

*More Spinn'd Against than Spinning?: Public Opinion,
Political Communication, and Britain's Involvement in the
2003 Invasion of Iraq*

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Abstract

When Tony Blair took Britain to war in Iraq in 2003, he overruled vociferous opposition from both the wider public and members of his own governing party. Public opinion was exercised by the issue on a vast scale. Over one million marched in London against the war. Opinion polls uniformly showed majority opposition to the use of force. Newspapers, the engine of media debate in this country, mostly attacked the government line, and encouraged their readers to protest or even, in one case, to rebel. The story of Iraq, however, is not simply one of an ideological or misguided premier dragging the entire nation to battle against its will. It is not simply one of 'spin', dossiers, Alastair Campbell, and Weapons of Mass Destruction. Much of the debate, and much of the hostility it generated, focused on areas that foreign policy analysts would consider peripheral; the domestic political consequences of war, the role of 'spin doctors' in the assessment of intelligence, and the question of whether the Prime Minister's (successful) efforts to build a strong alliance with the world's last superpower had transformed him into the President's 'poodle'.

Interactions between ministers and the media were conditioned on both sides by an intimidating array of structural pressures. Diplomatic and journalistic calculations often clashed, trapping the government in the middle of an immensely complex 'multi-level game'. News management influenced substantive foreign policy just as policy influenced news management, and the media arguably affected both, albeit often indirectly. The substance and the communication of the decision to go to war proved to be inseparable, both in the course of decision-making, and in their later retrospective assessment. Public Opinion, broadly defined, had a significant impact on British foreign policy at this time. Crucially, however, this impact operated through political communication mechanisms usually ignored by FPA.

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Chapter 1 – In search of the Loch Ness Monster...

Research question and research design

Every student of foreign affairs experiences the tension between a historian's compulsion to explain specific past *events*, and that of a political scientist to understand general *phenomena*. Although the two approaches are distinct, they are also ultimately complimentary (cf. Lawson 2012). In this study I seek to strike a balance between the investigation of events and the illumination of phenomena. My subject is the interaction between the government led by Tony Blair and British public opinion during the period between 11 September 2001 and the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. I ask specifically what was the impact of that interaction; on the public, on the government, on the decision to launch an aggressive war against Saddam Hussein, and what were the conflict's longer-term domestic political consequences. It is a question of some personal interest, but for social scientists, as King, Keohane and Verba remind us, "personal reasons are neither necessary nor sufficient justifications for the choice of a topic" (King, Keohane and Verba 1994, 15). I begin, therefore, by outlining a conceptual rationale for this project.

In terms of a theoretical contribution, this study involves the detailed analysis of a case in which, according to the literature, public opinion *should* have exerted considerable influence over government policy, but didn't. The British people were exercised by the issue of Iraq in a manner never seen before or since. Over one million marched against war in London alone. It appears evident that the government took some notice, so great were the range and volume of official efforts to 'sell' the confrontation. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that those who protested, who wrote critical editorials in the national press, and who spoke and voted against the Prime Minister in Parliament, were unsuccessful. They failed to 'stop the war'.

Not only, then, is this case worth considering because of what *should* have happened, but also because of what *did not happen*. This case should have offered good grounds for the illustration of existing theoretical expectations, and yet in practice its outcomes deviated

markedly from what earlier studies might have predicted (Schuster and Maier 2006). Deviant cases offer fertile ground for hypothesis generation, one of the fundamental building blocks of all scientific research (Mahoney and Goertz 2006). As a result, their utility goes beyond simple historical description, although political scientists remain sceptical of their overall effectiveness; Arend Lijphart, for example, warned that “a single case can constitute neither the basis for a valid generalisation, nor the ground for disproving an established generalisation” (Lijphart 1971, 691). Lijphart was right, but only because he focused on the production of general conclusions which meet the strict standards of scientific proof. He spoke solely of *confirmatory* explanation, explanation which produces absolute answers. No social scientist would claim that any more than a tiny minority of the research we produce meets such standards, whether based on single case studies or large-*n* multivariate comparisons. Confirmation must remain the absolute goal of scientific inquiry. But confirmation presupposes the existence of propositions to be confirmed. Hypotheses about social, economic, and political phenomena can only be described as proven once they have been shown to work *in general*. They cannot be shown to work *at all*, however, until they have themselves been generated. Most quantitative analyses test hypotheses either invented by their originators or suggested by earlier research. When King, Keohane and Verba quipped that “no-one cares what we think – the scholarly community only cares what we can demonstrate” (King, Keohane and Verba 1994, 15), they were being disingenuous. Of course the community cares what we think; most inquiries examine phenomena conjured out of the ether by the imagination of their authors. The better ones base their hypotheses on some sort of earlier analysis. They have empirical roots to support their theoretical branches. They derive from the *exploratory*, or even speculative, explanation of real-world examples. Deviant cases offer particular opportunities for hypothesis-generation precisely because they deviate from expectations. If existing theories fail to explain the outcome in a given set of circumstances,

they must require refinement. Exploring the reasons why a case is deviant, then, helps to explain weaknesses in our theoretical toolkit.

In addressing a deviant case, this study follows Gerring in asserting that “the utility of a single-unit study rests partly on its double functions”. It seeks “to know both what is particular” to the Iraq war, “*and* what is general about it” (Gerring 2004, 345, emphasis in original). The very aspects of a case that make it interesting in particular are what make it significant in general. Why does it not conform to existing expectations? What does this tell us about those expectations? Should the hypotheses upon which they rest be revised, or extended? Must they be abandoned entirely, or does detailed analysis reveal a more complex picture than the initial diagnosis of deviance might suggest? Noting the validity of these sort of objectives as components of the broader scientific process, Robert Yin has proposed that “case studies, like experiments, are generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” (Yin 3rd ed. 2003, 10). In other words, what is general about a single case study is the impact it can have on the process of theory-building by proposing new hypotheses and refining old ones. Single case studies cannot produce general *conclusions* on the basis of their observations about how phenomena actually play out across a wider universe. They remain nonetheless vital tools for the broader advancement of knowledge as a result of their contribution to theoretical refinement.

This study seeks therefore to explain why it was that the Blair government was able to take Britain into the Iraq war in the face of stiff public opposition, with a view both to providing a detailed account of an important historical moment, and to developing further the general hypotheses underpinning the study of public opinion as an influence over democratic foreign policy. It focuses on the causal *mechanisms* underpinning the public-policy relationship, rather than any specific set of causal *effects*. Causal effects, “the difference between the systematic component of observations made when the explanatory variable takes one value and the systematic component of comparable observations when the

explanatory variable takes on another value" (King, Keohane and Verba 1994, 82), are best observed through large-*n* cross-case comparisons. Causal mechanisms, "the ultimately unobservable physical, social, or psychological processes through which agents with causal capacities operate, but only in specific contexts or conditions, to transfer energy, information, or matter to other entities" (George and Bennett 2005, 137), are often left unexplained by such analyses, which tend to assume that the mechanisms through which an effect operates are irrelevant provided the effect itself can be observed. Studies such as this one thus have a role in shedding further light on relationships suggested by large-*n* comparisons through the exploration of the mechanisms by which they might operate. In particular, this study identifies the ways in which public opinion sought to influence the Blair government's stated policy positions, and the government's responses. In addition, just as large-*n* studies seeking causal effects and general confirmatory explanations focus on the "effects of causes", i.e. the impact of changes in the values of given explanatory variables on unknown outcomes, this single case study looks at the "causes of effects", working backwards from a known outcome (Britain going to war despite public opposition) to understand how it came about (Mahoney and Goertz 2006). It might be said, then, that from a social scientific perspective, this is not so much a study of public opinion, and how it might impact upon war in general, but of *a* war, how it *was* influenced by public opinion, and of the implications of that influence for future analyses.

This case is of interest from a historical perspective because of its centrality to the personal narrative of one of Britain's most successful politicians, Prime Minister Tony Blair. Iraq cost Blair dearly. Tim Dunne observed that "at the end of [his] decade in office, the obvious question is 'where did it all go wrong?'. The one-word answer favoured by the media and large sections of public opinion is 'Iraq'" (Dunne 2008, 340). Christopher Hill agreed; "apart from losses in the 2005 general election, Tony Blair's personal position has been seriously undermined in his party and the country at large" (Hill 2007, 276). Even Blair himself

admitted that his resignation in 2007 was partly driven by the fact that, in the British media, “Iraq still caused too much bitterness and obstructed sensible analysis of the broader picture” (Blair 2010b, 657). A key empirical contention of this study is that much of the bitterness, much of the lasting negative impact on Blair and his government more generally triggered by Iraq, stemmed from the effect of efforts to ‘sell’ the conflict, rather than necessarily from the conflict itself. This is not a straightforward position, but its basis is elucidated in the following chapters, and examined explicitly in Chapter 7. It informs and supports the theoretical claim outlined in Chapter 8 that the conceptual division between the substance and the communication of foreign policy is untenable in light of the embedding of modern news management practices within the policymaking process itself. Considered together, these observations contribute to this study’s overall contention, that public opinion is not an actor within the foreign policymaking process in Britain, but part of the structure of the system within which that process takes place.

Definitions

It is far from straightforward to define ‘public opinion’. Hill once expressed regret that most studies ignore “elementary distinctions between opinion as overall mood, opinion as the aggregate of many different and competing attitudes, and opinions as transmitted by the press, parliamentary representatives or pressure-groups” (Hill 1981, 53). This study agrees with Hill that it is important to be clear about what exactly one describes when one describes public opinion. Vague comments about “the mysterious and intangible nature of public opinion” are of little use, as Paul Lazarsfeld complained (Lazarsfeld 1957, 41). At the same time, however, it is recognised that public opinion is often extremely difficult to describe objectively; “public opinion, like beauty, is often in the eye of the beholder” (Everts and Isernia 2001, 267). Often it “may simply be taken to mean those opinions held by private individuals which governments find it prudent to heed” (Key 1961, 14), an entirely subjective definition. Slavko

Splichal has warned that “public opinion seems to be more a poetical than a scientific term because only in poetry may the incompatible become united” (Splichal 1999, 50); any attempt to render it scientifically is thus, he argued, inevitably fraught.

An initial dilemma emerges from the realisation that, as Roger Hilsman put it, “there is not one public, but many” (Hilsman 1987, 243). There is no single independent entity called ‘the public’ existing ‘out there’ and thinking up its own opinions on a variety of matters, awaiting our analysis. After all, as Walter Lippmann observed, “thought is the function of an organism, and a mass is not an organism” (Lippmann 1922, 243). Faced with this problem, Key proposed a fudge. It was “unnecessary to assume that ‘the public’ exists in any particular sort of loosely structured association or other ghostly sociological entity” (Key 1961, 15); public actors certainly existed, and they could be studied collectively and individually, without the need to assume any overarching structural links between them. Key’s position informs the approach taken in this study. The ‘public’ is defined as *a collective term for the non-state or non-governmental actors (individual and corporate) operating within a political system*. A public actor is, in this formulation, an entity outside of the government. It might potentially take a range of forms, from the individual citizen through to the opposition political party or major national newspaper. This definition further establishes geographical and structural boundaries between distinct publics (plural) whose spheres of activity are defined by the administrative ambit of the governments they seek to affect.

Clearly, however, such an open and effectively negative definition requires further specification to be of use; the suggestion that the public is not the government is hardly a profound discovery. As Key observed, the ‘public’ in this formulation contains a large number of varied actors. Faced by this complexity, he wrote, “students of public opinion often attempt broad classifications of the citizenry” (Key 1961, 543). The classification of the public has indeed been a favourite scholarly occupation. The most common and consistently-used approach has been to construct a hierarchy of actors according to their perceived level of

attentiveness to, awareness of, and influence over, policy. Typically this has involved the identification of 'mass', 'attentive', and 'elite' strata (Almond 1950, 138, Rosenau 1961, 33-34, Hilsman 1987, 284, Risse-Kappen 1991, 482, Sobel 2001, 12). Hierarchical approaches prove useful in differentiating between public actors on the grounds of the levels of sophistication they show, but remain problematic nonetheless. Distinguishing members of the elite and attentive sets from the broader mass is fiendishly difficult. Although elected representatives, interest group heads, and 'experts' from the media, academy and think-tank worlds are easy to observe conceptually (Powlick and Katz 1998, 34), they are too few to be reliably identified using the polling methods which typically dominate studies in this area (on which more later) (Key 1961, 536, Mueller 1973, 164). It is furthermore unclear whether these 'elites' hold significantly different views from the 'mass' (Verba, et al. 1967, 331-332). Even if they do, there is little evidence that policymakers actually try to seek out 'elite' views (Powlick 1995, 433). One of the main rationales, furthermore, for the use of a hierarchical classification system has been that inattentive actors lack the knowledge to hold stable and rational opinions. In other words, their views are inherently unsuitable source material for policymaking. For much of the 20th century, studies of public opinion were conditioned by the "Almond-Lippmann consensus", under which public inattentiveness and ignorance was held to breed irrationality and impotence (Holsti 1992). Most ordinary citizens do pay little attention to foreign policy, being interested only in those functions of government which impact upon their daily lives. As Lippmann himself put it, only once wars commence do most people pay much attention to their state's relationship with the international arena; "in the ante-bellum period, nobody has to fight and nobody has to pay" (Lippmann 1922, 241). For this reason, it was assumed that "the characteristic [public] response to questions of foreign policy is indifference" (Almond 1950, 53). More recent studies have noted not only the existence of public inattentiveness, but also that oblivion is economically rational for many ordinary people in light of the limited direct impact of most foreign affairs on domestic life (Page and Shapiro

1992, 14, Nincic 1992, 31). Inattentiveness is important in turn for reasons beyond the obvious argument that governments are less likely to listen to public actors who show little or no interest in what they do (Schuster and Maier 2006, 228, Knecht and Weatherford 2006, 705). It constitutes in a very real sense a surrender of the right to influence policymaking. This surrender is significant. Where the majority lacks interest in foreign affairs, dedicated minorities gain traction over the public debate, regardless of whether their preferred position stands to benefit society as a whole (Key 1961, 17-18, 92, Risse-Kappen 1991, 510, Everts 2000, 187). Of particular significance for multicultural western societies such as the UK has been the question of the extent to which ethnic, national, or religious minorities are gaining increasing power over policies affecting states, peoples, or regions in which they have a particular interest (Hill 2007). By failing to assert themselves as *a* public, non-governmental actors give up their right to be considered part of *the* public.

One reason why the inattentive are thought so impotent is the assumption, again derived originally from Lippmann and Almond, that a lack of interest in foreign affairs likely translates into a lack of knowledge (Lippmann 1922, 401, Almond 1950, 80). Even Ole Holsti, optimistic in other ways about public influence on policymaking, has warned that ordinary people “are poorly informed about most aspects of international affairs” (Holsti 1996, 215). Ignorance may be rational given the limited time citizens have to spend on different tasks, and the relatively high costs compared to the likely benefits of acquiring detailed information about foreign policy. It remains clearly sub-optimal in terms of developing public opinions in tune with actual public interests (Page and Shapiro 1992, 173). Fortunately for the public the recognition that much of the citizenry knows little about foreign policy has not undermined entirely the notion of public engagement in international affairs. The perceived existence of an “attentive” element within the public, whose interest (which may well be purely intellectual, and thus irrational in the economic sense) leads them to learn about foreign policy, has been introduced already (Risse-Kappen 1994, 238). Ignorance, it is noted furthermore, does not

prevent the development of opinion (Berelson 1952, 318, Sobel 2001, 21). Indeed, as Holsti himself points out, lack of direct knowledge is no bar to the use “even in the absence of much factual knowledge...[of] some simple – perhaps even simplistic – heuristics in order to make some sense of an increasingly complex world” (Holsti 1992, 450). Simplistic they may be, but the heuristics used by public actors in developing opinions on foreign affairs are often sufficiently appropriate as to generate reasonably rational outcomes, even on the basis of very little information (Jacobsen 2008, 351). Earlier images of the public as a ‘mob’, and public opinion as “impulsive, unstable, unreasoning, unpredictable, capable of suddenly shifting direction or of going in several contradictory directions at the same time” (Rosenau 1961, 36), have come under challenge in more recent studies for precisely this reason (Isernia, Juhasz and Rattinger 2002, Klarevas 2002). Indeed, the classical question, “should the *polis* adhere to beliefs informed by *doxa*, common opinion, or should its policies be shaped only by those who have refined, specialised knowledge, secured by *episteme*?” (Goodnight 1992, 243) has been reformulated in light of evidence that the distinction between the two is generally overstated. Collected (as opposed to individual) public opinions have been shown to demonstrate remarkable substantive rationality and consistency (Page and Shapiro 1992, Nincic 1992, 42, 45), although the point has been made that the two characteristics can conflict, where opinions are not updated in light of new information (Everts and Isernia 2001). Casualty levels, the perceived success of a policy, the benefits it promises, or the costs it seeks to avoid, have all been proposed as effective heuristics by which citizens gauge the significance of foreign policy to their daily lives, and on the basis of which they make decisions about which issues to learn more about (Mueller 1973, Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler 2005, Eichenberg 2005, 163, Klarevas 2006, 193, Gelpi, Reifler and Feaver 2007, 158).

Seeking to break away from the limitations of an approach to classifying the public based on their knowledge of foreign affairs, Mueller proposed a three-part typology of non-governmental actor derived from their actual behaviour in responding to particular official

positions. His “followers” always supported the government, while “partisans” stuck by their preferred political party line, and “believers” were guided by their own ideological views (Mueller 1973, 71, 116, 140). Splichal meanwhile has spoken of “a ‘voting public’ (i.e. the body of actual voters), an ‘attentive public’ (characterised by the interest in politics and at least occasional participation in debates on political issues), an ‘active public’ (representing the elite of the attentive public), and ‘sectoral’ or ‘special publics’” (Splichal 1999, 16). Research efforts which take this sort of functional approach, distinguishing between public actors according to their behaviour, have proven more successful, at least in terms of identifying their subjects, than those which consider the supposed sophistication of individual opinions. It has been noted, for example, that “regular viewers of television news and readers of broadsheet papers have higher-than-average levels of political information, interest, and engagement” (Norris 2000, 45). Press consumption indices have in turn yielded workable estimates of the size of different opinion strata, if not necessarily of their views (Sobel 2001, 13). Press consumption figures cannot distinguish between readers who ignore, who read and forget, and who avidly devour political news items. They are unable, therefore, to offer a sufficient guide to the makeup of a particular public. Alternative suggestions, such as the specification of a “minimum amount of outlay (money, and time in terms of money) necessary to warrant inclusion within the public” (Lasswell 1931, 315), have proven equally unsatisfactory in terms of their analytical coherence and practical applicability.

These varied contradictions can be reconciled by integrating the functional and the hierarchical classification systems. Acknowledging both that some public actors are more sophisticated than others, and that different actors respond to political issues in different ways, we can divide the broader public into *active* and *passive* elements. Active public actors seek directly to influence policy; they speak in Parliament, write in the press, or march in the streets. In the years after the period covered by this study, they increasingly found a voice through social networks and in the ‘blogosphere’ (cf. Hopkins and King 2007). Passive actors,

by contrast, may very well hold opinions on a subject, but these remain unexpressed, at least unless specifically prompted by pollsters. Active public actors distinguish themselves from the mass; there is no need to seek them out. They do so out of a particular interest in foreign affairs, and a desire to influence policymaking. They not only hold opinions, but establish *public* opinions, opinions expressed in public. As Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann has put it, in this formulation, “‘public’, in the context of public opinion, does not designate a certain category of topics on which opinions are held. It refers to the sphere in which public opinion processes operate” (Noelle-Neumann 1979, 152, Splichal 1999, 30). The collected expressions of the active public correspond neatly to what Lippmann called “Public Opinion with capital letters” (Lippmann 1922, 29), and it is the capitalised term which this study uses throughout whenever it discusses the impact of the active stratum.

Although “the tendency to confuse a part with the whole...to see the will of the majority in a stormy parliamentary debate or a persistent pressure-group lobby” has been labelled “one of the most common errors or sleights of hand perpetrated in discussions of public opinion” (Hill 1981, 57), a focus on the active public has in fact considerable historical pedigree. Before the advent of opinion polling, “‘public opinion was usually equated with riots, strikes, demonstrations, and boycotts’ and more generally with the opinions of those individuals who choose to enter the public sphere to express themselves” (Hopkins and King 2007, 1). Why should it not be? As Charles Tilly has noted, “if we push back into the strange terrain of western Europe and North America before the middle of the nineteenth century, we soon discover another world. In that world, most people did not vote, petition, or take positions on national affairs in anything like the contemporary meanings of those terms. Yet they did act together on their interests, broadcasting their demands, complaints, and aspirations in no uncertain terms” (Tilly 1983, 462). Public opinion therefore existed, in the form of Public Opinion, long before opinion polls were first conceived. What, furthermore, do the opinions of the public matter to politicians if those opinions are so lightly held that no

action is taken to broadcast them in this manner, or to impose them upon governments? Unsolicited public opinions tend to emerge from precisely those attentive and interested individuals whose views have proven so difficult to identify in general surveys (Verba, et al. 1967, 328). They frequently follow challenging trajectories when considering the most contentious policies (Mueller 1973, 157), meaning policymakers have an incentive to pay them attention (Powlick and Katz 1998, 45, Sobel 2001, 10, Hill 2003, 265). There is thus a very good argument that Public Opinion, as defined here, is a *more* significant subject for the consideration of public influence over foreign policy than the indicators of passive beliefs created by opinion polling. This is the case even before specific difficulties with the practice of polling itself are taken into account.

Public opinion does not exist

Since George Gallup first demonstrated the power of opinion polls for gauging the voting intentions of the passive public, most studies of public opinion, including those looking specifically at foreign policy, have used survey methods of the sort he pioneered. Already by the 1950s the notion was well established that polls represented “a well analysed distribution of attitudes” that actually existed in the passive public, this despite the fact that “very little” was yet known “about how such complete attitude distributions come into being” (Lazarsfeld 1957, 43). When a poll is conducted, a representative sample of the population of interest (likely voters in a coming election, controlling for socio-economic status, age, and gender, for example) is asked to respond to a question or a series of questions. The tools of statistical inference are then deployed to determine whether the results obtained represent a reasonable estimate of the responses that would arise were the same question asked of the entire population. Further specification can be gained by the conduct of repeated polls over a period of time. There are limits to what can be done with polling. But, generally speaking, the reliability of statistical inference and the range of more sophisticated analytical tools

statisticians have developed over the second half of the 20th century have seen opinion polling retain a prominent role in the study of public opinion.

This prominence is undue, at least when focusing on foreign policy. There is nothing wrong with the fundamental statistical principles that underpin poll activity, but their use to study public opinion remains flawed for reasons beyond the reliability of individual polls. Opinion polling is an invalid method for the study of public opinion on foreign policy matters as it is presently conceived because, as Pierre Bourdieu concluded in considering the matter, “public opinion does not exist”. Bourdieu offered three “implied postulates” stemming from the practice of polling that undermined the notion of an actually existing public opinion:

“[1] every opinion poll supposes that everyone can have an opinion; or, stated otherwise, that the production of an opinion is within everyone's range of possibility. At the risk of offending a naively democratic sentiment, I contest this...[2] it is taken for granted that all opinions have the same value. I believe that it can be proven that this is far from the truth, and that by gathering a plurality of opinions which do not have the same real importance, the results are very severely distorted...[3] the simple fact of asking everyone the same question implies...an agreement about which questions are worth asking” (Bourdieu 1979, 124).

Bourdieu’s argument was that, since ‘the public’ does not *actually* exist ‘out there’, and since therefore ‘public opinion’ equally does not *actually* exist, opinion polls *cannot* be said to measure public opinion. In his formulation, polls served simply “to impose the illusion that a public opinion exists” (Bourdieu 1979, 125). The practice of polling, similarly, filled a sociological position held in earlier ages by appeals to divine right. Writing to the Emperor Charlemagne in around the year 800, Alcuin of York warned “*nec audiendi qui solent dicere, vox populi, vox Dei, quum tumultuositas vulgi semper insaniae proxima sit*”; “do not listen to those who say ‘the voice of the people, is the voice of God’, for so uproarious is the mass as to be nearly mad” (Alcuin of York c800). The sentiment would have appealed to many 20th century scholars of public opinion. The specific phrase, “*vox populi, vox dei*”, which must clearly predate even Charlemagne, has a particular resonance in the face of Bourdieu’s criticism; as he put it, “the politician who yesterday said ‘God is on our side’ today says ‘Public

Opinion is on our side” (Bourdieu 1979, 125). The modern significance of *vox populi, vox dei* goes beyond the simple legitimisation function of an appeal to public support (Splichal 1999, 28). Not only is public opinion appealed to as a source of legitimacy in a similar way to God in earlier ages, it is also equally difficult to observe objectively, and indeed equally problematic from a scientific perspective. Opinion polls “are not designed to determine whether opinions exist, but to measure the variation in existing opinions” (Peer 1992, 231), just as theological studies do not question the existence of God, but proceed directly to analysing His works and intentions. Supporters of opinion polling argue that “there can be little doubt that public opinion, today, is a reality – in at least some senses of the term. It exists. If it did not, the activity of all those who claim to explore, measure and interpret it would be a little odd” (Osborne and Rose 1999). Their argument is that public opinion must exist, because of the size of the polling industry, and the level of interest in its outputs. But this argument merely reflects Splichal’s observation that “public opinion is often simply equated with what opinion polls measure, and the public with the population from which a (representative) sample of respondents is drawn” (Splichal 1999, 90). The claim that public opinion must exist because we can measure it with polls is tautological. One might equally argue that God must exist, because so many people pray to Him. In common with all research methods, polls are only scientifically valid if they are studying something which exists *independently of the practice of polling*. The use of polls to study public opinion on foreign policy matters does not meet this standard, and thus the entire practice is invalid. We cannot be sure that a response given to a pollster reflects an actual view, developed before the poll, or simply an off-the-cuff response relating to an issue to which the respondent had given no prior consideration. Opinion polls therefore do not reveal what the public *is thinking* about an issue, they reveal how it *would respond* to a question on that issue, *if* such a question was asked across the population as a whole. Where the question will indeed be asked, for example in the case of efforts to predict the outcome of elections or referenda, polls do not so much identify public opinion as predict public

behaviour; since the behaviour will itself exist come voting day, these polls *do* measure something that exists 'out there' (Splichal 1999, 242). They are consequently methodologically valid. Where, however, there is no intention to ask the general population to express its views on a subject, there is little point in estimating how it is likely to respond. This is the case with most foreign policy issues. As Cohen noted, the problem with polling is that it reveals "most about the foreign policy opinions of the people who, overall, are least likely to participate in foreign policy discussions and activities" (Cohen 1973, 4); those people being the passive public. Instead of focusing much energy and attention on artificially representing non-existent public views, foreign policy analysts should instead consider primarily the artefacts of Public Opinion, the existence of which is not in doubt.

This stance is not entirely novel, though it does require a more absolute dismissal of opinion polls as a guide to public opinion than most previous work. Leaving aside the established recognition that polling is often too simplistic to capture the complexity of foreign policy in any useful manner (Verba, et al. 1967, 318, Gaubatz 1995, 540), several scholars have already identified the faults highlighted here, even without recognising their significance. Mueller recognised that "many people simply do not *have* opinions on a number of questions" while going on to concede, as this study does, the validity of polling for the specific task of predicting voting behaviour, *and* to highlight "the ability of the poll question writer to manipulate in order to generate interesting newspaper copy" (Mueller 1973, 2, 121). Bourdieu identified the potential danger of relying upon the practice of polling to construct a definition of public opinion in raising the question of "who can afford to pay for an opinion poll" (Bourdieu 1979, 124). Economic interests determine, at a systemic level, both the sort of questions asked by pollsters, and the answers they seek to get. Most polls are paid for either by politicians (those in government or those seeking to be in government) with a view to winning elections, or by journalists seeking to generate source material to fill column inches (Beniger 1992, 216). Only those commissioned by journalists are regularly made available

beyond a small circle of party leaders and advisors. These media-created and media-reported analyses suffer from dual weaknesses. They are, firstly, commissioned with a view to providing source material for coverage of an issue of existing media interest, meaning they “rarely set agendas by themselves” (Herbst 1992, 223). The media does not pay for a poll without having first decided the topic upon which it wishes to hear the public’s views. Secondly, they “are necessarily superficial” (Beniger 1992, 216) because “if one tried to create a survey which took into account Bourdieu’s concerns [above], the poll would lose its news value because it would take so long to design and administer” (Herbst 1992, 228).

The notion that polls impose elite-determined categories onto passive individuals who may very well have no opinion on a subject prior to being polled is an important one, and, again, one that has not escaped notice in earlier studies in this area (Gamson and Modigliani 1989, Page and Shapiro 1992, 4-5, Cohen 1995, 53-54, Powlick and Katz 1998, 33). It does not require that the polls themselves be dishonest, but does imply that the act of their production is conditioned by elite views. This is particularly significant in light of the suggestion that “reporting trends in political opinion polls might similarly exert an influence on people” (Marsh 1984, 73, Splichal 1999, 240). If media coverage of poll results leads public opinion, rather than simply describing it, then there is considerable scope for journalists to determine, perhaps even unconsciously, the agenda of public debate. The role of the media as both a source and conduit of Public Opinion will be returned to in Chapter 8, underlining the role of polling as just one facet of a broader Public Opinion system with its own routines and broader implications for government.

Most scholars have sought to devise more elaborate polling or data analysis methods in order to get around the fundamental validity problem outlined here. Mueller himself advised comparing between similar polls, even while acknowledging that none involved the observation of something that actually existed. The most logical approach, however, is to accept that there is no objective value in opinion polling on foreign policy matters, other than

where voting behaviour of some sort is being predicted. Analysts would do better to look at the subjective ways in which policymakers and journalists interpret polls, and at the role of the action of polling in setting the tone for the public debate, rather than treating the results as intrinsically useful. As one recent study has put it, “once we accept that opinion polls are a form of representation, it raises the important question of how that representation works ideologically: what *kinds* of public opinion are produced, and what aspects of public discourse are excluded?” (Brookes, Lewis and Wahl-Jorgensen 2004, 63). Polls are not a good guide to what the public is thinking on a foreign policy matter. But such is their prominence in political life that their creation and deployment as rhetorical legitimising devices (Solomon 2009, 269), as mechanisms for the production of supporting evidence for particular elite-led arguments, remains a highly significant consideration. They are part of the system, an important part, even if they do not necessarily reveal any particular agency on the part of the passive public. It is in this capacity that they remain worthy of consideration.

Policymakers are rarely trained social scientists. They regard opinion polling as an expert activity and profess little understanding of the basis of its claims to validity and reliability. Demonstrating their failure to address these fundamental questions, they regard it as just one tool among many for the interrogation of the public mind. If polling is a valid and reliable method for studying public opinion, it should be used solely; if it is not, then not at all. No direct analysis has yet been carried out of the UK foreign policy establishment in this regard (though some anecdotal evidence gleaned from participant accounts is woven through the course of this thesis), but studies in the US have shown many of those most closely involved in the development and implementation of foreign policy adopt an intuitive rather than a scientific approach to gauging public views (Cohen 1973, 65, Powlick 1995, 431, Nacos, Shapiro and Isernia 2000, 5). Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann has argued that politicians understand the “climate of opinion” intuitively, without needing evidence (Noelle-Neumann 1979, 147-148, 154). Indeed, as shall be seen, this was the view of many in Tony Blair’s Downing Street. That

intuition is not based solely on abstract reasoning, however. It is informed by a range of trusted sources, including the media – both ‘objective’ news and ‘subjective’ editorial elements, with the boundaries between the two often blurred (Blair 2012a, 2) – elected members of the legislature, and prominent individual citizens including academics, business leaders, and public intellectuals (Cohen 1973, 78, 107, 125, Herbst 1992, 228, Powlick 1995, 433-435, Entman 2004, 21, Knecht and Weatherford 2006). Some leaders are simply overwhelmed by the volume of polls and “pseudoindicators of public opinion (letters, demonstrations, editorial opinions) [available to them] through the media, contacts with members of the opinion and policy elite, or observations of political events” (Graham 1994, 198-199). The result is an approach that can, at best, be described as *impressionistic*. Policymakers assume either that active Public Opinion represents the view of the population as a whole (Kull and Ramsay 2000, 104), or that the absence of significant public activity means their citizens are indifferent on an issue (Powlick and Katz 1998, 44). Few are likely to adopt a more sophisticated approach than developing an instinctive view of what they regard as ‘public opinion’ on a given question, based on whichever sources appear most prominent and most significant to them at the time. It is possible to re-construct the operation of these instinctive judgements, provided enough evidence is elucidated about individuals’ mindsets during the period of interest. Often this evidence reveals prejudices that policymakers, not being social scientists, would not have recognised themselves as holding. It also offers support for the model of Public Opinion as a systemic factor in the policymaking process, rather than a source of agency.

Influence and intervening variables

Christopher Hill has written that “politicians often argue that their hands are tied by public opinion, or at least that they have to work within the limits set by it...[while] political scientists tend to be sceptical and to side more with those radical critics who claim that public

opinion is paid lip service but in practice ignored” (Hill 2003, 262). No single study has yet demonstrated a direct causal link between ‘public opinion’ as an independent variable and foreign policy as a dependent variable; as Holsti put it, “the evidence describing public opinion still far outstrips, both in quantity and quality, that on the causal links between public opinion and foreign policy, [although] research in recent years has begun to cast doubt on the earlier consensus about public impotence” (Holsti 1992, 452). The Vietnam War has often been cited by US policymakers (particularly those of a conservative bent) as an example of the negative impact of Public Opinion on the ability of a democratic state to fight effectively. Daniel Hallin’s analysis, however, concluded only that further escalation of the conflict had been resisted by the Johnson administration “not so much because it felt political opposition gave it no choice, but because it was unwilling to sacrifice other political priorities to an all-out war effort”. The suggestion that a government might have other political priorities during a time of war would appear ridiculous to leaders of the ‘total war’ generation, but since the end of WWII most western states have experienced conflict only in limited terms. Hallin concluded that “maybe the lesson of Vietnam is not that it is difficult for an open society to fight a limited war, but that it is difficult to fight a limited war against an enemy for whom it is not a limited war” (Hallin 1986, 212, 214). The question of whether Public Opinion prevents democracies from waging war only makes sense, then, in the context of the sort of limited, ‘discretionary’ war discussed in this study. Its findings will not, then, necessarily be indicative of a more general phenomenon.

There is some evidence of shifts in passive public preferences being followed by corresponding shifts in policy (Page and Shapiro 1992, 2, Shapiro and Jacobs 2000, 225, Everts and Isernia 2001, 17, Aldrich, et al. 2006, 478). Doubts remain, even amongst those producing these studies, over whether their evidence accounts for a sufficiently wide range of alternative explanations (Jacobs and Page 2005, 119). Most analysts have restricted themselves to ascribing an agenda setting role to the passive public, with its preferences (as expressed in

polls, protest, or the press) helping to “move an issue to a spot near the top of the national agenda for government action”, rather than determining policy *per se* (Hilsman 1987, 233). Some have also qualified the notion of public influence, arguing that non-governmental actors have an *indirect* rather than a *direct* role in the policymaking process (Risse-Kappen 1991, 510, Graham 1994, 190).

So challenging is the task undertaken by this study that Hill once concluded “a search for public opinion and its influence over British foreign policy is of the same order as the search for the Loch Ness Monster – intriguing, but fanciful” (Hill 1981, 60). It is true that the influence of Public Opinion, where it exists at all, exists in the minds of policymakers, and “academics *cannot* peer inside the minds of policy makers and see influence at work” (Robinson 2008, 141). Public Opinion is, after all, simply a cognitive construction in the “psychological” environment of foreign-policy decision-making, informed but not dictated by observations of varying objectivity of phenomena in the “operational” environment (Sprout and Sprout 1956). It is *created by* policymakers, and other interested observers (Lippmann 1922, 15-17, Kull and Ramsay 2000, 109, Hill 2003, 267-268). Nevertheless, even the sceptics working in the 1960s identified models by which public influence *might* be identified. Rosenau for example proposed that the *flow of opinion* around a political system might better be traced than direct influence (Rosenau 1961, 11-12). His model failed to identify the causal mechanisms at work, but does provide a useful starting point. Later analyses have highlighted the occasional admission by governments that an act was driven by the public as a useful indicator (Kern, Levering and Levering 1984, 7). Here too there are problems, however. Policymakers’ perceptions of Public Opinion need not necessarily chime with what an ‘objective’ third-party might observe (Jervis 1976, Hill 1981, 59). Political rewards meanwhile await leaders who *show* deference to their electors, whether or not they *act* deferentially. In recognising, however, the potential for policymakers to say one thing and to do another in the conduct of foreign policy, we begin to identify the core causal mechanism suggested by this study. The classical, sceptical

view of public (non-)influence was that public opinion set the outer limits within which policy must be set in order to be seen as legitimate, but that there remained a sizeable “sphere of legitimate controversy” (Hallin 1984, 21) within which politicians remained free to act as they saw fit (Almond 1950, 5, Rosenau 1961, 36, Key 1961, 552). The public, in other words, exerted a weak influence over foreign policy, establishing distant ‘red lines’ beyond which policymakers must not pass, but having no real, direct impact. This image has survived challenges to the wider ‘Almond-Lippmann consensus’ (Nincic 1992, 97, Sobel 2001, 5, 25). It fails, however, adequately to explain the interaction of public and policymaking, for at least two reasons. To begin with, it does nothing to address the significance of what legitimate controversy there may be within the apparent ‘outer limits’, to define between whom it takes place, and on the basis of what information. In addition, it fails to account for the importance of the activities conducted by governments in bringing about public influence. Public Opinion rarely actively dictates a change of policy course. What it does do, however, is create structural conditions in which policymakers *chose* to change course, partially at least of their own volition. In seeking to account for the significance of the public debate that took place in Britain over the invasion of Iraq, it is necessary to explain what aspects of that debate influenced policymaking, and to understand what the ultimate impact of that influence was. This study consequently focuses on what interactions took place *within* the ‘sphere of legitimate controversy’ represented by public debate, rather than on how its outer limits were established (although it does discuss those limits, and the constraining effect they had on policymaking).

