

Security, territorial borders and British Iraq policy: buying a Blair way to heaven?

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Abstract

This paper looks at the development of British government policy towards Iraq in the run up to and during the war of 2003 with particular focus on the territorial borders of Iraq. The paper argues that, in contrast to what we might expect from the perspective of classical geopolitics, the issue of the location of Iraq's borders was largely taken for granted by the UK government. The territorial integrity of Iraq was repeatedly asserted by British ministers, including the Prime Minister, Tony Blair. However, the paper suggests that this disguises an important and potentially significant challenge to the role that territorial borders played in the Iraq crisis and conflict, and this is connected to wider changes in thinking about territorial borders in international politics that have characterised the Labour government's foreign policy thinking. This challenge sees territorial borders' significance more in terms of the nature of the regime they help to delimit than the geopolitical significance of their location. Also, the respect to be given to those borders is significantly influenced by the willingness and ability of that regime to contribute to dominant political and politico-economic agendas, including democracy, human rights, counter-terrorism and economic liberalisation. It is argued that policy towards Iraq demonstrates effectively this distinctive approach developed by the UK government, and points to weaknesses as well as strengths of adopting such a position on one of the most important institutions of the international system.

Introduction

The 2003 invasion of Iraq was immensely controversial, and continues to stimulate debate and analysis on a wide range of issues. The (il)legality of the invasion, the motivations behind it, the conduct of operations in terms of civilian casualties, the political ramifications for the states involved in the coalition, the fate and state of the United Nations, the impact on terrorism and anti-

proliferation and a host of other issues could, and have been, discussed. This paper aims to contribute to this debate, but to offer a different analysis from those which focus on the stories behind the policy-making processes and reasoning behind the conflict, on the conduct of military operations, or on the options in the post-war environment.

Instead, this paper looks at the way in which the UK government, led by Prime Minister Tony Blair, attempted to situate the war against Iraq into a broader sweep of its foreign policy ambitions and, in particular, how Iraq was located in relation to what were seen as an ongoing set of connected and important transformations in the nature of international politics. Whilst the UK was very much a junior partner to the United States in the Iraq war, its policy is interesting, and potentially significant, because of the way in which Blair saw Iraq as being indicative of these transformations. This, at least so we argue, marks the UK's policy out from that of the US, where the dominance of the neo-conservatives in the George W. Bush Administration causes observers to see its actions in terms of the world's preponderant power using that power to pursue perceived national security interests in fairly classic geo-political ways. This was spiced by the idea of Iraq being part of a global 'war on terror' and the Administration's efforts to connect Saddam Hussein to the attacks of 11 September 2001, and also by the use of appeals to freedom and democracy for the Iraqi people. However, the 'neo-con' agenda in Iraq was more focused on classic security issues of counter-proliferation, counter-terrorism, regional stability, security of access to resources and other themes familiar from a realist theory of international relations and a traditional approach to the geo-politics of the region.¹

Blair's arguments were often similar, in terms of appealing to the same issues of counter-proliferation, regional stability, counter-terrorism and so on, yet he put them together in a distinctive

way, that enabled him to make stronger connections to the ideas of democracy and human rights in Iraq, and, most interestingly, to globalization. There are those who argue that this portrayal of the significance of Iraq in a pattern of wider and globally significant transformations amounts to little more than wishful thinking, or even self-delusion, on the Prime Minister's part, and thus his views can be dismissed without any further ado.² Alternatively, the inequity of the 'special relationship' with the US meant that Blair's belief in 'public support and private candour' was seen in the US only in terms of public support, with the candid advice listened, too and then, generally, ignored.³

Yet the arguments put forward by Blair and other leading members of the UK government stand as the principal justifications for a policy of war in Iraq by a permanent member of the Security Council and one of the world's leading military and economic powers. As such they are worthy of serious consideration. This is the case even though subsequent events have shown pre-war claims on issues such as Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to be almost wholly inaccurate. Whilst many in the anti-war campaign have argued that the UK government knew its claims regarding Iraq's WMD to be false prior to the war, resulting in Tony Blair being styled 'Tony B-Liar', definitive evidence of this has not emerged, despite several enquiries into such claims.⁴

Discussing all aspects of the way the UK government characterized its policy on Iraq would not be possible in a paper of this length, particularly given the intention to explore the ways in which the UK government understood Iraq in the context of wider changes in the nature and conduct of international relations. Instead, the paper looks at the role of Iraq's territorial borders, arguing that this offers a valuable way to illustrate the extent and depth of claims about the transformation of international politics that underpinned the UK government's policy, offering a device for exploring the political and normative theory of international relations that has been developed and advocated

by the UK government in a series of key statements and in the context of crises dating back at least to Kosovo in 1999. Territorial borders are a good way to do this because of the way in which they are often seen as being amongst the most fixed and stable concepts in international relations, and one of the bedrocks of the sovereign states-system. An effort to portray these in ways other than these classic 'Westphalian' terms therefore points in the direction of a wider and deeper effort to consider changes in the international system more generally. As such, the place, conceptualization and significance of territorial borders offers something of a 'barometer' for gauging the distinctiveness of the UK government's argument.

As a result, the paper hopefully looks behind the debates over policy-making, policy-implementation, intelligence failings and so on to consider the deeper political and geo-political issues that the UK government's policy raises and the potential insights into this available from bringing to bear some of the analytical tools that international relations and political geography, particularly critical geopolitics, can offer.

