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The Search for World Order and the Wars in Kosovo and Iraq

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Introduction

In 1999 and 2003, two controversial wars were fought in the name of international order. The first, in Kosovo, was waged to prevent tragic humanitarian catastrophe not seen on the continent of Europe since the Holocaust. The second, in Iraq, sought to change a regime whose previous use of weapons of mass destruction, and possible continued possession of them, were believed to be a threat to regional and world safety. Both interventions were historic in the sense that they represented the latest trials in the endeavours since 1919, at least, to institutionalise order over anarchy in international affairs. As such, they were about matters with reach far beyond their immediate conflicts. That is because of what joined them, despite their many differences, which was nothing less than contravention of a principle born of world wars.

The principle at stake was collective security underpinned by international law and enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. From 1945, the UN Security Council was supposed to hold primacy above nations in the maintenance of international peace and security and only it could authorise the use of force. Yet the wars in Kosovo and Iraq commenced without its express authorisation and were not only considered by most to be strictly illegal under international law but also to be direct challenges to the superiority of the Security Council and, to an extent, the very idea of the UN. Furthermore, these two wars were important in that they raised one of the abiding questions of international relations since Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States, had involved his nation more fully in the affairs of others. Now altered by the collapse of Cold War structures leaving the world with only one superpower, it

was how, and for what purposes, the US should use its power beyond its borders and how other nations should react.

Answers to that question were variably formed in response to the changing political conditions and international setting of their times. That was true of the events of 1999 and 2003 which exploded in a world already unsettled by the end of the Cold War and then upturned by the 9/11 attacks. The principal actor in response to both international conflicts was the US president: in 1999, Bill Clinton, and in 2003, George W. Bush. From dissimilar political approaches and with contrasting personalities, these presidents grasped for foreign policies that would defend their nation's interests from rapidly emerging threats. The effect was the reassertion of American power overseas in a period which was defined by increasing US unilateralism and described by one prominent contemporary commentator as the 'unipolar moment'.¹ For many, this was an era dominated by a new generation of ugly Americans, but one foreign leader became very close to them. Tony Blair, a British prime minister who claimed no experience or expertise of world affairs on taking office would, within two years, undergo an 'awakening on foreign policy', as he called it, and declare a doctrine to reorder the world.² To pursue his aim, Blair called on his nation's tradition of working with American presidents and led the United Kingdom in support of the US. As a result, from 1999 to 2003, the Anglo-American relationship was once again consequential to world affairs. These are the subjects of this article.

Since 2003, there have been attempts to understand the causes and significance of the wars in Kosovo and especially Iraq, a reckoning which echoes the searching debates after the world wars. These efforts have taken two forms. One has concentrated on theoretical and historical principles and their evolution over the twentieth century and has revived arguments about intervention, law, war and international order. Advocates of liberal internationalism have restated their case with urgency while practitioners of realpolitik have reminded the world of the limits any order can achieve.³ Legal scholars have either defended the ideas and practice of international law, especially in relation to the use of force, or explored its relationship with

¹ Charles Krauthammer, 'The Unipolar Moment', *Foreign Affairs*, 70.1 (1990-1991), pp. 23-33.

² Tony Blair, *A Journey* (London, 2010), p. 223.

³ For example, G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Order and Imperial Ambition: Essays on American Power and International Order* (London, 2006). On realpolitik, Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History* (London, 2014) and Margaret Thatcher, *Statecraft: Strategies for a Changing World* (London, 2002).

politics and history.⁴ Historians have returned to the League of Nations and the United Nations to examine the concepts and processes that produced them and the enduring and novel historical issues at work in their creation and activity.⁵ Also, a particular interest in the history of human rights has featured.⁶ All of this scholarship extends work done in a previous epoch motivated by similar problems when the US fought another controversial war, in Vietnam.⁷

In parallel with this body of literature, another one has focused on the politics and diplomacy of the US in the post-Cold War period and specifically on the Iraq war. Contemporary histories depicted a powerful US uncertain about how to navigate global complexity and drawn increasingly to unilateral action and away from doctrines or single strategies until 9/11.⁸ The shocking attacks on that day forged the Bush administration's pursuit of a neo-Wilsonian mission for democratic enlargement through force and led to a calamitous war of choice in Iraq.⁹ The UK's involvement in that war, and particularly Blair's association with it, have already produced considerable analysis of him and of Britain's foreign policy. Blair is portrayed as an emphatic liberal interventionist resolutely committed to support of the US and to a doctrine of international community.¹⁰ The more critical studies represent Blair's wars and his policies as failures with some proposing alternatives that the prime minister and his government could, or should, have taken.¹¹ Greater historical context has been offered by a

⁴ Oona A. Hathaway and Scott J. Shapiro, *The Internationalists And Their Plan to Outlaw War* (London, 2017); Martti Koskeniemi, *The Politics of International Law* (Oxford, 2011); Gerry Simpson, *Great Powers and Outlaw States: Unequal Sovereigns in the International Legal Order* (Cambridge, 2004).

⁵ Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946* (Oxford, 2013); Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man: The United Nations and the Quest for World Government* (London, 2006); Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London, 2012); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford, 2015); Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 2013).

⁶ Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).

⁷ For example, Stanley Hoffmann, *The State of War: Essays on the Theory and Practice of International Politics* (New York, 1965).

⁸ Hal Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad: America's Search for Purpose in the Post-Cold War World* (Lexington, 2008); Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11* (New York, 2008). Also, David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (New York, 2001); George Packer, *Our Man: Richard Holbrooke and the End of the American Century* (London, 2020).

⁹ On Iraq, Terry H. Anderson, *Bush's Wars* (Oxford, 2011).

¹⁰ For an early account, John Kampfner, *Blair's Wars* (London, 2004). Also, John Rentoul, *Tony Blair: Prime Minister* (London, 2001); Anthony Seldon, *Blair* (London, 2005); Philip Stephens, *Tony Blair: The Making of a World Leader* (London, 2004). On US-UK relations, Con Coughlin, *American Ally: Tony Blair and the War on Terror* (New York, 2006); James Naughtie, *The Accidental American: Tony Blair and the Presidency* (London, 2004); and Peter Riddell, *Hug Them Close: Blair, Clinton, Bush and the 'Special Relationship'* (London, 2003).

¹¹ For example, David Coates and Joel Krieger, *Blair's War* (Cambridge, 2004); Patrick Porter, *Blunder: Britain's War in Iraq* (Oxford, 2018). Also, David Runciman, *The Politics of Good Intentions: History, Fear and Hypocrisy in the New World Order* (Princeton, 2006).

study of the Anglo-American relationship from the 1970s. It suggests that after 1989 a shared American and British vision of world order largely directed global affairs and proved resilient despite 9/11, Iraq and the 2008 financial crisis.¹²

This article proceeds with the literatures on the twentieth century and on the post-Cold War and Iraq war eras in mind and seeks to draw on the preoccupations of both. It calls upon recently released digital archival sources to consider anew the events of 1999 and 2001-03 and particularly the contexts and the roles of individuals at the apex of them, namely Clinton, Blair and Bush.¹³ It does so not to exalt high politics or to disregard the complex decision-making of governments, nations or international systems. Nor does it claim that the Anglo-American relationship was more than an important element of international affairs or that the UK was more than a prominent ally, among others, of the US. Yet it is to recognise the significance of the relationships between two presidents and a prime minister in determining why wars were fought in Kosovo and Iraq and why the Anglo-American relationship had global effects. The questions explored here are how those wars happened, what they meant, and what they represented in the history of US power and responses to it in the search for world order.

Blair and Clinton at War: Kosovo

By the time Blair became prime minister in 1997, Clinton had already spent four years dealing with the challenges and complexities of post-Cold War international affairs. Clinton's predecessor, George H. W. Bush, had declared a new world order in 1990 but left office without its realisation.¹⁴ Clinton's foreign policy was less ambitious. The pursuit of democratic enlargement was announced in September 1993 as the successor to containment, and was closely aligned with the feature of US Cold War foreign policy which survived 1989, namely economic expansion.¹⁵ Criticised for its lack of coherence in application, Clinton's

¹² James E. Cronin, *Global Rules: America, Britain and a Disordered World* (New Haven, 2014), pp. 289-316.

