World Trade Organization (WTO). Apart from trade in goods the EU sought to further liberalize trade in services (where it has a comparative advantage) and extend the WTO liberalization agenda into areas such as investment policy and government procurement policy (Wilkinson 2006: 106–9). The EU was instrumental in eventually getting agreement to launch the Doha Development Round of World Trade Talks. Although at least as proactive as the US in pushing for the reduction of trade barriers, the EU adopted a much milder discourse and approach, explicitly rejecting any hint of market fundamentalism. The EU has also led the way in trade concessions for least developed countries, its ‘everything but arms’ initiative (launched in 2001) is the most extensive set of trade concessions of the major economies. Peter Mandelson as EU Trade Commissioner from 2005–2008 (and Baroness Ashton from 2008–2009), spearheaded the EU trade agenda. Mandelson also led a reformulation of the EU’s bilateral trade policy. Whereas before it had focused on historical relationships and close neighbours, the Global Europe strategy launched in 2006 heralded a greater focus on free trade with the dynamic emerging economies of East Asia, South Asia and Latin America. Efforts to develop bilateral and regional free trade also assist another core British and New Labour objective in the EU: reform of the CAP.

Development aid is the most tangible illustration of Britain and the EU’s solidarity with developing countries. The New Labour leadership
took a high profile role in various international campaigns to reduce poverty through aid, debt relief and trade concessions, culminating in the make poverty history campaign and ‘Live 8’ concerts of 2005 (Williams 2005: 141–53). On the domestic front, New Labour introduced many changes. They established the Department for International Development (DFID) as an autonomous aid agency (in line with best practice). Development aid funding was increased (in line with international commitments) and DFID’s policies are highly regarded, including its focus on poverty reduction (DAC 2010: 28). With regard to the EU level, the picture is more nuanced. In the 1990s the various EU aid programmes and the European Commission in particular had come in for severe criticism. New Labour had something of a reformist zeal in this regard, with Clare Short (the first Secretary of State for International Development) declaring that the European Commission was the worst aid donor in the world and it had to improve before receiving more money (Short 2000). The EU aid system was radically reformed over the turn of the century, and by most accounts, improved. No repatriation of aid policy from the EU institutions occurred and they continue to manage a large range of important aid programmes, including a special fund for the African, Caribbean, and Pacific states and other aid programmes for the Middle East and more distant developing countries from the EU’s own budget. While DFID’s funding and expertise have made it something of an agenda-setter in the international aid community, the clout of any one member state is limited within the EU aid system. DFID officials’ efforts to reshape EU aid strategies were not always appreciated (Interview with Commission Official 2009). EU aid fulfils a variety of functions for the EU but it remains somewhat idiosyncratic with regard to international development norms (as professed by New Labour’s own leadership) as a large proportion of funding is not directed at the world’s poorest but rather on strategically important countries (Holden 2009; Open Europe 2007).

The attractiveness of the EU combined with its economic power was the major reason why one intellectual (close to New Labour) argued that Europe would ‘run the 21st century’ (Leonard 2005). Yet for all the effort the EU (and UK) has made to demonstrate a progressive concern for global solidarity, it has increasingly met with opposition from the developing world, notably on trade policy. Most of the new issues that the EU put on the agenda of the WTO have been shoved off (Wilkinson 2006: 132–3). The Doha Round of world trade talks have, as of 2011 (ten years in), shown no sign of completion because developing countries have proven more resistant than in previous eras. Agriculture, and
the EU’s CAP in particular, is one of the obstacles to a deal. Thus the EU’s desire to achieve lucrative trade liberalization agreements in goods and services continues to be hampered by the CAP and the different philosophy it embodies. The CAP remains a severe obstacle to other free trade agreements countries coveted by Britain, such as Brazil and India (who demand concessions in agricultural trade in exchange for opening their markets). In Africa, the EU’s efforts to develop Economic Partnership Agreements (deep free trade agreements designed to further secure Europe’s market presence and extend its regulatory norms) have aroused intense resistance from civil society (Mutume 2008). Rather than serving as a bridge between the developing and the developed world the EPA agenda has made the EU a lightning rod for critics of the inequities of the global trading system. Indeed there was considerable irony in the fact that Blair could pose as the champion of Africa’s poor with rock stars and NGOs while the European Commission, acting on a mandate from the European governments, pursued the EU’s expansionist agenda (Holden 2009: 127–9).

The EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy

A vast amount has been written about the EU’s efforts to develop cooperation in the sphere of traditional foreign policy or ‘high politics’. Successive British governments have supported EU-level cooperation, on their own terms. At Maastricht the EU had furnished itself with a Common Foreign and Security Policy based on strictly intergovernmental principles and procedures (with no role for supranational institutions such as the Commission and the Court of Justice). This intergovernmental quality was at the behest of Britain and France. Cooperation in this sphere was felt to be underdeveloped and the Amsterdam Treaty established the post of High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy to better coordinate and represent EU policy in this sphere, which was filled by Javier Solana (a former Spanish foreign minister and ex-NATO Secretary General). Such moves were reinforced by the bilateral agreement between France and Britain at St Malo in 1998 on beefing up the EU’s military and security role. The St Malo declaration stated that: ‘the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them and a readiness to do so’ (St Malo 1998). This represented a serious initiative, for once led by the UK, to extend the role of the EU, albeit on intergovernmental principles. Such a move surprised many, given the UK’s commitment to NATO and the transatlantic alliance. As Gaskarth outlines elsewhere in this volume, the Ministry of Defence
and, to a lesser extent, the Foreign Office remained wedded to transatlanticism in its strategic thought. For Blair, however, European defence was an area where the UK could lead whilst not inflaming domestic fears as to sovereignty (although he underestimated the imagination of many Eurosceptics who were able to conjure up a ‘European army’ from the modest cooperative arrangements that ensued). Thus, the European Security and Defence Policy/ESDP was officially born at a European Council meeting the following year.

Blair’s ongoing commitment to ESDP, a policy he had initiated, was surprisingly lukewarm. Explanations for this can be found in America’s ambivalence towards the project. Clinton’s Secretary of State Madeleine Albright voiced serious concerns about the ESDP process, fears which were expressed in terms of the ‘3 Ds’ (decoupling from NATO, wasteful duplication of NATO resources and discrimination against non-EU NATO allies notably Turkey). There ensued many years of discussion over the precise degree of autonomy of EU planning structures from NATO and extent to which the EU could avail of NATO assets for its operations (Larrabee 2004). Blair and other Atlanticists worked hard to ensure the ESDP developed along lines acceptable to America but Blair compromised after the Iraq argument in an effort to heal the divisions (Ibid: 55). Thus the EU did emerge with, at least the potential for, autonomous action (Ojanen 2006). The ESPD has engaged in numerous small-scale peacekeeping and policing operations. For better or worse the militarization of the EU has taken place, in large part due to Blair and Chirac. One noteworthy element of this was the European Defence Agency (EDA), a body which covers both EU defence planning and political economy. One of a number of new EU security organizations, the EDA (whose first chief executive was British) was established in 2004 with the objective of helping to harmonize and coordinate European research and production in the defence sphere. Needless to add, the EDA is a strictly intergovernmental body.

All of these institutional innovations were greatly overshadowed by the repercussions of ‘9/11’ and in particular the invasion of Iraq (Hill 2004). From the outset the Bush administration, with its explicit unilateralist tendencies, was unpalatable to many in the EU and conflict on some levels was inevitable. Blair believed that he could bridge the gap but in many ways his government was ill-equipped to do this. To the traditional UK bias towards the US was added New Labour’s totemic fixation on the transatlantic alliance and its leaders’ own self-confidence. With hindsight it was in fact a considerable diplomatic achievement of the US and the UK to convince so many EU countries and applicants to support a massive military intervention in the Middle
East. But it was not enough and in the final weeks before the invasion Blair gave up on any pretence of a unifying agenda, choosing instead to pick a fight with the French government. When the formal reasons for the invasion of Iraq proved inaccurate he was left in a severely diminished position (Riddell 2005b: 371).

Apart from the development of ESDP institutions, the Constitutional Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty (which came into force in 2009) also included significant institutional changes regarding foreign policy. (It is incidentally, highly debatable that the reasons for the lack of coherent EU foreign policy lie in institutional arrangements but that is beyond the scope of this chapter). The most important innovations here were the creation of a new post of High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy which combined the previous role of High Representative with that of European Commissioner for External Relations. This individual would oversee a new European External Action Service to represent and administer the EU’s foreign policy. Lisbon also established a President of the European Council, unified the legal structure of the EU in general and it gave the EU formal legal personality to enter into international agreements, doing away with the distinction between the EU and the European Community. Notwithstanding this formal unity the norms and procedures of EU foreign policy remain quite distinct from the supranational Community method. As the then Foreign Secretary explained in a high profile speech: ‘The principles, the framework and the policy decisions will still be decided by unanimity, so every country retains its veto. What Lisbon does do is create the right vehicles for us to implement a serious common policy where countries decide to do so’ (Miliband 2009c). This speech, which extolled the benefits of European foreign policy coordination, won Miliband considerable acclaim and heightened speculation that he would be the new High Representative. The post in question was widely expected to go to a UK national after Tony Blair was first touted then rejected as President of the European Council. The ensuing process of choosing a High Representative was messy even by EU standards. Miliband, widely touted as the next Labour leader, decided not to apply for the position. Another Briton, Baroness Ashton (who had been plucked out of relative obscurity to become EU Trade Commissioner) was the surprise choice as the first High Representative. This was a surprise as she had apparently expressed little interest in the post, lacked a background or expertise in foreign affairs and was not a high profile figure. It reaffirmed the second order in which EU affairs played in the UK (when it came to ‘high politics’). Soon after New Labour was thrown out of office and
elected a different Miliband as its new leader. The historiography of Britain’s relations with the EU is replete with symbolic incidents and stories but the fate of David Miliband is as resonant as any. He passed over the chance to take a leadership role in Brussels, hoping that he could get something better. It did not materialize.

Conclusion

New Labour instigated a change in tone on European policy from previous governments. It was more willing to at least profess enthusiasm for EU-level cooperation and to vigorously expound the benefits of EU membership for the UK’s global clout. Its concern for British sovereignty manifested more in a proactive development of an intergovernmental Europe than the kind of rearguard actions the Conservatives fought. However this was because there was no great integration wave during New Labour's period in office. There was no call for confrontation with an integrationist European Commission President (such as Jacques Delors in 1980s) because there was no such figure. (New Labour had helped ensure this by blocking Guy Verhofstadt in 2004 in favour of the more malleable Jose Manuel Barroso). On such substantial issues New Labour continued the traditional UK approach. Criticisms of this stance are well-known and will not be repeated at length here. Suffice it to say that there is a need for a strong dose of realism with regard to the UK’s self-image as a ‘bridge’ between mainland Europe and the US. A cursory analysis of key events in recent history, from the reunification of Germany to the invasion of Iraq, clearly illustrates that the UK has not succeeded in shaping the policies of the other major players on either side of the Atlantic. The New Labour leadership did exhibit a genuine commitment to using the EU to promote a global third way (moderated free market capitalism). As the foremost integrated region in the world, and the largest single market, the EU has enormous potential power to shape globalization and reform North-South relations. It is hard to argue that its efforts were successful in this period, but this is by no means down only to the failings of the Blair and Brown governments. The ambivalences and tensions within New Labour have been very publicly dissected but they are dwarfed by the tensions within the EU. Such tensions constrain its ability to act on the global stage and often its capacity to deal with European crises in an effective manner. However, the EU remains the primary structure within which many elements of British foreign policy are shaped, regardless of the government in question.
Britain’s Relations with China Under New Labour: Engagement and Repulsion?

Kerry Brown

Introduction

The Labour Party came to power just a few weeks before the formal hand back of Hong Kong from British to Chinese sovereignty on 1 July 1997. In his first years as Prime Minister Tony Blair embraced China in a relationship based on the principle of ‘engagement’. Difficult issues were meant to be confronted, but the broad thrust of the relationship was positive. After China’s entry into the WTO in 2001, however, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) embarked on an era of accelerated internationalization and economic growth. It overtook the British economy in size in 2005, Germany’s in 2006 and, in 2010, moved into second place, usurping Japan. China’s rapid rise has unsettled policymakers far beyond the shores of the UK. For example, its aggressively self-interested behaviour over the climate change negotiations at Copenhagen in December 2009 vividly raised the question of what multilateral framework can effectively deal with the risks and opportunities of a rising power, with a radically different political system to both the US, UK and other countries in the European Union (EU). After 1997, therefore, the UK carefully needed to refine, clarify and pragmatically choose key areas to cooperate with the PRC as the latter expanded its economic power, and its external influences.

This chapter studies New Labour’s approach to UK-China relations by first considering the question of what China is and the domestic dynamics that shape its international outlook. It then explores the key themes from the history of UK-China relations in the last fifty years that framed the relationship as it evolved under New Labour. The third part homes in on the thinking behind – and not altogether smooth operationalization of – Blair’s policy of ‘engagement’ with China after
1997. The fourth part studies the broad continuity in policy over the Gordon Brown years through the lenses of the FCO document ‘A Framework for Engagement’ (FCO 2009a). The chapter argues that New Labour generally managed key areas of its China policy effectively, particularly as far as trade was concerned. However, neither Blair nor Brown successfully resolved the ethical dilemmas associated with engaging with China; nor was Britain an influential enough international actor to alter Chinese thinking in other areas of global significance, such as the environment and climate change, where multilateral action was the only option and the long game needed to be played. With an increasingly important, assertive China able to dictate the terms on which it is dealt with, the UK under the Conservative-Liberal coalition government will need to articulate very precisely both what it wants from the relationship with China, how it will deal with them, and how it plans to mitigate some of the disruptive effects of China’s rise.

China from the inside

At the heart of the UK’s relations with China, whether under New Labour or any previous administration, lies the very specific nature of what China is as a country, and what the internal dynamics of its unique political system are. These have to be dealt with first, as understanding them helps understand the kinds of policies that New Labour pursued when it came to power in 1997. Put simply, the PRC is, in the international system, an anomaly. It is one of only five remaining states where a Communist party has a monopoly on power and is by far the biggest of this dwindling group. Its internal political system and the composition of its population, ethnically, economically, and socially, are immensely complicated. After talk increased of a global G2 in 2008, comprising the US and China, Chinese leaders frequently complained that the PRC did not want this because it was preoccupied with domestic issues. China is a nuclear power and has the world’s largest standing army. Its military expenditure has increased by double digit figures since the 1990s (Global Security 2010). Yet, it contains 200 million people still living in poverty, existing on less than a dollar a day, has 200 million migrant workers floating from casual job to casual job, and a population urbanizing at an unsustainable pace, creating cities which have neither the natural resources nor the infrastructure to cope with the influx of people from the rural regions (WB 2010). According to Yu Jianrong, an academic at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in
Beijing and an advisor on social issues to the government, there are 90,000 ‘mass incident events’ each year, arising from a social ferment of anger over land rights, wage levels, and the inability of the courts to deal with citizen grievances (cited in Garnett 2010). Guobin Yang, in his book on online activism in China, has gone so far as to call the era after 2001 one of increasing contention: ‘Accompanying the alarming ascendance of social conflicts in recent years is the appearance of an official rhetoric of “harmonious society”. Perhaps more than anything else, this new discourse indicates that Chinese society has entered an age of contention’, with conflict between different economic, ethnic and social groups increasing and incidents of protest rising (2009: 25).

China’s political elite is well aware of the danger internal instability presents for its hold on power. As Lynn T. White has explained: ‘As Chinese [leaders], they know [the loss of power] will happen someday. The decline and fall of regimes is a recognized national tradition. Communists only want it to come later, after utopia gets nearer’ (2009: 382).

To deal with this, elite leaders of the Communist Party see their legitimacy as being sustained by growth in the country’s GDP. President Hu Jintao underlined this in his keynote speech at the 17th Party Congress in October 2007, when he said that ‘the leadership of the CPC … [will] take economic development as the central task’ (Hu Jintao 2007). This will improve the living standards and meet the expectations of those within the PRC. But, as his speech celebrating the 30th anniversary of the economic reforms in December 2008 showed, a parallel objective is for the PRC to become a ‘strong, rich country’ (Hu Jintao 2009: 21).

From its compound in the centre of Beijing, the Chinese leadership perceives that, in domestic terms, rapid economic development has created social contention and contradiction, but is also lying at the heart of its ability to continue to govern. Beyond this, it perceives an external world that is the source of many of the solutions to China’s problems but also many of its woes. It is a world whose trade links with China through rapid export increases and large trade deficits have made many in the country wealthy. It is a world that is increasingly the source of many of its resources for energy and manufacturing. For example, China has been a net importer of oil which has been supplying 20 per cent of its energy needs since 1993, and, despite holding vast reserves, has been a net importer of coal since 2005 (Meidan 2007: 18–20). It is a world with which, through a strategy of internationalization since 2001, the PRC has become more deeply and intimately linked. Into this world, China has sent over one million students to learn foreign techniques of management and technical know-how.
Since 2006 it has also become the sixth largest investor amongst developing countries (OECD 2008). And yet, the Communists see the outside world as a source of both threat and competition. Views range from those who are angry at the historic wrongs that have been committed on China during what was called the ‘century of humiliation’ after 1840 (Callahan 2010), to those such as the strongly nationalist authors of a book published in early 2009, China is Not Happy, who state that through manufacturing cheap goods for the rest of the world, China has degraded its own environment and is now expected by the developed world to also pay for the clean-up (Xiadong et al. 2009).

On the back of these perceptions of Chinese national identity and role in international relations, the PRC has stood by three main principles of diplomatic behaviour. The first and second of these were articulated in the 1950s, initially by the then Premier Zhou Enlai at the Bandung Conference, when he talked of the ‘five principles of peaceful co-existence’ (Enlai 2010): non-interference in the affairs of other countries, and respect for sovereignty. The third, newer element of Chinese foreign policy behaviour in the last three decades, has been a willingness to work through multilateral organizations and to avoid being diplomatically isolated. As a member of the UN P5, China has been increasingly willing to become involved in peacekeeping missions and multilateral action but Beijing has largely resisted – and been unwilling – to act on matters not perceived to be directly relevant to its interests. Issues on which it has had to be more proactive include the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), which, as a border state, and one which has only recently acquired nuclear weapons, impacts directly on the PRC (Gill 2010). Crucially, however, China’s assertion of sovereignty has been consistent and trenchant. Lying behind this is its continuing problems with separatist movements in Tibet, on the western side of China, Xinjiang in the northwest, and the unresolved issue of Taiwan, which broke away from the PRC in 1949 as a result of the fleeing Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek establishing an alternative government there. The PRC has never retracted its threat to use force to resolve the issue of Taiwan and it remains one of the greatest potential sources of conflict with the US, the EU and other actors.

As China became more internationalized economically, and as it grew in influence and global visibility, the parameters set for its foreign policy behaviour in the 1980s under the then paramount leader Deng Xiaoping came under increasing pressure. According to a comment attributed to Deng (though it does not occur in his formally published statements or books), China should ‘keep cool-headed and observe, be
composed enough to make reactions, stand firmly, hide our capabilities and bide our time, never try to take the lead, and be able to accomplish something’ (Zheng and Tok 2007: 4–5). This ‘24 character statement’ (the number of Chinese characters it is usually written in) is taken as the classic statement of China’s desire to continue to focus on its internal development and to enjoy the benefits of a benign, stable international environment. From being a promoter of the export of revolutionary activism under Mao in the 1960s and 1970s, the PRC has become a biddable member of the international community. It does not seek hegemony; instead, it wants to achieve, in the words of one of its most prominent international policy thinkers Zheng Bijian, a ‘peaceful rise’ in a ‘multipolar world’ (Zheng 2005: 9ff). These are all phrases that have come to dominate Chinese foreign policy discourse in recent years. But there remains a deep contradiction in this posture, and it is one that impacted not just on the UK and its relations with China, but China’s relations with the world during and after the New Labour years. In the space of a few years the PRC became a major player in all of the key global institutions, including energy usage, global economics, climate change, and geopolitical security. Solutions to these, if they can ever be found, have to involve Beijing. ‘The United States does not seek to contain China’, President Obama said on the eve of his first official visit to the PRC in November 2009. ‘On the contrary, the rise of a strong and prosperous China can be a source of strength for the community of nations’ (quoted in Grammaticas 2009).

During the G20 summit in London in 2009, Obama’s recognition of China’s centrality in confronting the economic crisis was explicit. It was this language that started talk of a global G2 of the US and PRC. In short, far from being a passive actor on the international stage, quietly building itself up, in many areas the PRC has become prominent. Its cautious language (until now) of non-intervention and respect for sovereignty therefore sits oddly with the enormous entity that the country has become, diplomatically and economically. Furthermore, its investment abroad, along with interests in resources and energy, means that China has to increasingly, even if unwillingly, engage with issues that it once could treat as things far outside its sphere of interest. Its reputation was most damaged by investment in Sudan in the 2000s which came under international scrutiny as the Sudanese government continued to be accused of human rights violations in Darfur. The PRC was pressurized to support a UN resolution and to supply a major contingent to the UN peacekeeping forces sent to Darfur from 2007. In other countries in Africa, as its trade and investment links increased
and deepened, the PRC was also forced to take a position (as in Zimbabwe, for instance, where the deteriorating situation there finally forced President Hu Jintao to cancel his planned visit there in 2008). Like other major industrializing powers in the past, as it acquires assets and economic interests abroad, it has also had to defend and protect both these and its own citizens. In late 2008, for the first time since 1949, the Chinese navy was deployed off the coast of Africa in actions against Somalian pirates. This need to break its own principle of non-intervention in the affairs of other countries is only likely to increase as its overseas interests increase. We are therefore living in an era in which the PRC is set to become one of the major diplomatic and military forces globally.

China’s complicated internal dynamics and its increasing economic and diplomatic role in the world mean that those that frame policy towards it are faced with peculiar challenges. On the one hand, they have to seek common ground in many difficult areas, but on the other they are dealing with a partner state which is, politically, very different and at some times almost inimical to their own strategic objectives. It is in this context that New Labour’s policy towards China has to be seen.

**China and the UK**

China and the UK are old competitors. They know a lot about each other. During its era of rapid imperial expansion in the early nineteenth century Britain was one of the first, and the most aggressive, of the industrializing powers to move into China. As a result of the Opium Wars from 1839 to 1841, the Qing court ceded Hong Kong Island to the British government, creating the kernel of territories which were to be added to under a number of differing leases and conditions until the end of the nineteenth century. Britain also gained favourable terms for the use of a number of free trade ports. The Qing era ended after a military and public uprising in 1911–1912, to be followed by four decades of instability and weak, often decentralized government. Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek finally asserted some control in the late 1920s, but this was followed by the catastrophic Sino-Japanese war from 1937 onwards, and the Civil War between the Communists and the Nationalists from 1946 to 1949. When the Communists finally won in 1949, they found themselves in charge of a vast country with a degraded industrial infrastructure, raging inflation, massive levels of poverty, and systems of governance and social control that were almost annihilated (Fenby 2008).
The UK was the first of the European powers to recognize the PRC, as the new country was called, primarily because of its interests in Hong Kong, over which it maintained sovereign control. While Maoist China underwent numerous industrial and political and social mass campaigns, culminating in the decade long Cultural Revolution from 1966, the UK maintained relations despite seeing its representative office in Beijing burned down by rebellious Red Guard factions in 1967, a result of Chinese anger at the UK's support for the US and its war in Vietnam. However, unlike Tony Blair three decades later, the then Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson did not let this support for the US extend to actually sending any troops. In 1972, following the US lead after President Nixon's groundbreaking visit to the PRC, Prime Minister Edward Heath upgraded relations with China from Charge D'Affaires level to that of Ambassador (Hoare 1999). From this point on, the UK had a full embassy in Beijing. After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, the PRC moved away from its rigid state-planned approach to economic management and increasingly opened itself up to the outside world. Throughout the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the new leadership under the veteran communist Deng Xiaoping rebuilt many of its more constructive links with the outside world. One of the key issues with the UK was the status of Hong Kong, a major part of the lease on which was to run out in 1997. Emissaries were sent to Beijing both from the UK and from Hong Kong, holding initial discussions about this potentially problematic issue. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher briefly considered holding the UK stance firm by asking for an extension of the lease and attempting to maintain the status quo. But Deng and his co-leaders forcefully refused this option.