The paper proceeds in five main sections. The first of these briefly outlines a traditional understanding of the role of territorial borders in international relations. It serves as a backdrop designed to highlight the nature and extent of the claims underpinning the UK government's position that help to mark it out as worthy of consideration. It also briefly considers some of the alternative backdrops available, and explains why they are less appropriate in this situation. The second section looks at how the UK government downplayed the question of Iraq's borders in the run-up to and during the Iraq war. This emphasizes how issues that a traditional conception might expect to be prominent were absent. The third section of the paper argues this means we need to look at the alternative conception of the nature and role of territorial borders implicit in the UK

government's policy, and places this in the context of other foreign policy initiatives launched by the Blair government. This leads to the fourth section of the paper's emphasis on the connection between territorial borders and the Iraqi regime's willingness and ability to contribute to Western notions of legitimate authority and responsible membership of the international community. Finally, the paper, draws some wider lessons for the changing role of territorial borders in the UK government's understanding of the nature of a post-Cold War and post-9/11 international order. This lays much greater emphasis on non-territorialized processes, from global capitalism to global terrorism, and thus a reduced need to uphold the traditional understanding of the role of territorial borders in the maintenance of international order via doctrines such as territorial integrity and non-intervention.

1. Traditional conceptions of borders and security in international relations

The role of territorial borders, and most especially their location, is one of the most pervasive causes of military conflict.⁵ Their drawing and re-drawing is one of the persistent features of post-conflict treaties and settlements.⁶ Fights for land are seen as lying behind more wars and conflicts than any other cause in the last three hundred years.⁷ Such conflicts persist today, of course, although there are those who argue that such disputes are increasingly meaningless in the advanced, post-industrial, post-national or even post-modern parts of the world.⁸

Territorial borders are therefore traditionally conceived of as part of the war *problematique* in international relations.⁹ Not only are they the cause of so many wars and conflicts, but they are especially intractable causes, too.¹⁰ This is linked, in this traditional geopolitical conception, to their foundational role in sovereignty. The idea, or ideal, of sovereignty is inextricably linked to a

territorially specific and precise zone of final political authority.¹¹ Sovereignty as domestic supremacy and international autonomy over a particular portion of the earth's surface makes the very existence of the state dependent on the exclusive possession of land. Threats to the location of territorial borders, through secession, irredentism or neighbourly aggrandizement, are therefore threats to the existence of the state.

Territorial borders are thus intimately connected to ideas of military security and political stability.¹² The geopolitical tradition stretching from Mackinder and Mahan through to a contemporary figure like Saul Cohen emphasizes this aspect of borders.¹³ It tends to essentialize this aspect, too, ascribing notions such as 'heartland' and 'shatterbelt' to particular regions, seeing them playing unchanging roles as a result of geographical location.¹⁴ Border movements in such regions are especially dangerous because they threaten the stability of a whole region, contributing to the international norm against border changes.¹⁵ Here, geo-politics and realist international relations are in accord: the border questions that matter are those that raise military security questions.¹⁶

Nevertheless, historically this has not prevented innumerable efforts at addressing regional stability questions through the creation or re-location of territorial borders between states. Whether by colonial fiat, such as at Berlin in 1884-5; through judicial process, such as efforts to resolve the border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 2003; or through force of arms, as at Vienna in 1815 or Versailles and its associated treaties in 1919, seeking to address the cause of conflict and war through adjusting or creating territorial borders is a temptation the international community has found it difficult to resist. Since 1945, though, there has been a general presumption against altering the location of territorial borders, save with the express consent of the parties involved.¹⁷ Even when secession or state dissolution has proved impossible to prevent, most notably in the

period since 1989, the international community has made great efforts to insist that previously internal borders, such as those of the federal republics of the former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union, provide successor states with their international, sovereign borders. Territorial aggrandizement, such as that attempted by Iraq in 1990 or Serbia between 1991 and 1995 has been rejected as an acceptable form of international political conduct.

This kind of traditional position has, of course, been subject to sustained intellectual critique for over a decade from political geography, critical geopolitics and international relations.¹⁸ This border literature has argued that a static portrayal of territorial borders as fences between states reifies what ought to be seen as dynamic and changing patterns of behaviour organised around the lines on the map, yet linked to wider social practices and meanings. As a result, the potential for the changing significance of borders is always immanent. Nevertheless, the traditional view remains powerful and widely held in popular political debate and within the still dominant realist view of international relations and associated security studies.

In particular, two areas where borders are at play, and in which their role as fences between sovereignties has been challenged have attracted great interest in recent years. These are the ideas of humanitarian intervention and of failed or 'quasi' states.¹⁹ In both the role of borders in marking the limits of a state's claims to domestic supremacy have been questioned. For instance, in the case of humanitarian intervention, the idea that a state's government may treat its population in any manner it chooses has been called into question. The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, to take a leading example, argues in its report 'Responsibility to Protect' that such an appeal to the principle of non-intervention must be contingent on the state's observation of certain minimum and universal human rights standards.²⁰ Where it fails to do so and

a major humanitarian crisis ensues, the international community may have a responsibility to intervene, crossing borders in the face of the opposition of the state authority concerned. Failed and 'quasi' states pose a different sort of challenge, in that it is the absence or severe weakness of state authority that poses the challenge. However, the idea of the political fall-out from such situations requiring an international response that may involve coercive or dictatorial interference in the domestic affairs of the state, a classic definition of intervention, is prominent. Situations such as that in Somalia in 1991-2 may even involve both, with the collapse of state authority resulting in humanitarian crisis.²¹

However, neither of these approaches, crudely summarized though they have been, fit with the situation in the run up to the Iraq war. There was not a humanitarian crisis in Iraq of the sort that had existed in places such as former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Rwanda and East Timor where the languages of humanitarian intervention was deployed. The UK government's chief legal advisor, the Attorney General, referred to the Kosovo situation in his discussion of the legality of invasion shortly before hostilities commenced, but there was little, if any, effort made to portray Iraq as another Kosovo or Rwanda, whatever, the brutalities and human rights abuses of Saddam Hussein's government.²² Equally, Iraq could not be seen as a failed state, given the obviously highly effective control exercised by the government over the population.

Therefore, these intellectual frameworks for considering the UK government's policy are likely to prove misleading at best. Using the idea of challenges to the classic conceptualization of the role of territorial borders in conflict situations holds out more hope of enabling us to gauge the extent and significance of innovation in the approach the UK, and particularly Tony Blair, were promoting.