Even having identified the structural nature of Public Opinion, and established its generation and operation through public debate as the proper primary focus for analysts interested in the domestic sources of democratic foreign policy, a greater degree of specification is necessary in order to construct a working model of public-policymaker interaction. Much of the work needed in this area has already been done; a range of

'intervening variables' have been identified which affect the extent to which public opposition to a given foreign policy position comes to influence government behaviour. These variables await only the construction of a coherent overarching theoretical framework into which they can each fit, and their integration with the notion of active Public Opinion. The most self-explanatory is the idea that the absolute level of public support for, or opposition to, a policy will impact upon the extent to which the public is listened to. As Key put it, "a government sensitive to public attitudes confronts a different problem when 90 percent of the people are for and 10 percent against a proposition than when the division is 50:50", or indeed where "15 percent are pro, 10 percent are anti, and 75 percent are unaware of the question" (Key 1961, 21). The idea that 75% of the public might be unaware of any given foreign policy question is both intuitive and consistent with the criticisms of opinion polling advanced above. More recently, Thomas Graham has established an entire hierarchy of influence, arguing "majority" opinion against a policy (50-59%) could be ignored by policymakers, albeit with risks, while public "consensus" (60-69%) would override otherwise significant official opposition, "preponderant" opinion (70-79%) would drive the public's preferred policy into implementation, and "unanimous" public attitudes (80%+) would totally dominate a political system (Graham 1994, 195-196). Graham's model failed to account for a number of additional intervening variables, including the structure of a state, and the balance between political parties operating within it. It also relied too heavily on polls, an approach regarded by this study as detrimental to methodological validity. Nevertheless, the notion that a more concerned public will have greater influence is a useful one. This study builds on Cohen (1995, 62-63), who talked about the scale of public protest as an influence on decision-making. The size of the active public, in other words the proportion of the populace which chooses to contribute to the public debate over a policy, serves either to heighten or to lessen policymakers' attention to the substance of non-governmental views being thus expressed, creating conditions in which they are more likely to choose to respond directly. Public

activation can be seen, as Cohen suggests, in street protests. It appears, also, in the frequency and duration of parliamentary debates on a topic, and on the volume of media commentary dedicated to its discussion. Each of these elements aid this study's efforts to observe public activation in practice.

Secondly, public influence is conditioned by the beliefs of individual policymakers about the importance of attentiveness to public opinion, and about the need for non-governmental input into the foreign policy-making process. More recent work in this area has moved the field beyond 1960s debates over whether consulting the public on an issue was principled or cynical (Rosenau 1961, 24, Key 1961, 538). Douglas Foyle (1997) created a two-dimensional framework (and thus four different types of policymaker) to assess how far normative beliefs about the *desirability* of a public input to foreign policy, and practical considerations about its *necessity*, impact upon decision-making. In Foyle's formulation, policymakers labelled "delegates" think public support for their actions both necessary and desirable, "executors" think it desirable but not necessary, "pragmatists" necessary but not desirable, and "guardians" neither necessary nor desirable (Foyle 1997, 145). Efforts have since been made to integrate approaches which gauge the impact of policymaker attitudes with a more general consideration of how ministers view the national interest (Shannon and Keller 2007, 82), and with the polyheuristic model of foreign policy decision-making (Keller and Yang 2008, 687). This study will draw upon these insights in seeking to explain how and why particular expressions of Public Opinion achieved some measure of influence over policymaking.

A third intervening variable proposed in the literature is the structure of a state, including the locus of foreign policy decision-making power, the exposure of decision-makers to electoral vicissitudes, and the access routes through which Public Opinion can reach those with the power to act upon it (Cohen 1973, 43). Risse-Kappen has argued persuasively that the way governing coalitions are assembled in a state (whether within or between political parties,

for example) affects the significance of public opinion to policymakers (Risse-Kappen 1991, 479-480, 1994, 238). Linked to this, Chan and Safran have described the significance of the accessibility of foreign policymakers to the electorate, determined by their position within a democratic state structure (Chan and Safran 2006, 137). Domestic structures are held to be of further significance for the way they permit or prevent public opinions being expressed in meaningful forums such as a national parliament or the press (Cohen 1995, 53), and their interrelation with the notion of signalling in diplomatic bargaining, with more publicly accountable governments being better able to demonstrate seriousness to rivals than those less exposed to their publics (Fearon 1994, 587, Partell 1997, 504). Two main aspects of the structure of a state are relevant for this study; the division (or otherwise) of ministerial responsibility for foreign policy decision-making (and thus the flows of information between relevant actors), and the impact of the system of government on the direct accountability of decision-makers for their actions. It has, for example, been argued that the British executive has considerable freedom to ignore public views on foreign policy, owing to the combined effect of the government's control over the international use of force, and the implications of a political system under which the party in government by definition commands the support of a majority of MPs in the House of Commons (Hill 2007, 276). This study shows that Public Opinion is not really separable from these more established 'political' structures. They do not so much 'filter' Public Opinion as interact with it; the rules of parliamentary arithmetic must be considered in tandem with the operating procedures of the media and the dynamics of protests in the streets.

Fourthly, and following on from the structure of the system of government under consideration, public influence is affected by the distribution of views across the party-political landscape, and the distribution of power between competing political parties (Putnam 1988, 458, Shapiro and Jacobs 2000, 228, Schuster and Maier 2006, 223). As Key noted, "the ultimate weapon of public opinion is the minority party" (Key 1961, 556), because it is only by voting for

the minority party that the public can actually remove the government from power, other than by force, a highly unusual and unlikely eventuality in the sort of mature democracy under consideration here. It matters therefore whether, and to what extent, credible alternative policymakers support the policy proposed by those in office; and it has been claimed that a rational power-seeking opposition party will seek to capitalise on any measure of public dissatisfaction (Ramsay 2004, 460). Such is the significance of political opposition that its absence can completely undermine public influence (Sobel 2001, 23-24, Kreps 2010, 199). Opposition politicians' behaviour during the period of this study is thus of great importance.

The notion of international action being mirrored by domestic political competition represented by these four 'intervening variables' underpins the dominant "two-level game" model of foreign policy decision-making. According to the model, policymakers attempt to balance competing and often conflicting interests and opinions both within their own political system and in the wider realm of international politics (Putnam 1988, Bennett 1994, 17, Hill and Stavridis 1996, 5, Trumbore 1998, 561). That actions taken on one level might impact upon the other appears logical and well-supported by empirical evidence. Indeed, further work has suggested that policymakers perceive (and are right to perceive) a direct link between the retention of domestic power and the successful pursuit of foreign policy. Leaders who are unsuccessful overseas, it is said, often struggle to maintain domestic political support, though it is not necessarily the case that foreign policy failures lead directly to electoral punishment (Verba, et al. 1967, 317, Hagan 1990, 4, Nincic 1992, 91-92, Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson 1995, 853, Partell 1997, 508-509). The study of the credibility of threats as a diplomatic tool has helped to integrate Public Opinion into the two-level game model. On the one hand, an adversary that does not believe a government will be able to maintain domestic support for a threatened action may regard any threat it issues as chimerical (Eichenberg 2005, 148). On the other, it is now recognised that any policymaker who issues a public threat risks "domestic audience costs" should they fail to achieve their desired outcome or to carry the threat

through (Baum 2003, 285, Baum 2004a, 609, Heffernan 2006, 593, Tomz 2007, 821). The very act of issuing public statements on foreign policy thus establishes structural constraints on the freedom of policymakers to pursue their favoured course. This observation forms part of the basis for the core theoretical conclusions of this study, set out in Chapter 8.

Methods of observation

The level of domestic political punishment or reward accruing to a government for a particular foreign policy is determined by the balance between public expectations of its costs and benefits, and its actual consequences (Mueller 1973, 168, Gaubatz 1995, 541). It is in turn linked to the conclusion of many scholars that the “government responds to, as well as leads, public opinion” (Shapiro and Jacobs 2000, 230). A “highly iterative” process of interaction links domestic and international arenas (Powlick 1995, 430). The direction in which influence flows, and the significance of that influence, varies with circumstance (Putnam 1988, 427, Bennett 1994, 34, Everts and Isernia 2001, 17, 265). Public Opinion cannot, therefore, be described as having a simple causal relationship to foreign policy, though nor can foreign policy-makers be seen to hold a monopoly of initiative or absolute power to direct Public Opinion, despite their evident ability to influence the flow of information to the passive public. The degree of influence attained by both Public Opinion and policymakers is determined by the specific circumstances in which they interact. The public’s impact in any given situation can best be understood, therefore, only through in-depth empirical analysis of the events in question. There is no simple theoretical shortcut if we are to observe the way Public Opinion operates as a systemic force. For this reason there are no dependent and independent variables in this study, but rather a “thick description” (Geertz 1973), a detailed analytical account of exchanges within the British “public sphere” (Habermas 1962, 1992) during the eighteen months between 11 September 2001 and the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, and a comparison

of this account with the actions and statements of key policymakers, Tony Blair especially, in a search for the causal mechanisms discussed above.

Three main types of source material will be used to 'triangulate' what is essentially an interpretive account of policymaking against the background context established by Public Opinion. Firstly, there are the 'artefacts' of the public debate itself; government statements, parliamentary speeches, and media commentary. Frozen at the point of delivery, these offer evidence of the positions taken by competing actors during the pre-war period. Unlike interviews, contemporary statements cannot be revised with the benefit of hindsight (Laver and Garry 2000, Laver, Benoit and Garry 2003); a particularly important consideration in looking at the Iraq conflict given how inaccurate much of the official case for war was subsequently proven to have been. In addition, anything not made public at the time of the debate leading up to the war cannot possibly have influenced it directly. Public Opinion as expressed in the media will be gauged using editorial and commentary articles published in the leading British newspapers (by circulation) at the time. Unlike their television counterparts, newspaper commentators are under less pressure to provide instant reactions to new developments, and, compared to broadcasters, print journalists are forced by the nature of their medium to rely more heavily on analysis than on imagery (Gamson, Croteau, et al. 1992, Norris 2000, 25, Robinson 2008, 141). They are also able to develop their views in light of television coverage, and so they can react to major expressions of Public Opinion in televised forums. As a result, the full range of views expressed in the public sphere during this period should be reflected in newspaper commentary; it is unlikely any major contribution to the public debate was not at some point analysed by newspaper columnists and editorial-writers. Even where an argument did not originate in print, therefore, it should still be captured by a study that uses newspapers as a proxy for the media more generally; indeed, this is one of the characteristics of Public Opinion as a structure that this study observes (Blair 2012a, 2). This approach to assembling source materials is considered therefore to have achieved

“saturation” in terms of the range of views represented, a key criterion set out in methodology texts for the construction of a qualitative research corpus (Bauer and Aarts 2000, 34). Ultimately 2,114 separate opinion pieces relating to Iraq are considered, alongside an additional 273 discussing the earlier attack on Afghanistan, all obtained using keyword searches of the Lexis Nexis database. For the Afghan phase, between September and December 2001, the keywords used were ‘Afghanistan’ and ‘Blair’; for the period between January 2002 and March 2003 ‘Afghanistan’ was replaced with ‘Iraq’. ‘Blair’ was used in an attempt to keep the resulting corpus focussed on British political matters; there is a risk, however, that the data obtained on sources has been skewed somewhat as a result. Ultimately, the risk of source bias was thought low because the Prime Minister’s central role in policymaking rendered it unlikely much news coverage of the policy itself would have avoided mentioning him.

Such is the volume of newspaper commentary considered that it proves possible to generate quantitative data through a simple content analysis approach. Each article reviewed was categorised as “pro-war”, “neutral”, or “anti-war” depending on whether the writer explicitly expressed a view on the rectitude of military action (against either Afghanistan or Iraq, depending on the date), and on the substance of that view. To reflect better the actual shape of public debate, the resultant figures were then scaled according to the monthly average circulation figures achieved by the relevant publication, producing overall results which indicate not the distribution of pro-war, neutral, and anti-war views between the commentary articles *written*, but between those in *circulation*. Where, for example, low-circulating publications produced a large number of articles expressing a particular view, their impact on the general picture of public debate is qualified here with reference to the number of copies of each article actually distributed. Because the corpus is considered to be comprehensive, i.e. it is not a ‘sample’ of opinion pieces about Iraq, but contains the entire ‘population’, only this very basic level of control is necessary in producing descriptive statistics.

More sophisticated inferential methods would only have been necessary if it had not proven possible to classify the corpus in its entirety.

The second main type of source document, contemporary government documents not released to the public, will be used to assess the extent to which public statements genuinely reflected official thinking. So much material has been declassified early as a result of the various public inquiries into the invasion of Iraq that obtaining documentary evidence of this sort is far less challenging than would typically be the case with such a recent topic. Obviously internal papers do not change the nature of contemporary public statements. They do however shed light on how closely external messages matched the internal debates then taking place within government. In addition, they reveal a great deal about the processes by which the Blair government engaged with Public Opinion, and help to identify occasions on which it was constrained by its structural effects even while seeking to break away from individual public activities.

The final source of evidence will be retrospective accounts by a number of participants in elements of the decision-making process, including some based on contemporaneous diaries, 'first cut' historical surveys based on interviews and direct observations of events, and evidence presented to the Hutton, Butler, Chilcot, and Leveson Inquiries. Although such accounts are likely to be coloured by hindsight, a sufficient range of different viewpoints is available, from a number of actors whose interests in terms of how the Iraq war is remembered differ, that collectively they represent an additional and highly useful resource. By comparing the way different actors saw the impact of Public Opinion, we can gain some insight into how far its capacity to influence policymaking at a systemic level played out in practice in this particular case.

Overview

The empirical core of this study opens in Chapter 2 with an account of the public debate in Britain following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, and during the NATO response against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Among the issues raised are the centralisation of foreign policy decision-making in Downing Street during Tony Blair's premiership, and the concomitant sidelining of the Foreign Office; the general support in Parliament and polls for military action against the Taliban; and the difficulties faced by those opposed to war as they sought to develop a coherent and consistent alternative proposition, stemming not least from their own indecision. In Chapter 3, the focus shifts to Iraq, as 'hawks' in the Bush administration began agitating for 'phase two' of the 'war on terror' to involve the removal of Saddam Hussein from power in Baghdad. At the presidential ranch in Crawford, Texas, Bush and Blair met in April 2002 and agreed that something must be done about Iraq, though at this point forced 'regime change' was only the most probable of a range of possible solutions. Through the middle of 2002, as Chapter 4 recounts, the Blair government avoided talking about Iraq as far as possible, but in doing so it ceded control over the agenda of public debate. By September Blair was forced by the volume of media speculation (fuelled in part by the penetration of the British public sphere by discussions developing across the Atlantic) to bring forward the planned release of a 'dossier' outlining Iraq's violations of UN Security Council Resolutions governing the development of Weapons of Mass Destruction, the now notorious 'WMD'. The document's accelerated release, however, caused more problems than it solved. Chapter 5 looks at the period of UN consultation, beginning with President Bush's 12 September speech to the General Assembly, and ending with Hans Blix's second report to the Security Council on 14 February 2003. Britain and the US went to the UN to seek approval for military action against Iraq. They were not genuinely seeking an alternative to war, because by this point leaders of both countries were convinced that there was no genuine alternative. The other UN member states saw things differently, and again the resulting row did more harm

than good to the British government's case in the eyes of Public Opinion. By the time of the events described in Chapter 6, the mass street protests orchestrated by the Stop the War Coalition on 15 February, and the climactic parliamentary debates of 26 February and 18 March, the die had been firmly cast. Forced to choose between Saddam and Blair, a majority of the British public (and, crucially, British MPs) backed Blair, albeit grudgingly. The start of hostilities did not, as Chapter 7 recounts, mark the end of the debate over the invasion; far from it. Between 2003 and the withdrawal of British forces from Basra Province in 2009, three main factors combined in critically damaging the lasting legitimacy of the war in the British public mind. Firstly, there were no WMD, and a popular narrative developed to explain their absence based on mistrust of the government and the Prime Minister in particular. Secondly, Iraq descended into chaos and sectarian violence, and the costs in blood and gold of what had been sold as a short and inexpensive campaign rapidly spiralled. Finally, amidst a wider wave of 'home grown' jihadist terrorism, Britain experienced its first suicide bombings, explicitly linked by their perpetrators to the presence of British troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Tony Blair won the 2005 general election for the same reason that he was able to get the invasion approved by Parliament; although many voters, like many Labour MPs, disagreed with him on this specific issue, they were not willing to sacrifice him over it. He *was*, however, willing to sacrifice himself. Chapter 8 concludes this study by outlining its core theoretical contributions to the discipline of Foreign Policy Analysis, in the form of a set of implications for the future consideration of domestic influences over British foreign policy. The substance and the communication of foreign policy inevitably interact. Public Opinion thus gains traction over decision-making by virtue of the competition between government and public actors to set agenda of public debate. To a significant degree, the difficulties faced by the government in trying to win support for its Iraq policy were caused by how that policy was 'sold' in the context of the prevailing Public Opinion system. Certainly the conflict's lasting contentiousness derives from dissatisfaction with the communication as much as with the substance of the

decision to go to war in early 2003. Even with a more successful official narrative, however, the very nature of the Public Opinion system of media, politicians, and passive public into which policymakers' messages are transmitted militates against successful elite management. This study thus concludes by noting the remarkable and intractable challenge that the constraining effect of Public Opinion over foreign policy poses for the successful conduct of democratic government.

Chapter 2 – Tough on terrorism, or tough on the causes of terrorism?: September – December 2001

It was not inevitable that the terrorist attacks that took place in the United States on 11 September 2001 would lead Britain to war with Iraq. The public debate that took place in Britain over the initial response to those attacks, the campaign to remove the Taliban regime from power in Afghanistan, nevertheless prefigured in many ways the discord that would follow over Iraq. Before 11 September there had been little mainstream consideration of the idea that military action might be taken against Saddam Hussein; UN weapons inspectors, installed after the Gulf War in 1991, had been withdrawn in 1998 and not replaced. A limited course of air strikes had expressed the dissatisfaction of western states at the breakdown in the monitoring programme, and tough economic sanctions remained in effect, but the Iraqi Ba’athist regime still survived. There were concerns, in London as well as Washington, that the situation could not be allowed to continue indefinitely, but there was no plan to act. 11 September changed that, but not immediately. In the weeks and months following the attacks, both policymakers and the public focused on Afghanistan. This chapter considers in detail the nature of the debate over the campaign that had by mid-December driven the Taliban from power and established a tame interim administration in Kabul. It asks how far later disagreements had their origins in unresolved contradictions from these early months, and it sets up an implicit comparison between the invasion of Afghanistan and that of Iraq.

Three key elements within the debate together both characterised these early months and established the context within which later controversies developed. To begin with, there remained in December 2001 an unresolved question raised repeatedly after 11 September. To what extent did the ‘war on terror’ represent an irreconcilable and potentially open-ended “clash of civilisations” (Huntington 1996), as opposed to a more limited reaction to a specific incident, best kept narrowly focused on al-Qaeda and the Taliban? Secondly, there was uncertainty about the limits of Britain’s commitment to its alliance with the United States.

Tony Blair had offered US policymakers, and the American people, British support in facing up to terrorism (Blair 2001a). British involvement in the removal of the Taliban was broadly welcomed domestically, and gratefully received in Washington (cf. Bush 2001). How far that support might continue should the US seek to extend the limits of the campaign remained unclear. Finally, deliberate ambiguity on the part of ministers about Britain's wider goals for the 'war on terror', ambiguity which remained unresolved in a predominantly quiescent Public Opinion climate, facilitated the widespread projection of views about action against Iraq onto the blank canvas of government policy. Considerable scope existed for both supporters and opponents of the further use of force to be disappointed. For all the apparent unity evident in British public debate during the initial invasion of Afghanistan, these three core characteristics of the initial post-11 September debate set the scene for later disagreements over Iraq.

Waging war on an abstract noun

That the 11 September attacks warranted some sort of armed response by the US and its allies (under the broad label of 'the international community') was never in much doubt in Britain. As soon as efforts began, however, to define the appropriate limits of that response, questions arose as to the nature of the threat faced which immediately posed problems. Ministers struggled not only to manage Public Opinion in this regard, but to answer the questions for themselves. Tony Blair had taken the initiative in reacting to the attacks; that he was personally responsible for setting the tone for Britain's response appears never to have been seriously questioned, either in Whitehall or by the wider public (Daddow 2011, 225). He listened to senior colleagues, especially Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon, but he relied above all on his "inner circle" of Downing Street officials for advice; Director of Strategy and Communications Alastair Campbell, Foreign Policy Adviser Sir David Manning, and Chief of Staff Jonathan Powell (Kampfner 2003, 121). Only Manning was a career civil servant; both Campbell and Powell were political appointees. They had, unusually, been

given the authority to direct civil servants, something the bureaucracy was never happy about (Hollis 2010, 2-3, 58-59, 61). Neither fulfilled what Campbell called a “traditional” role; instead “what we did was largely driven by what [Blair] wanted us to do and what our personalities best allowed us to do” (Campbell and Stott 2007, 615). The result was an informal and often *ad hoc* approach which fit uneasily with civil service norms, causing occasional bureaucratic incidents as a result. In one early example, on 20 September 2001, Ambassador to Washington Sir Christopher Meyer threw “an absolute tantrum” when told by Powell that, in a break from protocol, he was to be excluded from a crucial meeting between Blair and Bush. Blair wanted instead to take “the three people he would be working most closely with” back in London, namely Campbell, Powell, and Manning (Campbell and Stott 2007, 573). Meyer himself describes his response as “furious and expletive-laden” (C. Meyer 2005, 202). He was eventually admitted, but journalists noted that it was still the Downing Street aides who accompanied Blair to dinner with Bush (Murphy 2001). Not without reason were they occasionally described as “the Prime Minister’s real war cabinet” (C. Anderson 2001).

If Public Opinion had gained the impression that the Prime Minister was relying more heavily on his personal staff than on his ministers and civil service officials in determining British policy after 11 September, the view would only have been compounded by the relative inactivity of the Cabinet during the initial weeks after the attacks (McAskill and White 2001, Dillon 2001a). Only a handful of formal meetings of the most senior British ministers took place during this time, and with Parliament not in session it was largely through Downing Street press briefings that the government’s position was advanced. In part this reflected the fact that Cabinet usually does not meet at all during the parliamentary recess, and although MPs were recalled three times during September and October, normal parliamentary business did not resume following the summer break until the fighting was well under way in Afghanistan. Tony Blair’s relative insulation from outside views in these early weeks did not necessarily represent, therefore, a deliberate effort to minimise the input of Public Opinion into

policymaking. The effect was nevertheless that most of the government's early thinking during the first month of the 'war on terror' took place at some remove from the key spheres of public debate. Certainly parliamentary influence was constrained, along with whatever broader public influence might exist by virtue of Britain's relatively open political system. Of far greater import was the Prime Minister's own opinion and, to the degree that they influenced him, the opinions of those closest to him.

Although expert advice was taken from within Whitehall, especially from the intelligence services (Campbell and Stott 2007, 568), the isolation of core decision-makers even from much of the system of government remained stark. It was exacerbated further by an apparently well-established sense of distrust within Downing Street of the supposedly pro-Arab Middle East analysts based in the Foreign Office, who, formally at least, were the British government's most knowledgeable experts on the region (Hollis 2010, 63). Alastair Campbell epitomised the No. 10 view in recording his disgust at a 12 September diplomatic briefing which he felt "came very close to saying the attack was justified" by focusing too heavily on US mistakes in the region (Campbell and Stott 2007, 563). Certain professional judgements, however informed by experience and diplomatically delivered, were unacceptable in Blair's Downing Street. Far from exerting the sort of dominance described by Allison's models (Allison and Zelikow 2nd Edn. 1999), the British bureaucracy was thus largely excluded from core policymaking in the immediate aftermath of 11 September. Instead of listening to civil service briefings, Jonathan Powell (an ex-diplomat himself) visited the Trafalgar Square branch of Waterstone's bookshop and bought *Taliban* by Ahmed Rashid (2000), which he read in an afternoon spent sat alone in his office. Both Campbell and Blair wanted to borrow the text once he was finished (Powell 2010b, 271), and it was later spotted on the Prime Minister's plane as he flew to the US (Wintour 2001). Shortly afterwards, a BBC World Service reporter named Najiba Kasraee, who had fled violence in Afghanistan as a child, was said to have left the Prime Minister "deeply moved" after offering an account of the suffering of ordinary

civilians in her home country during a chance encounter (Harris 2001). Blair himself had spent part of the summer reading the Koran. At one point he observed that “Mohammed had lost battles but there was a belief that if you died in the cause that you believed in then you went straight to heaven”. As Campbell put it, “that was a very, very powerful thing to work against” (Campbell and Stott 2007, 562). It was apparently on the basis largely of these personal interactions and reflections that the Prime Minister concluded there was “no compromise possible with such people, no meeting of minds, no point of understanding with such terror. Just a choice: defeat it or be defeated by it” (Blair 2001b). Such was the strength of this conviction that he, unusually, wrote his Labour Party Conference speech, which dealt in detail with the need for a robust response, “virtually straight out” with “none of the usual agonising” or repeated redrafting (Blair 2010b, 367). Public Opinion in general had almost no chance of influencing his position; even his own officials had largely been cut out of the loop. At this stage the Prime Minister’s show of leadership was welcomed; he was praised for showing “moral conviction [and] decisiveness” (D. MacIntyre 2001b), and hailed as “a man at the helm who knows instinctively what to do” (The Sun 2001a). That he had been rewarded for effectively ignoring the advice of those around him, and of the wider British public sphere, appears ominous with hindsight.

When President Bush responded to the 11 September attacks by declaring a ‘war on terror’, he introduced an entirely new conceptual framework into the global foreign policy discourse. To an extent, the detailed construct developed by his administration in the weeks that followed represented a novel and unique response to a particular set of circumstances (Wolfe 2008, 45). At the same time, it was undeniably “a direct metaphorical descendant of Lyndon Johnson’s ‘War on Poverty’ and the various ‘Wars on Drugs’” (B. MacIntyre 2001b). It might even be regarded as having earlier antecedents. During the Middle Ages, Christian warriors and theologians had between them developed the concept of a ‘crusade’. Soldiers on crusade were not merely participants in an armed conflict between secular authorities; they

served a higher divine power. Even pledging to travel to the Holy Land in the hoped of undertaking some feat of arms represented an act of service to God. The act of crusading, like that of pilgrimage, is an end in itself; the achievement of stated objectives becoming a secondary goal. So it was with the 'wars' on poverty, drugs, and terror. None of these 'enemies' would ever be defeated; but there was virtue in the struggle, and political capital to be made in their use as metaphors for the glory of a government and the virtue of loyalty. In a manner which uncomfortably echoed the notion of the 'crusade', the 'war on terror' proved a powerful "propagandistic and rhetorical device" in the US (Hoijer, Nohrstedt and Ottosen 2004, 7), where it comprised "the most important rhetorical construction of the entire [post-11 September public] discourse" (Jackson 2005, 31). It was also a serious policy programme, with significant "intellectual coherence and internal logic", based on the belief that future security for the US homeland would require a more pro-active approach to potential threats than that hitherto adopted (Burke 2011, 46). Its impact in the UK was limited. A handful of British journalists complained as so-called "soldier-speak" gradually penetrated the vocabulary of public debate during the course of the Afghan campaign, leaving the discursive landscape "radically and rapidly altered" (Roberts 2001, Fisk 2001c, B. MacIntyre 2001d). The overarching theme of a global 'war', however, did not resonate in Britain, at least outside Islamist circles. This was perhaps unsurprising; all successful discourses require a sponsor (Milliken 1999), and the most likely sponsor for this particular construction was the government, which spoke equivocally. In Parliament, Blair framed the attacks as "an act of wickedness" rather than as an 'act of war' (Blair, Hansard 2001a, c604). Although the distinction was subtle, it was roundly endorsed by MPs and commentators in the press (Richards 2001a, Miles 2001). It left open the possibility of a challenge to al-Qaeda's notion of intractable global politico-religious conflict, and so militated against the creation of an "escalating cycle of violence" (Hall 2001). It allowed those domestic actors who harboured doubts about the 'war' label the freedom to endorse military action in Afghanistan without confronting the contradictions latent in their approach

(cf. Kennedy, Hansard 2001b, c680, Keetch, Hansard 2001b, c750, Hansard 2001e, c1034). The extent to which Blair genuinely rejected the notion that 'the West' was 'at war' has been brought into question subsequently by his own memoirs. By 2010, the attacks on the United States had become, in his mind, very definitely "a declaration of war" (Blair 2010b, 342). This apparent revelation, then, serves to undermine the contemporary view that the Prime Minister did not regard 11 September as the start of a broad global conflict. Once this understanding is brought into consideration, the wider series of positions adopted by the government immediately appear more bellicose. Blair had, after all, referred at an early stage to the prospect of an all-out battle "between the free and democratic world and terrorism" (Blair 2001a). He had warned MPs, more than once, that the very values of Western society were at stake (Blair, Hansard 2001a, c604, 2010b, 345-346), and he had won Conservative Party support for the line (cf. Jenkin, Hansard 2001a, c661). When President Bush warned that the West's enemies "hate our freedoms - our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other" (Bush 2001), he largely reflected positions the British Prime Minister had already begun to lay out for himself. Crucially, however, Blair had done all of these things while ostensibly denying that Britain was actually at war. No evidence has emerged to suggest that the government engaged deliberately in doublespeak, but nevertheless the scope for confusion was considerable. The question of whether the Afghan campaign marked the first action in a general war, or the last action in response to 11 September, lay at the heart of the debate that developed over whether to move on to Iraq.

During October 2001 there was general consensus in British public debate that "when bin Laden's suicide pilots crashed into the Pentagon and the World Trade Center he attacked all our values and liberties" (Porter 2001). A few voices tried to highlight the political origins of Islamist terrorism with particular reference to Iraq and Palestine (Galloway, Hansard 2001a, c639, Benn 2001, Fisk 2001a, 2001e), but without gaining significant traction over Public

Opinion. The government explicitly rejected the suggestion that al-Qaeda might have political goals; terrorists with specific real-world demands might yet be open to negotiation, and negotiation was emphatically not a serious policy option, as Blair had already set out. Instead, the official line was that the perpetrators of the 11 September attacks sought only to “obliterate Israel, kill all Jews, kill all Americans who support Israel, indeed all Americans” (Blair, Hansard 2001f, c870). Al-Qaeda could neither be placated nor appeased; it had only to be defeated. Such assertions are problematic from an academic perspective. Although clearly volatile and violent, and often acting with scant regard for observable reality, al-Qaeda is not without political goals, even if it is not entirely clear within itself on how they might best be achieved (cf. Gerges 2011). The organisation’s ‘founding statement’, issued from Jalalabad in February 1998, condemns the presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia (a personal bugbear of bin Laden’s since the Saudi royal family’s decision to prefer American protection to his offer of *mujahedeen* to repel advancing Iraqi troops during the Gulf War), and criticises US support for Israel in light of its treatment of the Palestinians. The killing of Americans and Jews is indeed described as a religious duty, but the exhortation is dependent upon the failure of the United States to withdraw from the Middle East (Halliday 2002, 219). In practical terms this distinction is irrelevant; the US is not going to accede to al-Qaeda’s demands, therefore the call to violence stands. But the fact that al-Qaeda makes *any* political demands means that its campaign cannot objectively be dismissed as a mindless outbreak of violence. That such a dismissal was official British government policy would prove significant, not least because it contradicted views shared by many Muslims, in Europe as well as the Middle East (Burke 2011, 28-31).

A pervasive belief in the ethereal nature of the al-Qaeda threat partly lay behind widespread public scepticism about the practicality of a military campaign targeting the network. Although Osama bin Laden was known to be in Afghanistan, and his organisation certainly had a physical presence there, it was not seen as being tied to any particular

geographical location (The Observer 2001a). There is, in fact, some evidence that al-Qaeda leaders were themselves divided over whether they should seek actively to control territory. One line of thought, espoused by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, held that the organisation's primary goal should be to establish Islamist 'safe havens' to serve not only as bases for attacks on the "far enemy" (Gerges 2005), but also as the initial proving grounds for a new Caliphate. An alternative argument, advanced by Abu Musab al-Suri, focused on the creation of a genuinely decentralised global *jihad* movement. Al-Qaeda would form an *ideological*, rather than physical, 'base' (the literal translation of 'al-Qaeda') on which independent cells would build in launching their own self-organised attacks (Burke 2011, 152). The invasion of Afghanistan, by denying the organisation a secure territory, effectively forced it towards al-Suri's model, although al-Zarqawi would later perish seeking to implement his own ideas in Iraq. Al-Suri's apparent victory was reflected in the British public's reaction to the idea of a 'war on terror'. It was noted that "one cannot make war on an abstract noun" (Marshall-Andrews, Hansard 2001d, c1121, cf. Porter 2001), nor was it possible to "declare war on a tactic". As *The Independent* put it, the declaration of 'war on terror' was as ridiculous "as if President Roosevelt responded to the attack on Pearl Harbor by declaring war on bombing" (2001a).

There was agreement, then, that "terrorists" were the enemy (Steuter and Wills 2008, 8), but not on the manner in which they might best be fought. The government quickly proposed to support the US in taking military action against Afghanistan, arguing that this was the best, indeed the only, way to bring the perpetrators of the 11 September attacks to justice (Blair 2001c, Straw, Hansard 2001d, c1058, Hoon, Hansard 2001e, c1017). Although the proposed policy was simple, and legitimised by supportive poll results, commentators raised a number of objections. It was suggested that a police action would be preferable to a military one (Fisk 2001a), although advocates of this approach never explained how the Taliban refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden might have been circumvented without the use of force. Others argued that diplomacy, secret intelligence work, and 'soft power' inducements such as the

despatch of humanitarian aid would be more likely to win the cooperation both of the Taliban and of the Afghan people than outright confrontation, leading in turn to their surrendering the al-Qaeda leadership (The Independent 2001c, D. Anderson, Hansard 2001b, c789, Tonge, Hansard 2001c, c864). Indeed, it was argued both that the battle against terror could only really be fought and won in the hearts and minds of ordinary Afghans, and that they would inevitably suffer far more than benefit from a military campaign. There was no sense, several commentators argued, in trying to put pressure on the Taliban by “killing people who have had little say in who rules them” (The Sunday Times 2001, cf. The Daily Mail 2001). Such action was rather more likely to strengthen al-Qaeda’s hold over the country and its ability to mount attacks against Western targets (J. Khan 2001, Osborne 2001, The Independent 2001d, Ruthven 2001, Milne 2001, The Times 2001c, The Independent 2001i, McKay 2001). Warning against the unintended consequences of war, one MP concluded that only three leaders believed “the bombing of Afghanistan...is in the interests of their cause”; President Bush, Tony Blair, and Osama bin Laden (Marshall-Andrews, Hansard 2001d, c1121). The implication, of course, was that they could not all be right.

Within days of the first bombs being dropped on Taliban targets, questions began to be asked about the nature of the campaign. Supporters of the use of force praised the “restrained, small and targeted operations” (Mercer, Hansard 2001d, c1123) that were degrading hostile defences without harming civilian populations. Sceptics complained about indiscriminate “carpet bombing” (The Independent 2001j). Neither side, of course, had much real information about what was going on. Without western troops on the ground, it was impossible even for journalists to gain the relatively limited first-hand knowledge they would later have as ‘embedded’ correspondents with allied forces in Iraq. Concerns for the welfare of the Afghan people were driven, however, firstly by warnings from aid agencies, even before they were themselves forced to withdraw from the country in the face of looming hostilities, that the disruption caused by war would trigger a humanitarian crisis, and secondly by

awareness of the weakness of Afghan military defences under the Taliban. It was argued that civilians must be coming under attack, because Afghanistan lacked enough legitimate military targets to warrant a sustained aerial campaign. One report observed that in most cases Taliban “command and control centres...largely consist of a man sitting on a rug with a radio, an ancient, unconnected telephone and the mother of all teapots” (Burke 2001). The belief that there was very little left worth bombing in a country in which brutal and arbitrary Taliban rule had actually brought relative stability and security after decades of civil war, underpinned the widely held fear that much of what was proposed would do little more than “rearrange the rubble” (Ashdown 2001). Less than a week after the first strikes, a number of public actors, several of whom had supported the initial decision to use force (cf. Salmond, Hansard 2001c, c852), launched a campaign for a ‘pause’ in the bombing. Their stated aim was to allow space for aid to be moved in, and for refugees to move out of the country (Tonge, Hansard 2001d, c1094, Steele 2001, The Mirror 2001a, The Independent 2001h, M. Riddell 2001b). Ministers were unsympathetic; civilians were not being targeted, they insisted, and any reduction in the intensity of the assault would only allow Taliban forces to regroup, ultimately lengthening the conflict. Although they went on to insist that “no one who raises doubts is an appeaser” (Blair 2001d), in reality the spectre of Munich, a familiar device in British public debates over war, was raised occasionally to underline the point (cf. Straw, Hansard 2001b, c690). Certainly there was no ‘pause’.

What these initial battles to frame the appropriate response to the 11 September attacks had shown was the sheer complexity of characterising what was a novel situation. Unlike in earlier major wars, the states that rallied to support the US in late 2001 had little clear idea of who the enemy was, or how it might best be fought. The Taliban had been a useful proxy for al-Qaeda; their removal represented an early success that compensated for the failure to capture bin Laden and allowed leaders to frame their decision to militarise what might have been a more ideational conflict in positive terms. The British government had

avoided a direct clash with elements within Public Opinion by refusing to describe the conflict as an actual 'war'. Although ministers shared the Bush administration view that the significance of the 11 September attacks lay in the shift they engendered in western calculations of threat, they did little publicly to spell out the likely longer-term consequences of this. Instead, the Afghan campaign was presented if not as a free-standing operation, at least as likely the most physical confrontation of a broader-based struggle against a particular type of terrorist. The question of whether that struggle meant more traditional approaches to waging war was left unanswered.