From 1984 to 1997, therefore, the UK entered a period of intense negotiations with the PRC over the status of Hong Kong. Key topics included what structures of government would be in place after 1997 and how best to manage the transition from one sovereign owner to another. This was expressed finally in the Basic Law, a de facto constitution for Hong Kong, agreed by both sides through the Sino-British Declaration on the Question of Hong Kong in 1984 and passed into Chinese law at the National People's Congress in Beijing in 1990. Despite attempts by Lord Patten, the final governor of Hong Kong from 1992, to introduce greater democratic forms of governance in the territory, Hong Kong reverted to the PRC at midnight on the 30 June 1997 as a non-democratic entity (Craddock 1994; Patten 1999). New Labour, when it came to power, was in effect bequeathed a hugely difficult question which had been largely sorted out by the previous
Conservative administration, which had done the vast majority of the foot-work to resolve the status of Hong Kong. Prior to 1997 Hong Kong had been a constant source of argument and contention. After 1997, the main responsibility of any British government in this area was simply to ensure that agreements were kept to on the Chinese side. New Labour was able to both reap the benefits of this issue being resolved and to have that rarest of gifts in international affairs – a clean slate with a key diplomatic partner.

UK-China relations under New Labour

In this context, New Labour approached relations with China in the general spirit of engagement. While the formal hand back of Hong Kong happened a few weeks after Blair came to power, the terms of Hong Kong’s return to the PRC were already consigned to history. Initial concerns about how the PRC intended to manage Hong Kong, which from 1 July 1997 became a ‘special administrative region’ with, according to the Basic Law, ‘a high degree of autonomy over everything except defence and foreign policy’, calmed down. While the UK was committed to issuing six-monthly reports to Parliament about its assessment of how the handover had gone, and how Hong Kong was faring, as one analyst said soon after the event: ‘the UK had almost no powers to ensure that the Chinese government would do what they had agreed’. In fact, the final deal was better than anyone expected, with the key point being appreciated long before: that it was not in the PRC’s interests to jeopardize Hong Kong’s economic prosperity, and that the system as it stood was acceptable (Brown, K. 2007: 2). The negotiations were at times bruising and this left scars on both sides. Insults had sometimes been hurled from one side to the other. For instance, Patten was famously called by disrespecting Chinese papers during one particularly contentious period a ‘fat tango dancer’ (Vines 1997). On top of this, the Communist regime in Beijing was emerging from a period of international opprobrium following the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989. Only from 1992 did it start to fully reengage with the international community.

However, this legacy aside – and having settled this hugely time consuming political and diplomatic issue – the UK was in the privileged position of being able to contemplate other areas of engagement. It is possible to argue, in fact, that the New Labour government of 1997 enjoyed the best of both worlds. On one hand, the Hong Kong arguments were over; on the other, it faced a China which was less
contaminated by raw memories of how the world had seen it behave in 1989. More problematic for New Labour initially was the tension at the heart of the government’s approach around the issues of ethics and engagement with China. The newly appointed Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, spoke in 1997 of there being ‘an ethical dimension’ to foreign policy (Cook 1997a). This would subsequently be caricatured in the media and elsewhere as ‘an ethical foreign policy’, although Cook was adamant in subsequent discussions that he had used the words ‘ethical dimension’ precisely to prevent the idea that somehow foreign policy should be morally judgemental. The point was, though, that China presented plenty of ammunition for those concerned about the UK’s involvement with countries perpetuating human rights abuses. For example, within the first year of Blair’s government, the Beijing government had undertaken a crackdown on a small group of activists in central China who had tried to register a ‘China Democracy Party’, imprisoning many of them. Worse was to come. During Blair’s first visit to Beijing in 1998, a dissident, Xu Wenli, was imprisoned. In 1999, the quasi spiritual group Falungong mounted a demonstration in which they surrounded the central government compound. A massive and savage campaign against followers of the group ensued, with the government formally declaring them illegal, and many hundreds imprisoned. The rule of law, freedom of association, rights to free expression were all overshadowed by the Communist party’s assertion of its power and authority. Thus, all the time the UK maintained a human rights dialogue with China it was largely met with assertions that China’s priority was to continue lifting people out of poverty, and that while this stage of its economic development continued, collective rights took precedence over individual ones.

Blair, by contrast, was determined to frame UK-China relations in terms of engagement, one of his favourite foreign policy watchwords. To Blair, engagement meant that his government should have the flexibility to tell pressure groups and other stakeholders in the UK that it was continuing to raise its concerns about human rights and other sensitive issues in China (notably over Tibet, Xinjiang, and the stability of the situation across the Taiwan Straits). However, Blair maintained that the government should do this in a larger context where the two countries could continue to build up their other areas of interest. From 1997, this increasingly became trade-related. China was already seen as a major source of cheaper manufactured goods. What became clearer over the next decade was that it was also a major source of tourists, potential investment into the UK, and, most spectacularly, students.
From a mere 2,500 Chinese tourists in the UK in 1997, this increased to 85,000 by 2009, almost equalling the figure in the US, becoming a major source of university revenue. The UK also became the largest destination in Europe for Chinese Outward Direct Investment in 2009 (Burghart and Rossi 2009: 6–7). Trade was therefore one of the key areas where the Labour government wanted to see tangible benefits from its policy of ‘engagement’ with the PRC.

It did this despite some severe upsets. The ‘accidental’ bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during the NATO-led military action against Yugoslavia in early 1999 caused a major diplomatic rupture between China and the US and UK. This was only fully repaired when Chinese acquiescence in the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 changed them from being ‘strategic competitors’, in the words of President George W. Bush early on in his administration, to part of a more constructive relationship (BBC 2001). With the transition from Blair to Brown in 2007, engagement with China remained at the heart of the British approach. The Beijing Olympics, held before a global audience of billions in August 2008, was the prelude to China’s role in the international efforts to deal with the global economic crisis in 2009. New Labour’s relationship with China therefore benefited from two specific issues, neither of which could be said to have been things it achieved on its own. The first was the successful resolution of the negotiations over the hand back of Hong Kong in 1997 which meant Blair’s government started with a clean slate with China. The second was the marriage of mutual convenience between the US and China after 11 September 2001, which also had a knock-on effect on the UK, placing China as a highly necessary, and powerful, international ally in counter-terrorism issues which were defined as uniquely important for the UK. In view of these two issues, despite the many potential problems, there was little space for major disagreement.

If this was the positive side of the balance sheet in New Labour’s conduct of UK-China relations after 1997, there was a negative side to take into account. From 1997 to 2010, the PRC changed. It underwent immense growing pains as it made the transition to one of the world’s largest economies, and one of the major geopolitical actors of the day. Hence, China was, in subtle and not so subtle ways, a different entity than the country that had first confronted Blair when he attended the hand back ceremony for Hong Kong. Blair had been criticized, both by members of the Labour Party and from activists in the UK, for hosting the first ever state visit by a Chinese leader, President Jiang Zemin, to the UK in 1999. But with the entry of China, after fourteen years of negotiations,
into the WTO in 2001, productive forces were unleashed, both in Chinese society and in the Chinese economy. By 2010 China was the world’s largest exporter, the world’s largest holder of foreign currency reserves, the world’s largest trading entity, its second largest economy, the sixth largest outward investor, the largest producer of carbon emissions and the largest user of all energy resources apart from oil, where it was second only to the US. Moments of international recognition for the increasing importance of China in the last five years have come increasingly frequently. The Beijing Olympics were symbolic, but in 2009 China’s role in government stimulus packages to re-start the global economy was clear during the G20 conference in April in London.

Copenhagen and the Climate Change summit in December 2009 was a moment of more brutal recognition of China’s importance, and the problems benign engagement presented western powers. As the world’s largest emitter of greenhouse gases and as the larger user of fossil fuels (70 to 75 per cent of China’s energy comes from this source) any final agreement on how to cut carbon emissions without China’s involvement would be meaningless. Despite this, negotiators for the PRC led by the Premier Wen Jiabao made it clear they wanted to see no specific targets in a final accord and pushed the popular political line that the developed world bore the greater responsibility for paying for any final clean up. Its assertiveness on this position ended up irritating not just the UK, but also the G77 developing countries. Copenhagen, more than any other event, showed that China often belongs neither to a G77, G20, G8, G7 or even a G2, but a G1. It is all too frequently a law unto itself. The only way in which the UK could rationally and effectively engage with a country like this therefore was by working out the key strategic issues that were important to it, along with a means whereby it could realistically engage with China in ways which did not cut across China’s own interests and create antagonism. New Labour also had to accept that on many key issues, the UK alone has very limited leverage and simply had to work with other partners like the US and particularly the EU in speaking to China, something which has happened most noticeably in trade issues. Being clear sighted about where the key interests with China lie sounds straightforward, but has proved remarkably difficult to pin down.

Geopolitically, China’s construction of its hierarchy of external relations after 1997 can be seen to have been pyramidally structured. At the top was the US, to which the PRC was tied by immense trade links, and through respect for the US’s ‘hard’ military power. As one of the more muscular nationalists wrote in China is Not Happy: ‘Of course we
want to go along the rich strong militarized country route’ (Xiaodong et al. 2009: 108). Talk of ‘soft’ power, or cultural power, was of far less interest to this segment of public opinion in China than trying to use China’s new found wealth to buy hard military kit in order to enforce its views on the rest of the world. Such views, while not in the mainstream, were significant enough for even senior figures in the People’s Liberation Army to talk of the inevitability of an impending war between the US and China (Mingfu 2010). Beneath the US in the pyramid were the EU, Russia, and China’s regional neighbours. There, strategic interests were either driven by massive trade and technology issues (EU) or regional jostling for influence, with the remnants of some territorial and historic disputes, most notably with Japan. Further down the pyramid were more remote partners, like those in Africa and the Middle East and Latin America, where China had large energy and resource related interests. Finally, under all of these were China’s myriad bilateral relations. The question for the UK was often, under New Labour, where exactly it fitted into this pyramid. As a bilateral player, it came low down. But as part of the EU, it ranked higher up. The UK was adept at shifting between these two positions. And for a while, in the late 1990s, this worked well. Difficult trade and human rights issues were hived off to be dealt with via the EU route. Bilaterally, the UK enjoyed the fruits of China’s constructive side, represented by large tourist and student numbers and reasonable political relations. This was the background to the warm words in early 2009 accompanying the launch of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) UK-China framework document, to be considered in the next section.

From Blair to Brown: ‘A Framework for Engagement’ and beyond

There is some weight to the argument that, as the Blair years progressed, the UK travelled from being involved in one of China’s key foreign policy issues, the peaceful return of Hong Kong, to being increasingly marginal to China’s foreign policy thinking. In 2008 it gifted the Chinese government with one major change of policy which was a hangover from the ‘colonial era’ – the unique British policy on the status of Tibet, which it saw as an area in which the Chinese government exercised ‘suzerainty’ (special influence) rather than sovereignty. This position had been a major bone of contention with China. But on the back of assurances that a change of policy would lead to greater transparency and access to the area, David Miliband (Brown’s
Foreign Secretary from June 2007) argued in a written parliamentary statement of October 2008: ‘Like every other EU member state, and the United States, we regard Tibet as part of the People’s Republic of China’ (Miliband 2008c). Part of the rationale behind the alteration in policy was that an increasing amount of the UK’s business with China was being undertaken through the EU. Since enlargement to twenty-seven members in 2004, the EU had become China’s single largest trading partner. Most market access and trade negotiations, including those for WTO entry, were done through the EU. Dialogue on human rights, non-proliferation, intellectual property protection, and technology transfer, were largely done via the EU. Harmonizing the UK policy in this area with other EU states was therefore rationally calculated by the Brown government to enhance and protect the UK national interest across the board.

Faced with a country with burgeoning international links and needs, in 2009 the FCO published a policy document, ‘The UK and China: A Framework for Engagement’. China was the first country for which the Labour government had issued such a document. The strategy was divided into three areas or ‘pillars’. First, getting the best for the UK from China’s growth; second, fostering China’s emergence as a responsible global power; and third promoting sustainable development, modernization and internal reform in China (FCO 2009a). The scope of the FCO’s ambitions reached back to the very early years of the Blair era, when talk of an ‘ethical dimension’ to foreign policy was balanced against promoting the UK’s economic interests abroad. This remained the fundamental issue dominating policy towards China over the New Labour years and it explains some of the anomalies that followed from trying to enjoy good relations with a country economically, while often criticizing its record in areas such as governance and human rights. In the intervening decade China had continued to pose a quandary. Despite initial speculation when it came into office in 2003 that it might be more socially and politically reformist, the government of Premier Wen Jiabao and President Hu Jintao were more hardline on expressions of political dissent than even the previous leadership under Jiang Zemin. Activists who strayed into politically risky areas were imprisoned, the most prominent of them being Liu Xiaobo, drafter of the Charter 08 document issued soon after the Olympics, who was sentenced to eleven years in jail for subversion despite international pressure and condemnation. For all the efforts, therefore, that the UK put into both the bilateral human rights dialogue, and the various other similar kinds of dialogue conducted through the EU and the UN, the
atmosphere for purely political dissent in China did not improve greatly during the New Labour years.

These ethical dilemmas had to be balanced against the clear fact that trade relations with the PRC remained an economic priority for Britain. The UK continued to run large deficits each month, reaching £1 billion for every month of the year by 2008. Much government effort went into supporting semi-official, and partially government-funded trade associations such as the China-Britain Business Council, which also enjoyed immense political patronage. For most of the 2000s, its President was Lord Charles Powell, former Private Secretary to Margaret Thatcher and, more importantly in this period, the older brother of Blair’s Downing Street Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell. In order to produce a workable policy, government and non-government actors with interests in China were meant to intersect on the UK-China Task Force. This entity was set up with a wide range of representatives from business, academia, the arts and the media and was chaired initially by John Prescott, Blair’s Deputy Prime Minister, and later by Alistair Darling, Chancellor of the Exchequer under Gordon Brown. Trade engagement remained a key area of interest where the UK wished to demonstrate economic benefits from the relationship with the PRC. Increasing levels of tourists to the UK from China (175,000 in 2009), rising levels of Chinese companies listing on the stock market in London, and, as of 2008, 372 Chinese direct investments into the UK were all produced as evidence that this was a strategy worth pursuing (FCO 2010). China’s accrual of USD 2.5 trillion of foreign currency reserves by 2010 was only taken as proof of how crucial the trade relationship was.

London’s approach to China under Brown continued to be tied to the overall desire – through trade and other forms of engagement – to ‘support internal reform’ in the PRC, incorporated in the third pillar of the 2009 ‘Framework for Engagement’ strategy. Here, the levers of influence and the returns on them were more difficult to measure. Labour ministers were proud of talking about the UK’s unique influence in the PRC and the number of high level visits between each country (FCO 2009a: 20). But identifying the specific areas where the UK could say that it had unambiguously ‘influenced’ China’s internal reform and modernization was difficult to spell out. The Communist Party remained resolutely in control and equally opaque in its internal governance and functioning. Moreover, programmes of legal engagement and support in which the UK were involved remained small. Even the largest, through the EU, only came to ten million Euros from 2000 to 2006. UK aid to China was a tiny proportion of that given by Japan – by far the
largest – and the US. In this environment, therefore, New Labour con-
fronted a ‘New China’ that had expanded dramatically. Even within its
three pillars of strategic engagement there remained the question,
where was the UK able to influence Beijing? (FCO 2009a: 5–6).

A series of events in late 2009 and 2010 reminded New Labour that
there were areas where the UK and China looked set to continue to
disagree. The symbolic moment of first rupture was the fallout from
the negotiations over the climate change agreement at Copenhagen in
December 2009. Environment Minister Ed Miliband lobbied energeti-
cally for China’s full involvement in a comprehensive communiqué.
But domestic politics in China meant this was never likely to be poss-
ible. China had summoned key ambassadors in late November 2009
to set out its bottom line in the negotiations. Whilst elite opinion in
Beijing recognized that climate change was a genuinely global issue
– and that it had to sign up to something – popular opinion within
China continued to regard this as a problem that the rest of the world
had to address, in particular the developed countries. Having clearly
linked its legitimacy and future hold on power to continuing to post
high levels of GDP growth and economic development, the Chinese
government could not sign up to anything which might have impeded
its space to deliver this. The public backlash within China could have
been fatal. Therefore, China resisted any attempts to place specific
targets in a final communiqué. The result was that the final product of
this process was thin in content, according to most analysts, and brought
international condemnation for China in particular (Vidal 2009).

The UK seemed to have been painted as the ring leaders in what was
interpreted, in some areas of the Chinese domestic media, as a demo-
nization of the PRC (China Daily 2010). Ed Miliband in particular was
savagely criticized. More specifically, the execution of British national
Akmal Shaikh on 28 December 2009, amidst strenuous and persistent
representations on the part of the British and the EU, was taken as a
diplomatic affront. Mr Shaikh was the first European citizen to be exe-
cuted in China since 1951 and – the lapse in time notwithstanding
– Ivan Lewis, Foreign Office Minister for China, stated that he was
‘sick to the stomach’ by the execution (Eimer 2009). Over twenty-six
representations were made to the Chinese government, including two
letters from Gordon Brown to President Hu Jintao. The claims that
Mr Shaikh suffered from bipolar disorder only made the case more
unsettling (Eimer 2009). However, politically and technically the UK
has persisted with its relationship with China on the issue of climate
change. Trade links remain inviolable. In Africa, the Department for
International Development worked closely with Chinese development agents. Chinese students continue to come to the UK. But the new context of China’s booming economy while most of the rest of the world slowly emerged from a deep recession overshadows all this. China’s projected resource and energy needs, even on the most optimistic scenarios, remain colossal. Finally, the underlying reliance on fossil fuels above all other energy sources, means that China will continue to be the largest emitter of greenhouse gases for the coming decades. While the Chinese government attempts to change its energy efficiency and look at a different economic model in order to continue to deliver GDP growth, its reliance on industrialization and exports is set to continue for the short to medium term. Aspirations to create a ‘green economy’ in the PRC, while well intended, exist in the face of enormous environmental problems, which are as much a problem outside of the PRC as they are within (Economy 2006). China’s search for energy resources has led it into investments in assets in the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia. Its heavy investments in Iran have already become an issue. In 2010, the US pushed for UN sanctions against Iran’s nuclear programme. China needed to balance the need to support for this while at the same time preserving good relations with a country from which it receives over 40 per cent of its imported energy (Brown, K. 2010). The push to access the world’s easily accessible resources is likely to be a major source of international conflict in the coming decades, with conflict between China and the US and EU countries possible as the sources of energy and minerals come under greater pressure.

Conclusion

After over thirteen years in power, the New Labour government could look back on some clear areas of successful engagement with China. This had been a challenge because of the radically changing nature of the China that the UK was dealing with. It was a different entity in 1997 from the country that presented itself to the world in 2010. This necessitated a dynamic policy which was able to track the positive and negative areas. On the one hand, there were the clear benefits which the UK could point to in developing a policy of engagement which placed economic and trade issues at its heart. By 2010, crucially, increasing Chinese investment was coming to the UK and there was more evidence in the trade relationship that the UK was reaping benefits from its work in this area. On the other hand, human rights, differences about the understanding of the legal systems in the two countries, and
political arguments over the responsibilities for climate change and how to address it became more important. In the space of just over a decade, therefore, the UK had travelled from placing concerns over the hand back of Hong Kong at the heart of its relationship with China to looking at a wider set of global issues. But these were issues that were far bigger than could be managed at the level of bilateral relations between the two countries; they needed to be dealt with in multilateral fora such as the UN and EU.

Against this, there were two clear problems in UK-China relations that the New Labour governments did little to resolve. One of them is that the UK continues to lack a clear structure in the way it talks to China, despite several attempts to put one in place. Recognizing the unique political structure of the PRC, the prime importance of the Communist party infrastructure and elite leadership, in the late 1990s the UK government attempted to establish a UK-China Forum which combined government and non-government actors. This was wound down by 2005 despite vestiges of it lingering in the financial services and trade sectors. A means of fully engaging with various parts of the Chinese government, academic and newly emerging civil society machinery, which could supply some of the political cover that is always needed to further issues in the PRC, is still lacking. In the end, the UK and PRC systems remain markedly different and the role of political leaders in both cultures means that the exercise of power within each system of government is mismatched. Chinese elite leaders remain all powerful in ways that British Prime Ministers are not. If there is a solution to this, it has yet to be discovered. The second problem is global in nature and flows from China’s political differences from most of the other major world powers. In short, its system remains largely borrowed from the Soviet Union in the middle of the twentieth century. Although it has undertaken radical economic reforms in the last three decades, political and administrative reforms have barely begun. In terms of creating a truly independent judiciary, a legally enfranchised civil society and allowing greater public participation in decision-making, China’s current system stands at a crossroads. The Communist party’s strategy is to either co-opt or repress those who are antagonistic to the regime.

In the medium to long term this strategy will become increasingly problematic. The possibility of hugely destructive and disruptive social instability in China as the regime looks to reform some of the fundamental social and political institutions cannot be underestimated. The possibility of the PRC being a hugely contentious actor in international affairs because of its internal contradictions in the coming decade is
also high. Even a vastly more powerful China, with its current system intact, will be a problematic member of the international community, especially insofar as it seeks to assert itself over so far unresolved issues like Taiwan. Devising a strategy that looks beyond engagement to one which has to make tough choices about what the cut-off point is between the West’s interests and China’s, will involve hugely demanding bilateral and multilateral effort. In that sense, the years of New Labour government – while dealing with the easy aspects of UK-China relations and continuing to create an adequate basis for dialogue and cooperation – did not confront the truly seismic changes that are likely to make themselves felt in the next decade. A stable or unstable China will create huge challenges, along with potentially massive benefits over the coming years. New Labour could have done much more to prepare British foreign policy to recognize these challenges effectively and respond to them realistically. Nonetheless, it is some tribute to its efforts after 1997 that David Cameron’s coalition government which came to power in 2010 made it clear, informally, that it regarded UK-China relations as having been conducted successfully during the New Labour years, with no major change of policy necessary (informal conversations with FCO officials, June 2010).
From Asset to Liability: Blair, Brown and the ‘Special Relationship’

Mark Phythian

Introduction

This chapter charts how the ‘special relationship’ with the US, an asset to the New Labour project in the mid to late 1990s turned, after 9/11, into a liability that led the government to participate in wars that divided the country, undermined the party’s electoral support, isolated Britain in Europe, acted as a spur to Islamist terrorism and played a significant role in eroding trust in British politicians. The chapter demonstrates, moreover, how British acquiescence in US practices of extraordinary rendition and torture – in an attempt to extract information from detainees swept up in the net of the global ‘war on terror’ – challenged human rights norms and led to Britain being criticized by both human rights organizations and the United Nations (UN). Such complicity between the two countries rather undermined Winston Churchill’s insistence in his March 1946 ‘Iron Curtain’ speech that the US and Britain:

... must never cease to proclaim in fearless tones the great principles of freedom and the rights of man which are the joint inheritance of the English-speaking world and which through Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, the Habeas Corpus, trial by jury, and the English common law find their most famous expression in the American Declaration of Independence (Churchill 1946).