2. Iraq and the ‘non-issue’ of borders

Iraq's borders barely made it on to the radar as a serious issue for debate within the UK government. The idea of the territorial dismemberment of Iraq in any form never seems to have been regarded as an option, serious or otherwise, or, more importantly, as a possible outcome of military action. For example, from as early as 1999, the goal of the UK's Iraq policy was being described in a Cabinet memo as being, ‘... in the longer term, to reintegrate a territorially intact Iraq as a law-abiding member of the international community.’²³ Geoff Hoon, Defence Secretary during the 2003 war emphasised the benefits to regional stability of the removal of Saddam Hussein as far back as July 1999, whilst a junior minister at the Foreign Office, when he said, ‘It is not of course for us to remove him But it is not difficult to see how much better Iraq's future would look if he were gone’.²⁴ However, Hoon rejected adjusting Iraq's territorial borders to reinforce this stability. ‘Some suggest that we would like to see the break-up of Iraq. That is nonsense. Preserving the territorial integrity of Iraq is a fundamental part of our policy.’²⁵ This position was restated during the run-up to war from the autumn of 2002. Amongst other instances, Tony Blair stated on 8 November 2002, after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1441, that: ‘Whatever happens, the territorial integrity of Iraq will be absolute’.²⁶ This position was consistently reiterated.²⁷ For example just prior to war on 6 March 2003, Tony Blair noted: ‘And one thing I want to make absolutely clear, if there is conflict we will make it quite explicit that the territorial integrity of Iraq should not be interfered with, not by us, not by anybody else.’²⁸

This, in part, can be explained by the general distrust of border movements common to the principal powers of the international community, emphasised by the UK's role in drawing the borders of Iraq after World War One. But there is more to it than this. That there seems to have

been no sustained consideration given to possible secession by the Kurds in the north or the Shi'a community in the south is indicative. Blair emphasised the need for a post-Saddam government to respect minority rights, but not to the extent of regarding secession as an option. This is despite both Kurds and Shi'is often being perceived as victims of having secessionist hopes raised in 1991 and then dashed by the failure of the international coalition to come to their aid in support of their uprising against Saddam Hussein in the aftermath of military defeat.²⁹ Thus on 24 November 2002, he said: '[The Iraqi's] deserve to be led by someone ... who can lead a government more representative of the country as a whole, while maintaining absolutely Iraq's territorial integrity.'³⁰ On 25 March 2003, five days after the war started, this position was again reiterated by the Prime Minister: 'It is a matter of common consensus throughout the international community that the territorial integrity of Iraq has got to be respected ... the territorial integrity of Iraq has to be preserved entirely.' 'It is important that any post-Saddam Iraqi government has the broadest possible representation, is respectful of human rights, [and] is careful to preserve the territorial integrity of Iraq'³¹

The UK government devoted no sustained effort to the public discussion of the possibility of secession or the need to develop a detailed political position on the defence of the territorial status quo. As we shall see below, this was not just the result of a commitment to the territorial integrity norm, but part of an understanding of the Iraq issue that regarded traditional questions of the location of borders as having little bearing on the problems Iraq posed or the solutions to those problems. Blair was advocating the kind of 'postmodern' conception of the declining relevance of classic territorial questions associated with his key advisor Robert Cooper.³²

This is not to say, however, that territorial borders played no part in the British government's portrayal of the security issues at stake in Iraq. Instead, it is to point to the way that the *role*, rather than the *location*, of borders became the important issue. Rather than being the fences between sovereign states and the sites of particularly intense and highly militarized security relations focused on location, they instead become part of a wider set of political questions. These, for the British government, and especially Tony Blair, focused on the legitimacy of regimes in two senses: firstly the treatment of their population in accordance or otherwise with basic human rights norms; and secondly their contribution to dominant agendas of international peace and security, most especially the possibility of WMD proliferation to terrorists. These issues are discussed in detail below, but at this stage it is useful to contextualize this development in UK government thinking, led by the Prime Minister, as Iraq did not take place in isolation.

3. Borders and regimes

The clearest precursor to the approach adopted by the UK government in relation to Iraq comes in the Prime Minister's 'Doctrine of International Community' speech to the Economic Club of Chicago in April 1999, during NATO military action over Kosovo.³³ In this speech, Tony Blair made a bold case in defence of the existence of an international community of states united by certain basic and shared principles of governmental legitimacy and international responsibility. His argument makes the claim that where governments breach certain minimum standards relating to the decent treatment of their populations, and especially where this has the potential to destabilize neighbouring states via refugee flows or to stimulate security concerns in the region, then the international community ought to be able to act. If that involves intervention into the domestic affairs of a state to bring about a change in government policy, or even a change in government, then this ought to be permissible. The speech, heavily influenced by Lawrence Freedman,

Professor of War Studies at Kings College London, and written largely without the involvement, or even knowledge, of the Foreign Office, disturbed the advocates of traditional diplomacy within a settled Westphalian context.³⁴

Blair's argument challenged such assumptions and assertions in very significant ways. Blair instead saw the world in different terms. The most traditional part of his view was to assume the existence of an international community or 'society of states', to use the term associated with the English school of international relations theory, which seems to capture much of what Blair has in mind at the state level.³⁵ Thus, his proposed 'doctrine' sees states not as atomized security maximizers reacting to structurally induced pressures. This position, most commonly associated with neo-realism, sees long-term co-operation and the development of powerful and ethically charged norms of behaviour as being very difficult, if not impossible.³⁶ In a society of states, however, significant rules, norms and principles of state behaviour not only exist, they are internalized by states. Their protection becomes part of states' understanding of their interests.³⁷ Importantly, Blair argued in Chicago that these rules, norms and principles have extended into the domestic political arrangements and practices of states, rather than stopping at the proverbial water's edge, with what goes on within states being protected by a near-absolute rule of non-intervention.

