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Blair's Britain and the road to war in Iraq

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Reader's guide

This case study is about Blair's decision to go to war in March 2003: How did the then prime minister end up in a situation where he went to war without the backing of the UN Security Council and with his cabinet and the country being deeply divided? The narrative begins with the early policy statements of the first Blair administration (1997–2001), which raised expectations that the Labour government was about to plot a new course for Britain based around an internationalist set of commitments. The second part of the chapter considers the strategic dimension of the Blair effect: How far were the values consistent with Britain's status as a regional great power? Then, in the main body of the chapter, the explicit focus is on the diplomacy of disarmament inside the UN Security Council through 2002 and the wider impact that the Iraq War had on British domestic politics. In both domains, the government was unable to deliver on its promise to bridge the transatlantic divide that had opened up over Iraq. What influence did Britain exert on the course of events once it became clear that the USA was preparing for a military solution? And did the UK get a sufficient return for its risky decision to join the coalition of the willing?[1]

Introduction

In the days immediately following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, it became clear that Tony Blair had become a highly influential world leader. The *Washington Post* described him as one of the few political figures who, in these troubled times, had managed to break through 'the world's stunned disbelief' (Seldon 2005).

By late 2001, it did indeed seem that all was for the best in Blair's world: the government had just won a 167-seat majority in the general election; the economy was in robust shape and public services were beginning to get the investment needed to meet the public's expectations; the Prime Minister's grip on Parliament and his party was vice-like and the only

'opposition' he had to contend with was from his neighbour (and successor) in No. 11 Downing Street. As he delivered his 2001 Leader's Speech at the Labour Party conference, Blair's power was at its zenith. And his message? It was not the delivery of public services or the importance of being a player in Europe while retaining Britain's sense of identity. Instead, Blair led on the opportunities that 9/11 presented for a new world order. In a spirited oration, he concluded that, by harnessing the power of community, the time had come to 're-order this world around us'.

Looking back on Blair's decade in office, the obvious question is: 'Where did it all go wrong?' The one-word answer favoured by the media and large sections of public opinion is 'Iraq'. Blair's gamble was that, by giving unconditional support to Bush, he would be able to influence the course of American **grand strategy**. The key to managing the American response to the terror attacks was, he believed, to gain the backing of the UN Security Council (UNSC) as well as a wider coalition in favour of the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. As America rushed to war in early 2003, the coalition was in tatters and Britain was virtually alone in providing significant military support to the USA in a disastrous campaign to remove Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party from power. While that part of the mission was accomplished, the other stated goals of economic reconstruction and democratization appear more distant than ever. Many knowledgable practitioners were right to think that the situation was going to get worse before it got better, with 2007 as the low-point in terms of death and destruction.

There is a danger in thinking that Britain has *one* foreign policy. As Williams (2005) argues, there are several foreign policies covering a wide spectrum of issues and regimes. Nevertheless, while this point is well made, one of the intriguing aspects of the Blair decade was the emergence of a doctrine of **liberal interventionism**. Such a doctrine developed out of the quest for moral progress in a world in which there are many enemies of liberalism. In this respect, Iraq was not an aberration. The path to war was laid by missionary-like distinctions between moderate or fundamentalist religions, tolerant or despotic governments, societies committed to eradicating the threat of terrorism and those geared towards nurturing and protecting them. While many individuals and non-governmental organizations may have a great deal of sympathy with internationalist causes, the danger with trying to make the world a better place is that 'the tests are likely to be regular' (Freedman, cited in Seldon 2005: 303). Regular they were. In the Blair decade, British troops were despatched on enforcement missions to Afghanistan, East Timor, Iraq (the aerial bombings in 1998), Kosovo, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (a small contingent deployed in 2006).

To understand how the Iraq decision came about, it is necessary to turn the clock back to 1997. It is here that the 'mission' for UK foreign policy first saw the light of day. On 2 May 1997 the new Labour Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, threatened an assault on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) establishment. In a manner that came to symbolize Labour in power, Cook turned his opening speech about UK foreign policy into a media spectacle. The cameras were brought into the imperial chambers, the spotlights were turned on, and Cook delivered a 'mission statement' for the organization. Beneath the fanfare, many of his arguments resonated with the traditional pragmatism associated with the FCO such as the importance of national security and promoting economic goals. What sounded strange was the idea that Britain should have an 'ethical dimension' to its foreign policy. This Labour government, Cook went on to say, 'does not accept that

political values can be left behind when we check in our passports to travel on diplomatic business'.

Unsurprisingly, the following day's newspaper headlines were dominated by the apparently novel idea that Britain was going to have an 'ethical foreign policy'. Notice that, already, the media had elided the difference between an ethical 'dimension' to foreign policy and an ethical foreign policy *per se*. No matter, Cook's phrase 'released a cosmopolitan genie from the official UK foreign policy bottle' and however hard his subsequent successors as Labour foreign secretaries tried—and Jack Straw certainly tried—they did not succeed in putting it back in (Williams 2005).

Blair was said to be annoyed that Cook's speech had been delivered without his knowledge of the content (Kampfner 2004).[2] Indeed, if you compare the Prime Minister's first speech on foreign affairs delivered at the Lord Mayor's banquet a few months later, there were important differences, not least in terms of the priority Blair assigned to the relationship with the USA (Blair 1997). Cook did not mention the Atlantic ally in the mission statement; Blair, on the other hand, described it as being of critical importance to British security and identity.

A great deal of the content of UK foreign policy over the ten-year period is prefigured in these two speeches by Cook and Blair. From the outset, it is clear that Blair intended to take a highly active role in foreign policy making. By putting ideas and values at the heart of British foreign policy, and hitching these to Britain's significant diplomatic and military power, the risks of costly entanglements were there from the beginning. The early speeches also reveal the tensions between wanting to be a 'good citizen' on the global stage by following the rules, yet at the same time pressing for solutions to intractable problems even if this meant acting outside the accepted norms of international conduct.

When the storm clouds were gathering over Baghdad, these tensions began to unravel. Ministers resigned, there were public rows with other European leaders, and poll data showed that a plurality of ordinary British voters opposed war without a second resolution and proof that Iraq was hiding weapons of mass destruction.

This chapter reconstructs the dramatic struggle the British Prime Minister was waging in order to ensure that the war was both lawful and attained a high degree of domestic **legitimacy**. To do this, the chapter poses a number of questions about the policy position taken by the UK government in the period from 9/11 to early 2003. Was Blair realistic in thinking that the military activism of the USA could be reconciled with the slow negotiations of the UNSC? Could the transatlantic rift have been anticipated? Most significantly of all, after a second UNSC resolution was not forthcoming, was Britain in a position to derail the American train from its rush to war? In persuading the British people—and his colleagues in Westminster—to join the US-led mission, what was Blair able to negotiate with the USA in return for this heroic (tragic?) act of loyalty?

