

‘A WORD FULL OF TERROR TO THE BRITISH MIND’: THE BLAIR DOCTRINE AND BRITISH DEFENCE POLICY

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‘A Word Full of Terror to the British Mind’: The Blair Doctrine and British Defence Policy

STEVEN HAINES

When Tony Blair rose to speak to the Economic Club in Chicago on 22 April 1999, it was not generally to be expected that he would use the opportunity to launch a strategic policy doctrine. But that is precisely what he did. His speech was immediately seen as a significant statement framing what rapidly came to be referred to as the ‘Blair Doctrine’. He did not use that label himself, it must be said, but he certainly referred to an emerging ‘doctrine of the international community’ which was translated by commentators into the shorthand ‘Blair Doctrine’ as the speech was being delivered.

The articulation of a doctrine in this way came as a surprise. British leaders are not noted for such things. Indeed, one might even argue that the British are emotionally disinclined to be ‘doctrinaire’. As Oscar Wilde once observed, it is a ‘word full of terror to the British mind’(Holland 1993, 178). ‘Doctrine’ is often erroneously assumed to be synonymous with ‘dogma’ - and that suggests inflexibility and an absence of pragmatism. The pragmatism of Lord Palmerston, who famously stated that it was simply his duty at all times to pursue British interests, whatever they might be (Woodward 1962, 225), is regarded as more typically British. The articulation of a strategic policy doctrine could impose unhelpful constraints on action, thus endangering the pursuit of British interests. The aim must surely be to keep one’s policy options as open as possible.

This general approach is confirmed by reference to the recent history of British external policy. Where are the Attlee, Churchill, Eden, Macmillan, Home, Wilson, Heath, Callaghan, Thatcher and Major doctrines? Nothing of the sort is ever referred to in accounts of British foreign policy. While it might have been possible to convert the themes from Macmillan’s ‘Winds of Change’ speech into something approaching a strategic policy doctrine for decolonisation, it was never articulated in that way. Anthony Eden had previously developed

the ‘three unities’ in foreign policy.¹ But, even if one considers his musings as tantamount to the articulation of a doctrine, the result was more an exception that proved the rule than significant evidence of a doctrinal tendency in the framing of British external policy.

Of course, Blair’s audience that day in Chicago may well have been somewhat less surprised and more open to such a suggested doctrine than a similar audience gathered in London might have been. Students of United States foreign policy are familiar with the range of strategic doctrines promulgated by successive presidents since Harry Truman and his closest advisers came up with the Truman Doctrine (notwithstanding the early nineteenth century Monroe Doctrine, the grand-daddy of them all). The strategy of Containment, the Eisenhower Doctrine, the Johnson Doctrine, the Nixon Doctrine, the Ford Doctrine, the Carter Doctrine, the Clinton Doctrine and, the latest offering, the Bush Doctrine. These are milestones along the road of understanding America’s general strategic posture. We await the ‘Obama Doctrine’ with interest. Nor is it only US presidents who feel inclined to articulate what they or others choose to label as ‘doctrine’. Both Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Colin Powell articulated sets of criteria to be met in deciding to intervene abroad with military force. The Weinberger and Powell doctrines chime well with the most memorable aspect of Blair’s speech – that outlining similar decision-making criteria.

In the British context, Blair’s reference to doctrine was exceptional. Now, over a decade later, with his premiership well behind us, it is perhaps time to consider the impact of his message then and since. What exactly was the Blair Doctrine? Did it define British strategy during the years that followed? Does it retain any relevance today and, if so, will its legacy endure? All of these are good questions indeed.

The Doctrine of International Community

The day in Chicago when Mr Blair introduced the world to his thinking about the international community and its responsibilities, was also the twenty-ninth day of NATO’s air campaign against Serbia over Kosovo, a campaign destined to last a further fifty days. John Kampfner tells us that the appointment in the Economic Club was a long-standing commitment for Blair.

¹ Frequently described as the ‘three circles’ and often ascribed to Churchill, they were: a) the Commonwealth and Empire; b) Western Europe; and c) the United States – three unities that Eden stressed were ‘not disparate, not incompatible, but complementary’ (Rhodes James 1986, 330).

Planned before NATO's Operation Allied Force commenced, Blair was nevertheless keen to go ahead with his visit to Chicago, seeing it as an opportunity to articulate some of his broader foreign policy goals (Kampfner 2003, 50). But since NATO was fighting its first war, taking rather a lot longer over it than it should have been and, with no UN authorisation, doing so in legally contentious circumstances, it would have been surprising indeed if the speech had not contained some justification of the air campaign then in train. It did, and what it is best remembered for is Blair's list of five essential criteria for intervention (variations on a theme of Weinberger/Powell), all of which he naturally considered to be met in the case of the air campaign then underway.