Writing a blank cheque

British ministers worked hard in the weeks after 11 September to emphasise both their support for the US and the willingness of the Bush administration to act in partnership with the broader international community. They sought both to tie the Americans into multilateral co-operation by demonstrating the benefits of allied support, and to secure domestic credit for having done so. It was a difficult balancing act. President Bush may have been given an easy ride over Afghanistan from American journalists, at least in the eyes of their British counterparts (Greenslade 2001), but Tony Blair knew he could not expect similar treatment. Government statements to the media in the UK recognised, as one commentator put it, that "the secret to a good briefing is to have both a domestic and a foreign element" (Rayner 2001). Ministers and officials offered their support to their counterparts across the Atlantic, while reassuring domestic audiences that Britain's loyalty would be recognised with increased influence over US policymaking. Washington was slower to accept the importance of addressing audiences both at home and abroad, and tended to focus on satisfying the Republican 'base' ahead of respecting allies' sensitivities (Buncombe 2001, Wastell and Murphy 2001). For example, Alastair Campbell was not able to get the Coalition Information Centre, the centrepiece of his public relations strategy during the Afghan campaign, authorised

by Washington until 24 October, and then only by securing the personal intervention of National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice (Campbell and Stott 2007, 583). To a degree the failure of Bush administration policymakers to take seriously the prospect of their messages, aimed at a domestic audience, penetrating other public spheres reflects the balance of 'hard' power between the US and its allies. American pronouncements on international affairs are automatically regarded as newsworthy across the globe because the US has global reach in a way that no other country has; their prominence in media coverage results from a structural tendency on the part of journalists to 'index' their reports to the influence of individual actors. That British policymakers' views might become a central concern of US Public Opinion was unimaginable; that the converse would be the case was, at least, unanticipated (or thought irrelevant) in Washington. The impact in the UK of hard-line American rhetoric, particularly from administration 'hawks' such as Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney, was exacerbated by stereotypes of US public attitudes already established in British Public Opinion. President Bush would face immense pressure from his constituents for a dramatic and decisive response, and would offer either "isolationism" or "instant gratification for their anger", MPs warned (B. Anderson, Hansard 2001a, c629, George, Hansard 2001a, c636). Journalists concluded that some sort of show of armed force would be necessary in order to quiet domestic discord; "Americans expect a firework display, so there will probably be one", as one commentator put it (Maddox 2001a, cf. Osborne 2001, The Guardian 2001d). Americans did not care about people outside of America, they wanted revenge in the form of "blood in the sand" (Raven 2001). If that meant massacring civilians, so be it (I. Khan 2001). Ignoring their already stratospheric status, a number of writers even suggested that the primary goal of the campaign in Afghanistan was "to keep up President Bush's poll ratings" (Smith 2001c, cf. McCrum 2001, Cohen 2001a, Whelan 2001, Wastell and Lamb 2001). Clearly the British public had a low opinion of their American peers.

Perhaps mindful that Public Opinion was occasionally cynical in its consideration of US foreign policy, Blair was pro-active in seeking to head off the suggestion that the 11 September attacks constituted a rational response to American conduct overseas. He conceded that some of the grievances cited by those who conducted terror attacks against Western targets were valid; but utterly rejected the notion that terrorism was in any way a justifiable response (Blair, Hansard 2001a, c614). In any event, both supporters and opponents of military action in Afghanistan argued that there existed a degree of moral equivalence between US civilian casualties and those killed by western bombs or UN sanctions in the Muslim world. Established critics of US policies warned against overestimating the scale of the tragedy that had taken place on 11 September; they repeated that the death toll was less than the number killed each month by the economic restrictions in operation against Iraq, and that a failure to recognise this would only fuel further resentment in the region (Galloway, Hansard 2001a, c640, Ali 2001a, Smith 2001, Hirst 2001, Fisk 2001d). Ministers, unwilling to let such statements pass unchallenged, but equally seeking to avoid a broader debate on western policy towards the Middle East, insisted that “there is no moral equivalence between us and our enemy: the terrorists seek to maximise civilian casualties; we seek to minimise them” (Straw, Hansard 2001d, c1100). The distinction mattered little to those who were killed, it was pointed out, and in any event the moral equivalence argument still held, because “nothing justifies the killing of innocent people anywhere” (Pilger 2001). Taking a more aggressive stance than the government, right-wing supporters of military action actually accepted the left-wing ‘moral equivalence’ argument. They did not, however, include supposed victims of western sanctions in Iraq or of western support for Israel in their calculations. Instead they framed the campaign in Afghanistan as an opportunity, as one anti-war critic put it, to “even the score” (Steel 2001c). Whenever concerns were raised, either in the press or in Parliament, about the death of civilians in western air strikes, they were countered by pro-war advocates with reference to the number of civilians killed in the World Trade Center (cf. Evison 2001, Hughes, Hansard

2001e, c1016, Mercer, c1081). A wide range of public opinions were thus expressed as to who might properly suffer the effects of the US response to 11 September. That disagreements over the threat to civilians did not lead to greater controversy was largely a consequence of the relatively limited duration of the fighting. The campaign was over before dissatisfaction had begun seriously to manifest itself. When it came to debating an attack on Iraq, however, opponents had over a year in which to articulate a moral case against war based on the threat to civilians. The longer build-up period altered the conditions in which Public Opinion operated, and so inevitably affected its impact on policymaking.

The legal basis for the removal of the Taliban was similarly less contentious than that for the later action against Saddam Hussein. Formally, the British contribution to Operation Enduring Freedom was based on two legal principles. Firstly, in launching strikes on Afghanistan, the United States asserted its right to self-defence as enshrined by Article 51 of the UN Charter. Britain was committed to support its NATO ally in defending itself against attack by Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, invoked for the first time in the organisation's history on 12 September. With 11 September classed as an act of war in the US, both of these provisions were held to have been activated. Secondly, British ministers took pains to highlight the passage, in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, of UN Security Council Resolutions 1368 and 1373 (Blair, Hansard 2001b, c674, Straw, Hansard 2001b, c689). UNSCR 1368 authorised the use of force against terrorists and any states which harboured them; UNSCR 1373 imposed a duty on all member states to combat terrorism within their own territories. The combined effect was to require the Taliban to hand over the al-Qaeda leadership, and to authorise the use of force against them in the event of a refusal. Once that refusal had been received, the US took the view, supported by the UK and not seriously opposed by any other Security Council member, that it had the necessary authority to use force. During the earliest exchanges over the 11 September attacks, those who feared that the US would launch a violent counter-strike questioned the extent to which such an action could be legitimised by

Article 51; “retaliation is not self-defence by any legal measure”, warned Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesman Menzies Campbell (M. Campbell, Hansard 2001a, c625). With NATO and the UN firmly on board, however, and with very few exceptions (cf. Robertson 2001a, 2001b, 2001c), most elements of Public Opinion, including Campbell himself, broadly accepted that the action taken was in fact legal (cf. Llwyd, Hansard 2001a, c641, Kennedy, Hansard 2001b, c680, M. Campbell, Hansard 2001b, c704, 2001h, c859). Again, it would prove significant for the debate over Iraq that legal niceties only seem to trigger British public concern where there is no clear international consensus on the right way to act.

What agreement there was on the legality of the ‘war on terror’ began rapidly to evaporate once speculation began that the US intended to target Iraq as part of ‘phase two’. Just as the question of where the proper targets for a military response to 11 September might lie had been left unresolved, the existence of legal grounds for a wider programme of ‘pre-emptive self-defence’ was in some doubt. In accordance with Article 51, the US had written to the UN Security Council to inform it of its intention to strike against Afghanistan. In the process, it had reserved the right to conduct further operations “against other organisations and other states”. This reservation caused some concern when it was raised in Parliament (Salmond, Hansard 2001c, c851). In effect, the US had asserted the right to act unilaterally, pre-emptively, and without further UN approval against any entity it considered a threat anywhere in the world, and had sought to justify the assertion with reference to its right to self-defence. Sceptical voices had conceded the legal argument over Afghanistan because of the evident degree of international agreement, represented by the broad coalition gathered to support the US. When it came to extending the campaign beyond Afghanistan, however, they complained that “America has neither a moral nor a legal right to take such momentous decisions by itself without proper recourse to the international community” (The Guardian 2001b). Advocates of the use of force, meanwhile, took the exact opposite line. Not only did the US have the right to act against Iraq if it thought such action necessary for self-defence, it

also had existing UN Security Council approval stemming from the “unfinished business” of Iraqi disarmament, mandated at the end of the Gulf War but not yet concluded (The Times 2001d). The ceasefire within Public Opinion over the question of legal backing for military action in Afghanistan was thus unlikely to hold for long once attention shifted to Baghdad.

A subsidiary point worth making here is the varying degree to which different actors in Britain saw the maintenance of the international coalition assembled for the response to 11 September as an end in itself, as a means to an end (and so as an expendable luxury), or even as a potential obstacle to the achievement of desired ends. Advocates of the first position argued that every effort should be made to sustain the coalition, even at the expense of operational efficiency. Their line was that the degree of international unity established in the wake of the attacks on the United States would yield far greater dividends in the long run than any individual military strike, and so any proposed action that threatened to create disunity was inherently undesirable (cf. Keetch, Hansard 2001c, c845). Those who took the second line were willing to accept that a degree of multilateral co-operation might increase the effectiveness of the campaign against al-Qaeda, but they disagreed with the claim that the maintenance of the coalition was of greater value than the conduct of further military strikes. Instead of worrying too much about allies’ views, they argued, the US should press ahead as it saw fit, retaining the support of whichever states had the stomach for the fight (cf. Duncan Smith, Hansard 2001b, c677). Advancing the third line, that the coalition represented a potential roadblock, constraining the ability of the US in particular to defend itself, were for the most part actors already agitating in late 2001 for a confrontation with Iraq (cf. Hart 2001a, 2001b). Given that US policymakers, building on Donald Rumsfeld’s insistence that the mission should define the coalition and not the other way around, alternated between the second and third lines (Burke 2011, 48-49), a great deal of room had been left open for future clashes.

Drawing upon the well-established trope of a US-UK ‘special relationship’, Tony Blair declared on 11 September that Britain would “stand shoulder to shoulder with our American

friends” in facing up to terrorism (Blair 2001a). It was significant that he made no attempt to limit the extent of that support, or indeed to define what an appropriate response to terrorism might look like. Blair recalls that he “chose the words [‘shoulder to shoulder’] carefully”, that he “was aware this was a big commitment that would come to be measured not in words but in actions”. He had decided to offer unconditional support, knowing that the result might mean being asked to join in actions that were not necessarily popular in the UK, “for reasons both of principle and of national interest”; indeed, he notes having “never believed the two are mutually exclusive” (Blair 2010b, 352). Britain would be with the US in Afghanistan, and beyond, both because it was in Britain’s interests to be there, and because it was ‘the right thing to do’; that, at least, was the proposition advanced by the government. Speaking in Parliament, Blair referred to the British casualties of 11 September (still the bloodiest act of terrorism ever committed against the UK, in terms of the number of dead) in justifying his support for the US. In addition, he said, echoing his 11 September statement, the British would “stand by their friends”; principle and interest were thus evoked together (Blair, Hansard 2001a, c604), an approach endorsed by the Opposition (Duncan Smith, Hansard 2001a, c607). Blair may have thought the principle of support for the US and the British interest in being part of any retaliatory action after 11 September were inseparable, but he can have been under no illusions that this view was not universally shared in Britain. Veteran left-wing MP George Galloway praised “the great people of the United States” and “that great city, which I know and love, New York”, but at the same time attacked US foreign policy as the ultimate cause of the attacks, and predicted grave consequences should the US respond with further violence. In a phrase that gained some traction over Public Opinion, he warned the government against writing a “blank cheque” by being too forthright in its support for the Bush administration (Galloway, Hansard 2001a, cc639-640, cf. M. Campbell, Hansard 2001a, c625).

By introducing, and then rejecting, the idea of a British ‘blank cheque’ for the US, Galloway and others actively challenged the government’s efforts to frame the specific

question of whether to support individual military campaigns in the general terms of the 'special relationship'. To gain wider credibility for this position, they would have had to establish the belief in the public mind that US-UK co-operation was contingent on the clear identification of mutual interests. Public Opinion was primed, however, to take a less than coolly rational view. The 'special relationship', already a central reference point in the public consideration of international affairs, had taken on a new life as a result of Blair's pro-US positioning. So grateful had President Bush been for his ally's outspoken support that the Prime Minister had been invited to a special 'joint address to Congress and the American people' on 20 September. Promising to wage war against the perpetrators of the attacks, Bush turned to Blair and declared to general applause that "America has no truer friend than Great Britain" (Bush 2001). It was a moment of personal triumph for the Prime Minister of a state ever-paranoid about the esteem in which it is held in Washington. He was praised at home for having cemented "a genuine transatlantic bond" (Jones 2001). The 'special relationship' itself, often analysed critically by journalists, was described by one as "a pillar of the world order, a seamless alliance", and the product of a natural transfer of power from one global leader to its chosen successor (Cornwell 2001). Such sentiments may have been hyperbolic, but their gist was widely shared. The problem for the government, however, was that while the strategy of 'seamless alliance' had considerable domestic support, the tactics needed to maintain it prompted complaints. Blair believed that the only way a British Prime Minister would be taken seriously in Washington was if he offered absolute support for US policy in public, raising any doubts he might have about the President's chosen line only in private (Campbell and Stott 2007, 563). The calculation that any state could criticise the US, but only its closest allies might hope to influence it, was shared by much of the active public (cf. *The Independent* 2001a, D. MacIntyre 2001a, 2001e, McAskill and White 2001, *The Daily Telegraph* 2001c, P. Riddell 2001b, Rawnsley 2001, B. Anderson 2001, Keetch, Hansard 2001b, c752). Concerns nevertheless remained. For one thing, it was unclear to what extent the disparity existing in

terms of 'hard' power between the two allies might undermine their ability to co-operate; as one commentator put it, "a giant and a dwarf can never stand shoulder to shoulder" (Richards 2001b). In addition, as events played out (and in particular as the debate over Iraq developed during 2002), doubts began to creep in as to the actual benefits of publicly toeing the line. Subsequent studies have argued that Blair's loyalty in practice gained him very little traction over Bush's private considerations (Wallace 2005, 54).

What the question of the influence gained by Britain as a result of Blair's public stance fails to address, however, is the extent to which the Prime Minister agreed with the underlying logic of the 'war on terror', and so with its latent promise of a 'phase two' beyond Afghanistan. On 11 September he warned aides that his "big fear", in light of the attacks, "was terrorists capable of this getting in league with rogue states that would help them". Despite having been advised by John Scarlett of the Joint Intelligence Committee and Stephen Lander of MI5 that it was unlikely "rogue governments" had been involved, since "bin Laden was able to do it himself, and that suited his purposes better" (Campbell and Stott 2007, 560-561), Blair responded to the attacks by revising his analysis of the threat posed by a number of existing states of concern, primarily as a result of their development of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Jack Straw summed up the new thinking in his statement to Parliament on 14 September, warning that "people who have the fanaticism and the capability to fly an airliner laden with passengers and fuel into a skyscraper will not be deterred by human decency from deploying chemical or biological weapons, missiles or nuclear weapons if they are available to them" (Straw, Hansard 2001a, c619). Although at this stage the only public voices which talked about a general need to deal with "rogue states" were those already advocating a forceful response to 11 September (cf. Kavanagh 2001a, Ancram, Hansard 2001a, c622), the tenor of official statements indicated a desire to prime public debate more generally to accept a broader conception of self-defence that might in time lead to further military campaigns.

When Blair himself talked about the next steps for the counter-terrorist coalition he positioned the Afghan campaign within a far broader framework. Speaking to the Labour Party Conference at the start of October, he told delegates “this is a moment to seize...the kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us re-order this world around us” (Blair 2001b). It was a speech of some considerable ambition, prompting critics to accuse the Prime Minister of imperialism (Morrish 2001; Henscher 2001). At the same time, he won praise for having delivered his “most truthful, heartfelt, least manufactured” address since becoming leader of the Labour Party (Young 2001a). The speech itself was “the most statesmanlike and mature he has delivered” (*The Independent* 2001f); it was “remarkable and remarkably grandiloquent” (*The Sunday Telegraph* 2001a). Where the Bush administration’s ‘war on terror’ was primarily about taking pre-emptive action to eliminate future threats, and demonstrating US military superiority around the world, the British government appeared to be proposing a left-wing “mission to conquer world poverty and build international peace and a world based upon justice, equality and human rights” (Hain 2001). Fellow left-wingers were divided. Some embraced the “hard liberal” programme, under which “promoting liberal values everywhere from Burma to Saudi Arabia, Iraq to Chechnya is not neo-colonialism, but respect for a universal right to freedom from oppression” (Toynbee 2001a, cf. 2001b). Others attacked the “simplistic” reasoning and “selective moralising” embedded in the concept (Young 2001a, Pilger 2001). A number of right-wingers spoke up to support the core ideas (cf. Osborne, Hansard 2001a, c654), while the majority of commentators simply accepted as given the Prime Minister’s conviction in the rectitude of his proposed course (Rawnsley 2001, Watkins 2001, Ivens 2001b, Maddox 2001e). That conviction would only grow over the following months.

The problem of projection

Regardless of whether the response to 11 September was to be total war or a limited police action, the first phase inevitably focused on the relatively uncontested decision to oust the Taliban, and on the (unsuccessful) attempt to capture Osama Bin Laden. The really controversial decisions were always going to come later. During the period of the initial Afghan campaign, both supporters and opponents of a further action against Iraq projected their own views onto the blank canvas of official policy. This tendency to project appears to be a characteristic of Public Opinion rather than something unique to the case considered here. Nothing specific prompted it beyond the vagueness of the official line, and no one view was particularly strongly represented amongst the range of projections offered. The effect was exacerbated, however, by the apparently strong position the British government occupied, both domestically and internationally, at the end of 2001. With the Taliban removed from power, there was real hope that Afghanistan might have a better future. Western costs had been low and the campaign had been short. Successful military actions tend to be popular; as one study has put it, “victory has many friends” (Eichenberg 2005). There was a danger that ministers would be blinded by “soaring poll ratings and the adulatory press at home and abroad” (D. MacIntyre 2001d), that they would forget the myriad unanswered questions about the broader campaign, and the fact that “war leaders tend to become unpopular when the wars do” (F. Johnson 2001). Opinion poll results do not remain positive forever, and in late 2001 passive public support for military action remained high; the only way forward was down (M. Riddell 2001a). Parliamentary unity, meanwhile, was described as being “nearly always a bad sign” (Hoggart 2001, F. Johnson 2001). Partisan manoeuvring would in time return; politicians, “however aspirational their language becomes, can never wholly abandon the calculations of their trade” (Preston 2001). The political waters were calm, then, in late 2001, but the prospect of a storm hovered on the horizon, embedded in the nature of a Public Opinion system typically defined by conflict.

Blair's colleagues have recalled his belief that informing the public was a necessary component of both government (Campbell and Stott 2007, 572) and politics (Cook 2003, 56). He was described by journalists as "a compulsive, almost pathological, persuader", and praised for his "tireless...pursuit of public understanding" over Afghanistan (D'Ancona 2001; Moore 2001; *The Times* 2001b; D. MacIntyre 2001c). In late 2001 there was no real need for an aggressive public relations exercise to promote the military operation against the Taliban; passive public support was high, and much of the active public was at least sufficiently supportive of the general goals of the action that little overt criticism emerged (Kampfner 2003, 118). The Prime Minister nevertheless felt "the public *deserved* to have the facts" about the campaign (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 59, emphasis added), and he acted accordingly. Three main methods were used to advance the 'official line'; formal speeches and statements by ministers, information 'dossiers', and efforts to manage the flow of information from the battlefield via the Coalition Information Centre.

Part of the reason for the lack of rancour in the British public debate was a failure on the part of commentators to recognise that Blair really intended to implement his more ambitious rhetorical commitments. One writer, referring to the vast breadth of ambition on display in the Prime Minister's Labour Party Conference address, prescribed an unflustered response; "I'm not saying Tony Blair doesn't believe this stuff when he says it. The bad news is that he probably does. But there's better news. He doesn't do it, once he's said it" (Parris 2001a). Such scepticism can only have been fuelled by the unwillingness of No. 10 to press home the depth of the government's commitment to the 'war on terror' project. When, for example, a draft of a speech Blair was to make to the Welsh Assembly was leaked, press complaints that a mooted appeal for greater 'moral fibre' in the face of uncertain progress in Afghanistan was "ridiculous" and showed "damn cheek" (Maddox 2001c, Woods 2001), were enough to get the line dropped. Although the speech was subsequently praised as "one of the

best anyone has given since September 11” (Maddox 2001d) by one of those who had criticised the particular reference, its removal had reduced the force of what was said.

As for the information ‘dossiers’ released during late 2001, two documents were of primary significance. The first laid out the official line that “Usama Bin Laden and Al Qaida, the terrorist network which he heads, planned and carried out the atrocities on 11 September 2001” (British Government 2001). Although described (with hindsight, albeit somewhat appropriately) as “a portent of [bad] things to come” during the Iraq debate (Hollis 2010, 43), this document was generally well received. Sceptics did not yet automatically challenge the veracity of government statements, although they did warn that ministers were putting their credibility on the line by publishing information that could not independently be verified (M. Campbell, Hansard 2001b, cc704-705). Although there was little said or written on the subject at the time, some observers did note that the document contained “not ‘evidence’, so much as a convincing argument” (Robertson 2001b, cf. Blackhurst 2001). The distinction between the government’s case for its preferred course of action, based on a range of information available to ministers, and the public release of raw source material is important, but it was not emphasised either by the government or by observers at this time. A dangerous precedent had been set. In addition, there were specific errors made with the publication of individual papers. The ‘campaign objectives’ document that followed the first ‘dossier’ was initially only given to the media and not to MPs; a paper of such significance would ordinarily have been lodged in the Library of the House. Parliament was still in recess, despite its three recall debates in September and October, so the omission was not without reason. Although ministers apologised for the “error” (Straw, Hansard 2001d, c1054), however, complaints about MPs being sidelined bred a degree of early bad blood (Salmond, Hansard 2001d, c1098). It did not help that such incidents fed into an existing popular narrative about the danger posed by New Labour’s communication practices, and in particular the work of Alastair Campbell, already embedded in the operating code of British Public Opinion. By 2001,

Campbell's reputation for media management was such that, as Blair later put it, "everyone", even President Clinton, "believed [he] single-handedly shaped the news everywhere" (Blair 2010b, 240, cf. C. Meyer 2005, 102-103). In some quarters the precedent for the Coalition Information Centre (once it was finally up and running in late October) in Campbell's work during the Kosovo campaign was noted neutrally (*The Times* 2001f); indeed, a handful of actors regarded the 'spin doctor' as a strategic asset (cf. Deedes 2001). Many journalists however reacted critically to Downing Street efforts to influence their coverage of the Afghan campaign, accusing ministers of propagandising (Dillon and Gumbel 2001, Ali 2001b). Conservative MPs, happy to support the action itself, were equally ready to attack its presentation; the Opposition Defence Spokesman warned Geoff Hoon that "people want the facts of the situation. They do not want spin", implying that 'spin' was what they might otherwise have got (Jenkin, Hansard 2001e, c1027).

To a degree the government was unfairly maligned. Despite regularly being attacked for fostering a "culture of censorship" (Fisk 2001b), there is little evidence that officials sought actively to constrain what news came to be reported during the Afghan campaign, let alone that they worked to suppress critical commentary. In an indicative series of exchanges, ministers were simultaneously accused both of manipulative propagandising and of surrendering the initiative in the global public debate to al-Qaeda (Selous, Hansard 2001c, c878, *The Guardian* 2001a, Fisk 2001c, MacIntyre 2001a, Marshall 2001, Craig 2001, Jury 2001, Galloway, Hansard 2001d, c1111, Whelan 2001). Alastair Campbell saw this incongruity as part of a general culture of "media cynicism"; he regarded his role as largely a matter of combating journalists' cynical efforts to twist information in order to support attacks on the government (Kampfner 2003, 125). He was not alone in adopting a 'siege mentality' in dealing with the media; a number of leading political figures (several of whom were not Campbell's natural allies) agreed that some media outlets were behaving irresponsibly, at the least, in terms of how they presented coverage of the Afghan campaign (Cook 2003, 51, M. Campbell, Hansard

2001d, c1074, B. Anderson, Hansard 2001h, c865). Even journalists themselves remarked upon their peers' impatient demands for daily evidence of concrete military advances (Judd 2001, Rawnsley 2001), indulgence in speculation by writing that the absence of fresh information meant the campaign was floundering (Littlejohn 2001a, 2001b), poor source selection involving the uncritical repetition of Taliban claims about civilian casualties (Rayner 2001, D'Ancona 2001), obsession with writing stories about divisions between coalition partners or within the government (The Daily Telegraph 2001d), and undue pessimism about the prospects for a military victory (Parris 2001c, Toynbee 2001c). Sympathy with the government's predicament did not, however, translate into support for its actually doing anything in response. A memo from Downing Street warning reporters against relying on Taliban estimates when reporting civilian casualties from NATO airstrikes, an issue about which Campbell was apparently genuinely exercised (Campbell and Stott 2007, 586), was particularly poorly received. To have attempted to influence journalists' source selection practices was both "misguided" and "patronising", as one editorial put it (The Independent 2001g). The prospects for a more aggressive official communications campaign were thus far from ideal. The very effort to set the tone for public debate was likely to provoke a reaction; certainly ministers would struggle if they tried to exert anything that looked like control over Public Opinion; its component actors were primed to respond.

Whether such an effort would in fact be made depended in large part on the level of opposition to the general thrust of the policy. During late 2001, ministers enjoyed support in the press, and largely dominated parliamentary debates. Conservative spokesmen backed the action in Afghanistan; their only complaint was that it did not go far enough (Duncan Smith, Hansard 2001c, c815, Jenkin, Hansard 2001c, c837). Liberal Democrats were more equivocal about how they expressed their agreement with the policy, but overall they were onside (Kennedy, Hansard 2001c, c817, Keetch, Hansard 2001c, c842, Tonge, Hansard 2001, cc864-865). At this stage, the most vocal opponents of the use of force, Labour backbench MPs

George Galloway and Tam Dalyell, were dismissed as “the usual suspects” (cf. Dillon 2001a, P. Riddell 2001a). They represented the extreme end of a spectrum of views about both the appropriateness of military action as a tool of foreign policy, and the proper relationship of the UK to the United States.

The breakdown of contributions to parliamentary debates over the Afghan campaign set out in *figure 1*, shows that a majority of the MPs who spoke expressed support for the action; just 13% were outright opposed. Most of those whose views fell towards the anti-war end of the scale were co-opted to support the government either by the ‘hard liberal’ argument, or the level of international agreement; as Robin Cook put it, those “who would normally have reservations about military action are also those who are most respectful of international cooperation”. Given the breadth of the coalition assembled in the aftermath of 11 September, “they found it impossible flatly to resist military action” (Cook 2003, 45-46).

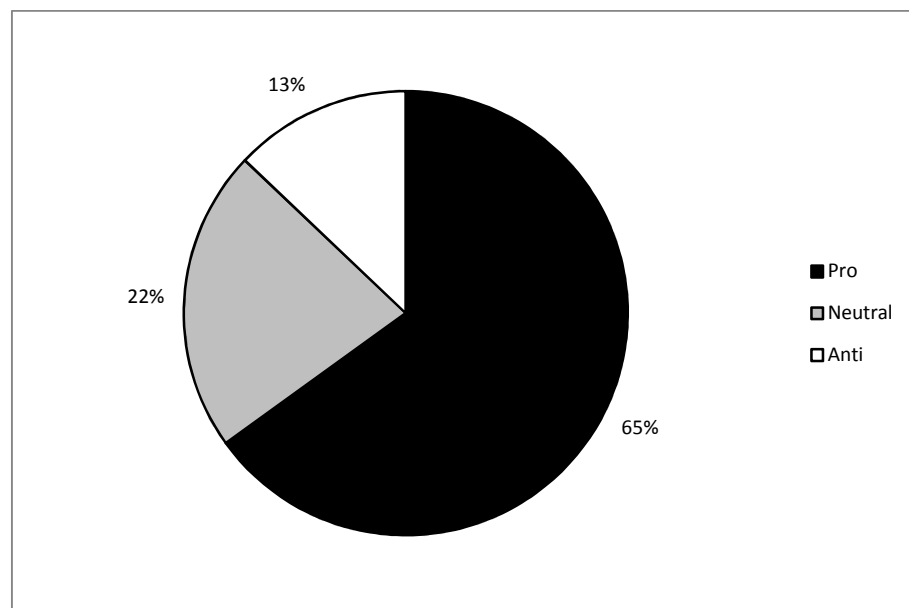


Figure 1: Positions adopted by British MPs towards military action in Afghanistan, September – December 2001.

In the media, meanwhile, right-wing commentators who might have opposed a Labour Prime Minister on principle (especially one expressing utopian views of world affairs) were won over by affection for the armed forces, a desire to support the United States, and the effect of

seeing the Conservatives supporting the government line (cf. The Sun 2001b, The Times 2001b).

Left-wing commentators were similarly guilty of ‘indexing’ (Entman 2004) their views in line with parliamentary debate. Clare Short’s praise for the “deep consensus” in the House of Commons (Short, Hansard 2001c, c893) found echo in the media among writers who, like Short herself, might otherwise have been expected to be sceptical of the Afghan operation (cf. The Guardian 2001c, Parris 2001b). The overall effect, as *figure 2* summarises, was a generally positive attitude on the part of newspaper commentary towards the use of force (at least once circulation is controlled for).

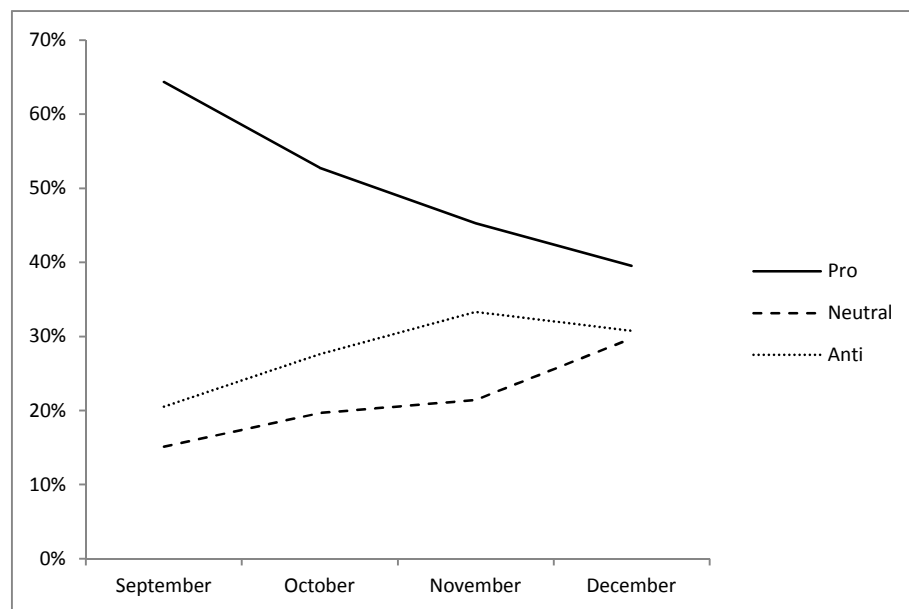


Figure 2: Editorial positions adopted by leading UK newspapers towards military action in Afghanistan, controlling for circulation, September – December 2001.

This positive attitude was not evenly distributed across publications, however, as *figure 3* makes clear. Over 80% of the 26 opinion pieces touching on the subject published by *The Sun* during this period were pro-war; over 70% of *The Independent on Sunday*’s 21 commentary articles were anti-war.

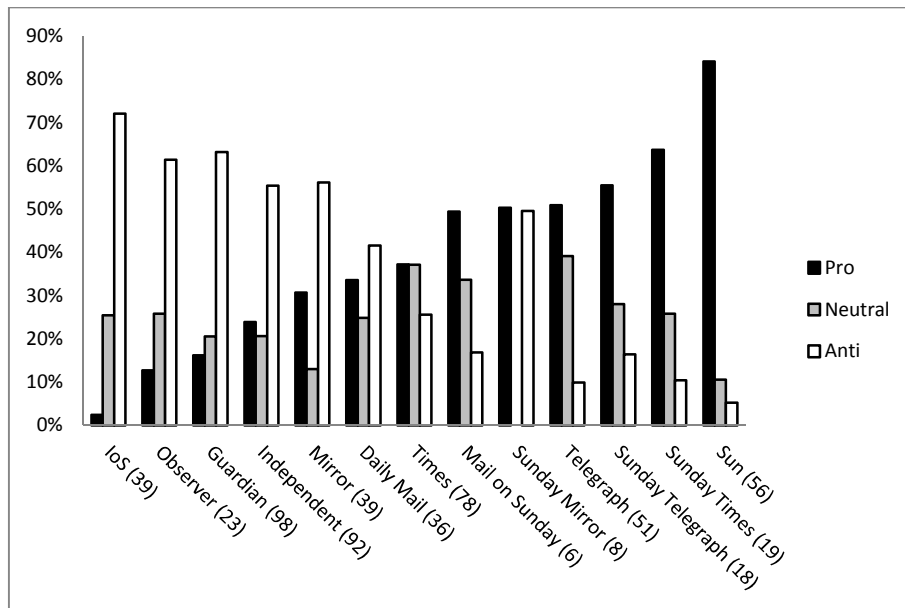


Figure 3: Editorial positions adopted by articles in leading UK newspapers towards military action in Afghanistan, by publication, September – December 2001 (n-numbers in brackets).

In terms of the activation of Public Opinion at this time, *figure 4* shows the volume of commentary articles about the Afghan campaign during the months covered by this chapter. What we can see from *figure 4* is that the interest of commentators in the Afghan campaign peaked in October, the month of the most intense military action, and then tailed off. This observation is consistent with the claim that Public Opinion shows the most interest in foreign policy matters during times of conflict.

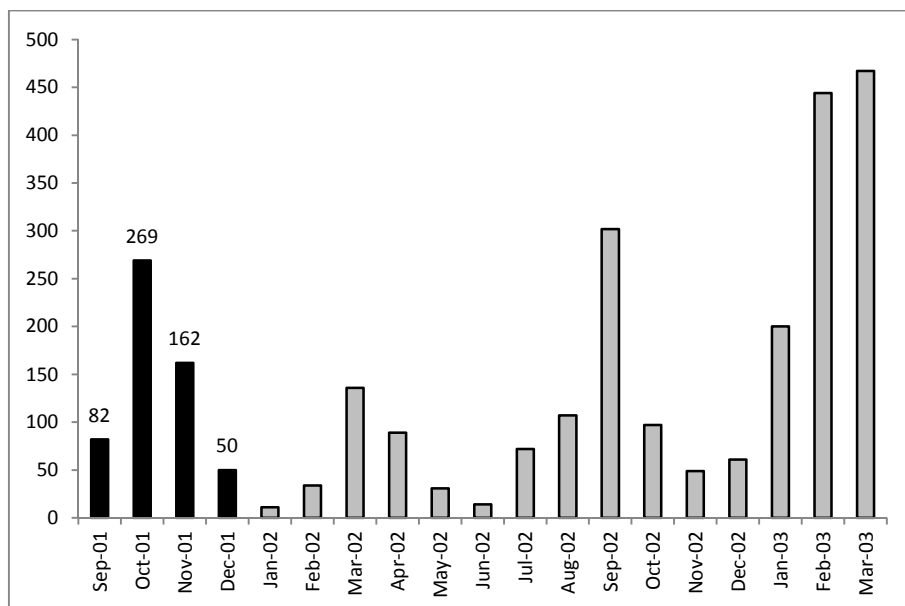


Figure 4: Volume of commentary articles in UK newspapers relating to Afghanistan or Iraq, September – December 2001.

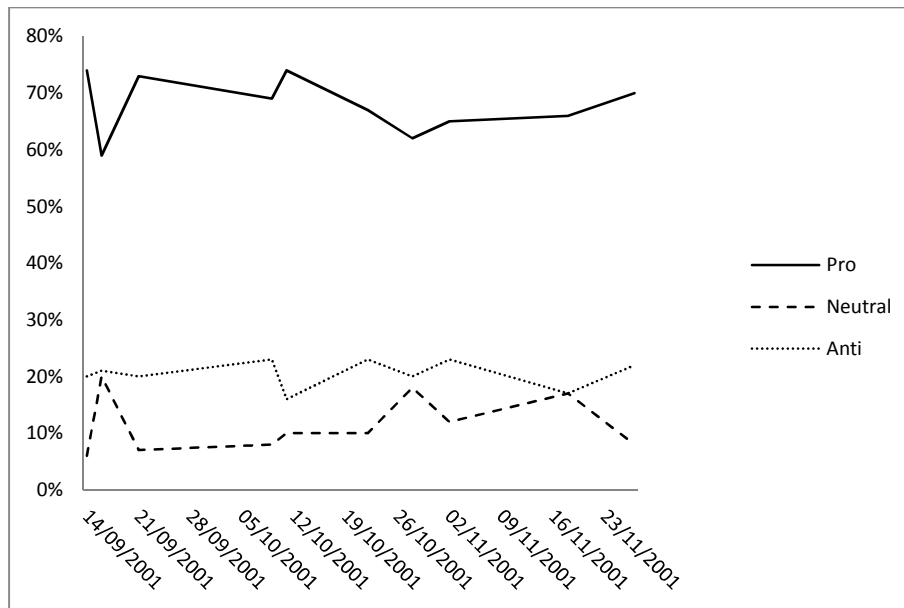


Figure 5: Opinion poll data showing support for military action against Afghanistan, September – December 2001. Source: Ipsos Mori/ICM.

Opinion poll data, meanwhile, shows the majority of respondents approving of the use of force against Afghanistan, as outlined in *figure 5*. Based on the wording of the questions, it is possible to confirm that this support was predicated on the assumption that Afghanistan was harbouring terrorists who were responsible for the 11 September attacks. Outright opposition hovered a fraction above 20%, representing a core pacifist tendency. The proportion of ‘don’t know’ responses increased when the rationale for action was less clearly spelt out in the question. The 16 September ICM poll that found just 59% support for military action had asked “Would you support or oppose the United States and NATO taking military action against countries that assist or harbour terrorists?”, without mentioning the 11 September attacks. This suggests that, in addition to the 20% who were against the use of force on principle, a further 10% of respondents wanted to learn more about the proposed target before expressing a view.