The international community of Blair's speech is thus akin to what we might call 'a solidarist international society.' In this, states share a general consensus around the universal validity of certain principles and that the source of these principles is not the positive agreement of states but a quasi-natural law rooted in certain basic ethical assertions and beliefs.³⁸ For Blair, and for academic commentators who have offered critical support for his foreign policy project, such as

Tim Dunne and Nick Wheeler, these principles are tied closely to liberal notions of universal human rights and democratically accountable government.³⁹ As even a trenchant critic of the Labour government like John Gray notes, foreign policy is, '... the one area in which he [Blair] has acted as a politician of conviction.'⁴⁰ His convictions about the importance of ethical principles to how we should understand the world and his belief in the possibility of making powerful and clear distinctions between 'right' and 'wrong', are deeply held. The moral dilemmas of specific policy situations may well have resulted in decisions being taken that appear at odds with these convictions, over arms sales, support for friendly, but repressive governments and so on.⁴¹ However, this is in part to misunderstand the nature of political ethics, seeing it as a rigid set of rules that must never be broken no matter what, ignoring the existence of genuine and real dilemmas. It also underestimates the significance of a government being willing to set itself such standards, inviting an inevitable holding to account by commentators, critics and opponents.

Other British government figures, such as Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, have made similar appeals to the impossibility of ignoring, in the name of *raison d'état*, the protection and promotion of universal human rights. His speeches on 'Principles of a Modern Global Community', in April 2002, and 'Failed and Failing States' in September 2002 argued that the flouting of human rights endangered regional, or even global, order and that the 'global community' had the right to make judgements, and take action, in the face of states that fail to abide by 'global values' or meet their 'global responsibilities'.⁴² Straw was here developing not only themes emphasized by Tony Blair in Chicago in 1999, but ideas initiated by his predecessor, Robin Cook, who announced an 'ethical dimension' to UK foreign policy when the Blair government first came to power in 1997. In 'Human Rights Into a New Century' in July 1997, Cook set out the claim that human rights are, '... rights which we claim for ourselves and which we therefore have a duty to demand for those who do not

yet enjoy them'. Whatever the intellectual merits of this train of logic, and they are arguably few, such a position has far-reaching consequences for the role of territorial borders in international relations.⁴³

The liberal character of this international community is becoming significantly detached from the territorially bound society of states, extending the international society element of Blair's vision further than that found in classic English school texts. Most significantly in this context, the UK government's position suggests a de-territorialization of the liberal project, with Blair open to the accusation that he elides the economically liberal character of a global economy with the politically liberal notion of a solidarist international society in order to de-territorialize liberal values of human rights and accountable government. In Chicago in 1999, he argued that the independence of governments to make economic decisions had been lost to the markets of a globalizing capitalist economy. At the same time and alongside this technological and economic globalization, there is a growing global acceptance of the values associated with liberal understandings of democracy and human rights. The connection between these two processes is not explored, but the implication of symbiosis is there and so is an assumption that both developments are normatively desirable.⁴⁴

This makes democracy and human rights 'global' in the sense that their existence and acceptance are no longer solely to do with the policies or practices of particular states. Instead they take on some of the 'supra-territorial' character of a global capitalist economy, contributing to the development and effectiveness of a liberal global civil society.⁴⁵ Enforcement action in the name of these principles is not solely about the imposition of one state's, or group of states', political beliefs upon another, but about acting in the name of common, universal values. Whilst this has attracted very considerable criticism, summed up in the invocation of Schmitt's famous claim that anyone

invoking humanity is trying to cheat, Blair's claims for a doctrine of international community are significant.⁴⁶

Blair developed and augmented this theme post-September 11, arguing that it marked a turning point, reinforcing the need for a doctrine of international community that not only justifies humanitarian intervention but also intervention in regimes involved in the support of trans-national fundamentalist terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Importantly, all of these elements – globalization, human rights, terrorism – became entangled in Blair's thinking on Iraq, exemplified by his speech on 'the continuing global terror threat', on 5 March 2004.⁴⁷ He argues: 'Here is where I feel so passionately that we are in mortal danger of mistaking the nature of the new world in which we live. Everything about our world is changing: its economy, its technology, its culture, its way of living. ... This is true also of our security. The threat we face is not conventional. It is a challenge of a different nature from anything the world has faced before. *It is to the world's security, what globalisation is to the world's economy.*'⁴⁸

The significance of this speech is not just because it makes direct reference to the Chicago speech and links together justifications offered for military action against Iraq as part of a refined and extended doctrine of international community. It also marks a major transition in the understanding and conceptualization of the role of borders in relation to international security, highlighting the extent of the shift being advocated by the UK government. Its arguments bring to the fore the idea of borders as containers for regimes whose domestic character and conduct is a legitimate security concern to be judged against traditional territorial notions of security, but more importantly against global standards and values, too. Where regimes are found wanting then territorial borders ought not to grant them protection. Instead of being fences between sovereignties, territorial borders

become permeable dividers between zones of political authority as part of a wider and increasingly global system of activity, values and governance. Where that authority is exercised in a locally accountable and globally responsible manner then regimes can be left alone to get on with their business. Where it is not then the plea of non-intervention should no longer carry the weight it did in the past.

The importance of Westphalian territory is thus greatly reduced. Fixed, impermeable borders delimiting sovereign authority and basically national economies have declining resonance in the British Government's understanding of the nature of the international system. Indeed, both Blair in March 2004 and Jack Straw a month later referred expressly to the declining significance of 'Westphalian' notions and the rise of a growing interdependence and an expanding universal consensus on broadly liberal values of human rights and good government to justify intervention.⁴⁹

The vision of the world from Downing Street thus seems to be a tripartite mixture of, firstly, a solidarist international society of liberal states and, secondly, what John Rawls might have called 'well-ordered' states.⁵⁰ These are not liberal, and thus non-ideal, but they are generally compliant with dominant political agendas, especially on terrorism, and do afford their citizens some respect and decency, even if this is not in compliance with liberal standards. Thirdly, there are outlaw and failed states – places where the regimes are brutal towards their populations and uncooperative in the policy agendas of the leading powers; and places where governmental authority has collapsed. These are portrayed as the sources of danger and threat in the world, the places where trans-national terrorism finds its training grounds and bases, and where the dangers of WMD proliferation are at their highest. A globalizing network of economic, civic and cultural ties that make global responsibilities impossible to ignore brings with it great benefits, for the first and

second categories of state. The flip-side of this, though, is also the principal threat to the development and progress of this liberal, global utopia – trans-national terrorist networks aided and abetted by tyrannical regimes or parasitical on the lawlessness and chaos of failed states. Where these groups are motivated by, or appeal to, religious fundamentalisms that are anti-liberal then their potential to threaten and destabilize the international community is further heightened. This is the category into which Iraq was placed by the British government.