Blair's Five Criteria for Military Intervention

As already noted, the most widely quoted aspect of the so-called Blair Doctrine is the extract of the Chicago speech in which he articulated his criteria for military intervention. When should one intervene and how might one decide that the time was right to do so? To quote Blair himself:

'I think we need to bear in mind five major considerations:

- First, are we sure of our case? War is an imperfect instrument for righting humanitarian distress; but armed force is sometimes the only means of dealing with dictators.
- Second, have we exhausted all diplomatic options? We should always give peace every chance, as we have in the case of Kosovo.
- Third, on the basis of a practical assessment of the situation, are there military operations we can sensibly and prudently undertake?
- Fourth, are we prepared for the long term? In the past we talked too much of exit strategies. But having made a commitment we cannot simply walk away once the fight is over; better to stay with moderate numbers of troops than return for repeat performances with large numbers.
- And finally, do we have national interests involved? The mass expulsion of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo demanded the notice of the rest of the world. But it does make a difference that this is taking place in such a combustible part of Europe.'

It was Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman of King's College, London, who came up with the five criteria, having been asked to contribute to the speech by Jonathan Powell, Blair's Downing Street chief of staff. Ideas associated with the notion of humanitarian intervention were the backdrop to this request.² As also noted, the Blair criteria were very similar in concept to the so-called Weinberger Doctrine that Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Defense had produced some years earlier.

The Weinberger Doctrine was made public in 1984 as a response to the US military's unfortunate experience in Lebanon the year before. It insisted that US forces should only be committed as a last resort measure and only then if it was in the national interest. The objectives of military intervention must be both defined and achievable, the action must have public support and the forces intervening must be of sufficient capability to ensure success. The doctrine was highly controversial at the time and was opposed by then Secretary of State George Schultz who regarded it as a rather negative product of Vietnam Syndrome – a marked reluctance to deploy US forces as an effective instrument of US power (Herring, 2008, 875). Colin Powell had been one of the authors of the Weinberger doctrine, in his then capacity as military adviser to the Secretary of Defense, and he deployed very similar thinking as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Powell's updated version of the doctrine stressed the need for the US to deploy disproportionate or overwhelming force and added a requirement for an exit strategy. He opposed US intervention in the Gulf, arguing that such involvement was not fundamental to US interests (Herring, 2008, 909).

These three groups of criteria (Weinberger, Powell and Blair) are essentially guides or frameworks for political decision-making in relation to military intervention. They point to when intervention will be considered appropriate, and when it will not. Although all three groups differ in precise content, they are also very similar. Arguably they represent statements of the obvious, or simply common sense. Indeed, they are all merely frameworks for applying pragmatism to particular sets of circumstances. Nevertheless, the actual policy results of their application may well be controversial in that one person's answers to any or all of the implied questions posed by all three groups of criteria may not be another's. There is also one very

² According to John Kampfner (Kampfner 2003, 51), some of these ideas were resulting from the work 'being done by a group called the ICISS'. This is incorrect. The ICISS was only convened to look into the issue of humanitarian intervention some months after NATO's legally ambiguous intervention in Kosovo. Kosovo and the Chicago speech preceded the ICISS's work by almost two years.

significant difference between the Weinberger and Powell doctrines on the one hand and the Blair Doctrine on the other. Whereas the first two were crafted as an intentional attempt to restrict the use of force by the US, when Blair articulated his version in Chicago his intention was quite the opposite. He was seeking a justification for Britain to use force and not a reason for not doing so. In that sense, both Weinberger and Powell were motivated by pessimism whereas Blair was optimistic about the utility of force.

While Blair's five criteria largely chimed with Weinberger/Powell he took issue with Powell's approach in important respects. Powell was concerned with defining objectives, in particular in relation to an exit strategy. Blair, was quite openly critical of this in suggesting that talk of exit strategies undermined long term goals. Indeed, his comment that it would be better to stay with moderate numbers than to return in larger numbers at a later date seemed also to contradict Powell's preference for overwhelming force at the outset. He seemed relaxed about long term commitment – quite a different approach from that of Powell.