¹³ Among other records, these include those of the Clinton Digital Library (hereafter CDL) and the documents produced by the UK Iraq Inquiry.

¹⁴ Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress, 11 September 1990, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/2217>. In general, Jeffrey A. Engel, *When the World Seemed New: George H. W. Bush and the End of the Cold War* (Boston, 2017).

¹⁵ Address to the UN General Assembly, 27 September 1993, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-1993-book2/pdf/PPP-1993-book2-doc-pg1612.pdf>. Also, John Dumbrell, *Clinton's Foreign Policy: Between the Bushes, 1992-2000* (London, 2009).

foreign policy faced two problems.¹⁶ First was his administration's primary focus on domestic matters. Second were unanswered questions presented by the crises that evolved in Haiti, Rwanda, Somalia and North Korea. These were when, and on what grounds, should the United States, either alone or with allies, abrogate the sovereignty of another nation to intervene in a conflict, and what if the situation in that nation was catastrophic but did not present the US with a direct security threat? In addition, there was a post-Cold War conundrum: what should be the US government's attitude towards the United Nations and its Security Council, especially with regard to legitimacy and the use of force, when the US was the member state which contributed most financially and possessed the greatest capability to act? Such questions would dominate the post-9/11 era but they were present before non-state international terrorists had altered calculations of threat perception.

The Clinton administration's answers to these questions were not clear from 1993 to 1995 but one point was obvious: when domestic and foreign criticism affected the reputation of the president and his government, action followed. That was what had happened as the ethnic cleansing and massacres of the Bosnian war from 1992 brought degradation in Europe not seen since the Second World War. While European Union (EU) member states vacillated, the Clinton administration pursued arms-length diplomacy which by 1995 began to damage the president. In June of that year, the US Ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright, told the administration's foreign policy team that the 'strategy we have now makes the President look weak'.¹⁷ Clinton himself said that if his government could not resolve the situation in Bosnia, 'We are history'.¹⁸ The result was a real achievement: in November 1995 a peace settlement was negotiated at Dayton, Ohio, where the Americans mediated between the leaders of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia.¹⁹ Clinton could claim that he had reasserted American leadership and morality in foreign affairs. However, his administration's success was temporary. The continued malevolence of the Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic, and the acts of genocide

¹⁶ For an example of criticism, Richard N. Haas, 'Fatal Distraction: Bill Clinton's Foreign Policy', *Foreign Policy*, 108 (Autumn 1997), pp. 112-123.

¹⁷ Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary: A Memoir* (London, 2003), p. 186.

¹⁸ Brands, *From Berlin*, 177; *New York Times*, 'The Clinton Record: Foreign Policy; Bosnia Policy Shaped by U.S. Military Role', 29 July 1996, <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/29/us/the-clinton-record-foreign-policy-bosnia-policy-shaped-by-us-military-role.html>.

¹⁹ OSCE, Dayton Peace Agreement, 14 December 1995, <https://www.osce.org/bih/126173>; Chollet and Goldgeier, *America*, pp. 113-145; Packer, *Our Man*, pp. 367-391.

by Serbs against ethnic Albanian Kosovars in Kosovo from spring 1998 demanded further US intervention in the Balkans.²⁰

That would come from 24 March 1999 when the US-led Operation Allied Force, an 11-week NATO bombing campaign to deter Milosevic.²¹ This use of force by NATO was an historic departure from the norms of international order. It was prosecuted without the authorisation of the UN Security Council and thus in contravention of its Charter. In its first act of war in its 50-year history, NATO justified its ostensibly illegal military intervention on the grounds that diplomatic negotiations had broken down and that force was a necessity to prevent actual and further humanitarian catastrophe.²² This danger was acknowledged by the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, as he also reminded NATO, and the world, of the primacy of the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security.²³ He needed to do so because NATO's engagement, even in the name of humanitarian action, was momentous in its implicit threat to UN rules. That fact, and the legitimacy of NATO's bombing, were issues of debate at the time and have preoccupied legal scholars since. What was at stake was the system of collective security if the Kosovo action was a portent of future departures from the UN Charter.²⁴

These were the issues and principles with which NATO's leaders dealt in 1999. While the US president was the most dominant figure among them, the British prime minister played a self-appointed prominent part in their actions. Their collaboration gave NATO's campaign in Kosovo a significant Anglo-American dimension, unlike its predecessor in Bosnia. In the early 1990s, John Major's Conservative government retained a non-interventionist policy and was sceptical of the Bush administration's new world order, even doubting the existence of the international community.²⁵ In contrast, Blair's New Labour government became both interventionist and ambitious. Within a matter of months of being gripped by the genocide in Kosovo, Blair attempted to assert his and the UK's presence in the post-Cold War debates

²⁰ Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York, 2002), pp. 443-474. Human Rights Watch has documented the atrocities, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/campaigns/kosovo98/reports.shtml>.

²¹ Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo* (Washington DC, 2000).

²² NATO Press Release 1999(040), 23 March 1999, <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-040e.htm>.

²³ UN Press Release, SG/SM/6938, 24 March 1999, <https://www.un.org/press/en/1999/sgsm6938.doc.htm>.

²⁴ Adam Roberts, 'NATO's "Humanitarian War" over Kosovo', *Survival*, 41.3 (1999), pp. 102-23; Bruno Simma, 'NATO, the UN and the Use of Force: Legal Aspects', *European Journal of International Law*, no. 10 (1999), pp. 1-22; Simpson, *Great Powers*, pp. 194-223.

²⁵ Brendan Simms, *Unfinest Hour: Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia* (London, 2002), pp. 6-7 and *passim*.

about the purpose of the UN and the responsibilities of the international community. While Blair had not entered office with such aspirations – he had travelled light on foreign policy and international relations – he would, over Kosovo, pursue them with a new-found zeal.²⁶ Attempts to understand how and why he did so have produced interesting interpretations. They suggest variously that Blair was motivated by morality, politics and his relationship with Clinton to take a lead in British foreign policy and international affairs.²⁷ His announcement of his own doctrine amid the Kosovo crisis has also been seen as significant, especially in relation to his later approach to Iraq after 2001.²⁸ The extent to which Blair was personally compelled to intervene over Kosovo, manipulate Clinton, risk his prime ministership and claim leadership of the international community without seemingly having prepared the ground or contemplated the implications of his new doctrine, are points still open for analysis. So too is the significance of Kosovo for Blair's evolution, its legacy for his involvement with Bush after 9/11, and the course of world events.

In his memoirs, Blair dedicated a chapter to the Kosovo crisis of 1999, a signal of its importance to him and the narrative he wished to present; the only other international events to receive his detailed attention are 9/11 and Iraq. Kosovo was meaningful to Blair as an 'abrupt' 'awakening on foreign policy', an intriguing choice of words not least due its secular/spiritual ambiguity.²⁹ The awakening did not take place immediately. Blair had been aware of the emerging crisis in the Balkans but left Britain's part in international diplomacy largely to his first foreign secretary, Robin Cook. His priorities as prime minister had not been foreign affairs but domestic policy and the search for peace in Northern Ireland. While Milosevic featured increasingly in Blair's telephone conversations with Clinton in 1998, it was the president who set the pace. He warned in August that 'we are getting closer to a major humanitarian disaster' in Kosovo and suggested intervention. Moreover, Clinton wanted 'to make it clear [to Milosevic] that, while we would like to get UN authority, we can

²⁶ Jonathan Powell, *The New Machiavelli: How to Wield Power in the Modern World* (London, 2011), p. 262.

²⁷ Oliver Daddow, 'Tony's War? Blair, Kosovo, and the interventionist impulse in British foreign policy', *International Affairs*, 85.2 (2009), pp. 547-560; Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p. 36; Andrew Rawnsley, *The End of the Party: The Rise and Fall of New Labour* (London, 2010), pp. 7-8, 92, 174; Riddell, *Hug*, pp. 1-23 and *passim*.

²⁸ Coates and Krieger, *Blair's Wars*, pp. 107-110; Daddow, 'Tony's War', pp. 549-554; Lawrence Freedman, 'Force and the international community, Blair's Chicago speech and the criteria for intervention', *International Relations*, 31.2 (2017), pp. 107-124; Jason Ralph, 'After Chilcot: The "Doctrine of International Community" and the UK Decision to Invade Iraq', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 13.3 (August 2011), pp. 304-325.