What is most interesting about *figure 5* however is the apparent absence of a ‘rally effect’ at the beginning of the actual Afghan campaign. Historically opinion polls show marked increases in supportive responses as troops go into battle. Partly this reflects the fact that support for action in Afghanistan was already high as the war began, since the greatest rallies

begin from low levels of support (Baum 2002). It may additionally show something more significant for the interpretation of British public views towards the Afghan and Iraq wars. British polling figures have shown greater rally effects in the past when a direct threat to the UK has been perceived, or where the action taken could be framed as defensive, compared to cases where the use of force is seen as an aggressive act (Lai and Reiter 2005, 268). Considering the circumstances in which Afghanistan was attacked, with the balance of Public Opinion largely satisfied that the action was an appropriate response to 11 September, a significant rally should have taken place, notwithstanding Baum's point about the need to begin from a low base. An explanation may actually come from a hypothesis advanced by Tony Blair, speaking some months later in support of the proposed invasion of Iraq. He noted that there would have been little support for war in Afghanistan on 10 September 2001, even though the overall threat posed by al-Qaeda would have been the same as it was on 12 September (Blair 2002e, 2003a). Public Opinion in late 2001 largely agreed with this assessment (B. MacIntyre 2001a, Glover 2001, Young 2001b). But no such polls were conducted prior to 11 September; the question was not on the agenda of public debate, and as Chapter 1 makes clear, opinion polling is primarily a reactive practice driven by media interest. When we say that no rally occurred at the start of the Afghan campaign, therefore, our perception of when the campaign began is skewed by the absence of baseline data from before 11 September. What the absence of a rally effect after 7 October suggests is not that no rally took place, therefore, but that the British public regarded the action in Afghanistan as a continuation of a conflict that began on 11 September. The invasion of Iraq prompted a significant rally effect in Britain; support amongst poll respondents jumped from 38% on 16 March 2003 to 54% a week later, according to ICM (the first air strikes having taken place on the night of 19/20 March). British voters approached the action in Afghanistan as the continuation of a conflict begun by an enemy attack against the West; self-defence, in effect. They saw Iraq differently, a fact underscored by an 11 October 2001 ICM poll which found just

36% of respondents thought the “war on terrorism” should “be extended to Iraq”, compared to 47% who thought it should not. It is noteworthy that ICM asked the question on behalf of *The Guardian*, which had declared itself implacably opposed to a war with Iraq the previous day, before commissioning a poll to use in legitimising its position. Even here, the views of media editors were driving the agenda for opinion polling, and not the other way around. This phenomenon follows from the logic of the Public Opinion system itself, rather than as a result of the specific issues considered here.

Although it was apparently unambiguously the case that the passive public expressed firm support for the use of force against Afghanistan in late 2001, that did not stop anti-war commentators claiming that the action was taken in defiance of public opinion (Dalyell, Hansard 2001a, c632, *The Mirror* 2001b, Wheeler 2001, Routledge 2001). Some sought to shift the goalposts; it was true, for example, that the government lacked a “full consensus” domestically for its policy (O’Hagan 2001), but no political decision ever enjoys 100% support. Anti-war columnists attacked the “conservative press” (meaning *The Sun*) for the “irresponsible distortion of public opinion” through claims made, with the backing of poll data, that the British people supported removing the Taliban (*The Independent* 2001b). These complaints ignored the fact that this is exactly what the polls showed. Indeed, commentators on both sides of the argument sought to discredit poll results which did not fit their pre-conceived views about public opinion (cf. *The Times* 2001e). Seeking ‘better’ estimates, they focused on personal contacts (Osborne, Hansard 2001c, c874, Awan 2001, *The Daily Telegraph* 2001b, Branigan 2001, Gimson 2001) or response methods such as the letters written to editorial pages (*The Daily Telegraph* 2001a).

Active public opposition to the action in Afghanistan was, meanwhile, notably weak. Anti-war commentators tended to devote more time to calling for others to develop alternative, peaceful strategies for dealing with al-Qaeda than they did to coming up with their own ideas (cf. Smith 2001b, Freedland 2001b). They left themselves open to the accusation

that they had “no other strategy to offer” (McElvoy 2001b), or indeed that they were paralysed by “hysteria” (The Sunday Telegraph 2001b, cf. Ivens 2001a, The Sun 2001c, The Guardian 2001e), “befuddlement” (McElvoy 2001a), or an inability to cope with reality (Young 2001b). When Labour MP Paul Marsden defected to the Liberal Democrats in opposition to the Afghan campaign, he found himself ridiculed, even by newspapers themselves opposed to war, as a “cop-out”, famous for “loudly complaining he is being silenced” (The Independent 2001i). The worst warnings of his fellow sceptics, it was noted meanwhile, bore little relation to the actual campaign (The Independent 2001e, Freedland 2001a). Criticising the carpet bombing of innocent civilians as part of foreign policy only works if there is at least some level of public belief that innocent civilians *are* being carpet bombed. This was not the case during the early part of the Afghan war. By the end of December the anti-war case had been reduced in the public mind to “conspiracy theory – that last refuge of the desperate” (McElvoy 2001c).

That is not to say that there were no grounds for the complaints of some critics of military action that they were being subjected to considerable public pressure on account of their views (cf. Monbiot 2001, M. Riddell 2001a). Generally however these attacks came from within the public sphere itself, rather than the government. *The Sun*, for example, launched a series of concerted efforts to identify and to castigate publicly those it regarded as ‘traitors’. Some of the claims it published bordered on the bizarre. One article suggested that delegates at the Labour Party conference were more interested in attacking Israel than dealing with terrorism (Kavanagh 2001b). Another included the solidly pro-war Conservative Defence Spokesman Bernard Jenkin on a list of “wobblers”, apparently because he had once expressed the hope that military action might be conducted in such a way as to minimise civilian casualties. There were a number of attacks on the “Anti-American, anti-Tony Blair press” which framed critics of the use of force as “traitors”, “fools”, “wobblers” and appeasers; *The Observer*, *The Independent*, *The Mirror*, and columnist John Pilger received special recognition (The Sun 2001e, cf. Spanton and Hartley 2001, Kay 2001). Adopting a slightly more civil tone,

the broadsheet *Daily Telegraph* largely backed *The Sun's* assessment. Critics of the Afghan action were “inveterate anti-Americans, pacifists, alarmists who think we are all about to be killed by Anthrax, Muslim fundamentalists, anti-Semites, Continental European adventurers, and broadcasters, like the BBC, whose sense of self-worth comes chiefly from lacerating the society which pays their wages” (The Daily Telegraph 2001d). *The Mirror*, which had framed the fall of Kabul to the Northern Alliance in largely negative terms, warning it was “too early to uncork the bubbly” (The Mirror 2001c), elected to hit back, calling *The Sun* “an offensive, racist, sexist, misogynistic, tawdry, lying little rag” and “a *Pravda*-like government propaganda sheet” (The Mirror 2001d). The two top-selling British daily newspapers thus focused on fighting each other in their reporting of the successful removal of the Taliban from power, rather than on actually analysing the issues. As one commentator noted “the problem with this form of debate is that not only does nobody listen to his opponents, but nobody takes any real notice of what is happening” (Anthony 2001). An open and energetic public debate can, then, be more of a hindrance than a help to public influence over foreign policy.

Conclusion

By the time the Taliban had been driven from power, early critics of military action were relenting (cf. Marshall-Andrews, Hansard 2001h, c871). At the same time, a sense remained that reaching consensus over what to do about Iraq would prove a much greater challenge for the government. Even before any action had been proposed, *The Guardian* had already declared itself opposed to an Iraqi campaign, and the ICM poll it commissioned allowed it to frame the passive public as equally reluctant (The Guardian 2001b). One editorial warned Blair that “a return to that theatre of war would divide his party, his country and his allies abroad...it would be the biggest decision that any British Prime Minister had been called upon to make in living memory” (The Times 2001d), and it was significant that no pro-war publication dared to generate its own poll data. It was noted, furthermore, that Iraq was the

one foreign policy matter in which the Conservatives might seek successfully to appear tougher than the government (D. MacIntyre 2001e).

So the apparent consensus over the foreign policy approach that characterised the period between 11 September and the end of 2001 was deceptive, at least as a guide to the likely reception of a proposal to attack Iraq. There were reasons why the British public supported a campaign in Afghanistan, and clear limits to that support; limits which would be tested by the shift of focus to Iraq, and reasons which definitely did not extend that far. The 'enemy' in the Afghan campaign, however ill-defined, had clearly struck first. There was multilateral agreement on the need to respond against Afghanistan, and the legal grounds for that action were not seriously in doubt, not least because of the legitimacy granted by international consensus. US officials talked aggressively of wider war, but their attention appeared focused on the specific task of disrupting al-Qaeda. There was little doubt that Britain was only the most favoured of several American allies, even if none was as powerful as the United States itself; indeed, the Bush administration had surprised critics both by its restraint and by its openness to international co-operation. Opponents of military action failed to articulate an adequate alternative approach; too often they were tied up in fighting pro-war rivals over whose interpretation of international affairs represented the greater treachery, or unable to advance beyond lamenting the lack of peaceful solutions. At the same time, a range of potential future tripwires for a debate over Iraq evidently already existed, albeit without yet having too much of an impact on policymaking. Official efforts to influence Public Opinion were received sceptically, if not yet cynically. Decisions were made by a small inner circle of ministers and advisers with limited external input, restricting the degree to which the public might seek to influence future policies with which it was less content. The legitimate extent of the 'war on terror' remained ill-defined. Both supporters and opponents of shifting attention to Saddam Hussein projected their own views onto the government, and the government did little to correct speculation on either side. There remained sufficient grounds for disagreement

between official policy and elements of Public Opinion that the invasion of Iraq could not with any certainty be planned on the assumption of public support in Britain.

The British public debate over the invasion of Afghanistan did not therefore entirely prefigure the discord surrounding Iraq. Most of the implications this chapter highlights for the Iraq debate relate to the nature of Public Opinion as part of the context within which policymaking took place, rather than to the specifics of the views expressed at this time. Some elements of later clashes clearly did have their origins in discussions over Afghanistan; but many more did not. The Afghan campaign was too short in both build-up and action, too limited in ambition and scope, and too successful to provoke an outright confrontation. Instead future flashpoints remained latent at this time. The British public was not implacably opposed to the use of force as a legitimate tool of foreign policy in the aftermath of 11 September; indeed, there was genuine support for the effort to remove the Taliban. Whether it would offer similar backing for the removal of Saddam Hussein would depend on how that action was presented and, ultimately, how far the presentation resonated with established public views.

Chapter 3 – Don't mention the war!: January – April 2002

Even before the end of 2001 the Blair government had begun to face questions over the extent to which it would support a US decision to shift the focus of the 'war on terror' to Saddam Hussein's Iraq. During the early months of 2002, the outlines of a general public debate began to develop, as many contributors to Public Opinion asked whether a further move was desirable, necessary, or justifiable. After President Bush made his first State of the Union speech at the end of January, it was increasingly apparent that the US would pursue some sort of confrontation with the regime in Baghdad; whether this would lead to military action was unclear, but it was possible, even likely. Critics of alleged American 'warmongering' quickly put pressure on the Prime Minister to stand up to his ally in the White House. When he refused, they labelled him the President's 'poodle', failing to recognise in the process that Blair actually shared much of the analysis underpinning Bush's stance. To the extent that Blair sought to explain his agreement with the American administration, most notably during his visit to Bush's Texas ranch at the start of April, the public illusion of a rampaging American hegemon held in check by Britain began to dissipate, though not without consternation on the part of opponents of the use of force. But Blair refused to enter into a public debate over the prospect of war with Iraq before a firm decision had been made to authorise a specific strike. He made it clear that, in his mind, policy debate should follow rather than precede policy making, with the latter the preserve of the Prime Minister, aided by a core group of trusted ministers and advisors. Much of Public Opinion disagreed, and increasingly dissatisfied journalists turned to speculation to fill column inches left empty by official reticence. This in turn soured relations with parliament, creating a situation in which the media and MPs fed off each other's discontent in a spiral of cynicism that undermined the government's ability to get its message heard.

The way British policy towards Iraq was communicated in public in the early months of 2002 determined the shape of the arguments which were to come. President Bush was unequivocal in condemning Saddam Hussein's regime; Tony Blair appeared to offer at least the possibility of a peaceful solution to the issue of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Yet both had established expectations. From the time of the 'axis of evil' speech in the case of Bush, and of the Crawford visit in the case of Blair, the two leaders had staked their credibility on a successful confrontation with Iraq. They had identified themselves personally with a process that would lead to the public disarmament of the regime, or its removal from power. These early months of the debate in Britain over Iraq, therefore, were characterised above all by rhetorical commitments made by the Prime Minister which would set the tone for the wider discussion that followed.

The 'axis of evil'

President Bush was in a position of some domestic strength as he sought to shift the focus of the post-11 September agenda onto Iraq. Although British intelligence had rejected the notion of a direct link between Saddam Hussein and 11 September at an early stage, US agencies were less willing to rule the possibility out. The CIA put considerable stock in a (later discredited) report from their Czech counterparts suggesting that lead hijacker Mohammed Atta had met Iraqi intelligence officers in Prague shortly before the attacks (Burke 2011, 104). A number of leading administration officials were established advocates of the US taking a more robust approach in dealing with Baghdad. Writing under the aegis of the Project for a New American Century (PNAC), several key figures¹ had signed an open letter to President Clinton in January 1998 which demanded the use of "a full complement of diplomatic, political and military efforts" to remove Saddam Hussein from power (Project for a New American

¹ Including Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, Chairman of the Defense Policy Advisory Board Richard Perle, Undersecretary of State and later Ambassador to the UN John Bolton, and Trade Policy Representative and later Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick.

Century 1998). The similarities later seen between the 'Bush doctrine' of US foreign policy, and PNAC's founding call for a return to "a Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity" (Project for a New American Century 1997) were no coincidence, but the consequence of considerable crossover in the memberships of PNAC and the Bush administration. In addition, under section 3 of the Iraq Liberation Act, signed into law by President Clinton in 1998 and drawn up partly under pressure from PNAC, the Bush administration was not just permitted, but required, "to support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq and to promote the emergence of a democratic government to replace that regime" (Ehrenberg, et al. 2010, 31). In terms of the American public, meanwhile, opinion polls conducted in the US at this time showed some 78% of respondents supporting the idea of an immediate follow-up action to overthrow Saddam Hussein as soon as the initial campaign in Afghanistan could be concluded (Huddy, Khatib and Capelos 2002, 425). Still reeling from the shock of 11 September, and buoyed by their success in driving the Taliban from power, US policymakers were determined to defend against perceived threats, intervening "robustly and ruthlessly" in other states where necessary to achieve security. They recognised "the fact that this might cause resentment in other countries". It was "unfortunate", but "of much less concern...than achieving results" (Cox 2004, 597). At least they were unlikely to face significant domestic discord if they pressed ahead.

British commentators began to note as early as October 2001 that for all the initial focus on the Taliban, Iraq was still regarded as "the quintessential terrorist state" in Washington (Almond 2001). The views of figures such as Rumsfeld were well known, and while the United States had decided to focus on Osama bin Laden in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks, administration officials had made no secret of their desire also to confront Saddam Hussein. Chapter 2 noted the concern expressed within British Public Opinion about the US insistence that it retained the right, under Article 51 of the UN Charter, to expand its Afghan campaign to other states if it felt such action necessary to defend itself. With the

suggestion of a direct link between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein repeatedly dismissed by British officials, there seemed at first to be no prospect of a coherent policy line developing that would justify that extension. By the end of November, however, observers began to report that “a new argument has begun to take shape among US hawks. Since the Iraqi regime is building weapons of mass destruction, and is known to consort with terrorists, and since Osama bin Laden made clear his desire to acquire such weapons, the US is entitled to take action against Iraq” (D. MacIntyre 2001e). Such thinking, prefigured by PNAC and later enshrined in the ‘Bush doctrine’, was beginning to crystallise around the model of a “new category” of *potential* rather than *actual* threat (Wastell and Lamb 2001) before the year was out. When David Manning visited Washington in early December 2001, he travelled in the knowledge that he would be expected to discuss Iraq. A Foreign Office briefing prepared in advance of Manning’s trip warned that “there are no anti-terrorist grounds for Stage 2 [of the ‘war on terror’] military action against Iraq” since “it has no responsibility for the 11 September attacks and no significant links to UBL/Al Qaida”. The briefing was, as Chapter 2 discusses, consistent with the view of British Intelligence at this time. However, the note went on, there was “real reason for concern about Iraq’s WMD programmes”, left without adequate external oversight after the withdrawal of UNSCOM inspectors in 1998. A number of “options” for how to proceed were set out, including a toughening of sanctions and an escalation of military containment operations. The note concluded by noting that while “regime change may look an attractive alternative [to sanctions]...military intervention for this purpose would be illegal” (McDonald 2001). British policymakers knew, therefore, that the US was thinking about military action against Baghdad on the back of the removal of the Taliban, and agreed that there was a potential threat from Iraq’s development of WMD. Where British and US assessments differed in early 2002 was on the immediate nature of that threat. In a note for the Prime Minister written at this time, MI5 Deputy Director-General Eliza Manningham-Buller assessed that “Saddam is only likely to order terrorist attacks if he perceives that the survival

of his regime is threatened". The US nightmare scenario, of a pre-emptive global terror campaign, orchestrated by Baghdad and utilising Iraqi WMD, was thought unlikely, absent at least a determined effort by the Western allies to drive the regime from power. Even if this assessment was proven inaccurate, the note continued, the "Iraqi capability to mount attacks in the UK is currently limited". Iraq had no established links with al-Qaeda and very limited resources in either the US or UK with which it might arrange its own operations. Instead Saddam's "preferred option would be to use conventional military delivery systems [for chemical weapons] against targets in the region, rather than terrorism" (Manningham-Buller 2002).

It remains debatable whether such assessments might have influenced the White House had they been more firmly advocated by British policymakers. By the time of Manningham-Buller's memo, President Bush had already changed the agenda for public debate over Iraq in both Britain and the US with his first State of the Union address. Referring back to 11 September, Bush declared that "history has called America and our allies to action" against "regimes that sponsor terror". Bush's focus on *regimes* was deliberate. While British officials had determined that al-Qaeda was unlikely to be reliant on state support, the prevailing thinking amongst right-wing politicians on both sides of the Atlantic was that the real danger from terrorism lay in its ability to garner support from 'rogue' governments. Warning of the particular threat posed by Iraq, Iran and North Korea, the President claimed that "states like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world" (Bush 2002a). Terrorists were merely the "allies" of the states which posed the 'real' threat by virtue of their weapons development programmes. That states were easier to target militarily than individual terrorist cells was a convenient consequence of this interpretation, and one wholly intended by the administration.

The speech had an immediate impact on the British public. The morning before, the British right-wing press had stuck to their established script, arguing that while action was

needed to curb Saddam Hussein's ability to challenge Western power, direct efforts to root out international terrorism were a greater priority (The Times 2002a). In the aftermath of the "paradigm shift" in US thinking on foreign affairs marked by the unveiling of the 'axis of evil' concept (Harnden 2002b), the following day's headlines were dominated by what was considered to be a significant step-change in presidential rhetoric (cf. Harnden 2002a, Watson and Whitworth 2002). Critics resumed an earlier refrain, complaining that "tragedy does not give America a free hand", and attacking the 'axis of evil' concept as "nonsense" or "ludicrous tripe" (The Guardian 2002a, Maddox 2002a, Routledge 2002a). British commentators were in no doubt, however, that Bush had meant what he said, and that the consequences were likely to be dramatic for Britain as well as for Iraq. When Jack Straw suggested Bush might simply have been playing domestic politics by talking tough, he was labelled "out of touch" (The Sunday Telegraph 2002a). Some, more cynical, observers had suggested that the bombing campaign in Afghanistan was motivated primarily by a desire to bolster the administration's approval ratings. At the end of January 2002 it remained abundantly clear that the President did not need to try any harder to appear tough on terrorism; his domestic authority in this regard was uncontested.

Bush may not have been playing domestic politics, but his statements nevertheless had significant domestic political implications in the US. He had been unequivocal in referring to the three 'axis of evil' states as potential threats, and in reiterating his determination to defend the United States. British commentators noted that it would be very difficult to reconcile these commitments with a policy that did not involve a direct and aggressive confrontation (Watson 2002). As one observer put it, although the speech had been primarily rhetorical, "rhetoric on occasion does change reality. And the axis of evil is for real" (Cornwell 2002). From this point onwards the agenda for public debate in Britain over how best to engage with the US was inevitably dominated by Iraq.

Comments from Bush administration officials made headlines in Britain on two further occasions during this period, contributing both times to rising public anxiety over the development of US policy towards Iraq. The first was Vice-President Cheney's visit to London on 11 March. Anticipating the arrival of a known administration 'hawk', journalists had assumed that the primary purpose of his visit was to plot military action. The anti-war press launched a pre-emptive strike, warning "it would be lunacy to attack Iraq at the moment, madness for Britain to back an American assault, and complete insanity to make any large-scale commitment of our troops" (The Mirror 2002a). Their pro-war counterparts retaliated, insisting that Cheney was in London to "listen and not lecture" (The Times 2002d). This was, they claimed, a genuine opportunity for Anglo-American co-operation. A joint press conference between Vice President and Prime Minister passed off well. Both insisted that the proliferation of WMD posed a potential threat, while maintaining that no decisions had been made over what to do about Iraq's alleged weapons development. Cheney, however, caused some concern by warning in addition of a "potential marriage" between al-Qaeda and Iraq (Blair and Cheney 2002). Pro-war commentators were comforted by the apparent recognition of the inseparability of the threats posed by "rogue groups" and "rogue states" (The Times 2002e). Critics pointed out that there was no evidence of any such link (Freedland 2002a).

The second occasion, again a joint press conference, this time between Blair and President Bush at the latter's ranch in Crawford on 6 April, saw the President reiterating that the administration favoured "regime change" in Iraq (Blair and Bush 2002). Although there was nothing new about the specific assertion, its coming at the end of a much-discussed bilateral summit with the Prime Minister raised eyebrows back in Britain. Bush's commitment to military action was reinforced, and the pressure he would face not to change course increased, while the conviction, held by many in Britain, that the US was planning to go to war regardless of British or international objections, was underlined.

A poodle called Tony

Most subsequent analyses agree that “the American President did not, for a variety of reasons, push a reluctant Blair into war” with Iraq in early 2003 (Kennedy-Pipe and Vickers 2007, 207). It is evident from participant accounts, and from contemporary official papers released during the Chilcot Inquiry, that the view within Downing Street was at the least highly sympathetic towards the US assessment of the Iraqi threat. As Chapter 2 describes, however, ministers’ failure directly to address the question of where they stood on the prospect of extending the ‘war on terror’ to Iraq had allowed domestic audiences of various views to project their own opinions onto the government’s agenda. Many natural critics of US foreign policy assumed that the Prime Minister would take their side in opposing what they regarded as an ideological and unwarranted attempt to settle old scores with Saddam Hussein. They were wrong. In their disappointment, they accused Blair of selling out, of ditching domestic allies solely to ingratiate himself in Washington. He had made himself the President’s ‘poodle’, they claimed, obediently following his master’s orders instead of making up his own mind. Because Blair had never actually been opposed to the idea of confronting Iraq over its WMD, he was psychologically unprepared for making sense of these attacks, and so failed to respond effectively. Sticking to the mantra that ‘no decision has been taken’, he maintained that there was no need to consider directly the desirability of a fresh war in the Middle East, even while repeatedly underscoring the nature of the Iraqi threat. This stance was consistent with his belief that policy debate should follow policymaking, but it did little to calm concerns. The government’s refusal to ‘mention the war’ during early 2002 thus became a defining characteristic of the public debate over Iraq, and a cause of much of the tension that followed.

Tony Blair later wrote that the question of what to do about Saddam Hussein and his WMD had been “there in the background” from the beginning of the ‘war on terror’ campaign (Blair 2010b, 357). He had known all along that Washington would turn its attention to Baghdad at some point. In one of the early planning meetings of Cabinet Ministers and senior

officials, three days after 11 September, the participants agreed that it was “possible to be sympathetic” with an American desire to move against Iraq as part of the response. At the same time, they concluded, “the political consequences” of rash action were “all too obvious” (Campbell and Stott 2007, 567). It would be better to wait, and to try to get international support for any fresh campaign. British policymaking proceeded against this sympathetic backdrop in the early months of 2002. Tony Blair remained very much in control of decision-making. He continued to rely upon the combination of personal instincts and the advice of close aides that had supported him in crafting Britain’s involvement in the initial Afghan campaign. Despite the relaxation of the time pressures faced in those first days, and the shift in focus from the relatively straightforward decision to support military action in Afghanistan to the much more vexing question of Iraq, the Foreign Office continued to be excluded from the most important discussions (Fawn and Hinnebusch 2006, 323, Daddow 2009, 556, Hollis 2010, 59). As one observer put it, for Blair what mattered was not so much the expertise undoubtedly possessed by members of the Diplomatic Service, but the fact that “they were not his people” (Kampfner 2003, 92). The alternative approach he adopted, however, of both involving political appointees in key decisions regardless of their lack of relevant knowledge, and relying on informal, *ad hoc* discussions with ministers and advisers over formal Cabinet committee meetings, caused consternation in the Civil Service and continues to be a source of criticism (Hollis 2006, 44-45). No doubt the Chilcot Report will make some mention of the issue when it appears.

Blair had made up his mind to support the US in confronting Iraq before his trip to Crawford in April 2002, although he was not yet certain that this would mean military action. He shared at least part of the outlook underpinning the ‘war on terror’, having declared even before the end of 2001 that, in his view, “if anybody harbours a terrorist, they’re a terrorist...if they house terrorists, they’re terrorists...if they develop weapons of mass destruction that will be used to terrorise nations, they will be held accountable” (Blair, Hansard 2001g, c966). Blair’s

public silence over the 'axis of evil' speech (in contrast to his Foreign Secretary, for example, who, as we have seen, sought to downplay its significance) did not immediately commit him to support the substantive foreign policy doctrine it spawned. That he did not dispute it was, however, potentially significant. By March, in an exchange Robin Cook thought both "frank and unsettling", Blair was warning MPs "I cannot offer the comfort that no military action will be taken" against Iraq (Cook 2003, 123). Behind the scenes, discussions with the Americans assumed that London's analysis of the Iraqi threat broadly mirrored that emerging from Washington, although it was tempered by more challenging domestic political circumstances. Writing back from a preparatory visit in advance of Blair's trip to Crawford, David Manning reported having told Bush that the Prime Minister "would not budge in [his] support for regime change but that [he] had to manage a press, a Parliament and a public opinion that was very different from anything in the States" (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 89-90). Three days later Blair wrote to Powell and Manning describing his position. Noting neither he nor Bush had "a proper worked-out strategy on how we would do it", he argued that "from a centre-left perspective, the case [for regime change] should be obvious...a political philosophy that does care about other nations – eg Kosovo, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone – and is prepared to change regimes on the merits, should be gung-ho on Saddam" (Blair 2002a). The claim, which Blair continues to advance (Blair 2010a, 21-30), that his objective was never 'regime change' *per se*, sits uneasily when considered alongside his contemporary comments. Importantly, what emerges from these exchanges is the central importance of Public Opinion to the Prime Minister's overall foreign policy strategy. He and Bush agreed action would be needed against Iraq, but neither knew exactly how they should proceed. The main problem, as Blair saw it, was of how to gain public support, both at home and around the world, for the chosen course. In his formulation, Public Opinion is not so much an actor in policymaking, but a constraining factor upon it, and a background context against which it must be carried out.

The Cabinet may not have been the site of the decision that Britain should support a confrontation with Iraq, but it was offered at least one major opportunity to have its say during this period. Robin Cook described the 7 March meeting as “a momentous event”; a rare “real discussion at Cabinet”, prompted by his and Home Secretary David Blunkett’s entreaties. Cook later recalled that,

“this was the last meeting of the Cabinet at which a large number of ministers spoke up against the war. I have little sympathy with the criticism of Tony that he sidelined the Cabinet over Iraq. On the contrary, over the next six months we were to discuss Iraq more than any other topic, but only Clare Short and I ever expressed frank doubts about the trajectory in which we were being driven” (Cook 2003, 115-116).

Cook’s reference to Clare Short here is deliberate; she has been the most vociferous of those accusing Blair of excluding Cabinet from the decision to go to war, describing ministerial meetings as “little chats” devoid of substance, in which decisions made elsewhere were reported rather than discussed (Short 2010, 3). Short was not actually at the 7 March discussion. She was out of the country in her official capacity as International Development Secretary. Although regarded as a competent minister, she was treated cautiously by Downing Street because of her unwillingness to stick to agreed common positions in public (Campbell and Stott 2007, 569, Blair 2010b, 436). It is possible that the opportunity had deliberately been taken for a discussion on Iraq without her present. The Department of International Development had been cut out of Iraq policymaking in the past, apparently as a result of bureaucratic jealousies left over from its separation from the Foreign Office in 1997 (cf. Austin 2001), and there are historical precedents for foreign policy decision-makers choosing to exclude one of their number from a key discussion in order to maximise group cohesion. In one example, the dovish US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was deliberately not recalled from vacation to attend a crucial Carter administration meeting in the run-up to the failed attempt to rescue American hostages being held in Iran. Although there is no evidence that it was because of his views that Vance was excluded, it was known that he would have opposed the use of force had he been in Washington and so able to attend (Smith 1985, 19). Similarly, there

is no evidence in the case of Clare Short to support the suggestion that she had deliberately been excluded. That she was not present at the Cabinet's first "real discussion" on Iraq was significant, nonetheless, because it meant a known opponent of military action was unable to state her case.

More readily apparent than the question of Short's exclusion from Cabinet discussions is the fact that the 7 March meeting was less important in terms of concrete decision-making than a follow-up session at Chequers on 2 April to which only the Foreign and Defence Secretaries were invited. As was his usual approach (Daddow 2011, 224), at Cabinet Blair had largely listened, interjecting only to reassure ministers that "the management has not gone crazy" (Campbell and Stott 2007, 609). At Chequers he set out his own thinking on the link between the need to deal with WMD and the prospect of regime change in Baghdad. It was impossible, he argued, to address either issue on its own; the Iraqi regime was a problem because it was developing WMD, and WMD would be a problem whatever the regime (Campbell and Stott 2007, 612-613, Blair 2010b, 402). Lord Butler wrote that the government's position on the Iraqi threat at this point "was accurately represented by a statement in one of the policy papers that: *'What has changed is not the pace of Saddam Hussein's WMD programmes but our tolerance of them post 11 September'*" (Butler 2004, 70, italics in original). Both Straw and Hoon had sent Blair memos on Iraq in advance of the discussion. Butler's quote appears to paraphrase Straw's observation that "if 11 September had not happened, it is doubtful that the US would now be considering military action against Iraq...objectively, the threat from Iraq has not worsened...What has however changed is the tolerance of the international community (especially that of the US)" for the prospect of an Iraqi WMD capability (Straw 2002a). Hoon, similarly, wrote that "in objective terms, Iran may be the greater problem for the UK" than Iraq. he thought, nevertheless, that Iraq would be the next American target, although at that point Britain was "not privy to detailed US planning, either strategically across the region or on Iraq" (Hoon 2002). That both Straw and Hoon suggested

Blair take the opportunity to sound out Bush, to try to gain some insight into his planning, supports the claim made in public that Britain had not yet been explicitly committed to military action. Straw concluded his note with a warning that “the rewards from your visit to Crawford will be few. The risks are high, both for you and for the government” (Straw 2002a). To his mind, the domestic political price that would have to be paid to gain access to US decision-makers was disproportionate to the value of that access. Blair evidently disagreed; he did not follow Straw’s advice to proceed with caution.

Although Straw and Hoon were nominally responsible for British foreign and defence policy respectively, neither went to Crawford. Journalists travelling with the Prime Minister observed that, “unusually”, even Manning, Powell and Campbell were excluded from the first evening’s talks; they were “despatched to a hotel for an early night” while Bush and Blair spoke alone (Murphy 2002). Much of what transpired in private over the course of the weekend followed a similar pattern, limiting the extent to which outsiders were able to gain an insight into the content and the tone of the discussions. Christopher Meyer speculated at the Chilcot Inquiry about a deal to go to war having been “signed in blood” at this meeting (C. Meyer 2009, 29), but Jonathan Powell dismissed this suggestion, recalling that “I was at Crawford, David Manning was at Crawford, Christopher Meyer was not at Crawford. He was at Waco, about thirty miles away”. Unlike the previous September, on this occasion the British Ambassador had not managed to argue his way into the key session, and had to hear about its results second-hand (Powell 2010a, 24). The Crawford meeting drew Tony Blair into an unusually close personal association with British policy towards Iraq. He had discussed Saddam Hussein alone with President Bush, and he personally, and alone, had made the commitment that Britain would support a US policy of confrontation. This personal association with the US position would, for different reasons, put as much pressure on Blair to stay the course as had been placed on Bush by his public condemnation of the Iraqi regime.

Going into the meeting, Blair had made clear his intention to capitalise on the “unprecedented appreciation” he had won in Washington for his response to 11 September by seeking direct British participation in US decision-making. He was hamstrung, however, both by his physical remove from the Oval Office, which meant he could never compete with American ‘hawks’ for access to the President (Daddow 2011, 225-226), and the need to respond to British journalists who tended to greet his every expression of support for Washington with derisory remarks about his independence from presidential influence (Hollis 2010, 35). Despite the general hostility shown by the British public, several commentators had kept faith in the Prime Minister’s ability to win influence in return for his support (cf. P. Riddell 2002a, Young 2002, Rawnsley 2002a). It was during the build-up to the Crawford meeting that doubts, apparently well-founded (Cook 2003, 99), began to develop about the extent to which Blair was actually using what access he won to propose strategies other than military action. Reflecting these concerns, *The Mirror* led the media field in attacking the Prime Minister for being the President’s “poodle”. Its favoured tactic in launching such assaults was to publish a commentary article accusing Blair of behaving like a “poodle”, and then, in the same edition, to note in a news story that the Prime Minister had been accused of behaving like a poodle, which of course he had, by *The Mirror*’s own columnists (cf. Brown 2002, Blackman 2002a, *The Mirror* 2002b). This blurring of the lines between news and commentary continues to exercise policymakers (Blair 2012a, 2). Blair did himself no favours in terms of countering the ‘poodle’ image. Shortly before travelling to Crawford, he told an interviewer from US network NBC that he had never seen his relationship with President Bush in terms of his ability to constrain US adventurism;

“I know people sometimes think it is my job to sit there restraining this or restraining that. It is a dialogue and it is a discussion about strategy from points of agreement, in exactly the same way that in Afghanistan I had absolutely no doubt whatever that we had to go after the al Qaida network, that we had to remove the Taliban regime. The discussion we had, it wasn’t a question of restraining the President, the discussion was what is the best way of doing it? We worked out the best way, we did it. Now in respect of Iraq it is exactly the same” (Blair 2002b).

The suggestion that the question of what to do about Iraq was “exactly the same” as that previously asked over Afghanistan was unlikely to calm the anxiety back in London that further military action was on the cards, given what had happened to the Taliban.

What was actually said between Prime Minister and President remains somewhat unclear, despite the proliferation of first and second hand accounts that have emerged since April 2002. No notes were taken of the actual discussion, so all are based on recollections of the two leaders’ own summaries. Most secondary studies describe Blair promising to support a confrontation with Iraq, using military force if necessary to bring Saddam Hussein to heel, but stipulating “three conditions” for that support; a serious effort to involve the UN, progress on the stalled Middle East Peace Process, and a concerted and co-ordinated public communication campaign designed to explain why Iraq was seen as such a threat in the post-11 September world (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 89). Jack Straw in fact referred to these exact proposals as “conditions” for British support in a memo to Blair in July (Straw 2002b). Blair, however, denies having set down specific criteria of this sort. He maintains that, rather than being a bargaining position, his reference to the UN, the Middle East Peace Process, and public communication was intended to aid Bush in driving the confrontation policy forward (Blair 2010a, 45). That even Straw appears to have been confused on the level of ‘conditionality’ attached to Blair’s pledge of British support is significant. Blair essentially argues that he advised Bush on communication and did not bargain with him on substance. The preparatory notes he had received from Straw and Hoon, and the tone of his own comments both in writing and at the Chequers meeting on 2 April, show that concern was already developing within the British government about the level of public support for military action. Straw thought that substantive demands had been made. Whether in doing so he was himself confusing the substance and the communication of foreign policy is unclear. What is clear is that there was considerable crossover between the two elements, and that this was

reflected in diplomatic exchanges at the very highest levels. The effect was exacerbated by the extreme personalisation of British diplomacy under Blair, reflected in the intimacy of the discussions at Crawford and the significance of the commitments emerging from them.

In public the Prime Minister expressed himself with greater caution than the President; at the 6 April press conference he did not follow his host into endorsing regime change outright. Instead, he posed the prospect as a rhetorical question, asking “would the region, the world, and not least the ordinary Iraqi people, be better off without the regime of Saddam Hussein?” (Blair and Bush 2002). He recalls having “delivered a strong message” at the press conference, but maintains that “behind closed doors...our talk was more nuanced”, referring not only to the threat from Iraq, but the need to consider it as part of a wider strategy towards a “region in transition” (Blair 2010b, 401). Because Blair had kept his more subtle arguments private, Public Opinion had only the tougher public line with which to engage. Given that domestic opposition to the notion of military action was beginning to grow in Britain, this may have been a tactical miscalculation on the Prime Minister’s part. Blair had been called upon, even before the end of 2001, to “use his influence with the President to stop military action being expanded to include Iraq” (Kennedy, Hansard 2001f, c867). Labour MPs were particularly restive. Jack Straw had warned “that there is at present no majority inside the PLP for any military action against Iraq...colleagues know that Saddam and the Iraqi regime are bad. Making that case is easy. But we have a long way to go to convince them” of the need for military action (Straw 2002a). Blair was not unaware of this. Writing to Jonathan Powell on 17 March, he had noted that “the persuasion job on this seems very tough. My own side are worried. Public opinion is fragile. International opinion – as I found at the EU – is pretty sceptical” (Blair 2002a). Despite this recognition, however, he persisted with a hard line.