Insisting on the importance of the ‘special relationship’ to the UK and legitimizing that position within the context of British foreign policy by regularly invoking Churchill (see the introduction to this book) left little space to reconsider the wisdom of the relationship and fatally
overlooked its costs. For the New Labour project these were to prove high.

The chapter proceeds in three parts. It begins by sketching out the post-1945 evolution of the Labour Party’s relationship with the US. The second part studies the ‘special relationship’ as it evolved between Britain and the US under Tony Blair, homing in on the way in which, after 9/11, this relationship came to be defined by a shared belief in the primacy of pre-emptive military intervention. The third part examines Gordon Brown’s more qualified approach to the ‘special relationship’ and considers the extent to which this marked a departure from the Blair approach.

The Labour Party’s ‘special relationship’

To understand the close attachment that New Labour actively sought and developed with firstly the Bill Clinton and then the George W. Bush administrations, it is necessary to sketch the broad contours of the party’s attitude towards, and relationship with, the US since the Second World War. In the post-1945 period the Labour Party had something of a schizophrenic approach to the US. On the one hand, successive generations of frontbench politicians – notably Hugh Gaitskell, Anthony Crosland, Denis Healey, Roy Jenkins, Harold Wilson, Shirley Williams, Roy Hattersley and David Owen – gravitated towards the US, mesmerized by the power of its example (Fielding 2001). On the other, Cold War-era US foreign policy was repeatedly seen to be at odds with the core values the wider party liked to believe lay at the root of its own foreign policy, especially respect for international law, the primacy of the UN and anti-colonialism. At the domestic level, similarly, America’s conspicuous materialism and approach to social policy were at odds with values held to be central to the Labour Party’s purpose.

The question of the degree to which the UK should be aligned with the US in the emerging Cold War initially divided the Labour Party under the Attlee governments of 1945–1951 (Phythian 2007: chapter 2). However, Soviet actions in eastern Europe, Soviet antipathy towards the Labour Party, and the apparent gift of Marshall Aid (Britain was to be the principal recipient of the US$12 billion earmarked for Western Europe) converted former critics and reduced those opposing a close UK-US alignment to a motley rump easily isolated as Communist ‘fellow travellers’. While over time the intelligence relationship would develop into a substantive pillar of the ‘special relationship’, initially it was the defence pillar – specifically, the UK’s global reach and its ability and willingness to
deploy military force abroad – that underpinned it. This was understood early on by Ambassador to the US Oliver Franks, who by April 1948 was advocating a UK foreign policy aimed at encouraging:

... the Americans to regard us, not as a purely European power to be lined up with the rest of the queue of supplicants for US aid, but as the third member of the ‘Big Three’, whose world-wide position, economic, political and military, is a vital factor in world prosperity and world peace (quoted in Hopkins 2001: 30).

Similarly, a February 1949 Foreign Office paper entitled ‘Anglo-American Relations: Present and Future’, made it clear that the key assumption underpinning the ‘special relationship’ was that Britain was ‘the principal partner and ally on whom the United States of America can rely’ (quoted in Adamthwaite 1985: 229). As such, the Attlee government offered its support for the US-led UN intervention in Korea following the North’s invasion of the South in June 1950. In doing so, opposition leader Winston Churchill proclaimed, Attlee was carrying out ‘what seems his inescapable duty’ (quoted in Hickey 1999: 43). However, Attlee’s agreement to commit ground forces would subsequently be met by further US demands, first that the UK shoulder its share of the global anti-communist policing burden at the heart of its strategy of ‘containment’ and secondly that it increase defence spending, just as the US was itself doing. At each turn, British credibility and the future of the ‘special relationship’ was said to be at stake.

Attlee told his Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin that the significance of British involvement in Korea was that it allowed Britain to be ‘lifted out of ‘the European queue’ and we were treated as partners, unequal no doubt in power but still equal in counsel’ (Yasamee and Hamilton 1991: 257). However, there were concerns about the volume of influence that Britain actually exercised over the course of the Korean War. By January 1951, Acting Foreign Secretary Kenneth Younger was writing in his diary that this:

... may be the moment at which to assert our independence of the USA in foreign policy in that the Americans have clearly reached a frame of mind in which they count upon us always to ‘go along’ with them, no matter what our misgivings. We have got to stop this rot if we ever want to have real influence upon them (quoted in Greenwood 2003: 18).

But the moment was not seized. Instead, the Korean War and full compliance with the US-mandated rearmament programme – ultimately
scaled back by the successor Churchill government which regarded its costs as unsustainable – were to prove costly for the Labour Party, which lost the 1951 general election and went on to endure thirteen years in opposition.

When a Labour government was next elected, under Harold Wilson in 1964, its front bench was essentially Atlanticist in orientation and clearly recognized the importance of maintaining the ‘special relationship’. Nevertheless, US military intervention in Vietnam tested the limits of Labour’s support for US foreign policy, polarizing the party as Wilson came under pressure from the Johnson Administration to commit UK military forces and internationalize, and thereby legitimize, US involvement in Vietnam. At the same time, he faced increasingly vocal calls from within his own party to dissociate the government from US actions as it extended the war to the North. This he did in 1966 in response to the US bombing of targets around Hanoi and Haiphong. Yet Wilson continued to perform a balancing act by offering general support for the US (Phythian 2007; Young 2003). Even though elements of the Johnson Administration understood the balancing act that Wilson felt obliged to perform, his failure to commit British troops, the dissociation statement and the minor irritation of Wilson’s serial peace efforts, combined to damage London’s standing with Washington. This explains Secretary of State Dean Rusk’s undimmed exasperation at his 1968 retirement party, recorded by journalist Louis Heren: ‘All we needed was one regiment. The Black Watch would have done. Just one regiment, but you wouldn’t. Well, don’t expect us to save you again. They can invade Sussex, and we won’t do a damned thing about it’ (quoted in Dumbrell 2000: 154). However, it was the 1967 decision to accelerate British withdrawal from East of Suez, not least for economic reasons (Alexander 2003: 190–1), that marked the end of this phase of the ‘special relationship’. British Ambassador Patrick Dean lamented that in future, ‘subsequent Administrations will be liable to consult with us less and take us less into their confidence about areas of the world from which we are consciously opting out’ (quoted in Dumbrell 2000: 71).

Relations between the Labour governments and the US in the 1970s were cordial rather than close. And while the ‘special relationship’ revived in the 1980s under the leaderships of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, Labour’s relationship with the US under the Reagan Administration plumbed new depths. By this time the Party had adopted a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament, a 1983 election manifesto commitment. This was formulated in response to the planned siting of a new generation of US intermediate-range nuclear missiles across
Western Europe in Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, West Germany, and Italy. Labour’s stance was, in effect, a policy of opposition to US defence policy. In addition to the question of nuclear defence, under Neil Kinnock’s leadership the party opposed the Reagan Administration’s interventionism in Central America. In response to the report of a US National Bipartisan Commission on Central America chaired by Henry Kissinger, which in essence advocated a military solution to instability in the region, the Party commissioned an alternative report, ‘Kissinger’s Kingdom’, which argued that:

... claims made by the United States administration that it needs to intervene in Central America in order to stem Soviet-Cuban aggression is but a new name for an old claim – stemming from the Monroe Doctrine – its self-assumed right to dominate the Central American and Caribbean areas’ (cited in Holland and Anderson 1984: 3).

Reagan Administration justifications for the October 1983 invasion of Grenada were dismissed as ‘dishonest’ by Shadow Foreign Secretary Denis Healey, who characterized the invasion as a violation of the UN Charter: ‘If Governments arrogate to themselves the right to change the Governments of other sovereign states’, Healey warned, ‘there can be no peace in this world in perhaps the most dangerous age which the human race has ever known’ (Hansard 1983). Criticism of the Iran-Contra affair and the 1986 US bombing raid on Tripoli led to a further distancing of the Labour Party from the outlook of the US on international security issues.

Hence, by the time of the 1987 general election there was an almost total estrangement between the Labour Party and the US government. This distance was clearly reflected in Kinnock’s reception during his March 1987 visit to the Reagan White House, just weeks before the general election, a moment that was to prove highly symbolic for the architects of New Labour. Preceded by some discussion of whether Reagan should refuse Kinnock’s request for a meeting, the event itself was over before its allotted thirty minutes. Marlin Fitzwater, the White House spokesman, explained: ‘The President made clear that he had no intention of intervening in Britain’s domestic affairs. But he said we disagree with Labor’s defense policy’ (quoted in Lewis 1987). Of course, in saying this Reagan had effectively intervened. As The Times reported:

Describing the policies of the British Labour Party on defence as ‘grievous errors’, President Reagan yesterday came closer than any
US official has yet done to open intervention in the election in support of Mrs Thatcher … he said that if a government was elected in Britain that embraced unilateral disarmament and sought the removal of US bases, ‘I would try with all my might to persuade that government not to make those grievous errors … But I have to tell you I have great admiration for the manner in which Prime Minister Thatcher has handled not only the domestic affairs but the international affairs’ (cited in Dobson 1990: 389–90).

New Labour and the US

Labour Party opposition to US defence and foreign policy diminished somewhat with the end of the Cold War. Shortly thereafter, in 1992, Labour lost its fourth successive general election and Neil Kinnock stepped down as leader to be replaced by John Smith. The modernization of the Party begun under Kinnock continued apace, a central aim of which was to distance the Party from what was regarded as the electorally disastrous manifesto of 1983. By the time Tony Blair succeeded Smith as leader in 1994, suspicion of American power was held to be a core feature of the ‘old’ thinking that, along with unilateral nuclear disarmament, had made Labour seem weak on defence, by extension unpatriotic and untrustworthy and, as such, unelectable. The purpose of modernization was to demonstrate that Labour had realized the error of its ways and ditched this ‘old’ thinking. Closeness to the US therefore became a symbol of electability-proof. That the Labour Party was now welcome in the White House was, by extension, proof of responsibility on defence and foreign policy (for an insider’s account of this modernization process see Gould 1998). At the same time, the new political generation of which Blair was a part was able to draw ideas and inspiration from the ‘New’ Democrats in the US following the 1992 election of Bill Clinton, who similarly represented a new generation of politician. By the time New Labour came to power in 1997, links with Clinton’s New Democrats were strong. Labour pollster Phillip Gould had advised Clinton during his 1992 presidential campaign and shortly thereafter both Blair and Gordon Brown had visited Washington to better understand how the Clinton campaign persuaded middle-class voters to shift from the Republican Party. From its earliest days, the influence of Clinton’s New Democrats on the New Labour government was clear. Just three weeks into it, journalist Larry Elliott was observing that: ‘Almost every idea floated since the election – operational independence for the Bank of England, a beefed-up Securities and Investment Board, Welfare to Work, hit-squads in
schools, an elected mayor for London – has its origins on the other side of the Atlantic’ (cited in Dumbrell 2000: 120). Not only did New Labour borrow from the Clinton team’s ideas, it even borrowed from the name: the ‘New Labour’ brand was devised in clear imitation of Clinton’s New Democrats.

While Europe occupied much of Blair’s initial foreign policy agenda (Seldon 2004: 315–32), he was also at pains to emphasize the centrality of the US to British foreign policy, telling his audience at the 1997 Lord Mayor’s banquet: ‘When Britain and America work together on the international scene, there is little we can’t achieve’ (Blair 1997e).

Blair supported the August 1998 US cruise missile strike on the al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum and subsequently involved UK forces in the December 1998 Desert Fox aerial attack on Iraq following the withdrawal of the UNSCOM weapons inspection team. Already, one Cabinet member was explaining that ‘supporting the Americans is part of Tony’s DNA’ (see Kampfner 2003: 33). However, he did not yet advocate regime change in Iraq. Indeed, in December 1998, at the time of the Desert Fox military strikes, Blair himself posed the question:

Is it a specific objective to remove Saddam Hussein? The answer is: it cannot be. No one would be better pleased if his evil regime disappeared as a direct or indirect result of our action, but our military objectives are precisely those that we have set out. Even if there were legal authority to do so, removing Saddam through military action would require the insertion of ground troops on a massive scale – hundreds of thousands ... Even then, there would be no guarantee of success. I cannot make that commitment responsibly (Hansard 1998b).

The relationship between Blair and Clinton would cool somewhat over the question of ground troop deployment during the Kosovo intervention of 1999, on which the two leaders differed (Halberstam 2003: 469–70). Nevertheless, the personal relationship remained close, inviting comparisons with that between Reagan and Thatcher during the 1980s. The advent of a Republican administration whose foreign policy direction was largely determined by neo-conservative intellectuals around the President did not result in any change of approach on Blair’s part. Never a ‘tribal’ politician in the manner of earlier Labour leaders, Blair’s tendency to view international politics through the prism of leaders’ personal relationships – and his own conviction concerning his power to persuade (see Dyson’s chapter in this collection) – meant he was predisposed to follow the advice of the outgoing Clinton
to: ‘Get as close to George Bush as you have been to me’ (Riddell 2003: 2) and make himself an equally valuable ally.

In this context, Blair’s immediate response to the events of 9/11 centred on a firm commitment to stand ‘shoulder to shoulder’ with the US. He spoke of the attacks as representing a ‘tragedy of epoch making proportions’ (Hansard 2001) and as being ‘not just attacks upon people and buildings; nor even merely upon the USA; [but] attacks on the basic democratic values in which we all believe so passionately and on the civilised world’ (Hansard 2001). At the same time he transformed himself into what Peter Riddell termed Bush’s ‘Ambassador at Large’ (Riddell 2003: 161). In the eight weeks following 9/11 Blair held fifty-four meetings with other national leaders as he sought to build multilateral support for the inevitable US response. In this he was able to draw on the good relationships he had earlier formed with European leaders. However, this period was to mark the beginning of an estrangement as Blair’s support for the US response and the military interventionism that would underpin it ran ahead of any European enthusiasm for action. Nevertheless, Blair continued to view his role as that of a transatlantic bridge, simultaneously Atlanticist and at the heart of Europe, conveying and translating the hopes and concerns of each side to the other. In this he was playing a role that conformed to the advice proffered by Oliver Franks some 50 years earlier, working on the assumption that his personal relationship with Bush was such that his advice would be sought and acted upon – in other words that he had influence in Washington. It is clear that he believed he had. For example, in March 2002 he assured Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey that: ‘Bluntly, I am the one Western leader the US will really listen to on these issues’ (quoted in Seldon 2007: 87). This relationship, he told Carey:

... carries a price. It means that I don’t grandstand; I don’t negotiate publicly; I don’t list demands. It is a v. difficult and delicate line to tread. Of course if I disagreed fundamentally with their objectives, I w[oul]d have to say so and w[oul]d. My objectives must be to pull the Americans towards a strategy that is sensible in Iraq, contemplate military action only in the right circumstances; and broaden strategy so that it is about the wider world, including the Middle East peace process, Africa, staying and seeing it through in Afghanistan’ (quoted in Seldon 2007: 87).

The implications of the military intervention in Afghanistan from October 2001 were little considered or understood at the time the
decision to intervene alongside the US was made. Blair’s reference point for understanding the nature and likely implications of the military intervention was the Kosovo war, and he deployed the language of the ‘doctrine of the international community’, developed in relation to Kosovo, in speeches explaining the need for the Afghan intervention (see, for example, Blair 2001b). The example of Kosovo may also have predisposed him to think of the British military deployment in Afghanistan as a short-term one. As Blair explained to a meeting of backbench Labour MPs at the time of the December 2001 fall of Kabul, Afghanistan’s future would evolve in three, implicitly straightforward, stages: ‘First, the US, the UK, France and a few others would establish secure bases, Bagram airport for example. Second, there needed to be a UN force, involving Islamic countries. Third, the creation of a proper Afghan force’ (Mullin 2009: 239). A month later, in January 2002, Blair was reassuring the same backbenchers that ‘it was nonsense to talk about overstretch. We would be sending about a thousand troops for a maximum of three or four months and then someone else would take over’ (Mullin 2009: 245–6). Eight years later there were 10,000 British troops in Afghanistan, where over 300 had died, but there was no UN force involving Islamic countries and the creation of a ‘proper Afghan force’ remained an elusive aim.

As the focus of the Bush Administration shifted from Afghanistan to Iraq in the latter weeks of 2001, persuading the President of the desirability of a broader strategy that went beyond just Iraq to include a commitment to a Middle East Peace Process became a key Blair objective, both as an end in itself and in order to neutralize left-wing opposition to military intervention in Iraq within the Labour Party. Although he succeeded in persuading Bush to sign up to a ‘Road Map’ for peace in the Middle East, he both over-estimated his influence (which was greater with regard to the State Department than with regard to Vice-President Dick Cheney or Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, which was where the real influence lay), and either under-estimated or misunderstood the significance of Israel as an issue in domestic US politics. Ultimately, Blair’s ability to influence wider US behaviour in the Middle East proved limited. Moreover, his ability to persuade the Bush Administration to follow the UN route to war with Iraq foundered on its impatience with the UN. As a result, Blair found himself supporting a US-led war in Iraq in opposition to ‘old Europe’, to use Rumsfeld’s characterization, and in a role that offered the kind of legitimizing support that Lyndon Johnson had sought from Harold Wilson over Vietnam almost forty years earlier. British support was, furthermore, militarily unnecessary, as Rumsfeld’s March 2003 press conference...
comment that the US could and would go it alone in Iraq in the event that the House of Commons voted against war made painfully clear (see Campbell 2007: 676). However, by now Blair was a firm believer in the efficacy of military interventionism, so much so that some commentators came to regard him as a neo-conservative (for example Gray 2007: 93–106). Although Foreign Secretary Jack Straw sought to use Rumsfeld’s intervention as an opportunity to decouple the Blair government from the juggernaut of US Iraq policy, Blair remained committed to supporting the US-led war of regime change.

As a result, a relationship that was initially an asset to New Labour in terms of electoral and programmatic guidance, prestige and gravitas was transformed into a liability. Blair’s personal authority was greatly diminished by Iraq as the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) he had assured Parliament and the public represented a real and imminent threat turned out not to exist and it became clear that his case for war had involved such a level of threat exaggeration as to amount to deception. As a consequence, in the 2005 general election Labour’s majority was reduced by almost 100 seats to sixty-seven, as core voters who had opposed the Iraq war left in droves, many defecting to the Liberal Democrats. However, Blair’s commitment to military interventionism alongside the US survived undimmed. Post-Iraq, Blair continued to advocate military interventionism through speeches, statements and articles that linked Britain’s role as a state prepared to deploy military force alongside the US with the advancement of values. For example, in an article published in Foreign Affairs in early 2007 he wrote of the justification for the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq in the following terms:

The crucial point about these interventions is that they were not just about changing regimes but about changing the value systems governing the nations concerned ... This is a battle of values and for progress, and therefore it is one that must be won. If we want to secure our way of life, there is no alternative but to fight for it. That means standing up for our values, not just in our own countries but the world over. We need to construct a global alliance for these global values and act through it. Inactivity is just as much a policy, with its own results. It is simply the wrong one (Blair 2007).

The ‘special relationship’ under Brown

Six months after Blair’s Foreign Affairs article was published he had left Downing Street, with what biographer Anthony Seldon termed his
‘fatal misjudgement’ in response to Israel’s July 2006 invasion of Lebanon acting as a catalyst (2007: 466–78). The article had been part of a planned process via which Blair set out an expansive vision of Britain’s role in the post-Iraq world, creating a legacy to which he sought to tie the incoming Brown government. Still, there was nothing inevitable about Brown or his foreign policy team adopting wholesale this commitment to military interventionism, nor the increasingly messianic tone or conjoined relationship with the Bush Administration that underpinned it. For one thing, there were clear indications that the British public did not share Blair’s vision. Opinion polls coinciding with Blair’s departure from office showed that 58 per cent thought the Iraq war his biggest failure, while just 1 per cent rated it his biggest success; 69 per cent thought Britain’s relationship with the US was too close and 64 per cent thought Britain’s international standing had deteriorated under Blair (Sanders and Whiteley 2007). Moreover, in June 2007 when Brown assumed the Labour Party leadership and British premiership, he faced constant reminders of the unpopularity of the Iraq intervention, of which four stood out. First, he had to confront anti-war protesters during the leadership hustings. Second, the question of Iraq repeatedly surfaced during the deputy leadership contest, in which one candidate, John Cruddas, reflected rank-and-file disquiet in calling for a troop withdrawal and the eventual winner, Harriet Harman, effectively disowned the Iraq war decision. Third, former Ambassador to Washington Sir Christopher Meyer called for a withdrawal of British troops from Iraq. Fourth, the Conservative Party began to open a political space on Iraq by calling for an inquiry into the origins of the war.

As a consequence, Brown initially attempted to walk a tightrope in his relations with the Bush Administration, in a manner reminiscent of Wilson’s efforts forty years earlier. On the one hand, he signalled adjustments to address the domestic unpopularity of the Iraq and, increasingly, Afghanistan, interventions. On the other, he sought to retain Britain’s post-9/11 role as the key ‘war on terror’ ally of the US. This response was rooted in a pragmatism of which Blair had been incapable during his later years in power. However, it inevitably generated conflicting signals, to the extent that neither his domestic critics nor the Bush Administration could be absolutely certain about where Brown’s government actually stood. For example, in signalling a break with the Blair era approach to the ‘special relationship’, the Brown government called for greater multilateralism, emphasized the EU’s potential as a military actor, and appointed former UN deputy secretary general, and critic of the Bush Administration, Mark Malloch-Brown as a Foreign
Office Minister. In his first interview following his appointment, Malloch-Brown explained: ‘What I really hate is the effort to paint me as anti-American, but I am happy to be described as anti-neo-con. If they see me as a villain, I will wear that as a badge of honour’ (quoted in Sylvester and Thomson 2007). At the same time, in a speech given in Washington DC, Secretary of State for Trade and Development Douglas Alexander, a close Brown ally, called for a recognition ‘of the importance of a rules-based international system’ (Wintour and Borger 2007), an apparent criticism of the manner in which the Iraq invasion proceeded. This speech came in advance of Brown’s first, and awkward, Prime Ministerial visit to Washington. Brown described his talks with Bush, in which he indicated that Britain would withdraw from Iraq according to its own timetable, as ‘full and frank’ (Economist 2007).

One response to these early signals came from former Bush Administration Ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, who warned that Britain could not have two best friends, and had to decide between the US and the EU. ‘Whether the “special relationship” grows stronger or weaker lies entirely in British hands’, Bolton explained,

Americans across the political spectrum are content to keep it as it is and has been essentially since the second world war. That does not mean that the two countries always agree, nor has it ever meant that Britain is a poodle following America’s lead, self-flagellating Brits notwithstanding (Bolton 2007).

Moves towards a single European foreign and defence policy, Bolton warned, would damage relations with the US. ‘The question’, Bolton claimed, was ‘whether Britain still has sovereignty over its foreign policy or whether it has simply taken its assigned place in the EU food chain’ (Bolton 2007). Choosing the EU could well lead to Europe having only a shared seat on the UN Security Council, Bolton warned. The US would wait to see what the Brown government did before drawing ‘conclusions about the “special relationship” under Mr Brown. But not forever’ (Bolton 2007).