²⁹ Blair, *Journey*, pp. 223-253, 223.

do it without it'.³⁰ The president's proposition held within it a radical approach to revision of international order – a departure from the UN Charter's principles of authorisation for the use of force – principles which British governments had habitually upheld. Yet he would find that Blair's own view was not different to his own.

Before the point of decision about possible military intervention to dissuade Milosevic and his Serbian forces, Clinton had worked with Blair in the tradition of effective Anglo-American relations. They had discussed purpose and strategy and carved up diplomatic tasks. Following Clinton's request, Blair's diplomacy at the North Atlantic Council on 12 October 1998 contributed to the announcement of activation orders for NATO airstrikes on Milosevic's forces.³¹ Two days later, Clinton called Blair to say that he could not 'thank you enough for the strength you showed on Kosovo'. Whereas it had taken 'two years to get everybody off the dime' over Bosnia, 'it happened here a lot quicker, in no small measure because we were in lockstep from the get go'.³² While the activation orders were not implemented as Milosevic conformed to NATO's demands, the threat of force had been raised. That act alone was significant as it signalled that the US government, with British support, had readied NATO for military intervention prior to securing UN Security Council authorisation for its use. A further act, not in the Balkans, but against Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, then extended the challenge to UN norms.

In December 1998, a combination of the ongoing resistance of Iraq to the post-Gulf War UN weapons inspection regime, and Republican and neo-conservative criticism of the Clinton administration's policies in response, produced a historic US-UK military intervention.³³ Operation Desert Fox, a four-day airstrike against Iraq, involved the use of force by two members of the UN Security Council against a sovereign state without strict UN authorisation, even if it was prosecuted in defence of existing UN resolutions. The other permanent members of the Security Council viewed the situation in Iraq differently and questioned the legitimacy and necessity of the airstrikes.³⁴ As such, the bombs that dropped

³⁰ Telephone conversation (hereafter Telcon), 6 August 1998, Clinton Digital Library (hereafter CDL).

³¹ NATO, Statement to the Press, 13 October 1998, <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1998/s981013a.htm>.

³² Telcon, 14 October 1998, CDL.

³³ Chollet and Goldgeier, *America*, pp. 178-209

³⁴ David M. Malone, *The International Struggle over Iraq: Politics in the UN Security Council 1980-2005* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 160-1. On reactions, UK House of Commons Library Research Paper 99/13, *Iraq: "Desert Fox" and Policy Developments*, 10 February 1999, <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/RP99-13>; on France, Frédéric Bozo, *A History of the Iraq Crisis: France, the United States, and Iraq, 1991-2003* (New York, 2016), pp. 44-63.

on Iraqi targets were seen as a unilateral action which separated the UK and US from the UN and indicated their frustration with its politics and processes. Yet Operation Desert Fox did not represent a coherent attempt to revise the UN Charter or reform international order. Clinton's foreign policy was more cautious in its ambitions and Blair's was yet to form. It would do so over Kosovo and put him out in front of the US president.

From spring 1998, atrocities perpetrated in Kosovo by Serbian forces, and in response by the Kosovo Liberation Army, an ethnically-Albanian militia, increased in murderous number.³⁵ The US diplomat who had orchestrated the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, Richard Holbrooke, was sent back to the Balkans as the Clinton administration's special envoy to halt the violence. Working with the international Contact Group, and with the threat of NATO's activation orders in his pocket, Holbrooke achieved Milosevic's agreement in October 1998 to comply with UN Security Council resolution 1199 which demanded a ceasefire between Serbian and KLA forces and oversight by observers.³⁶ Milosevic's promise lasted until 15 January 1999 when Serbian police forces massacred 45 Kosovans in the village of Racak. That act, more than any other to date in the Kosovo crisis, revealed the brutality of the post-Cold War disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, the Serbian president's defiance of the international community, and his return to the use of ethnic cleansing. For Blair, it was a pivotal moment which began his awakening on foreign policy.³⁷

After the Racak massacre, Kosovo featured more significantly than it had done in the Blair-Clinton telephone conversations. So too did Blair's initiation of the subject. Clinton was already disposed to act, saying to him on 21 January that 'I don't want to get into a pickle, but now that 45 people have been slaughtered and Milosevic is trying to throw the KVM out, we don't have any choice but to do something'.³⁸ Diplomatic attempts at Rambouillet in February 1999 failed due to Serbian non-cooperation and continued Serb atrocities.³⁹ By 20 March, international monitors were withdrawn and it was thereafter, on 23rd, that NATO announced Operation Allied Force.⁴⁰ The difference between this NATO action, which lasted for almost

³⁵ Human Rights Watch, Kosovo War Crimes Chronology, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/campaigns/kosovo98/timeline.shtml>.

³⁶ UNSCR 1199(1998), 23 September 1998, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1199>; also, Albright, *Madam*, pp. 388-90; Packer, *Our Man*, pp. 408-9.

³⁷ PBS, Frontline Interviews, Tony Blair, undated, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/interviews/blair.html>.

³⁸ Telcon, 21 January 1999, CDL. KVM was the Kosovo Verification Mission of international observers.

³⁹ Marc Weller, 'The Rambouillet conference on Kosovo', *International Affairs*, 75.2 (1999), pp. 211-251.

⁴⁰ NATO Press Release 1999(040), 23 March 1999, <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-040e.htm>.

three months, and that of the Bosnian war of 1992-95, was that it did not have UN Security Council authorisation.⁴¹ NATO claimed legitimacy on the basis of averting humanitarian catastrophe but the bombing was a second, controversial and historic departure by members of the UN Security Council and, with them, NATO allies, from the UN Charter's provisions for the use of force.

Clinton, with support from Blair, had begun to revise the way the world worked in the name of humanitarian intervention. At stake were the fundamental principles of the UN Charter and stable international order. Operation Allied Force challenged the Charter's relevance and implicitly called for its revision. Disagreements in the Security Council had rendered it incapacitated, from the American and British perspectives. In particular, the government of the Russian Federation opposed NATO's engagement as it attempted to sustain its own presence in the Balkans. On the day that bombs began to fall, its leader, Boris Yeltsin, wrote to Clinton. He urged continued international diplomacy and condemned the intervention: 'On what basis does NATO take it upon itself to decide the fate of peoples in sovereign states? Who gave it the right to act in the role of guardian of order?'⁴² Two days later, the Russian Federation tabled a resolution in the UN Security Council which described NATO's action as a 'unilateral use of force' which constituted 'a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter' and demanded cessation. It was defeated by 12 votes to three but Russian opposition remained.⁴³

There were actually limits to Clinton's commitment to Kosovo. Vietnam's political legacy and strategic concerns about ground forces led him to state categorically in his address to the nation as bombing commenced that US troops would not be sent to fight.⁴⁴ Thus while the action itself was radical, it was not open-ended. That very fact would cause problems in the Blair-Clinton relationship as Britain's prime minister began to formalise publicly his government's interventionist foreign policy and try to work with the US president to achieve

⁴¹ Like Operation Desert Fox, Operation Allied Force referred to existing resolutions: UNSCR 1199(1998), 23 September 1998, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1199> and UNSCR 1203(1998), 24 October 1998, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1203>.

⁴² Yeltsin to Clinton, 24 March 1999, CDL; also *Washington Post*, 'Russian Leader Cancels Trip in Protest', 24 March 1999, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/daily/march99/russia032499.htm>; *BBC News*, 'Why Russia Opposes Intervention in Kosovo', 13 October 1998, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/111585.stm>.

⁴³ UNSC, S/1999/328, 26 March 1999, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/kos%20S%201999%20328.pdf>; UNSC, 3989th meeting, 26 March 1999, <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/S/PV.3989>.

