

'When the shooting starts': Atlanticism in British security strategy

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'It would be the irony of fate if my administration had to deal chiefly with foreign affairs.'¹ These words, spoken by Woodrow Wilson in 1913, would have sounded just as appropriate if uttered by Tony Blair prior to his taking office in 1997. During his brief period as leader of the Labour opposition, Blair made no speech on British foreign and defence policy. His colleague Peter Mandelson was once moved to scribble 'won't TB fight wars?' on a redraft of a Labour Party constitutional document that made no mention of defence.² After seven years in office, the British Prime Minister has deployed UK troops on enforcement actions on as many occasions,³ more than any leader in modern political history. As we approach the end of Labour's second term in office, it does indeed seem that Blair's record will in large measure be judged by how he has dealt 'chiefly with foreign affairs'.

Of all 'Blair's wars', the decision to join the US mission to disarm Iraq by force will have the most lasting impact. It is not too far-fetched to suggest that it may become a defining moment in UK foreign policy, alongside Munich in 1938 and Suez in 1956. What motivated the Prime Minister to send 46,000 UK troops to fight a war which lacked explicit UN Security Council authorization, not to mention being opposed by 139 MPs in his own party and a significant

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¹ Quoted in Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America unbound: the Bush revolution in foreign policy* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2003), p. 5.

² John Kampfner, *Blair's wars* (London: Free Press, 2004), p. 9.

³ Kampfner's calculation, writing in 2003, is 'five times in six years': Iraq (1998 and 2003), Kosovo (1999), Sierra Leone (2000) and Afghanistan (2002). If Kampfner's broad definition of war is used, then his list is incomplete. It ought to include deployments to the INTERFET operation in East Timor (1999) and the participation in the EU-led peace support operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2003). I am grateful to Paul Williams for pointing this out.

proportion of the British people?⁴ The answer lies in the resurgent Atlanticist identity which is shaping British security strategy after 9/11. In a recent BBC interview, the Prime Minister captured what this relationship means for Britain's role in the world. In a time of crisis, he argued, a mere expression of support is not enough. The fundamental question is: 'Are you prepared to commit, are you prepared to be there when the shooting starts?'⁵

To establishment figures, and to critics on the hard left, such a perspective will sound like 'business as usual' in view of the so-called 'special relationship' between Britain and the United States. This article suggests that such an outcome was not self-evident, for two reasons. First, internationalism has been a persistent theme in the Labour Party's conception of Britain's role in the world. Strong expressions of internationalism were evident during the early part of New Labour's period in power. Second, well beyond the reach of domestic politics, changes in the international system ought to have prompted a re-examination of the UK's international alliances. A strategy of dependence on the United States might have been a rational course to chart in a bipolar world, but is it capable of delivering the goals of British foreign and security policy in a world ordered very differently?

In the twelve months since the end of summer 2003 the British government published a series of documents designed to address strategic questions about power and purpose in British foreign and security policy. Yet, instead of facing the new realities of a world dominated by a restless 'supersize' power, these publications are mired in evasion and contradiction. The reader is taken to a parallel universe, where there are no hard choices to be made between alignment with Europe and with the United States, where acting outside the UN Security Council can be reconciled with multilateralism, and where evil means can be reconciled with good ends. The Prime Minister and his advisers need a revised security strategy that is anchored in a different conception of Britain's identity and moral purpose.

The opening section of this article explains why strategic thinking matters. An enlightened strategy rejects a means/ends calculus in favour of showing the connection between identity and interests. The concept of identity is an important link between the structural context in which all actors find themselves and the various interests articulated by them. Current thinking on British security strategy does not make the connection between *who* 'we' are and *how* 'we' should act in the world. Is the UK a civilized state that seeks to act in ways that minimize harm and promote cosmopolitan purposes? Or is the UK—or, more accurately, are the elites who take decisions in the name of the people—a state that wants to retain the privileges (and the responsibilities) of

⁴ At the time when the House of Commons passed a motion in favour of going to war, MORI published a poll that found 67% of those surveyed opposed war if there were no second UN resolution, and if the UN inspectors did not find 'proof' that Iraq was hiding weapons of mass destruction. Had both these conditions been present, 74% would have favoured war. MORI poll, 17 March 2003. Sample: 968 British adults interviewed 14–16 March 2003. At <http://www.mori.com/polls/2003/iraq3.shtml>.

⁵ Tony Blair's words: BBC News, 6 Sept. 2002, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/2239887.stm.

being a great power? States do not freely choose their identity; rather, it depends on what conceptions are available to them and how these relate to domestic opinion and cultural values. What is striking about recent documents from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) is the absence of reflection on what possible roles exist for the UK in the emerging unipolar order.

During the Cold War, Atlanticism became the keystone of British security strategy.⁶ The identity of a loyal ally in the context of a hostile international system generated a convergence of interests across a range of security and defence issues. International relations after 9/11 suggest a very different context. Aware of its predominant position in the unipolar order, the 'imperial republic' has demonstrated that it is not content to act as a status quo power.⁷ Under such circumstances, Blair found it impossible to act as a bridge between the 'old Europeans' and the 'new conservatives'. In the second section of this article it is argued that, in the course of standing 'shoulder to shoulder' with the Americans, the UK risks undermining many of the goals outlined in the FCO's 'strategic priorities' document. The third section sets out the contention that the UK would have calculated its interests differently had it realized the fundamental incompatibility between Atlanticism and internationalism. Instead, the Prime Minister held on to the myth that US power could be harnessed for the good of international society as a whole. This represents not a tragic dilemma whereby the British government was put in an 'impossible situation' by decisions taken in Washington, but a misreading of power and principles.⁸ Strategy is ultimately about choices, even if the circumstances in which these are made are not themselves of our choosing.⁹