4. Borders and the Iraqi regime

The UK government increasingly focused its justifications for military action against Iraq on the uses that the territory enclosed by Iraq's borders would be put to. At one level, and this was consistently portrayed as the principal reason for military action, concern was about Iraqi acquisition of WMD in the face of UN Resolutions. However, additional justifications were frequently offered that significantly augment the WMD issue and place Iraq within the wider context of a re-interpretation of the nature and role of territorial borders as part of this wider scheme for promoting a re-interpretation of the basis of international politics. Christoph Bluth, in a generally sympathetic reading of UK policy, argues that the issues of human rights in Iraq, the impact of sanctions on the Iraqi people – and on reinforcing the Iraqi regime – and the perceived impossibility of rehabilitating Iraq into the international community with Saddam in power combined to persuade Tony Blair that war was the least worst option.⁵¹ This paper wants to suggest that the changing understanding of the role of territorial borders that the UK government has developed provides important background to this move towards war and helps explain the presentation of policy.

The 'dossiers' published by the UK government during the autumn and winter of 2002-03 are symptomatic of this line of argument. Two of these dossiers – those of September 2002 and March

2003 – ostensibly focused on technical issues. The first offered the UK government’s assessment of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction programmes.⁵² The claims made in the dossier, the circumstances of its production and the intelligence upon which it was based have been the subject of intense political debate in the UK, resulting in four enquiries.⁵³ The domestic political fall-out from this affair continues to damage the Labour government. What has been overlooked, however, in the furore over the use, or misuse, of intelligence is that what was an ostensibly technical dossier about Iraq’s WMD programmes and capability concentrated heavily on the character of ‘the Saddam Hussein regime’. A third of the dossier was devoted to an account of repression, torture and other human rights abuses by the regime against the Iraqi people. On the face of it these had nothing to do with whether or not Iraq had managed to retain significant stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction in the face of UN disarmament efforts, or had managed to develop previously existing or new weapons development programmes despite UN sanctions and military action by the UK and US.

Nevertheless, the UK government’s inclusion of this material was part of its efforts to emphasise the human rights abuses and political repression of the regime. By linking this to the issue of WMD, even in such a crude fashion, the dossier makes the case that repressive, brutal torturing regimes, like that in Iraq, are also regimes that develop and use WMD in the face of the international community’s opposition and threaten regional peace and security. Whilst, unlike the US Administration, the UK government was circumspect in its efforts to make the claim of a direct link between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, the dossier hints at the potential for such links and the horrifying consequences of a WMD equipped global terrorist network.⁵⁴

The character of the regime was centre-stage in the second of the UK government's dossiers, which directly addressed human rights abuses in Iraq.⁵⁵ It also reappeared in the third dossier, which, as with the first, was ostensibly focused on a technical matter – the evasion and concealment mechanisms of the regime in their effort to neutralize UN inspection and enforcement mechanisms.⁵⁶ While the credibility of the dossier was badly damaged when it was shown to contain substantial amounts of material plagiarized from a PhD thesis written several years previously, it continued the theme of linking human rights abuses and tyrannical political practices to the WMD 'threat' posed by the regime and the potential for WMD to be transferred to terrorist organisations. As with the so-called 'dodgy' dossier on WMD capability, approximately a third of the document was devoted to human rights in Iraq. It emphasized the consequences of the secret police system used to conceal WMD activity for the Iraqi people, linking political repression and torture to WMD.

Whilst the claims made about Iraq's WMD programmes have been proven to be seriously inaccurate by the Iraq Survey Group's failure to find weapons or active weapons programmes, they serve to show how the UK government's understanding of the situation reflects the wider ideas about territory and the international system. It was the character of the regime and the uses to which it was putting the territory of Iraq, or might allow the territory of Iraq to be put, that were the central security issue. 'Regime change', whatever the official claims to the contrary, was the logical outcome of the evidence and arguments put forward, as acknowledged by Tony Blair after war had begun. He said, '... the logic of that position [operating within the demands of the UN for disarmament of WMD] has been somewhat uncomfortable, frankly, for me and others, that if Saddam had voluntarily disarmed he could have remained in place. ... In one sense I feel more comfortable with the position now where we are saying quite plainly to people that the only way now is to disarm him and remove his regime.'⁵⁷

Opposition to war mounted by leading neo-realists, such as John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt – on the grounds that Iraq had been successfully deterred and contained and there was no reason why deterrence and containment ought not to continue to be effective – thus missed the point from this perspective.⁵⁸ Blair's rejection of a policy of containment in March 2004 appeals to the nexus of economic globalization, liberal values and trans-national fundamentalist terrorism that is so characteristic of the Blair vision of a global system.⁵⁹ In elaborating his understanding of an unconventional, post-September 11 international security environment, Blair argued that: 'September 11th did not create the threat Saddam posed. But it altered crucially the balance of risk as to whether to deal with it or simply carry on, however imperfectly, trying to contain it. ... September 11th was for me a revelation.'⁶⁰ His domestic political targets, mainly the Liberal Democrats, are often accused of lacking a credible response to the question of how they would have solved the problems Saddam Hussein presented through being in power had their preferred policy of containment been followed.⁶¹

The 'Saddam Hussein regime' was thus portrayed as beyond the pale of the international community. At times, the UK government has seemed so keen to make it clear that Saddam Hussein's Iraq was in the category of outlaw and failed states, that it was portrayed as being both a highly authoritarian state bent on the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction that would threaten the region and the wider world, and a state where lawlessness would see such WMD proliferate to Al Qaeda or other Islamic fundamentalist trans-national terrorist organisations.⁶² Either way, or in the event of this implausible combination of a ruthless and efficient dictatorship overseeing lawless chaos, the UK government's position makes a far-reaching set of claims about the status of the territorial borders of Iraq – lines on the map that will not change their location, but

with a political, and ethical, role that is in flux as the nature of the international community undergoes fundamental transformation as a result of globalization.

