What did tony blair achieve?

Environment, Air

\n[toc title="Table of Contents"]\n

\n \t

\n[/toc]\n \n

Abstract

Tony Blair's foreign policy can be divided into two phases, the first broadly successful and the second afailure. The Labour government'sNorthern Irelandpeace settlement and the formation of Blair's ' humanitarian interventionist' doctrine in Kosovo andSierra Leone, can be regarded as successful. A far less successful five years followed from 2002 as a result of the support provided for George Bush's invasion ofIraqand for the whole ' war on terror' agenda. The early successes were overshadowed by the political costs associated with an unpopular war.

Introduction

The Labour Party's foreign policy during the years of the Blair governments can be judged in a variety of ways, including the verdict of the media and the response of voters. Rather than seek an objective test, this essay will follow the line of Buller (2008) that political success is defined as the achievement of one's owngoalsthrough politics. Labour trumpeted an ethical foreign policy in its early years, as elucidated by Foreign Secretary Robin

Cook (1997). Security, promotion of trade and protection of theenvironmentwere the other three principles of the policy. I will show how this early vision, although difficult to fulfil within the constraints imposed by international power politics and economic self-interest, did achieve some successes. It will then show how this framework evolved into Tony Blair's doctrine of ' intervention' as defined by Blair at the Chicago Economic Club (Blair, 1999).

Body

The ethical foreign policy was an attempt to bring New Labour'sThird Waydoctrine, evolved primarily for domestic policy, to the international arena (Wheeler and Dunne, 1998). A ' Third Way' foreign policy would break with both traditional realism and its opposite doctrine, idealism, by promotinghuman rightswhile at the same time recognizing that ' terrible moral choices have sometimes to be made' in international affairs (Hedley Ball 1983). Wheeler and Dunne (1998) raised the possibility that the pursuit of human rights could lead to action outside the accepted channels of deploying military force only with sanction of the UN security council. This issue would become paramount in the run-up to the war withIraqand lead to Cook's resignation from the government.

Early successes of this doctrine had the effect of reinforcing Blair's conviction that he, rather than Foreign Office advisors or other members of the government, knew the right course (Daddow, 2009). Blair led the charge of NATO to take military action againstYugoslaviato prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo. The success of this policy can be judged by the

relative peace and security now seen in Kosovo and the Balkans. Blair later explained how he saw modern wars as being fought on television as much as on the ground (PBS, 2000). Blair was a successful propagandist and, as seen later in the run-up to theIraqwar, he became the public face of the new wars of intervention.

In Blair's first term, the government could justifiably claim a historic success in theNorthern Irelandpeace process, which was concluded with the Good Friday agreement of 1998. The peace deal was achieved with the support ofDublinandWashington, as well as the republican and loyalist parties to the conflict in Northern Ireland (BBC).

In Europe, Labour broke with Conservative Euro-scepticism and sought greater influence forBritainwithin the EU. Bulmer (2008) describes the schizophrenia of what he calls Labour's utilitarian supranationalism which was exposed in the two manifesto pledges on European policy: to hold a referendum on participation in the single currency; and to lead reform in the EU (Labour Party, 1997). At the Lisbon Summit in 2000 theUKhad considerable influence on the treaty document which set out to transformEuropeinto ' the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010' (European Council, 2000). TheUK's voting weight in the Council of Europe was also increased to 29. Chancellor Gordon Brown's five economic tests forBritain's participation in the single currency dominated Labour's relations withEuropeduring the second Blair government (2001–5). However, theIraqwar caused a split betweenBritainand its key European allies, France andGermany, and made it much more difficult

forBritainto maintain constructive relations with EU partners. Brown's grip on the euro policy also pushed Blair further toward interventionist policies overseas where he had full control over policy.

Rasmussen (2003) describes Blair using a hegemonic western metanarrative about

security and peace-building and warning against letting dictators go unchallenged. While it can be argued that this idea worked successfully in the Kosovo intervention and when Blair sent British forces to fight rebels inSierra Leone, it was less successful inAfghanistan, and disastrous inIraq. InAfghanistanthere was broad international support for the war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Such a consensus was absent for the invasion ofIraq. The war aim was the removal of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. When the invading forces failed to find these, the occupation's raison d'etre was changed to one of lifting the tyranny of the regime and bringing democracy toIraq. Plant (2008) argues that Blair misjudged the motivations of hisUScounterpart, seeing a liberal ally where there was really an economic realist concerned with national interest.

Blair set out five tests of intervention in his Chicago speech (1999): are we sure of our case, has diplomacy been exhausted, are we in for the long term, are national interests involved, can military operations be sensibly and prudently undertaken. One can argue that these tests were not met inIraq. Blair not only faced mass public opposition to the war, he also began to lose support within his own party. This culminated in a revolt over the government's support forIsrael'sLebanoninvasion of 2006. It was following

this crisis that Blair was compelled to commit to stand down as Prime

Minister, making way for Gordon Brown.

Conclusion

After 9/11, Blair's confidence in his own Biblical vision of intervention of good

against evil (Seldon, 2005) led to an unshakeable alliance with George W

Bush. This would tie the Labour government into support for a divisive and

increasingly unpopular foreign policy. By associating so closely with

aUSPresident widely seen as pursuing narrow party and economic interests

against world public opinion, Blair's foreign policy became a poison chalice

for the Labour government that ultimately sealed his own fate as Prime

Minister and overshadowed earlier foreign policy successes.

REFERENCES

BBC News (1998) On This Day, 10/04/98 http://news. bbc. co.

uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/10/newsid_2450000/2450823. stm

Blair, A. (1999) ' Doctrine of The International Community', Speech to

theChicago Economic Club, Chicago.

Tony Blair (2000) War in Europe, Frontline Interviews, PBS.

http://www. pbs. org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/interviews/blair.

html

Bull, H. (1983) ' Justice in International Relations', Hagey Lectures, University

of Waterloo, Ontario.

Buller, J. (2008) ' New Labour and the European Union' in Beech, M. And Lee, S. Ten Years of New Labour. (Palgrave Macmillan, UK)

Bulmer, S. (2008) ' New Labour, New European PolicyBlair, Brown and Utilitarian Supranationalism' Oxford Journals, Parliamentary Affairs.

Robin Cook Speech on Ethical Foreign Policy, The Guardian, 12/05/97

http://www. guardian. co. uk/world/1997/may/12/indonesia. ethicalforeignpolicy

Daddow, O. (2009) ' Tony's war'Blair, Kosovo and the interventionist impulse in British foreign policy', International Affairs.

European Parliament (2000) ' LisbonEuropean Council Presidency Conclusions', 23-24 March 2000

http://www. europarl. europa. eu/summits/lis1_en. htm

Labour Party (1997) ' New Labour: Because Britain Deserves Better' (Labour Party, London)

Malmvig, H. (2006) State Sovereignty and Intervention: A Discourse Analysis of Interventionary and Non-Interventionary Practices in Kosovo andAlgeria. (Routledge, UK)

Rasmussen, M. V. (2003) ' The history of a lesson: Versailles, Munichand the social construction of the past', Review of International Studies.

Seldon. A. (2005) ' Blair' (Free Press, NY)

Walmer, N. and Dunne, T. (1998) ' Good International Citizenship: A Third

Wayfor British Foreign Policy', International Affairs