Why strategy matters

Until recently, it has been unconventional to think about a British security strategy. One reason for this is that the military origins of the term seemed

⁶ 'Atlanticism' is a term with many meanings. In debates about security among NATO's European members, Atlanticists are those countries that view the Atlantic alliance as the primary institutional referent, and Europeanists those that want the EU to have greater autonomy in defence and security. See e.g. Stuart Croft, Jolyon Howarth, Terry Terriff and Mark Weber, 'NATO's triple challenge', *International Affairs* 76: 3, 2000, p. 506. In discussion connected to these debates but reaching beyond them, Atlanticism is sometimes used as a shorthand for the transatlantic security architecture. See Ivo H. Daalder, 'The end of Atlanticism', *Survival* 45: 2, 2003, pp. 147–66. The present article uses the term in a third sense, in which it has long been associated with those in the Labour Party, from Ernest Bevin to Tony Blair, who favour the bilateral relationship with the United States above all others when forced to make a choice. Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour party and the world: the evolution of Labour's foreign policy 1900–1951* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 12.

⁷ Raymond Aron, *The imperial republic: the United States and the world 1945–1973* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975).

⁸ Steven Philip Kramer, 'Blair's Britain after Iraq', *Foreign Affairs* 82: 4, 2003, pp. 90–104.

⁹ Karl Marx put the relationship between structure and agency astutely: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past.' Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in *The Marx–Engels reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd edn (London: Norton, 1978), p. 595.

increasingly at odds with the belief that force was losing its utility.¹⁰ During the Cold War, the idea of a state having a grand strategy became inextricably associated with policy planners in the United States. In the process, strategy evolved from being thought of as ‘the art or science of exploiting military force so as to attain given objects of policy’ to the broader ‘process by which ends are related to means’.¹¹ Strategic thinking is so deeply ingrained into the US political culture that the Defense Department is required by Congress to submit a ‘national security strategy’ report every year.¹²

There are two major flaws in conventional strategic thinking, one conceptual and the other moral. While the ‘relating means to ends’ formula has the advantage of enabling complex problems to be broken into their component parts, the downside is the danger of imputing immutable ends. During the Cold War, the goal of prevailing over communism was so deeply held that it was never questioned (not, at least, by patriotic Americans). Once the end had been determined, the debate became one about the appropriate methods of bringing it about. In the context of this goal, possible military strategies were limited to a choice among deterrence, compulsion and defence: *all* started from the same assumption that the Soviet Union was the enemy and that there was no alternative to bipolar competition. Separating means and ends implies a positivist view of knowledge in which ‘reality’ is produced by a set of identifiable antecedent conditions. What remains hidden in this account is the extent to which the identity relationship of the Cold War generated certain kinds of behaviour on the part of the players that were appropriate to that relationship.¹³ Social action is not comprehensible independently of the shared understandings that constitute the actors’ identities: this is as true of the relationship between master and slave as it was of that between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Cold War. George Kennan, the architect of the strategy of containment, was well aware of the importance of the social-psychological dimension. He saw the Soviet challenge as social in character, and believed it was necessary to alter the mindset of the adversary as well as the minds of the American people and their allies. Kennan understood that such a transformation ‘would facilitate the emergence of an international order more favourable to the interests of the United States’.¹⁴

¹⁰ John E. Mueller, *Retreat from doomsday: the obsolescence of major war* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

¹¹ Robert O’Neill and David N. Schwartz, *Hedley Bull on arms control* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 11; John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of containment: a critical appraisal of postwar American national security policy* (New York: Oxford, 1982), p. vii.

¹² John Lewis Gaddis, ‘A grand strategy’, *Foreign Policy*, Nov.–Dec. 2002, p. 53.

¹³ For an excellent account of constitutive theorizing, see Alexander Wendt, ‘On constitution and causation in international relations’, in Tim Dunne, Michael Cox and Ken Booth, eds, *The eighty years’ crisis 1919–1999* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 101–17. Constructivist thinking in security studies is mapped out in Theo Farrell, ‘Constructivist security studies: portrait of a research program’, *International Studies Review* 4: 1, 2002, pp. 49–72. See also Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The culture of national security: norms and identity in world politics* (Columbia, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996). For a brilliant application of constructivism, see Christian Reus-Smit, *American power and world order* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004). The overall argument in this article draws on insights in this book, albeit applied to a different context.

¹⁴ Gaddis, *Strategies*, p. 36.

Strategic thinking not only runs a risk of treating contexts as though they are immutable; it runs the parallel moral problem of instrumentality. Locked in the mindset of a strategic game, it is too easy to treat individuals and communities as means and not ends.¹⁵ Torture is perhaps the most graphic example of the depraved extreme of instrumental thinking. The belief that torture is inhumane commands near-universal consensus across different cultures, suggesting a widespread recognition that ends frequently do not justify all conceivable means. Why should this be so? As Albert Camus warned, the means one uses today shape the ends one might reach tomorrow.¹⁶ The torture and abuse of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison have significantly damaged the claim by the occupying powers that their purpose was to liberate Iraq from tyranny.

Enlightened strategic thinking needs to be constitutive: that is to say, it needs to address the broad question of how the international social world is put together. The factors constituting the 'war on terror' do not exist independently of the new international rules of the post-9/11 game.¹⁷ The naming of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon as 'terrorism', and the decision to declare a war on 'anti-western' networks of terror and the states who harbour them, are moves that make possible other moves, such as changes in legislation on how to deal with suspected terrorists, or the denial of rights accorded to victims of war as stipulated by the 1949 Geneva Convention.