In part, these early tensions reflected the lesser sentimentality that Brown brought to the ‘special relationship’. He had not stood ‘shoulder to shoulder’ with Bush immediately after 9/11 and had not had the same personal bond with Clinton as Blair, one forged in the early heat of the New Democrat-New Labour project. Brown would subsequently retain an emphasis on multilateralism and calls for reform of the UN Security Council, while his Foreign Secretary, David Miliband,
continued to emphasize the importance of an EU military force capable of intervening in conflict zones independently of the US. Miliband would, moreover, distance himself and Brown from the Blair government’s military interventionism by insisting that the lesson of Iraq ‘is that while there are military victories there is never a military “solution”. There’s only military action that creates the space for economic and political life’ (quoted in Russell 2007). Reconstruction, he argued, had to be a core plank of interventionism – an implicit criticism of the absence of adequate preparation by the US for the post-war environment in Iraq. At the same time, though, the Brown government conceded that British forces would remain in Iraq for as long as the US found them politically useful – and their usefulness continued to be defined more in political than military terms – especially in the context of the contemporaneous Australian withdrawal from Iraq and the imminent 2008 US presidential election.

The arrival of the Barack Obama Administration offered Brown greater freedom to express his own brand of Atlanticism, which he could now do without attracting criticism from what remained of the left wing of the Labour Party which, in contrast to Blair, he had consistently courted. At the same time though, Brown’s scope for manoeuvre was limited by the fact that he had incurred Washington’s displeasure over his approach to the question of reducing Britain’s troop commitment to Iraq, just as the US was deploying a ‘surge’ of forces. This raised questions for the US about the future British commitment to military interventionism. As the Economist reported:

Some Americans have indeed been expressing doubts: policymakers ask whether British leaders are losing the will to fight, soldiers whether their British counterparts are losing the ability to do so. There is talk that Britain is becoming ‘Europeanised’, more averse to making war and keener on peacekeeping … one senior official in the former Bush administration says there is ‘a lot of concern on the US side about whether we are going to have an ally with the capability and willingness to be in the fight with us’ (Economist 2009; see also Porter 2010).

With Afghanistan the Obama Administration’s top foreign policy priority it became politically impossible, in the light of the Iraq withdrawal, for Brown to resist completely requests for a greater British troop commitment, especially if he was to continue to enjoy the fact and symbolism of the ‘special relationship’, one of the key pillars of which had always been Britain’s ability and willingness to deploy
military force abroad alongside the US. Indeed, Brown seemed peculiarly sensitive to this symbolism and any suggestions that might be derived from it that Britain was now regarded as simply part of the ‘European queue’. However, this meant selling the war to a British public that did not view it as essential to protecting the streets of Britain. And this, despite Brown’s repeated warnings about ‘a chain of terror that comes from the Pakistani and Afghan mountains, right across Europe, and can end up very easily on the streets of Britain,’ which meant that ‘the British people are safer today because we have our troops working with the Afghan people and other nations to act against terrorism and to defend the security of our people’ (Brown 2008b). By late 2009, opinion polls showed 35 per cent favouring an immediate troop withdrawal, 57 per cent believing that ‘victory’ was no longer possible (Wintour et al. 2009), and 46 per cent believing that the presence of British troops actually increased the threat of terrorism in the UK, in spite of the well worn claims of Brown and his Ministers to the contrary (Sengupta and Morris 2009). Labour Ministers were clearly aware of this lack of public support and its implications (Rayment 2009; Coghlan 2010), as were Labour MPs, a number of whom began to organize opposition to the war in late 2009 (Morris 2009). However, despite the loss of public and backbench support, New Labour’s ‘special relationship’ logic determined that British forces would stay the course. Arguably, this was a more important factor than the official security narrative. Indeed, by late 2009, senior party figures, such as the Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee, Kim Howells, were openly questioning the security rationale and arguing for a troop withdrawal and a greater focus on border security (Morris 2010).

By this time another key pillar of the ‘special relationship’ – the intelligence relationship, underpinned by the Cold War UKUSA Agreement – was becoming a source of considerable embarrassment to the Brown government. There is no doubt that the UK is a net beneficiary of intelligence sharing with the US. For example, Peter Hennessy has estimated that anywhere between 50 to 80 per cent of intelligence discussed at Joint Intelligence Committee meetings stems from US sources (Hennessy 2010: xxiv). However, the intelligence connection is arguably even more important in terms of it being the glue that holds the ‘special relationship’ together, through which the UK can demonstrate its ongoing usefulness to the US. Hence, the government fought vigorously through the courts to prevent the publication of details of British intelligence acquiescence and/or involvement in extraordinary rendition and torture, the publication of which might have undermined US confidence in the
intelligence relationship. Where information on this aspect of ‘war on terror’ cooperation did come to light it did not suggest that Britain was able to exert much influence on US ‘war on terror’ practices, but did suggest a degree of British complicity in extraordinary rendition and torture, including of British nationals. For example, a 2007 Intelligence and Security Committee report into the US rendition of four British nationals or residents – Martin Mubanga, Binyam Mohamed, Bisher Al-Rawi and Jamil El-Banna – concluded that in the case of the latter two, US intelligence showed a disregard for intelligence protocols in a manner that ‘has serious implications for the working of the relationship between the US and UK intelligence and security agencies’ (Intelligence and Security Committee 2007: 43). The Foreign Affairs Committee and parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights both voiced concerns. In addition, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Extraordinary Rendition – whose very existence was evidence of legislative concern about aspects of ‘war on terror’ cooperation with the US – highlighted allegations of official British involvement in extraordinary rendition. Domestic criticism was joined by international criticism of Britain’s role as a ‘war on terror’ intelligence ally of the US. In November 2009, for instance, Human Rights Watch published ‘Cruel Britannia: British Complicity in the Torture and Ill-Treatment of Terror Suspects in Pakistan’, a report cataloguing instances of alleged British complicity in torture and calling for a full and independent inquiry with subpoena powers to investigate the allegations (Human Rights Watch 2009). This was followed, in 2010, by a report by the UN human rights experts Martin Scheinin and Manfred Nowak on secret detention that included allegations that Britain was complicit in the mistreatment and possible torture of a number of individuals, including Binyam Mohammed (Scheinin and Nowak 2010).

One result of all this was that during the Brown premiership explicit discussion of the ‘special relationship’ was less frequent than discussion of its manifestations: Britain’s involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan and its complicity with extraordinary rendition and torture. Iraq still cast a shadow over the party during the 2010 general election campaign, partly as a consequence of evidence heard at the Chilcot inquiry into the Iraq war after Brown failed in his attempt to have it conducted behind closed doors. David Miliband’s question at the time remained a rhetorical one:

Some people feel very, very strongly about it, and I respect that. There are people who resigned from the government because of Iraq. But what on earth is the point of punishing yourself or punishing the
country for Iraq given that the alternative government, the Tories, also voted for it? (quoted in Edemariam and Wintour 2010).

To borrow a phrase from Oscar Wilde, to involve the country in one unpopular war may be regarded as a misfortune, to involve it in two is carelessness. This carelessness contributed to the 2010 electoral defeat, after which Labour leadership candidates queued up to either distance themselves from the Iraq war or even, in the case of Ed Balls, reveal that it was a ‘mistake’ and ‘wrong’ (Riddell and Porter 2010). As the title of a column by journalist Jackie Ashley put it: ‘Here lies New Labour – the party that died in Iraq’ (Ashley 2010).

Conclusion

Ultimately, New Labour paid a high price for the emphasis it placed on the maintenance of the ‘special relationship’. Proximity to the US was central to New Labour’s self-identity, but in the context of the ‘war on terror’ this closeness came to act as a straitjacket, locking Blair into participation in the disastrous Iraq war and then tying Brown’s government to an increasingly unpopular war in the run-up to the 2010 general election. It also made New Labour a willing partner in the darker sides of the ‘war on terror’. Indeed, the decision of the Conservative-led government of David Cameron to institute a judge-led inquiry into allegations of British complicity in torture served to highlight the ethical distance that Labour had travelled in its post-9/11 efforts to maintain the ‘special relationship’. Initially, British-US relations after 1997 were based on the shared values built up between New Labour Clinton’s New Democrats, as well as the perceived importance of cultivating the Clinton White House as a means of proving that New Labour had succeeded in burying its 1980s image as a party that was soft on both defence and the cherished ‘special relationship’. Beyond this, though, the thinking underpinning it had not advanced beyond that articulated by Oliver Franks – that the relationship with the US was essential because it defined Britain as being more than a ‘purely European power’. As Tony Blair explained in his very first Lord Mayor’s Banquet speech:

We cannot in these post-Empire days be a super-power in a military sense. But we can make the British presence in the world felt. With our historic alliances, we can be pivotal. We can be powerful in our influence – a nation to whom others listen. Why? Because we run
Britain well and are successful ourselves. Because we have the right strategic alliances the world over. And because we are engaged, open and intelligent in how we use them (Blair 1997e).

While the words were Blair’s they could equally have been spoken by Conservative premier Harold Macmillan forty years earlier. Although official thinking about the ‘special relationship’ may not have changed in over half a century, the world and the US certainly have. As Kerry Brown has found for China in this volume, the UK’s ‘special relationship’ with the US is just one of several ‘special relationships’ that the US enjoys – alongside those with Canada, Mexico, Israel, Japan and even Australia. Moreover, the US has changed. Western Europe, let alone Britain, simply does not occupy the central place in US thinking that it did in the early stages of the Cold War. Increasingly, the US sees its most important relationships as lying across the Pacific, not the Atlantic. As such, its relationship with Britain is driven, from a US perspective, more by Britain’s perceived utility on a given issue than on any sentimental attachment to the past contours of the ‘special relationship’. The logic of this is that if maintenance of this relationship is to be pursued as an end in itself, Britain will have to be prepared to work harder and harder at proving its usefulness in order to stand still. Its willingness and ability to deploy military force abroad in support of US-defined security goals is likely to be fundamental to any such effort.

Blair and Brown’s desperation to maintain at least the appearance of a ‘special relationship’ had its roots deep in New Labour’s psyche. The ‘New Labour effect’ in this realm has been to illustrate the costs of an uncritical attachment to the US – in domestic political terms, in economic terms, and internationally in alliance and reputational terms. The lesson of the New Labour era is that a reassessment on the part of the UK of the utility of the ‘special relationship’ is now overdue. Like Churchill’s ‘iron curtain’, it is a concept that has been overtaken by history.
New Labour, Defence and the ‘War on Terror’

Max Taylor

This chapter will initially focus on the immediate events associated with the UK government’s response to the tragedy of 9/11 as the critical factor that set the scene for subsequent developments in the UK approach to the ‘war on terror’. The chapter then explores the particular individual psychological qualities of Tony Blair as Prime Minister (for further analysis of this see Dyson 2009), using it as a general contextual factor relevant to explaining how 9/11 came to be framed by the British foreign policy establishment. The arguments put forward below are twofold. First, that the UK’s response to 9/11 represented the first serious – but not the first – challenge of international terrorism, as distinct from Irish terrorism, with the potential to involve the UK directly, as well as through its relationship with the US. Given this, the outlook of Blair was crucial in framing the British approach to the ‘war on terror’. Second, the government’s response to this crisis established the directions for future government initiatives associated not simply with the US-led global response to terrorism, but with the broader management of the threat of terrorism within the UK. The chapter ends by considering the impact of the personality and outlook of Tony Blair on shaping the UK response to 9/11, and as such speaks directly to Stephen Dyson’s chapter on Blair’s and Gordon Brown’s conceptions of leadership and identity in foreign policy.

The domestic context

As a starting point, it is necessary to identify three major contextual threads that had provided continuity in UK defence policy prior to 9/11: the significance of defence, the importance of the ‘special relationship’ and the paradoxical (in)significance of evidence in making
policy decisions. First, despite rhetoric to the contrary, particularly in opposition, and famously so in the 1980s, the Labour Party in government has a long history of being strong on defence (Gummett 2000). For example, under the Harold Wilson government of 1964–1970, Denis Healey as Defence Secretary maintained UK defence capability at a comparatively high level despite substantial reforms and military equipment cancellations (Healey 1969; Gummett 2000). In many ways this represented a relatively strong degree of policy continuity between past Conservative and Labour administrations. Issues such as unilateralism, pacifism, or stringent control over defence spending although prominent in opposition, never seemed to have been ‘real’ agenda items. To illustrate this, both the Vanguard class Trident submarines and the Eurofighter were excluded from the 1998 Strategic Defence Review (MoD 1998). The evidence suggests that New Labour in this respect was not so different from Old Labour. Second, the central position accorded to transatlantic relations within Britain’s foreign and defence policy posture also provided continuity between Conservative and Labour Governments (see for instance Aldrich 1998; Bartlett 1992), and between Old Labour and New Labour (for example Dunne 2004). Whether justified or otherwise, the perception from London that the UK is the ‘strongest’ European defence player – and therefore of significance to the United States – has permeated policy over many years even though discrepancies in the balance of the relationship have clearly been apparent. Whilst from the UK perspective its military contribution to coalition operations may seem large, in real terms, and especially compared to the US effort, it is in fact rather modest. The phrase ‘punching above our weight’, attributed to the former Conservative Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, has some credibility in the UK as a description of the UK’s international position, although this rarely seems to characterize perspectives from outside the UK.

The third contextual factor that has shaped Britain’s post-war defence policy and posture concerns the broadly liberal approach by British governments to evidence-based policy development for domestic and foreign policy alike. Within New Labour circles, in particular, there was a strikingly paradoxical and schizophrenic commitment to, on the one hand, the rhetoric of ‘evidence based policy-making’ and, on the other, a rhetoric of ‘being tough on issues’. The government was, crucially, often influenced by a preoccupation with the media response to policy initiatives (Tonry 2003: 1). Very often these different approaches yielded contradictory policies, with the media agenda arguably taking precedence over the weight of evidence in constructing new policies. For
example, in criminal justice policy there was a tendency to disregard credible systematic evidence against the prevailing ideology or political self-interest shaping New Labour’s restrictive policy-making group. Hence, the government disregarded negative evidence on the utility of CCTV for crime prevention, as distinct from crime apprehension, and identity cards, the multitude of different sentencing and disposition initiatives, and the rather spurious emphasis on money laundering as an element in the management of terrorism (Parker and Taylor 2010). Given the broad context of a simple emphasis on ‘defence’, the ‘special relationship’ and the need for evidence-based policy-making (when it suited the government’s agenda) we can begin to appreciate the circumstances influencing the reception and interpretation of the events of 9/11 in New Labour decision-making circles.

Traditions and dilemmas: New Labour and 9/11

It is clear that the events of 9/11 came as a profound shock to policymakers in and outside the UK. This section explores the ways in which this shock was felt and managed by drawing on interviews about the immediate ramifications and aftermath of 9/11 with a number of civil servants and politicians serving at the time. A total of seven people were interviewed over a two-year period between 2008 and 2010; a number of other less formal conversations were conducted with some eight others. Interviewees were asked to reflect on their experiences of the period immediately after 9/11. Neither interviews nor the less formal conversations were recorded, but in the case of interviews notes were taken at the time, and in the case of conversations notes were written up afterwards. Interviews were conducted to a semi-structured format, with interviewees encouraged to expand and develop topics as they wished. All participants were aware that both interviews and conversations were part of a research project exploring the UK response to 9/11 and all interviews and conversations were undertaken on the basis of anonymity and non-attribution. The analysis of the accounts of those events is informed by the author’s twin specialisms in Terrorism Studies and Forensic Psychology; all the comments or views expressed are the author’s responsibility and not attributable to anyone else.

On the basis of the interviews and informal discussions, three threads can be identified that both characterized the immediate UK response to 9/11 and set the scene for subsequent policy development: shock within the policy-making setting, knowledge of the alleged attackers and anxiety about the likely consequences for Britain’s economy and society.
To begin with, the initial aftermath was, not unnaturally, moulded by a profound shock at the events, mitigated only to a degree by the structure of Whitehall machinery. Within the constraints offered by the administrative and decisional structures, the UK response was described by all interviewed as professional, in that all administrative structures worked. That said, although interviewees suggested the systems in place appeared to have worked well, there were questions raised about the Cabinet administrative structures and their utility in managing a crisis of this kind and magnitude. David Owen (2007a) has identified as a major structural weakness the reorganization of the Cabinet Secretariat undertaken by Blair, which effectively brought policy advice directly to the Prime Minister rather than to the Cabinet as a whole: ‘The new structure in No 10 was designed to cause the progressive downgrading of the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence and their respective Secretaries of State’ (2007b: 32). It might be argued that the result of this was to exclude, or diminish at critical moments, the views of experienced civil servants, who might have tempered or supported the decisional capacity of ministers. What appears to have followed from the restructuring was the progressive loss of the value of Cabinet consensus, the result of partial and selective information disclosure. As later investigations into government policy-making would reveal, this might be thought to have been a deliberate quality of New Labour’s policy development – its policy-making style (for example Butler Report 2004).

Interviewees further reported that the decision-makers themselves and the context in which they worked were ill-equipped to deal with the challenges posed by the 9/11 attacks. A critical factor in this was that the political management team had little experience of crises of this kind. This may seem a rather odd interpretation because the UK has had considerable experience of constructing political and military responses to terrorist atrocities. However, that experience has largely been either in distant settings where there was little domestic consequence, such as Malaya in the 1950s, or primarily of terrorism related to Northern Ireland, where experience and patterns of behaviour had developed over a period of thirty or more years. Of critical significance in this regards, and in contrast to 9/11, Irish terrorism tended to be very focused, very constrained, and with limited political goals. The violence of Northern Irish terrorism also tended to be graded, proportionate and ‘knowable’ in the sense that because it was enduring, there was always a context and a capacity to either make direct contact in some sense with the terrorist organizations or to use informants to find
out what lay behind the action – a means of contact and sometimes even negotiation might therefore be assumed (see for example Powell 2008). The relatively ‘knowable’ quality of terrorism in Northern Ireland was of particular policy importance, in that it gave policy-makers a clearer sense of the broad historical context, likely outcomes and the options available to them, and also offered the opportunity, however deniably at arm’s length or in secret, of negotiation. No equivalent knowledge or route appeared to be available to contact Al Qaeda, and in any event it seems that from the very beginning, contextual knowledge was lacking and the possibility of negotiation was not recognized as a viable option.

The second factor that framed the immediate response and shaped subsequent policy lay in the context in which the attack of 9/11 might be understood. With the exception of Jack Straw, interviewees reported that the ministers involved had little experience of Muslim communities. More generally, there was felt to be little sense of Muslim concerns or potential community reaction and little sense of ‘public mood’ in response to 9/11. This again contrasts with the Northern Irish situation where there was widespread knowledge of the community and the political issues at stake. In academic quarters, and in some elements of the intelligence services, there was a level of understanding of the threat of Islamic fundamentalism and some knowledge of the potential for major attacks on Western interests. However, it seems that, in policy circles, this knowledge was not widely acknowledged or was not regarded as of sufficient significance; in this context, the Northern Irish experience was also not seen to be particularly relevant. The final issue that came through in the elite interviews was that, not unreasonably, there was profound anxiety about the consequences of 9/11 in terms of its economic, social and political effects. The unilateral US closure of airspace in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 had vast potential to affect UK economic interests and there was particular anxiety about the consequences of closure or limitations in use of Heathrow Airport. However, both in terms of the terrorists and the US response, the UK had limited or no capacity to influence events. Policy-makers were faced with responding to decisions made elsewhere, namely in Washington, and possessed little or no immediate capacity to influence them.

The American dimension to British foreign and defence policy-making thus added a further layer of complexity to an already complicated picture. The experienced Lord Malloch-Brown (Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme between 1997 and 2005; UN Deputy Secretary-General in 2006; Minister of State at the
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2007–9) has observed that Tony Blair and George W., Bush were ‘joined together at the hip’ (Sky News 2007). Although a relationship between Blair and Bush clearly existed before 9/11, it initially seemed to be typified more by differences of style rather than by fundamental shared values. After 9/11, the nature and quality of the relationship as far as Blair was concerned seemed to grow in significance. On Blair’s part, this was clearly illustrated by his Labour Party conference speech of October 2001, one month after 9/11, in which the Prime Minister said to his Party members and inter alia the American public: ‘We were with you at the first, we will stay with you to the last’ (Blair 2001a). This tone of shared adversity, shared pain and shared agenda increasingly framed Blair’s response to 9/11 and its aftermath, and suggests that this reflected something more than political calculation. It was, rather, a fundamental response to the world situation as Blair saw it. A further element in the development of their assertive relationship was what was described by one interviewee as a ‘coincidence of dynamism’. Both Blair and Bush might be described as having been energized by the crisis and for both men the tragedy of 9/11 appeared to offer an arena for expression of what might have otherwise been latent broader global aspirations, rather than just explicit policies focused on the events of 9/11. Given what seem to have been the structural and policy limitations of the UK response, those weaknesses were rapidly filled by the immediate US mobilization. The US showed a great deal of immediate and dramatic activity, particularly in terms of the closure of airspace, the rapid identification of Osama bin Laden as the instigator of the attacks, and the mobilization of military resources. Accompanying this was a huge outpouring of information and analysis that rapidly both filled the lacuna in the UK response and shaped the contours of such response as there was from London. The contrast with the weak European response, both in terms of collective policy and dissemination of information, interviewees suggested, resulted in limited or no counter balance to US activism. Having set the policy-making scenario in context it is now possible to trace how New Labour responded to the challenges 9/11 and the US response posed to UK defence policymaking, and to seek an explanation for New Labour’s approach in these formative weeks and months of the nascent ‘war on terror’.

The need to be ‘seen to be doing something’

The immediate response to the events of 9/11 can be argued to have set the scene for subsequent policy, but in doing so it exposed a major
weakness in New Labour: its rhetorical emphasis on evidence, but its practice of making decisions based on essentially local and short-term political considerations. In the case of 9/11, the effects of this seem to have been exaggerated by poorly prepared decision-makers, weak government structures and the dominance of US information at the critical juncture. As a result, a number of interviewees described the initial UK response immediately, and in the months and years following 9/11, as ‘locked into the process’ and ‘a reversion to what they understood’. What emerged was an emphasis on legislation, Parliamentary response and on cooperation with a US-led initiative. The explanation for this is relatively simple: in contrast to a ‘great power’ such as the US there was little in real terms that Britain could actually do.

For governments, to appear to be doing nothing in the face of such a major emotional and catastrophic event as 9/11 would have been problematic, and interviewees suggested that politicians in general and particularly the prime minister felt politically vulnerable. They had to respond to this event by showing leadership through being seen to be active within the UK as well as by following an external US lead. New Labour’s thinking was also preoccupied by the rise within the UK of criticism of its policy (illustrated in a very dramatic way by Philips 2006), and growing criticism of UK policy from, notably, France and other European countries. A number of interviewees suggested that those UK and European voices encouraged a political and legislative focus on indeterminate but essentially media attractive issues, such as the alleged threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in Iraq. Big legislative initiatives – illustrating the sense of needing to be seen to do something – then emerged to address what were, from a UK perspective, relatively small terrorist-related problems, for example the emphasis on terrorist financing, attempts to criminalize possession of materials ‘glorifying’ terrorism, and the attempts to introduce identity cards. As well as having unintended effects on their primary focus (the terrorists themselves) they frequently appeared to be driven by agendas unrelated to terrorism (see for example Mythen and Walklate 2006). More substantive issues, such as the problems of multiculturalism and social exclusion seemed to have attracted much less political attention and were therefore less inclined to be tackled in a substantive way by New Labour.