5. The Blair way to Heaven of peace, stability and anti-terrorism.

On 16 March 2003, following a summit with Spain and the US in the Azores, Tony Blair said, 'And what we say is that we will protect Iraq's territorial integrity. We will support representative government that unites Iraq on the democratic basis of human rights and the rule of law ... We will help Iraq rebuild ... because of the appalling legacy that the rule of Saddam has left the Iraqi people.'⁶³ The following day the UK government published, 'A Vision for Iraq and the Iraqi People.'⁶⁴ This, too, emphasised, '[A] unified Iraq within its current borders, living at peace with itself and its neighbours ... an Iraq which respects fundamental human rights ... an independent Iraq respecting the rule of law, whose government reflects the diversity and choice of its population'. The UK government promised '... to help the Iraqi people restore their country to its proper dignity and place in the community of nations, abiding by its international obligations'.

Iraq is thus a test-case for the Blairite vision of international security and stability in a post-September 11 world and this is a world where territorial borders as fences between sovereignties are downplayed. British involvement in the Iraq war was not primarily about securing the geopolitical stability of the Persian Gulf, or preventing challenges, especially from Iran, to the territorial integrity of Iraq. Such challenges have little place in the liberal, globalized worldview of the British government, and particularly of the Prime Minister. Indeed, for all the insistence upon WMD, UN Security Council resolutions and the rule of international law, the 2003 Iraq war may well turn out to

be of greatest significance for the contribution it makes to shaping the direction of change in thinking about territory.

In this view, peace and stability in the region, and more widely, are not secured by adjusting a balance of power via territorial re-allocations. Instead, they come through ensuring that the regimes that govern bordered territory are acceptable members of the international community.

Authoritative, accountable governments that protect and respect basic human rights and are not hostile to the operation of a globalizing capitalist world economy are therefore desirable for practical and pragmatic reasons, as well as for the normative power of this political vision. In particular, this vision appeals to the claim that in a world of trans-national, de-territorialized and religious fundamentalist terrorist networks, democratic legitimacy serves to inoculate states against becoming tacit or active supporters of such networks.

Tony Blair has been quite explicit about this connection. In March 2004 he argued:

The terrorists pouring into Iraq, know full well the importance of destroying not just the nascent progress of Iraq toward stability, prosperity and democracy, but of destroying our confidence, of defeating our will to persevere. ... The terrorists know that if Iraq and Afghanistan survive their assault, come through their travails, seize the opportunity the future offers, then these countries will stand not just as nations liberated from oppression, but as a lesson to humankind everywhere and a profound antidote to the poison of religious extremism. That is precisely why the terrorists are trying to foment hatred and division in Iraq. They know full well, a stable democratic Iraq, under the sovereign rule of the Iraqi people, is a mortal blow to their fanaticism.¹⁶⁵

The immovability of Iraq's territorial borders has thus been taken for granted by the UK government because moving them would not address any of the political and security challenges that Iraq was understood to present. By extension, attempting to re-draw Iraq's borders would be a pointless exercise because the location of Iraq's borders is essentially irrelevant to the challenge of transforming Iraq into a responsible member of the international community. The traditional geopolitical and realist focus on the *location* of borders as being at the heart of their significance to international relations is denied. Security questions are still important, but this is not security in the face of potential invasion or secession. It is security in the context of globalization and that is something that, according to the UK government, is coming to mean something very different, with a different role for the lines on the map.

Iraq's political challenges, like accommodating the desires for autonomy of the Kurdish north, are better addressed, in this view, through careful construction of a democratic political system that will enable cultural autonomy and the expression of the diversity of identities in Iraq without these having to seek the protection of territorial borders via secession. The nineteenth and twentieth century solution of national self-determination as the acquisition of territorial sovereignty is inappropriate in an age when territoriality is in flux and notions of fixed sovereignties as the only way for nations to acquire a sense of belonging are being overtaken by non-territorial communities and the development of notions of global civil society. In a network age, land and freedom no longer go together. Instead, Kurdish identity can be met perfectly well within a sovereign Iraq because that sovereignty is seen as increasingly contingent on the government respecting such identity and offering a tolerant and open political climate.

Again, the reality may prove different, and Kurdish leaders have made it clear that they expect the effective autonomy they have enjoyed for thirteen years to be preserved, making this one of the most difficult issues in the negotiations over an Iraqi constitution.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Kurdish autonomy was a goal that the Prime Minister endorsed early on in the war, linking it to a notion of security that was about the consequences of political authority for the people of the region, not about some fixed geo-political notion of the role that this part of Iraq must play in regional stability. '... [I]n the north of Iraq child mortality has been falling, and has been falling because they have got greater freedom from Saddam ... we would obviously not want to give up the considerable gains that people in the north have made.'⁶⁷ An eighteen province Iraq, the favoured solution to the question of how to organise Iraq's internal political situation, has rung alarm bells in some Kurdish quarters.⁶⁸ Leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, Marsoud Barzani, said, '... if the rights of the Kurdish people are denied, then, of course, the Kurdish people cannot accept to live as second-class citizens. They must live free and with rights.'⁶⁹ Thus, traditional territorial questions may well return to haunt the UK government and others. The argument that the UK government has been developing may come under intense pressure from the kind of nationalist forces portrayed as of passing relevance in the Blairite vision of the international community.