The context to which enlightened strategic thinking must first attend is one that has been marked by profound change in the period since the fall of the Berlin Wall. One question that needs to be put to those responsible for British security strategy is: What impact has systemic change had on your thinking? The theory of realism would suggest that the rational response for states in a unipolar order is to balance against the hegemon in order to check the projection of its power. An underlying assumption here is that a unipolar world is a more disorderly one. The ties that bind alliances together will also be looser in a unipolar world—as Kenneth Waltz famously said of NATO after the collapse of communism, 'its days might not be numbered but its years are'.¹⁸ In the absence of a common threat, why should the principles of collective defence still hold? Calculations of power politics alone cannot explain why patterns of alliances have endured after the end of bipolarity. To provide a better explanation, we need to invoke non-materialist accounts of identity formation. It is rational to expect bilateral and multilateral security structures to persist *if the actors share a common identity*. The question before British strategic planners is whether the country continues to have binding obligations to a

¹⁵ Ken Booth has been a persistent critic of strategy for its instrumentalism and its ethnocentrism. See Booth, *Strategy and ethnocentrism* (London: Croom Helm, 1979).

¹⁶ Quoted in Stanley Hoffmann, *Duties beyond borders: on the limits and possibilities of ethical international politics* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1981), p. 197.

¹⁷ For applications of the game metaphor, see Karin Fierke, *Changing games, changing strategies: critical investigations in security* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Saving strangers: humanitarian intervention in international society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁸ Quoted in Ethan B. Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno, eds, *Unipolar politics: realism and state strategies after the Cold War* (Columbia, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 143.

superpower which openly declares that alliances ought to be determined by the 'mission' and not the other way around.¹⁹

During the Cold War, the peculiarity of the Anglo-American relationship was alluded to by leaders of both countries. Although rarely put in these terms, the special relationship is an example of a shared identity (based on shared culture, language and history) that generated converging interests. At its core, the relationship represents a bargain: Britain pledges its loyalty to the United States in return for influence over the direction of the hegemonic power's foreign policy.²⁰ Given the asymmetrical capabilities of the two states, it is not surprising that the degree of influence the UK is able to exert has been subjected to critical scrutiny.²¹ For the moment, the more important issue is that the special relationship was always premised on the view that the United States was committed to upholding—having, in fact, created in the first instance—the institutional architecture of international relations. On occasions when the United States decides to 'go it alone', the view of Tony Blair is that 'our retreat' will not 'make them multilateralist'.²² Blair fears the re-emergence of a competitive balance of power system that prevents collective action to achieve security and realize mutual gains.

The French view the United States through a different prism. They regard it as a revisionist state which seeks to alter the configuration of rules and institutions in a manner that maximizes its own power and freedom of manoeuvre. Former foreign minister Dominique de Villepin believes that stability will be achieved not by partnership with Washington but by the development 'of a number of regional poles'.²³ The unstated assumption here is that if the hyperpower is counterbalanced, the prospects for persuading the United States to cooperate will improve. Britain's idea of partnership is regarded by the French with suspicion on the grounds that it overlooks the extent to which the United States and Europe inhabit different social worlds.²⁴ The relative understandings of sovereignty on either side of the Atlantic are a case in point. While interdependence and mutual interference are prized in Europe, they are believed to be a threat to the American model of sovereignty.

¹⁹ The original phrase 'the mission determines the coalition' was used by US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld (on 18 Oct. 2001) to refer to the US-led war on terror. He subsequently returned to it in order to clarify the room for manoeuvre that all states ought to preserve. Daalder, 'The end of Atlanticism', p. 156.

²⁰ This accords with Blair's view. See Tony Blair, 'Britain and the world', speech to the Foreign Office conference, London, 7 Jan. 2003, available at <http://www.number-10-gov.uk/output/page1353.asp>.

²¹ The literature on the special relationship is vast. See e.g. C. J. Bartlett, *The special relationship: a political history of Anglo-American relations since 1945* (London: Longman, 1992); John Dumbrell, *A special relationship: Anglo-American relations in the Cold War and after* (London: Palgrave, 2001).

²² Tony Blair, speech in the House of Commons, 18 March 2003, p. 7.

²³ Dominique de Villepin, quoted in Anand Menon, 'From crisis to catharsis: ESDP after Iraq', *International Affairs* 80: 4, 2004, p. 638.

²⁴ For two bold accounts that portray Europe and the United States as being on different historical and cultural trajectories, see Robert Cooper, *The breaking of nations: order and chaos in the twenty-first century* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003), and Robert Kagan, *Of paradise and power: America and Europe in the new world order* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003).

Contradictions in British security strategy

Even though there is no consensus in Europe as to what kind of an actor the United States is, the publication of the European Security Strategy and an FCO strategy document recognize the need to respond to the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States of America (NSS).²⁵ The marriage of democratic idealism with the doctrine of pre-emption provoked consternation in European capitals.²⁶ Many viewed the NSS and the wider Bush doctrine as a threat to transatlantic relations and the UN system. Robert Cooper, foreign policy guru to the prime minister during Blair's first term, viewed it more as an opportunity for others to reappraise the foundations of their security. As he wrote in *The breaking of nations*, 'if Europeans do not like the United States National Security Strategy they should develop their own rather than complain from the sidelines'.²⁷ By the time the book was in press, Cooper was doing just that. In his new capacity as Javier Solana's adviser, he was one of the main drafters of the European Security Strategy (ESS) document that was adopted by EU member governments on 12 December 2003.²⁸

In the same month, the FCO published its own version, entitled *UK international priorities: a strategy for the FCO*.²⁹ It is a lengthy document covering many issues that fall outside the normal bounds of 'strategy', such as issues to do with the FCO's service delivery priorities and other bureaucratic dimensions. *UK international priorities* needs to be read alongside various MoD publications that attempt to contextualize Britain's role in the world after 9/11.³⁰ The complexity of how various ministries combined to set out the goals of British security policy prompted the House of Commons Select Committee on Defence to request a short 'inter-agency' document along the lines of the NSS. The UK, the committee argued, 'was in need not of another statement of defence policy, or foreign policy, but rather a broadly defined national security policy'.³¹

²⁵ 'National Security Strategy of the United States of America', 17 Sept. 2002, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nssall.html>.