In making judgements on the level of domestic support he then had for taking Britain to war with Iraq, Blair drew on a range of sources of information and advice. His Cabinet colleagues, including Straw, kept him informed on the position of the Labour Party. Alastair

Campbell provided daily updates on his continued battle against the “poisonous media” (Campbell and Stott 2007, 604). The Labour Party’s chief pollster, (the late Lord) Philip Gould, visited Downing Street regularly, although he never had Campbell’s level of access. Gould’s main presentation of the latest internal party polling data and focus-group results during this period took place on 11 March, the same day as Dick Cheney’s visit to London (Campbell and Stott 2007, 610). Published figures from an ICM poll for The Guardian completed on 17 March show support for war with Iraq hovering around the 35% mark, with over 50% of respondents opposed (ICM 2002), suggesting Gould is unlikely to have had good news. Whether his presentation had any impact on Blair’s thinking going into the Crawford meeting is unclear. Although the desirability of managing the media was apparently accepted, there were doubts within Downing Street about the efficacy of opinion polling as a tool of government. Blair offered his view in his memoir;

“Polls are an absolute nightmare. All leaders will tell you they don’t pay attention to them, but all leaders do. The problem is they can be an instant snapshot of public opinion (i.e. real, but superficial and therefore potentially transient) or they can indicate a trend (i.e. potentially of lasting significance). You never know which it is. But they matter because quite apart from anything else, your supporters and the media dwell on them. They help create a mood, which itself often then reinforces the polling” (Blair 2010b, 298).

Polls were more important, then, because of what they *did to Public Opinion* than because of what they *said about public opinion*. Blair’s position ties neatly with the claims set out for this study in Chapter 1, and offers some support for the approach taken of focussing on the system of public debate ahead of the agency of individuals via opinion polls. Jonathan Powell is similarly wary, with hindsight, of the application of polls to political decision-making;

“Polling is an essential tool of prime ministers, but polls, like secret intelligence, have to be handled carefully. Without them, a modern leader is driving blind. However, they are a snapshot of the past not a glimpse into the future, so if a leader uses them to govern it is like steering while peering over the stern of the boat. The numbers help locate your whereabouts in the ocean and tell you the state of the tides, but they do not tell you how to set your forward course...A wise leader should use quantitative polling as a tool but not as a substitute for his own political instincts” (Powell 2010b, 136-137).

When, therefore, President Bush told the 6 April press conference “the thing I admire about this Prime Minister is that he doesn’t need a poll or a focus group to convince him of the difference between right and wrong” he may have unconsciously been echoing scepticism on the part of Blair and his team about the value of such measures as much as recognising his counterpart’s commitment to “the defence of freedom” (Blair and Bush 2002).

Public reaction to Blair’s statements at Crawford was mixed. He was praised for the “brave and right” decision to stand up to his own party in supporting the United States (The Daily Telegraph 2002b), and attacked for having “rolled over like a rather docile poodle” in capitulating to unreasonable American demands (The Mirror 2002c). His speech at College Station on 7 April was “subtle and important” (The Guardian 2002b) or “unconvincing” (The Independent 2002a) depending on the particular nuances that most appealed to different editorial writers. Most significant, wrote several observers, was the degree to which Blair expected to be able to win over his domestic doubters. He seemed “puzzled by the degree of opposition to his stance”, they observed, and thought his critics “utterly naive” (Eastham 2002a, McSmith and Sparrow 2002, Wintour and White 2002). Although their authors could not have known it for certain, these statements are consistent with Blair’s 17 March note to Powell. He could yet be proved right, commentators concluded. Although the ‘war on terror’ concept had not caught on in Britain, denying the government the overarching narrative of threat already proving useful for the Bush administration across the Atlantic (Entman 2004, 2-3), there remained room for common ground with war sceptics (The Guardian 2002c; The Independent 2002b). In proposing, whether as diplomatic conditions or as presentational advice, that Iraq be confronted through a UN-led process, alongside a fresh effort in the Middle East, and after a determined campaign to win over Public Opinion, Blair had recognised this room for accommodation. He had also conflated the management of domestic opinion with the construction of foreign policy. By April 2002, however, his refusal publicly to discuss

the prospect of war had already begun to undermine what political gains the Crawford strategy might yet have made.

No decision has been taken

When parts of Public Opinion demanded to know whether Britain would join the US in an attack on Iraq, the standard official response was to insist that 'no decision has been taken'. This was hardly a reassuring line. For one thing, as has been set out above, by April 2002 a decision *had* in fact been made, and communicated to the Americans, that Britain would support a confrontation with Iraq over its WMD, involving forced regime change if necessary. Technically it was true that no troops had been committed to a specific campaign, but to call for increased diplomatic pressure on Iraq while denying the need to discuss the prospect of military action was disingenuous at best, and the government was quickly called on this point. In addition, by asserting that no public debate on military action was necessary because no firm decision had yet been made to take military action, officials underscored Blair's belief that decision-making properly preceded parliamentary and press scrutiny. Every time, then, that the government claimed no debate on Iraq was needed because no decision had been made to use force, it also stated clearly that no debate would be permitted until *after* a decision *had* been made in favour of military action. By that point, of course, it would be too late for the decision to be reversed. The strongest negative reactions to this official obfuscation came from journalists, but the effect of adverse media commentary soon crept into parliamentary debate as well; the two forums were linked, whether Blair liked it or not. As MPs began to raise their own concerns, the fact of rising opposition to the government, particularly on its own backbenches, became newsworthy, increasing the volume of coverage and further fuelling discontent. Above all, it was the unwillingness of ministers at this time to admit that military action was on the cards that established the atmosphere of distrust that poisoned the public debate over the following year. Government statements during this time have been described

as “remarkable for their impenetrability” (Coates and Krieger 2004, 47). They hardly provided a sound basis for the fostering of public trust.

Tony Blair had dismissed early questions over the extension of the ‘war on terror’ to Baghdad; “in respect of Iraq, of course it is important that we act on the basis of evidence”, he insisted (Blair, Hansard 2001b, c679). He did not explain what evidence he thought might be found; nor did he commit himself on whether such material actually existed. His government meanwhile failed to address counter-suggestions from the Conservatives that “sooner or later the evidence may compel us to act” (Jenkin, Hansard 2001c, c839). Right-wing newspapers similarly speculated about the role the regime in Baghdad might play in sponsoring international terrorism, in part to pressure Blair into a less equivocal stance (The Sunday Telegraph 2001a, Hart 2001b, The Times 2001d). The various pro-war voices already emerging in the British public sphere were encouraged and incensed in equal measure by the ‘axis of evil’ speech. On the one hand, President Bush had made clear his intention not to forget about Saddam Hussein. On the other, the British government had failed immediately to endorse the President’s reasoning; ministers were “unrealistic” if they thought the new paradigm could be ignored, and “unfocused” if they failed to appreciate its logic (The Times 2002b). From an anti-war perspective, whereas commentators had earlier projected their own views about Iraq onto policymakers when the latter failed adequately to speak for themselves, now they heard official silence in the face of American belligerence, and assumed the worst. Ministers had failed to condemn the ‘axis of evil’ speech because the Prime Minister was a “poodle” (Routledge 2002a). There would be war, as one 14 February account put it, before the end of the year (Borger 2002). Perturbed by the latter article in particular (as they themselves admitted), MPs asked anxious questions of the Defence Secretary. Why were MPs only finding out about British troops being committed to military action via the media? When would Parliament have its say? (H. Cohen, Hansard 2002a, c364, Mahon, Hansard 2002a, c371). Hoon held the line, insisting the reports were inaccurate. His political opponents were less reticent;

Conservatives Julian Lewis and Gerald Howarth reacted to left-wingers' concerns by expressing their own strong support for an immediate attack on Baghdad (Lewis, Hansard 2002a, c389, Gerald Howarth, Hansard 2002a, c399). Reporting the exchanges, the right-wing press went further, again decrying the "traitors" on the left who refused to stand up to terrorism (The Sun 2002a), and criticising the government for being "too slow in preparing British opinion for the inevitable" (The Times 2002c). Tensions were rising in British public debate, whether the government spoke up or not.

It was in this febrile atmosphere that, on 23 February, Blair's trip to Crawford was first announced. Journalists were incensed. The government planned a "u-turn" from its previously sober stance (Sengupta and Morris 2002), they warned. The Prime Minister was going to the US to receive his marching orders. So hostile was the reaction of large parts of Public Opinion (despite the absence of any indication from the government that it intended even to consider military action at this point) that it was discussed at Cabinet on 28 February. Ministers observed that "the press and the media were as much the opposition as the Tories", reflecting the confluence of Conservative support for and vociferous media criticism of the prospect of war. The government had become "more spinned against than spinning", quipped Blair (Campbell and Stott 2007, 607).

Two dynamics had begun to emerge in Public Opinion by this point which are encapsulated by these exchanges. The first was the failure of the 'official' Opposition to offer a real alternative to military action against Iraq. It was evident that the Conservatives regarded advocating the use of force as 'their' territory, and were neither willing nor able to attack the government for its (presumed) intention to commit the country to war. The second was the reaction this prompted from the media. Driven by journalistic norms to seek balance in their reporting, media producers had to construct their own anti-war narratives, rather than simply reproducing the lines put out by rival politicians. Often during this period a 'balanced' news

article discussed the pro-war positions of Labour ministers and their Conservative shadows on one hand, and anti-war arguments produced by journalists themselves on the other.

By the start of March the press had detected a “heightening of the rhetoric against Saddam Hussein” in British government communications (Webster 2002a). One commentator warned that these “first word-bombing raids” showed a clear intent on the part of the government to join “a campaign of limitless violence” in the Muslim world (Routledge 2002b). Questions began to be raised over whether the government could be trusted, given its refusal to set out its Iraq position. The chairman of the newly-formed Stop the War Coalition asked “can those continually caught fibbing over everything from public spending increases to who is doing what favour for whom be trusted when it comes to war and peace?” (Murray 2002). When it was suggested, apparently by Downing Street, that a ‘dossier’ outlining the threat posed by Iraq might be released to accompany the Crawford visit, journalists responded sceptically; “let’s hope this dossier is compelling and - in view of New Labour’s declining reputation for probity - open and honest”, warned one (Glover 2002). This scepticism was shared in parliament; “when we receive the dossier, no doubt we will read that some such weapons are more sophisticated than those in the Pentagon” said one anti-war MP, sarcastically. “I expect that”, she added, “and I shall read about it with interest” (Mahon, Hansard 2002b, c77WH). Pro-war Conservatives, meanwhile, seized upon the opportunity to attack the good faith of a Labour Prime Minister, despite their agreeing with the substance of what he was apparently doing (Turner, Hansard 2002b, c73WH). At best it was assumed any document would contain “little new or surprising evidence” (Rufford 2002). Concerns over the way the government presented its policy were beginning, then, to bleed into public deliberations supposedly focused on the policy’s substance.

Chapter 4 deals in detail with what eventually became of these discussions, a document entitled *Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government* (British Government 2002). It was not released until late September. In mid-

March a decision was made, apparently in Downing Street (Hutton 2004, 106), not to proceed with a public document, at least not immediately. Jack Straw told the Chilcot Inquiry that the main reason for the delay was that the first draft originally earmarked for release in March had discussed Iraq alongside Iran, North Korea, and Libya, reflecting the ‘axis of evil’ model. Ministers had decided to avoid confusing the debate by appearing to accept the notion of a link between those very different states (Straw 2011, 48). No reason was given publicly for the delay; if Straw’s assessment is accurate (and it should be recalled that he was the only member of the government publicly to dispute the appropriateness of the ‘axis of evil’ label), it may have been thought impossible to explain the true rationale without risking offending the Americans at a crucial time. After all, the government could hardly have told the public that it had decided to re-write the dossier to remove references to Iran, North Korea, and Libya without facing questions on why those states had been considered together in the first place. Privately Straw had warned Blair, in the aftermath of Bush’s speech, that “a lot of work will now need to be done to delink the three” members of the ‘axis of evil’ in the public debate (Straw 2002a). A dossier lumping them together would hardly help. A speculative frenzy was nevertheless triggered by this latest example of official reticence. The government had halted the dossier because it “feared it would increase the frenzied speculation about an immediate war against Iraq, leading to an overwhelming backlash”, cried commentators. In any event, “the evidence against Saddam produced so far is not as strong as No 10 would like” (Ahmed 2002a). Further “speculation” suggested that the delay was the product of “mendacious spin”, “incompetence” or “negligence at a very high level” (D’Ancona 2002b, cf. Pilger 2002b, Osborne 2002). Although journalists recognised that speculation itself did not constitute news, the *existence* of speculation apparently did warrant coverage, and there was no harm in specifying what it was that was being speculated. The government had been damaged by its own communication efforts even when those efforts consisted of a decision not to communicate.

Robin Cook wrote on 4 March about “mounting speculation in the press that we will all be off to war soon”. He felt that “to a large extent this is generated by the newspapers themselves, who are each terrified that they will be the last to get in on the storyline”, but went on to observe that “it is true that, whenever he gets the opportunity, Tony fails to kill the mounting speculation” (Cook 2003, 113). It *was* true. Blair missed repeated opportunities to clarify his position in the months before Crawford. During the joint press conference with Dick Cheney on 11 March, he maintained that “no decisions of course have been taken yet” about the possible use of force, despite agreeing with the Vice-President on the need to do *something* about Iraq. He was challenged directly on the question of whether he had evidence to support the claim that Saddam Hussein posed a threat. The danger was “not in doubt at all”, he replied, but he offered nothing concrete to explain why not (Blair and Cheney 2002). Pressed, similarly, about the IAEA’s clean rating of the Iraqi nuclear programme, he maintained that there was “no doubt” that Saddam was “still trying to acquire nuclear capability and ballistic missile capability” (Blair, Hansard 2002e, c32). Clearly there *was* doubt, if the IAEA doubted it. Public Opinion encompassed a range of unimpressed voices, and Blair appeared not to be taking their questions seriously. Later exchanges over the dossier revealed that when he spoke of an absence of doubt in public statements about the Iraqi threat, Blair referred only to his own mind. At this stage the public reaction to his unsupported claims was sarcastic rather than angry (cf. Steel 2002a). Commentators were far more concerned with speculating over whether a decision to go to war had in fact been made (cf. The Daily Mail 2002) than in picking up the Prime Minister for logical inconsistencies. Lacking better sources of further information during Cheney’s visit, the British media resorted to interviewing American journalists travelling with the Vice President, inviting their views on the likelihood of war. The response was unanimous. Any effort to get UN weapons inspectors readmitted was “almost an exercise”; the US was going to invade, probably before the end of the year (*Channel 4 News* 2002a). More nuanced reporters observed that the arguments made in March 2002 did “not

yet amount to a case against Iraq” but that “Bush, Blair and Cheney were not quite claiming that it was” (Maddox 2002b). The result, however, of Cheney’s visit, and its presentation in the British media was “deep unease...at the prospect that Her Majesty’s Government might support United States military action against Iraq” on the part of many MPs, neatly encapsulated in a parliamentary Early Day Motion put down by Labour backbencher Alice Mahon (EDM no.927, 2001/02 session). Ultimately 162 signatories would be found to support the statement, 134 of them from the Labour Party. Even the 39 whose names initially accompanied the Motion were sufficiently strong in number for the exercise warrant the title of “backbench rebellion” in press reports (B. Roberts 2002).

The particular problem faced by the government in its public communications at this time was underscored by the 7 March Cabinet discussion, which participants regarded as amicable and productive. Sir Gus (now Lord) O’Donnell, who succeeded Sir Andrew (now Lord) Turnbull as Cabinet Secretary in 2005, told the Chilcot Inquiry that Blair “was reluctant at times to take as many Cabinet discussions as possible [on a range of issues, including Iraq], because he felt that they would become very public, very quickly” (O’Donnell 2011, 24). The 7 March discussion *was* very public, very quickly. Although accounts varied, the majority of press reports described a “Cabinet revolt”, and warned that the existence of “real unease” within the government itself on the question of Iraq heralded a potential ministerial rebellion (G. Jones 2002a, White and Borger 2002, Morris and Osborne 2002). Right-wing commentators then attacked the supposedly rebellious ministers for their disloyalty (D’Ancona 2002a), while disgruntled ex-ministers claimed their allegedly sycophantic successors would “swallow Mr Blair’s diktat without question” (Kilfoyle 2002). Sceptics noted that the Cabinet was “unused to collective discussion of any kind” (D. MacIntyre 2002a), and it was suggested that any account which featured New Labour ministers risking their jobs by standing up to the Prime Minister must surely be “exaggerated” (Ivens 2002). Concerns lingered into March that the entire debate “was more for show than for real” (Freedland 2002a). Some commentators noted

nonetheless that it was “unlikely that Mr Blair can back Mr Bush while members of his own government protest so aggressively” (Gilfeather 2002). This hostile and damaging set of public exchanges had been sparked entirely by the decision to allow an actual policy discussion at Cabinet. Blair’s reluctance under normal circumstances was apparently not without reason.

Speculation over Iraq continued to dominate British Public Opinion over foreign policy through March 2002. Blair himself admitted to understanding “totally” the “speculation about action on Iraq”, given the rising prominence of Baghdad in government communications on both sides of the Atlantic, even while continuing to insist that “no decision has been taken at all in respect of any action” (Blair, Hansard 2002c, c32). Commentators remained sceptical, and the press did little to calm fears, or to help Labour Whips, by reporting “a whiff of rebellion in the air” at Westminster (Seddon 2002a), although it did point out deliberate Conservative efforts to steer parliamentary debate onto Iraq solely to cause the government trouble with its own backbenchers (Letts 2002a, F. Johnson 2002a, Letts 2002b, Finkelstein 2002, F. Johnson 2002b). Blair “must decide”, the pro-war press warned, “at this early stage, that he is unwilling to compromise for the sake of party management” (The Times 2002f). He was praised for “commendable bravery” whenever he appeared to take a strong stance (The Times 2002g). Labour Party divisions over Iraq were quickly becoming both a legitimate subject of news reporting, and a target to be attacked from both pro-war and anti-war segments of Public Opinion. That reporting, and those attacks, then exacerbated the divisions. It was a perfect storm.

The implications of the government’s continued insistence that a proper debate would follow when, and only when, “judgements are made” about what to do with Saddam Hussein (Blair, Hansard 2002e, c23) did elicit some comment towards the end of this period. Critics complained that “a great deception is being practised on the British people”, insisting “a decision has been taken in principle and the strategic planning is under way. The decision will be announced in due course and presented as a done deal, so that MPs cannot force the

government to think again” (Routledge 2002c). They were supported by the Prime Minister’s regular rivals in on the political right. *The Daily Telegraph*, not normally a natural ally of *Mirror* columnists, agreed with this assessment, warning that “what lends weight to this feeling of some Labour - and Opposition - MPs that parliament’s voice should be heard at this point is this Prime Minister’s propensity for thrusting the Commons aside when it suits him, particularly when he sniffs unrest on his own benches” (The Daily Telegraph 2002a). Before Crawford, Blair continued simply to concede that “it is hardly surprising frankly if people are concerned about military action in Iraq at this present time” while maintaining that “we are not suggesting it at this present time” (Blair 2002b). He apparently did not accept that refusing to discuss a potential foreign policy decision in public was a bad way of calming speculation that the decision was secretly being made in private.

In both the joint press conference with President Bush on 6 April, and his own speech at College Station on the 7th, Blair gave what was described as his “clearest signal yet” of British support for American war plans (Elliott and Murphy 2002, Ahmed 2002b, Blackman 2002a). The repeated claim that ‘no decisions have been taken’ began to wear thin as the Prime Minister insisted Western nations must “learn from our experience” on 11 September; exactly Bush’s point in the State of the Union. If the British and American peoples wanted security, “we must be prepared to act where terrorism or Weapons of Mass Destruction threaten us”. The two dangers were conflated through rhetorical juxtaposition, and no attempt made to discuss the evidence for any actual link. Again echoing President Bush, Blair warned that “leaving Iraq to develop WMD, in flagrant breach of no less than nine separate UNSCRs, refusing still to allow weapons inspectors back to do their work properly, is not an option”. Little doubt of the seriousness of his statement remained with the assertion that “if necessary the action should be military and again, if necessary and justified, it should involve regime change”. Although Blair still maintained that “the moment for decision on how to act is not yet with us” (Blair 2002c), those actors who earlier had scoffed at the Prime Minister’s

willingness to see through rhetorical foreign policy commitments could not so easily dismiss the significance of what had been said. Christopher Meyer may have been criticised for his views about what was agreed at Crawford, but he has correctly highlighted that “this was the first time that Tony Blair had said in public ‘regime change’” (C. Meyer 2009, 29). Blair later recalled having, by this point, “resolved in my own mind that removing Saddam would do the world, and most particularly the Iraqi people, a service. Though I knew regime change could not be our policy, I viewed a change with enthusiasm, not dismay”. Even here he splits verbal hairs; in the space of one page noting his “enthusiasm” for regime change, and dismissing as a “myth” the suggestion that he agreed to support it at Crawford (Blair 2010b, 400). Blair’s public position had an immediate practical impact. Civil servants regarded the assurances contained within the Prime Minister’s two public statements in Texas as establishing a degree of British commitment to eventual military action, and began to plan accordingly (Webb 2002a). Some media commentators concluded “it is now the agreed policy of the one superpower and its closest ally that Saddam Hussein be overthrown” (The Daily Telegraph 2002c), while others described Blair as having “parroted Mr Bush’s views on Iraqi ‘regime change’” (The Guardian 2002c). Although, therefore, he remained equivocal in the face of Conservative demands that he confirm “that getting rid of Saddam Hussein may now be an objective of the government?” (Duncan Smith, Hansard 2002e, c12), Blair had clearly established certain expectations. That he repeatedly reminded MPs “I have been involved in three regime changes—Milosevic, the Taliban and the gangster group that took over Sierra Leone” was unlikely to add reassurance, especially when he maintained “I can honestly say that we should not regret any of them” (Blair, Hansard 2002e, c37).

For all his protestations to the contrary, therefore, the Prime Minister had only himself to blame for the general belief expressed in Public Opinion at this time that he “has completed his own thinking about Iraq, and intends to back military action when, and not merely if, the time is right” (B. MacIntyre 2002a). Distrust of the government was already growing as a result

of frustration with the 'official line', and it had been heightened further by confusion over the missing 'dossier'. Such was the apparent disconnect between Blair's continued claim that no decision had been taken to use force, and his insistence that "doing nothing is not an option", that distrust was exacerbated all the more. The Prime Minister was "lying to parliament", wrote one regular critic, "he [was] also lying to his own MPs". He had "privately assured President George Bush that he will support an American assault on Saddam Hussein", and in failing to admit this publicly he had, it was argued, been caught out in the lie (Routledge 2002d). Opponents of military action were in a weak position at this time, however. Given the distribution of authority in the British system of government, "once Blair had set his Iraq policy in train, it was very hard, indeed close to impossible, for anyone to stop him" (Coates and Krieger 2009, 251). He retained Cabinet support, and sufficient backing amongst Labour MPs not to be unduly concerned about reining in rebels. As Prime Minister, he had the right to exclude or include officials and ministers from key decisions as he saw fit. Oddly, his assumed pro-war stance won him plaudits from his more natural foes in the Conservative Party and the right-wing press, while the ambiguity deliberately cultivated across the government prevented anti-war actors from having too much to oppose. Those who spoke out, as during the Afghan campaign, were relatively easily dismissed as extremists, John Pilger's continued insistence that the 'war on terror' had nothing to do with terrorism being one example (Pilger 2002a). George Galloway, the most consistently outspoken anti-war MP at this stage, spent the later months of 2001 and early part of 2002 busily prophesying the fabrication of evidence by British "spooks" to provide a "pretext" for a campaign against Iraq (Galloway 2001, 2002a). His credibility was undermined, however, by the resurfacing of a video clip from 1994 (whether by chance or design is unclear), showing his meeting with Saddam Hussein during a fact-finding trip to Iraq. "Sir", he had addressed the Iraqi dictator, "I salute your courage, your strength, your indefatigability". Galloway later told a Senate hearing in Washington that he had "met Saddam Hussein exactly the same number of times as Donald Rumsfeld met him...The

difference”, he maintained, was that “Donald Rumsfeld met him to sell him guns and to give him maps the better to target those guns. I met him to try to bring about an end to sanctions, suffering and war” (Galloway 2005, 88, 94). The damage had been done, however, and media reports of Galloway’s contributions to the debate were regularly accompanied by discussion of his “reputation as a propagandist for unacceptable regimes” (Bowditch 2002, McSmith 2002a, Walters 2002). Most significantly, the 6 March Westminster Hall debate pulled together by Tam Dalyell to criticise “George Bush’s war – the war of his daddy’s ego” (Dalyell, Hansard 2002b, c72WH) was terminated as a result of Galloway’s record, and his temper. Responding to the debate on behalf of the government, junior minister Ben Bradshaw labelled the Glaswegian MP “not just an apologist, but a mouthpiece, for the Iraqi regime” (Bradshaw, Hansard 2002b, c88WH). Galloway’s incensed response (he repeatedly shouted ‘liar’ as the minister attempted to conclude his speech) breached parliamentary protocol, and forced the Deputy Speaker to terminate the session prematurely. Both Bradshaw and Galloway eventually apologised, but the result was that media coverage focused entirely on the row, and not at all on the substance of the debate itself.

Quantitative indicators

As *figure 6* shows, there was limited support from newspapers for military action during this period. Anti-war commentary came both from those natural sceptics of the use of force lying on the left wing of the political spectrum, and from right-wingers such as the columnists of *The Daily Mail* whose instinctive dislike of a Labour Prime Minister led them automatically to challenge his judgement (see *figure 7*). Opinion polls similarly indicated low levels of approval amongst the passive public for further military action; though at this time the handful of polls conducted were generally commissioned by anti-war newspapers with a view to providing copy for anti-war news stories. *Figure 8* summarises available poll data from this period.

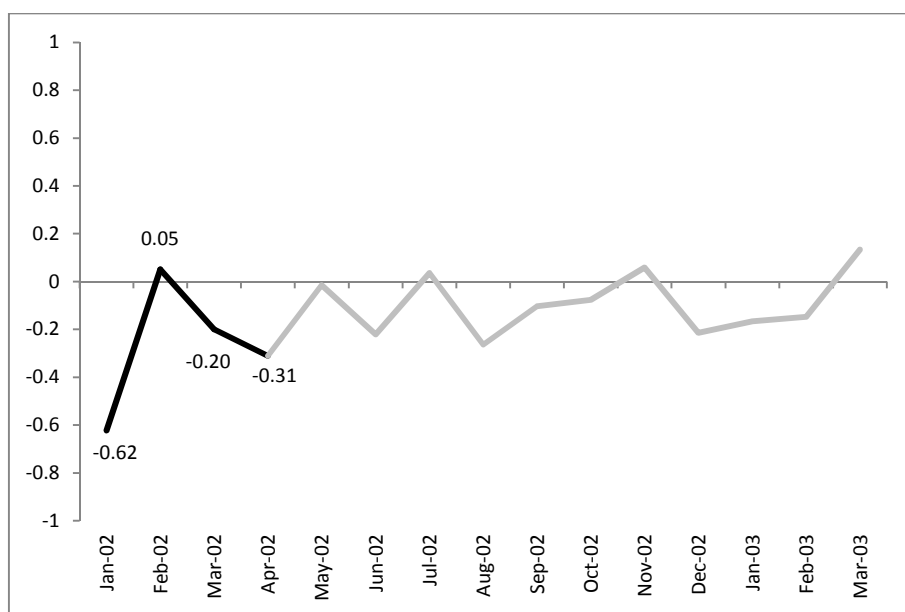


Figure 6: Average editorial positions adopted by leading UK newspapers towards military action in Iraq (1 = pro-war, 0 = neutral, -1 = anti-war), controlling for circulation, January – April 2002 ($n = 270$).

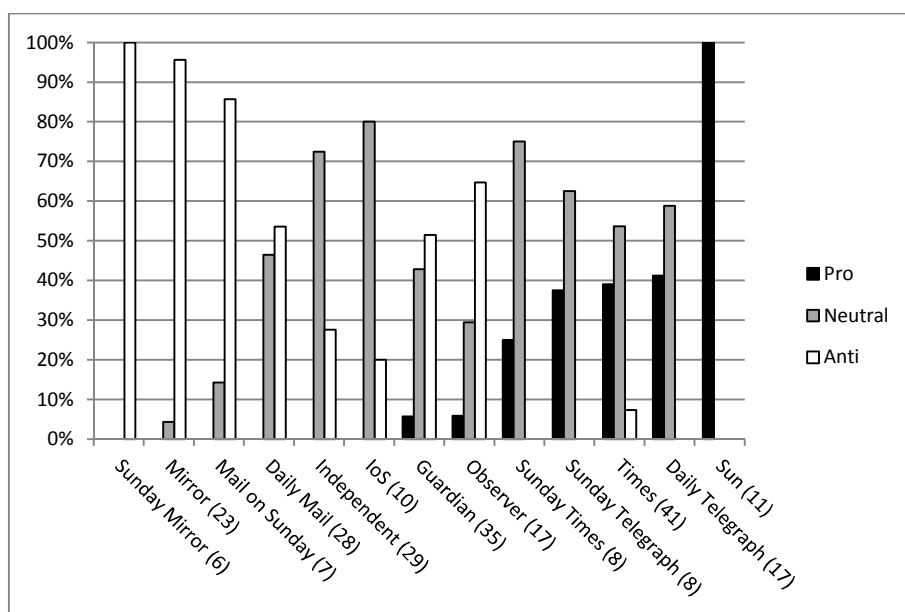


Figure 7: Editorial positions adopted by leading UK newspapers towards military action in Iraq, broken down by publication, 1 January – 10 April 2002 (n -numbers in brackets).

It was unclear, then, in the aftermath of the Crawford meeting, whether or not the British government was in a strong position with regard to Public Opinion when it came to the discussion of its policies towards Iraq. Most of its vocal support came from its natural rivals, who busied themselves stirring up trouble amongst sceptical Labour MPs even as they publicly demanded a harder line against Baghdad. The most vociferous opponents of military action lacked credibility, although clearly not a modest support base in both Parliament and press.

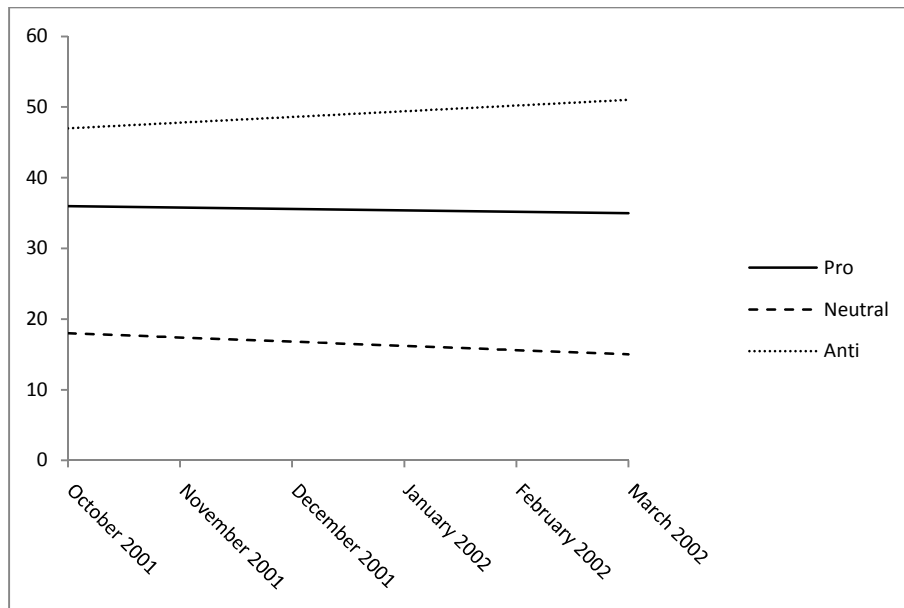


Figure 8: Opinion poll data showing support for military action against Iraq, October 2001 – March 2002.

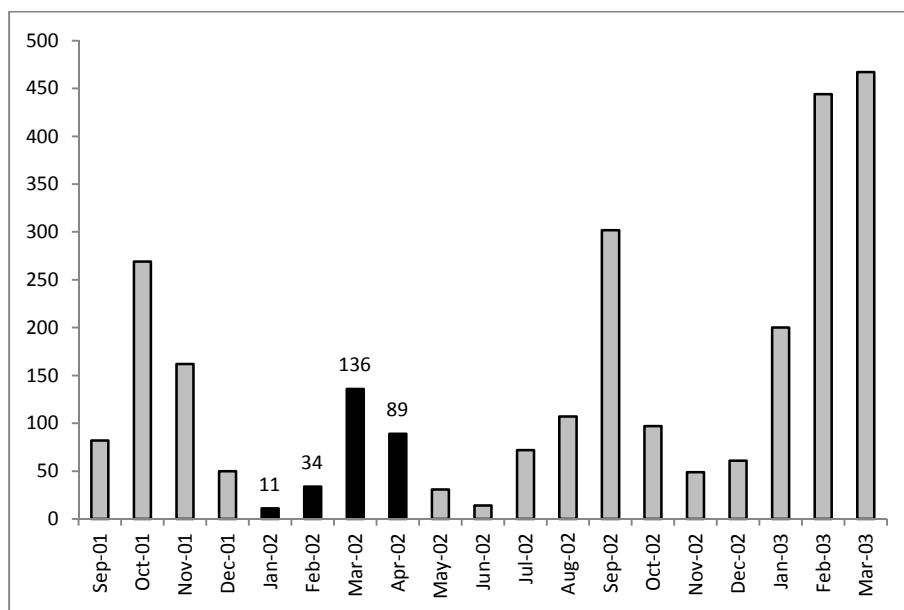


Figure 9: Volume of commentary articles in UK newspapers relating to Iraq, January – April 2002.

Figure 9 shows that the initial level of interest in Iraq evident in Public Opinion during March tailed off after the Crawford meeting in April. The repeated insistence that ‘no decision ha[d] been taken’ about military action, however, apparently did more harm than good; it frustrated MPs and journalists alike, and opened the government up to accusations of dishonesty that would make its later communication efforts all the more challenging.

Considered alongside the fairly apparent fact that *some sort of decision* evidently had been taken, the ‘no decision’ line was disingenuous if not dishonest. It was also counterproductive.

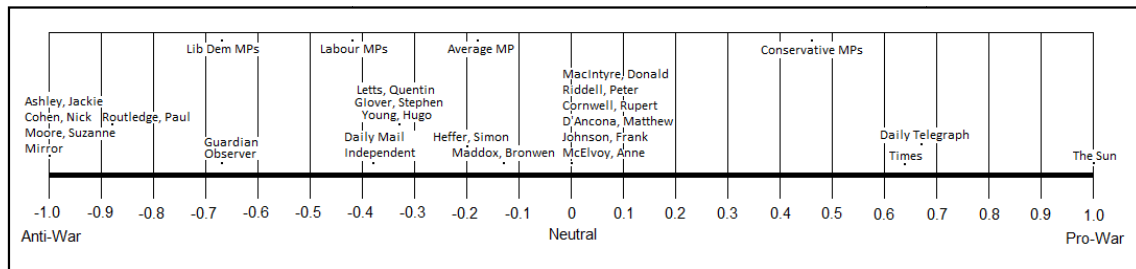


Figure 10: Basic two-dimensional factor analysis of British active public actors' positions towards war with Iraq between January and April 2002.

Finally, figure 10 presents a basic factor analysis showing the relative positions adopted by leading contributors to the public debate at this time. For the most part, these actors expressed anti-war views, though a healthy contingent remained neutral, and the government could take some comfort from the handful already adopting a pro-war line.

Conclusion

During the early months of 2002, Public Opinion in the UK began to focus on the prospect of a confrontation between the US, with British support, and Iraq. President Bush had been unequivocal in declaring his intention to take tough action against the 'Axis of Evil', and although no specific military threat had been issued, the implication of the State of the Union speech was clear. Most commentators accepted that the US was, at least, willing to use force to overthrow Saddam Hussein, even if an actual invasion was not yet imminent, and Bush had established conditions within which he would suffer politically should he subsequently fail to act. Britain's Tony Blair, for all that he was criticised at home for failing to resist American aggression, in fact shared much of the President's analysis. Iraq was thought to be developing Weapons of Mass Destruction. Terrorists were known to be seeking such weapons. 11 September had shown that, if their search was successful, they would have no compunction about using them on Western civilian populations. The risk of failing to deal robustly with Iraq

was too great. His views were, if not necessarily shared, at least accepted by most ministers; the few dissenters were sidelined or ignored.

Before meeting Bush at Crawford in April 2002, Blair avoided giving too strong a public commitment to any particular course of action. The combined effect of statements emerging from the US, and Blair's own unwillingness to rule out the use of force, was however that the British public began to suspect the government was being dishonest in claiming that no decision had been taken. In fact, participant testimonies and declassified government papers show that behind the scenes British ministers were willing, by April, to countenance 'regime change' in Baghdad in order to see the threat of Iraqi WMD eliminated. This was not quite the same as a decision having been taken definitely to deploy troops. But the difference was not so great that the government can escape entirely the charge that it engaged in wilful misdirection, and nor was it sufficient to protect it against criticism at the time. In turn the resulting distrust became a central factor in the burgeoning opposition movement. By refusing to 'mention the war' in early 2002, British ministers thus did themselves no favours. Public Opinion was shaped by too many alternative sources, several of which went far further in declaring their expectations of imminent war than a full and frank disclosure of the 'real' official position (which did not yet involve the use of force without an extended effort to achieve disarmament peacefully) would have allowed. Ministers were afraid that any attempt to set out their ongoing reasoning about the Iraqi threat, and their fear that the use of force might yet become necessary, would prompt such negative coverage in the congenitally unsubtle British media that Public Opinion would reject the policy without properly considering its consequences. Lacking official disclosure, however, the public debate was left to play out in its own terms. The result was that trust in the government began to decline at just the time when policymakers were beginning most heavily to rely upon it.