One can, of course, expend too much energy deconstructing the various criteria. Ultimately, all three groups if applied to the same set of circumstances could conceivably return the same result. And the application of just one group to one set of circumstances by different decision makers could also produce different answers to the same set of questions. Blair's final criterion, for example, which refers to national interest, is notoriously in the eyes of the beholder and impossible to pin down definitively – a matter of opinion and not a matter of fact (except, of course in extremis). Engagement in the Balkans was in Britain's national interest as viewed by Blair. There were opponents in Britain who viewed the national interest quite differently. As for the issue of last resort and exhaustion of diplomatic options: were they really exhausted in relation to Kosovo by the Rambouillet talks? Some thought not. Four years later, in relation to Iraq, were other means effectively exhausted by the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1441(2002)? Blair clearly thought so. Neither President Chirac nor Chancellor Schroeder agreed.

Blair's Strategic Vision – or World View

Blair's five criteria are in general assumed to be the crux of the Blair Doctrine. However, we prefer to see it as existing on two levels. Clearly it is strategic, but there have traditionally been two levels within strategy: the grand strategic and the military strategic. The first, and higher, of

these is emphatically a political realm. The second is the level at which political and military decision-makers tend to interact. While the grand strategic is largely about policy, the military strategic combines both policy and military doctrine, the former being ultimately the responsibility of the political leadership of the state while the latter is ultimately the responsibility of the most senior military commanders. A simple distinction between ‘policy’ and ‘doctrine’ is that while policy will determine what the military will do, doctrine determines how the armed forces will go about doing it. There is, of course, a fundamental relationship between policy and doctrine at the military strategic level. Very obviously, the armed forces can only do what their overall capability (including their doctrine) will allow them to do - something acknowledged within the Weinberger, Powell and Blair criteria. Policy is constrained by military capability such that political decision makers should never charge the armed forces with doing something beyond their ability to deliver. The essential interaction between political decision making and military decision making for the use of force represents the fundamental relationship between political and military that defines the military strategic level. One needs to regard the Blair criteria as sitting on the policy side of that relationship. They are emphatically not, for example, to be confused with military strategic level military doctrine. When this author set about writing the UK’s military strategic level doctrine for the Armed Forces in early 2000, he never seriously considered incorporating the Blair criteria in the draft – nor did they get inserted by others as that draft went on to achieve endorsement by the Chiefs of Staff and final signature by the Chief of Defence Staff.

As a statement of an approach to policy making, the Blair criteria are perhaps best regarded as one means of operationalising a particular way of looking at the world. Blair undoubtedly had a ‘world view’ that served as a backdrop to the emergence of those criteria. Although that ‘world view’ did not constitute a grand strategy in itself, it represented the sort of thinking at the right level to serve as the essential intellectual underpinning to inform both the development of grand strategy and an approach to dealing with issues of importance in an international system understood from that perspective.

Blair’s world view has emerged over time and is not, it must be said, revealed in its entirety in the Chicago speech, although that was an important starting point.³ There were pertinent

³ Almost literally, in fact. Blair had demonstrated an almost total lack of interest in foreign affairs or defence prior to reaching Downing Street and was on a steep learning curve in his first months in office (Kampfner 2003, 9-17).

pronouncements right up to the year of his resignation as prime minister. The Chicago speech in 1999 was followed by a significant speech to the 2001 Labour Party Conference, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 (Kampfner 2003, 123). In the summer of 2003, following the invasion of Iraq, a Downing Street document was circulated among foreign leaders who were visiting London for a summit of 'progressive' governments (McSmith and Dillon 2003). Until then, each of his major pronouncements had coincided with a significant deployment of military force; subsequently, of course, all had Iraq as a backdrop.

In March 2004, he delivered a speech to his Sedgefield constituents about his approach to combating global terrorism (Blair 2004). A series of three further connected speeches, in the spring of 2006 (Blair 2006a, 2006b, 2006c), was followed by another major foreign policy statement in Los Angeles to the World Affairs Council in August of that year (Blair 2006d). Also in 2006, he published a lengthy pamphlet through the Foreign Policy Centre in which he further outlined his vision and approach to foreign affairs (Blair 2006e). Finally, in January 2007, as he was becoming increasingly conscious that his time in Downing Street was drawing to a close, he spoke onboard the Royal Navy's new amphibious warship HMS Albion to initiate what he hoped would be a vigorous debate about Britain's role within the international system (Blair 2007).