²⁶ 'It would be difficult to overestimate the consternation provoked in European foreign policy circles by the publication of the Bush administration's National Security Strategy in 2002': John Peterson, 'America as a European power: the end of empire by integration', *International Affairs* 80: 4, 2004, p. 623.

²⁷ Cooper, *The breaking of nations*, p. 165.

²⁸ Christopher Hill identifies the connection between Cooper and the drafting of the ESS. He also provides background context for the publication, such as the fact that one of the main motivations behind the ESS was 'to convince the USA that Europe was not totally mired in delusional soft power thinking'. See his 'Britain and the European Security Strategy', unpublished paper, 18 May 2004, available at <http://www.fornet.info/documents/Working%20Paper%20no%206.pdf>, p. 2.

²⁹ The Foreign and Commonwealth Office issued its document on *UK international priorities: a strategy for the FCO* in Dec. 2003, available at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/FCOStrategyFullFinal.pdf>.

³⁰ *The Strategic Defence Review: a new chapter*, July 2002, at http://www.mod.uk/linked_files/SDR_New_Chapter.pdf; *Delivering security in a changing world*, Defence White Paper Cm 6041-1, Dec. 2003, at http://www.mod.uk/linked_files/publications/whitepaper2003/volume2.pdf; *Delivering security in a changing world: supporting essays*, Dec. 2003, at http://www.mod.uk/linked_files/publications/whitepaper2003/volume2.pdf. See also Select Committee on Defence, *Fifth report on the Defence White Paper*, June 2004, at <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmdfence/465/46502.htm>.

³¹ Select Committee on Defence, *Fifth report*, p. 5.

Policy-makers' aversion to strategic thinking is mirrored in wider civil society. While it is commonplace to find articles in academic journals about the alternative roles for the United States in the world,³² the choices for Britain (and, to a lesser extent, for Europe as a whole) have not been similarly debated and scrutinized. It is worth noting in this regard that the publication of the ESS and *UK international priorities* documents were barely noticed by the media.³³ Perhaps this is attributable to the difference between the experience of intellectual and public life in the United States and in Britain. Questions about the direction of America's role in the world since 9/11—the nature of preponderance, the merits of pre-emption and so on—have been debated extensively in academic journals, in newspapers and among policy elites. Contrast this with the plain fact that, to date, the only academic article on the UK's role in the world that focuses on Blair's 'grand strategy' has been written by an American and published in *Foreign Affairs*.³⁴

Before considering in more detail the content of the British security strategy document, it is important to head off initial objections to such an enterprise. One often-cited argument is that because Britain is embedded in the EU and a member of NATO, it is meaningless to speak of the possibility of an independent foreign and security policy. There are two immediate responses to this argument. First, although there have been elements of convergence on the question of a distinctive European Security and Defence Initiative among NATO's European partners, key differences remain in terms of both goals and processes. Second, the frequency with which armed intervention is being called for as a response to a humanitarian crisis means that those states with military capability are more likely to have to engage in the narrow strategic issue of when to use force for political ends. In short, the fact that British foreign and defence policy is embedded in the various institutions of NATO and the EU is not a reason for failing to think through the possible strategic directions for the British in the early part of the twenty-first century. Doubters might want to reflect on the fact that only two of the seven military interventions undertaken by British armed forces since 1997 have been led by a regional institution.³⁵

The centrepiece of the strategy for the FCO is chapter 4 of the *International priorities* document, which sets out eight strategic policy goals. These are:

- 1 a world safer from global terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.
- 2 protection of the UK from illegal immigration, drug trafficking and other international crime.

³² The possibilities include: neo-isolationist, neo-imperialist, selective engagement, liberal internationalist, defensive realist, offensive realist—all outlined in Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, 'Competing grand strategies', in Robert J. Lieber, ed., *Eagle adrift: American foreign policy at the end of the century* (New York: Longman, 1997), pp. 100–34.

³³ Hill notes how the ESS 'passed almost unnoticed even by informed public opinion'. 'Britain and the European Security Strategy', p. 1.

³⁴ Kramer, 'Blair's Britain after Iraq', pp. 90–104.

³⁵ See note 3 above. NATO led the Kosovo war, and the EU has led the DRC peace support operation.

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- 3 an international system based on the rule of law, which is better able to resolve disputes and prevent conflicts.
- 4 an effective EU in a secure neighbourhood.
- 5 promotion of UK economic interests in an open and expanding global economy.
- 6 sustainable development, underpinned by democracy, good governance and human rights.
- 7 security of UK and global energy supplies.
- 8 security and good governance of the UK's Overseas Territories.

One immediately identifiable feature of this list is that it fails to distinguish between 'possession goals', or those items for which a state competes (for example, a share of world trade or energy supplies), and 'milieu goals', which are aimed 'at shaping conditions beyond their national boundaries' (for example, security from terror or a rule-based international order).³⁶ The discussion below will focus on the milieu side of the register, particularly the first, third and sixth goals.