Democracy as inoculation against terrorism and passport to responsible membership of the international community are thus central to the vision for a post-Saddam Iraq. The reality to date, of course, has been very different, but the possibility of such a transformation continues to play an important role in political debate in defence of military action against Iraq. The months since the end of major military operations has shown that making the transition real is an enormous undertaking, and one which the UK government, and others, appear to have been ill-prepared to undertake.

The consequences for the status of territorial borders, though, are potentially far-reaching. The British government's policy towards Iraq and its continuing approach to the issues of humanitarian crises and trans-national terrorism are moving further and further away from the traditional understanding of the nature and role of territorial borders. This contingency of Westphalian notions of territory rests, on the one hand, on compliance with certain basic liberal standards of governance and human rights and, on the other, on being seen not to harbour or give succour to terrorism, especially Islamic fundamentalist trans-national terrorism.

Beyond Iraq, the economically liberal nature of this globalization reinforces the sense in the UK government that liberal ideas and values are increasingly universally applicable and acceptable. The perceived effectiveness of liberal democratic and capitalist political, social and economic forms in protecting human rights and countering the appeal of terrorism also grants them pragmatic weight as the best way to achieve immediate political goals. Drawing general lessons from the experience of Iraq, Tony Blair has argued that, '[C]itizens who are free, well educated and prosperous tend to be responsible, to feel solidarity with a society in which they have a stake; so do nations that are free, democratic and benefiting from economic progress, tend to be stable and solid partners in the advance of humankind. The best defence of our security lies in the spread of our values. But we cannot achieve these values except within a framework that recognises their universality.'⁷⁰

Securing stable and effective government in Iraq is therefore not threatened by secession or aggrandizement, but by illiberal approaches to institutions and economy. The nature of the regime

the borders contain is, in the eyes of the UK government, much more important than where the lines are drawn on the map.

Conclusion

The UK government position on Iraq is thus multi-faceted, complex, and, at times, arguably incoherent. Iraq's non-compliance with the UN, the threat it posed should it acquire WMD, the government's human rights abuses and the possibility of Iraqi involvement with Al Qaeda or other fundamentalist terrorism has become bundled together, at least in the mind of the Prime Minister, with a belief that we are living through a serious transformation in the nature of international politics. The role of territorial borders is a symptomatic part of this transformation that, this paper has argued, helps us understand that the UK's involvement in war in Iraq was in important ways about how to think about and understand security challenges in the context of globalization.

As with the so-called 'Bush doctrine' of preventative war, Blair's position challenges many of the most well established rules of international politics regarding the use of force.⁷¹ 'Containment will not work in the face of the global terror threat that confronts us. The terrorists have no intention of being contained. The states that proliferate or acquire WMD illegally are doing so precisely to avoid containment. ... [W]e surely 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 Saddam's. Otherwise we are powerless to fight the aggression and injustice which over time puts at risk our security and way of life.'⁷² However, the context and thinking behind Blair's arguments for preventative military action are very different from the 'neo-con' vision that sustained Bush's enunciation of the argument at West Point. The UK government's solidarity with the US on fighting a war in Iraq and on supporting the Bush Administration more generally, with Blair in the vanguard

of that support, does not extend to the underpinning vision of the international system, where Blair is a long way from the neo-conservative vision of a 'new American century', one increasingly characterized as a new American empire.⁷³

In a Blairite world we see a re-securitization of territorial borders through their connection to failed states, corrupt states and authoritarian and militaristic regimes as human rights abusers, WMD proliferators and potential harbourers of terrorism. It is not a fear of the territorial ambitions of these sorts of states that makes them a security issue, it is either their willingness to use the territory they control, or permit others – wittingly or not – to use the territory they control for human rights abuses and terrorist purposes. This leads to an alternative understanding of the solution to the security problems facing the international community. A 'war on terror', for example, is not to be won through unilateralist, unipolar hegemony where preventative war is the policy tool of choice.⁷⁴ Instead, re-building failed states, replacing brutal militaristic dictatorships with passable facsimiles of liberal democracy and attempting to generate economic development through incorporation into the global capitalist economy are the prescription for success in making the world a more secure place. Territorial borders as delimiters of sovereignty enjoying the protection of the non-intervention norm become, instead, the identifiers of islands of heaven: states where watchful liberal democratic governments, overseeing capitalist wealth creation tempered with a little social-democratic redistribution, offer individuals the kind of opportunities that will turn them away from the lure of fundamentalist violence. Territorial borders can no longer be tied to a monolithic, undifferentiated notion of sovereignty and a universal principal of non-intervention.

Heaven on earth, as even those believers in the existence of heaven accept, is, unfortunately, unattainable. The Blair government has learnt some hard lessons in the course of its policy

towards Iraq about the challenges such a vision faces and the scale of the obstacles that lie in its way. Some of these come from failings in the policy-planning, policy-implementation and intelligence processes that have dominated most popular discussions of the Iraq war. Others stem from the Prime Minister's inability to persuade others, especially George W. Bush and other leading figures in the current US administration, of the viability of his interpretation.⁷⁵ Still others can be seen in what Chris Brown has described as the 'lock in' effect of established understandings of international politics and the practices they sustain.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, the conviction behind Blair's normative vision of 'heaven on earth' remains striking. Re-thinking the role of the UN, re-emphasizing the need for collective action and institution building, identifying the limits of acceptable behaviour by government towards their own populations and attempting to be innovative about ways of meeting the threat of trans-national terrorism offer numerous hostages to fortune and generate significant opposition. This comes from a variety of quarters: from those with a vested interest in sustaining the status quo; from those who believe in the immutability of a power-politics version of international relations; and from those who reject the normative vision on offer, for various reasons. Nevertheless, and whatever the final outcome of the Iraq adventure, the UK government, and the Prime Minister in particular, has asked some very real questions about the nature and role of territorial borders. These are questions that even those who find Blair's answers unsatisfactory – or even downright dangerous – also need to think about seriously.

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1 The dominance of the 'neo-cons' in the US at this time is a key theme of John Kampfner's analysis of the situation. See John Kampfner, *Blair's Wars* (London: The Free Press, 2003), especially pp. 152-91.