⁴⁴ Address to the Nation, 24 March 1999, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-nation-airstrikes-against-serbian-targets-the-federal-republic-yugoslavia>.

it. On 5 April, as the bombing continued, the president told the prime minister that ‘under no circumstances are we going to be defeated. If you tell me that, and I tell you that, and we hold hands’.⁴⁵ Lockstep had become hand-holding but Clinton’s call came on the Easter weekend of 1999 when, according to one of his biographers, Blair ‘reached a nadir’ and ‘confided to one aide, “This could be the end of me”’.⁴⁶ The bombing campaign was not showing early success, Milosevic had accelerated ethnic cleansing, questions were being raised by politicians and the media and international opinion was mixed about allied action in the Balkans.

Over the following week, Blair and Clinton spoke of intensifying the diplomatic and military pressure on Milosevic but the prime minister had reached a point of transition about how and what that should mean which would shortly separate him from the president.⁴⁷ His own subsequent account emphasises his frustration and determination. He told his closest aides that ‘I am willing to lose the job on this, but we are going to go for broke. ... The response so far to what was a monstrous and unpardonable outrage had been pathetic. ... I would use all my chips with President Clinton to get a commitment to ground troops on the agenda’.⁴⁸ It was Blair’s morally-inspired commitment to save the Kosovars and his belief that the humanitarian tragedy of Kosovo could not be halted without ground troops that led him to do what prime ministers rarely seek to do to presidents: force their hand. And he did so not only privately but publicly.

To influence events in Kosovo, Blair personally intervened in NATO military planning and public relations and exploited his relationship with Clinton. In their telephone calls, Blair began to take the initiative from 16 April.⁴⁹ This was just before he was to travel to the US for meetings with Clinton and his foreign policy team ahead of NATO’s 50th anniversary celebrations in Washington DC from 23 to 25 April. Blair also used this trip to give his most important speech to date on foreign affairs, going further than he had done in an attempt to persuade the Clinton administration over Kosovo and set the agenda for the international community. Before leaving London, he indicated for the first time that deployment of ground troops in Kosovo was now being considered, saying in the Commons that ‘All options are

⁴⁵ Telcon, 5 April 1999, CDL.

⁴⁶ Seldon, *Blair*, p. 395.

⁴⁷ Telcons, 10 and 14 April 1999, CDL.

⁴⁸ Blair, *Journey*, p. 237. Also, Seldon, *Blair*, p. 396.

⁴⁹ Telcon, 16 April 1999, CDL.

always kept under review'.⁵⁰ The problem was that Clinton had ruled them out. Arriving in Washington, Blair and Clinton had a tense meeting, the president 'visibly uncomfortable' and 'almost silent' throughout.⁵¹ 'What saved us in the end,' Albright wrote, 'was largely the relationship between President Clinton and Prime Minister Blair'.⁵² They left the meeting together and were alone for over 30 minutes. What passed between them is unknown but thereafter Blair 'did not press his case for a firm commitment to a ground campaign' at the summit and Clinton, in return, agreed 'to do "whatever was necessary" to ensure victory'.⁵³ They also agreed jointly to lobby NATO leaders on planning for ground troops, and to secret Anglo-American military preparations for their use.⁵⁴ Blair had pushed Clinton as far as the president would go, at this stage.

Sensitivity to the president's position did not prevent Blair from using his visit to the US to become acknowledged as the West's leading statesman on the future of international order. The day after meeting Clinton, he flew to Chicago to deliver the most significant foreign policy speech of his prime ministership. It had been hurriedly prepared, in large part by a British academic and not by government foreign policy experts, and given its title – the 'Doctrine of International Community' – by Blair on the flight to the US.⁵⁵ There had also seemingly been no ground laid, despite the ambition of the speech. With globalisation as his backdrop, Blair claimed boldly that 'We are all internationalists now, whether we like it or not' and in making the case for liberal intervention, outlined 'five major considerations' for which the speech has mostly been remembered.⁵⁶ Yet it was an audacious, idealistic and wide-ranging call for a 'serious and sustained' focus on the principles and practice of international order and reform of the institutions on which it was based. The speech ended with a plea for the US to recognise its responsibilities, engage with world problems and not give in to isolationism. Clinton needed no reminding of that fact, especially as on 20 April 1999, a Republican-led bipartisan Senate Resolution called on him to use ground troops in Kosovo.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Hansard HC Deb, 21 April 1999, vol. 329, cc 898-905, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1999/apr/21/engagements>; Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p. 49.

⁵¹ Seldon, *Blair*, p. 399.

⁵² Albright, *Madam*, p. 415.

⁵³ Albright, *Madam*, p. 416; Seldon, *Blair*, p. 400; Stephens, *Tony Blair*, pp. 164-165.

⁵⁴ Seldon, *Blair*, p. 400; Rentoul, *Blair*, p. 525.

⁵⁵ Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, pp. 50-53; Powell, *New Machiavelli*, pp. 263-5. Also, Freedman, 'Force', p. 108.

⁵⁶ Blair's speech to the Economic Club of Chicago, 22 April 1999, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page1297>.

⁵⁷ US Senate, S.J. Res. 20, 20 April 1999, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/106th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/20/text>. Also, Chollet and Goldgeier, *America*, pp. 217-9.

On his return from Chicago, Blair worked successfully with Clinton and other allies to ensure that NATO's 50th anniversary summit in Washington went smoothly.⁵⁸ Yet the prime minister flew back to London uncertain about what he had achieved personally with the president. He told an aide 'that he still had "no idea" whether Clinton would really commit to ground troops'.⁵⁹ Blair also feared that his 'strong-arm tactics would backfire if Clinton felt bounced'.⁶⁰ The president was now facing difficulties on all sides. Yeltsin telephoned Clinton as the NATO summit closed on 25 April to demand that his country be involved in the diplomatic resolution of the war in Kosovo; he even raised the threat that if not, Russia would be pushed into war.⁶¹ Clinton probably expected that he would have to worry about Yeltsin. Increasingly, he also had to worry about Blair.

On 3 May, the prime minister made the first of his visits to Kosovar refugee camps where he was personally and politically affected by the misery that he witnessed.⁶² Blair's determination to find a solution was enhanced but he doubted whether Clinton was still in lockstep with him to achieve it. One Number 10 adviser documented Blair's concern that the president would reach an agreement with Milosevic independently, thus 'selling him down the river'; 'If he does that,' Blair was recorded as saying, angrily, 'that's it. I'm finished with him'.⁶³ Tempers were not calm in Washington, either. The prime minister's soaring rhetoric about good and evil being fought out over Kosovo led the president to suggest that he 'pull himself together' and stop the 'domestic grandstanding'; one of Clinton's aides wondered if Blair was 'sprinkling too much adrenalin on his cornflakes'.⁶⁴ The State Department's Deputy Secretary, Strobe Talbot, privately remarked that 'Winston' Blair was 'ready to fight to the last American'.⁶⁵ Relations worsened when on 17 May the *New York Times* covered a leader column from the *Financial Times* which referred to British criticisms of Clinton's lack of leadership over Kosovo. Furious that the original report might have been inspired by the prime minister's press secretary, Alastair Campbell, Clinton 'exploded' in an 'ugly' telephone

⁵⁸ NATO, Statement on Kosovo, S-1(99)62, 23 April 1999, <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-062e.htm>; *New York Times*, 'Kosovo Overshadows Subdued NATO Event', 24 April 1999, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/world/global/042499nato-summit.html>.

⁵⁹ *The Guardian*, 'How Kosovo Strained Blair's "Special Relationship"', 17 September 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2000/sep/17/labour.labour1997to99>.

⁶⁰ Seldon, *Blair*, p. 401.

⁶¹ Memorandum of conversation (hereafter Memcon), Clinton and Yeltsin, 25 April 1999, CDL.

⁶² Memcon, Blair and Clinton, 4 May 1999, CDL.

⁶³ Diary of Deputy Communications Director, Lance Price, 7 May 1999, quoted in Seldon, *Blair*, p. 402.

⁶⁴ Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, pp. 56-57.