National and international security

Has the world been made 'safer from global terrorism and weapons of mass destruction'? Blair has consistently argued that the combination of trafficking in WMD and shadowy terrorist networks constitutes a major threat to the West. In the light of the Iraq war, the efficacy of force as a tool for disarming a 'state of concern' must be seriously questioned. In the short run at least, war is conducive to massive instability. This point was well made by David Clark, who argued that the lack of central authority and the intercommunal violence mean that Iraq 'comes far closer to matching the archetype failed state today than it did a year ago'.³⁷ Any future British participation in enforcement action to disarm a weaponizing state must meet strict criteria for establishing the target state's capability and intentions.

On the question of national security, notable omission from the *UK international priorities* document is a clear statement of the need to defend the state's territorial integrity. The MoD White Paper *Delivering security in a changing world* argues that while 'there is no major conventional threat to Europe', asymmetric attacks from terrorism 'pose a very real threat to our homelands'.³⁸ How does this threat assessment lead to a rationale for the possession of nuclear weapons? The leadership in both the United States and Britain has frequently claimed that the new enemies of the West cannot be deterred, and moral prohibitions would appear to rule out the use of nuclear weapons in a retaliatory

³⁶ Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and collaboration: essays on international politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), esp. ch. 6.

³⁷ David Clark, 'Blair's vision of a new world order is critically tainted', *Guardian*, 8 March 2004, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4874740-103677,00.html>.

³⁸ *Delivering security*, p. 5.

capacity.³⁹ This means the only remaining rationale is to deter other nuclear weapons states, an argument which is not found in the defence White Paper.

There is a wider dimension to this issue. *UK international priorities* speaks in muted tones about the need to ‘work with others to prevent the development of nuclear weapons’, while at the same time strategic defence planning in the United States and Britain includes the enhancement of existing nuclear infrastructure. Mohamed Elbaradei, former director general of the International Atomic Energy Authority, draws attention to the double standards at the heart of the US/UK position on WMD: ‘We must abandon the unworkable notion that it is morally reprehensible for some countries to pursue weapons of mass destruction yet morally acceptable for others to rely on them for security—and indeed to continue to refine their capacities and postulate plans for their use.’⁴⁰ Such double standards weaken the counterproliferation regimes and act as an incentive to non-nuclear states to join the club.

The goal of eradicating global terrorism takes us back to Camus’s warning that the means the West uses today may become the ends to be reached tomorrow. The concern here is the increasingly close tailoring of UK defence forces to US strategic doctrines.⁴¹ The operational ‘success’ of the enormous contingent of British armed forces in Iraq, following on from the deployment of special forces in Afghanistan, has shown that the British armed forces retain significant war-fighting capability, as well as experience and capacity in prevention and stabilization. As the new chapter to the *Strategic Defence Review* observed, ‘only a few countries have this capacity at present’.⁴² The 2003 White Paper indicates that priorities will in future be geared to producing high-tech ‘network enabled capability’ that is compatible with US strategic doctrine. It is also, however, very costly and dependent on US research and development. The diversion of resources to this defence sector means that there is less available to underwrite the growing demands for British troops to be involved in UN-mandated peace support operations.

Strengthening the rule of law and reform of the UN

The third goal advanced in *UK international priorities* links ‘our security’ to a wider international community ‘based on the rule of law and shared principles’. Such a claim rests very uneasily with the decision to stand ‘shoulder to shoulder’ with the Bush administration in prosecuting a war which has undermined the rule of law and revealed deep divisions on ‘principles’. Robin Cook’s resignation speech in the House of Commons illustrated the unresolved tension that lay at

³⁹ As Michael Clarke writes: ‘Both political and moral imperatives suggest that strategic nuclear weapons can deter only other strategic nuclear weapons.’ See his ‘Does my bomb look big in this? Britain’s nuclear choices after Trident’, *International Affairs* 80: 1, 2004, p. 57.

⁴⁰ Mohamed Elbaradei, ‘Saving ourselves from self-destruction’, 12 Feb., 2004, at http://www.wagingpeace.org/articles/2004/02/12_elbaradei_saving-ourselves.htm.

⁴¹ See Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon’s foreword to *Delivering Security*, p. 1.

⁴² *The Strategic Defence Review: a new chapter*, p. 10.

the heart of the government's view of Britain's role in the world. Cook argued that the government's decision to use force—in the face of opposition from three permanent members of the Security Council—represented a fundamental challenge to the authority of the UN. In a newspaper article, the former Foreign Secretary cogently exposed the flaw in the government's case for war: 'If we believe in an international community based on binding rules and institutions, we cannot simply set them aside when they produce results that are inconvenient to us.'⁴³

The 2003 Defence White Paper suggests that military action outside the formal authority of the United Nations may be undertaken again. It contends that we need 'to be realistic about the limitations of the UN' given the difficulty of 'translating broad consensus on goals into specific actions'.⁴⁴ In discussions with the Select Committee on Defence, the Secretary of State expanded upon the UN's limitation in terms of the mobilization of military power. The purpose of the UN, Geoff Hoon believes, is to provide 'political supervision' rather than 'the "delivery ... of military effect"'.⁴⁵ Where the UN has shown itself as being incapable of acting as a result of disagreements in the Security Council, the UK will retain 'the flexibility to build coalitions of the willing to deal with specific threats where necessary'.⁴⁶ This is a clear statement of the government's preference for *à la carte* multilateralism.