In Chicago, with Kosovo very much in mind, he made severely critical reference to Bismark's famous remark that the Balkans were not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier, and went on to state emphatically that NATO's action against Serbia over Kosovo was 'a just war, based not on any territorial ambition but on values'. Going on to speak of global interdependence and globalisation he insisted that 'We are all internationalists now' and that 'We are witnessing the beginnings of a new doctrine of the international community'. He privileged global security over national security, insisted that most Western states were not under existential threat and suggested their actions should be 'guided by a more subtle blend of mutual self interest and moral purpose in defending the values we cherish'. 'The spread of values makes us safer' and for that reason we should 'spread the values of liberty, the rule of law, human rights and an open society' – all of which would be in the national interests of liberal democratic states. Adding a note of caution, he said that the principle of non-intervention should not be jettisoned too readily but, at the same time, insisted it was no longer acceptable to assume the internal

affairs of states were necessarily the business of themselves alone. Minority rule equals illegitimacy – and illegitimacy breeds conditions that justify intervention. In July 2003 (following the Iraq invasion), he insisted that:

‘Where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect.’
(McSmith and Dillon 2003)

This, of course, reflected the conclusions of the post-Kosovo report of the Canadian initiated International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, presented to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in December 2001 (ICISS 2001).⁴ Annan’s UN reform agenda chimed well with Blair’s desire to see a general reform of international institutions. In 2003 that agenda was very much alive and there was much hope that the ambitions of the reformists would eventually prevail.

In his Sedgefield speech (Blair 2004), Blair asserted that his own thinking had begun to evolve sometime before his Chicago speech. He noted that, even before Kosovo and certainly before the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001, ‘the world’s view of the justification of military action had been changing.’ Prior to 2001 he ‘was already reaching for a different philosophy in international relations from a traditional one that (had) held sway since the treaty (sic) of Westphalia in 1648’. But September 11 was a revelation for him: ‘What had seemed inchoate came together’. Importantly, he then remarked that:

‘It may well be that under international law as presently constituted, a regime can systematically brutalise and oppress its people and there is nothing anyone can do, when dialogue, diplomacy and even sanctions fail, unless it comes within the definition of a human catastrophe.....This may be the law, but should it be?’

On the subject of the threat from terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, echoing the pre-emptive message in the US National Security Strategy of 2002, he went on to assert that:

‘we have a duty and a right to prevent the threat materialising; and we surely have a responsibility to act when a nation’s people are subjected to a regime such as

⁴ The report went on to become a source document for the Secretary General’s High Level Panel and was influential in the report that Kofi Annan presented to world leaders at the World Summit in 2005.

Saddam's'....It means getting the UN to understand that faced with the threats we have, we should do all we can to spread the values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law, religious tolerance and justice for the oppressed, however painful for some nations that may be: but that at the same time, we wage war relentlessly on those who would exploit racial and religious division to bring catastrophe to the world.'

In his 2006 speeches Blair railed against the mainstream world view, which he characterised as a doctrine of 'benign inactivity. In contrast to this he called for 'a policy of engagement not isolation; and one that is active and not reactive'. Progressive views (related to the neo-conservatism of the right) he saw as stronger and more effective at dealing with the world's new problems than mainstream conservatism, which viewed interventionism as 'dangerous and deluded' and believed that 'provided dictators don't threaten our citizens directly, what they do with their own, is up to them.' 'Progressives are stronger on the challenges of poverty, climate change and trade policies.'

As a final thought, before he gave up office in 2007, in his speech onboard HMS Albion (a significant platform for the launching of expeditionary warfare) he called for a debate about Britain's future world role. He pleaded for a military posture geared to war fighting rather than merely peacekeeping. He talked of the new security context in which 'Our armed forces will be deployed in the lands of other nations far from home', combating global threats that can only be countered with a strong combination of hard and soft power. The debate he called for was about how Britain should respond to these threats and contribute to their defeat. Would it be benign inactivity, as he had previously called it or would it be a strong and influential combination of effective hard and soft power, incorporating what he had called progressive pre-emption in his FPC pamphlet? (Blair 2006e, 9) In other words, should Britain continue to be an influential great power, with all that implied, and an activist one at that, leading from the front and influencing the development of the international system for the benefit of all, or should it retreat from that status and merely follow? He may have been calling for a debate, but he was very clear on which side he placed himself – progressive not benign.

In summary, Blair's world view is liberal and interventionist. Ideologically committed to the liberal approach to international affairs, his pronouncements while prime minister pointed to a firm belief in the responsibility of liberal democratic states to accept the burden of advancing that cause - and to be activists in its pursuit. A noticeable strand of idealism permeates through

these pronouncements. Blair is undoubtedly an optimist who believes in the possibility of progress towards a better world - and an activist who believes that all right thinking liberals should take positive action to achieve such change.