⁶⁵ Rentoul, *Blair*, p. 527.

call with Blair.⁶⁶ Whoever was responsible in the British government, a line had been crossed in Anglo-American relations – airing criticism publicly, rather than privately – at a moment when Clinton was beleaguered. The president said to Blair that he ‘was sure [that] it gives you and your people a lot of pleasure to see me done down’.⁶⁷ On the same day, Clinton indicated publicly for the first time that the military action in Kosovo might not be limited to the air campaign: ‘we have not and will not take any option off the table’.⁶⁸ On 23 May he published his own article in the *New York Times* in which he stated that he did not ‘rule out other military options’ while sustaining the current bombing campaign.⁶⁹ Ostensibly, it seems that Blair had forced Clinton into a public admission that ground troops might have to be part of the solution to the problem in Kosovo. Yet Clinton had told Blair at their 21 April meeting that he had regretted ruling out ground troops in his 24 March statement not because he believed them necessary, but because he accepted that his administration ‘could not continue to exclude the possibility’.⁷⁰ On 10 May, the president’s advisers had also recognised that the government’s rhetoric had to change and on the 20th, Clinton met with them to discuss the timetable of an invasion.⁷¹ One of them has since said that ‘We didn’t need Blair to tell us we had to win this thing. Their suggestion that they convinced us is fantasy land’.⁷² Another aide judged that ‘Blair’s pressure did help steel some of us in the administration ... but ultimately his input was merely to speed up what would have happened anyway’.⁷³

The war in Kosovo ended without deployment of the ground troops that Blair had campaigned for, a strategy that had stretched his personal relationship with Clinton and diminished his reputation with the president’s administration. It is likely that the threat of a ground invasion was only one factor in Milosevic’s acceptance of peace terms on 3 June produced by American, EU and Russian negotiators. Others probably prevailed, particularly US perseverance, Russian involvement in the diplomatic process, the effect of NATO’s unity and its strategic bombing, increasing Serb losses and his own survival.⁷⁴ Compromises were

⁶⁶ Seldon, *Blair*, pp. 402-3; Blair, *Journey*, p. 240.

⁶⁷ Seldon’s source for Clinton’s quote is a confidential interview, *Blair*, p. 403.

⁶⁸ *New York Times*, 19 May 1999,

<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/world/europe/051999kosovo-clinton.html>.

⁶⁹ *New York Times*, 23 May 1999, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/05/23/opinion/a-just-and-necessary-war.html>.

⁷⁰ Albright, *Madam*, p. 415.

⁷¹ Daalder and O’Hanlon, *Winning*, p. 156.

⁷² Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars*, p. 48.

⁷³ Seldon, *Blair*, p. 403.

⁷⁴ Daalder and O’Hanlon, *Winning*, pp. 140-2; Roberts, ‘NATO’s “Humanitarian War”’, pp. 116-118.

duly made by both sides and on 10 June NATO halted its bombing campaign and Serb forces withdrew from Kosovo.

On that day, Clinton phoned Blair to say ‘thanks, it’s been a good run’.⁷⁵ The peace that was achieved in Kosovo in 1999 was partly the result of their relationship. The understanding between them had contributed to NATO’s cohesion and Blair had used it to enhance the effect of the ground troop lobby in Washington. The agreement in Kosovo was a success for Clinton whose record on international affairs had always been controversial as he and his administration strove to find a consistent approach to foreign policy. He described the cessation of 10 June in those terms when he spoke to a Democrats’ dinner that night.⁷⁶ Yet in its achievement, Clinton had not only dealt with genocide and war in the Balkans; he had also faced political conflict at home and abroad about his leadership, the world role of the US and the overextension of its power. The complexity of the battles he had to fight explain why humanitarian intervention did not become a doctrine of US foreign policy and why Clinton did not make world order the theme of his final days. Instead, he proceeded as a pragmatist, reminding Americans that a globalized world was one which would affect their interests, hence the need for the US to take a lead.⁷⁷ For the US president in the era in which he held the office, intervention had to be as much about practical politics as it did about morality.

This was true too of Blair’s position in that he could not act without consideration of the costs to him, his government and the UK. Yet he was less encumbered than Clinton. A British prime minister could not affect world affairs as a US president could and thus he dealt with a different level of responsibility. Blair was also less experienced than Clinton, and more affected by the moral abhorrence he felt in response to the tragedy in Kosovo and his frustration with the reality of international politics and diplomacy. Rather than restrain his ambition, these factors actually enhanced it. He was personally emboldened having influenced the US president, presented the case for humanitarian intervention more powerfully than any other leader, and announced a doctrine for international community. Blair was said to have drawn lessons from Kosovo, principally the need to work with the US

⁷⁵ Telcon, Blair and Clinton, 10 June 1999, CDL.

⁷⁶ Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Dinner, 10 June 1999, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-1999-book1/pdf/PPP-1999-book1-doc-pg916.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Chollet and Goldgeier, *America*, pp. 280-289; Dumbrell, *Clinton’s Foreign Policy*, pp. 165-72; David Hastings Dunn, ‘Innovation and precedent in the Kosovo war: the impact of Operation Allied Force on US foreign policy’, *International Affairs*, 85.3 (2009), pp. 531-546.

and guide it away from unilateralism, and for Britain to be a 'bridge' between America and Europe.⁷⁸ Together, these were the elements of his 'awakening on foreign policy' over Kosovo.⁷⁹ For one journalist, it had been Blair's 'Idealism mixed with realpolitik, terror stirred with vanity'.⁸⁰

It must be remembered that Blair's 'awakening' was rapid and defined by risk. Moreover, the doctrine he declared in Chicago was created in haste without careful diplomatic preparation amidst the intense, complex diplomacy and politics of the Kosovo crisis. The problems of international affairs that it sought to address and which were exposed in the Balkans were enormous in their significance. They were about the sovereignty of states, collective security, international law and the future of the UN. Since the end of the Cold War, those matters had exercised the international community that Blair sought to unite. His answers to the problems that it faced prioritised working with the US to guide its leaders and its power. In doing so over Kosovo, as over Iraq in 1998, he had had no difficulty in departing from international law and the primacy of the UN Security Council. While the humanitarian necessity of Kosovo had been overriding for most, the post-Cold War dominance and unilateral tendencies of the US which had caused concern in 1998 were now intensified. The US president did not seek to exacerbate them by proclaiming a new world order. Ironically, the British prime minister did.

Blair and Bush at War: Iraq

Had it not been for the terror attacks of 11 September 2001, the relationship between Blair and Clinton's successor, George W. Bush, might have been cordial but not close, varyingly collaborative but not historically consequential. It was 9/11 which produced the conditions for their personal cooperation, the more complex alliance between their governments and, ultimately, their fighting forces. For the two leaders, in different ways, it was the defining moment. The evolution of the Bush administration's response to 9/11 produced a widely approved just war in Afghanistan and then a deeply controversial invasion of Iraq which enjoined the president and the prime minister, and eventually engulfed them in accusations of war guilt. As Iraq disintegrated after the coalition forces' military victory, the main public justification for war – Saddam Hussein's failure to prove that he had disarmed Iraq's WMD – fell away as the invaders failed to prove that his regime had had them in the first place. Thus

⁷⁸ Riddell, *Hug*, pp. 113-5; Seldon, *Blair*, p. 407.

⁷⁹ Blair, *Journey*, p. 223.

⁸⁰ Rawnsley, *End*, p. 92.

the already fragile legitimacy of the war in most international opinion, let alone its morality, came under fierce scrutiny as post-war violence scarred Iraq and destabilised the region.