On the positive side, the development of the government’s CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy (Home Office 2009) provided an overall coherence to UK terrorism policy that was lacking prior to 9/11. In many ways it represented an effective and sophisticated model of policy expression, particularly in a country like the UK with a decentralized policing service
and no tradition of military involvement in civil society. Even there, however, weaknesses emerged particularly around the PREVENT strand (tackling the radicalization of individuals in the UK and elsewhere, which sustains the international terrorist threat), reflecting amongst other things New Labour’s predilection to be driven by media response, rather than evidence. More than one interviewee suggested that as CONTEST developed, contradictions emerged that were the result of fundamental flaws in UK policy in the immediate period after 9/11. The reason for this was because although what was being followed was essentially a law enforcement and social agenda initiative, it was framed by a highly mobilized and articulate US response, rather than an analysis based on UK needs and the UK context.

Indeed, New Labour’s response to 9/11 contrasted with the way UK legislation and policy developed when faced with Northern Irish terrorism. Then, responses had been slower and more thoughtful, and there was much more careful working out of consequences, as illustrated in the patient and detailed negotiations associated with the implementation of the 1998 Belfast Agreement. The frenetic activity following 9/11 was thus something out of the ordinary. For example, in the period immediately after the New York attacks, Blair held meetings with 54 foreign leaders and is thought to have travelled more than 40,000 miles on some 31 separate flights (Smith 2003). Ironically, this was also the period when careful and detailed negotiations about the future of Northern Ireland were being conducted. Subsequent legal problems in this area might in part be explained by the volume and pace of activity, and by a kind of compartmentalization of government. Additionally, as Philip Norton has suggested, the problems that emerged might also have been the result of unintended consequences in relation to conflicting legislative provision. In particular, legislative efforts to control the threat of terrorism have come into conflict with Human Rights legislation (Norton 2007: 117ff). The conditions that enabled what might be regarded as hasty legislative provision were reinforced by the manner in which 9/11 and its aftermath were constructed as ‘different’ from what had gone before, and therefore not requiring the same analysis or response as other forms of terrorism. It might also be argued, however, that it reflected the influence of US priorities. American rhetoric, particularly that of George Bush, emphasized how different the perpetrators of 9/11 and those commanding them were from previous terrorists. For instance, Bush’s address from the White House on 16 September 2001 described his determination to ‘rid the world of the evil-doers’ (CNN 2001a), illustrating how that
difference was framed in absolute moral as well as military and political terms. New Labour’s schizophrenic attitude to the role of evidence in guiding legislation is apparent in the government’s failure to acknowledge that evidence on which to base any notion of ‘difference’ was either complex or lacking altogether.

Critiquing the rushed and in many ways badly thought-through New Labour response to 9/11 is one thing, explaining it quite another. In the absence of the release of official material on government deliberations this is as far as any analysis can go. That said, we can take a cue from the rich literature on the psychology of foreign policy decision-making to begin piecing together a viable explanation. Here, two possible factors can be studied: one is couched in terms of broad political and social processes, the other draws on personal, group and psychological factors and the qualities of the political leadership. Given the intensity and emotional valence of events in the immediate period surrounding 9/11, an exploration of psychological factors seems to stand out as perhaps the most significant factor. Indeed, the present author has argued elsewhere (Taylor 2010) that explanations in terms of social forces do not adequately account for terrorist behaviour, and the same judgement might be thought to apply here. That is to say, accounts reliant upon analysis of social and group processes may provide a necessary element in the explanation, but they are not sufficient. It has long been established that conditions of crisis favour the influence of individual factors and that in such circumstances decisional styles and interpersonal relationships are of particular significance in shaping outcomes (for example Preston 1997; Winter 2003; Greenstein 1967; Holsti 1976; Keller 2005). A further important consideration is the juxtaposition between how circumstances were constructed at the time and how they are interpreted later through political and media commentary.

A common theme raised by all the interviewees was that the crisis management team dealing with the immediate aftermath of 9/11 was working under intense and understandable stress. Lack of preparedness, lack of experience, time pressures and an excess of, but paradoxically limited, information on events all undoubtedly contributed to an elevation in levels of stress. Research on the impact of stress suggests that the greater the stress, the greater the perception of threat and risk. We also know that stress can result in a narrowing of attention, loss of routine responses and a reduction in an individual’s ability to handle complex issues associated with an increased risk of hasty decisions (for instance Cannon-Bowers and Salas 1998; Cowan 2009); these are all outcomes that have been referred to in the context of the
UK crisis management of 9/11. We can bolster this argument by drawing on our knowledge of the relevant social psychological processes. Two broad qualities of group processes can be identified that seem to have characterized the New Labour response in the days after 9/11, the effects of which were then transmuted onto later policy: groupthink (Janis 1973; t'Hart 1990; Allison and Zelikow 1999) and ‘psychological traps’ (Brockner and Rubin 1985).

Groupthink refers to what has been termed ‘rationalized conformity’ (Whyte 1956), where decisions emerge in situations involving group decision-making that meet group rather than rational or empirically influenced outcomes. It is a feature of decisions made by highly cohesive groups working under pressure, and is characterized by examination of few alternatives, lack of contingency planning, limited or no critical analysis, not seeking outside opinion and selective information gathering. The emergence of groupthink is not inevitable in groups operating under stress, but there are circumstances that optimize its occurrence. McCauley (1989) describes three conditions in which groupthink might emerge: first, groups exposed to directive leadership; second, homogeneity of members’ social background; and third, ideology and isolation of the group from outside sources of information and analysis. The emergency planning meetings that followed the events of 9/11 met many of these qualities, and whilst it is not yet possible to access detailed accounts of what happened, nor adequately reconstruct them, there are sufficient grounds indicated in the interviews for supposing that at least some of the decisions made at that time were made in conditions conducive to the operation of groupthink (see for example Daddow 2009). We do know that groupthink results in: illusions of invulnerability, rationalization (the group’s end justifies the means) and holding onto poor decisions despite evidence to the contrary, a belief in group morality, sharing stereotypes, not expressing true feelings, selective filtering of information and maintaining the illusion of unanimity. From the accounts provided in the interviews, it could be argued that many of these attributes describe the New Labour Government’s immediate response to 9/11, and carried forward in a more general way to analyses of the problem of terrorism.

‘Psychological traps’ refer to an escalating commitment to a previously chosen, though failing, course of action in order to justify or ‘make good on’ prior investments. For example, it is often seen to be politically unacceptable for a leader to admit that he or she has made a mistake and that sacrifices made have achieved nothing, or worse still, that the decisions they have taken may even have hurt a relevant
group’s ability to pursue its interests. Similarly, people who make the sacrifices are also understandably reluctant to admit that they have served no useful purpose and that their confrontational strategy should be abandoned. The reluctance to abandon failed strategies can be seen in the same light and this reluctance, ironically, tends to increase as the magnitude of the sacrifice increases. Expressed more generally, the greater the costs incurred, the more becomes invested in the goals pursued. In this we can see that the more pain or damage there has been, and the more criticism a policy generates, the greater the need to continue towards ‘victory’ in order to justify the sacrifices that have already been made. Psychological traps therefore closely relate to theories such as groupthink, and while it is not possible to track individual decisions and their context made at the time of 9/11 in toto, in general terms, the description above of the effects of psychological traps seems to capture something crucial about the emergence of UK policy within New Labour circles after 9/11. The comments of those interviewed for this chapter do not contradict that analysis. Both groupthink and psychological traps seem to offer very powerful explanatory tools to help understand the emergence of UK policy after 9/11. However, suggestive as such analyses might be, perhaps the single factor that underpins the whole process revolves around the character of the leadership offered at that time. Tony Blair was intimately involved in the management of the UK response to 9/11 and it is therefore to him that we turn in the final section of this chapter.

Tony Blair: Leadership and foreign policy

There exist few formal psychological assessments of the mental health or wellbeing of any world leaders, including Tony Blair. It is reasonable to assume that such leaders are unlikely to have the time to make themselves available for formal assessment, and the political consequences of any negative outcome must surely weigh heavy in the judgment. Nevertheless, there are grounds for supposing that the personal qualities associated with a leader, rather than notions of ideology or broader themes of international relations, are critical in determining policy choices particularly in the case of Tony Blair (Dyson 2007, 2009). For example, a collection edited by Jerrold Post (2003) has explored some of the methodological issues associated with the psychological assessment of political leadership, and offers what is termed ‘profiles’ of Saddam Hussein and Bill Clinton that might inter alia offer some insights into Blair’s activities, for instance being a judicious political
calculator, justification of actions in terms of exceptional events, politically out of touch with reality, chooses sycophants for advisors, use of aggression instrumentally and a sense of messianic rightness. In a more specific discussion of leadership and decision-making style, Mark Schafer and Stephen Walker (2006b) explore, but do not develop, a strategy for an analysis of Blair in terms of ‘operational code’, a concept originating in the analysis of Bolshevik ideology and character. This relates to essential qualities of personality that express motivational biases as well as the appraisal of political realities. However, in the absence of a clear working out of this in practice, it is difficult to judge the adequacy or otherwise of the approach. Suggestive as these approaches are, in the absence of participation by Blair himself, conclusions based on analyses of this kind are necessarily tentative.

Dyson (2006) addressed some of the above weaknesses by offering a more specific analysis of the relationship between personality factors assessed as being present in Blair and his determination to attack Iraq, using more formal and validated ‘at-a-distance measures’ (Winter 2003; Taber 2000). Dyson’s assessment of Blair suggests that his personality and leadership style did indeed shape both the process and outcome of British foreign policy after 9/11, including the decisions taken on Iraq. Dyson notes, amongst other qualities, that Blair had a very high score in his belief in his own ability to control events. The Prime Minister scored two standard deviations above the mean of both a 51 ‘leader’ reference group and a 12 ‘British Prime Minister’ reference group (Dyson 2006: 294). He scored low on conceptual complexity, and high on the need for power. This work appears to confirm the significance of personal qualities in shaping the direction of policy and supports conclusions drawn from the preceding section on the specific occurrences in elite decision-making that followed 9/11, notably the impact of groupthink and psychological traps on the decisions that were taken by Blair and his advisory team.

Added to the work on leadership and foreign policy, there have been suggestions that an array of other characteristic traits influenced Blair’s decision-making, not just in terms of the personality variables referred to above, but in ways that might raise broader questions around his mental health. Paul Broks (2003), for example, raised the question as to whether Blair showed signs of psychopathy in his response to the potential availability of WMD to Saddam Hussein. He suggests Blair’s psychopathy showed itself in a number of ways: ‘... charming, intelli-
gent, emotionally manipulative, ruthlessly ambitious and self-serving. Plausible psychopaths are skilled in the tricks of cognitive empathy. Blair certainly seems to have held strong views on the relationship between terrorism and WMD and the association of Saddam Hussein with both. In speeches he was very effective at raising cognitive empathy and through juxtaposition associating unrelated ideas and concepts (see Blair 2002). It is important to note, however, that Allan Beveridge (2003) quite properly raises doubts about the adequacy or indeed appropriateness of attempts at such diagnoses based on little or no reliable clinical evidence and drawing only on necessarily limited (and secondary) clinical experience.

Owen (2007b) and Owen and Davidson (2009) have offered a suggestive analysis more concentrated on Tony Blair’s behaviour that has some degree of overlap with Broks, but extending his arguments in new directions. They dwell not on psychopathy (which has limited and contentious connotations) but the concept of the ‘Hubris Syndrome’. This syndrome is said to develop after someone has been in a position of power for some time, and describes a cluster of behaviours and attitudes. These include a narcissistic propensity to see the world primarily as an arena to exercise power and seek glory, a predisposition to take decisions that show themselves in a good light, a disproportionate concern with image and presentation, a messianic manner of talking, exaggerated self-belief, loss of contact with reality, and a tendency to allow ‘broad vision’ (especially of moral rectitude) to distort decision-making (from Owen 2007b). Other authors have identified similar qualities in political leaders, including David Ronfeldt (1994) who describes a related syndrome he identifies as the Hubris-Nemesis Complex, but hitherto none have explored this within the context of formal diagnostic criteria. The following table from Owen and Davidson (2009: 1398) describes what they offer as the proposed diagnostic criteria for the Hubris syndrome, relating the symptoms to broader the psychiatric diagnostic category of Cluster B personality disorders in DSM-IV-TR (1994). (There are four Cluster B personality disorders identified in DSM IV-TR: anti-social, borderline, narcissistic, and histrionic. DSM-IV describes these as a subset of personality disorders that are characterized by dramatic, emotional or erratic behaviour. The Cluster B personality disorders are the most common of the DSM-IV personality disorders.). In this categorization, APD = Anti-social Personality Disorder; HPD = Histrionic Personality Disorder; NPD = Narcissistic Personality Disorder.
Table 12.1  Proposed criteria for hubris syndrome, and their correspondence to features of cluster B personality disorders in DSM-IV

1. A narcissistic propensity to see their world primarily as an arena in which to exercise power and seek glory; NPD.6
2. A predisposition to take actions which seem likely to cast the individual in a good light – i.e. in order to enhance image; NPD.1
3. A disproportionate concern with image and presentation; NPD.3
4. A messianic manner of talking about current activities and a tendency to exaltation; NPD.2
5. An identification with the nation, or organization to the extent that the individual regards his/her outlook and interests as identical; (unique)
6. A tendency to speak in the third person or use the royal ‘we’; (unique)
7. Excessive confidence in the individual’s own judgment and contempt for the advice or criticism of others; NPD.9
8. Exaggerated self-belief, bordering on a sense of omnipotence, in what they personally can achieve; NPD.1 and 2 combined
9. A belief that rather than being accountable to the mundane court of colleagues or public opinion, the court to which they answer is History or God; NPD.3
10. An unshakable belief that in that court they will be vindicated; (unique)
11. Loss of contact with reality; often associated with progressive isolation; APD 3 and 5
12. Restlessness, recklessness and impulsiveness; (unique)
13. A tendency to allow their ‘broad vision’, about the moral rectitude of a proposed course, to obviate the need to consider practicality, cost or outcomes; (unique)
14. Hubristic incompetence, where things go wrong because too much self-confidence has led the leader not to worry about the nuts and bolts of policy; HPD.5

Items 5, 6, 10, 12 and 13 in the above table do not appear explicitly in the DSM-IV-TR list of symptom criteria, although they seem quite closely allied to other criteria. For example, recklessness (12) may be associated with Borderline Personality Disorder.
In Owen's descriptions of Blair's behaviour (Owen 2007b), we can see how clearly Blair fits within virtually all of these diagnostic categories as an almost archetypal example. However, there have been conceptual and practical criticisms of this approach, not least of which is that in some senses these behaviours are not objectively derived, and appear to lack external validation. To a large extent, they are descriptions of Blair, rather than an objectively defined state. Furthermore, Seamus MacSuibhne (2009) cautions against the extension of the notion of illness to something that, although personally troublesome and a cause for concern, might not necessarily fit under the umbrellas of psychopathology and mental illness. Medicalization of understanding difficult behaviour is not always helpful, and perhaps the use of a term like 'problematic behaviour' might be more appropriate. We are accustomed to categories of behaviour that are potentially damaging, but that do not necessarily imply a formal sense of psychopathology or mental illness. Indeed, terrorism itself would be one such category (Taylor 1988; Taylor 1991) and a number of criminal activities might fall within the same framework. In a general sense, 'problematic behaviour' in this context relates to behaviour that significantly interferes with an individual's capacity to engage appropriately with other people, feel good about themselves, relate to others appropriately and to deal with the demands of life. As such it can be set within a context of cognitive and social dysfunction. But where what is at stake is so enormous, as in decisions that might take a country to war, we might then reasonably feel that procedures and checks should be in place to ensure that policy decisions are not taken that might be unreasonably distorted by these factors.

The purpose of this discussion has not been to determine whether or not Tony Blair might be given a formal diagnosis of mental illness. Indeed, it might even be argued that for someone to be an effective leader at this level, some of these qualities are necessary. It is also important to stress that none of the people interviewed for the purpose of this chapter offered any opinion on Blair's behaviour, nor did they call into question his mental health. Instead, it is necessary to study what the implications of the behaviour the Prime Minister showed were for British foreign and defence policy, especially in the critical period during and after 9/11. On the basis of Owen's account (Owen 2007b) there are indeed grounds for supposing that Blair showed forms of problematic behaviour after the events of 9/11, which, when seen within the context of the analysis presented above, is a source for concern. Furthermore, although not discussed here, there are grounds for supposing that Blair's response to 9/11 was foreshadowed by his
response to the war in Kosovo (Daddow 2009). Certainly the experience of Kosovo seems to have confirmed in him his own sense of leadership, perhaps reflecting the origins of what Dyson (2006) identified as Blair’s belief in his own ability to control events. Daddow also sees in Blair’s response to Kosovo a legitimization of his distancing of executive decisional structures from those of Whitehall: ‘The third lesson Blair had confirmed by Kosovo was that he did not need to rely on Whitehall’s decision-making machinery for ideas or strategy’ (Daddow 2009: 556). Whilst we can only surmise from the public record, it seems possible that the effects of processes such as groupthink and psychological traps give the potential for problematic behaviour of the kind identified above to become very potent. Thus, the crux of the analysis presented here is that we can begin to identify the qualities of Blair’s behaviour that might result in what might be identified as problematic behaviour.

Conclusions

This chapter has studied the UK government’s response to the immediate events surrounding 9/11, focusing in particular on the character and decision-making style of Tony Blair. It has gone beyond the regular narratives and understandings to help place into context the forces that shaped the UK response. In doing so it has explored a number of issues, some of a very personal nature (the potential problematic qualities of Tony Blair’s behaviour), some rooted in the research into social psychological processes (groupthink and psychological traps). What has emerged from the discussion is a weakness, perhaps even a failure, in the nature of the decisional process, which may have been flawed anyway given what Owen (2007a) and Dyson (2007) have both identified about Whitehall machinery and Blair’s handling of his foreign policy decision-making. They were exaggerated after 9/11 by weaknesses in the crisis decision group, exacerbated by both psychological processes and Blair’s highly personalized leadership style. Perhaps the moral of this episode is that steps need to be taken to ensure that vulnerabilities of this kind can be identified and addressed in the future. In the context of the UK, this probably means that the systems of Cabinet government need to be examined and revitalized to ensure sufficient checks and balances are in place in the system to avoid the excesses of problematic leadership behaviour and ill-prepared crisis decisional processes.
This collection was put together for two reasons. First, at the empirical level, it set out to test the validity of a proposition about British foreign policy that has been frequently heard in the period since 1997: that the New Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown promised a radical break from the past but ultimately produced little in the way of novel thinking or practice in the conduct of Britain’s external relations. Stimulated by a discovery of overlapping findings in the editors’ respective research into foreign policy ethics and Britain’s relations with the EU under New Labour, we wanted to branch out to include other realms of foreign policy action under Blair and Brown in order to produce a more holistic account of the continuities and ruptures with previous practices. Second, at the theoretical level, we wanted to spur the study of British foreign policy in new directions by incorporating the classic Churchill ‘three circles’ model of British foreign policy in a conceptually inclined approach to appreciating the complexities of the material and ideational frameworks within which British foreign policy is necessarily constructed and executed. Our ‘Identity-Ethics-Power’ (IEP) model moves away from seeing British foreign policy as the sum of its geostrategic relationships at any point in time. Instead, we propose that policy-makers would do well to take seriously the ideational underpinnings of foreign policy, paying attention to: the kind of Britain they want to create and want to see being created on the world stage; the sets of values they want to promote at home and export abroad to secure particular elements of both the national interest and those of the international community as a whole; and, finally, the levers of power (at home and abroad) that they can best pull to help achieve these objectives. The IEP model can thus act simultaneously as a spur to a more nuanced enactment of foreign policy as well as a critical tool
by which scholars and commentators can hold the foreign policy establishment to account by asking pertinent questions about why certain foreign policy actions have taken place, based on which beliefs, and in pursuit of which objectives. This conclusion reflects on the evidence presented in the chapters as it pertains to the empirical and theoretical ambitions of the book as a whole. It begins by reviewing the evidence on the continuities and changes over the New Labour years, moves on to reassess the merits of the IEP model, and ends with a brief look at the contours of the emerging Coalition foreign policy from 2010.

Continuity and change in British foreign policy under New Labour

I always reckoned that even the ones who didn’t like me ... or who didn’t agree with me ... still admired the fact I counted, was a big player, was a world and not just a national leader. It’s not a reason for doing anything, by the way, but the British, whatever they say, prefer their Prime Ministers to stand tall internationally (Blair 2010b: 410).

The bulk of the evidence in the preceding chapters supports the argument that New Labour brought little in the way of genuine novelty to the conduct of British foreign policy, either in terms of machinery (the way foreign policy was made) or in terms of output (the content of foreign policy, usually expressed in the way Britain dealt with leading states and other actors on the world stage). The two, indeed, overlap to such an extent that they will be treated simultaneously here. Underpinning this finding is the argument that, ideationally, New Labour’s foreign policy initiatives were few and far between. Where such initiatives did take hold – notably Robin Cook and the Foreign Office’s ‘ethical dimension’ – they either did so for relatively short periods, or became watered down over time because they did not manage to mobilize widespread support from within the crucial mainspring of foreign policy ideas: Downing Street. Other foreign policy innovations, such as a more nuanced appreciation of Scottish-English-Welsh action on the European stage (Pauline Schnapper’s chapter) appeared more by accident than design. And all of this came against a backdrop of dominant foreign policy discourses that rehashed Churchill’s global pretensions for the twenty-first century. The idea that Britain was a ‘hub’, ‘pivot’ or ‘bridge’ was alarmingly evident in speeches by New Labour
Prime Ministers and Foreign Secretaries right across the period 1997–2010. Even if the Blair-Brown governments genuinely set out to tack British foreign policy in new directions, as David McCourt points out in his chapter, the continued allure of a post-imperial global role would have held New Labour back by virtue of them continually over-inflating the British public’s and, crucially, others’ expectations of what Britain wanted to achieve on the international stage. As the quote from his memoirs at the start of this section indicates, Blair seriously seems to have believed he was enacting the popular will in foreign policy. British foreign policy is intersubjectively constituted on the back of a range of beliefs in the country’s ‘great power’ status that go largely unquestioned. Until New Labour could admit to Britain that it was no longer a global power, it would be hard to manage those expectations abroad and devise a foreign policy that matched resources to objectives. By the time the New Labour years drew to a close Britain’s armed forces were damagingly overstretched and its reputation as a ‘good international citizen’, patiently constructed through the later 1990s and early 2000s, was if not in tatters then certainly under review after the Iraq debâcle.

The lasting New Labour innovation is likely to be the significance accorded the Department for International Development (DfID) within the foreign policy-making machinery, along with a seat in Cabinet for its Secretary of State. This significantly ramped up the priority given by government to poverty reduction and global development activities, which had previously been overseen by the Overseas Development Agency (ODA). Since its creation in the 1970s the ODA had a rather uncertain institutional position, bouncing around between being a separate department and a wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (DfID 2010). The creation of DfID put an end to this and, as Jamie Gaskarth observes in his chapter, the institutionalization within Whitehall of a department dedicated to the promotion of New Labour’s ‘ethical’ agenda has taken concrete form in the work it has carried out in multilateral forums such as the European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN) on issues such as aid to African nations, and the study of the humanitarian impact of cluster munitions. DfID’s promotion of the international ban on landmines, against the US position, is a signal departure from a general subservience to the US on many policy issues that shines through elsewhere in this collection, a point to which we will return below. Britain’s robust support for, and ratification of the Rome Statute leading to the establishment of the International Criminal Court in 2002, could also provide a point of contrast with the American
position which, as Tara McCormack, Jason Ralph and Mark Phythian all point out, was less inclined during the George W. Bush years to make such a play of abiding by accepted norms and rules of ‘international society’.