It is impossible to answer such questions without engaging with ideas and theories found in the foreign policy literature. This is a case study which has **leadership** at the heart of the matter. There are two important dimensions to judging Blair's conduct. First, did he allow decision making to be adequately scrutinized by advisers or more broadly by governmental committees? Second, independently of the process of government, did the UK have sufficient international standing to make a real difference? The importance of this issue is such that the chapter begins with an analysis of **agency**, or the capacity of the state to mobilize power and

resources to affect change in the world. Finally, to understand how it was judged to be in Britain's interests to go to war it is necessary to engage closely with the conception of a shared Atlanticist identity that was shaping perceptions at the heart of the Labour government (Dunne 2004). Viewing the bonds with America in these terms helps to explain why the Prime Minister did not extort a higher price for his loyalty.

UK foreign policy: agency and commitments

One of the first questions students of foreign policy need to address concerns the power of the actor in question. In the case of the UK, the answer to this question is not self-evident. Writing at the turn of the 1990s, Steve Smith rightly noted that the country defies easy classification into the kinds of categories favoured by foreign policy analysts (Smith 1991). These interdependences include membership of 120 international institutions (Williams 2005: 29), permanent membership of the UNSC, and one of the 'big three' states in the EU. Recognized membership of the nuclear club is also, some would argue, an indicator of high status in world politics. Yet, as we shall see below, Britain's capacity to get its way in the world is highly constrained.

Three faces of power

When Blair talked about Britain's capability he employed the useful term **pivotal power**. By pivotal, Blair meant a country 'that is at the crux of the alliances' that 'shape the world and its future'. Projecting the term into the language used in International Relations to categorize states, one could argue that pivotal powers claim the same rights and responsibilities as great powers, albeit in a domain that is restricted. Pivotal powers are regional great powers with the capacity to project their military forces in their near-abroad. This sets them apart from the category of middle powers who make no corresponding demand to be serious military players in their region. Examples of other pivotal powers include Australia, Brazil, Israel, India, Indonesia, Iran, France, Japan, Nigeria, South Africa, and Turkey.[3]

Even a realist would admit that **hard power** capability is only a necessary condition for influence—it is certainly not sufficient. Given the UK's relative decline as an economic and military power since 1914, an analysis which only addressed hard power would inevitably conclude that Britain is a significantly diminished player on the world stage. Historians of the decline thesis often point to the Suez crisis of 1957 as a symbolic moment when a once-global power realized it could no longer flex its military muscle without the support of the Americans.

While material power has been in decline since the Second World War, foreign policy traditionalists would claim that Britain has maintained its influence through the skilful mobilization of **soft power** resources (Nye 2004). These include the extensive diplomatic network; the wealth of experience in international relations that comes from being a former imperial power; the importance of London as a financial centre; the private school and university system which indirectly socializes many of the next generation of world leaders; the importance of English as a world language; and membership of powerful international institutions (the EU, the UNSC, NATO, and the Commonwealth). By pulling on the levers of

soft power, Britain has been able to 'punch above its weight', to invoke Douglas Hurd's worn-out phrase.

Liberals are drawn to soft power levers just as realists focus on material or brute power. Constructivists, on the other hand, argue that the only durable way to get others to do what you want is to wield **legitimate power**. Coercion is costly in terms of human life and resources. Bribery is simply expensive and its results are short-lived. Stable compliance comes from locking others into a normative context that they believe to be morally right, thus shaping their identity and enabling a recalibration of their interests. It is hard to see how measures like the legalization of the Human Rights Act—during the first Labour government—helped to advance the national interest in a conventional sense. Instead, institutionalizing human rights principles was an indicator of the emergence of a social identity which owed more to social democratic values and less to an imperialist past. The fact that, post 9/11, many core human rights values have been under threat from the Labour government suggests that internationalist norms are not deeply embedded in the habits and practices of the British state (Dunne 2007).

Later in the chapter, it will be argued that the UK *could* have exerted considerable influence on the direction of US policy—thereby defying the 'poodle' image beloved by cartoonists (Figure 22.1).

The Prime Minister could have made a second UN resolution a red-line issue that the UK would not cross under any circumstances. Without a clear resolution which explicitly authorized military force to disarm Iraq, he could have pulled British forces out of the warfighting campaign while at the same time providing diplomatic and logistical support to the USA. Such a role was mooted by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld who, when questioned on 11 March 2003 about the difficulties the UK was having over Iraq, noted that the situation for the UK was 'unclear' and, if necessary, the USA would go it alone. The response from Secretary of Defence Geoff Hoon the following day was to reiterate the British government's commitment to forcibly disarm Iraq even without a second resolution. Would a better alternative have been to use Rumsfeld's intervention as a moment to pull British forces back from the brink of war, and to see whether others in the US administration bought the Defense Secretary's line that the USA could in fact 'go it alone'?

Goals and commitments[4]

The above discussion has focused on the many levers of power that the UK government is able to pull to effect change in world politics. What, then, of the goals that these capabilities are designed to deliver?

The first commitment underpinning Labour's strategic foreign policy goals is **multilateralism.** This goal has a principled as well as a prudential basis. Multilateralism is consistent with Labour's long-standing belief in internationalist values and the institutions which support them. Also, given the country's dynamic soft power capability, it made sense to harness the country's diplomatic resources in order to shape the rules-based international order.

Alongside multilateralism, and sometimes in tension with it, the Labour governments under Tony Blair (1997–2007) and Gordon Brown (2007–2010) demonstrated the clear view that the UK's interests were best served by maintaining a **special relationship** with the USA. Whether or not this sense of diplomatic intimacy is shared on both sides of the Atlantic is an

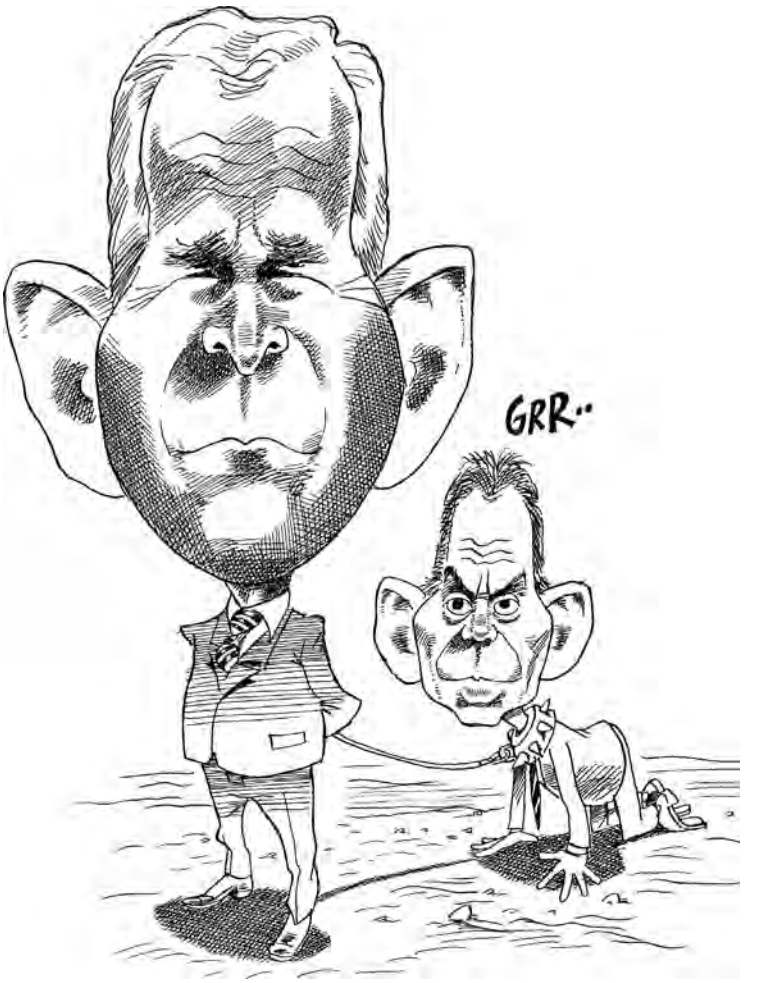

Figure 22.1 Tony Blair on a leash.