Chapter 4 – Selling the threat: April – September 2002

Over the course of the summer of 2002, the tone and content of British Public Opinion on the question of Iraq policy, already imbued with bitterness born of frustration with official obfuscation, rapidly spiralled out of the government's control. Forced by pressure emanating from the public sphere into releasing, ahead of schedule, their dossier on *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction* (British Government 2002), ministers unwittingly gave hostages to fortune for which they were later punished. Relatively uncontroversial when produced, the dossier subsequently gained notoriety after the invasion as a result of Andrew Gilligan's *Today* programme report of 29 May 2003, in which the journalist claimed Downing Street had deliberately "sexed up" the intelligence-based judgements it made to bolster the case for war (Gilligan 2003). Chapter 7 deals with the fallout from Gilligan's broadcast. During the summer of 2002, there was a general consensus in Britain and the wider international community that Iraq possessed an active programme for the development of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Consequently, the actual impact of the claims made in the dossier was limited. Very few people in Britain appear to have revised their instinctive positions on Iraq merely because the government published the reasons why it considered the regime of Saddam Hussein a threat. Later claims by critics that the government sold the country a line in order to bring about a widely unwanted war generally overlook this crucial fact.

Although it had a limited impact on the substance of the public debate, the dossier nevertheless *was* significant when it was produced. It may not have changed minds, but it answered widespread demand for evidence of the Iraqi threat that had grown steadily over the summer of 2002. It clumsily conflated policy advocacy and intelligence assessment in a manner which ultimately discredited both. And it represented the government's best attempt to regain the initiative over an increasingly fractious public debate. The dossier matters, then, not because of what it *said*, but because of what it *was*. It was a response, a reply to critics, a hand that policymakers had hoped not yet to have to play, which they were driven into

revealing earlier than planned by public pressure, fuelled by the press and by MPs. It was a consequence of the influence of Public Opinion over the communication of British foreign policy, and one which ultimately had major substantive implications.

A summer of drift

Chapter 3 recounted the latent hostility amongst sections of British Public Opinion at the start of 2002 to any talk of increasing the pressure on Saddam Hussein, and the government's consequent reluctance to discuss options for doing so. The Crawford meeting had raised tensions temporarily, particularly as the disconnect grew between Tony Blair's condemnation of Iraq, and his refusal to debate the prospect of military action. During April and May, however, the issue of Iraq largely receded from view. In parliament, only Donald Anderson (Hansard 2002h, c481, Hansard 2002i, c140WH) and Tam Dalyell (Hansard 2002g, c192, c219) kept the issue current, while press coverage was limited, if primarily negative. Blair was characterised as a "moral crusader...eager for action" (Young 2002b), attacked "for his slavish stance towards the Americans" (Rowson 2002), described (generally still only in *The Mirror*) for the same reason as a "poodle" (Reade 2002), and denounced for planning a "Western crusader invasion" of Iraq (Galloway 2002b). Alastair Campbell attributes to John Reid a remark in early June that "we had now reached the stage where all communications was dismissed as spin, all funding was sleaze, all attacks were smears...There was real nastiness and poison about where we were at the moment" (Campbell and Stott 2007, 623). Reid had a point, but at least the overall level of interest remained low.

Although Campbell admitted he "wasn't quite sure" how to deal with the negative press environment, his primary purpose as Director of Communications in Downing Street was to try to maintain a degree of control over the way the government and its policies were represented. Although it is unclear exactly to what extent Campbell was personally behind them, three key innovations were made in official communication practices during June and

July. Firstly, ministers granted an increased number of television interviews, notable among them Blair's three-part session with Jeremy Paxman for BBC Two's *Newsnight* in mid-May, the second instalment of which focused almost entirely on Iraq. It was not unusual for ministers, even the Prime Minister, to speak to the media (Blair 2012b, 2), but a deliberate effort was made at this time to increase the direct exposure of policymakers to the passive public through television discussions. The appearances then had the added benefit of giving newspaper journalists something solid to report on, reducing the volume of speculation filling column inches. Secondly, the daily 'lobby' briefings of the press by the Prime Minister's official spokesman were augmented by monthly opportunities for journalists to question Blair directly, beginning on 20 June. At different times the press conferences came to be dominated entirely by Iraq, with extended discussions taking place between the Prime Minister and correspondents not just from the UK, but from around the world. Finally, on 16 July, Blair appeared before the House of Commons Liaison Committee, comprising the Chairmen of the various Select Committees. Both the press conference and the Liaison Committee appearance represented new additions to the government's communication arsenal; one for the media, and the other for MPs. They generated some positive public comment, though Blair continued to be attacked for not having published a dossier on Iraq in March, as journalists had been led to believe he would (Seddon 2002b, The Guardian 2002d). It was noted, in particular, that Blair's explanation of the delay "was more to do with spin than substance"; namely that it was a matter of political timing (P. Riddell 2002b). In addition, the government was accused of trying to bypass the media through the press conferences. Blair told journalists he thought it was "a bit unfair to say I am trying to get round you", having "got you all here in the room" (Press Conference 2002a). It was an accusation he faced, nonetheless. Interestingly, since it was the only innovation out of the three not directly targeted at the media, the Liaison Committee session on 16 July garnered the greatest volume of positive commentary. Observers thought it "astonishing...that this was not done before", and criticised the "inane"

Prime Minister's Questions while contrasting its "partisan knockabout" with the "sensible public conversation" managed by the Committee (Jenkins 2002a). MPs were generally praised for their "polite, non-partisan" approach "designed to elicit real answers" (The Times 2002i, Ashley 2002a), though *The Mirror's* coverage labelled them "poodles" on account of their polite, non-partisan approach (Hardy 2002a).

Overall, therefore, the government's initial efforts to calm post-Crawford public speculation over the prospect of war with Iraq had some success. But problems remained even before Parliament began its long summer recess at the end of July. To begin with, the 'official line' on Iraq lacked substance. Doing nothing about Iraq was not an option, intoned ministers and spokesmen alike, but no decisions had been taken as to what would be done, and no military action was imminent (Bradshaw, Hansard 2002h, c544, Macshane, Hansard 2002i, c175WH, Hoon, Hansard 2002j, c413, Blair, Hansard 2002k, c36, Press Conference 2002b). As Chapter 3 notes, such statements lacked credibility in light of Blair's tough language (and praise for 'regime change') in April. They appear positively disingenuous, even dishonest, when set alongside declassified government documents recording discussions which took place during the early summer on the "assumption that the UK would take part in any military action" the US might launch (Rycroft 2002a). A second problem arose from the first weakness. Lacking concrete statements from the government about the prospects of a fresh Gulf War, journalists continued to rely mostly on speculation, and then on reporting the impact of each others' speculation. Finally, and most importantly, the developing debate over Iraq in the United States began to penetrate the British public sphere, with arguments made in Washington reported in lieu of official comment in London. This had the doubly destabilising effect of giving newspapers sources for stories about military action at a time when the British government had genuinely not definitely decided that it would go to war, and fuelling representations of the Prime Minister as an American 'poodle', taking his cues from Washington.

Tony Blair has complained of the difficulty balancing the fact that the government “had not decided we would take military action” during the summer of 2002, with the recognition that “you couldn't say it wasn't a possibility”. He describes particular problems stemming from the media’s tendency to take anything other than the outright denial of any military planning as conclusive proof of imminent war; he thought Public Opinion did not appreciate nuance (Blair 2010a, 93). In fact, the range of press speculation was more diverse than Blair implies. After the *Newsnight* interviews in May it was noted that his “language on Iraq appeared less bellicose than previously” (G. Jones 2002b), and the conclusion drawn that “military action is not imminent” (Thomson and Maddox 2002). His message had, then, gotten through in some quarters. The problem was that, while outright cynicism about the government’s intentions was largely limited to the pages of *The Mirror* at this time (cf. Routledge 2002e), the British public considered bellicosity the default state of the Bush administration, and even of the American people, as Chapter 2 discussed. Donald Anderson raised the issue in Parliament in April (Anderson, Hansard 2002h, c481, Hansard 2002i, c140WH), and Malcolm Savidge warned that “ideology, rather than intelligence in either sense, has tended to be the driving force in the US” (Savidge, Hansard 2002i, c161WH). By May British journalists suggested that “despite Mr Blair’s solid public support for President George Bush...London and Washington are pursuing diverging strategies behind the scenes” (Usborne & Grice 2002). There was probably a degree of wishful thinking going on here. While this latter article was being read around the country, behind the scenes in Whitehall civil servants had concluded that “while regime change may not be an objective in its own right...we see it as a likely – though not certain – way point in a campaign to secure the strategic objective” of Iraqi disarmament (Webb 2002b). As Chapter 3 sets out, this was apparently the view Blair had held all along, and which he had discussed with President Bush in April.

The final high-level meeting on Iraq before the summer break took place on 23 July. Blair reiterated the position he had first expressed at Chequers on 2 April that “regime change

and WMD were linked in the sense that it was the regime that was producing the WMD” (Rycroft 2002a). To eliminate the threat posed by the weapons, it might be necessary to change the regime, and disarmament would in any event change the regime’s character if not immediately its personnel. There was, therefore, good reason for scepticism in the British public debate at the start of the summer of 2002 over claims that no military action was planned. Technically, it remained true that no formal decision had been taken, but after Crawford planning work was underway, and despite the continuing public denials that war was intended, it was regarded at the highest levels as *almost* inevitable. This was not the same, however, as the government yet being ready to make a public case for war. More work was thought necessary to head off opposition, and to shore up support particularly in the government’s pacifist-leaning Labour Party base. So no public announcement was made, and no public discussion permitted.

Across the Atlantic, the Bush Administration was less reticent when it came to setting out its aims. In a speech at West Point on 1 June that passed largely unremarked at first in Britain, the President began to develop a new foreign policy doctrine. Essentially, Bush proposed a stance based on pre-emptive self-defence according to which the United States had the right to strike unilaterally at any state or sub-state group which it thought might at some point represent a threat. Although Iraq was never specifically named, it was clearly implied that Saddam Hussein would be the first target for the new project. Belatedly (by two weeks), *The Times* called the move from deterrence to pre-emption implied by Bush “the most far-reaching shift in American foreign policy for more than 50 years” (*The Times* 2002h). This interpretation would gain further currency in British public exchanges with the publication in September of a new US National Security Strategy that explicitly codified the pre-emptive posture. As early as the end of May, newspapers had warned that despite the apparent post-Crawford lull, “President Bush’s commitment to overthrowing Saddam Hussein and other rogue regimes remains as strong as ever” (*The Daily Telegraph* 2002d), a view carried into June

and July (cf. Young 2002c, D’Ancona 2002c). Such claims were based in large part on statements made both on and off the record by Bush administration officials, reported initially by US media, and then picked up in the UK. At his 20 June press conference, Blair was confronted over reports published in the *New York Times* about US military planning which the journalist concerned insisted were “certain to be correct”, having originated with off-the-record Bush administration briefings (Press Conference 2002a). The same day both Bernard Jenkin (Hansard 2002j, c412) and Tam Dalyell (*ibid.*, c416) challenged Geoff Hoon to explain warlike comments by the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Radio 4. On 5 July the first of a series of Pentagon information ‘leaks’ took place, with details appearing in the *New York Times* of a planned “massive military assault on Iraq” drawn from an internal Bush Administration paper; *The Independent on Sunday’s* coverage observed that “this sort of document never surfaces by accident” (Cornwell and Brown 2002). Already commentators had begun to view “the volume and density of the leaks, to say nothing of their frequency” as decisive evidence of a decision for war having already been made in Washington (C. Hitchens 2002). Such speculation only increased further following the 15 July announcement that Blair would again visit the US in September (cf. Ahmed, Burke and Pelham 2002, The Independent 2002c). Suddenly momentum appeared to be building towards a strike before the end of the year.

It does appear that factions within the Bush administration, particularly within the Pentagon-based ‘hawks’ camp, made active use of strategic ‘leaks’ in order to try to create a public narrative that suited their goals, even where this meant applying pressure to other bureaucratic actors. Such tactics would be entirely consistent with the “bureaucratic politics” model of foreign policymaking, with its discussion of inter-agency competition as a primary driver of decisions (Allison and Zelikow 2nd Edn. 1999). British newspapers responded to the leaks by warning against the country “sleepwalking” into war, and began to suggest that military action would begin before the US mid-term elections on 5 November, if not earlier

(The Mirror 2002d, Routledge 2002e, The Daily Mail 2002a, J. Smith 2002). Press concerns on this point were shared within government. 'C' told the 23 July pre-summer Iraq policy meeting that there had been what he called "a perceptible shift in attitude" in Washington, and observed that "military action was now seen as inevitable" (Rycroft 2002a). No timescale had been set, but arguably part of the motivation for the Blair government's earnest desire to avoid having to discuss military action publicly at this time stemmed from its inability to keep pace with developments in the US. Even for a loyal ally, it was difficult to get a clear signal about the likely direction of policy travel from within the Kremlin-esque swarm of hostile inter-bureaucratic briefing and intrigue buzzing with growing intensity around what Straw, quoting Keynes, later termed the "White Hive" in Washington (Keynes 1979, 215, Straw 2010b, 40).

It was unfortunate for the government that press speculation over Iraq peaked when it did. On 24 July Parliament began its long summer recess; MPs were not due to sit again until mid-October. Asked whether he would recall the House in the event of military action against Iraq beginning before that date, Blair stuck to his established line, that no military action was planned and that Parliament would be consulted in 'the normal way' should those plans change. He did not commit to a recall, nor indeed to a debate, in the event of that situation changing, since his notion of Parliament's 'normal' role in foreign policymaking was that it could consider government decisions only once they had been made. A significant proportion of the press, in an example of the sort of wilful misinterpretation Blair continues to complain about (cf. Blair 2012a, 10), framed the statement as evidence that military action was definitely planned for the summer so as to avoid parliamentary scrutiny (Letts 2002, McSmith 2002b, Hoggart 2002, Grice 2002a). Only *The Sun* and *The Times* took the Prime Minister at his word, with columnists noting that "there is no evidence that the US, either on its own or with allies, is likely to attack Iraq over the next three months" (The Sun 2002b, P. Riddell 2002c). But pro-war commentators were growing frustrated too with Blair's failure effectively to make his case (cf. Phillips 2002, Hastings 2002), while the Prime Minister could have been forgiven for

growing frustrated himself. On 5 August, just over a week after Parliament had gone into recess, and with absolutely nothing having happened to indicate a shift in the policy position, Tam Dalyell requested MPs be recalled to debate Iraq. He was backed by *The Daily Mail*, while *The Times* criticised the move as “a publicity stunt”, which it clearly was (The Daily Mail 2002b, The Times 2002j). Dalyell was rebuffed, but MPs’ impatience with the length of the summer break and their continued fear (shared and stirred up by journalists) that military action might be launched without their approval would resurface in September. Only a handful of commentators reflected on the fact that Blair would be on holiday (rather than planning a war) for most of August, as usual (cf. Marr 2002), or acknowledged that, despite “for the umpteenth time this year, informed opinion...working itself into a panic”, there was still no actual evidence that military action was imminent (Dejevsky 2002).

It was on a lack of evidence that the press began to focus during the Prime Minister’s seasonal absence from the political fray, with complaints mounting that “the case for war simply hasn’t been made” (cf. The Daily Mail 2002c, The Mirror 2002f). A sense of urgency developed, fuelled in part by prominently-reported statements from US General Wesley Clark (The Mirror 2002e), former Secretary of State James Baker (The Guardian 2002e), and Vice-President Cheney (The Daily Mail 2002c, The Daily Telegraph 2002e, The Guardian 2002f), each implying that some form of escalation was on the cards. Writing on 8 August to dismiss “US claims” about Iraq’s WMD as “outdated fabrications and recycled information”, Mudhafar Amin, Baghdad’s sole representative in London as head of the Iraqi interest section in the Jordanian Embassy, was among the first to reopen calls for the publication of a ‘dossier’ outlining the alleged threat (Amin 2002). *The Times* of 17 August agreed with Amin’s proposal, but disagreed with his substantive assessment, arguing that there was indeed a clear threat, and suggesting an official account of it would help win over doubters (The Times 2002k). By the end of the month, one commentator warned that “US stridency means that at next Tuesday’s press conference, the prime minister will have to say more than ‘wait and see’”

(Toynbee 2002), while another thought the release of the WMD dossier was now needed to close “a gaping hole in the debate about a military attack on Iraq” (The Independent on Sunday 2002a). Alastair Campbell agreed that some action was necessary, noting “it was clear that public opinion had moved against us during August” in his 1 September diary entry (Campbell and Stott 2007, 632-633).

On 3 September Tony Blair took action, announcing during his press conference that a dossier on Iraq’s WMD would be published imminently, stating that “it is clear that the debate has moved” from its position when he had last discussed the matter publicly, on 25 July. “Originally”, he went on, “I had the intention that we wouldn’t get round to publishing the dossier until we had actually taken the key decisions. I think probably it is a better idea to bring that forward...to publish that within the next few weeks”. Accepting that many of those voicing concerns were asking “perfectly reasonable questions” – MPs Donald Anderson and Gerald Kaufman were named – Blair insisted that Public Opinion would be won round once presented with the evidence (Press Conference 2002c). He had, by his own admission, been pressed into a shift in communication policy, but he remained adamant that his substantive position was right. There was a threat to the international community from Iraq’s WMD development, the US was correctly raising the need to do something about it, and once more people recognised these facts, the wider argument could, and would, be won.

September’s anti-climax

When the dossier actually appeared in late September, it did so against a backdrop of anti-war commentators’ demands not just for evidence of a threat from Iraq, but for *new* evidence. Three weeks on from the widely-discussed release of an International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) report that summarised much of the publicly available information on Iraq’s armaments, novelty was always going to be a big ask, and the general assessment was that the dossier failed to deliver. It met little substantive resistance. For the most part

commentators (reassured by the IISS) accepted that Iraq probably did possess WMD. What controversy did arise stemmed primarily from the procedural complaints of MPs opposed to military action as they sought to express their views through a parliamentary vote. Few minds seem to have been changed by the long-anticipated publication, especially in the press. *The Times* of 29 August, for example, had argued before seeing the dossier that “no reasonable person doubts that Saddam is actively pursuing weapons of mass destruction, no neutral observer would contest that his motives for that quest are either to blackmail his neighbours or sponsor attacks on others, and no rational figure could believe that he will abandon this effort of his own volition” (The Times 2002l). By contrast, four separate newspapers (from both the left and right of the political spectrum) had carried leading articles describing Blair’s 3 September press conference statements as providing inadequate justification for war (The Daily Mail 2002d, The Daily Telegraph 2002f, The Guardian 2002g, The Independent 2002d). They, too, remained unmoved by his efforts to respond.

Given the amount of information already publicly available about Iraq’s WMD, some observers worried that Blair had risked “setting up expectations he is unlikely to fulfil” by promising to release a dossier proving that Iraq represented a threat. “Those who are already deeply alarmed will feel vindicated”, they warned, “but those who are critical or uneasy about an attack on Iraq are unlikely to find enough to convince them” (Maddox 2002c). Within the government, Alastair Campbell privately wrote of similar concerns (Campbell and Stott 2007, 633). But although some critics claimed Downing Street was engaged in producing a “cobbled together” pile of potential falsehoods (cf. Waterhouse 2002; Steel 2002b; Alexander 2002), most of the debate prior to the dossier’s publication remained reasonable. The government had thus been quite successful in seeking to set the agenda for public debate by presenting the issue primarily in terms of Iraq’s disarmament obligations, at least at this stage. Sceptics generally admitted that “the case for war could be made”, given that “Saddam has acquired chemical and biological weapons in the past and tried to acquire nuclear weapons”, although

they still maintained that insufficient evidence of a new or immediate threat had yet appeared to justify war (The Independent 2002f). Claims that the government was engaged in propagandising largely fell away after the IISS report came out on 9 September; clearly an independent think tank, working with UN source material, was not seeking to spin the British government's official line. Press coverage of the IISS report is nonetheless interesting for the way different publications focused on sections that supported their established editorial positions, rather than developing those positions on the basis of the evidence they had seen. *The Daily Mail* concluded that "nothing in the IISS report is a surprise", insisting that the threat was already well known, and maintaining that no further action was required to contain it (The Daily Mail 2002f). *The Independent* thought the IISS contribution "interesting...but by no means...particularly decisive" in terms of the broader debate over Iraqi disarmament (The Independent 2002g). Donald MacIntyre, whose criticisms were mentioned specifically by Jonathan Powell in an email about the dossier to John Scarlett and Alastair Campbell on 19 September (Powell 2002a), thought the IISS document would "help [Blair] somewhat", but concluded (presciently) that "it won't, of course, be enough" to win the argument, "any more than will the official dossier" (D. MacIntyre 2002b). *The Times* disagreed; "certainly [the report] will help Mr Blair" (The Times 2002m). Most revealingly, the IISS assessment that Iraq was several years from nuclear capacity under sanctions, but could put together a weapon in months if it was able to obtain enriched uranium illicitly, received highly selective coverage. *The Mirror* reported that "Saddam Hussein is years away from developing his own nuclear weapons" (Blackman 2002b), *The Sun* that "Saddam Hussein could have nuclear weapons within months" (S. Hughes 2002a). Both of these articles were, ostensibly, objective news reports. Both were in fact heavily slanted in accordance with the editorial position taken in their respective publications. There was scope, therefore, for the government dossier to be well received, but also the latent likelihood of its conclusions being subsumed into press-generated frames, instead of serving as the basis for the dissemination of the government's

preferred line. Too much time had been allowed from March. Journalists' first impressions had become entrenched. The nature of Public Opinion as a political structure meant that once those impressions had become reified, they were incredibly difficult for government to overcome.

With accusations of official perfidy having been undermined by the independent IISS, government critics changed tack. Press commentators shifted from outright denial that Iraq had potentially dangerous WMD, to querying why more robust action against the regime was seen as so much more necessary in 2002 than it had been in 1991. *The Mirror* accepted "that Saddam's not a very nice guy and has some rather unpleasant weapons" but argued that because "we knew that when we pulled back from Baghdad in 1991 and let him carry on running his country", military action to deal with those weapons could not possibly be justified eleven years on (The Mirror 2002g). *The Guardian* similarly questioned what had changed in Iraq to justify the abandonment of the previous decade's strategy of containment and deterrence (The Guardian 2002i). Ministers avoided explaining the real reason for the shift, the changed tolerance of the Iraqi threat outlined above, not least because in doing so they would have had to concede that the threat had not actually grown worse. Refusing to engage directly with the question did little, however, to reassure the questioners.

MPs meanwhile began to revisit Tam Dalyell's demands for a recall of Parliament. Having failed to make headway along official channels, former Labour whip Graham Allen announced on 4 September that he would arrange an 'unofficial' sitting of the Commons instead. On 6 September he gained press support for the initiative (The Guardian 2002h, The Independent 2002e, The Daily Mail 2002e), and on 7 September former House of Commons Speaker Lord Weatherill agreed to chair an informal debate. Pressure on the Prime Minister was growing, and quickly. One commentator warned on 9 September that "Mr Blair is in danger of turning the return of Parliament into a damaging controversy", and argued this would be a double error because of the strong position the Prime Minister would find himself

in once he began to make his case (P. Riddell 2002d). By the 10th, with the BBC having agreed to broadcast the 'informal' debate, and Church House in Westminster booked to host it, the government conceded the point and announced that there would indeed be a recall to coincide with the publication of the dossier. For the second time in a week, public pressure had forced the government to accelerate its preferred communication strategy; after all, the view in Downing Street remained that no debate was necessary (or worthwhile) until a clear policy proposal had been developed. Again, however, it was denied the opportunity to regain the initiative and to set its own agenda for the public debate by the flexibility of its opponents. Within days of the recall being announced, critics had moved from demanding a debate to attacking the government's proposal to debate a technical rather than a substantive motion (Wintour 2002, Grice 2002b, The Independent 2002i). A few even went so far as to dismiss the recall altogether; it was "a grandstanding act of propaganda, designed to con the British people", cautioned one (Routledge 2002f). Complaints about the procedures to be followed persisted right up to the day of the debate itself (cf. The Daily Mail 2002g). Even once they had forced the government to change its plans, critics of the use of force had kept up their attacks, moving the goalposts faster than Downing Street could respond. More than at any other time during the period under consideration here, British journalists demonstrated during the summer of 2002 their propensity to make decisions about the volume of critical coverage to produce without reference to the substance of what the government was trying to do. Criticism was simply endemic. It was embedded in how they operated, and each time it was answered, it was automatically revised and maintained still further. Ministers, seeing this effect, grew cynical themselves about the media, and began to focus their briefing efforts only on publications thought reasonable (Blair 2012a, 1), exacerbating the negativity of the debate.

President Bush's speech to the UN on 12 September, in which he challenged the Security Council to deal with Iraq, had helped Blair somewhat; as one television report put it, "diplomacy" was "being given one more chance" (ITV News 2002b), one of the key opposition

demands. By 17 September *The Guardian* was reporting falling public opposition to military action (an ICM poll showed 40% opposition compared to 50% on 28 August), describing the shift as “a vindication of the prime minister's belief that the gap in the polls would close once the public began to focus on the debate over Iraq's capability to wage nuclear and chemical warfare” (Travis and White 2002). Again, the success of government agenda-setting in this regard is worthy of note. The debate itself, however, remained divided, especially as details of the dossier began to be trailed to journalists. Predictions of “spin” and “propaganda” in *The Mirror* and *The Observer* contrasted strongly with assertions in *The Times* that the document would be “sober in tone” and would “directly reject Iraqi claims that it has no weapons of mass destruction” (Routledge 2002g, Lewis-Smith 2002, T. Jones 2002, Bone and Webster 2002). *The Independent on Sunday* expected an “inconclusive” summary, while the *Mail on Sunday* quoted officials claiming that the dossier would “prove ‘beyond any doubt’ that Saddam’s regime has weapons of mass destruction” (Sengupta and Dillon 2002, Leake 2002). Despite *The Mirror*’s insistence that any publication would “have to contain something really unexpected” to shift the balance of the debate in the government’s favour (The Mirror 2002h), there was little expectation of a ‘smoking gun’. It even appears, from its relative ubiquity in press reports, that the phrase ‘smoking gun’ may have been used in official briefings as part of an effort to lower expectations. If this was in fact the case, the effort was unsuccessful; the search for the ‘smoking gun’ would dominate discussions during the winter months.

This then was the pattern of the debate “in light of” which, Blair wrote in his foreword to the dossier, he had taken the “unprecedented” decision “to publish this kind of document”, namely one drawing heavily on classified intelligence (British Government 2002, 3). In Parliament, the Conservatives remained unquestioningly supportive of both the dossier exercise and the adoption of a robust approach to Saddam Hussein more generally. Iain Duncan Smith made claims about Iraq’s efforts to obtain enriched uranium that went beyond the government’s, and even warned that “Saddam has the motive to strike against Britain”

(Duncan Smith, Hansard 2002m, cc7-8). Overall MPs largely agreed with Blair's statement about the potential danger Iraq posed. Former Conservative leader William Hague warned that British Intelligence likely under-estimated Iraq's capabilities (Hague, Hansard 2002m, c13), while Labour backbencher Jon Owen Jones suggested "few in the House or outside would disagree...that Saddam Hussein's regime represents a threat" (J. Jones, Hansard 2002m, c20). These initial exchanges set the tone for the debate which followed, introduced by Jack Straw. Michael Ancram, the Conservative Shadow Foreign Secretary, stated "we [the Conservatives] support the Prime Minister's stance today. We share his analysis of the threat" (Ancram, Hansard 2002n, c35). Several MPs, including Ancram as well as Donald Anderson, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, and Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesman Menzies Campbell, referred to the dossier as evidence to support their existing views that Iraq did have WMD and did indeed pose at least a potential threat (Ancram, Hansard 2002n, c35, D. Anderson, c42, M. Campbell, c43, Maude, c52, Robathan, c119). Others, themselves already convinced of the need to act, hoped it would win over sceptics (Key, Hansard 2002n, c83, Ross, c86, Gilroy, cc143-144), while several of those very sceptics suggested their concerns had been reduced, if not eliminated (George, Hansard 2002n, c48, Salmond, c56, C. Smith, c64, Leigh, c75, Tyrie, c113, Walter, cc122-123). A common refrain was that while a threat from Iraq had indeed been identified, military action was not yet a practical or proportionate response (Hogg, Hansard 2002n, cc49-50, Clifton-Brown, c111, Godsiff, c129, Keetch, cc138-142). This argument was undermined by the fact that the government was not claiming that it was, focussing instead on the UN process launched by Bush two weeks previously; a sign of some success for the 'official line'. Those who remained most strongly opposed to the government largely based their complaints on procedural rather than substantive matters, bemoaning the supposed delay in the recall of Parliament, or the timing of the dossier's release on the morning of the debate (Soames, Hansard 2002n, c59, Galloway, c60, G. Jackson, c95, Garnier, c97, Mahon, cc100-102, Heath, c106, Turner, c126, Selous, c129, Doughty, c137). George

Galloway led a small number of MPs in accusing the government of propagandising, but the charge was not widely taken up (Galloway, Hansard 2002n, c60, Simpson, c81, Kilfoyle, c108). Instead, many took the opportunity to criticise Bush Administration officials for their alleged bellicosity during August (Salmond, Hansard 2002n, c58, Soames, c59, Bruce, c66, Bell, c72, Strang, c78, Browning, c79, Baker, c88, Taylor, c93, F. Cook, c105, Burden, c115, Ruddock, c120, Lloyd, c123, L. Smith, c132). Overall the government was not challenged strongly; clearly MPs were not yet ready for war, but as Blair himself argued to a receptive audience, war was not yet proposed. Critics forced a division on the motion for the adjournment, allowing sixty-four MPs to vote in symbolic opposition to the government. Just six Ulster Unionists voted in favour of the motion, with the majority of MPs and both main parties having refused to participate, accepting the argument that a vote was pointless without a policy having been proposed. It was an anti-climatic conclusion to an anti-climatic debate, one which suggested that opponents of military action would find it harder to win support in Parliament than they had in the press.

Journalists were disappointed by both the dossier and the parliamentary debate, with many focussing on the document's failure to offer the new evidence of an imminent Iraqi threat they had previously accepted it would not provide (The Daily Mail 2002h, Barnett 2002, La Guardia 2002a, Dawkins 2002, The Independent 2002j, Aaranovitch 2002, Heyman 2002, Jenkins 2002b). Informed observers were equally underwhelmed; as Dan Plesch of RUSI put it, "there are one or two catchy points - maps of missiles that Iraq does not have, missile ranges that Iraq cannot achieve, the ability to launch chemical or biological weapons in 45 minutes and some talk of Iraq trying to obtain not particularly useful radioactive material from Africa. None of this amounts to a wholesale break-down in the strategy of containment" (Plesch 2002). *The Mirror* published the greatest volume of outright criticism, calling Blair's speech "as good a defence of the indefensible as was possible" and printing several articles expressing distrust of Blair and accusing the government of propagandising (The Mirror 2002i, Loach

2002, Ali 2002, Routledge 2002h). *The Sun* similarly remained unequivocally supportive, calling the evidence “overwhelming and – except to the most blinkered minds – irrefutable” (The Sun 2002c). Overall, therefore, most of Public Opinion stood after the dossier exactly where it had stood before. It had been released in circumstances of broad agreement that Iraq posed some kind of threat, it had underlined some positions, but undermined few.

Drafting a dossier

Limited though its initial impact may have been, the very existence of the dossier marked a significant deviation from normal patterns of British government behaviour. Although the idea of producing a public summary of ministers’ judgements on Iraq was neither unprecedented (British Government 2001) nor new (Campbell and Stott 2007, 618), the specific processes followed in this case were unique. Tony Blair appears to have made his 3 September announcement of the accelerated timing of the dossier’s release without consulting any of the people who might actually be required to write it. Both John Scarlett and Alastair Campbell implied to the Chilcot Inquiry that the Prime Minister’s public statements on that occasion had marked the beginning of the active preparation process (Scarlett 2009, 56, Campbell 2010a, 66). Blair had requested a briefing on Iraq in advance of the press conference, but had not suggested announcing the release of a dossier (Blair 2002d). In fact, Matthew Rycroft’s reply proposed answering any specific questions on the subject with the well-established line that “when the time is right we shall publish a dossier documenting the evidence against Saddam” (Rycroft 2002b). It apparently had not occurred to Rycroft that the Prime Minister might decide, the following day, that the time was in fact right. September was far from an ideal moment to conduct the drafting exercise. Jack Straw told Chilcot he thought “the final product might have been a bit better” if it had been drafted by the FCO, as had been the ‘original’ dossier drawn up but not released in March (Straw 2011). With John Scarlett concerned about the use of intelligence, however, and the relevant FCO staff busy at the UN

General Assembly in New York, Alastair Campbell ruled on behalf of Blair that the JIC should take 'ownership' of the project (Campbell and Stott 2007, 636). The fact that such a ruling was required underlines the *ad hoc* nature of the project.

David Omand told Chilcot he "didn't see [the dossier] in any different a light really than an ordinary JIC assessment when it came to process; in other words, two members of the assessment staff were detailed to write it essentially, supervised by the Chief of the Assessments Staff, superintended by the Chairman of the JIC, who took a personal interest in the actual drafting of it". Omand felt Scarlett's personal involvement provided particular assurance that the sensitive material covered was "being handled in the right way" (Omand 2010, 18). Downing Street's main input into the dossier came through Campbell, who aside from confirming Scarlett in charge of the drafting, chaired two meetings in Downing Street on 5 and 9 September to discuss presentational matters, and advised Scarlett on the stylistic composition of the text. Criticisms were subsequently made of Campbell having chaired an 'intelligence meeting', but Lord Hutton dismissed these, concluding it was "wholly appropriate" for JIC officials to take advice on communication matters from Downing Street, and indeed that "there was no discussion of intelligence issues, intelligence matters, intelligence at all, at that meeting or at those meetings" (Hutton 2004, 108). Omand has similarly strongly rejected the suggestion that communications staff were involved in intelligence discussions – "they certainly don't get into the JIC" – while arguing "their views were sought perfectly properly" on the presentation side (Omand 2010, 19, 20).

The distinction between the assessment and presentation of what were anyway subjective judgements based on limited evidence is fine. A line can probably be drawn, on the basis of the Hutton conclusions in particular, between the JIC view that the claims made in the dossier were supported by intelligence, which was not influenced by Downing Street, and the decision to use the document to make the strongest case possible for confronting Iraq, which rested with the Prime Minister. Although the exercise was unusual, therefore, there does not

appear to have been procedural impropriety, at least in the form of political *manipulation* of intelligence; *misuse* is a different matter. Hutton concluded that “10 Downing Street...was concerned that the intelligence...should be presented in a way which made as strong a case against Saddam Hussein as the intelligence properly permitted”, but that while Campbell did make requests for changes to ‘firm up’ the argument, “Mr Scarlett did not accept drafting suggestions emanating from 10 Downing Street unless they were in keeping with the intelligence available to the JIC and he rejected any suggestions which he considered were not supported by such intelligence” (Hutton 2004, 132, 141). Omand reinforces this point; “I think by then I knew John Scarlett well enough, and he knew me well enough, that, if he had felt under pressure [from No. 10], he would have put his head round my office door and said, ‘Can you help me fend these people off?’ But he didn’t” (Omand 2010, 23). Again, therefore, it appears that the dossier as produced had not been subject to undue influence by Downing Street. Rather it represented (albeit in the strongest manner possible) the best professional judgement of British Intelligence as to the threat posed by Iraq’s development of WMD.

Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction

The problem, of course, with this last point, is that the best professional judgement of British Intelligence as to Iraq’s WMD capacity was proven to have been spectacularly misguided once the invasion had taken place. Iraq did not have any nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons, nor a viable programme for their development. Saddam Hussein may still have harboured an intention to develop WMD, and apparently believed allowing Iran (or his own truculent, oppressed, subjects) to discover he no longer had the ability to launch chemical attacks was a greater threat to his regime than defying the United States (Iraq Survey Group 2004, 1). He did not, however, have any actual weapons; a crucial fact Western intelligence services failed to identify. This failure underpins every continuing discussion of the rights and wrongs of the Iraq invasion. It was the foundation of later controversies, and the reason why

the apparently 'cautious and dull' dossier subsequently attained such prominence in the public mind. A country was invaded and its government deposed by force, at great cost, to disarm it of weapons it did not have. Chapter 7 considers the impact of these issues on the long-term political consequences of the war.

The problem was primarily one of "group-think" (Freedman 2004, 25). Not only were Western intelligence analysts incorrect in their judgements, so too were politicians, independent researchers, and even the passive public; "most people in countries where polls were held on this issue" thought Saddam Hussein a threat to world peace (Everts and Isernia 2005, 273). Both Jack Straw and Alastair Campbell pointed out to the Chilcot Inquiry that the IISS report actually went further than the government in describing the Iraqi nuclear threat, with its worst-case assessment that Iraq could have a bomb in nine months (Campbell 2010a, 102, Straw 2011, 57). The Defence Intelligence Staff (2002) had determined in March 2002 that at least a year would be required. When Anthony Seldon interviewed former Chief of the Defence Staff Admiral Mike Boyce, former head of the Diplomatic Service Lord Jay, and UNMOVIC chairman Hans Blix, each recalled having been convinced of the threat (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 138). Blix confirmed to Chilcot that "I, like most people at the time, felt that Iraq retains [sic] weapons of mass destruction" (Blix 2010, 29-30). Blair, Campbell, Powell, and Straw have all stated that, in their view, few people in government, the public, or the wider international community, disputed the assumption that Iraq had WMD prior to the invasion (Blair 2010a, 78, Campbell 2010a, 94, Powell 2010a, 50, Straw 2011, 54). This is an image well-supported by the relative absence of controversy over the dossier at the time of its release. It simply did not warrant detailed public discussion, and did not, at the time, prompt a rancorous public debate.