It is, of course, entirely possible to be an optimistic idealist while remaining passive. Indeed, there is a strong element of liberal philosophy that suggests that the condition within states is rightly the preserve of those inhabiting them. One can either see intervention as depriving citizens of the right to determine their own future without interference or as forcible change imposed by external agents providing a recipe for failure – if a people are not themselves ready or able to effect change, it is most unlikely they will be able to sustain it without supportive force once it is imposed.⁵ An alternative world view is based on a pessimistic attitude to progress. The world is the way it is because human nature makes it that way – while change is inevitable, positive change in a particular direction should not be anticipated or predicted. Pessimism certainly breeds realism, however, and the naturally realist are emphatically pragmatic. Even if personally committed to liberal democratic ideals, the pragmatist would not regard it as by any means essential actively to impose those ideals on others. Indeed, he would regard it as essential not to intervene for reasons of order.

In managing the international system the pessimistic and pragmatic realist seeks order before justice because order can be imposed while justice can only emerge in an ordered world. The optimistic idealist, in contrast pursues order through justice. One of the great dilemmas of international politics is the search for both order and justice. A combination of the two would be wonderful. But is it possible? Perhaps not, for while order is a matter of fact, justice will invariably be a matter of opinion; one can be objective about order but only subjective about what is just. British policy has traditionally sought order before justice, despite a commitment to the idea of liberal democratic progress. Hence the enduring influence of Palmerston. Blair would place Palmerston firmly in the Westphalian past.

The Blair Doctrine and British Defence Policy

⁵ The non-interventionist views of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill are of relevance here. See, for example, John Vincent's classic study of non-intervention (Vincent 1974)

While Blair's world view and his determination that liberal interventionism should be the guiding basis for British military activism became very clear as his premiership progressed, they were not reflected in anything tangible or explicit in terms of overarching strategy. What were explicit were the five Chicago criteria, constituting what can be described as a military strategic level means of operationalising that world view. Indeed, if they are taken in isolation from that world view they are arguably relatively meaningless – just five questions that might produce widely differing answers depending on the identity and instincts of those providing them. It was Blair's greater vision – optimistic, activist and committed to achieving a better world - which rendered his five criteria distinct from the similar criteria articulated by Weinberger and Powell. His optimism prompted a desire to utilise force just as their pessimism caused them to advocate reigning in interventionist tendencies elsewhere in the US administrations in which they served. So the totality of the Blair Doctrine is best seen as the five criteria for intervention set against the world view – the latter shaping the likely answers to the questions those criteria served to posit. The question is, to what extent did the Blair Doctrine in the round actually influence the formulation and direction of policy?

In 1997, two years before Kosovo and the Chicago speech, the new Labour Government had ordered a full review of Defence Policy. The subsequent Strategic Defence Review (SDR) has gained a reputation for having been one of the most thorough in memory, for being one of the most open, with much opinion being sought from outside government, for being foreign policy led and based on a clear assessment of the international security environment (ie not merely driven by budgetary considerations), and for marking a significant shift towards genuinely joint approaches to operations. The author believes there to be substantial flaws in most of these claims, although this is not the place to expand on them.⁶ Suffice it to say that the SDR process was well managed and its public projection benefited from sound presentation. Certainly there was a noticeable (and commendable) attempt to ensure that what was decided for defence would chime with the Government's approach to foreign policy.

The latter had been articulated immediately after the election, by Foreign Secretary Robin Cook in his Foreign and Commonwealth Office Mission Statement. In the brief speech he used

⁶ The author, who was serving in the MoD at the time, would challenge most, if not all, such claims.

to launch this, Cook remarked that in this ‘age of internationalism’ one of the goals of Labour’s foreign policy would be:

‘to secure the respect of other nations for Britain’s contribution to keeping the peace of the world and promoting democracy around the world.....Our foreign policy must have an ethical dimension and must support the demands of other people for the democratic rights on which we insist for ourselves. The Labour Government will put human rights at the heart of our foreign policy....(Cook 1997)’

George Robertson, Labour’s first Secretary of State for Defence, in his introduction to the SDR published in July 1998 stated that:

‘The British are by instinct an internationalist people. We believe that as well as defending our rights we should discharge our responsibilities in the world. We do not want to stand idly by and watch humanitarian disasters as the aggression of dictators goes unchecked. We want to give a lead. We want to be a force for good.’(MoD 1998, 4)

The SDR itself went on to reiterate this theme in its text, mentioning the need for Britain to be a force for good and stressing the ‘immense importance’ attached to the ‘international community as a whole, working together through the many international organisations, above all the United Nations’ with one of the eight defined missions of the Armed Forces being ‘Peace Support and Humanitarian Operations’ (MoD 1998, 7).