Source: www.CartoonStock.com

issue which historians have long contested: suffice it to say that there is far greater noise about the special relationship in Britain than there is in Washington DC. In the literature on the special relationship, it is possible to distinguish a narrow and a wide conception. The narrow view is based on close defence cooperation, including the sharing of weapons technologies and the pooling of information by the intelligence services of the two countries. The wide view goes beyond military cooperation—what defines the special relationship are the shared values and connected histories. What does this mean in terms of policy formulation? The degree of trust that the USA accords Britain is such that it enables the junior partner to exercise a degree of influence in return for its loyalty.

What is striking about the Atlantic alliance during the Blair years is the disjuncture between the extremely close personal relationship he established with George W. Bush—aided in part

BOX 22.1 Ending the special relationship the *Love Actually* way

Context: Press conference in 10 Downing Street after discussions between the new British Prime Minister and the President of the United States.

[Question]. Mr President, has it been a good visit? [President]. Very satisfactory indeed. We got what we came for and our special relationship is still very special.

[Prime Minister addresses question]. I love that word 'relationship'. Covers all manner of sins, doesn't it? I fear that this has become a bad relationship. A relationship based on the President taking what he wants and casually ignoring all those things that really matter to Britain. We may be a small country but we're a great one, too. The country of Shakespeare, Churchill, the Beatles, Sean Connery, Harry Potter. David Beckham's right foot. David Beckham's left foot, come to that. And a friend who bullies us is no longer a friend. And since bullies only respond to strength, from now onward, I will be prepared to be much stronger. And the President should be prepared for that.

Source: Reprinted by permission of the Peters Fraser and Dunlop Group on behalf of Richard Curtis.

by the shared Christian convictions[5]—and the uncomfortable tensions which exist between their respective political parties. In the virtual realm, the YouTube sketch of the two leaders singing 'Endless Love' was much closer to the mark than the fraught Anglo-American press conference featured in the film *Love Actually* (see Box 22.1).

The third goal framing UK foreign policy was a commitment to **neoliberal** views of political economy. Internationally, this meant supporting the position on trade, economic development, and aid taken by key international institutions such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. From his earliest interventions in foreign policy, Blair took on board the realities of globalization and the need for the UK to steer a course between succeeding in the global marketplace while maintaining sufficient welfare provision to protect communities from the consequences of economic failure. Domestically, modernization meant applying a new regulative framework to the public sector, including the FCO and the Ministry of Defence (MoD). This prompted the former head of the diplomatic service, John Coles, to observe that 'the priority accorded to issues of management and administration detracted from the time ministers and civil servants had to engage in strategic reflection about foreign policy' (Williams 2005: 31).

Putting morality at the heart of British foreign policy remained a consistent commitment during the last decade. In the language used by Robin Cook in the 1997 FCO mission statement, he and the Labour leadership wanted a different kind of identity for Britain. Instead of being regarded as a declining imperial power which had little influence beyond the Commonwealth, Cook and Blair were agreed that Britain needed to become 'a force for good in the world' promoting human rights, tackling debt among the poorest nations, and supporting progressive multilateral initiatives such as the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. The fourth framing commitment was, in other words, that Britain had to be a so-called **ethical state.**

The missionary-like commitment to promoting good over evil led the *Economist* to amend Dean Acheson's famous quip and reformulate it along the lines that Britain had indeed lost an empire but it had found Tony Blair (Williams 2005: 165). Behind the quip lies a serious point: the former prime minister was engaged with foreign policy issues from the outset despite showing little knowledge of, or interest in, world politics prior to 1997. This fact makes a

BOX 22.2 The ethical state debate

The altered language of foreign policy that accompanied the arrival of 'New Labour' in power generated a significant academic debate about the possibilities and perils of exporting ethics. Such claims provoked a backlash in the right-wing press who preferred the familiar path of the national interest. Former practitioners partly endorsed the idea that this was a risky strategy while at the same time implying, somewhat contradictorily, that the pragmatic approach associated with the tradition of the FCO had always sought to try and make the world a more civilized place.

The academic debate on the 'ethical foreign policy' took a different form. Early interventions concurred that the political debate was misconceived: all foreign policies are ethical in that they are driven by moral commitments. Recall how classical realists understood that the primacy of national security was, first and foremost, a commitment to the nation as the source of value. Even arch-pragmatists with their cost–benefit calculus are slaves of an ethical theory of sorts, in this case a crude form of utilitarianism.

While all agreed that the government had no choice but to have an ethical foreign policy, a significant chasm opened up in terms of evaluating whether or not they had made progress towards their stated goals. On one side were those who believed that states should strive to be 'good international citizens', but that this was often compromised by the fact of value pluralism and the degree of contestation over the meaning and priority accorded to principles of justice (Dunne and Wheeler 1999). A broad commitment to social democratic values in foreign policy does not provide a clear guide as to how to resolve a number of moral dilemmas. For example, does supporting equality entail privileging the substantive rights of individuals over the procedural rights of states? Or, under what circumstances are institutional inequalities reasonable—for instance, in the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or in terms of the veto power of the five permanent members of the Security Council? One way to reconcile such tensions endorsed by advocates of the 'good state' is to allow governments to make decisions that are at odds with cosmopolitan values *only* when their vital interests are not threatened.

By engaging with the Labour government's declaratory policy, advocates of good international citizenship risked becoming apologists for those in power. Writers such as Mark Curtis adopt a more radical position: Britain is an 'outlaw state' and all claims to be ethical are a chimera. The truth, for Curtis, is that there was never an intention to chart an ethical course in British foreign policy (Curtis 2003). Elsewhere, he argues that 'violating international law has become as British as afternoon tea' (Curtis 2003: 7). Yet what critics never adequately appreciate is that international legal rules are enabling of certain policies thought to be unconscionable such as the arms trade.

mockery of the media line that the ethical foreign policy died a death when Robin Cook left the ministry at the end of the first Labour administration. Box 22.2 highlights the academic debate triggered by Labour's mission statement and the wider question about whether states can be progressive change agents in world politics.