Much has already been written about the motives for the war in official inquiries and also contemporary histories. In addition to the greater criticisms of the Bush administration's precepts, preparations and purpose, there has been specific focus on the Blair-Bush relationship as a driving force on the road to war.⁸¹ Notably, given that Iraq became somewhat of a crucible in British political history after 2003, there has been particular interest in the priority Blair placed on loyalty to Bush, the American cause and Atlanticism, and what he did or did not achieve or accomplish in return.⁸² Such issues were among the most significant of the Iraq Inquiry which released its report in 2016.⁸³ The remarks of its chairman, Sir John Chilcot, on its publication went further than its conclusions in one important regard. He judged that Blair 'overestimated his ability to influence US decisions on Iraq' and then said that 'The UK's relationship with the US has proved strong enough over time to bear the weight of honest disagreement. It does not require unconditional support where our interests or judgements differ.'⁸⁴

In his statement, Chilcot had referred to a note that Blair had written to Bush on 28 July 2002 as the US government proceeded towards finalisation of its war plans for Iraq. It began with what seems an unequivocal avowal, 'I will be with you, whatever.'⁸⁵ As no formal decision had yet been taken by his Cabinet, or put to Parliament, this commitment suggested that Blair had, as one of his biographers has argued, made 'the greatest error in diplomacy: declaring his hand too early'.⁸⁶ He had offered his pledge before securing guarantees and 'made it too easy for the Americans to take him for granted'. A weighty query follows: 'Whether a little less eager trust and a little more Thatcherite rigidity would have given Blair more ability to shape

⁸¹ On the Bush administration's decision to invade, Anderson, *Bush's Wars*, pp. 93-129. Also see Melvyn P. Leffler, '9/11 and American Foreign Policy', *Diplomatic History*, 29/3 (June 2005), pp. 395-413 and Melvyn P. Leffler, 'The Foreign Policies of the George W. Bush Administration: Memoirs, History, Legacy', *Diplomatic History*, 37/2 (April 2013), pp. 1-27.

⁸² The biographies of Blair focus upon these issues as do early analyses, e.g. Coates and Krieger, *Blair's War*; Coughlin, *American Ally*; and Porter, *Blunder*. Also, Christoph Bluth, 'The British road to war: Blair, Bush and the decision to invade Iraq', *International Affairs*, 80/5 (October 2004), pp. 871-892; Ralph, 'After Chilcot', pp. 304-325. For broad perspective, Cronin, *Global Rules*, pp. 292-304 and *passim*.

⁸³ The Report of the Iraq Inquiry, 6 July 2016, <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20171123123237/http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/>.

⁸⁴ Statement by Sir John Chilcot, 6 July 2016, <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20171123123237/http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/>.

⁸⁵ Blair to Bush, 28 July 2002, Iraq Inquiry.

⁸⁶ Seldon, *Blair*, p. 625.

the world will be one of the enduring historical questions of the age.⁸⁷ To understand why Blair put himself in the position that he did, with all its consequences, is to try to grasp his personal beliefs and outlook and to interrogate his relationship with Bush. It is also to realise the limits of his power.

In his memoirs, Bush describes the tasks he carried out on the day after 9/11. Chief among them was to telephone the world leaders who had sent messages of sympathy. ‘My first call,’ he wrote, ‘was with Prime Minister Tony Blair ... Tony began by saying he was “in a state of shock” and that he would stand with America “one hundred percent” ... There was no equivocation in his voice. The conversation helped cement the closest friendship I would form with any foreign leader. As the years passed and the wartime decisions grew tougher, some of our allies wavered. Tony Blair never did’.⁸⁸ Blair did not waver because he had found the purpose of his premiership which was ‘to steer [the Americans] in a sensible path’ with the aim of re-ordering the world.⁸⁹ These were the lessons he had learned from Kosovo in 1999; now he had the chance to alter global affairs if he could engage Bush and his administration.

Blair’s reaction to 9/11 was immediate in its identification of terrorism as the new threat to civilisation, his resolution to stand ‘shoulder to shoulder’ with the Americans, and his determination to influence the US government.⁹⁰ That process began with a five-page personal note sent to Bush on 12 September after their phone call. What was remarkable about this brief document was that it assumed the prime minister’s role as adviser to the president in a joint response to 9/11. Blair advised Bush on targeting Osama bin Laden and the Taliban in Afghanistan and constructing a new ‘political agenda against international terrorism’, adding that ‘If this is a war – and in practical, if not legal terms, it is – we need war methods’. That involved ‘[c]o-opting the rest of the world’.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (London, 2010), p. 140.

⁸⁹ Alastair Campbell and Bill Hagerty (eds), *The Alastair Campbell Diaries Volume 4 Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq* (London, 2013), p. 13.

⁹⁰ Hansard, HC Deb, 14 September 2001, vol 372, cc 604-7, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/2001/sep/14/international-terrorism-and-attacks-in>.

⁹¹ Blair, ‘Note for the President’, 12 September 2001, Iraq Inquiry. Also, Campbell, *Burden*, 9, diary entry for 12 September 2001.

These were the matters that Blair and Bush discussed during the prime minister's visit to Washington on 20 September 2001. On that day, in Congress, Bush made the most important speech of his presidency to date.⁹² Blair remembers Bush being 'at peace with himself' having 'found his mission as president'.⁹³ Actually, Blair was finding his own mission. His memoirs record that as he flew to the US on 20 September 2001, he felt that his 'position as the world leader strongly articulating the need for comprehensive and strategic action was pretty well established'.⁹⁴ Blair had been trying to guide Bush ('I was regularly writing notes to him, raising issues, prompting his system and mine') and 'globetrotting – to the Middle East, Pakistan, Russia'.⁹⁵ According to one account, Blair told Bush at their 20 September meeting: 'Don't get distracted; the priorities are ... Al Qaida, Afghanistan, the Taliban'. The president said that he agreed and added 'But when we have dealt with Afghanistan, we must come back to Iraq'.⁹⁶

That prospect troubled Blair. From early October he cautioned Bush 'against widening the war'; 'if we hit Iraq now,' the prime minister wrote in another note to the president, 'we would lose the Arab world, Russia, probably half the EU...'. Blair also urged Bush to address the Middle East Peace Process, 'the huge undercurrent in this situation ... the context in the Arab world'.⁹⁷ What these thoughts indicated was that less than a month after 9/11, Blair had already recognised its historic effect and the opportunity it presented, not least for him. Those judgements were the themes of his impassioned speech at the Labour Party conference in Brighton on 2 October 2001. 'This is a moment to seize', he declared, '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.'⁹⁸ Informed onlookers and those close to Blair recognised his transformation. Campbell's diary recorded the journalist 'Andrew Marr's reaction ... that it was as though [Blair] had levitated above the party'; Campbell himself added 'indeed just

⁹² Address before a Joint Session of the Congress, 20 September 2001, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-2001-book2/pdf/PPP-2001-book2-doc-pg1140.pdf>; also, Remarks with Prime Minister Tony Blair, 20 September 2001, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-2001-book2/pdf/PPP-2001-book2-doc-pg1138-2.pdf>.

⁹³ Blair, *Journey*, p. 354.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

⁹⁶ Anderson, *Bush's Wars*, p. 76.

⁹⁷ Campbell, *Burden*, 46; Blair to Bush, 11 October 2001, Iraq Inquiry; also Manning testimony to the Iraq Inquiry, 30 November 2009, p. 9.

⁹⁸ Blair's speech, 2 October 2001, <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=186#banner>.

before I left the hotel, I had said to him I got the sense that this year he needed us less, and he needed his colleagues less'.⁹⁹ Blair's ambition was outgrowing his country.

From the outset, then, in what would become a complex and controversial history of the US declaration of a War on Terror and the US-led, and UK-backed, invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Blair was personally determined to influence the US government through his relationship with Bush. His fundamental objectives were unchanged from those he had outlined in Chicago in 1999. Hitherto, he had lacked the opportunity to pursue them but now, after 9/11, the threat of transnational terror, and the Bush administration's insistence on dealing with Saddam Hussein, presented him with an opening. In comparison with 1999, Blair was now much more confident in his diplomacy, the foreign policy he wished Britain to pursue, the primacy he attached to relations with the United States, and in his vision of a new post-Cold War, post-9/11 order. He also had self-belief and a sense of his own stature as an international statesman. In Campbell's opinion, it verged on self-importance.¹⁰⁰

What reception Blair's interventions in Washington had at this point is unclear. His attempt to caution Bush about extending the war from Afghanistan to Iraq did not prevent the president from instructing his Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, on 21 November 2002 to order US Central Command to revisit war plans for Iraq and consider 'what it would take to protect America by removing Saddam Hussein if we have to'.¹⁰¹ The Bush administration thereafter developed a momentum which Blair would seek to guide. In so doing, he would face the dilemma of choosing between his preferred course and that dictated by the Americans. His face-to-face chance to attempt to sway Bush came at the president's ranch in Crawford, Texas, from 5 to 7 April 2002. In preparation, Blair asked his Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell, for 'a proper worked-out strategy' for military action against Iraq and especially consideration of how the case should be made publicly. The issue, in his view, was why 'from a centre-left perspective' the argument was not obvious and the reason was that 'people believe we are only doing it to support the US' and 'the immediate WMD problems don't seem obviously worse than 3 years ago'. Blair's solution was to 're-order our story and message. Increasingly, I think it should be about the nature of the regime. We do intervene – as per the Chicago

⁹⁹ Campbell, *Burden*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁰¹ Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (London, 2004), pp. 1-2.

speech'.¹⁰² This note suggests that Blair had decided before the Crawford meeting that his government would support the Bush administration's decision to act against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Yet exactly what that meant, in detail, is not certain.