In the 1999 Defence White Paper there was further reference to Britain having ‘a responsibility to act as a force for good in the world’ and the Armed Forces’ very existence was stated as being ‘to make the world a safer, better place.’ The text went on to state that:

‘as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council and a country both willing and able to play a leading role internationally, we have an important wider interest in supporting international order and in promoting freedom, democracy and prosperity.’(MoD 1999, 6)

Despite this document being drafted in the months following Kosovo and the Chicago speech, there was no real hint of the Blair Doctrine in its text. This is especially notable. The first occasion on which a major defence policy statement was being published following the Chicago speech would have been perhaps the most obvious point at which to endorse what the Prime Minister had said. One would have thought that from a presentational point of view the five criteria would have been a most apposite insert to the white paper.

A further publication in February 2001 outlined the future strategic context. This also contained nothing especially significant that could be construed as reflective of the Blair Doctrine, which, by then, had been a subject for public discussion for almost two years. While it is important to stress that these post-SDR publications were not reflecting major reviews of Defence – they were merely periodic restatements of the existing policy promulgated in SDR, or statements supportive of it – it might nevertheless strike one as odd that they were devoid of any reference to the Blair Doctrine, in particular the five criteria.

Following the 11 September 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, the MoD set about the production of what it called a ‘new chapter’ of the SDR. The implication here was that while the SDR still stood, an additional chapter reflecting some consideration of international terrorism would be appropriate. In fact, the New Chapter work certainly had the feel of a mini-defence review for those of us who were serving on the Central Staff at the time. The results of this mini-review were published in July of 2002; the New Chapter contained no material making any direct reference to the Blair Doctrine or, indeed, anything that could be construed as reflecting its distinctive features (MoD 2002). Following the invasion of Iraq the Government published a further white paper in December 2003. Still there was no specific mention of or reference to the Blair Doctrine (MoD 2003). One must of course admit that the 2003 white paper, in envisaging an overall military capability to mount short-term high and low intensity operations up to divisional level was, in its substance, not inconsistent with the ambitions encapsulated within the Blair Doctrine (Cornish and Dorman 2009). But why no mention?

Since 2003 the Government has effectively abandoned the past practice of regular (usually annual) white papers on Defence and has instead opted to produce periodic policy papers on issues of significance (those on the Defence Industrial Strategy (MoD 2005) and on the future of Trident (MoD 2006) being examples). Very obviously, the conduct of the operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq have been a major pre-occupation. So too has been a decision to produce a national security strategy, from which one might expect a restatement of defence policy to flow. In fact, the so-called *National Security Strategy* when it was published in 2008 was revealed as very little more than an extremely wide threat assessment, with nothing remotely approaching a coherent ‘strategy’ for dealing with the threats described therein (MoD 2008). Indeed, it is difficult to see how anyone could possibly arrive at a single strategy for dealing with such a broad range of threats. This document was the first of those mentioned that post-dated the Blair

premiership. Arguably, if Blair's world view had had any impact of an enduring nature at all, it might have been expected that the very first national security strategy document produced in Whitehall would have made mention of it. While the five criteria sat most appropriately at the level of defence policy, the broader world view would have sat very comfortably in an overarching national security strategy document.

The Influence of the Blair Doctrine

The most remarkable feature of the collection of policy statements since 1997, and up to date, is that none of them reflect the apparently passionate intensity of Blair's formulation of his grand strategic world view. And nowhere is there any mention of the five criteria for military intervention articulated in Chicago in 1999. There is scant read across from the Prime Minister's speeches into defence policy statements. For the Blair Doctrine not to get any mention in periodic defence policy statements seems stark evidence of its lack of influence. Significant mention of 'internationalism' and Britain and its armed forces acting as a positive 'force for good', was contained in the earliest documents examined, and there is arguably more evidence to support the influence in those of Robin Cook's ideas than those of Tony Blair. Indeed, they are, on reflection, signposts pointing in the direction in which Tony Blair went as he became increasingly involved with the international dimension of his job and came to his own understanding of the nature of the international system. This suggests that Blair, almost entirely new to foreign affairs in 1997, was initially influenced by the internationalism displayed by his Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook. Kosovo was a turning point, however. From that point on Blair assumed the leading role, with Cook losing influence. As Oliver Daddow has observed, after Kosovo Blair was 'a more confident, proactive leader genuinely committed to grounding British foreign policy in the theory of liberal interventionism' (Daddow 2009, 548)

Blair was a prime minister securely in office for ten years, a winner of three general elections and the most successful Labour leader ever, a major international figure and a statesman of significance. There is some justification, therefore, in asking ourselves what led to his pronouncements on international affairs and the utility of military force in pursuit of an activist interventionist agenda being apparently ignored in formally promulgated policy documents.