That very agreement, however, posed problems for the government as it sought to justify a change of policy from containment towards a more aggressive confrontation with Saddam Hussein. Merely describing what was already known about Iraqi arms would not be

enough. As Chapter 3 notes, however, not even the strongest advocates of military action in Britain believed that the threat from Baghdad had actually, objectively, increased. British intelligence assessments thought an Iraqi attack on the UK highly unlikely (Joint Intelligence Committee 2002b). There was, however, a “changed calculus of threat” after 11 September, with the subjective view becoming prevalent amongst both ministers and officials that the demonstrable desire of terrorist groups to cause mass casualties, and the availability to such groups of personnel unafraid of death, meant possible threats previously disregarded as too outlandish to be credible had to be reconsidered. An existing concern that terrorist groups might seek WMD was consequently re-evaluated in a context in which key officials believed such weapons were now genuinely likely to be used (Butler 2004, 34). The common ground between this thinking and arguments emerging from the US was considerable. Reflecting on his own calculations at this time, Blair has written “would someone like Saddam want al-Qaeda to be powerful inside Iraq? Absolutely not. Would he be prepared to use them outside Iraq? Very possibly. Was there a real risk of proliferation, not only from Iraq but elsewhere, leaching into terrorist groups which would not be averse to using WMD? I certainly thought so. Actually, I still think so” (Blair, 2010b, p.386). By September he was beginning to make this argument in public, asking the TUC to ponder a hypothetical scenario:

“Suppose I had come last year on the same day as this year - 10 September. Suppose I had said to you: there is a terrorist network called Al Qaida. It operates out of Afghanistan. It has carried out several attacks and we believe it is planning more. It has been condemned by the UN in the strongest terms. Unless it is stopped, the threat will grow. And so I want to take action to prevent that. Your response and probably that of most people would have been very similar to the response of some of you yesterday on Iraq. There would have been few takers for dealing with it and probably none for taking military action of any description” (Blair 2002e).

Praised in *The Guardian* (Freedland 2002b) and dismissed as “an intellectual conjuring trick” by *The Independent* (2002h), this argument was otherwise little remarked upon, though one writer observed that it sounded “very similar to what Monty Python characterised as ‘the Welsh Art of Self-Defence’: attacking your opponent before he’s even thought of attacking

you” (Harris 2002). Only *The Times*’ Bronwen Maddox linked the TUC line to the IISS report, noting the absence of a clear sign of a growing Iraqi threat, and concluding “if there is new urgency” in Western efforts to confront the regime, “it is in [Saddam’s] intentions, not his present capabilities” (Maddox 2002d). No evidence was ever presented of a shift in intent on the part of Iraq, however. The government thought it implicitly obvious that Baghdad would strike the West if it could, and 11 September had shown the relative ease with which even a low-tech operation could wreak devastation. Ministers failed to acknowledge their own assumptions on this point, and in doing so failed to recognise that they were not universally shared. They also apparently gave little consideration to the point raised in Eliza Manningham-Buller’s memo, discussed in Chapter 3, that Iraq would probably only become a threat to Britain if Britain began directly to threaten Iraq (Manningham-Buller 2002).

It is notable that prior to September 2002 ministers do not appear to have treated Iraq as a particular concern when compared to other potential proliferators. During the 23 July meeting, for example, Jack Straw revisited his 25 March line in noting that “the case [for military action] was thin. Saddam was not threatening his neighbours, and his WMD capability was less than that of Libya, North Korea or Iran” (Rycroft 2002a). Following up on this discussion, the Attorney-General wrote to Blair to outline the possible legal basis for military action on the grounds of self-defence. Confirming that, in deciding whether a pre-emptive strike could be justified, “the key issue...is whether an attack [by Iraq] is imminent”, Goldsmith added that “the development of WMD is not in itself sufficient to indicate such imminence”, and that “on the basis of the material which I have been shown...there would not be any grounds for regarding an Iraqi use of WMD as imminent” (Goldsmith 2002a).

This was the position, then, at the start of the summer break. But on 29 August MI6 received a new report from an “established and reliable line of reporting...quoting a senior Iraqi military officer in a position to know” (Hutton 2004, 112-116). The details of this report led the JIC to assess on 9 September that Iraq’s “chemical and biological munitions could be

with military units and ready for firing within 20-45 minutes” (Joint Intelligence Committee 2002b). This assessment then formed the basis for the statement in the dossier that “intelligence indicates that the Iraqi military are able to deploy chemical and biological weapons within 45 minutes of an order to do so” (British Government 2002, 19). It was one of a number of reports received in quick succession at the end of August which, in John Scarlett’s words, “led to a firming up of what were already quite firm judgments” that Iraq had WMD which it was prepared to use (Scarlett 2009, 59). Alastair Campbell has even suggested that it was this “firming up”, rather than the need to respond to press speculation, that led to the dossier’s publication in September (Campbell 2010a, 64), though in light of what Blair said at his press conference this interpretation does appear somewhat far fetched. The intelligence picture remained imperfect, despite the new material. The indefinite terms used in these statements, such as “intelligence *indicates*” and “*quite firm judgements*” (emphasis added), reflect the uncertainty that characterised the position. Hans Blix, who “thought [the dossier] was a good paper” overall, noted the slightly speculative language it contained, and concluded “this was not evidence”, but inference (Blix 2004, 83). The JIC had warned repeatedly during 2002 that intelligence was “limited” while “Saddam’s own unpredictability” complicated matters, meaning much of what it produced was “necessarily based on judgement and assessment” rather than hard evidence (Joint Intelligence Committee 2002b). Taken together, and in the context of what one official later called a perceived “creeping tide” of WMD proliferation (Butler 2004, 63), the various strands of intelligence were, by September 2002, nevertheless regarded as adding up to a highly suggestive, if incomplete, picture of ongoing Iraqi weapons development. As Jack Straw has put it, “all the little bits of information, however patchy and sporadic, all pointed in one direction” (Straw 2010, 67). Iraq was developing WMD.

Drafting deficiencies

So the Blair government, in September 2002, had come to the conclusion, on the basis of intelligence assessments, that Iraq possessed an ongoing WMD development programme, and probably some active weapons. It was furthermore genuinely concerned that, should those weapons be passed on to terrorist organisations, they would be used in mass casualty attacks against Western targets, although it recognised that this was worryingly possible rather than particularly probable. The dossier produced on 24 September reflected those conclusions, and the intelligence assessments underpinning them, and was itself authored by the professionals of the Joint Intelligence Committee, with only limited input coming from Downing Street in the form of Alastair Campbell's advice on presentation – which was not decisive in terms of the substantive content. Nevertheless, even setting aside its ultimate inaccuracy, the dossier contained crucial flaws that helped undermine its credibility. Firstly, by its very nature it conflated the government's advocacy of its policy of adopting a more assertive line towards Iraq, with neutral intelligence assessment, and failed adequately to distinguish between the two. Secondly, a particular (and admittedly fairly minor, at the time) presentational error was made with regard to the '45 minute claim', namely that by referring to "chemical and biological *weapons*" (emphasis added) the document, and Blair's statement to Parliament, failed to distinguish between strategic missiles and battlefield munitions. Several press stories spoke of Iraqi missiles capable of reaching Israel, Turkey, or even British bases on Cyprus, but the intelligence assessment in fact referred specifically to *munitions*; artillery shells. In other words, it suggested Iraq had in 2002 very similar WMD capabilities to those it had possessed since the early 1980s at least. Tim Dunne concludes that "this initial omission – and subsequent failure to clarify – generated a misleading impression". Certainly, without it, the later furore caused by Andrew Gilligan could not have been so intense.

Dunne also concludes that the dossier episode "illustrates the difficulty of staying on the right side of the line between persuasion and propaganda" in political communications,

particularly regarding matters of intelligence material and war (Dunne 2008, 352). Dunne has a point. Even before the dossier's release, concerns had been expressed in the press about the centrality of rhetoric and assertion to the government's case, particularly in light of the lack of definite evidence of an Iraqi threat (B. MacIntyre 2002b). Warnings about statements catching "unwanted implications" (Mullan 2002) or intelligence becoming "overtly politicised" (Beaumont and Vulliamy 2002) were particularly prescient. With the dossier, the main problem was that it represented the government, and specifically the Prime Minister, setting out why it (he) thought Baghdad needed to be confronted, which was because it (he) had *decided*, having seen intelligence assessments which consciously avoided policy recommendations, that Iraq's apparent development of WMD posed an intolerable threat to British interests. Blair's foreword featured statements such as "what I *believe* the assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt..." (British Government 2002, 3, emphasis added). The crucial point being that his claim was not that the intelligence picture itself *objectively* proved 'beyond doubt' that there was a threat from Iraq, but that he, personally, *subjectively*, believed it did. As Blair told Chilcot, "I did believe it, frankly, beyond doubt" (Blair 2010a, 80). It is a subtle distinction, and it was one quickly lost in the debate. Jack Straw built upon Blair's expression of his beliefs, describing what the dossier "shows", "reveals", or "sets out" about the threat, and even referring back to what "the Prime Minister spelt out" in his own expression of beliefs, as if Blair's assertions themselves constituted evidence. Straw did not refer to belief, judgement, or assessment (Straw, Hansard 2002I, cc27-30). It was this elision of advocacy and assessment which gave the impression (albeit without changing many minds) that the evidence available to the government was stronger than it was. This impression was then further cemented by Blair's conflation of warnings about the limitation of intelligence with expressions of faith in the conclusions drawn, and hints that there might be still more material left unpublished (Butler 2004, 82).

Had these issues been confined to the Prime Minister's foreword and to the parliamentary debate, questions about the veracity of the underlying intelligence assessment might have been avoided. But they were not. For the text not only implied an impolitic conflation of advocacy and assessment by virtue of its existence, it took a form unusual for JIC documents, leaving aside many of the usual caveats about the limitations of particular areas of intelligence. Lawrence Freedman has suggested that "the JIC were aware that they had to produce a document that was stronger than normal", and that this change in format was the result (Freedman 2004, 27). Lord Hutton concluded that "the possibility cannot be completely ruled out that the desire of the Prime Minister to have a dossier which...was as strong as possible in relation to the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's WMD, may have subconsciously influenced Mr Scarlett and the other members of the JIC to make the wording of the dossier somewhat stronger than it would have been if it had been contained in a normal JIC assessment" (Hutton 2004, 152-153). It has even been suggested (albeit by a Defence Intelligence Staff official who did not attend the JIC at the time) that JIC drafters were under "direction and pressure" to "make [the text] as strong as possible", and that although "Alastair Campbell said to the [Chilcot] Inquiry that the purpose of the Dossier was not 'to make a case for war'", many of those involved in its production "had no doubt at the time that this was exactly its purpose and these very words were used" (Laurie 2010). Robin Cook certainly thought there were problems with the format adopted, noting his concern that the intelligence agencies might be blamed for the "violence" it did to their "craft" (Cook 2003, 220). Lord Butler agreed that "the dossier did not follow the format of JIC assessments exactly", but concluded "nor should it have done so. It was written for a different purpose and a different audience" (Butler 2004, 79-80), namely the public via the media, which had little patience for subtlety. Butler was not uncritical on this point (*ibid.*, 82), and most studies now conclude that while the government "did not falsify evidence", it "did make the most of the unreliable information that was available" in seeking to 'sell' its case (Bromund 2009, 267). In a

telling example, intelligence which the JIC labelled “sporadic and patchy” and “limited” (Joint Intelligence Committee 2002a, 2002b) was described in Parliament by the Prime Minister as “extensive, detailed and authoritative” (Blair, Hansard 2002m, c3). Seldon quotes Butler describing “the three words – extensive, detailed, authoritative” as “the closest Blair came to the ‘lie direct’” (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 140). Compared to the caution contained within JIC assessments, Blair’s certainty on this point does appear to have been a rhetorical flourish unsupported by evidence. David Omand defended the dossier to Chilcot, warning that “we mustn’t be too precious about ministers’ wish to, as it were, make their case”, in a hostile communications environment. His concession, at the same time, that the confusion between intelligence analysis and policy advocacy represented by the dossier discredited both the JIC and the government is nevertheless indicative of the damage done by this particular exercise (Omand 2010, 11).

On 24 September, the *Evening Standard* ran a front-page story about the dossier under the headline “45 minutes from attack” featuring an image of rows of bombs described as “chemical weapons containing nerve gas” (*figure 11*).

<Image removed for copyright reasons>

Figure 11: Front Page of the Evening Standard, 24 September 2002.

The picture caption adds “Tony Blair’s dossier claims Saddam has missiles ready and capable of hitting British bases in Cyprus”. With the debate in Parliament still ongoing, this coverage fed back into MPs’ statements to the House (F. Cook, Hansard 2002I, c105). Alastair Campbell has argued that just “one or two” British newspapers appeared to interpret the ‘45 minute claim’ as a reference to missiles (Campbell 2010a, 112). At least nine separate articles across the following day’s *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Mirror*, *Sun*, and *Times* repeated either the dossier’s ambiguous reference to “weapons” or the *Standard*’s more specific description of Iraqi missiles (Seamark and Hickley 2002, G. Jones 2002c, Rogers 2002, Penketh 2002, Hardy 2002c, S. Hughes 2002b, Pascoe-Watson 2002, Kavanagh 2002, Maddox 2002e). No less an expert than former head of UNSCOM Charles Duelfer commented that the inclusion of the ‘45 minute claim’ in the dossier suggested “that concrete intelligence has now been obtained” of something UNSCOM had “strongly suspected”, namely “that the regime had the ability to launch a chemical or biological attack” (Duelfer 2002). Only *The Guardian*’s expert commentators, Wyn Bowen of King’s College London and Trevor Findlay of the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre, noted the claim was “a bit vague” as to whether it referred to missiles or artillery, and concluded that if it meant the latter then it seemed credible if unsurprising. Iraq had long been able to launch artillery shells carrying chemical agents – this was how it had gained its reputation for not only developing but using WMD in the first place (Pallister and Watt 2002).

Clearly, then, the dossier had left room for uncertainty, and in an area which would later provoke great controversy. The question thus arises as to what extent the government in general and the Downing Street communications team under Alastair Campbell in particular were responsible for the misunderstanding. In an apparently incriminating exchange, Jonathan Powell had asked Campbell on 19 September “what will the *Standard* headline be [on the day of the dossier’s release]? What do we want it to be?” (Powell 2002a). But Powell told Chilcot that this “relates back to an in-joke from opposition time [relating to Campbell’s poor record of

predicting *Standard* headlines]...so it was a bit of a sort of a dig, I am afraid, rather than a serious point” (Powell 2010a, 63). Lawrence Freedman noted that “historians might find that detail very helpful” (*ibid.*). Campbell insisted that no deliberate manipulation had taken place, and referred to the Butler Report as evidence (Campbell 2010a, 111). Butler noted that his committee;

“wrote to some 60 Editors of national and regional print and broadcast media to ask them if they had been briefed by representatives of the Government about the dossier...all of those who replied said that they had not been guided to particular parts of the dossier prior to its publication. There was [contra Campbell] some evidence from the replies that some journalists had had their attention drawn after its publication to passages in the Prime Minister’s Foreword. Some Editors noted that the ‘45 minute’ story attracted attention because it was of itself an eyecatching item in a document containing much that was either not new or rather technical in nature” (Butler 2004, 127, emphasis in original).

It would appear therefore that the confusion in the British press about the nature of the weapons Saddam Hussein was allegedly capable of launching in 45 minutes, and the prominence given to such reports, was not primarily a result of government news management efforts. A further charge remains, however, against Campbell *et al.*, namely that more could have been done at the time to correct the misperception once it had arisen. It is a charge that Campbell himself rejects, arguing that “if we corrected it, every single story in every newspaper that we knew to be wrong, we’d be 24/7” (Campbell 2010b, 4). As a general argument, this is a good point, but it fails to account for the sensitivity of this specific claim. Geoff Hoon requested a special briefing when he read the 45-minute claim, which he noted was “the only thing in the draft that I had not seen before in terms of my familiarity with the intelligence”. He, however, has admitted not having paid attention to the media reaction to it, and to not having seen the *Standard* front page until “shortly before Lord Hutton reported” in 2004 (Hoon 2010, 120). David Omand concluded that “with hindsight, one can see that adding a bit of local colour like that is asking for trouble. But we didn’t really spot that at the time” (Omand 2010, 25). So a lack of capacity to monitor and respond to media coverage, and a lack of foresight about the way one particular claim in the dossier would be reported, appear to

have underpinned the confusion in the press, rather than any deliberate effort to mislead. Not that this distinction has mattered much; the damage to the government's credibility had already been done. It would not be the last time incompetence undermined the effect of an exercise intended to win public support.

Quantitative indicators

In terms of the distribution of passive opinion at this time, there was a degree of variation in opinion poll estimates of the likely response of the British public to a question on whether Britain should take part in military action against Iraq. Much of this variation, however, can be ascribed to different questions being asked rather than to actual shifts in public reactions. Excluding the effects of inconsistent questions, the trends are fairly consistent across the period (and indeed consistent with polls taken in March 2002 and October 2001), with a margin of around 10% of respondents on average preferring anti-war to pro-war statements (see *figure 12*).

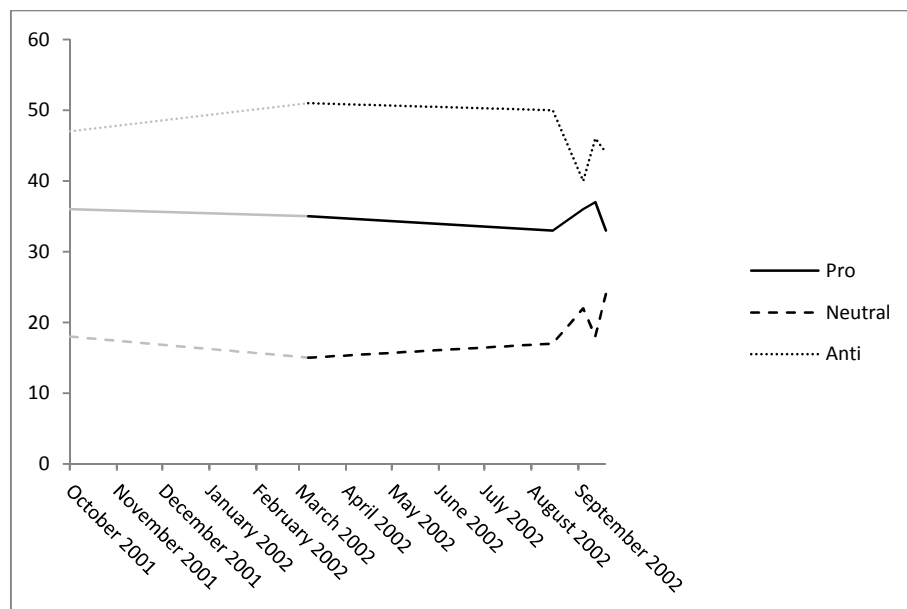


Figure 12: Opinion poll data showing support for military action against Iraq, October 2001 – September 2002.

It was not, therefore, the passive public which had turned against the government during the summer of 2002 (though they remained lukewarm at best on the prospect of a further war), but active Public Opinion (in particular in the press) which sought to use poll

numbers to support its own views. *The Mirror's* approach to polling was most clearly tailored to support its editorial position. In early August, it committed the '*Readers' Digest* fallacy' by presenting the results of a phone-in vote by its readers as a representative guide to the views of the populace more generally (Cummins 2002). Coverage suggested, for example, that the size of the sample – over 20,000 *Mirror* readers had phoned in – rendered its conclusions of particular import (Hardy 2002b). There was no scientific basis for this assertion. On 2 September *The Mirror* published the results of a (scientific) poll by ICM, which it argued showed "how swiftly the public is turning against involvement" (Seymour and Blackman 2002). In fact, *The Mirror's* poll had asked for views on British participation in a war on Iraq that was not supported by the United Nations, finding just 22% of respondents willing to accept such a plan, with 71% against. By mentioning the UN, something earlier exercises had not done, this poll in fact reveals the extent to which that institution was used by passive actors as a heuristic for judging the propriety of the use of force; about 20% of respondents switched from pro-war or neutral positions to anti-war when asked specifically about military action *without UN support*. This effect would be significant in the months that followed, as Chapter 5 describes. More revealing still was the result of the previous question on the same poll, 'based on what you know, do you think an attack on Iraq aimed at removing Saddam Hussein is justified or unjustified?'. 41% of respondents thought an attack justified with UN approval, and another 12% that it was justified whether the UN agreed or not; in other words, 53% of respondents thought that regime change in Iraq was justified in September 2002, provided it was sanctioned by the UN. *The Mirror's* coverage of the poll did not mention this second question at all. *The Daily Mail* did report it, but excluded the 12% who favoured regime change under any circumstances to report that "even if an attack were to be sanctioned by the UN, only 41% would back it"; a clear distortion of the results, albeit one which could charitably be ascribed to error. In addition, *The Daily Mail* mentioned that 38% of respondents had agreed that Blair was "a poodle who follows along with almost anything George Bush decides", but did not

report that 11% of respondents thought Blair considered only British interests, and 45% that he assessed Bush's proposals before offering his support; in other words, that a majority did not think he was a 'poodle' (Clarke and Eastham 2002).

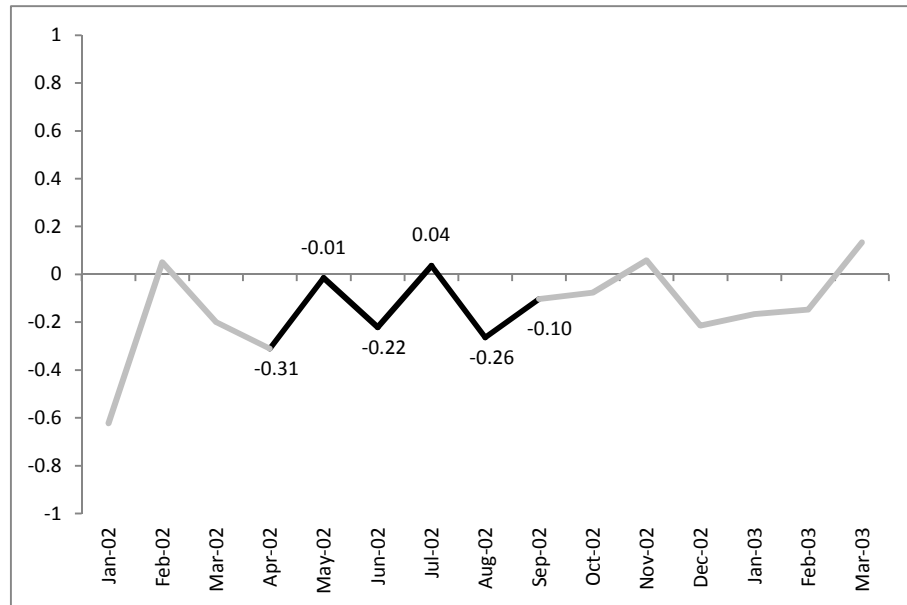


Figure 13: Average editorial positions adopted by UK newspapers towards military action in Iraq (1 = pro-war, 0 = neutral, -1 = anti-war), controlling for circulation, 1 April – 30 September 2002 (n = 615).

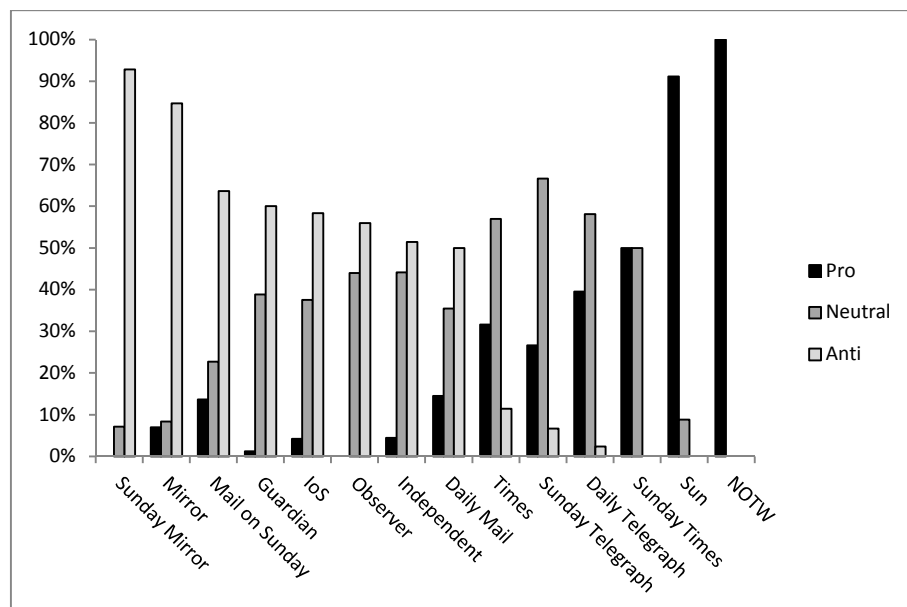


Figure 14: Proportional distribution of commentary articles in UK newspapers between pro-war, anti-war, and neutral positions, 10 April – 30 September 2002 (n = 556).

Newspaper commentary during this period, as figure 13 shows, largely opposed military action, even accounting for the fact that 'pro-war' papers, identified by figure 14 as the *Times*, *Telegraph*, and *Sun* as well as their Sunday counterparts, tended to achieve higher

circulation figures than their anti-war counterparts. In terms of the overall activation of Public Opinion at during this period, *figure 15* shows the initial decline in commentators’ interest after Crawford continuing during the summer of 2002.

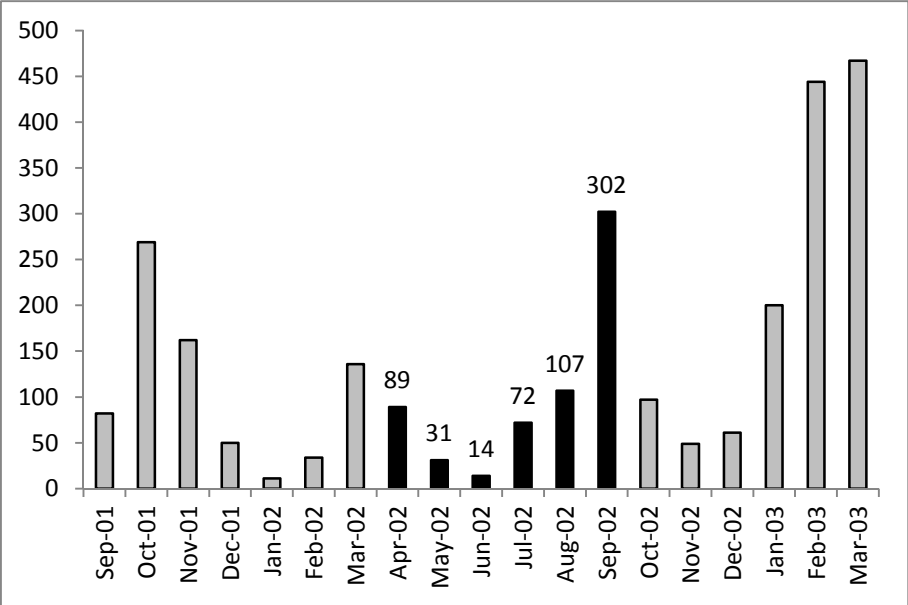


Figure 15: Volume of commentary articles in UK newspapers relating to Iraq, April – September 2002.

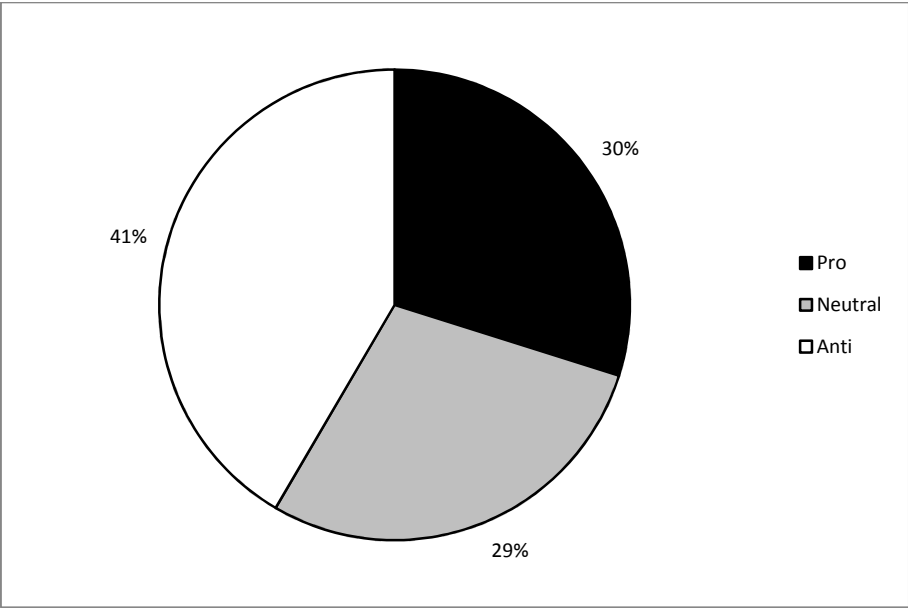


Figure 16: Distribution of speeches by British MPs in debates on Iraq policy during Summer 2002 between pro-war, anti-war, and neutral positions (n = 77).

By August, however, public interest has clearly been rekindled, while debates over the recall of Parliament and then the release of the dossier in September pushed the volume of newspaper

commentary to a level higher than that seen with respect to the invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001.

The distribution of parliamentary speeches made in debates on Iraq between April and September in *figure 16* shows MPs were slightly more neutral than journalists, but that a plurality of speeches opposed the prospect of war. The parliamentary debate was slightly more finely balanced than that taking place in the press; though it should be noted that government statements (which necessarily supported the government line) are excluded from these figures, meaning overall that pro-government speakers outnumbered opponents.

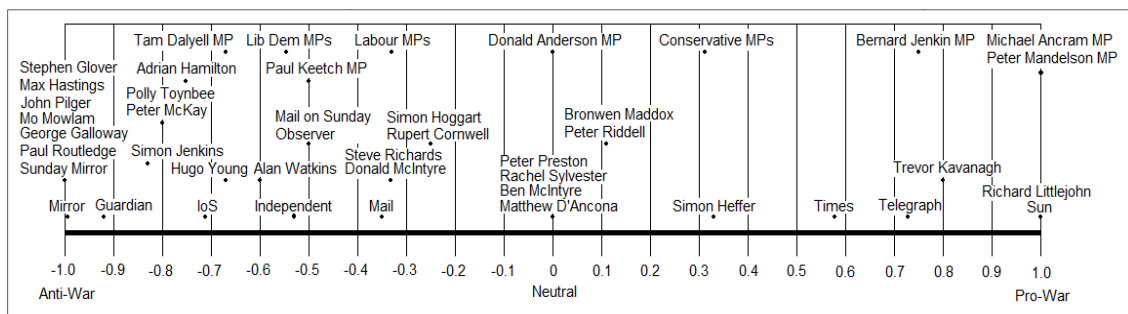


Figure 17: Basic two-dimensional factor analysis of British active public actors' positions towards war with Iraq between April and September 2002.

Finally, *figure 17* illustrates the range of positions taken by the most frequent contributors to Public Opinion during this period. From this it is immediately obvious that the majority of the most prominent voices took anti-war positions at this time. As with the opinion poll data in *figure 12*, however, the distribution outlined here is not significantly different from that recorded during the early months of 2002. The government was clearly yet to win the argument, but its position had not grown appreciably worse during the apparent drift of the summer of 2002.

Conclusion

Tony Blair maintains that, far from epitomising the 'spin' of which his government was often accused, the dossier instead represented a genuine effort to inform and educate the public (Blair 2010b, 463). But 'spin' has dual definitions. The first, the more negative, sees it as simple manipulation, as deliberate falsification and propagandising. The second, however, sees

‘spin’ as a process of putting the government’s case in the strongest manner possible *without* resorting to dishonesty, and frames it in turn as a necessary tool of statesmen given their need to operate in light of Public Opinion. Lord Hutton concluded that the dossier was not dishonest, but *had* been designed to state a particular position; in other words, that it had been ‘spun’ in the latter sense, but not the former (Hutton 2004, 144). The dossier contained claims about the threat posed by Iraqi WMD, derived from and supported by the analysis of secret intelligence, published to support the ‘sale’ of the policy of confrontation with Saddam Hussein, as a component of a wider strategic communications approach driven from Downing Street. It was not deliberately dishonest. Both Hutton and Butler concluded that key government ministers and officials genuinely believed during 2002 and 2003 that Iraq held and continued to develop WMD, that this belief was consistent with the (limited) intelligence evidence available, and that the text of the dossier reflected this evidence accurately. Its conclusions were evidently inaccurate, but this was not known at the time, and it is unclear to what extent it realistically could have been, given the lack of up-to-date information on Iraqi practices then available, and the (independently-verified) track record of Saddam Hussein’s regime of developing, and concealing the development of, WMD.

When the dossier finally came out, it was widely “regarded as cautious, and even dull” (Butler 2004, 76), and few predicted that it might achieve its later notoriety. Claims by policymakers that later criticisms amount to little more than “*ex post facto* wisdom” (Blair 2010b, 406) do not entirely hold up, however. For the dossier remains important in a number of ways. Having been produced with the official imprimatur upon it, it remains the key document outlining the British government’s reasons for confronting Saddam Hussein’s Iraq during 2002 and early 2003. Because of the gaps between its assertions and evidence found after Saddam’s overthrow, it serves both as a base line against which the shortcomings of Western intelligence-gathering can be assessed, and as a central example of what critics claim was an overstated case for war. Chapter 7 will consider the longer-term systemic impact of

these failings on the government's credibility, and on the popular memory of the Iraq invasion in Britain; for now it will suffice to note that there was such an impact, and that it arose at least in part because of actual errors of judgement made by policymakers. Finally, the dossier matters because the government was pressed into producing it at a time not of its choosing by public pressure, initially in the press and then from MPs. Along with the early recall of Parliament, the new monthly press conferences held by Tony Blair, and his appearance at the Liaison Committee, it formed part of a wider communications campaign that was essentially reactive in nature, being driven by a desire to reclaim authority over a public debate divided by speculation and increasingly bellicose statements from the American right-wing which penetrated the British public sphere. The entire episode stands as a prime example of the influence that Public Opinion can exert over the communication, and through communication the substance, of British foreign policy.

Chapter 5 - Going the UN route: September 2002 – February 2003

Emphasising his commitment to pre-emptive self defence, reiterating his conviction that Iraq was developing WMD, and responding to British advice, President Bush used his speech at the General Assembly on 12 September 2002 to challenge the UN to confront Saddam Hussein. By November a tough new UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) had given Iraq a final chance to comply with outstanding disarmament obligations dating back to the Gulf War. UNMOVIC, the revamped weapons inspection organisation led by Hans Blix, deployed shortly thereafter, and began seeking to verify the continued insistence of the regime in Baghdad that it neither retained banned weapons, nor had the capacity or the intention to develop them in future. Britain had advocated a UN-led approach since at least the time of the Crawford meeting between Prime Minister Blair and President Bush. Blair thought UN backing vital both to the success of any confrontation with Iraq, and to the maintenance of his own domestic support base. In seeking both benefits, however, he faced a range of competing legal, diplomatic, and political pressures. Although the British government had some success in setting the agenda for public debate during late 2002 and early 2003, public actors repeatedly and effectively contested official efforts to frame crucial components of the discussion. The nature and purpose of the UN, the concept of 'international community', and the principles of international law, were all up for debate. Ministers knew the scale of the challenge they faced in the autumn of 2002. They were committed, rhetorically and diplomatically, to a confrontation with Iraq. They were convinced that its supposed development of WMD posed a threat to Britain. They were well aware that, barring a dramatic change of heart on the part of Saddam Hussein, the US planned to take military action to remove him from power, probably early in 2003. And they knew that British participation in any such action was both essential for the maintenance of the 'special relationship' with Washington, and impossible without the conferral of additional legal backing, and legitimacy in the eyes of the public, by the UN (Blair

2011, 67). By the time the actual invasion began, however, the debate over the 'UN route' had so played out in Britain that the use of force was regarded, even by senior officials, as "legal, but of questionable legitimacy" (Greenstock 2009b, 38). Many public actors, and indeed some Whitehall insiders, challenged the substance of the legal judgement, as well as the claim that the US and UK were acting only on behalf of the international community as represented through the UN (Ralph 2011, 124). In late 2002 and early 2003 the British government tried, and failed, to sell the prospect of war with Iraq as a necessary consequence of international law and the will of the international community. This chapter investigates how that failure came about.

Playing a multi-level game

Ministers faced a number of potentially insurmountable obstacles in seeking both to legalise and to legitimise war with Iraq by asking the UN Security Council for support. The first, and most substantial, was the complexity of the diplomatic balancing act upon which any consensus about the legitimacy of military action, whether at the UN or back in Britain, would depend. As Chapter 1 discusses, Robert Putnam has described foreign policymaking as a "two-level game", in which governments must address domestic and international pressures simultaneously, handicapped by their inability to take actions at one level without their having an effect at the other (Putnam 1988). Britain's experience during the period of consultation at the UN over Iraq highlights the descriptive power of Putnam's model, while also demonstrating its need for further extension. Rather than simply facing two levels of calculation, British ministers played a *multi-level game* (figure 18) as they sought to balance legal, political, and diplomatic imperatives across at least four different political arenas, some of which themselves had multiple layers. In the UK, there was a broad consensus across Cabinet, Parliament, and Public Opinion that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, and that it should be pressed into giving them up. But beyond this basic level of agreement lay

considerable discord. British Public Opinion encompassed few pacifists, but a good number of actors concerned about the practicality, legality, legitimacy, or morality of military action in late 2002. They could all have been satisfied through a successful UN process, at least in theory, were it not for tensions within, and between the other arenas of debate.