Given these commitments, what was Britain going to do when brutal dictators such as Slobodan Milosevic decided to turn the brutish power of the state against a particular ethnic grouping among its own population? By early 1999, it was clear that the answer was that Britain was prepared to fight alongside NATO partners in a humanitarian war. Not only did the armed forces engage in the intense waves of aerial bombings, but in April 1999 Blair used an invitation from the Economic Club of Chicago to identify 'the circumstances in which we should get actively involved in other people's conflicts' (Blair 1999). The subtext of the speech was to remind the US political elite of their responsibility to act militarily when a humanitarian emergency was unfolding. (An excerpt from Blair's speech can be found in Chapter Twelve, Box 12.2.)

In today's world, the Prime Minister argued, countries 'fight for values, not for territory'. More precisely, he went on, we must be prepared to act forcibly when genocide or ethnic cleansing had occurred, when refugee flows threaten international peace and security, and to deal with 'undemocratic' and 'barbarous' regimes. Since **humanitarian intervention** breached the norm of non-intervention (article 2.4 of the UN Charter), Blair recognized the crucial significance of establishing a shared consensus about the determination of legitimate conduct. He came up with the following 'five considerations'.

1. Are we sure of our case?
2. Have we given diplomacy every chance?
3. Can military force be successful? Are there military options that are viable?
4. Are we in it for the long term?
5. Is our own national interest at stake?

This list chimes with a great deal of contemporary thinking on the just war doctrine (Walzer 1992). However, there is one important difference—nowhere did Blair admit the need for military action to have 'right authority' by which advocates of just war mean prior authorization from the appropriate international organization(s).[6]

The Kosovo case stimulated a heated debate about the former prime minister's crusading approach to international relations (Booth 2001). Internationally, it triggered a fierce argument as to whether humanitarian intervention can be regarded as a general right or duty (Wheeler 2000; Holzgrefe and Keohane 2003). The fact that China and Russia threatened to block a resolution legitimating armed intervention, was to Cook and Blair an 'unreasonable' use of their UNSC veto power. As Blair was to argue over Iraq, it would be wrong for the UNSC to be paralysed from acting simply because a permanent member took the decision to block the resolution regardless of its wording.

The road to war

Towards the end of his first term in office, Tony Blair had established himself as an important international statesman. Relations with other European states were more constructive than they had been during the previous four Conservative administrations. He had led the pro-intervention debate over Kosovo, and sought to galvanize world opinion around values of justice and fairness in relation to the environment and global poverty.

9/11 and the new world order

Then came 9/11. While the US President appeared uncertain as to how to respond to the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, Prime Minister Blair instinctively found the right words to describe the shared sense of outrage and the concomitant duty to stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with the USA in its hour of need. For Blair, 9/11 had changed the terms of the debate about security threats: 'potential threats had to be dealt with before they became actual' (Freedman 2004: 38). Shortly after 9/11, Blair delivered one of his most powerful speeches on foreign policy at the Labour Party conference in Brighton. It

advanced the idea of the 'power of community' both domestically and internationally. In a rhetorical flourish, the Prime Minister urged his party faithful to seize the moment: 'the kaleidoscope has been shaken. The places are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us re-order this world around us' (Blair 2001). Many critics pointed out that this level of normative ambition far outstripped Britain's capability to bring about those ends.

In the immediate post-9/11 period both Bush and Blair were strengthened domestically by their close cooperation on international issues. The US media increasingly viewed Blair as an important player in internal Bush administration debates about how to respond to the al-Qaeda attacks. As has been well documented (Woodward 2002), the period from 9/11 through 2002 saw the US position hardening on the need to eliminate the threat that Iraq posed. After the defeat of the Taliban, the neoconservatives increasingly viewed Iraq as the next front in the War on Terror.

Cheney and other leading neocons had hoped that Saddam Hussein would be overthrown in the period following the first Iraq War. Instead, the Iraqi President remained in complete control of the regime despite a highly intrusive monitoring of Iraqi military capabilities in line with UNSC resolution 687 of April 1991. This resolution linked a cessation of hostilities to the elimination of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and missiles with a range of more than 150 kilometres. The regime tasked with overseeing the policy of disarmament was the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM). From 1991 to 1997, UNSCOM uncovered significant stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons. By the end of 1997, this policy of containment combined with coercion (resolution 687 allowed 'all necessary means' to be used) was beginning to fray: Iraq was subverting UNSCOM's activities and leading states on the UNSC were increasingly unsupportive. One year later, the head of UNSCOM, Richard Butler, reported Iraq's continued non-compliance to the UNSC. Inspectors were withdrawn and the USA and the UK prepared for Operation Desert Fox—coordinated waves of air strikes against Iraqi military targets.

Well before the al-Qaeda attacks on America, the policy of containment and sanctions against Iraq was increasingly regarded as ineffectual and disreputable. As the President later observed, after September 11 'the doctrine of containment just doesn't hold any water' (Freedman 2004: 16). The agenda had moved on—prevention was the new strategic narrative. In this spirit, Vice-President Cheney formulated the so-called 'one percent doctrine' meaning that if there is only a one percent chance that the USA might be attacked then it has to respond militarily to such a potential threat (Suskind 2006). As President Bush noted, 'facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud' (Freedman 2004: 17). Week by week, it was becoming apparent to decision makers in Washington and London that the policy of containment had to make way for a policy of removing the threat altogether.

2002 policy options

During the crucial twelve months after 9/11, Blair and his foreign policy team visited Bush and his administration on three occasions—Washington in September 2001, Crawford in April 2002, and Camp David in September 2002 (see Box 22.3).

BOX 22.3 The road to war: a timeline

2001	
11 September 2001	American Airlines Flight 11 crashes into the north tower of the World Trade Center in Manhattan just before 9.00 a.m. Fifteen minutes later, United Airlines flight 175 hits the south tower.
12 September 2001	Bob Woodward, in *Plan of Attack*, notes that both Donald Rumsfeld (Secretary of Defense) and Paul Wolfowitz (his deputy) raised the issue of broadening the military response from al-Qaeda to Iraq.
28 December 2001	General Tommy Franks, head of US Central Command, briefs President Bush on Pentagon planning for the Iraq War.
2002	
29 January	Bush's first State of the Union address lists Iraq as one of the 'axis of evil' who threaten world order through their attempts to acquire WMDs and who sponsor terrorism.
1 June	At an address given at West Point, Bush argued that 'shadowy terrorist networks' could not be deterred. For this reason, 'we must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge'. Our security means we have 'to be ready for pre-emptive action when necessary'.
12 September	Bush goes to the UNSC and urges them to enforce Iraq's compliance with previous disarmament resolutions. If the UN was not prepared to act, it should stand aside as the USA acts.
22 September	Gerhard Schröder wins the German election on a platform of withholding German support for the war.
24 September	UK Government publishes dossier on Iraq's WMD capability. Dossier claims that Iraq could produce nuclear weapons within one to two years. Includes the claim that Iraq could launch chemical or biological weapons within 45 minutes of the order being given (see Box 22.4).
10 October	The US Congress authorizes Bush to use armed force against Iraq in order to (1) defend US national security, and (2) enforce all relevant UNSC resolutions regarding Iraq.
8 November	UNSC unanimously approves resolution 1441 countersigned by the USA and the UK. The resolution gives Iraq 'a final opportunity to disarm', warning that 'serious consequences' would follow if Iraq continued violations of UNSC resolutions.
18 November	Hans Blix leads UNMOVIC (UN Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission) team back to Baghdad to start their mission.