By way of contrast, if the president of the US were to make a similar series of speeches to those referred to above, they would more than likely have a notable influence on the national

security strategy emanating from the White House and the single service strategies emanating from the Pentagon. It is verging on inconceivable that a presidential world view and articulation of principles for military intervention would have been effectively ignored by branches of the US Government in the way that the Blair Doctrine seems to have been in Whitehall. This is despite the fact that US presidents frequently find themselves checked in their power and influence by powerful forces within Congress – which, unlike a British prime minister in relation to Parliament, they emphatically do not dominate through the mechanisms of tight party discipline.

The British prime minister is powerful and influential in relation to Parliament, but noticeably weaker in relation to his own colleagues. His cabinet is not a collection of appointees entirely dependent on him for their positions. Whereas a US cabinet member (the Secretary of Defense, for example) will be a presidential appointee and placeman, there to serve the president, a British cabinet minister is usually a figure of political substance – possibly even a rival – whose direction of his or her department may well be a means of exercising significant influence. There is a limit to the extent to which prime ministers can simply direct cabinet members to do their bidding. Constitutionally, the prime minister is a *primus inter pares* within the Cabinet. A US president is constitutionally in a much more revered and powerful position relative to cabinet colleagues. A presidential command or directive carries constitutionally significantly greater weight than a prime ministerial decision or expressed preference about policy. This has effect at lower levels. Whereas, the Pentagon would feel obliged to reflect the substance of presidential speeches in strategic policy papers, the MoD in London is not so tied.

Another factor to be taken into account is that while the top end officialdom within US departments are largely political appointees, holding their positions because they have been so appointed by or on behalf of the president, the top officials in Whitehall are almost all career civil servants who may well have held the same position under the previous government. Permanent officials are responsible for the drafting of major policy documents; they are less inclined than would be political appointees to fill them with text reflective of a party leader's prejudices. The staffing processes by which key policy documents (such as defence white papers) achieve departmental endorsement are almost entirely driven by officials, with ministers having little opportunity to shape the end product. It is not too strong a claim to make that the totality of officialdom in the MoD tends towards pragmatism rather more so than idealism. The collective product of their labour tends, not surprisingly, to reflect that

It is important to make these points because one detects a tendency among pundits and political ‘scientists’ to overstress the extent to which government has become more ‘presidential’ in recent years, that political appointees within the ranks of officialdom in government departments have greatly increased in number and influence, and that even cabinet ministers no longer wield the same power and influence that once they might. These shifts may well have occurred and may even seem seismic to those closest in time and space to them. But when processes in Britain are contrasted with processes in Washington, for example, the distinct British political realities are seen in different light. Very obviously, the style of government does change from administration to administration, but there are some enduring verities. The prime minister is emphatically not the president of the US and experiences both the advantages and disadvantages of that truth. One prime minister may be more a chair of equals in cabinet while another may lord it over colleagues. Yet another – and this is reputedly the case with Mr Blair – may well exclude cabinet colleagues by forming small cabals of favoured ministers and Downing Street advisers, or may engage in surprisingly informal forms of decision making on his office sofa. Nevertheless, the reality remains that no prime minister can assume that his or her philosophical musings will filter inexorably down into major, formally endorsed and published policy statements. For this to happen requires a conviction on the part of cabinet colleagues and their determination, in turn, to insist on this within their departments. There is no reference in any of the sources consulted of any measure of cabinet discussion of the Blair Doctrine. This may, paradoxically, be one of the reasons why it had legs for some observers of the political scene but failed to gain traction in the deeper recesses of government.

Finally, one needs to appreciate precisely what periodic defence white papers and other related documents are actually for. They are partly an element of the government’s approach to public relations, partly an intra-departmentally negotiated set of literary hooks for the services’ desired equipment programmes, and only partly about national strategy. Over the last thirty or forty years, the content and substance of white papers has been progressively reduced to the point where they are now relatively thin and ‘glossy’ documents consisting largely of a series of brief paragraphs and bullet points – with at times the right looking set of bullets having the appearance of being produced before the policy has been fleshed out around them. They are not invariably substantial statements of strategic intent. Surprisingly, despite Blair’s five criteria for

military intervention representing what might have been regarded as a useful set of bullets, they still found no way into a major policy document.