At Crawford, Iraq was only one issue of many, with much time given to the Middle East Peace Process. According to Blair's foreign policy adviser, David Manning, who was present, Bush told Blair that there was no war plan for Iraq but that Central Command was reviewing options and when they had done so, he would consider them. Manning also recounted that Blair pressed Bush on the necessity of engaging the UN, telling him later that 'the President probably did want to build a coalition and that this had led him to dismiss pressure from some on the American right'.¹⁰³ Blair's strategy of influencing US policy-making at its apex seemed to have achieved a first success. Bush wrote little about the April 2002 Crawford meeting but did note that while he 'didn't have a lot of faith in the UN,' he agreed to consider Blair's suggestion that they seek 'a UN Security Council resolution that presented Saddam with a clear ultimatum: allow weapons inspectors back into Iraq, or face serious consequences'.¹⁰⁴

In his own account of the meeting, Blair stated that he had been clear about 'two things. The first was that Saddam had to be made to conform to the UN resolutions, that the years of obstruction and non-cooperation had to end. The second was that Britain had to remain, as a country, "shoulder to shoulder" with America'. This act 'didn't mean we sacrificed our interests to theirs; or subcontracted out our foreign policy. It meant that the alliance between our two nations was a vital strategic interest ...'.¹⁰⁵ Blair expected to achieve influence through loyalty. However, by July 2002, as US Central Command approached finalisation of Iraq war plans for the president on 4 August, Blair's Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, became concerned that the prime minister's conditions for supporting the Bush administration, namely preparation of public opinion, exhausting the UN route, and progress on the Middle East Peace Process, were being ignored in Washington.¹⁰⁶ According to Campbell's diary, when Straw raised doubts at an important meeting of ministers and advisers chaired by Blair on 23 July 2002, the prime minister said that 'we had to be with the Americans', adding 'It's

¹⁰² Blair to Powell, 'Iraq', 17 March 2002, Iraq Inquiry.

¹⁰³ Manning to Iraq Inquiry, 30 November 2009, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ Bush, *Decision*, p. 232.

¹⁰⁵ Blair, *Journey*, pp. 400-1.

¹⁰⁶ Straw to Blair, 8 July 2002, Iraq Inquiry.

worse than you think, I actually believe in doing this'. His reply to the foreign secretary's idea that Britain not join with the US in the invasion of Iraq was even more revealing of his position, and his understanding of the past. Blair 'said that would be the biggest shift in foreign policy for fifty years and I'm not sure it's very wise'.¹⁰⁷

Only Blair's conviction that the course he had set was right, and his self-belief in his ability to influence US policy through personal access to the president, can explain the opening line of his 28 July 2002 lengthy note to Bush, 'I will be with you, whatever.' Apparently definitive, this assertion was designed to convince the president of Blair's allegiance and win him over to the consequent six-page strategic restatement of the necessity of a multilateral coalition, UN authority, evidence, the MEPP, 'Post Saddam' and a workable military plan.¹⁰⁸ Public release of this memorandum via the Iraq Inquiry gave credence to the criticisms mentioned above that Blair gave unconditional support to the US government and overestimated his persuasive abilities. His diplomacy with Bush was certainly not akin to his diplomacy with Clinton over Kosovo and ground troops when he used private and public influence to force the president's position. Three possible factors explain the difference. First, Blair may have judged his earlier approach to have been too costly or estimated that his statesmanship and stock were now higher; secondly, Blair was perhaps confident in his ability to counteract hawkish opinion in the Bush administration by influencing the president without strong-arm tactics; and thirdly, that he simply meant what he said. It is difficult to escape the interpretation that Blair believed in the objective of removing Saddam Hussein and in his own cause and effect in pledging his and the UK's support for Bush and the US. It is also clear from his correspondence with Bush and his public statements that Blair's ultimate goal was to achieve a new liberal world order. He may have preferred that the action against Iraq would be taken under UN authority with multilateral support, public opinion having been squared and with a US commitment to the MEPP, but he increasingly accepted that he would have to compromise on these 'principles'. Thus although he swayed Bush at Camp David on 7 September 2002 to persist in seeking UN authority despite US Vice President Dick Cheney's opposition (and that of other hardliners in the administration), Blair also replied to Bush's suggestion that war might be necessary, including British troops, with the phrase 'I'm with

¹⁰⁷ Campbell, *Burden*, pp. 278-9.

¹⁰⁸ Blair to Bush, 28 July 2002, Iraq Inquiry.

you'. Bush told Campbell, 'Your guy's got balls'.¹⁰⁹ Roy Jenkins called it conviction that same month, adding 'almost too much'.¹¹⁰

After Bush had spoken at the UN and its Security Council had adopted resolution 1441, giving Iraq 'a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations', Blair's resolve led him to conclude that although his 'principles' could not be defended, he would lead the UK in support of the US regardless.¹¹¹ At a Downing Street meeting on 17 October 2002 with the foreign and defence secretaries, the chief of the defence staff, and advisors, the prime minister 'concluded, that if there was a breach, and no second resolution [at the UN authorising the use of force against Iraq], 'we and the US would take action'.¹¹² He must have envisaged the use of Anglo-American military force against Iraq as a foundation stone of the international order which he saw as critical in a new world of terrorism. Yet it was an enormous gamble. The 'principles' he was about to abandon were the basis of the order he sought.

Blair's memoirs suggest that his ultimate decision to support the Americans militarily came during Christmas 2002, after Iraq had submitted its report to the UN on 7 December which failed to end speculation about whether it possessed WMDs. 'So, in or out?' Blair asked. 'In, I concluded. And if in, better in fully and not partly. I still thought it possible to avoid war. ... I was determined, at the least, to try to persuade the Americans to get more time. But I had said I would be with them, and if conflict could not be avoided, I would be in with the whole and not half a heart'.¹¹³ Regardless of the storms in domestic politics and among EU and UN member states about evidence, rationale and legality, Blair remained firm, as he had done when he thought the diplomacy of the Kosovo war could have been the end of him as prime minister. He maintained his unwavering stand at a meeting with Bush in Washington on 31 January 2003 when the president told him that regardless of whether the UN Security Council agreed to a second resolution authorising force, the US would take military action. According to one account, Blair replied that he was 'solidly with the President and ready to do whatever

¹⁰⁹ Campbell, *Burden*, pp. 294-7; Woodward, *Plan*, pp. 177-9.

¹¹⁰ Hansard, HL Deb, 24 September 2002, vol 638, cc 893-4, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200102/ldhansrd/vo020924/text/20924-03.htm#20924-03_head0.

¹¹¹ Bush's UN speech, 12 September 2002, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020912-1.html>; UNSCR 1441, 8 November 2002, <http://www.un.org/Depts/unmovic/documents/1441.pdf>.

¹¹² Rycroft to Sedwill, 17 October 2002, Iraq Inquiry.