(Continued)

7 December	One day before the UN deadline, Iraq deposits its 12,000-page dossier indicating it had disarmed.
19 December	Following concerns raised by both Hans Blix (head of UNMOVIC) and Mohamed El-Baradei (head of the International Atomic Energy Agency), US ambassador to the UN, John Negreponte, says that Iraq is in 'material breach' of 1441.
2003	
9 January	Blix reports to the UNSC that no 'smoking gun' had been found, though there were aspects of Iraqi non-compliance including disclosing the names of key scientists.
27 January	Sixty days after the resumption of inspections, Blix tells the UNSC that Iraq 'appears not to have come to a genuine acceptance' of 'the disarmament which was demanded of it'. There were gaps which Iraq ought to have resolved by now, but UNMOVIC's information is, according to Blix, too incomplete to conclude that Iraq possessed prohibited weapons.
28 January	President Bush gives his second State of the Union address. The speech claims that British intelligence reveals that Iraq recently acquired significant quantities of uranium from Africa. 'Trusting in the sanity and restraint of Saddam' is not an option and is not a strategy, Bush declared.
31 January	Meeting between Bush and Blair in Washington. Blair allegedly tells Bush he is 'solidly' behind US plans to invade Iraq despite doubts about the legality of such action expressed by the Attorney General.
3 February	A briefing document produced by No.10 staff sets out the 'concealment' charge against Saddam Hussein. Cambridge academic Glen Rangwala notices that large sections have been copied from a 2002 article published in *Middle East Review of International Affairs*.
5 February	US Secretary of State Colin Powell presents the US case against Iraq to the UNSC.
9 February	The French and German governments set out a proposal to increase the number of inspectors.
14 February	Blix reports that there continues to be more cooperation with the weapons inspectors in terms of 'process' than 'substance'.
15–16 February	Anti-war demonstrations in several cities around the world; one million in London and Glasgow organized by Stop the War Coalition.
1 March	Turkish Parliament votes to refuse the USA a base in southern Turkey from which it could launch a second front against the Iraqi army.
7 March	Blix and El-Baradei report that Iraqi cooperation had increased since January and that, for the remaining disarmament tasks to be met, the process will take several months. In the UK, the Attorney General presents equivocal advice on the legality of the war.

10 March	President Chirac declares that France will oppose any move within the UNSC to pass a resolution enabling war.
11 March	Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld admits that the situation for the UK without a second resolution was 'unclear'. The implication was that the USA was prepared to go it alone.
17 March	The Attorney General gives his legal advice to the Cabinet stating that the war would be legal even in the absence of a second resolution.
	Robin Cook resigns from the government in order to distance himself from a war that lacked 'international authority' and 'domestic support'.
	Back in New York, the attempt to secure a second resolution authorizing force collapses when it becomes clear that there is no majority for such action in the UNSC and, if there were, France would use its veto.
18 March	Debate in the UK Parliament. The Prime Minister argues that 'our legal base' is disarmament as set out in 1441: 'I have never put our justification for action as regime change.' With the support of the Conservative Party, Blair defeats an anti-war motion. 139 Labour MPs voted for the motion and against the Prime Minister.
19 March	Operation Iraqi Freedom begins with decapitation strikes against Iraqi military targets.

At what point did Blair know that the USA had decided to take military action against Iraq? And crucially, when did he give an assurance to Bush that Britain would also participate in the ground offensive? What conditions were sought by British policy makers for this unstinting support?

No one is better placed to judge the timing of the British 'decision' than Christopher Meyer, the UK Ambassador to Washington throughout the diplomatic crisis. According to him it was during a series of meetings in 2002 that an understanding developed that the UK would participate in the coming war.[7] A key date in this respect concerns the meeting between Bush and Blair in Crawford, Texas, on 6 April 2002. Classified Cabinet Office documents leaked to the press record that Blair told Bush at the Crawford meeting in April that:

> The UK would support military action to bring about regime change, provided that certain conditions were met: efforts had been made to construct a coalition/shape public opinion, the Israeli–Palestine crisis is quiescent, and the options for action to eliminate Iraq's WMD[s] through UN weapons inspectors had been exhausted (Meyer 2005: 246).

In a speech the following day given in the Presidential Library at Texas A&M University, the Prime Minister set out his unflinching support for the US position. When America is fighting for democratic values 'we fight with her', Blair said.

Given how critical UK support was for the American-led war, this was a moment to put the special relationship to the test. To what extent did the diplomacy over Iraq illustrate that London was able to exert 'influence' over Washington in return for fighting 'with her'.

Which of the 'conditions' noted by the UK Ambassador were met and which were sidelined? Of the three conditions, gaining UNSC backing was the most significant in the eyes of the British executive. Blair and his team of advisers threw their diplomatic weight behind an initiative to multilateralize the decision-making process. Going through the UNSC would be deemed reasonable by most world leaders—the heavyweight neocons in the Bush administration did not see it this way. It had become a *leitmotif* of their cause that America does not need anyone's permission before it uses military force. In order for Blair's initiative to work, he had to bolster the more moderate voices in the administration, such as Secretary of State Colin Powell, who were up against the powerful neocon grouping in the Pentagon (supported by Cheney).

The British government have tried to take the credit for persuading Bush to go the UN route. However, according to Meyer, a private meeting between Powell and Bush on 5 August appears to have been 'decisive' (Meyer 2005: 250). Either way, the multilateral preferences of the State Department and the British government had prevailed over the Cheney–Rumsfeld preference to keep the UN at arm's length.

At the strategic level, Blair saw the issue in plain terms: commit the military to the forcible removal of Saddam Hussein or allow the USA to go it alone. As is often the case in international politics, neither choice was without significant costs. A war of regime change would be fought in the teeth of international and domestic opposition. Allowing the USA to go it alone undermined the bilateral relationship which had been the keystone of UK foreign policy for most of the post-1945 period. Blair concluded that joining the US-led war was the right path to follow, and that decision was endorsed by Parliament.

Were these the only policy options? Would it have been possible to defer a decision to support the USA militarily until Blair was certain that there was wide international support for such action? If this support was not forthcoming, could the UK have opted out of the decapitation phase while offering significant military assistance in the reconstruction phase? Experts located in Washington think-tanks argued that there was a window of opportunity for the UK to explore an alternative policy. This window was opened up when Rumsfeld let slip, on 11 March, that the British position was 'unclear' and that America was becoming impatient with the endless rounds of diplomacy in New York.

'Britain opting out', noted Ken Pollock from the Brookings Institute, 'would have radically changed the course of the war' (interview, 6 June 2007). The timing of the war would, in his view, have been slowed down. Moreover, the likelihood of Italy and Spain joining the coalition of the willing would have been very remote without at least one of the 'big three' being on board. It is even conceivable, Washington insiders claim, that in the absence of military support from Europeans—allied with the refusal of Turkey to allow its bases to be used—the USA might not have have been prepared to 'go it alone'. The damage such untrammelled unilateralism would have done to transatlantic relations would be a cause for concern even among the neocons.