Recognizing that DfID itself has a history – often silenced in the clamour to present it as a ‘new’ department – flags up one of the counter arguments to the interpretation that New Labour’salteration to the foreign policy machinery was quite such an innovation as the government liked to suggest. Two further factors come into play here. First, DfID was only significant in New Labour’s foreign policy calculations so long as the departmental figurehead had the ear of the Prime Minister. Thus, in its early years, Clare Short, representing the ‘left’ of the Labour movement, was a credible spokesperson for DfID and managed to maintain the confidence of Tony Blair. As time passed, and the war in Iraq approached, her vocal criticisms of the war on terror and the secretive way foreign policy was made by the Prime Minister and his aides limited the credibility accorded her department by the central ‘hub’ of decision-making power in Downing Street. Following her resignation in 2003 it took Hilary Benn during the remainder of Blair’s time and Douglas Alexander during Brown’s period as Prime Minister to restore DfID’s profile as a credible foreign policy-making actor.

A similar fate befell the principal Whitehall repository of foreign policy expertise during the New Labour years: the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and this is the second factor that helps explain the relative continuity in foreign policy machinery and therefore output during the New Labour years. What emerges from the preceding chapters is just how centralized foreign policy decision-making was around the Prime Minister, away from the FCO and Cabinet, which became something of a forum reported to but not listened to. Cabinet meetings under New Labour appear to have been decorative rather than fully functioning sources of critical debate, discussion and collective decision-making (Blair is at pains to deny this in his account of the period – see Blair 2010b: 338 and 447). It appears that Blair, in particular, was impatient with the FCO’s cautious approach to multilateral diplomacy, part of his personal predilection for working with individuals and organizations (such as his military ‘guys’) who – as he saw it – ‘got the job done’ without any fuss. As far back as the Kosovo intervention of 1999, the Prime Minister cut the FCO diplomats out of the loop altogether in devising the landmark Chicago speech, apparently because he was wary of them trying to write in a sixth condition for intervening in a humanitarian dispute: that the UN should have authorized the
intervention prior to it taking place. That Blair effectively stole the ‘ethical’ clothes of Cook and the FCO as early as 1999 further illustrates the shift in the locus of authority to ‘speak’ for foreign policy that Blair would entrench in the coming years. It was especially apparent during moments of crisis, such as 9/11 and the build-up to the Iraq war, as the chapters by Taylor and Phythian aptly testify, when all the key decisions were taken by Blair using personal diplomacy with other leaders, notably George W. Bush, and taking counsel from his ‘democracy’ of advisers in Number 10. As Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw was brought into the loop to legitimize the policy decisions – and to sell them to the public via the media – but one suspects that had it been a different Foreign Secretary in situ the outcome would have been much the same.

To take another example, on EU policy, as Patrick Holden has shown in his chapter, we can argue that Chancellor Brown and the Treasury held the whip hand over this key area of British European policy by virtue of its control over the timing and nature of the engagement Britain would be able to have with the EU under New Labour. By keeping Britain out of the Eurozone from the off (and appeasing the Eurosceptical media in the process), such ‘Europeanism’ as there was within the FCO, or Downing Street for that matter, became dissipated because staying out of the euro militated against Blair building his desired national consensus around the idea of Britain being a constructively engaged ‘European’ nation. While he could claim certain achievements, notably in the area of European defence cooperation, on key European issues such as the single currency Blair followed his predecessors in ducking the difficult questions and doing relatively little to alter the place ‘Europe’ occupied in official and public debates about foreign policy. As for the other half of Blair’s ‘bridge’, it is clear from this volume that Blair, like Brown (the latter perhaps more so) was a convinced Atlanticist, and that when push came to shove he would choose to follow Washington’s lead rather than risk being cut out of the loop by being seen to disagree in public with the thrust of American policy, notably in the war on terror. Blair’s overconfidence that he could bend the ear of the President to suit Britain’s policy choices might mark another point of continuity with past British foreign policy practice: over-estimating the influence a junior partner such as Britain could exert over an economic, political and military powerhouse such as the US. Deluded by the romantic notion of the ‘special relationship’, Blair was heard but not necessarily listened to by Bush because Vice President Dick Cheney and the defence ‘hawks’ led by Donald Rumsfeld in the
Pentagon had his ear more frequently than natural Blair allies such as the moderate Colin Powell and diplomats in the State Department. Ultimately, in the run-up to Iraq, Blair backed the wrong horse. That London never got to grips with understanding where the locus of power lay in US foreign policy-making was a factor in Britain being swept along in the US slipstream and is a facet of Anglo-American relations that David Cameron and William Hague should find it easier to deal with under the multilaterally-inclined Barack Obama. If we have learned anything from the New Labour years it is surely that the UK’s unquestioning belief in the ‘special relationship’ needs serious redefinition, if it is workable as a basis for cogent foreign policy action at all.

In sum – and here New Labour exaggerated pre-existing trends in British foreign policy-making rather than instigating a new trend altogether – it is arguable that Director of Communications Alastair Campbell, his eye constantly on the media reaction to foreign policy initiatives, and influential advisers such as Downing Street Chief of Staff Jonathan Powell (for his account of the period see Powell 2010) had more influence over New Labour foreign policy than did the various ministers nominally in charge of the UK’s external affairs over the period 1997–2007. After Blair stepped down, David Miliband appears to have formed a more equal partnership with Prime Minister Brown between 2007 and 2010. However, the nature of the events with which they were confronted, notably the war on terror in Afghanistan and the bloody aftermath of the war in Iraq – which both had supported – left neither of them much room to leave a distinctive mark on British foreign policy, especially given the relatively short period over which they were responsible for overseeing it. The notable break between Blair and Brown, which Stephen Dyson alights upon in his chapter, was that Brown was more inclined than his predecessor to work through multilateral institutions to achieve his foreign and foreign economic policy objectives. It will always be a ‘what if?’ question, but it does suggest that British policy during the aftermath of 9/11 and the build-up to the war in Iraq might have been different under Brown because it would have paid more due to the wishes of the international community as expressed through UN resolutions and the like.

The IEP model reassessed

Our goal in devising a new model of British foreign policy was to take the strengths of the Churchill model – its Realist emphasis on alliance patterns – and couch them in a broader framework that would prompt policy-makers to study the levers of power at their disposal along with what we consider to have been badly neglected underlying conceptual
issues at stake, notably those concerning identity and ethics. In emphasizing that we still believe alliances to be important for the conduct of British foreign policy we were, nonetheless, attempting to shift the focus from the Cold War’s rather static conception of which powers Britain can or should work with to achieve its national objectives. We hoped, in doing so, to encourage reflective thought on the possibilities, and limits, of British foreign policy action when it works with states beyond the Anglophone and European worlds to achieve its foreign policy objectives. The idea of loose, often shifting partnerships or ‘coalitions of the willing’ has become a guiding principle of international action since the end of the Cold War and it is within this fluid framework that future British foreign (and defence) policy choices will have to be made. They will, as Christopher Hill has written (2010), entail ‘tough choices’ – but not only because of the mismatch between Britain’s seemingly endless list of national security aspirations and the resources it can use in support of them (see Tara McCormack’s chapter). Ethical concerns (such as working with states possessing dubious human rights records or which, like China, can be critical of interventionist foreign policies) and identity concerns (for example, what kind of international community is foreign policy action seeking to advance) will all become increasingly important in the future as drivers and products of British foreign policy behaviour. This will entail managing expectations at home and abroad about what the British can realistically achieve on the global stage, as well as a priori consideration of what Britain wants to achieve. On the basis of the evidence presented in this volume we would suggest that insufficient attention was paid by New Labour to those and related questions about the scope and limits of British foreign policy action in the twenty-first century.

We can use the Iraq episode as a case study to illustrate the benefits of thinking about foreign policy action using the IEP model. As Max Taylor clearly demonstrates in his chapter, the 9/11 attacks on the US came as a shock to policy-makers in national capitals the world over. They occurred at a time when Blair had managed to position Britain as something of a ‘leader’ – post-Kosovo 1999 – in terms of thinking on the nature of international society and about how to uphold the rules and norms of ‘civilized’ international behaviour. In relation to the IEP model, Britain’s identity as a ‘good international citizen’ was, for the most part, established. The New Labour government could, just about reasonably, make the case that it had made headway in pursuing an ‘ethical’ dimension to foreign policy (despite many a criticism documented in this book that Britain was saying one thing on ethics but doing another); and in the ‘power’ circle Blair could legitimately claim
that he had ‘normalized’ Britain’s relations with the EU, had retained close ties to the US even after the switch in White House occupant from Bill Clinton to George W. Bush, and was deepening British trade and diplomatic engagements with important geostrategic powers such as China (Kerry Brown’s chapter) and Russia. Elsewhere, Blair’s quiet diplomacy had helped Libya return to the fold of the international community in 2003, an example of Britain leading the way on nuclear and chemical weapons proliferation (see David Allen’s chapter for the less happy Trident story domestically).

The New Labour response to 9/11, however – strongly shaped as Stephen Dyson suggests in this volume by the character and leadership outlook of Blair – was to fall back on well worn assumptions about British foreign policy and on severely limited information-gathering and decision-making processes. First of all, in the identity circle, there was a knee-jerk ‘natural’ inclination to align Britain immediately with the US, with Blair emphasizing that Britain would stand ‘shoulder to shoulder’ alongside them. Fears in London about how Washington might react, coupled with the government’s impatience to be seen to be doing something, limited the time but perhaps more worryingly the inclination in Downing Street to think through where Britain might want to position itself in relation to an international or US-led military and diplomatic response. At no stage in the intervening months between 9/11 and the March 2003 invasion of Iraq does it appear Blair ever seriously thought about redefining Britain’s stance vis-à-vis the emerging Washington consensus that a military invasion of Iraq was inevitable – with or without the requisite UN authorization (see also Blair 2010b). Simultaneously, he joined American policy-makers in disparaging or ignoring the attempts by powers such as France and Germany – which Donald Rumsfeld tried to write off as ‘old’ European powers – to construct a different understanding of 9/11 and a more studied international response, not least as the invasion of an Arab country would impact on intra-community and intra-faith relations in multicultural societies such as Britain. In so doing, Blair must have seen that he was effectively undermining much of the credibility he had built up for the British in Europe since 1997. But instead of worrying about the damage that might accrue to him personally or the British diplomatically, Blair rationalized the collapse of the European end of his ‘bridge’ by suggesting that although Europe became divided, at least Britain was not alone amongst European nations in being involved in the invasion of Iraq. In identity terms, was this seriously as far as the conceptualization of Britain as a European and global actor had taken New Labour?
New Labour’s Iraq policy was equally problematic as far as the ethics circle of foreign policy action was concerned, not just in the manner of the explanations used to justify the invasion, but in the practices used to effect it. The myriad justifications Blair gave for believing in the rectitude of the Iraq invasion, covering everything from Saddam Hussein’s alleged possession of an aggressive WMD capability to the evil nature of his reign, severely undermined the credibility of the invasion at its inception. The public street demonstrations across Europe in February 2003 indicated that leaders of the invading countries were acting on the back of very thin public support and this rapidly ebbed away after the invasion when the foremost justification for war – the existence of WMD – turned out to be wrong. Of course, in pure ethical terms Saddam had been in breach of both formal UN Resolutions and acceptable norms of international conduct for quite some time and Iraq had been on Blair’s radar right the way through the New Labour years; crucially, however, he had never shown much inclination until the beginning of the war on terror to take on the regime itself. More than the timing, however, Blair’s sudden and public discovery of the evils of Saddam’s reign also raised questions about which other regimes he might propose to topple by way of spreading democracy and liberating the people in those states of the tyranny of dictatorship: Zimbabwe? Iran? North Korea? Ethically speaking, an open-ended commitment to spreading democracy might be a desirable ambition for states in the international community working together over a long period of time, but for a medium-sized power like Britain to lead the charge when it was already militarily overstretched in operations such as Afghanistan was fanciful at best and impossible at worst.

If this tension in New Labour’s foreign policy was privately recognized in Downing Street, it was unfortunately never publicly debated so that a strong national consensus could be built around the liberal interventionist approach to British foreign policy in the twenty-first century. One suspects, in fact, that this crucial conceptual basis of foreign policy-making was never weighed up seriously with regard to how it fitted into Britain’s view of itself as an international actor in the identity circle, precluding the launch of any national debate in the first place. As soon as the war on terror and the invasion of Iraq turned sour ethically, with the abuses in the detention camps at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay and reports of British complicity in rendition and torture (well documented in this book by Jason Ralph and Mark Phythian), New Labour’s authority to speak for the international community on the ethics of warfare (either on going to war, *jus ad bellum*, or
the laws of war, *jus in bello*) became tarnished. Every new scandal and every death of a British soldier chipped away at the credibility of the invasion in terms of public support at home and, more significantly, in the eyes of the very people the Iraq invasion had been aimed at liberating and making more secure. It also flagged up the dearth of pre-invasion planning that had gone into what would follow, as Iraq descended into tribal violence and a counter-insurgency campaign which the Americans in particular were acutely uncomfortable counteracting. With the benefit of hindsight, Blair, most obviously, but also Brown and their respective ministerial and advisory teams have to bear the burden for involving Britain in the war on what have turned out to be false premises, and for doing so in a way that permitted such a paucity of post-invasion planning to take place. But perhaps the word ‘permitted’ is the crux: could Britain have slowed American military posturing or diverted it to take more account of the post-invasion scenario? Probably not, which highlights the point that worthy ethical considerations can often be subjugated to naked power concerns, and that, recognizing this, British foreign policy-makers will need in the future to weigh up the ethical component of their foreign policy with the ‘power’ at their disposal to support those principles for the good of the nation and the international community as a whole. It will be all the more difficult, in fact, to make a case for an intervention or war on ethical grounds in the post-Iraq era; certainly, should explicit UN authorization be absent. This blunt fact alone makes attention to the interplay between our three new circles of foreign policy all the more urgent.

In the power circle of the IEP model we would draw attention to the twin factors of the levers at the UK’s disposal to achieve its national objectives and the importance of thinking through where a potential foreign policy action would leave Britain within the international system in the future: politically, economically, strategically and, we would add, ethically and in identity terms. The overlap between the circles in the IEP model is evident in that, on Iraq, we have seen in the identity circle how New Labour’s appreciation of Britain as a basically Atlanticist power moulded and constricted its view of the appropriate choices that needed to be made in the run-up to and conduct of the Iraq invasion. The power Britain exerted in this episode came through it acting out its junior partner role to the US, prolonging an established tradition dating back at least as far as the Second World War in keeping Europe at arm’s length, particularly in times of crisis – ‘with but not of’ to use Churchill’s phrase. If this was the ‘hard’ end of British power exercised in Iraq, what about the ‘soft’ power element of foreign policy action? Power here means
the other levers at Britain’s disposal – the power to influence others (via diplomacy) by winning the case and building consensus communicatively and including as many other domestic and international actors as possible in the decision-making process. It seems from the evidence in this collection that in this regard New Labour also reverted to type.

Internationally it is hard to escape the interpretation that, with the effective sidelining of the UN, the US (with British complicity for the most part) was ‘in charge’ of the international community’s response to 9/11 and then the Iraq invasion. The global pattern of limited discussion and consensus-building was mirrored in London, with Blair falling back on his inner circle in Downing Street for advice. Cabinet was effectively bypassed as a source of deliberation, discussion and information, and diplomatic institutions such as the Foreign Office spent more time trying to fathom what Blair and his team were doing than being listened to as a source of countervailing pressure against a hasty or ill-timed invasion. In the IEP model, the ‘soft’, ‘influential’ or ‘information-gathering’ dimensions of decision-making are obvious additions that, we suggest, would help British foreign policy-makers come to more informed decisions, taking into account different options, rival scenarios, and competing visions of the future. It is impossible to predict the future, and foreign policy actions necessarily take place in realms that any one state, even a powerful one such as the US, cannot control. Nevertheless, a foreign policy machinery that enables leaders to look beyond the predilections and whims of a leader and an advisory circle that is unable (or unwilling) to weigh the alternatives is surely not beyond the realms of possibility in an advanced democratic polity such as Britain. Getting the best out of the FCO, DfID and the Ambassadors and Embassies abroad must surely be a top priority for the Coalition, and it is to the prospects for the 2010–2015 government that we now turn by way of summary.

From New Labour to Conservative-Liberal Coalition

it will be more difficult for this country and its traditional allies to achieve their foreign policy goals unless we improve the way we go about them (Hague 2009).

The principle finding of this collection has been that the New Labour years saw more continuity than change in British foreign policy. It is not necessarily that continuity implies ‘bad practice’ while change would automatically have improved on traditional ways of managing Britain’s external relations. However, we have identified the Churchill three circles
model and associated modes of thinking about Britain’s role in the world as having framed British foreign policy in vital and not always constructive ways since 1945. This and the ideas that have flowed from it, (such as Britain’s destiny as a ‘great power’) have shut down many potentially fruitful debates about how Britain could more astutely match commitments with resources in an era of economic decline and geostrategic upheaval. How the Conservative-Liberal coalition that came to power in May 2010 will deal with this conundrum remains to be seen; but, we can sketch some possible scenarios by looking at what the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, has said about British foreign policy in speeches before and since the general election. As with the New Labour years, we can break down our account of the Coalition government’s foreign policy contours into likely changes and likely continuities, with the latter apparently set to outweigh the former.

The most probable change is that the Foreign Office will be given more input to decision-making, or brought back into the fold as it were, after its marginalization during the Blair-Brown years. To an extent this is a pragmatic calculation on David Cameron’s part to get the best out of Foreign Secretary Hague, who as a former Conservative Party leader is something of an ‘elder statesman’ within the party and more experienced than Cameron himself at appreciating the complexities and demands of international diplomacy. Hague, a ‘big political beast’ by virtue of his stature within the party, should be able to form a more equal partnership with his Prime Minister than did New Labour Foreign Secretaries, who often seemed to be mouthpieces for decisions taken in Downing Street rather than independent components of the policy process itself. As Hague expressed it in a speech under a year before the election: ‘Good decision-making also requires the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to be in its rightful place at the centre of decision-making … In my view, the sofa-style of decision-making of Labour’s Downing Street has often prevented it from taking this role’ (Hague 2009). This was both warning to Cameron about not treading on Hague’s toes too heavily and an ideological point – that a revitalized FCO should be centrally engaged in the conduct of Britain’s external relations. A second alteration to foreign policy appears set to come in terms of its content. The Conservative-Liberal Coalition will actively look to the world beyond the Atlantic alliance and the EU (Blair’s ‘bridge’) for outlets for British foreign policy action. In essence, Hague has set out a weak neo-imperial agenda, hoping to draw on the strengths of ‘the Commonwealth, an organisation which in our view has been neglected and undervalued under the Labour government in Britain’
(Hague 2009) High profile (but not always successful – see Gaskarth 2010) visits by Hague and Cameron to countries such as India and Pakistan in 2010 have been accompanied by the elaboration of lists of countries and regions with which they wish to deepen British ties: the Middle East and Gulf states, China, Brazil and Russia. As we have seen in this book, New Labour did not ignore these partners but Conservative ministers are certainly placing them closer to the heart of their thinking on foreign policy than did New Labour in the early months and years after 1997 when it looked for ideological inspiration on the Third Way, for example, in the EU and Bill Clinton’s New Democrats in the United States.

These two facets of the Coalition’s foreign policy provide indicators of possible ruptures with British foreign policy 1997–2010, yet the overarching impression is that continuity will reign in many significant areas, of which three stand out: the consensus on a liberal interventionist, values-based approach to foreign policy; a propensity to equate the national interest with the sum of the ‘threats’ Britain faces and the qualities it possesses to combat them; and a multilateralist approach that positions the EU firmly within the context of the government’s wider ambition to uphold Britain’s status as a global actor. The first is a direct hangover from the Blair years and is in keeping with the tenor of much thinking in the ‘West’ on good international citizenship in the post-Cold War era. As Hague notes: ‘In Britain, “Liberal interventionism” has generated much debate but to varying degrees all of us have subscribed to it’ (2009). Cameron and Hague have not proposed to deviate from the accepted wisdom that Britain needs to be ‘out there’, engaged, pursuing ‘a foreign policy with a conscience’. They cleave to the same false choices that New Labour erected within its foreign policy discourses, such as between isolation on the one hand and engagement on the other. For the Coalition government, like New Labour, resting ‘idle or uninterested while others starve or murder each other in their millions is not for us’ (Hague 2009. See also Hague 2010). This means an activist, globally expansive foreign policy that asserts British power and influence at the source of a potential problem, rather than letting that problem cascade into something bigger that will necessitate defence or security action further down the line. As for New Labour, this ‘utopian’ facet of foreign policy thinking has to go hand-in-hand with an emphasis on ‘the continued relevance of the nation-state’ and will surely put the Coalition government in ethical quandaries when it works with (economically, politically or militarily) countries that do not share Britain’s (official) commitment to upholding the highest standards of values and human rights. It
is also the case, as Hague recognized in his 2009 speech, that not all of the ‘newer’ powers on the world stage are as keen as Britain and others in the ‘West’ on interventionist approaches that impinge on the sanctity of state sovereignty (Hague 2009).

The second continuity is part machinery-related and part substantive. As with New Labour’s proud emphasis on its Strategic Defence Review (SDR) of 1998, the Coalition has loudly trumpeted its Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), which reported in autumn 2010. Its element of distinctiveness is said be that it is even more joined up and thorough than New Labour’s explicitly policy-led review, in that the SDSR will include the security element along with defence and foreign policy and will be allied to a ramping up of the powers of bodies such as the National Security Council (Hague 2010) to enhance what Tara MacCormack identifies in this volume as an ‘all risks’ approach to security policy. However, with the ‘new’ machinery and review comes a fairly traditional approach to understanding both the threats facing Britain and the assets Britain is able to use to mitigate their most damaging effects (see Daddow 2010). The threats, or ‘challenges’ as Hague (2009) calls them are: state failure, transnational terrorism, the changing character of conflict from regular to asymmetric warfare, developing world poverty, climate change, nuclear science proliferation, and the economic decline of the ‘West’. Set against this sprawling list are Britain’s assets: its diplomatic corps, a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, bipartisanship in certain areas of foreign policy, ‘an exceptionally strong relationship with the United States of America, a major role in the affairs of the European Union’, worldwide links via the Commonwealth, and the legacy of being a global trading nation (Hague 2009). None of these threats or qualities would have sounded out of place in a speech by Blair or especially Brown; nor would Churchill, Macmillan, Wilson or Thatcher have flinched at describing Britain’s supposedly ‘unique’ qualities and advantages in this manner.