Liberal values of sustainable development, good governance and human rights

While the government, particularly the Department for International Development, can claim some success in pushing these goals higher up the international agenda, what seems to have been overlooked is how far the war on terror limits the extent to which these goals can be realized. The production of the sovereignty/terror narrative renders certain kinds of violence legitimate and others an existential threat. On one side of the dichotomy we find strong states listed—the United States, Russia, Israel—and on the other we find 'Islamic terrorists', 'Chechen rebels' and Palestinian 'suicide bombers'.

The same logic renders the 'holocaust of neglect' invisible behind the 'war on terror'.⁴⁷ According to the State Department, 625 people lost their lives in terrorist attacks in 2003. By way of comparison, consider two other statistics of loss of life in the same year: 3,508 people died in fatal car accidents in the UK,

⁴³ Robin Cook, 'Why I had to leave the Cabinet', *Guardian*, 12 March 2003.

⁴⁴ *Delivering security*, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Select Committee on Defence, *Fifth report*, p. 4.

⁴⁶ *Delivering security*, p. 5. This sounds reminiscent of statements from the early post-1945 period, when the FCO noted that 'The UN is not an ideal instrument for shaping international politics on purely British lines': Mark Curtis, *The ambiguities of power: British foreign policy since 1945* (London: Zed, 1995), p. 11.

⁴⁷ The phrase 'holocaust of neglect' is discussed in Henry Shue, *Basic rights: subsistence, affluence, and US foreign policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980). For a brilliant discussion of the construction of terrorism by sovereign states, see William E. Connolly, *Identity/difference: democratic negotiations of political paradox* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 206–7.

and over 11 million children died from causes that are preventable.⁴⁸ Why do western states mobilize vast resources to fight a war against one form of destruction and accept others as being beyond their control? Who and what counts as an enemy is not intrinsic to the 'crime' so much as it is the product of a narrative about identity relationship forged by the powerful actors in the international system.⁴⁹



What is the explanation for the misfit between the stated goals and the likely consequences of Britain's actions? One answer, outlined below, is that internationalism has gained little in the way of traction over the direction of British foreign policy. To understand how it can be in our interest to retain a nuclear deterrent capability and to develop war-fighting capabilities further, one needs to understand how a particular account of identity makes such calculations possible.⁵⁰ Interests acquire meaning only when they are understood in the context of a narrative about identity. Who or what constitutes a threat is a product of social understandings about self and other. To use a Weberian metaphor, these 'world images' generated by ideas are like relays that determine 'the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest'.⁵¹ The closing discussion examines how the world image of Atlanticism triumphed over internationalism in the period from 9/11 to the Iraq war.

Atlanticism vs. internationalism

A strategic vision of Britain's role in the world has been central to the New Labour project. In his first keynote speech on foreign policy, on 10 November 1997 at the Lord Mayor's banquet, the Prime Minister took the opportunity to set out an alternative vision. The unifying theme was one of 'national renewal'. Blair believed that Britain, after decades of relative economic decline, coupled with an uncertain and detached role in international affairs, could be 'a global player' with a moral purpose. The key levers for achieving this were, he argued, 'our historical alliances'.⁵²

Those on the left of the Labour Party wanted the prime minister to choose between the historic alliances with Europe and with the United States. They

⁴⁸ World Bank, *Millennium development goals report*, available at http://www.developmentgoals.org/Child_Mortality.htm.

⁴⁹ Steve Smith makes a powerful critique of academic International Relations and its culpability in this process: see Smith, 'Singing our world into existence: international relations theory and September 11', *International Studies Quarterly* 48: 3, 2004, pp. 499–515.

⁵⁰ As Mary Kaldor argues, 'a country's military forces still represent a symbol of the nation, especially among current and former superpowers': 'American power: from "compellence" to cosmopolitanism', *International Affairs* 79: 1, 2003, 1–22.

⁵¹ H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds, *From Max Weber: essays in sociology*, new edn (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 9.

⁵² Tony Blair, speech by the Prime Minister at the Lord Mayor's banquet, 10 Nov. 1997, available at <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page1070.asp>.

dreamed of hearing the kind of speech given by the fictitious prime minister in the film *Love Actually*, in which Hugh Grant terminates the special relationship in front of an ebullient crowd of journalists, MPs and television crews. Inside the real No. 10 Downing Street, the script was very different. Right from the outset, the Prime Minister argued that we do not need to make a choice between Europe and the United States. In a phrase that would later ring hollow, Blair told his audience that 'we are the bridge between the United States and Europe. Let us use it.'⁵³ Consistent with his idea that it was possible *both* to embrace the market *and* to preserve the welfare state, Blair believed we could have the special relationship *and* be a player at the heart of Europe.

The Prime Minister had said little in his opening speech about internationalism. Such an omission was striking given that it had been a central plank of Robin Cook's 'mission statement' for the FCO. Moreover, internationalism has historically been 'the over-riding principle' on which the Labour Party has built its thinking on foreign policy.⁵⁴ What is meant by the term? There is both an empirical and a normative component. Empirically, internationalism denotes the fact of interdependence and mutual interests generated by it. Such a claim motivated Blair to argue during the Kosovo war that 'we are all internationalists now'.⁵⁵ Closely connected to this argument is the priority accorded to international institutions in facilitating cooperative agreements to enhance security and prosperity. Normatively, internationalism means conceiving of foreign policy goals in such a way that the collective good is privileged over the national interest in cases where there is a conflict between them (with the proviso that such sacrifices are not required when a country's survival is at stake).⁵⁶ As will be apparent from this brief description, the political philosophy underpinning internationalism is fundamentally liberal in its origins.⁵⁷

It was during the Kosovo war that Blair's internationalist instincts were brought to the fore. Believing that war was a legitimate instrument to use against a state that had been committing egregious human rights violations, Blair was nonetheless aware that the United States and Britain had failed to gain explicit Security Council authorization for military action. Under international law, the only permissive rules for using force are individual or collective self-defence in the face of an imminent armed attack, or a UN Security Council resolution that judged there to be a threat to international peace and security. Neither

⁵³ Blair, speech at the Lord Mayor's banquet.