While it would have been diplomatically very difficult for Britain to change tack as late as March 2003, the multilateralists in the British and US governments should have bargained harder. The combined power of Powell in the State Department and Blair in Downing Street was enough to insist that the administration engage in more robust planning for the post-war reconstruction and stabilization phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Inside the UNSC

There followed frantic months of diplomatic negotiations in order to come up with a Security Council resolution (UNSCR) that was both robust and fair, such that it could retain the support of all permanent and non-permanent members on the Council. UNSCR 1441 stipulated that Iraq must comply with previous Security Council resolutions and disarm. If it failed to do so 'serious consequences' would follow. To establish whether Iraq had taken up the final opportunity to disarm, the Security Council mandated an inspections team (UNMOVIC) to be sent to Iraq to intrusively monitor Iraq's WMD capability.

How far was the UK 'condition' of allowing inspectors to assess Iraq's compliance or non-compliance met? There is no easy answer to this question as there were too many ambiguities in the process. Was the mission of the inspectors to find whatever capability Iraq had, or to verify the Iraqi disclosure demanded by 1441? If nothing was found, does that mean that Iraq has fully disarmed, or cleverly concealed its stockpiles? And if the inspectors deemed Iraq to be in partial compliance, would this be a reason for peace or war? Was a follow-up resolution required before military action could be taken?

In the aftermath of 1441, the greatest risk lay with the possibility that the inspectors' reports would become the site of a battle between the coalition of the willing and the coalition of the unconvinced. Was it ever realistic to think that any empirical claim, or even proof, as to what capability Saddam possessed would be evaluated according to the same criteria? Such a conundrum was encapsulated in Donald Rumsfeld's dismissal of cautious UNMOVIC reports: an 'absence of evidence', he argued, was not the same as 'evidence of absence'.

Ambiguities about how to interpret what was 'there' were heightened by the radically opposed understandings about what 1441 permitted if WMDs were found. For the USA and the UK, UNSCR 1441 was a 'trigger' resolution, meaning that if Iraq was found to be in 'material breach' of the resolution, war would follow. Other members of the Security Council took a different view. Evidence of WMD capability suggested that the inspections were working, and that the inspectors should be given more time to finish the job. Decision makers in London and Washington viewed further rounds of inspection as a return to the failed policy of containment. The truth was that no evidence was going to be regarded as neutral by either the USA–UK axis or France–Germany–Russia (the so-called *non-nein-nyet* states) and the rest of the Security Council. War remained a possibility even if Iraq responded to 1441 by disarming and asking the Americans to take 'yes' for an answer.

Spinning the threat

Apart from scrutinizing the **special relationship**, the road to war raises important and controversial questions about the 'reality' of the threat posed by Iraq, how this was sold to the British public, and the processes by which intelligence estimates were mobilized in favour of the line being taken by Blair internationally. As we have seen, the former Prime Minister ultimately made the case for war on the basis of Iraq's capability *and* the fact that there was good reason to impute an intention on the part of Saddam Hussein to threaten international peace and security. Indeed, given that the military action was in part justified by prevention, it was vital that the public understood the nature of the threat and why the coalition of the willing had to act.

In September 2002, members of Blair's inner circle—including his press secretary Alastair Campbell and one of the Prime Minister's foreign policy advisers David Manning—published an assessment of 'Iraq's weapons of mass destruction'. Several times, including in the foreword by Blair, the dossier noted that Iraq's WMDs could be ready to deploy 'within 45 minutes of an order to use them' (UK Government 2002: 4). This claim became notorious for two reasons.

BOX 22.4 The 45-minute claim

It would be naïve to expect politicians to be indifferent to the possibilities of shaping public opinion. In his biography of Blair, Anthony Seldon refers to his 'hubristic belief' in his own powers of persuasion (Seldon 2005). The September 2002 dossier on *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction* illustrates the difficulty of staying on the right side of the line between persuasion and propaganda. As a former chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee, Pauline Neville-Jones, put it, 'the dossier required the JIC to shift from evaluating to make that case' (Freedman 2004).

At the outset, one of the difficulties with the dossier is that its ownership is obscure. The report draws on a variety of intelligence sources, including the Secret Intelligence Services (SIS), the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), the Security Service (MI6), and the Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS). The heads of these various agencies sit on a key Cabinet Committee called the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) chaired by Sir John Scarlett. The committee provides advice and analysis to the Prime Minister on a range of international issues and concerns.

The foreword to the September dossier was written by the Prime Minister, though the original draft was by Alastair Campbell. It contained 'the 45-minute claim' which was repeated a further three times in the document, despite being based on only a single uncorroborated source (para. 70, Foreign Affairs Committee, June 2003). The following day, newspaper headlines drew the inference that Saddam Hussein could launch strategic chemical or biological weapons with in 45 minutes. Yet the intelligence assessment of Iraq's WMD capability referred only to battlefield weapons. This initial omission—and subsequent failure to clarify—generated a misleading impression.

On 29 May 2003, the BBC *Today* programme ran an interview with its security correspondent Andrew Gilligan. In the course of a short two-way conversation with John Humphrys, Gilligan alleged that an 'intelligence source' had claimed that the September dossier had been 'sexed up' to make it less equivocal. He highlighted the 45-minute claim as a basis of concern among the intelligence community. Gilligan's source was David Kelly, an MoD adviser on biological weapons and expert on Iraq's capability. Kelly had met Gilligan but denied commenting on the 45-minute claim. No.10 and the MoD were keen to 'out' the source in order to bolster their own credibility. The process by which this occurred was unfortunate: the media were not told the source for Gilligan's story but instead were allowed to guess the person's name. The combination of the allegations laid at Kelly's door, the lack of protection given to him by the MoD, and the intense media pressure, were all contributing factors to him taking his own life on 17 July 2003.

The public outcry created by his death led the Prime Minister to set up an inquiry into the circumstances that had brought it about. The Hutton Inquiry had narrow terms of reference: 'The question of whether the information in the September dossier was unreliable was an irrelevance; if the JIC had approved and the government believed it was reliable, then it could be taken as reliable by the inquiry' (Doig 2005: 117). Hutton concluded that the document had not been 'sexed up' and that the 45-minute claim had not been inserted by the Prime Minister's press secretary Alastair Campbell. Following the publication of the inquiry, Gilligan resigned as did Greg Dyke, the Director-General of the BBC.

On 12 October 2004, UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw told the House of Commons that the head of M16 had withdrawn the 45-minute claim.

First, it later transpired that the dossier did not stipulate that this applied to battlefield weapons which could not have an offensive capability. Second, when doubts about this claim were aired by a BBC journalist, a major confrontation began between the BBC and the government, a battle whose significance was heightened by the tragic death of the WMD adviser Dr David Kelly who had been an MoD employee. (See Box 22.4.)

The errors underpinning the presentation of the 45-minute claim were not the only examples of the misuse of intelligence information. In February 2003, a second dossier was published with the aim of providing Parliament and the British public with 'further information' about, in the Prime Minister's words, 'the infrastructure of concealment'. The document had not been cleared by the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) or the FCO. It included text taken from an article by Dr Al-Marashi without his permission either being sought or granted. In its July 2003 report, the Foreign Affairs Committee noted that the effect of the dossier was to undermine the credibility of the government's case for war.