This leads to the third likely continuity – the magnitude of the ambition underlying the Coalition’s approach. After Hague’s July 2009 speech The Times approvingly reported that ‘Britain faces the question of whether, after Iraq, financial crisis and recession, it chooses to be a shrunken power. Hague’s answer is no’ (Maddox 2009). Hague has made much of the relatively limited resources Britain can bring to bear to implement his foreign policy objectives and he is acutely aware of the impact the economic downturn will have on the ability of the ‘West’ to stand as the international arbiter of global values, rules and norms. However, this is no regionally focused foreign policy, or one that admits defeat in the battle to keep Britain in the first rank of global powers. Nor
does it imply a defence policy that looks to the British military carrying out ‘niche’ post-invasion tasks; for example, peacekeeping or peace-building after an American-led coalition has intervened in a rogue or failing state (this and other options for a reorientation of British foreign/defence/security policy are considered in Codner 2010). Hague has put a strong emphasis, like Gordon Brown, on the need for Britain to work in multilateral contexts to achieve its objectives. Like Brown, Hague can use this line of reasoning to dodge the politically sensitive question of Britain’s relations with the EU by arguing that such British involvement as is necessary will be used to help the EU reform to make it, first, more palatable to British economic interests and political sensitivities and, second, a more effective global actor (Hague 2009). When pushed after the election, Hague’s ‘Europeanism’ extended only so far as pushing ‘British influence in the EU’ by getting more British officials placed in the Brussels institutions (Hague 2010). As in the later administrations of Blair and Brown, the Coalition looks set to use the EU as a prop to British global power and influence rather than anything approaching an end in its own right. As usual, the ‘unbreakable alliance’ with the US is assumed to be ‘our most important relationship’ (Hague 2010).

There are some things it seems impossible for British Prime Ministers and foreign secretaries not to say, just as there are some things it seems impossible for them to think. The Coalition has gone all out to prepare British foreign policy for the networked world, but in doing so its foreign policy discourses exhibit many of the facets of New Labour thinking that have been critiqued in this volume. The elements of novelty in 1997–2010, such as they were, emerged within highly restricted cognitive parameters, showing a paucity of attention to the underlying conceptual basis of British foreign policy and the actions that flow from a series of assumptions about Britain’s role in the world that have gone unchallenged since the Second World War. If the Conservative-Liberal Coalition truly wants to introduce the novelties it promises, some of these uncomfortable conceits about Britain’s place in the world and the stories it tells itself about who the British are, as a people and a global actor, need to be opened up for critical scrutiny. If Iraq taught us anything, it is surely that Britain cannot continue to be a viable international actor if its understanding of itself does not move with the times.
Bibliography


Blair, T. (1999b) Speech at the Lord Mayor’s Banquet, 22 November.
Bibliography


Bibliography


Hansard (1983) 26 October, Col. 291.

Hansard (1998a) 12 January, Col. 35.

Hansard (1998b) 17 December, Col. 1101.


Interview with David Blunkett, by telephone, 1 May 2007.

Interview with Clare Short, by telephone, 30 April 2007.

Interview with Chris Smith, by telephone, 18 June 2007.

Interview with Commission Official, Cairo, Egypt, 13 April 2009.


Bibliography


Tiedemann, K. (2009) ‘Holbrooke on Success: “We’ll Know It When We See It”’, report on conference on Afghanistan hosted by the Centre for Policy, Foreign Policy, 12 August, http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/08/12/holbrooke_on_success_we’ll_know_it_when_we_see_it, accessed 22 March 2011.


Index

Abu Ghraib, (detention camp, 229
Acheson, Dean, 32, 33
Act of Union, the, 48
Action Plan on European Engagement
(Scottish National Party document), 58
Afghanistan, 133, 149
Blair on, 64, 72, 82
Brown on, 65, 76, 78
call for withdrawal from, 60
insurgency in, 44
military intervention in, 6, 27, 39,
63, 88, 94–104, 105, 107,
112–16, 121–2, 195–6, 226,
229
New Labour foreign policy, 111–16,
121–2
realist foreign policy dynamic
towards, 103, 115, 122
terrorism in, 75
Africa, 65, 75, 80, 93, 184, 195
aid to, 223
China, relations with, 174–5, 181,
185
EU economic relations with, 166
aid, overseas, 7, 223
Al-Megrahi, Abdelbaset, 60
Al-Rawi, Bisher, 202
Al Qaeda, 78, 114, 209
Albright, Madeleine (former US
Secretary of State), 167
Aldermaston, 139, 142
Alexander, Douglas (former Secretary
of State for International
Development), 79, 132, 199,
224
Alexander, Wendy (former leader of
the Scottish Labour Party), 53
All-Party Parliamentary Group on
Extraordinary Rendition, 202 see
also rendition
‘all-risks’ approach to security policy,
22, 118, 120, 234
alliances, 18, 19, 36, 79, 106, 203, 204
see also ‘special relationship’
importance of, 226–7
Amnesty International, 92
Amsterdam, (EU treaty revisions at),
39
Amsterdam Treaty, 159, 166
Ancram, Michael MP, 52
Anglo-American Relations: Present and
Future (1949) Foreign Office, 190
anti-war protestors, 198
Arbuthnot, James (former Chair of
the Commons Defence
Committee), 151
‘arc of prosperity’, 59
Argentina, 143
arms sales, 5, 7, 21, 95, 109
small arms sales restrictions, 7, 21,
91
Ashdown, Paddy (former Liberal
Democrat Leader), 72
Ashton, Baroness (first EU High
Representative), 168
Atlanticist, 16, 27, 78, 125, 138, 159,
167, 191, 195, 225, 230
Asymmetric warfare, 234
Attlee government 1945–51
on nuclear weapons, 141
relationship with US, 189, 190
on US-led UN intervention in
Korea, 190
Australia, 95
withdrawal from Iraq, 200
‘awkward partner’ (UK with Europe),
32, 40, 44, 158
Balkans, the, 38, 71, 94, 128 see also
Kosovo, Serbia and Yugoslavia
Balls, Ed, 132, 203
Bandung Conference, 173
banks, 81–2, 148, 203
Northern Rock, 81
Royal Bank of Scotland, 81
Barrosso, Jose Manuel, 169
Bavaria, 58
Beaconsfield (by-election), 139
Beckett, Margaret (former Foreign Secretary), 144
Beijing, 171–4, 176, 178
Beijing Olympics, 179–80, 182
Belfast Agreement, (1998), 212
Benn, Hilary (former Secretary of State for International Development), 97, 144, 224
Benn, Tony, 110
Barnett, Corelli, 45
Bevin, Ernest (former Foreign Secretary), 32, 190
Bijian, Zheng, 174
Bin Laden, Osama, 73, 113, 210
Blair, Tony (former Prime Minister), xiii, 1, 5, 11, 22, 24, 32, 37–8, 49, 70–1, 125, 127, 144, 163, 224, 234
on Africa, 166
Atlanticist, 167, 195, 225
Bush, George relationship with, 210
Chicago Speech, 5, 38, 111, 118, 126, 138, 224
on China, 26, 170, 178–9
on Churchill’s three circles model, 13–14
Clinton, relations with, 37–8, 194, 199, 203
on constitutional reform, 51
decision making-style, 8, 109, 224–5
on Defence Budget, 148–9
delusions of national grandeur, 15
on devolution, 20, 26, 51
on doctrine of international community, 5, 125–7
on Europe, xiv–xv, 8, 10, 24, 39, 158–61
faith, 5
on France’s position on intervention in Iraq, 168
history, use of, 11
hubris, 46
on human rights, 95
international prominence, 46, 203–4
on intervention in Afghanistan, 113–14, 195–7
on intervention in Iraq, 5, 129, 136, 194, 196–7, 216–17
interventionism, 5, 22–3, 197–8
Iraq policies, 72, 113–14, 123, 230
on Kosovo, 74–5, 103, 108, 112
Labour Party Conference Speech (2001), 210
conception of leadership and identity in foreign policy, 205
leadership traits, 20, 22, 70, 73–6, 194
on Major government years, 1
meetings with foreign leaders post 9/11, 212
mental health, 216–17, 219
on Middle East Peace Process, 196
moral fervour, 5, 6
on 9/11, 7, 194, 211, 215–19
on nuclear deterrent, 143, 152–3
on nuclear disarmament, 139–41
on nuclear weapons, 139–41, 144
pacifism, in childhood, 140
personal diplomacy, 224–5, 194
personality, 27, 45
power to influence, 194, 225–6
prominence internationally, 46
rejected as President of the European Union, 168
on Saddam Hussein, 26
on the ‘special relationship’, 16, 23, 27, 131, 188, 193–7, 204, 225
Trident, 23–4, 150–1
UK as a transatlantic bridge, 15, 31, 37, 195
UK-US cooperation on development policy, 94
US, 27, 41, 44, 74–5, 77–8, 189, 193–7, 225
values, 5, 7, 8, 86, 90, 95, 103, 109, 126, 195, 197
vision of foreign policy similar to IEP model, 47
on weapons of mass destruction, 94, 113–14, 131, 197, 216–17, 229
world view, 63, 143
Blunkett, David, 78
Bolton, John (former US Ambassador to the UN), 79
on the ‘special relationship’, 199
borderline Personality Disorder, 218
see also personality disorder
Brazil, 143, 166, 233
‘bridge’, concept of Britain’s role as, 13–16, 31, 36, 37, 38, 41, 43, 69, 194, 195, 222–3, 225
‘Bringing Foreign Policy Back Home Initiative’ (2009), 87
Britain, 2, 10, 11, 166
on China, 87
on European identity, 88–90
as a global hub, 32–3
global role, 233, 235
‘great power’ status, 223
identity, 19, 21, 48–9, 51, 235
in Europe, 225, 234
interests in Hong Kong, 176
as a middle power, 32
role, theory of, 32–6, 45, 46, 105
on Tibet, 181
as a trading nation, as a, 86
on troop commitment in Afghanistan, 200
British
anti-Americanism, 18
armed forces, 200, 223, 234
assets, 234
constitution, 62
conventional forces, 140
Court of Appeals, 137–8
Election 2010, 149–51, 206
European relations, 8, 10–11, 221
Foreign policy, 11, 15, 16–18, 54–5, 61–2
General Election 2005, 197
House of Commons, 69 see also British Parliament
Intelligence, 133, 137–8
Interests, 64, 123–4, 132–3, 142
Media, 159
Muslim community in the UK, 86–7
overseas involvement, 27
Parliament, 132, 138, 177, 147 see also British House of Commons
Public opinion on Europe, xv
public opinion on Britain’s nuclear future, 151
public opinion on United States, 47
resilience to security threats, 120
secrecy, UK government, 120
withdrawal East of Suez, 191
British Indian Ocean Territory, 91
British troops in Afghanistan, 196
Browne, Des (former Defence Secretary), 144, 151
Brown, Gordon (former Prime Minister), xiv, 11, 37, 44, 49, 51, 53, 124, 132, 144, 226, 234
on Afghanistan, 27
Atlanticist, 78, 225
on Britain as ‘bridge’ concept, 13
on British identity, 51, 85–8
on Bush, George, 78
as Chancellor of the Exchequer, 225
on China, 171, 179
on devolution, 20
on execution of Shaikh Akmal, 184
on Europe, 8, 10, 11, 24–5, 85, 158–61, 198
on foreign policy, 70–1
on ‘interconnectedness’, 80–2
on international development, 79–80, 82
on Iraq, 27, 230
on leadership and identity in foreign policy, 205
leadership traits, 20–1, 70, 76–7, 79–82
on Liberal Democrat foreign policy, 125
on multilateralism, 198, 199
on multinational institutions, 80
on National Security Strategy, the, 117, 119
on nuclear arms, 139, 141, 142, 144, 153, 147–150
on nuclear arms reduction negotiations, 94
on single currency, the, 162
on small arms trade regulations, 92
on the ‘special relationship’, 27, 65, 78, 189, 197–203, 204, 225
Brown, Gordon (former Prime Minister) – continued
on terrorism, 201
on Trident, 139
UK/US relations, 27, 189, 193–7, 225
on UN Security Council, reform of, 199
Washington, first visit to, 199
world view, 63–4, 82–3, 76–82
Brussels, 20
Bush, administration, 6, 131–2, 134, 189
on climate change, 163–4
Bush, George W., 26, 114, 127, 189, 225
on 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement, 145
on 9/11 terrorists, 212–13
on China, 179
on nuclear issues, 148
relations with Blair, 210
Burma, 95
Butler Report (2004), 208
Cabinet administrative structures, 208, 220
Cabinet consensus, 208
Cabinet Secretariat, re-organization of, 208
Cabinet, role of in foreign policy-making, 223–4, 231
Calman Report 2009, the, 54
Cameron, David (Prime Minister), 44, 138, 226, 232, 233
Cameron Government (on New Labour’s record on China), 187
Campbell, Alistair, (Director of Communications for Tony Blair), xiii, 226
Canada, 95
Cardiff, 51
Catalonia, 58
CCTV, 207
Central Eastern Europe, 161
Cheney, Dick (US vice-President), 129, 134, 196, 225
Chevaline multiple warhead capability, 145
Chicago Speech, 1999 (Blair), 5, 38, 111, 118, 126, 138, 224
Chilcot inquiry into the Iraq War, 202 see also Iraq War inquiry
China-Britain Business Council, 183
Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), 166
China (PRC), 26, 106, 170–87, 227–8, 223
Africa, investments in, 185
Africa, relations with, 174–5, 181, 185
Belgrade, Chinese Embassy in, 179
British policy towards, 87
on Climate Change, 184–6
energy needs, 185
EU, relations with, 182
Foreign policy, 173–5
Global Financial Crises and China’s role in dealing with it, 179–80
Human rights issues, 178, 182–3, 184, 185
return of Hong Kong to China, 26, 170, 176–7, 179, 186
on international community, 186
Iran, investments in, 185
on Iraq, US-led invasion of, 179
Japan, relations with, 181
Latin America, relations with, 181
Middle East, relationship with, 181, 185
on political dissent, 182–3, 186
on political reform, 183, 186
regional neighbours, relationship with, 181
Russia, relationship with, 181
Taiwan, 173, 178, 187
Tibet, 173, 178
Trade with the UK, 178–9, 183–5
UK, relations with, 175–9
US, relations with, 179
WTO entrance into, 178–80
Xinjiang, 173
‘China Democracy Party’, 178
Chinese
Civil War (1946–1949), 175
Communist Party, 171, 172, 173, 175, 178, 183, 186
Cultural Revolution, the, 176
investment in the UK, 183
Nationalists, 175
outward Direct Investment, 179
students in the UK, 178–9, 185
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 171
Chirac, Jacques (former French President), 42–3, 129–30, 147, 167
Churchill, Winston, 234
Iron Curtain speech (1946), 188, 204
on Korean intervention, 190
on re-armament programme, 190–1
‘three circles’ model, 3, 12, 13, 18, 21, 27, 33, 46
City of London, 163
civil emergencies, 118
Clark, David (Advisor to Robin Cook), 111, 115
Clarke, Charles, 151
Climate change, 18, 26, 117, 151, 163, 170, 188, 234
China and Climate Change, 184–6
Clinton, Bill former US President (election), 37, 189, 228
administration, 38, 106, 109
election of, 37, 193
on International Criminal Court, 92
on Iraq, 114
on Kosovo, 73, 74–5
on landmines, 93
on Lewinsky affair, 38
psychological profile of, 215–16
relations with Blair, 194
Clinton, Hillary (US Secretary of State), 113
cluster B personality disorders, 218
cluster munitions, 92, 223
Coalition Government, 61, 138, 149, 171, 233, 234
defence policy, 234
foreign policy, 232, 233–4
‘Coalition of conscience’, 95
‘Coalitions of the willing’, 227
cognitive factors in foreign policy decision making, 66–8
Cold War, 105–6, 117, 120, 189, 227
Britain’s Cold War defence strategy, 116
end of, 65, 140, 193
post-Cold War, 144
US Cold War security strategy, 116
Colley, Linda, 48
colonial expansion, 48
Commission on National Security in the 21st Century, 150–1
Committee of the Regions, 57
Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), 25, 160–1
Commonwealth, 12, 99, 86, 158, 232
computer coding methodology for foreign policy analysis, 68–9
Conservative Liberal coalition see Coalition
Conservative Party, 50, 52–4, 61–2, 125, 138, 140
Atlanticist, 125, 138
Conference, 1948, 12
on constitutional reform, 49
on Europe, 158–60
on Iraq, 198
on Trident renewal, 149
Constitutional Convention (1988), 50
Constitutional Treaty, 160, 168
Constructivism, 65–6
Content analysis, 64
CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy (2009), 211–12
CONTEST II, 117
‘control principle’ (on non-disclosure of intelligence), 133, 135, 136
Cook, Robin (former Foreign Secretary), 7, 39, 75–6
on the ‘bridge’ concept, 15
on an ethical dimension to foreign policy, xiii, 4, 21, 26, 31, 36, 91–5, 103, 108–9, 222, 225
on intervention, 128
resignation over Iraq War, 129–30
on trade, 86
on Trident, 142, 153
‘cool Britannia’, slogan, 49
Cooper, Robert, 85
Copenhagen Climate Summit (2009), 164, 170, 180, 184
counter-insurgency in Iraq, 230
counter-proliferation, 6, 23, 94
Crosland, Anthony, 189
Cruddas, John (Labour Party Deputy Leadership candidate, 2007), 198
‘cultural Cold War’ notion, 78
D’Ancona, Matthew, 78
Dalyell, Tam, 110
Darfur, 6
accusations of human rights violations, 174
UN peacekeeping, 174
Darling, Alistair (former Chancellor of the Exchequer), 183
Davies, Ron (former Welsh Labour Party leader), 54
Davis, David, 151
Dean, Patrick (former British Ambassador to the US), 191
death penalty, 21, 92, 133
debt reduction, 7
decentralization (in Scotland and Wales), 49–50
decision-making styles in foreign policy, 213, 215–16, 220
Defence relationship, UK/US, 189
Defence Review (1998), 140–1
Defence Review (2010), 145, 150
Defence Select Committee, 96
Defence spending, 206
Deighton, Anne, 12, 14
Delors, Jacques, 169
Democracy, 113, 115
‘Democratic deficit’ of EU, 47
Democratic Republic of Congo, 6, 97, 110
Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), 173
Demos, UK think tank, 117
Denmark, 59
‘Desert Fox’ (1998), aerial attack on Iraq, 194
Devolution, 19–20, 49–55, 61–2, 222 referendum on (1979), 50
Dewar, Donald (former Secretary of State for Scotland), 54
Department for International Development (DFID), 36, 97–8
Annual Reports, 2008, 85, 89, 94
Budget, 89
on engagement with China in Africa, 184–5
role of in foreign policy making, 224
Strategy Document (2006), 93
USAID, link with, 94
Disarmament, 38, 139–40, 141, 142, 148, 151, 152, 191, 193
negotiations, 139
Doctrine of International Community, 5, 7, 22, 23, 95, 123–38, 196 see also ‘international community’
Doha ‘Development Round’ of world trade talks, 164–5
Downing Street, 222, 224–5, 228–9, 231
Durham, John (Special Prosecutor), 135
Dutch voters, 160
East of Suez, withdrawal from, 191
East Timor, 110
‘ethical dimension’ to foreign policy, xiii, 3, 4, 6, 7, 21, 31, 36, 103–5, 107–16, 121, 125, 178, 182, 222–3, 225, 227 see also Cook, Robin
economic decline (of the West), 234
Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA), 166
economy decline, 15
mismanagement of, xiv
Eden, Anthony, xiv
El-Banna, Jamil, 202
empire, 12
loss of, 48, 123
energy, competition for, 117
English national identity, 48, 58
English School of International Relations, 125
Enlai, Zhou, (Premier PRC), 173
Index 269