⁵⁴ This claim is made by Vickers, *The Labour party and the world*, p. 193. For a more detailed evaluation of the current Labour government's interventions, see Rhiannon Vickers, 'Blair's warlike humanitarianism', paper presented to the International Studies Association Conference, Montreal, Canada, 19 March 2004.

⁵⁵ Tony Blair, 'Doctrine of international community', speech given at the Economic Club of Chicago, 24 April 1999, available at <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page1297.asp>.

⁵⁶ Andrew Linklater, 'What is a good international citizen?', in Paul Keal, ed., *Ethics and foreign policy* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), pp. 28–9.

⁵⁷ Peter Lawler has been a consistent advocate of internationalism in foreign policy, as well as a persuasive critic of the British government's claim to be internationalist. His latest essay on internationalism, currently under review, is 'The good state: in praise of "classical" internationalism', unpublished manuscript (2004).

applied in the case of Kosovo. Blair used the opportunity of a longstanding invitation to speak at the Economic Club of Chicago to set out his rationale for when the norm of non-intervention should be suspended.⁵⁸ In one of the most often-cited passages from the speech, Blair argued: ‘We are fighting *not for territory but for values*. For a new internationalism where the brutal repression of ethnic groups will not be tolerated.’⁵⁹ He gave this new internationalism an old name: ‘the doctrine of international community’.

Apart from setting out the broad justifications for intervention, the Chicago speech sought to trigger a debate about what conditions needed to be met before a decision to intervene should be taken.⁶⁰ The absence of ‘right authority’ from the list was thought by many to be acceptable, given that action in a cause perceived to be just had been thwarted by a Russian threat to veto a resolution authorizing the use of force. In this case, Blair could claim that Britain and its NATO allies, far from weakening the UN, were in fact upholding the humanitarian values embodied in the UN Charter and thereby acting in accordance with the commitments to human rights and multilateralism that Blair and Cook had placed at the heart of foreign and security policy. A similar claim could be sustained to defend the UK’s limited military intervention in Sierra Leone in 2000, initially to shore up a failing UN peacekeeping mission and then to stabilize the democratically elected regime of Ahmad Kabbah.

As the millennium drew to a close, the Kosovo war and the UN-backed stabilization operation in Sierra Leone suggested that some key building blocks for an internationalist strategy were being put in place.⁶¹ Political risks had been taken to advance internationalist norms of human rights and democratization, and Britain was seen to be providing global leadership on the question of when intervention was appropriate to prevent or contain a humanitarian emergency.⁶² These advances had been achieved without the Blair government having to face up to the possibility that its intersecting alliances—with the United States, Europe and the world community—were unravelling.⁶³

⁵⁸ Prior to leaving for the United States, both Blair and his team were preoccupied with the conduct of the war, so Jonathan Powell asked Lawrence Freedman if he would map out a list of requirements that needed to be met prior to intervention. Kampfner nicely tells this episode of Freedman’s walk in the park, and how—at high altitude—it became the ‘doctrine of international community’. Kampfner, *Blair’s wars*, pp. 50–53.

⁵⁹ Blair, ‘Doctrine of international community’, emphasis added.

⁶⁰ These were: ‘we must be sure of our case; we must exhaust all diplomatic possibilities; we must be confident that military force will be successful; we must commit to the long-term reconstruction of the state-society in question; our own interests must be at stake’. Blair, ‘Doctrine of international community’. It is worth noting that Lawrence Freedman did not intend the checklist to be permissive. Interview, London, 8 May 2004.

⁶¹ For an audit of the government’s claim to have an ethical foreign policy, see Nicholas J. Wheeler and Tim Dunne, ‘Moral Britannia? Evaluation: the ethical dimension in Labour’s foreign policy’, published by the Foreign Policy Centre, March 2003. Also available at: <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/233.pdf>.

⁶² See Nicholas J. Wheeler, ‘Humanitarian responsibilities of sovereignty’, in Jennifer M. Welsh, ed., *Humanitarian intervention in international relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 46–7.

⁶³ Historians of UK foreign policy will find similarities with the past. Writing in the late 1960s, David Calleo argued: ‘Yet in a way, Britain, by not choosing one path or the other, has been gradually forced to let down all three’: David P. Calleo, *Britain’s future* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1968), p. 185.

The period from 9/11 through to the declaration of war against Iraq revealed that the strategy of binding British security to the United States was putting considerable strain on the UK's principal ties within the European Union, not to mention opening up fissures in the international community as a whole. The terror attacks on New York and Washington alerted Blair to the destructive potential of anti-western nihilists while at the same time reinforcing the internationalist idea that world politics is constituted by overlapping communities of fate. True to form, Blair's speech to the Labour Party conference shortly after the collapse of the Twin Towers sought to show how internationalism and Atlanticism were mutually supporting. Blair called for the 'power of the international community' to show that it had the capacity both to feel compassion and to deal effectively with those who committed the atrocities of 9/11.⁶⁴ In his peroration, memorable for its soaring internationalism, Blair argued: '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.*'⁶⁵