Alastair Campbell later confirmed to the Select Committee that the February dossier had been a 'cock-up' and that he had apologized to the Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service and the Chair of the JIC. The embarrassment of the February dossier did not shake the Labour leadership's unstinting belief that Saddam Hussein had WMDs and that either the UNMOVIC inspectors would find the weapons *or* he was engaged in an elaborate process of concealment. As the former Prime Minister told the House of Commons on 5 February 2003, 'it is perfectly obvious that Saddam has them' and that he was refusing to put them beyond use.

Not everyone who saw the intelligence information agreed with Blair. Robin Cook, leader of the House of Commons during the build-up to the Iraq War, had access to the intelligence reports produced by the JIC. Cook was sceptical that Iraq constituted a current and serious threat to UK national security; in fact, he believed that Saddam had no 'usable' WMDs. The French President, who was also sceptical of the case, admitted that his intelligence services also had estimates of Iraq's WMD capacity though he chose not to attach too much credibility to these sources. Instead, he followed Clausewitz's dictum that 'many intelligence reports in war are contradictory; even more are false, and most are uncertain' (Jervis 2006).

Long after the cessation of the ground offensive, the quest for proof that the weapons existed took another twist. In June 2003 a US-led team was despatched to search for the WMDs that UNMOVIC failed to locate. Months later, David Kay, the head of the group, told a US Senate hearing that his survey group had not uncovered any stockpiles of WMDs. In a devastating appraisal of the intelligence information, Kay noted that 'we were almost all wrong'. Contrast this with the confidence prior to the war expressed by CIA leader George Tenet who sought to reassure the President with the phrase it was 'a slam dunk case'. In spinning the threat in late 2002, Bush and Blair had left themselves exposed to the charge that they sold their publics a false prospectus for war.

Explaining the errors

In the last instance, the British public ought not to have been surprised that Tony Blair tried to persuade them of the 'fact' that the Ba'athist regime in Iraq posed a threat to its people, to the region, and potentially beyond. All attempts to avert a *potential* threat require strong and persuasive rationales. The question, in this case, is whether the Prime Minister and members of his inner circle of advisers and officials misrepresented intelligence

assessments as though they were the same as threat assessments (Freedman 2004: 36). The insertion into the September dossier that Iraq's threat was 'serious and current', and the many expressions of certainty that Iraq *had* WMD capability, implied that these claims were securely grounded in intelligence information. They were not. Even if there was no intention to deceive, as the Prime Minster persistently reminds the British public, this was a significant failure of leadership.

The extent to which the intelligence community in the UK were complicit in this process needs to be considered. There existed inside the secret intelligence service a preconceived belief that Saddam had sought WMDs before the Gulf War and tried to develop them afterwards; therefore rational and coherent. Into this general hypothesis, various details from Western intelligence agencies were inserted. Each new piece of information 'that *could* be interpreted as showing that Iraq had active programmes was interpreted in this way' (Jervis 2006: 22).

Besides the tendency to join up the dots in the intelligence information that fitted a preconceived picture, the information presented to decision makers was inadequately scrutinized. There was an active search for leads that confirmed the existence of WMD capability and intent, and there was a downplaying of negative evidence. Critics of the intelligence community argue that they allowed their work to be politicized; the more cautious charge made by Hans Blix was that there was a 'deficit of critical thinking' on the part of the intelligence agencies (Blix 2005).

This deficit came about because of **groupthink**. In its original academic formulation (Janis 1982), groupthink captures the tendency for tightly knit groups to seek converging opinions and approval. Members of the group avoid challenging the consensus, preferring to adopt strategies of affirmation. Evidence that groupthink was operational in this case can be gleaned from the carefully worded conclusion of the Hutton Inquiry that the Prime Minister may have 'subconciously influenced' those drafting the document with his request for a document that was 'consistent with the available evidence' but at the same time was 'as strong as possible in relation to the threat' (Freedman 2004: 27).

The tendency of decision makers to seek convergence is such that all governments need institutional mechanisms and procedures in which unity can be punctured and criticisms can be ventured. Cabinet committees exist to provide this scrutiny. Unfortunately, under Blair, both the full cabinet and the committees were stripped of their power. In place of the formal committee structure, Blair preferred an informal style of leadership based around a charmed circle of advisers holding meetings in the 'den' at No.10. Minutes were seldom taken. Often individuals would not be present for the entire meeting. The casual politics of the 'denocracy', as Seldon calls it, explains how it was that the Attorney General's advice on the legality of the war was never put before a full cabinet meeting. Evidence gathered by the Hutton Inquiry provides further weight to the view that formal government processes were not operational through 2002 and early 2003.

The disunity over the interpretation of 1441 ramped up the need for a second UNSC resolution which unambiguously declared that Iraq had not taken the final opportunity to disarm and that 'all necessary means' were now required. It was also made apparent to Tony Blair in a memorable live BBC *Newsnight* broadcast that a second resolution would go a long way towards tempering domestic concerns about the impending war. When the US President understood the dilemma his friend faced, he was prepared to override Cheney and others

who were opposed to going for a second resolution. To which Bush replied: 'if that's what you need', we will 'go flat out to try to help you get it' (Seldon 2005: 590). Whether this was in fact the case has been doubted by British writers. Either way, when it became clear that France and Germany were not going to support regime change, the USA and the UK regrouped outside the Council, declaring that it was them and not their opponents who were acting in support of the United Nations.

Back in London, the Chief of Defence staff needed a ruling that the war was legal. Previous advice given by the Attorney General indicated that a second resolution was vital in order to dispel doubts about the legality of war. Despite the collapse in negotiations in New York, the Attorney General revised his opinion and gave military action his cautious support. In a secret memo of 7 March 2003, he noted that 'a reasonable case can be made that resolution 1441 is capable of reviving authorisation in 678 without a further resolution' (Goldsmith 2003). This prompted the immediate resignation of the deputy legal adviser to the Foreign Office, Elizabeth Wilmshurst. In her words, 'an unlawful use of force on such scale amounts to the crime of aggression'.

The former Prime Minister's apparent willingness to countenance war where the legal basis is doubtful is one of the most damaging aspects of the case. However, it is overshadowed by the charge that Blair held a strong diplomatic hand during the crisis but played it poorly. Efforts to multilateralize the conflict came to a halt by about December 2002 as the US government had already decided that Iraq was in 'material breach' of disarmament resolutions. Yet, even as it grew more likely that the coalition of the willing was going to be a narrow one (in the sense of significant troop deployments), Blair still had a final card to play: he should have coordinated more closely with Colin Powell to ensure that a higher priority was placed upon post-war planning.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the choices made by the Prime Minister Tony Blair as the storm clouds gathered over Iraq between 9/11 and early 2003. Controversy over the decision still rages, as the oral evidence surrounding the Chilcot Inquiry makes clear (see 'Further reading').