The conclusion one is inexorably drawn to is that the Blair Doctrine obtained no recognisable form of endorsement in the formal policy process within government. Some have argued that the Blair Doctrine was a 'fully fledged doctrine'; others believe it 'hardly qualifies as a fully worked out doctrine' (Daddow 2009, 548-549). Clearly this author is more inclined to the latter assessment than he is to the former.

Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that it had no impact at all. While it did not influence the writing of formal policy documents, it would be most surprising if a world view as strongly articulated as Blair's had had no discernible influence on the decisions he made; of course it did.

Conclusions

There is no doubt whatsoever that the Blair government was one of the most militarily interventionist of post-Second World War British administrations. Military actions against Iraq, against Serbia, in Sierra Leone, and in Afghanistan have been the subject of much analysis, debate and both domestic and international controversy. The key question is not, therefore, about the extent to which Blair was generally prepared to deploy the military instrument but rather about the extent to which such interventions that did take place were consistent with the principles under-pinning his doctrine.

It is perfectly possible to posit an argument that all 'Blair's wars' were consistent with his articulated doctrine. One could run through the main features of his world view and tick off the elements of it that were reflected in his decisions to deploy military force, and the five criteria can also be interpreted in ways that would confirm this. Notwithstanding this, it cannot be denied that some British military interventions were undoubtedly more consistent than others with the idealism and humanitarianism that were such important themes in the Chicago speech and the other principal sources quoted above.

Both Kosovo and Sierra Leone seem strongly to fit the bill – Kosovo as the backdrop when Blair originally enunciated his ideas, and Sierra Leone, which seemed to confirm his thinking by its immediate military success. Both served to persuade many that there was something of substance in his approach. Both were strongly altruistically humanitarian in motive, rather than

governed purely by British self interest. But in the aftermath of 9/11, there was a noticeable shift in emphasis away from the idea of doing good towards taking action in expressed defence of the national interest. This is not to imply criticism necessarily; it is merely an observation. Indeed, many in Britain and abroad (including this author) were strongly in favour of the decision to join the US in the intervention against the Taliban and al-Quaida in Afghanistan. The real schism in opinion emerged with the decision to join the US in the invasion of Iraq.

That invasion was a real test for the Blair Doctrine – a test which arguably it not only failed but which also effectively destroyed it (although, to be consistent with other statements above, this is admittedly a matter of opinion). Iraq was not an intervention for humanitarian purpose. As for general internationalist motives, the distortion of international law by the British Government in the process of justifying its involvement, put paid to any claims by Blair that he was supportive of the UN (although, to be fair, he had challenged the value of the law as it stood and had also been critical of an unreformed UN).

In the context of the Blair Doctrine – including the wider vision that underpinned it - the real impact of Iraq was not these concerns, however, but its opportunity cost. If Britain's armed forces had not been so consumed with the effort in Iraq, it would have been possible to maintain a much higher commitment in Afghanistan. Even more dramatically in tune with the idealistic rhetoric behind the Blair Doctrine, it may alternatively also have been possible for Britain to deploy serious military capability elsewhere, including into Darfur – even if a Chinese veto in the Security Council would have meant intervention without a Security Council mandate, resulting in a very similar 'illegal but legitimate' justification to that argued in the case of Kosovo (Haines 2009).

It is ironic that a doctrine born out of humanitarian motive against a backdrop of an illegal but arguably legitimate intervention in Kosovo, should be sacrificed in an illegal and illegitimate invasion of Iraq, almost at the same time that a genuine and massive humanitarian catastrophe was unfolding in Sudan. The experience of Iraq may also have had the longer term effect of reducing public support for the very sort of progressive pre-emption that Blair was advocating in his various articulations of his world view. One may, of course, be wrong about this; the British people as a whole are not generally inclined to oppose the use of the military instrument or regret too much the loss of British military lives in genuinely heroic endeavour. But it is certainly worth asking the question: following the war in Iraq, would an intervention in Sudan today,

without UN Security Council mandate, obtain the majority support of the Cabinet, of Parliament or of the voting public in general? One hopes that it might but fears it would not. The tragedy for Blair is that the world view he so passionately advocated was ultimately undermined by the war he so passionately pursued. On the evidence to date, it is our conclusion that the Westphalian world has survived for now - and for Britain it is Palmerston's rather than Blair's instinct that prevails.

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