The possibility for the international community to act in solidarity and re-order the world along internationalist lines was dealt a crushing blow by the US-led war on Iraq. In the event of the failure to acquire a second UN Security Council resolution that explicitly authorized force, few were persuaded that there was a compelling case for abandoning the inspections process.⁶⁶ Given the disunity inside the Security Council and beyond, the government's decision to 'be there when the shooting starts' revealed the reality behind two myths at the heart of British security strategy and the 'special relationship'. First, in return for loyalty to the United States, Britain could influence only the timing, not the content, of decisions. Bush was persuaded to take the UN route, but when the second resolution was thwarted, the United States was not going to be deterred by the lack of explicit authorization. Second, the UK has no choice but to offer the US unconditional support when the superpower believes its security interests are at stake. Michael Quinlan sets out the case for why London had to fall into line:

There is more and more ground for suspecting that for Mr Blair, facing extremely difficult decisions, the real bottom line was not this or that justification for action against Saddam but the combination of three judgements: first, that Mr Bush was intent

⁶⁴ While the Clinton administration might have accepted this view of the international community, members of the Bush administration had made it clear they did not even before they arrived in Washington. Condoleezza Rice argued prior to the election victory that America ought to prioritize the national interest and not the interests of 'an illusory international community'. Quoted in Joseph Nye, 'The American national interest and global public goods', *International Affairs* 78: 2, 2002, pp. 233–44 at p. 236.

⁶⁵ Tony Blair, speech at the Labour Party conference, 2 Oct. 2001, reprinted in *Guardian*, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4268838,00.html>, p. 4. Emphasis added.

⁶⁶ The legal arguments are, as ever, intricate and contested. On balance, however, a large majority of international lawyers reject the government's claim that UN Resolution 1441 gives legal authority for an attack on Iraq. See Richard Norton-Taylor, 'Law unto themselves', *Guardian* 14 March 2003. For a defence of the legality of the war, see Christopher Greenwood, 'International law and the "war against terrorism"', *International Affairs* 78: 2, 2002, pp. 301–18.

on war; second, that nothing Britain could do would ultimately deflect him; third, that British national interest required that in the end that we go along. Put another way, the question may have been not so much whether the arguments were good enough to warrant the huge step of starting a war as whether they were bad enough to warrant the huge step of breaking with the United States.⁶⁷

The contrast between Quinlan's view of Britain's role in the Iraq war and the argument set out above is that it was in 'the national interest' to mobilize 46,000 members of the British armed services *only because of a prior belief in an Atlanticist identity*. Had key ministers in the UK government believed in internationalism, then, at a minimum, it would have made its support for the United States conditional upon a consensus in the Security Council as well as upon indicators of significant support from other multilateral institutions. The argument then would have been framed in terms of whether the case for war was persuasive enough to warrant 'the huge step' of breaking with our obligations to the international community.

Conclusion

New constellations of power and morality in world politics are pressurizing states to rethink their security strategies. An instrumental approach to strategy is unreflective about how and why a state defines its interests in a particular way. An enlightened approach shows how interests are constituted by socially embedded ideas about who 'we' are, and about which actors represent a 'threat' and which an 'opportunity'. Such an approach emphasizes the fact that states have choices: in world politics today there is considerable variation in how actors deploy their resources and to what ends.

The Iraq war reaffirmed the vice-like grip of Atlanticism on Britain's identity. Blair's desire to 'be there when the shooting starts' rested on an implicit assumption that the UK has a binding obligation to support US military power. The primacy of the bilateral relationship with the United States is nothing new in post-1945 foreign policy; what has changed is the fact that the 'new Rome' has signalled that it no longer wants to play by old rules. Moreover, US revisionism across a range of international issues—on rules regulating the use of force, on regimes to control and eliminate WMD, on the road map for peace in the Middle East, and on reducing carbon emissions—is not simply the handiwork of a few 'neo-cons' in the White House. Systemic change brought about by the end of bipolarity and the beginning of the war on terror will continue to enable the United States either to defect from the multilateral order or to try to reshape it in a manner convenient to its power and purpose.

Hitching the British wagon to the American express train in 'unilateralist overdrive' would make sense if it were thought that a US-dominated order

⁶⁷ Michael Quinlan, quoted in Hugh Beach, "The concept of "preventive war"", in *Contemporary essays: the Strategic and Combat Studies Unit* 47, 2004, p. 69.

would deliver important returns to Britain.⁶⁸ This is indeed the subtext of the strategy document *UK international priorities*. Even in its dealings with European allies on defence matters, the UK takes up a position that is dependent upon a perception of US preferences. There are many other cases where the British government has calculated interests in a manner intelligible only in the context of a dominant Atlantist identity. The acceptance of key components of US military doctrine is a further reinforcement of the Washington–London axis, at the expense of the kind of capabilities required for an internationalist security strategy. Reading the Defence White Paper, one infers that the lesson of the Iraq war is that the UK has shown the United States that it is ‘good at force’, rather than that it has fulfilled the internationalist goal of being ‘a force for good’ in the world.

Robert Kagan has argued that being good at force is a necessary condition for a hyperpower that regards itself as being threatened by the combined forces of terrorism and vengeful failing states. Europe, on the other hand, is said by Kagan to inhabit a Kantian paradise in which power politics has been transcended. This article has argued that Britain is more like America’s Mars than Europe’s Venus because of the allure of an Atlantist identity. It seems that Kagan was right about the division but wrong about its location. The fault-line between Mars and Venus runs through the English Channel, not the Atlantic.

⁶⁸ The phrase ‘unilateralist overdrive’ is that of EU Commissioner Chris Patten, quoted in Steven Everts, ‘Why should Bush take Europe seriously?’, *Observer Comment Extra*, 17 Feb. 2002, available at <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/worldview/story/0,11581,651636,00.html>.