The framing question underpinning this case study has been why Blair pledged his active support for military action (including the issue of the timing of this support). One answer, familiar to historians of the special relationship, is that Blair was looking to influence the Americans. Having a seat at their table gave him an opportunity to reinforce the State Department's preference for building a broad coalition prior to military action being taken. Bush's decision to go the UN route was a partial victory for British diplomacy—it was, after all, one of the 'conditions' for ensuring we would be standing side by side when the shooting started. It was only partial for the reason that the divisions between France, Germany, and the USA proved unbridgeable.

Britain's second condition—bringing back weapons inspectors—backfired spectacularly. A leaked confidential Downing Street memo of 23 July 2002 records the Foreign Secretary's view that the intelligence case was 'thin'. From that moment on, it was vital that the intelligence case became sufficiently robust to deliver domestic and international support for the war. As it turned out, allegations that Iraq posed a threat to its neighbours and to regional and

international security proved as unpersuasive to President Chirac as it did to large sections of the UK public.

While the intelligence condition backfired, the third—the Middle East roadmap—was stillborn. The position of both George W. Bush administrations was consistently hostile to the idea of an independent Palestinian state, while supporting the Israeli programme of building settlements on Palestinian lands. It was never realistic to believe, as Blair hoped, that a solution to the Palestinian problem was important to the USA. This prompted the British Ambassador to Washington to ask, incredulously: 'when is a condition not a condition?' (Meyer 2005: 247).

Beyond the Atlantic alliance, what was the Blair effect on British foreign policy? The humanitarian disaster created by the Iraq War buried any credible claim for Britain being a good international citizen, despite the leadership Blair and his successor Gordon Brown showed over debt relief for the poorest African nations. It is unlikely that Britain can rebuild itself as an ethical state until it shows fidelity to the rules and institutions of international society. The power of community, so valued by Blair, means following the rules even when these are potentially at odds with your strategic vision. Far from re-ordering the post-9/11 world along progressive lines, the Blair effect in foreign policy was to lend legitimacy to US interventionism as well as fanning the flames of instability and injustice in the Middle East.

Key points

- The arrival of the Labour government in May 1997 suggested the possibility of a new course for UK foreign policy, particularly in relation to the 'ethical dimension'.
- Continuities with previous governments remained, however, particularly in relation to the importance the UK Prime Minister attached to the special relationship.
- From post-9/11 to March 2003, it became clear that many of the goals pursued by Britain were in tension with one another. Following a brief moment of unity in the Security Council in November 2002, a division opened up between Britain's European allies and the USA.
- The government, reflecting the strong convictions of the Prime Minister, has been committed to an interventionist foreign policy over the past decade.
- The policy choice made by Blair was to stay close to the USA in order to ensure that the world's hegemonic power went the UN route. This was initially a success. But by March 2003, the UNSC was unable to agree a second resolution and the war was fought without explicit authorization.
- Blair's two other conditions—to ensure that intelligence information is public and convincing, and that the US administration takes seriously the need for progress on the Palestine–Israeli crisis—were not met.
- Were there other choices that could have been taken? As the US position hardened at the end of 2002, the Prime Minister should have coordinated more closely with the US State Department such that more attention was given to post-war planning.
- When it became clear, in March 2003, that the USA was past the point of no return in terms of war planning, the UK should have remained on the sidelines in the absence of a second UNSC resolution. At best this might have prevented the war altogether; at worst, it would have slowed the timetable for war. Set against this, if the USA went alone, the implications for future transatlantic relations could have been very negative.

Questions

1. Knowing that your key ally had decided to go to war, if you had been Prime Minister, would you have taken the same strategic decision? If not, evaluate the likely consequences of your chosen path.
2. What are the key commitments underpinning UK foreign policy during the Blair decade? Are they coherent?
3. Does Britain have to choose whether it is to be intimately connected with either the USA or Europe?
4. What does the Butler Inquiry tell us about the use of intelligence assessments by the UK government as the storm clouds gathered over Iraq? What does the Chilcot Inquiry tell us about the legal arguments presented by the Attorney General (Lord Goldsmith) and how these impacted upon the Blair government's policy options?
5. How far has 9/11 changed the calculation of risk in terms of potential threats to national and international security?
6. Has Blair been the 'foreign secretary' throughout his premiership? Is such involvement of the executive in international affairs routine or anomalous? Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of prime ministerial activism in this domain.
7. Why do states find it so hard to practise ethical statecraft? Is the failure rooted at the individual level (leadership), the state level (nationalism), or the international level (the problem of anarchy)?
8. Where do you think Britain falls on an analytical continuum with 'outlaw state' at one end and 'ethical state' at the other?

Further reading

Curtis, M. (2003), *Web of Deceit: Britain's Real Role in the World* (London: Vintage).
Takes a highly critical view of Labour in power, showing the negative humanitarian impact of the arms trade and other pro-capitalist initiatives pursued during the Blair decade.

Freedman, L. (2004), 'War in Iraq: Selling the Threat', *Survival*, 46: 7–50.
A comprehensive and measured article on the intelligence debate leading up to the war.

Goldsmith, P. (2003), 'Iraq: The Legal Case', *Guardian Unlimited*, 25 April 2007.
Advice on the legality of the war given by the Attorney General on 7 March 2003.

Hill, C. (2003), *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).
The best single authored work on foreign policy; examples are frequently drawn from the British case.

Kampfner, J. (2004), *Blair's Wars* (London: Free Press).
A lively account of Blair's military interventions. The narrative very much takes the line pursued by Robin Cook.

Lawler, P. (2004), 'The Good State: In Praise of "Classical" Internationalism', *Review of International Studies* 31: 427–99.
An excellent account of the theoretical issues at stake in the ethical foreign policy debate.

Meyer, C. (2005), *DC Confidential: The Controversial Memoirs of Britain's Ambassador to the U.S. at the Time of 9/11 and the Iraq War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson).
An extremely lively and readable account of Blair and his team during their many visits to Washington.

Ralph, J. (2010). 'After Chilcot: The "Doctrine of International Community" and the UK Decision to Invade Iraq', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, *13: 304–25.*

Seldon, A. (2005), *Blair* (London: Free Press).
An outstanding biography—draws on a phenomenally large range of sources (kept confidential).

Williams, P. (2005), *British Foreign Policy Under New Labour 1997–2005* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).
An unrivalled account of UK foreign policy during the first two New Labour administrations.

Wheeler, N.J. and Dunne, T. (2004), 'Moral Britannia? Evaluating the Ethical Dimension in Labour's Foreign Policy', Foreign Policy Centre paper.

Web links

There have been three government-led inquiries into Britain's role in the Iraq War.

http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk The Hutton Inquiry was tasked with investigating the death of scientist Dr David Kelly.

http://www.archive2.officialdocuments The Butler Inquiry was set up to investigate the accuracy of intelligence on Iraqi WMDs.

http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/about.aspx The Chilcot Inquiry (or Iraq Inquiry) had a broader remit to focus on policy. It considered the UK's involvement in Iraq to establish 'what happened and to identify the lessons that can be learned'. Witness testimony was broadcast live over the internet and the transcripts used here are available on the same website.

Visit the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book for more information:
www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/smith_foreign/