2 We are grateful to an anonymous referee for making just such an argument in their report on an earlier version of this paper.

3 For a discussion of the UK-US special relationship that looks in some detail at Iraq see John Dumbrell, 'The UK-US special relationship in a world twice transformed', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 17:3, 2004; for a more journalistic view see Peter Riddell, *Hug them close: Blair, Clinton, Bush and the special relationship*, London: Politico's, 2003.

4 The first by the House of Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, 7.7.03, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmcaff/813/81302.htm>. The Second by the Intelligence and Security Committee on 'Iraqi weapons of mass destruction: intelligence and assessment', 9.9.03, <http://www.civil-service.net/wmd/iwmdia.pdf>. The third followed an enquiry by Lord Hutton into the fierce political row that erupted in the aftermath of the suicide of UK WMD expert David Kelly following his role in a BBC report that the UK government knowingly issued false intelligence in its September 2002 dossier, 'Report of the enquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Dr David Kelly C.M.G.', 28.1.04, <http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/report/index.htm>. The fourth, known as the 'Butler Report', after its chairman former Cabinet Secretary Lord Butler, 'Review of intelligence on weapons of mass destruction', 14.7.04, <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Politics/documents/2004/07/14/butler.pdf>.

5 E.g. Barbara F. Walter, 'Explaining the intractability of territorial conflict', *International Studies Review* 5:4, 2003, 137-53.

6 During the last sixty years in particular there has been an international aversion to changing the physical location of territorial borders, but even where this has not been altered, the juridical character of the line has changed, moving

from being the internal border between units of a federation to being a sovereign state border. The cases of the former Yugoslavia, Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia are prominent examples. New borders have been created as a result of conflict, too, although the full and formal acceptance of these is sometimes moot, and often conveniently so – the division of Cyprus in 1974, of Israel/Palestine in 1967 and Korea in 1954 provide three enduring examples.

7 Walter, 'Intractability', p. 137.

8 One example of this sort of argument is provided by Robert Cooper, *The postmodern state and the world order* (London: Demos and the Foreign Policy Centre, 2000). Cooper is particularly significant in this context because he was a leading foreign policy adviser to Tony Blair.

9 Leading studies of the causes of war in international relations typically refer to territorial borders in this fashion. E.g. John Vasquez, *The war puzzle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Kal Holsti, *Peace and war: armed conflicts and international order, 1648-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

10 Walter, 'Intractability'.

11 E.g. Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty – organized hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

12 E.g. Peter Andreas, 'Redrawing the line: borders and security in the twenty-first century', *International Security* 28:2, 2003, p. 81.

13 E. g. A. T. Mahan (1893), *The influence of sea-power upon history, 1660-1783* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957); H. J. Mackinder (1904), 'The geographical pivot of history', *Geographical Journal* 23; Saul B. Cohen, 'Geopolitical realities and united states foreign policy', *Political Geography* 22:1, 2003, pp.1-33.

14 For a critical analysis of this form of geo-politics see Gearoid O Tuathail, *Critical geopolitics: the politics of writing global space* (London: Routledge: 1996). For a recent example of the kind of analysis Tuathail critiques see Cohen, 'Geopolitical realities'.

15 Mark W. Zacher, 'The territorial integrity norm: international boundaries and the use of force', *International Organization* 55:2, 2002, pp. 215-50.

16 Andreas, 'Redrawing'.

17 Zacher, 'Territorial integrity'.

18 E.g. John Agnew, 'The territorial trap: The geographical assumptions of international relations theory', *Review of International Political Economy* 1:1, 1994; John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge, *Mastering space: hegemony, territory and international political economy* (London: Routledge: 1995); Michael J. Shapiro and Hayward Alker (eds), *Challenging boundaries: global flows and territorial identities* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Thuathail, *Critical geopolitics*.

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20 International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *Responsibility to protect*, Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001.

21 E.g. Wheeler, *Saving strangers*.

22 Lord Goldsmith, 'Iraq: resolution 1441', Available from <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page7445.asp>

23 Quoted in Christoph Bluth, 'The British road to war: Bush, Blair and the decision to invade Iraq', *International Affairs* 80:5, 2004, p. 874

24 Geoff Hoon, 'Defence and security: a snapshot of the issues', 25.5.99.

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029391647&a=KArticle&aid=1013618398236>.

25 Hoon, 'Defence and security'.

26 Tony Blair, 'PM statement on Iraq following UN Security Council Resolution 1441', 8.11.02, <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page3206.asp>.

27 E.g. 'Prime Minister's Iraq statement to parliament', 24.9.02, <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page1727.asp>.

'PM speech at the Lord Mayor's banquet', 11.11.02, <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page1731.asp>.

28 Tony Blair, 'PM answers Questions on MTV forum', 6.3.03, <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page3250.asp>.

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32 Cooper, *The postmodern state*.

33 Tony Blair, 'Doctrine of the international community', 24.4.99. <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1297.asp>

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48 Blair, 'Continuing global terror threat', emphasis added. The idea that 9/11 marks a turning point in Blair's foreign policy thinking is supported by Williams, 'Who's making UK foreign policy?', p. 920 and, more strongly, by Bluth, 'The British road to war', p. 874.

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57 Blair, 'Saddam and his regime will be removed'.

58 Stephen M. Walt and John J. Mearsheimer, 'An unnecessary war', *Foreign Policy* 134, Jan/Feb 2003.

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60 Blair, 'Continuing global terror threat'.

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62 Blair, 'Continuing global terror threat'.

63 Available at <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/page3280.asp>.

64 Available at <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/page3280.asp>.

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67 'PM: Saddam and his regime will be removed.'

68 Muir, 'Kurds anxious'.

69 Muir, 'Kurds anxious'.

70 Blair, 'Continuing global terror threat'.

71 The Bush Doctrine was most clearly set out in his speech at West Point military academy on 1 June 2002.

Kampfner, *Blair's wars*, p. 173.

72 Blair, 'Continuing global terror threat'.

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