ethics, 21, 96, 98, 227, 229, 230
  in British Foreign Policy, 85, 178, 183, 221, 233
ethnic cleansing, 71, 73, 126
ethnic minorities, 46, 86
Eurofighter, 206
Europhilia, 10
Euro-scepticism, 9, 10, 25, 89, 162, 167
Euro-socialism, 159
Europe, 49
  Britain in, 157–69
  US relations with, 42
European Central Bank, 162
European Commission, 57
European Council of Ministers, 55, 57–8
role of President, 160, 168
European Court of Justice, 166
European Defence Agency (EDA), 167
European Defence co-operation, 225
European Emission Trading Scheme, 164
European External Action Service, 168
European External Relations
  Committee of European Parliament, 57
European integration, 44, 61, 158–61, 164
European Parliament, 162
European response to 9/11, 210
European Security and Defence Policy, 157, 167–8
European ‘superstate’, 159
accession states, 89, 92
aid programme, 165
British Presidency of, 161
budget, 161
budgetary rebate, 161
on climate change, 163–4
Commission, 89, 165–6
common foreign and security policy, 166–8
Constitutional Treaty, 44
defence policy, 158
‘democratic deficit’ of, 47
Development fund for Africa, 89
enlargement, 159, 161
foreign policy, 11
foreign relations, 158
free trade, 164
High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, 166, 168
membership of, 161–2
Security Defence Policy, 25, 40–1
Structural Funds, 56
on Tibet, 182
trade, 25
UK relations, 94, 99, 228, 233
Extraordinary rendition, 91, 188, 201–2, 229
Failed states, 77, 118
Falkland Islands, 18
Falungong (quasi-spiritual group), (UKIP MEP), 178
Farage, Nigel, 10
Federalism, 51
Financial crises, 157, 162–3
Financial power, 65
Finland, 59
Fitzwater, Marlin (White House spokesman), 192
‘Five principle of peaceful co-existence’, 173 see also
  Enlai, Zhou
Flooding, 120
‘Flu, 117, 120
Foreign Affairs Committee, 16, 202
report of (2010), 43
Foreign Affairs, 197
Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), 36, 61–2, 84–5, 87, 90, 98, 127, 130, 208, 222, 223–4, 231
Active Diplomacy for a Changing World, strategy document, 89, 95
Annual Departmental Reports, 84–5, 89–90, 92
on the Commonwealth, 166–7
Global Issues Department, 6
Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) – continued
Mission Statement, 2009, 84 reaching out to minority communities in the UK, 87 role in new coalition foreign policy making, 232 on transatlantic alliance, 166–7 Foreign policy see also ethical dimension to foreign policy foreign policy led foreign and defence policy, 103–4, 108, 122 individual, importance of, 20, 27 ‘manoeuverist’, 19 role based, 19 traditional patterns, 1 Forensic Psychology, 207 Fortuyn, Pym, 49 Fox, Liam (Defence Secretary), 151 Franks, Oliver, 195 France, 23, 24, 72, 94, 152, 161, 166, 168, 228 criticism of UK policy, 211 European Security and Defence Policy, 41 Foreign Policy, 41–2 Integration, 44 on Iraq intervention, 130 national identity, 49 Franks, Oliver (Ambassador) to the US, 190 Free trade, 86, 161, 163, 164, 166 Freedland, Jonathan, 78 Freedman, Sir, Professor, Lawrence, 126–7 French voters, 160 G8, 93, 94 Gleneagles Summit, 93 G20 Summit in London (2009), 174, 180 Gaitskell, Hugh, 189 Gamble, Andrew, 13, 48–9 ‘Gaullist Consensus’, 42 Gaza, 75 Genocide Convention, 96 genocide, prevention of, 18 geostrategic decline, 15 Geographic model of Britain’s role, 47 see also Churchill’s three circles model Germany, 94, 170, 228 on Iraq intervention, 130 reunification of, 169 global financial crisis, 44, 59, 65, 81–2, 148 global financial system, reform of, 82 Global G2, 171, 174 global instability, 117 Global Issues Department, of FCO, 6 global leadership, 11, 13 global influence, 15 global terrorism, 18 see also terrorism ‘global society’, 21, 81, 95, 96–7, 98, 99 Global Opportunities Fund, 6 global role for Britain, 222–3 global ‘Third Way’, 163, 169 see also ‘Third Way’ global ‘war on terror’ 188 see also ‘war on terror’ globalization, 64, 80, 82, 88, 119, 162–3 ‘good international citizen’ concept, 36, 125, 130, 132, 137–8, 223, 227, 233 Gorbachev, Mikhail, 65 Gould, Phillip, pollster, 193 governance, 93, 118, 182 Government of Wales Acts (1998) and (2006), 52 Grant, Hugh, 78 Grenada, US invasion of (1983), 192 groupthink (social psychological process), 214–16, 220 Guantanamo Bay, 6, 133, 229 Guthrie, Charles, Lord (Former Chief of the Defence Staff), 151 Habermas, Jurgen, 112 Hague, William (Foreign Secretary), 61, 151, 226, 232, 233, 234 Hain, Peter (former Welsh Secretary), 43, 88, 97, 144 Haiphong, 191 Halperin, Morton, 135 Hampton Court Agenda, 9
Hanoi, 191
Hansard, 69
Harman, Harriet, 198
Hattersley, Roy, 189
Healey, Denis, 142, 189, 206
on US invasion of Grenada, 192
Heath, Edward (former Prime
Minister), 176
Heathrow Airport, 209
Helsinki Headline Goals, 40
Hill, Christopher, 13, 33
Hennessy, Peter, 116, 120, 201
High Representative for Foreign and
Security Policy (EU), 166, 168
Holocaust, the, 110
Home, 13th Earl, xiii
Holbrooke, Richard (US Special Envoy
to Afghanistan and Pakistan), 114
Holder, Eric (US Attorney General),
134–5
Holyrood, 53
Hong Kong, 26
Basic Law, the, 176, 177
ceded to Britain, 175
Sino-British Declaration on the
Question of Hong Kong (1984),
176
‘specialist administrative region’,
177
Hoon, Jeff, 142
House of Commons, 69 see also
Parliament
House of Commons Defence
Committee, 144–5
Howorth, Joylon, 40
‘hub’, Britain as, 14–16, 32, 33, 49,
64, 222–3
hubris, 46
‘Hubris syndrome’, concept of, 217,
218, 219
Hubris-Nemesis Complex’, 217–19
human rights, 4–7, 36, 88, 93–5,
108–9, 188, 227, 233
in China, 182, 185
groups, 128
legislation, 212
UN Human Rights Council, 88–9
violations, 23, 91, 125, 127, 137,
174, 178
Human Rights Department (FCO), 6
Human Rights Project Fund (FCO), 6
Human Rights Watch, 202
humanitarian intervention, 20, 94–7,
108, 127 see also intervention
Hurd, Douglas (Foreign Secretary), 32,
105
Hussein, Saddam, 26, 38, 42, 72, 74,
114, 127–8, 131, 194, 215–17,
229
Hyslop, Fiona, 57
Iceland, 59
Identity cards, 207, 211
Identity, Ethics, Power (IEP) foreign
policy model, 3, 16–19, 46, 63–5,
221–2, 226–7, 230–1
identity, xv, 3, 7, 17–23, 25, 32, 46,
47, 61, 63–4, 65–6, 84–90, 96–9,
104, 222, 205, 227–9, 235 see also
British identity
immigration, 49
India, 151, 106, 233
Indonesia, 5, 109
Inquiry into allegations of British
complicity in torture, 203
Institute for Public Policy Research
(IPPR), 117
Institute for Public Policy Research
(IPPR), 150–1
Intelligence and Security Committee,
202
intelligence elites, 138
intelligence relationship, UK-US,
132–7, 189
interconnectedness, 64, 71 see also
interdependence
Interdependence, 2
of national states, 119 see also
interconnectedness
Integration, European, 158–61,
164
International Affairs, 147
international aid, 88
international community, doctrine
of, 5, 7, 22, 94–9, 123, 125–30,
132, 138, 221, 226, 229, 230 see
also doctrine of international
community
International Covenants on Civil and Political and Economic and Social Rights, 96
International Criminal Court (ICC), 7, 21, 91, 92, 223–4
International Development Act (2002), 97
international development, 65, 93, 158, 161, 223
international law, 123, 130–2
International Monetary Fund (IMF), 82
international organizations, cooperation with, 20
international terrorism, 26, 78, 205, 234 see also terrorism
international trade, European policy on, 157–8, 161
Internet, 117
interpersonal relationships, 213
Interrogation, 125, 133, 134, 135, 137
Internationalism, 38
Interventionism, 22–3, 80, 192, 195, 197–8, 200, 233 see also liberal interventionism
Iran, 143, 147, 151, 185, 229
Iran-Contra Affair, 192
Iraq, 26, 43–4, 72, 74–6, 78–9, 82, 86, 103–5, 107, 111–16, 121–2, 131, 152
British public opinion on war, 43
Divisions over in Europe, 25
Legality of, 7
Lessons from, 235
Second UN Resolution, 75, 95, 127, 129
Weapons Inspector, 130
Iraq Inquiry, 126, 132 see also Chilcot Inquiry
Ireland, 44, 59
Islamic fundamentalism, 209
Islamist terrorism, 7, 188
Israel, 24, 151, 196, 204
invasion of Lebanon (206), 198
Japan, 170
aid to China, 18, 183
Jenkins, Roy, 189
Jiabao, Wen (Premier PRC), 180, 182
Jianrong, Yu, 171–2
Jintao, Hu (President of PRC), 172, 175, 182, 184
Joas, Hans, 34
Johnson administration, 191
‘joined-up’ government, 99
Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR), 6, 202
Jordan, 92
July bombings, London (2005), 43
Kai-shek, Chiang, 173, 175
Karachi, 133
Kazakhstan, 143
Kelly, Dr David (death of), 44
Kennan, George, 78
Khartoum, 194
Kinnock, Neil (Labour Leader), 139, 140
steps down as Leader, 193
on US intervention in Central America, 192
visit to the White House, 192
Kissinger, Henry, 192
‘Kissinger’s Kingdom’ report, 192
Korea, 190
Kosovo intervention, xiv, 5, 6, 22, 38, 59, 64, 72, 74, 76, 82, 103–4, 108, 110–12, 115–16, 125–9, 194, 195–7, 224, 227
effects on Blair’s response to 9/11, 219–20
‘Kosovo precedent’, 127–9
Krugman, Paul, 82
Kyoto Protocol, 163–4
Labour Government 1974–1979, 50
Labour Party, 53–4 see also New Labour
On Clause IV of the Labour Party Constitution, 106
Conference 2001, 75
criticism of Blair’s approach to China, 179
on defence policy, 206
Index 273

on devolution, 61
 divisions over Iraq War, 132
 identity, 110
 on Iran-Contra affair, 192
 Manifesto 1997, 40
 Manifesto 2005, 143
 opposition to intervention in Iraq, 196
 relations with US under Reagan, 191
 relationship with US post-1945, 189–93
 on unilateralism, 139
 on US bombing raid on Tripoli, 192
 on US missiles in Europe, 191–2
 Labour/Plaid Cymru coalition, 58, 201
 landmines
  ban on, 36, 223
  Ottawa Treaty, 93
  Treaties, 7, 21, 93, 223
 leaders, importance of in foreign policy-making, 63–83, 215–16, 219
 leaders, importance of in IR theory, 83
 leadership traits, 20, 63–83
 Lebanon, invasion of, 198
 Lee, Simon, 80
 Lewis, Ivan (Foreign office minister for China), 184
 Liberal Democrats, 50, 53–4, 59, 61, 125, 138, 197
 on Trident renewal, 149
 liberal internationalism, 45, 46, 138, 229, 233
 liberal interventionism, 46, 233, 234
 Libya, 61, 228
 Lisbon economic reform agenda, 161
 Lisbon Treaty, 24–5, 90, 160, 168
 Lisbon Strategy, 39
 Lichtenstein, 65
 Lord Mayor’s Banquet (1997), 194
 Love Actually, 43, 78
 Maastricht Treaty (1994), 57, 158–9, 166
 MacAskill, Kenny (Scottish Justice Minister), 60
 Macmillan, Harold (former Prime Minister), 204, 234
 Major, John (former Prime Minister), 1, 45
 Government, 44
 Malaya, 208
 Malloch-Brown, Lord Mark (former UN Deputy Secretary General and former Foreign Office Minister for Africa, Asia and UN), 79, 113, 198–9, 209–10
 Manning, David (Foreign Affairs advisor to Tony Blair), 72
 Mandelson, Peter (Business Secretary), 82, 139
 Mansion House Speech, (Brown, 2006), 144
 Mao, Zedong, 174, 176
 Marquand, David, 16
 Marshall Aid, 189
 May, Lord, 137
 McChrystal, General Stanley (former US and NATO Commander in Afghanistan), 114
 McCourt, David, 19
 Mead, George Herbert, 34
 media, importance to New Labour, 206, 211–12
 media reaction to foreign policy, 226
 mental health of leaders, 215
 Meyer, Christopher (former Ambassador to the US), 77
 Middle East, 18, 26, 167–8, 233
 Middle power, Britain as, 32
 Miliband, David, 14, 15, 32, 45–6, 78, 88, 91, 98, 124–5, 138, 163, 168–9, 226
 on an EU military force, 199–200
 on Europe, 47
 on ‘intelligence sharing’, 133, 135–8
 on interventionism, 200
 on Iraq War, 132, 202–3
 on the Lisbon Treaty, 168
 on ‘special relationship’ the, 15, 132–3
 on Tibet, 181–2
 on torture, 133, 135, 138
Miliband, Ed (Labour Leader), 169, 184

military intervention, 197–8

Millennium Development Goals, 97–8

Milosevic, Slobodan, 72–3

Ministry of Defence 144, 146, 208

strategy documents, 84–5, 87, 90

minority communities, 87 see also

ethnic minorities

Mohamed, Binyam, 124, 133, 135–7, 202

Mohamed v FCO, 135–7

Mohamed v Obama (2009), 136–7

money laundering, 207

Moravcsik, Andrew, 66

moral purpose, 115, 126

Morgan, Sally (Blair aide), 74

Mubanga, Martin, 202

Multiculturalism, 61, 211

Multiculturist approach, 233

Multilateralism, 226, 234

Multilateral negotiations, 140

Murdoch Press, 159

Muslim communities, 209

Mutual Defence Agreement (1958), 145

Nairn, Tom, 50

nation state, relevance of, 233

national interest, 103–4, 106–7, 111–13, 115–17, 122, 125–6, 130, 134, 137, 221, 233

national identity, 20, 48–9, 62, 173

see also identity and British identity

National People's Congress 1990, Beijing, 176

National Risk Register, 103, 117–21

national security, traditional conception of, 117, 131, 135, 136–7

‘all risks’ approach to national security, 22, 118, 120, 234

National Security Council, 234

National Security Strategy 2008, 22, 86

National Security of the United Kingdom, Security in an Interdependent World, 103–5, 116–22

National Security Update 2009, 103

National Security Strategy II (NSII), 117

nationalists (Scottish), 51

NATO, 40–1, 60, 71–2, 90, 96, 106, 114, 108, 126, 130, 150, 152, 167

stance on Kosovo, 73, 76

UK commitment to, 166

use of force in Balkans, 128

in Yugoslavia, 179

Naughtie, James, 80

Nazi Germany, 73, 110

Hitler 110

neoliberalism, 2

Netherlands, 49

on European integration, 44

Neuberger, Lord, 136–7

‘New Democrats’ in US, 37

New Labour, foreign policy, 8–19, 62–3, 83, 95, 138, 221, 222, 231

Atlanticist, 16, 230

British Power, 26

on China, 26, 171

on the Commonwealth, 233

defence, 205–7

on Europe, 8–11, 25, 88–90

links to ‘New Democrats’, 193

policies in Scotland, 59

policy making style, 208

Identity, 153

on Iraq, 136

nuclear weapons, 139–53

war on terror, 205, 207, 210–15, 220

New York Times, The, 82

Nice, 39

Nine/Eleven (9/11), 37–8, 72–3, 75–6, 81, 111, 152, 167, 179, 188–9, 225–7, 228, 231

economic effects of, 209

effect on Blair/Bush global aspirations, 210
effect on Blair/Bush relationship, 210
shock in policy-making setting, 207–8
UK response to, 205, 207–15, 220
Nixon, Richard (US President), 176
non-governmental organizations, (NGOs), 3
non-interference, doctrine, of, 80, 109
Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), 24, 140, 141, 143, 146, 147
review conference, 148, 150
dialogue, 151
North Africa, 75
North Korea, 151, 229 see also Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK)
Northern Ireland, 51
negotiation on future of, 212
terrorism, 205, 208, 209, 212
Norway, 59, 93
Nowak, Manfred, 202
nuclear science (proliferation), 234
Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, 140, 146, 148
nuclear weapons, 23, 139–53 see also Trident
Atomic Weapon Establishment (AWE), 142
Blue Streak, missile, 145
Bradford Disarmament Research Centre, 147
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), 140, 150
Cruise missiles, 146, 149
deterrent, 24, 62, 145–6, 152
disarmament, 139–40, 141, 142, 148, 151–2, 191, 193
Official Group on the Future of the Deterrent, 144
proliferation, 93, 143
RAF (nuclear mission, end of), 140
reductions, 94, 140
Reliable Replacement Warhead project, 142
Skybolt, 145
threat of nuclear war, 118
Obama, Barack (US President), 23, 44, 114–15, 123–4, 152, 200, 226
on China, 174
on nuclear non-proliferation, 150
on release of Al-Megrahi, 60
on torture, 134
on UK and EU support in Afghanistan, 149
on values and interests coinciding, 137–8
Ohio class submarines, 145
‘Operation Allied Forces’, 38, 59, 108, 125
‘Operation Desert Fox’, 38
‘Operational code’ framework, 67, 216
Opium Wars (1839–1841), 175
Organized crime, 117
organizational memory, 13
Oslo Process, the, 92
Ottawa Treaty, 93 see also landmines
overseas aid, 7, 80, 98
Overseas Development Agency (ODA), 223
Owen, David (Former Foreign Secretary), xiii, xv, 145, 189, 208
on Blair, 218–219
Oxford Research Group, 147
pacifism, 206
Pakistan, 151, 233
Officials, 133
pandemics, 117, 120
Parliament on Iraq War, 197 see also House of Commons
Parnell, James, 81
Patton, Lord (Governor of Hong Kong 1992–1997), 176, 177
Pentagon, 111, 142, 226
People’s Liberation Army, 181
perception of threat, 213
personality disorders, 217, 219
personality of leaders, 64, 63–83
Pilger, John, 109, 111
‘pivot’ Britain as, 222–3 see also pivotal power
‘Pivotal power’, Britain as, 13, 31, 32–3, 36, 37, 38, 41, 43
Plaid Cymru, 50, 52–3, 60
index
management of Structural Funds, 56
Referendum (1997), 52
Referendum Bill (2009), 53
on the US, 59
‘West Lothian’ question, 52
Scottish
First Minister, 51, 52, 57
identity, 48
interests, 57–8, 61
nationalism, 50, 52–3
public opinion, 60–1
unionist parties, 53–4
Scottish Act, The, 52
Scottish Executive, 52–3, 56–7, 60
Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP), 50, 53, 58–9, 60–1, 147
Scottish nationalists, 20
Scottish Office, 57
Scottish Parliament, 49, 51–2, 54–7, 59
Scottish Secretary, role of, 56–7
Second World War, 48
Secret Intelligence Service, 120
security concerns, 103, 105, 111–17, 122
security threats, 118–20
separatism, in UK, 51
September 11 (9/11), 6, 7, 27, 41 see also nine eleven
Serbia, 71, 110
Shaikh, Akmal, execution of, 184
Sharia Law, 113
shock of 9/11 to policy makers, 227
Short, Clare (former Minister for International Development), 15, 78–9, 98, 110, 111, 115, 144, 165, 224
Single currency, 157, 159, 162, 225
Single European Foreign and Defence Policy, 199
Single market, 160–1
Sino-Japanese War, 175
Slaughter, Anne-Marie, 131
slave trade, 18
small arms trade, regulation of, 92–3 see also arms sales
Smith, Chris, 79
Smith, John (former Labour Party Leader), 49, 51, 193
Smith, Julie, 40
Soames, Nicholas (former Defence Minister), 151
social and group processes in foreign politics decision making, 213–14
Social Chapter, 9, 159
Social cohesion, 86
social communitarianism, 125
social exclusion, 211
social psychology, 66
Somali pirates, 175
Solana, Javier, 166
South Africa, 143
Soviet Union, 65, 116, 189
leadership, 140
sovereignty, 109, 149, 233
‘special relationship’, the, 15, 16, 23, 26, 27, 33, 35, 38, 40, 43, 44, 61, 65, 78, 85, 124, 125, 131, 132, 138, 158, 188, 189–204, 205, 207, 225, 226 see also UK relations with US
Stewart, Michael (former Foreign Secretary), xiii
St Malo Declaration, (1998), 39, 166
START Treaty, 148
State failure, 234 see also failed states
Strategic Defence Review (SDR), 45, 97, 98, 84, 87, 104–5, 107–8, 118–19, 206, 233
Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010 (SDSR), 233
Strategic policy in public documents, 84
Straw, Jack, 14, 32, 43, 74, 88, 93, 129, 197, 209, 225
stress, effects on crisis management post 9/11, 213–14
Stirrup, Sir Jock (Chief of the Defence Staff), 153
Submarines, 206 see also resolution class submarines
Sudan, 93
Sudan, Chinese investment in, 174
Suez crisis, xiv, 15
Sun, The newspaper, 9
Taiwan, 26
Taliban, 72, 73, 113, 115
Terror see under ‘war on terror’ and terrorism
Terrorism, 6, 7, 26, 43, 72–5, 77–8, 117, 120, 133, 201, 234
as a behaviour category, 219
counter-terrorism, 6, 18
domestic, threat of in Britain, 43
management of the threat in the UK, 205, 207–9, 213–15
terrorist financing issues, 211
United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering International Terrorism, 103, 117–21
Textual analysis, 130
Thatcher, Margaret, xiv, 24, 32, 40, 50, 176, 191, 193, 194, 234
Bruges Speech (1988), 40, 159
downfall, 158
on EU Budgetary rebate, 161
on Hong Kong, 176
on replacement of Polaris with Trident, 141, 145
Thatcherite individualism, 125
on US, 191
The Gulf, 233
think tanks, 13
Third Way, 14, 31, 37, 106–7, 109, 125, 158, 233 see also ‘global third way’
Thornton, Billy Bob, 78
Threats (to UK), 118–21, 234 see also security threats
Tiananmen Square, 26, 177
Tibet, 26, 173, 178
British policy, on, 181
torture, 21, 91, 132, 133–8, 188, 201–2, 229
‘enhanced interrogation techniques’, 134
prohibition against, 21
tourism, from China to UK, 178, 183
Trade Unions, 106
Transatlantic alliance, 106, 127, 166–7
‘transatlantic bridge’ see ‘bridge’
Treasury, the, 108, 225
Trident, 140, 141, 143–6, 206, 228
cancellation of, 139
nuclear submarines, 149–50, 152
renewal, 149–51, 153
replacement of, 34, 146
retention of, 140–1, 143
updating, 59
Vanguard class Trident submarines, 140
Tripoli, US 1986 bombing raid, 192
Trust, in British politicians, 188
Turkey, 167
Turnbull, Andrew (former Cabinet Secretary), 71
UK–China Forum, 186
UK–China Task Force, 183
UKIP, 10
Ukraine, 143
Ukrepl, 57
UKUSA agreement, 201
UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), 92
UN Resolution (second) on Iraq War, 75
Unilateral nuclear disarmament, 140–2, 149, 152, 191, 193
United Kingdom (UK) see also Britain aid to China, 183
aid policy, 97
defence Policy before 9/11, 205–6
economic interests, 209
global role, 235
military deployment in Iraq and Afghanistan, 97
relations with China, 170–1, 175–9, 182–3, 183–7
relations with EU, 188
relations with Europe, 24, 32, 34, 36, 39–42, 45, 228, 234
relations with France, Germany, IMF, India, Israel, Russia, UN, World Bank, 24
relations with US, 32, 34, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 45, 47, 78–9, 82, 123–4, 131–2, 234
UK-US Intelligence relationship, 201–2
United Nations, 79, 143, 152, 224–5
Declaration of Human Rights, 96
General Assembly, 92
Human Rights Council, 88–9
on Iraq intervention, 196
P5 (Chinese membership of), 173
Peacekeeping, 96
resolutions, 226, 228
UN Charter, 96
United Nations Association, 96
Resolution 1441 (2002), 127, 129–30
United States, 71, 94–5, 131
Chinese relations, 179–81
CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), 125, 133–5
Cold War security strategy, 116, 119
conflict resolution in Sudan, 93
Congress, 142
Department of Justice, 134
effect on UK response to 9/11, 209, 212
on ESDP, 167
EU enlargement, 182
European relations, 106
Federal Reserve, 162
identity and values, 116–17, 123
Nuclear arms reduction, 152
Office of Legal Council, 134–5
policy in Afghanistan, 113
policy on Tibet, 182
on post-Iraq war planning, 126
response to terrorism, 205, 210–11
State Department, 137
trade with China, 182
troops, 116
UK relations, xii, xiii, 23–4, 26, 32, 34–6, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 45, 47, 64, 86, 90–4, 99, 133, 137, 143, 147–9, 152, 157–8, 190, 228, 234
US aid to Africa, 93
US bases in the UK, 193
US cruise missile strike on al-shifa pharmaceutical plant, Khartown, 194
‘unreasonable veto’, 129
US National Bipartisan Commission
on Central America, 192
values, 4, 5, 7, 8, 16–19, 21, 22, 47, 65, 79, 84–5, 86, 90, 95, 98, 103, 104, 109, 110, 115, 116, 117, 121, 122, 126, 137, 197, 203, 221, 233, 234
Van Gogh, Theo, 49
Verhofstadt, Guy, 169
Vietnam War, 176, 191
Wales, 48, 50–3, 58, 62
referendum (1997), 52
Wall, Sir Stephen, 157
Wallace, William, 15
Walzer, Michael Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad, 96
‘war on terror’, 7, 25, 26, 27, 41, 73, 75, 77–8, 103, 111, 124, 198, 202, 203, 205, 224–6
Britain’s approach to, 210–15, 220
war, rules of, 229
Washington Consensus, 25, 93, 162
Washington Post, The (newspaper), 93
Weiss, Thomas, 114
Welsh
identity, 48
interests, 57
nationalism, 20, 50, 52
public opinion, 61
Welsh Assembly, 49, 51–3, 56–8
Welsh Secretary, role, 56
Wenli Xu (Chinese dissident), 178
Western Europe, strategic importance to the US, 204
Western values, 115
White House the, 123–4
White, Lyn T., 172
Whitehall administrative structures, 208, 220
Williams, Shirley, 151, 189
Index

Wilson, Harold (former Prime Minister), 176, 189, 206, 234
  - government as Atlanticist, 191
  - on Vietnam War, 191
Wilson, Richard (Cabinet Secretary), 73, 77
  - on nuclear weapons, 141
Wilson, Woodrow, 131
Wolfers, Arnold, 106, 116
Women's rights, 113, 115
World Trade Center, 111
World Trade Organization (WTO), 164–5, 180
  - China's entry, 170
Xiaobo, Liu, 182
Xiaoping, Deng, 173, 176
Yang, Guobin, 172
Young, Hugo, 157
Younger, Kenneth (former acting Foreign Secretary), 190
Yugoslavia, 31, 179
Zemin, Jiang (former President of China), 179, 182
Zimbabwe, 6, 92, 95, 229
  - arms sales to, 5