¹¹³ Blair, *Journey*, pp. 412-3.

it took to disarm Saddam'.¹¹⁴ Blair was still resolute even as Bush offered him a way out after being briefed about the knife-edge political situation in the UK on the question of the UN and legality. In response, with a fortitude which is remarkable either for its resolve or its recklessness, the prime minister told the president 'I'm with you ... I'm there to the very end'.¹¹⁵

Blair's determination was undaunted two days later, on 11 March, when his government came under friendly fire from Donald Rumsfeld. In a Pentagon press briefing, the US defense secretary intimated that British military involvement in the invasion of Iraq was 'unclear' and not vital.¹¹⁶ This was acid to Blair's position, particularly in Parliament, and he was furious.¹¹⁷ Straw used the occasion to renew the case that he had put to the prime minister previously. Campbell's diary records him saying that 'Rumsfeld's idiotic comments gave us a way out'; the UK could contribute solely to the post-conflict humanitarian phase and leave the invasion to the Americans. As Blair was 'not keen', Straw told him, bluntly, that 'we were dealing, however right he thought it was, with a US "war of choice" and we had to understand, as [US Secretary of State Colin] Powell told him the whole time, that some of the people around Bush could not care two fucks about us whatever, and that went for TB as much as the rest of us'.¹¹⁸ At this vital instant, Manning supported Straw, who 'was absolutely vituperative about Rumsfeld and said we were being driven by their political strategy'. Blair said that 'maybe, but it was still the right thing to do'.¹¹⁹ With war days away, the prime minister remained personally dedicated to it, to Bush, Anglo-American relations, Atlanticism and the idea of the international order. He held this position seemingly without calculation of the damage that was being done to the prospects for that order, or, conversely, with acceptance of it as a necessary risk.

In the House of Commons on 18 March 2003, Blair went on to recommend a vote in favour of the deployment of UK military forces in Iraq. He made the case in the manner he was increasingly prone to do, forcefully and without caveat, but there is no reason to doubt that he

¹¹⁴ Philippe Sands, *Lawless World: Making and Breaking Global Rules* (London, 2006), pp. 272-3.

¹¹⁵ Woodward, *Plan*, p. 338.

¹¹⁶ *The Guardian*, 'US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld's comments about UK involvement in war', 12 March 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/mar/12/usa.iraq>.

¹¹⁷ Blair, *Journey*, pp. 432-3; Campbell, *Burden*, p. 491.

¹¹⁸ Campbell, *Burden*, pp. 491-2; Jack Straw, *Last Man Standing: Memoirs of a Political Survivor* (London, 2013), pp. 371-2.

¹¹⁹ Campbell, *Burden*, p. 492.

believed what he said in his opening lines. The outcome of the war in Iraq would ‘determine the way Britain and the world confront the central security threat of the 21st century; the development of the UN; the relationship between Europe and the US; the relations within the EU and the way the US engages with the rest of the world. It [would] determine the pattern of international politics for the next generation’.¹²⁰ The prime minister’s conviction compelled MPs; he won the vote and UK forces joined those of the US in the invasion of Iraq. The eventual descent of Iraq into violence and destruction and the failure to prove that it had had WMD would ensure that Blair’s conceptions and motives were widely questioned as the liberal order he sought dissolved. Yet the costs of both had already been weighed before a shot had been fired in Iraq.

On 17 March, Robin Cook, who had been Blair’s foreign secretary during the Kosovo war in 1999, resigned from the government and delivered a personal statement in the Commons. With ‘a heavy heart’, Cook reminded MPs that ‘Britain is being asked to embark on a war without agreement in any of the international bodies of which we are a leading partner – not NATO, not the European Union and, now, not the Security Council’. This was ‘a serious reverse’ because only ‘a year ago, we and the United States were part of a coalition against terrorism that was wider and more diverse than I would ever have imagined possible’. Calling upon the most significant judge, history, Cook said that it would ‘be astonished at the diplomatic miscalculations that led so quickly to the disintegration of that powerful coalition’. While the US could ‘afford to go it alone’ Britain could not because it was not a superpower. Blair would have agreed with that measure but not with Cook’s wider thesis, even though it was essentially a reassertion of the case for liberal order and multilateralism that the prime minister had promoted amid his Kosovo awakening in Chicago in 1999: ‘Our interests are best protected not by unilateral action but by a multilateral agreement and a world order governed by rules,’ Cook said. ‘Yet tonight the international partnerships most important to us are weakened: the European Union is divided; the Security Council is in stalemate. Those are heavy casualties of a war in which a shot has yet to be fired.’¹²¹

¹²⁰ Hansard, HC Deb, 18 March 2003, vol 401, cc 760-858, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/2003/mar/18/iraq>.

¹²¹ Hansard, HC Deb, 17 March 2003, vol 401, cc 726-8, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/2003/mar/17/personal-statement> ; also, Robin Cook, *The Point of Departure* (London, 2003), pp. 324-5.

Conclusion

The wars of 1999 and 2003 were products of the end of the Cold War. While both had specific origins in their moments, the greater change that produced them was the passing of a global system which had contained forces of nationalism and sectarianism within two superpower alliances. When unrestrained, those forces generated violent disintegration in the Balkans and resistance in Iraq. The consequent wars that happened there were also about international order, what form it should take, and who should lead it. Integral to these questions were others which had been pressing since 1989 but had actually been debated for much longer. Those were what role the United States should play in the world and for what purpose, and how other nations and institutions should act in response. Although the wars in Kosovo and Iraq were fought for very different reasons, in very different settings, and were separated by an epochal rupture, they were united as post-Cold War conflicts in which such matters were at stake. The dominant actors in these events were two presidents and their administrations. While the politics and periods of the Clinton and Bush presidencies were distinct, the power and interventions of their foreign and defence policies and their challenge to the existing international order of the UN Charter and UN Security Council reveal strong continuities. One significant disparity, born in part from 9/11, was the Bush administration's pursuit of a new international order. Bush was not alone in this aim; Blair stood with him, as he had done with Clinton, in the name of the doctrine of international community he had hastily announced during the Kosovo war and saw as an objective for the Iraq war.

Blair's 'awakening on foreign policy' over Kosovo was critical to the course of these events.¹²² His mix of idealism, realpolitik, self-belief and vision were ultimately too much of an awakening for Clinton. They were not for Bush, even if Blair's liberal world order was too liberal for the hardliners in his administration. Blair's post-Kosovo certainty and confidence nevertheless coalesced with Bush's determination to ensure that terrorists would not again attack the US and that America's power would be reaffirmed after what he saw as the Pearl Harbor of the new age. The prime minister's loyalty to his own idea of the world must explain his loyalty to Bush and his devotion to defeating Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime. It does not explain why he could not see the essential fault in his approach. Henry Kissinger had observed it in May 1999 when he described international reactions to American involvement

¹²² Blair, *Journey*, p. 223.

in Kosovo: ‘The paradox is that a country that thinks of itself as acting in the name of universal values is seen by too many others as acting arbitrarily, or inexplicably, or arrogantly.’¹²³ Six days after the assaults on Baghdad had begun in 2003, Blair wrote a note to Bush called ‘The Fundamental Goal’. It started by saying that this was the moment when the president could ‘define international politics for the next generation: the true post-cold war world order’. He added: ‘Our ambition is big: to construct a global agenda around which we can unite the world; rather than dividing it into rival centres of power.’ Blair’s very next point serves to illuminate his world view and its flaw: ‘The problem is that a ludicrous and distorted view of the US is clouding the enormous attractions of the fundamental goal.’¹²⁴

The history of the wars in Kosovo and Iraq suggest that world order could not be achieved via a UK-US design, especially if prosecuted by force without either multilateral support or accepted legality. That is the conclusion reached when these wars are viewed with the longer history of international affairs, international institutions and international law in mind. Claims to liberal order and universal values, to Anglo-American, Atlanticist, Western idealism, and to doctrines of supposed international community, were, especially in the methods they were pursued after 9/11, shown to be unrealistic for a post-Cold War world which was then disordered by them. A UK prime minister, however familiar with a US president, could not transcend the realities of power or get him to defend principles or promote policies which were not prioritised by his administration. He could not also expect to resolve a century’s problems of world order in one doctrine. That fact was especially true after 9/11 when the liberal intervention that Blair had sought since 1999 became a casualty of the US-led war against Iraq that he supported and when Anglo-American foreign policies were profoundly questioned. The search for order in dealing with the legacies of imperialism, World Wars and the Cold War now also had to face the Iraq War. Power politics would return and new leaders would learn, as their predecessors had done, that no individual or partnership can alone bring world order and that order itself might only ever be an ambition.

[James Ellison, 17 July 2020; revised 15 August 2020]

¹²³ Henry Kissinger, ‘New World Disorder’, *Newsweek*, 31 May 1999, p. 43.

¹²⁴ Blair to Bush, 26 March 2003, Iraq Inquiry.