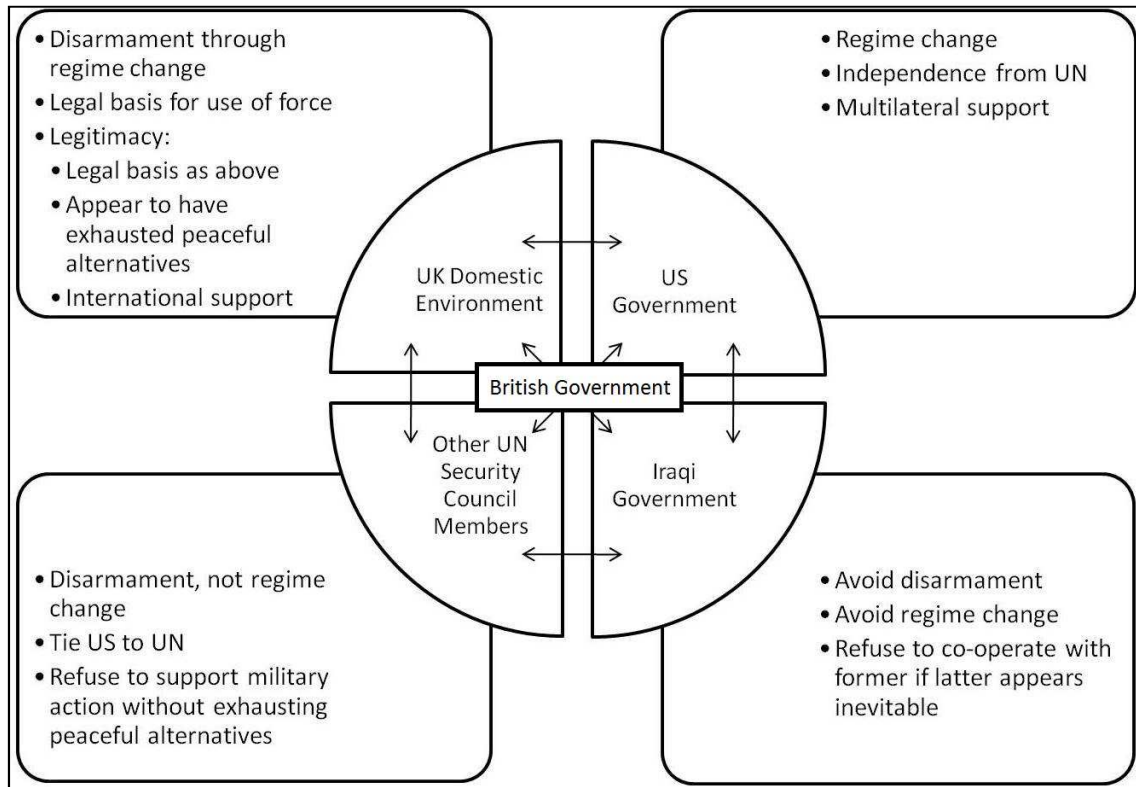


Figure 18: The 'multi-level game' played by the UK government by 'going the UN route', with selected actors' interests identified.

The Bush administration was divided along bureaucratic lines, and within those lines between 'hawks' who demanded immediate action to force regime change in Baghdad and had little patience with allies or international institutions, and 'doves' who saw value in a multilateral approach that preserved at least the semblance of international law. Unlike in the UK, where the UN proved a central totem around which public debate could focus, the range of legitimate public debate in the US – and, thanks to bureaucratic rivalries, much of the debate over US policy *was* public (Straw 2010b, 41) – encompassed outright rejection of the UN as a source of legitimacy and of influence over national security policy. No British leader could credibly sustain the claim that UN approval did nothing to increase the legitimacy of British

foreign policy; in the US, the situation was essentially the opposite. Also unlike in the UK, it was clear that the immediate benefits of a multilateral approach to US foreign policy-making were limited. Allied forces added little to the firepower of the US military, and no potential rival had the capacity effectively to resist American might. Realisation and fear of this simple fact drove developments in the third arena, among the members of the UN Security Council, especially the veto-wielding P5. Britain, Russia, and France each recognised the devaluation that their own permanent positions would undergo should the US act without UN authorisation, and in doing so effectively withdraw from the UN framework. At the same time, they did not doubt that Iraq was flouting the obligations that the Security Council had imposed upon it. This was, after all, why so many previous resolutions had been passed, and why it was possible to get a consensus for UNSCR 1441. Where divisions developed among members of the Council was over the best way to keep the US tied to a UN process. France and Russia refused to approve regime change as a primary policy goal. They would not rule out approving military action leading to regime change as a response to an Iraqi failure to co-operate with UNMOVIC, but they calculated that their own position would be weakened to a greater extent by approving an attack without the clear exhaustion of peaceful alternatives, than by withholding their support, whether that stopped the war or not. Blair calculated that the US was going to invade Iraq regardless of what the UN said, and that a rubber-stamp from the Security Council was the best that could be hoped for. At least the sceptics within the Bush administration who argued against any consultation with the UN would not gain further ammunition to use against bureaucratic rivals, such as Colin Powell, who still saw some value in international institutions. There was in essence a conceptual disagreement over whether the authority of the Security Council was undermined to a greater extent by the demonstration of its irrelevance or of its impotence. Finally, of course, there was the Iraqi regime itself, determined to avoid public disarmament for fear of encouraging domestic dissent and Iranian aggression, and equally determined to avoid regime change (Iraq Survey Group 2004). Iraq had

form in dealing with the UN. In 1998, Operation Desert Fox had been launched in response to years of well-documented Iraqi resistance to Security Council demands that it declare and destroy its WMD following the Gulf War. The regime had watched sanctions erode through the 1990s as the patience and determination of the international community waned, and appears never to have accepted fully that it genuinely faced the threat of force. At the same time, of course, were it to be convinced that war was inevitable, it would have no incentive to co-operate with peaceful disarmament efforts.

Britain therefore needed to follow a UN process that offered a strong prospect of war, to engage US hawks and to intimidate Iraq into compliance, but similarly preserved the possibility of peace, to ensure domestic legitimacy, to assure France and Russia that the US was taking them seriously, and to convince Baghdad that it had something to gain from co-operation with UNMOVIC. Blair might reasonably have thought himself well placed to strike this immensely complicated balance (Hollis 2006, 41). During negotiations leading to the Good Friday Peace Agreement in Northern Ireland, he had alternately cajoled, misled, misrepresented, and outright lied to delegates until sufficient common ground had been fabricated for a genuine compromise to be reached (Blair 2010b, 152-199). Serious and deep-rooted disagreements had been overcome, in part by the Prime Minister's ability to say contradictory things, but always with conviction, to different audiences. Such political flim-flammy would not bridge the gaps that existed between the 'four arenas' over Iraq. In part, this was because much of the debate played out in public; it was, as Putnam suggested, nearly impossible to target messages effectively when every audience heard every pronouncement. In part it was because of conflicting policy priorities between London and Washington. And in part it was because of structural pressures established by British Public Opinion.

Legality and legitimacy

That concerns about legality and legitimacy were intricately linked was well understood in Whitehall throughout the period covered by this chapter (Wood 2002b, Wood 2002c, Adams 2002). As Chapter 4 notes, the Attorney General had written an unprompted and, he thought, not “terribly welcome” memo (Goldsmith 2010, 23) to the Prime Minister following the 23 July Iraq planning meeting, outlining problems with the legal grounds for war. Goldsmith accepted the general validity of the “revival argument”, under which a failure by Iraq to comply with the terms of UNSCR 687 revived the suspended authority to use force under UNSCR 678, initially passed in the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. This argument had been, after all, the basis of law officers’ advice that Operation Desert Fox was legal in 1998. He warned nevertheless that, absent a fresh Security Council finding of Iraqi non-compliance with UNSCR 687, it would be hard to establish the argument’s applicability in the summer of 2002 (Goldsmith 2002a). In 1998, UNSCOM had just been forced to withdraw from Iraq. No such immediate crisis existed in 2002 that might trigger revival in the same way, unless the Security Council were specifically to rule otherwise. Given the real prospect that an invasion lacking clear legal grounds might prompt both official resignations (Greenstock 2009a, 8) and Cabinet divisions (Straw 2010a, 7, 24), it was obvious from at least mid-2002 that some sort of UN process would be a necessary prerequisite of UK participation in a war, not just a sensible PR exercise.

Legitimacy is a more complicated concept than legality. Something either is, or is not, legal. While there is considerable scope for debate over what actually constitutes international law, there is no doubt on this ultimate point. Legitimacy is far more subjective. Tony Blair seems to have believed that a military campaign would be seen as legitimate by the British public and the international community provided it had legal backing, express multinational support, and at least the semblance of being a last resort (Kampfner 2003, 257). Certainly the invocation of the “international community” by policymakers has “an important political

function in generating legitimacy” for their actions (Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2005, 31). Blair, in addition, genuinely believed in the capacity of the “international community” to act decisively and collectively in addressing common concerns (Dyson 2011, 64). It was a position notably not shared by President Bush (Hollis 2010, 55). Referring to the will of the international community over Iraq caused some difficulties, however. No matter how often British ministers claimed that it had been the UN itself which had chosen to confront Saddam Hussein over his WMD (cf Press Conference 2003a), this remained demonstrably untrue. Both contemporary commentators (Cornwell 2003a) and subsequent studies have observed that “the idea of invading Iraq would not have even been an issue before the international community were it not for the determination of the United States that the Baghdad regime be overthrown” (Zunes 2006, 21). The United States, with Britain as its auxiliary, had challenged the UN to confront Iraq; the UN had not raised the matter of its own accord.

Generally speaking, the internationalisation of an interstate dispute through the UN enhances the legitimacy of any subsequent military action not just in the eyes of policymakers, but in the consideration of the public, even where the state in question has little practical to gain and much to lose from multilateralism. In the US, for example, “when given the choice of...multilateral action versus ‘going it alone’, survey respondents almost always choose the former” and “are also likely to endorse the opinion that the United States should seek the approval of international institutions” (Eichenberg 2005, 5). Public opinion in militarily weaker states such as the UK, “tends to insist even more strongly on UN authorisation” before it will accept the use of force as legitimate (Voeten 2005, 532, Everts and Isernia 2005, 275). This heightened British concern is perhaps unsurprising. The US is at least capable of conducting unilateral military operations in far-flung parts of the globe without incurring crippling costs. States lacking American resources are far less able to act effectively on their own.

British Public Opinion expressed three main interpretations of the legitimacy-granting powers of the United Nations Security Council. The comparison of these highlights the extreme

difficulty the government would face in seeking public consensus on the level of assurance any one UN process brought to a policy. Firstly, the Security Council was regarded by some public actors as a source of foreign policy legitimacy through its role as an arbiter of international law (Scott and Ambler 2007, 83). Proponents of this interpretation generally rejected outright the suggestion that any organisation affording considerable clout to human rights violators such as Russia and China might reasonably hold any great *moral* authority, but they nonetheless thought that its legal role was significant (Sillars 2002, The Observer 2003a, Finkelstein 2003a). For a second group, the UN was thought to represent a kind of global moral authority. Jacques Chirac was praised for his principled stand in insisting upon a UN-led process (Lichfield 2002, Amalric 2002, D. Macintyre 2002c), while the US and UK were attacked for “corrupting the security council” by treating it as a mere forum for political deal-making (Norton-Taylor 2003a, Fisk 2003a). Finally, the UN was described by a third group of commentators as a forum for political deal-making, an arena in which different states with interests of varying compatibility could meet to forge agreements. Believers in this interpretation of the legitimacy granted by a UN consultation praised the achievement of consensus as an intrinsic good (The Independent 2002l), acknowledged the basis of inter-state relations in *realpolitik* (The Sunday Telegraph 2003a), and explicitly denied that the Security Council could offer anything more substantial in legal or moral terms than public inter-state agreement in support of a particular action (Hogg, Hansard 2003c, c39). Russia was regarded as the most proficient player of the Security Council ‘game’, with Vladimir Putin’s initial scepticism over Iraq widely and dispassionately reported as being rooted in Iraqi oil contracts (Wilson 2002, The Guardian 2002k, Baldwin 2002, J. Simpson 2002a, The News of the World 2002). Claims that Putin had in fact questioned the real level of the threat from Iraq were not published until much later (Campbell and Stott 2007, 644). In theory, adherents of each of these viewpoints could have been satisfied had the Security Council approved military action; each could project their own explanations onto an unambiguous Council decision. Certainly the wide range of views about the UN’s nature and

purpose meant its invocation in the early Autumn of 2002 quickly silenced even harsh government critics, especially those within the Labour Party itself (Freedland 2002c), as they waited to see how the UN process would play out. It was for this reason, as Blair openly stated, that a UN route had been pursued at all (Blair 2002f). At the same time, considerable scope remained for debate. Many critics had been quietened by the decision to work through the UN, but at a cost. From the moment the consultation process began, the British government had ceded its freedom to lead domestic public debate over its policy. It had placed itself at the mercy of developments in Washington and New York, and had given its rivals in Paris and Moscow an avenue directly to impact British domestic affairs.

Problems on the Potomac

For the UK, then, the UN route offered the prospect of conferring vital legality and legitimacy upon its policy of supporting the US in confronting Iraq. For the US, which did not share Britain's legal concerns (Goldsmith 2010, 87), and had alternative avenues to legitimacy, the UN represented a potential roadblock on the way to a solution, rather than a vital part of the solution itself. For one thing, Britain and the US had conflicting ideas of what they were trying to achieve, and contrasting views of the impact of international law upon their plans. Although Britain was willing to countenance "regime change" as a means to the end of Iraqi disarmament, for the US the position was "almost the opposite" (Manning 2009, 24). British government lawyers had warned that while "it could be that another lawful basis for force might lead to regime change...wanting regime change was not of itself a lawful basis for the use of force" (Goldsmith 2010, Grainger 2002). British Cabinet ministers thought "a foreign policy objective of regime change", the very objective being pursued by their American counterparts, was "improper and self-evidently unlawful" (Straw 2010b, 17, Straw 2010c, 2). US policymakers had the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998 to rely on in obtaining domestic legal backing. They were committed, furthermore, to the 'Bush doctrine', which regarded pre-

emptive action as a necessary tool of self-defence even if the threats thus confronted were merely potential, rather than imminent (Bush 2002b, US Government 2002). Despite suggestions from Geoff Hoon that “pre-emptive action is no more than modern jargon to deal with the ancient right of self-defence” (Hoon, Hansard 2003c, c39), legal advice circulated within the Foreign Office confirmed that the principles of the Bush doctrine were not consistent with Britain’s view of international law as it then stood (Wood 2002a). These contradictions, subsumed as they were by the agreement that the US and UK would together follow a UN process, meant that, as Christopher Meyer warned London (and as Robin Cook was highlighting within the Cabinet), “what the Americans understand by exhausting the UN process and what we understand by exhausting the UN process may prove not to be the same” (C. Meyer 2009, 54, Cook 2003, 204-205).

Despite this difference in understanding, the US did agree, at least partly at Britain’s behest, to seek a UN Resolution in the Autumn of 2002 rather than immediately launching military action against Iraq. The Bush administration needed the appearance of multilateral backing before it could proceed to war sure of the support of the American people. It would settle for only token practical assistance (since it hardly needed any actual help to defeat the Iraqi military), but stood to benefit politically from the semblance of wider international agreement. What was envisaged, then, was “multilateralism in form, unilateralism in substance”, as one study put it (Coates and Krieger 2004, 34). British involvement was crucial to this approach. In addition to its position as ‘first ally’, and a contributor of forces that were relatively easily integrated into the overall military chain of command, Britain is generally better placed to lead international negotiations, as it “often raises fewer hackles” than the US (Greenstock 2009a, 6-7). It was believed in Downing Street that, such was the importance of British involvement as a source of legitimacy, “it was unlikely that the US would proceed” against Iraq without UK support (Powell 2002b). But Britain was constrained by legal and political concerns from supporting an invasion without a UN mandate. David Manning had

warned Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice in the Summer of 2002 that “it was impossible for the United Kingdom to take part in action against Iraq unless it were through the United Nations” (Manning 2009, 19). Powell and Rice convinced the President, and a meeting between Tony Blair and Vice-President Cheney at Camp David in early September is said to have clinched an agreement across the administration that a UN approach would be tried (Greenstock 2009b, 9, Campbell 2010b, 44). Sure enough, on 12 September Bush appeared at the General Assembly. Asking “will the United Nations serve the purpose of its founding or will it be irrelevant?”, he announced the US “will work with the UN security council for the necessary resolutions” in order to resolve outstanding issues relating to Iraq (Bush 2002c). The plural, “resolutions”, was an error; the wrong version of Bush’s speech had been placed on the teleprompter, and he had to ad-lib the line, misspeaking in the process (C. Meyer 2005, 253). It was a potentially costly error, as the question of whether the US had sought one resolution, or two, came to dominate the following debate.

UNSCR 1441

When it was agreed on 8 November 2002, UN Security Council Resolution 1441 was hailed in Britain as “nothing less than a diplomatic triumph for the Bush-Blair approach” (The Daily Telegraph 2002g). From the beginning, however, the new resolution contained weaknesses that would ultimately undermine its power to legitimise decisions made over Iraq. As Christopher Meyer put it, a number of ambiguities, “necessary to get a consensus” had been deliberately tolerated in the text, ambiguities which in time left the whole agreement “fatally undermined” (C. Meyer 2009, 68). Of greatest significance was the lack of clarity over whether a ‘second’ resolution was required to authorise the use of force in the event of Iraqi non-compliance with UNSCR 1441. France and Russia had originally argued for a ‘two-stage’ approach, under which one resolution would re-establish UN weapon inspections, while a second would then be required, in the event that inspections failed, to give the green light for

military action. The US, however, was said to be “dead against” constraining its freedom of action by agreeing in advance to seek a second UN mandate before proceeding (Adams 2002). From a British perspective, Jeremy Greenstock’s instructions stipulated it was “important that the [first] draft should provide legal cover for military action without further Council action” (MacDonald 2002), a point ministers continue to highlight in discussing the UN exercise (Straw 2010b, 70, Blair 2011, 56). France and Russia were primarily concerned that they should not be seen to be approving immediate military action, and were adamant that they would not agree a resolution without some sort of mechanism to prevent it being used by the US as cover to move directly against Iraq (Goldsmith 2010, 41-42). They suspected that any resolution containing an explicit threat of force and lacking safeguards would be used to circumvent the inspection process, which they required as a plausible alternative to war, and one more in keeping with the notion of the UN as an organ of collective security. For weeks there was an impasse as both sides struggled to find a compromise position with which each was comfortable (Straw 2010d, 43). A solution was found through a concession offering some “procedural comfort” to compensate for the American refusal to yield on substance (Straw 2003b). In the event that UNMOVIC reported Iraqi non-compliance, the Security Council would have to meet “to consider the situation” before any military action could take place (United Nations Security Council 2002, OP12). No reference was made to a further UNSCR, satisfying the American wish not to be constrained to seek consensus for action they thought already provided for under existing resolutions, but also the French and Russian desire to create some sort of space for UN inspections actually to work.

Originally negotiated in private between Britain and France, without the involvement of the rest of the P5, let alone the wider Security Council (Adams 2003), this section of UNSCR 1441 would form the focus of the legal debate that played out in Britain during the latter months of 2002 and early 2003. Participants argued over whether the Council had retained the right to decide upon, as well as to discuss, the nature of any response to Iraqi non-compliance.

In November 2002 the question was largely thought unproblematic. Although some elements of British Public Opinion did not accept that military action could be launched without the Security Council confirming that UNSCR 1441 had been violated (cf. Salmond 2002, Usborne 2002, Kennedy, Hansard 2002s, c39, Simpson, Dalyell, c43, Moore, c73), the majority view was that the UN had given Iraq one final chance to comply with the disarmament provisions of resolution 687, or military action would ensue (Flynn 2002, Cecil 2002, La Guardia 2002b, Keane 2002, Ellis 2002, The Times 2002n). Public acquiescence on this point underscored the extent to which the British government had boosted the legitimacy of its policy by working through the UN. It did not rule out, however, the possibility of that legitimacy being undermined by future developments; no 'blank cheque' had been obtained.

British ministers assumed that Iraq would either refuse entirely to admit UNMOVIC inspectors, with the resolution thus "provoking an indisputable example of Iraqi intransigence" (Greenstock 2002), or that the inspectors, once admitted, would quickly find enough banned material to demonstrate a further breach of UNSCR 687. As a result, little thought was given to how the inspection process should be presented to the public on an ongoing basis, a "tactical error" from a communications perspective, as commentators put it in early 2003 (Gedye, Harnden and Helm 2003, cf. Grice 2003a). UNMOVIC's role was primarily to validate Iraq's statements about its weapons programme, rather than to ferret out evidence of specific violations. As Hans Blix later put it, "self-declaration is as basic to arms control as it is to income tax systems. The weapons inspector or tax man should not need to go and find what you have" (Blix 2004, 99). Considering Downing Street apparently thought UNMOVIC "didn't have a cat's chance in hell of finding anything" (Kampfner 2003, 257), however, it is surprising to note that the British government failed conspicuously to convince Public Opinion that Iraq could be found in violation of UNSCR 1441 even if inspectors did not locate any hidden weapons. Tony Blair argued, on the one hand, that the process "is not a game of hide and seek" (Press Conference 2002e), but on the other that "it is for the inspectors to examine

whether there is evidence of weapons of mass destruction” (Blair, Hansard 2003b, cc164-168, emphasis added). This second ambiguity in the presentation of UNSCR 1441 allowed anti-war actors to argue that the burden of proof lay on the US and UK rather than on Iraq (Tapsell, Hansard 2002s, Rufford and Allen-Mills 2002, D. Blair 2002, Norton-Taylor 2002). Only those elements of Public Opinion already convinced of the need for war ever accepted that the “resolution...does not require the UN weapons inspectors to provide proof of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction. The onus is explicitly upon Iraq” (D'Ancona 2003a, cf. Stewart 2003a, Coman 2003, Daley 2003a). Commentators who remained unconvinced or undecided expected to see additional concrete evidence before they would be won over, despite the relatively high level of agreement in September 2002, discussed in Chapter 4, that Iraq *did* retain banned materials. This meant that, when weaknesses were quickly identified in the declaration submitted by Iraq on 8 December, the government was unable to capitalise in order to boost the legitimacy of military action. Blix recalls being “hopeful” that Iraq would use the declaration as an opportunity to come clean on its activities, perhaps blaming a rogue general for having exceeded his remit, and “disappointed” when this did not happen (Blix 2010, 38). Blair, meanwhile, “told his staff that Saddam’s declaration was ‘the defining moment. This was his big opportunity. He’s blown it’” (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 143). By 14 December, a number of British newspapers, apparently each harvesting Bush administration quotes given off-the-record to the *New York Times* (cf. J. Simpson 2002b), were reporting that the declaration contained holes “big enough to drive a tank through” (Paveley and Lowther 2002, cf. The Sun 2002f, Evans 2002). The Joint Intelligence Committee informed the Prime Minister on 18 December that the documents submitted by Iraq were indeed deficient in a number of ways and that, crucially, no attempt had been made to deal even with the outstanding issues left unresolved at the time of UNSCOM’s withdrawal, let alone with new questions raised by subsequent Western intelligence-gathering (Joint Intelligence Committee 2002c). Despite all this, ambiguity over whether UNMOVIC was tasked with

verification or detection remained, and undermined government efforts (and particularly attempts by elements within the Bush administration) to convince Public Opinion that the 8 December declaration marked a decisive moment.

Divisions on the role of the inspectors were exacerbated by a third ambiguity, present at least in the reaction of the British public to UNSCR 1441, over to what degree the US was actually willing to be constrained from launching a military assault by diplomacy. Diplomats in Washington reported that the early August “frenzy about imminent action” had been dampened down by “the President’s emphasis on caution and deliberation” (Brenton 2002), but expectations had been generated, and a lasting impression created in Britain that proved difficult to shake off. Several actors questioned the extent to which UNSCR 1441 had been obtained as a good faith effort to avert war, or whether the plan was “to contrive an assault on Iraq whatever Saddam does” (Cook 2003, 209, cf. The Guardian 2002j, The Independent 2002k, Ellis and Blackman 2002, Channel 4 News 2002c, Ritter 2002, Tisdall 2002, G. Jackson, Hansard 2002q). Blair’s insistence that “the UN route...has got to be the way of dealing with this issue, not the way of avoiding dealing with it” did little to clarify matters (Press Conference 2002d, Hansard 2002o, c309, Hansard 2002p, c268, Hansard 2002t, cc836-837). He was, after all, arguing that Britain and the US would work through the UN to disarm Iraq only so long as the UN facilitated the escalation of the confrontation. As a result, although some MPs were won over to the government’s position by its involvement of the UN and efforts to obtain a fresh UNSCR (cf. Hood, Hansard 2002s, c73, Kaufman, c92), other public actors attacked UNSCR 1441 as “a war resolution...mined with trip wires to trigger a war” (Mahon, Hansard 2002r, c439, The Guardian 2002l, Anne Campbell, Hansard 2002s, c48).

Train timetables

As problematic as the ambiguities contained within UNSCR 1441 were in their own right, their significance paled beside the fact that the US had, by September 2002, a reasonably

well-established timetable for the commencement of military action in early 2003, and little interest in seeing this delayed by diplomacy (Greenstock 2009b, 76, C. Meyer 2009, 55). Britain, which had offered the US a division-sized land force for planning purposes even before UNSCR 1441 was agreed (Wechsberg 2002, P. Watkins 2002a, 2002b), was not completely committed, but was equally hardly free to withdraw at will. By January 2003 Blair “was pretty clear...that we couldn’t peel off from the US without very good reason”, and indeed without very substantial costs (Campbell and Stott 2007, 657-658). On the 15th he was briefed, for the first time, on a concrete invasion plan, asking only “will it work?” (Blair 2003a). Ministerial statements that “no decision has been taken”, which had been received sceptically as early as March 2002, rang increasingly hollow in early 2003 as troop deployments were announced (Hoon, Hansard 2003a, c25). Concerns began to be raised that the mobilisation might develop a momentum of its own (Kilfoyle, Hansard 2002t, c854, The Independent on Sunday 2002b, M. Campbell, *Channel 4 News* 2002d).

This latter notion was well founded. Three former senior British officials each told the Chilcot Inquiry that the “American political timetable” dictated the “window for invasion”, and that the deployment of forces as a ‘contingency’ had indeed developed “huge momentum of [its] own” by early 2003 (Omand 2010, 57, Greenstock 2009b, 76). Military imperatives were undermining diplomatic efforts, an effect that would inevitably have political consequences in turn, in Britain at least. Most immediately, the military pressure meant “you had to short-circuit the inspection process by finding the notorious smoking gun” (C. Meyer 2009, 52). Operation Desert Fox had followed the determination by UNSCOM that the failure of Iraq to comply pro-actively with weapons inspections had rendered the entire inspection process pointless. UNMOVIC would not be allowed the time to reach the same conclusion for itself.

Initially, this fundamental tension was revealed through briefings by Bush administration officials opposed to the UN process that painted a negative picture of the work being done by weapons inspectors on the ground. Anti-war columnist Robert Fisk had warned

in December that the first sign of imminent hostilities would be the rise of media commentary criticising the inspectors (Fisk 2002), while British journalists had shown a willingness to spin events involving UNMOVIC according to their opinions on the necessity of war (Blackman 2002c, The Sun 2002d). Noting his refusal to dismiss the Iraqi declaration, some British newspapers called Hans Blix “complacently bureaucratic” (The Sunday Telegraph 2002b) and accused him of “bumbling” (The Sun 2002e); this despite his not having had the chance actually to read the document at that point. Blix was also coming under pressure from hostile media briefings in the United States. He describes a meeting with Condoleezza Rice in February 2003 which was immediately reported, on the basis of anonymous official sources, as having involved Rice lecturing Blix to toughen up his inspections. Blix himself recalls Rice doing nothing of the sort, and suggests “information might have been passed to the media on what some policy hub wanted or expected her to say – without caring to check what she actually *did* say”. In a wry observation, he remarks that by acting in this way such ‘hubs’ “were creating their own virtual reality!” (Blix 2004, 195). Similar reports appeared in the UK, apparently based on second-hand accounts circulating in the US (cf. Watson and Bone 2003). Their effect was to fuel concerns that the inspectors were little more than “chess pieces on someone else’s board” (Gilligan 2002), hardly the independent arbiters Public Opinion had been promised.

On 27 January 2003, Blix delivered his first report to the Security Council. Although later he thought the phrase “perhaps was a bit too harsh” (Blix 2010, 81), at the time he stated that “Iraq appears not to have come to a genuine acceptance – not even today – of the disarmament, which was demanded of it” (Blix 2003). It was a moment of huge significance, especially for Tony Blair, with his faith that UNMOVIC would prove the need for military action, and thus grant it legitimacy in the eyes of the British public. Blix effectively accepted the American argument that Iraq had yet to make a “strategic decision” in favour of disarmament. As he later recalled, “it appeared from our experience that Iraq had decided in principle to provide cooperation on process, notably access. A similar decision on substance, I said, was

indispensable” (Blix 2004, 139). Although he maintained that UNMOVIC should be given more time to seek a peaceful solution, the disappointment Blix recalls feeling in private after the December declaration had, by January, become palpable in his public statements. As he told *Channel 4 News*, “there is something odd about having had eight years of inspections, then four years without, and then only two months, and then write it off...[but]...I cannot say in good conscience that I see sign [sic] of co-operation” (Channel 4 News 2003b). Had Blix’s reports continued in this vein, leading him to the conclusion that Iraq would never take its disarmament requirements seriously and that UNMOVIC was unable to complete its task, the legitimacy debate in Britain might well have been won, as it had been after the withdrawal of UNSCOM in 1998.

But when Blix returned to the Council on 14 February (a report added in to the UNMOVIC schedule by the US, excited by the prospect of further condemnation of Iraq, and impatient to proceed to war), his “tone was less critical of Iraqi cooperation than it had been” (Blix 2004, 178). Although concerns remained, he reported that Iraq had begun to demonstrate a degree of pro-active engagement in the inspection process. If his first report had given hope to the ‘hawks’, the 14 February update was “just what the anti-war lobby had wanted” (Kampfner 2003, 272). Robin Cook called it Blair’s “nightmare come true” (Cook 2003, 293-294). Despite his argument that “if you are asked to report about the weather, your reports must be different when the weather changes” (Blix 2004, 178), Blix has been accused by British ministers and officials alike of having altered position to try to delay military action (Greenstock 2009b, 71, Blair 2010a, 120, Blair 2010b, 411, Straw 2010b, 88). Implicit in such claims is the suggestion that Blix had ceased to be a neutral figure, and that his conclusions should not necessarily be regarded as independent of political considerations. To a significant degree this represents *ex post facto* justification by individuals who otherwise might themselves be accused of politicising the inspection process. Blix certainly understood the power of his office to confer legitimacy on military action. But, as his 27 January report shows,

he hardly gave Iraq an easy time, and at no point did he ever suggest that the regime had reached a level of co-operation he regarded as acceptable. Had the US military timetable been less urgent, and UNMOVIC allowed to work through its inspection process, Blix might very well have concluded that he could not offer sufficient assurance to the Security Council that Iraq had in fact disarmed. Arguably France, and even Russia, would have been willing to go along with military action in response to such a report.

Because Blix was never to be given sufficient time to reach his own conclusions, however, those individuals within the US and UK governments who had advocated a UN-led course to Iraqi disarmament had to find a way of justifying the premature termination of the UNMOVIC inspection process. They had to do this without entirely abandoning the UN route, and without the clear-cut evidence of Iraqi wrongdoing that the discovery of a 'smoking gun' might have provided. Their approach was to argue that UNMOVIC was neither solely responsible for, nor practically capable of, determining the level of Iraqi co-operation. Instead this was claimed as the responsibility of individual member states. Britain put out a second 'dossier' describing Iraq's *Infrastructure of Concealment, Deception and Intimidation* (British Government 2003). The US meanwhile sent Colin Powell to the Security Council, armed with his own conclusions about Iraq's efforts to circumvent the inspection process. Although pro-war actors (Shawcross 2002, Webster 2002b, Jenkin, Hansard 2003a, c26) had made similar claims at various stages, the majority of contributors to British Public Opinion were not primed to respond favourably to this effort to reframe the inspection process, and as with the September dossier exercise reactions were lukewarm at best. Weaknesses in both the new British document and the Powell presentation then served further to undermine official credibility.

Alastair Campbell has argued that the second dossier represented a simple effort to inform the public debate at a time when attention had apparently shifted away from the 'real issue' of Iraqi co-operation with UNMOVIC onto the question of the US timetable for war

(Campbell 2010b, 26). Others have dismissed it as “an Alastair Campbell stunt” (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 150), and it is routinely labelled today as the ‘dodgy’ dossier. In terms of its genesis, it is better compared to the earlier exercises conducted during late 2001 to explain the need for action in Afghanistan, rather than to the more professional JIC-led operation of September 2002. Compiled under the aegis of the Coalition Information Centre by Campbell’s secretary, two junior press officers from Downing Street, and the FCO’s “head of story development and briefing team” (Wilson 2003a), the document drew on a range of both secret and open sources in describing Iraq’s efforts to hide its WMD capabilities from the UN. Neither set of source material was well used. Although the JIC did see and approve the intelligence-based claims made, there was no system of overall quality control comparable to that used in September. Crucially, no-one checked that open-source material included within the text had been properly cited. It had not. Journalists quickly identified the unacknowledged reproduction of an article from the *Middle East Review of International Affairs* by an American researcher named Ibrahim al-Marashi (al-Marashi 2002), and were soon focussing their attention solely on this issue, while largely ignoring the dossier’s substantive claims. The scandal of official misconduct proved far more newsworthy, in other words, than anything the government might say about Iraqi WMD. Campbell felt the media reaction overblown, but even he admitted the situation constituted “a bad own goal” for the government communications effort (Campbell and Stott 2007, 664-665). Campbell probably underplays the point. Robin Cook, never a great supporter of Campbell or his techniques, expressed amusement at the “almost entertaining, comic Inspector Clouseau quality” of “this bungling incompetence”, but nevertheless worried that “the serious consequence is to damage Tony’s credibility when he asks the public to trust him” (Cook 2003, 287). Cook was right to be concerned. Even war supporters complained that “the Number 10 culture of spin is undermining a perfectly good case” (The Daily Telegraph 2003b), while anti-war voices spoke of “a deliberate attempt to hoodwink and mislead the public [which] will undermine trust in

anything the government says about the Iraqi threat" (The Observer 2003b, The Independent on Sunday 2003b). Certainly little was done to support the claim that the British government was better placed to judge the success of weapons inspections than the weapons inspectors, and indeed much to undermine it. This was despite no substantive problems being identified with the text; plagiarism had been enough to discredit the entire document.

Colin Powell's presentation to the Security Council was more professional but barely more effective. Trained in advance as an "Adlai Stevenson moment" (The Daily Telegraph 2003a, Borger 2003, C. Brown and Coman 2003) in reference to the decisive revelation of proof that the Soviet Union was misleading the UN during the Cuban Missile Crisis, it lacked the concrete evidence seen on that occasion, and so failed to have a major impact, either at the UN or on the public. Jeremy Greenstock, who thought the presentation "extremely impressive", still conceded it was "not decisive" (Greenstock 2009b, 86-87). Christopher Meyer has been harsher, calling Powell's statement "inadequate and incorrect" (C. Meyer 2009, 55). Commentators in Britain generally expressed concern about the alleged Iraqi violations set out by Powell, but did not accept his crucial claim, that they were sufficiently serious so as to warrant the acceleration or even early termination of the inspection process (The Daily Mail 2003a, Barnett 2003a). So limited was Powell's impact, in fact, that the direct refutation of several of his key hypotheses by Hans Blix on 14 February elicited little comment in Britain. As Blix himself concluded, for many observers it was "hard to avoid the reflection that Colin Powell had been charged with the thankless task of hauling out the smoking guns that in January were said to be irrelevant and that, after March, turned out to be nonexistent" (Blix 2004, 156).

Smoking guns had become relevant in early 2003 only because of the pressure to conclude efforts at peaceful disarmament before the military timetable stipulated war must begin. British ministers knew the US was willing to go to war without UN backing, but Britain itself was unable to do so, and yet equally unwilling to appear a fair-weather friend by letting

the US fight alone. It fell, therefore, to Tony Blair, and to a lesser extent to Colin Powell, who had put his own reputation on the line in pushing for a UN route, to find a compromise that would be consistent with Public Opinion. In early February the argument advanced was that UNMOVIC was being successfully misled by wily Iraqi security agents, to the extent that UN formalities could no longer be allowed to delay the military action that such obfuscation made inevitable. The argument failed, partly because the public, trusting of international institutions and primed to await the inspectors' findings, rejected the substance of the claims made. It failed, also, because of incompetent spinning by Downing Street. In effect, the government had, through shoddy execution and a lack of imagination, undermined its own case.

The 'second' UNSCR and the 'unreasonable' veto

Every other avenue exhausted, Britain was forced to seek domestic legitimacy for military action through a 'second' Security Council Resolution. Great efforts had been made during the negotiations which led to UNSCR 1441 to avoid having to return to the Council a second time, but unable otherwise to reconcile clashing military and diplomatic timetables, and constrained by Public Opinion, ministers had little choice. In early January Blair was warned that, absent a decisive report from UNMOVIC or the discovery of an indisputable 'smoking gun', he "might be unable to survive the expected House of Commons vote" on the use of force, without a further resolution (Blair 2010b, 412). By the end of the month "everyone [he] was speaking to was saying they needed a second resolution or they wouldn't get support" (Campbell and Stott 2007, 658). Under the rules of the multi-level game that Britain faced at the UN, these domestic political concerns had to be balanced against the very real possibility that a second resolution might fail, which would have undermined claims to both legality and legitimacy (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 144), and damaged the Western allies' ability to avoid appearing weak while trying to pressure Saddam Hussein to give up without a fight (Wood 2002d, 1). Considerable tension had developed between the US and

France, after Dominique de Villepin's 20 January "ambush" of Colin Powell at the UN, in which the French Foreign Minister used an impromptu press conference during an unrelated ministerial summit to attack US posturing over Iraq (Straw 2010d, 74). The publication on 30 January and 6 February of letters of support for the US from a range of EU member and candidate states² had further underscored European divisions (Ehrenberg, et al. 2010, 124-126). It has subsequently been argued that the US would not have allowed negotiations for a second UNSCR to begin had it not been thought that France might yet come round (Marfleet and Miller 2005, 338). But clearly there was little prospect of an easy ride, and if Blair really did tell Bush a second resolution would be easier to obtain than the first (Cook 2003, 276), he offered an assessment of the situation that was neither objective nor accurate.

Somewhat counter-intuitively, Britain's best hope for achieving a second resolution lay in refusing to acknowledge publicly that a further Council decision was necessary to legalise war, thereby shifting the argument from the question of whether France and Russia would permit military action, to whether Britain and the US would allow France and Russia to 'approve' a war that would (and legally could) take place regardless. For this reason, Blair had initially refused to comment on whether he would seek a second resolution in the event UNSCR 1441 did not produce the desired level of Iraqi co-operation, arguing "there are certain questions frankly...it is not very helpful to speculate on" (Press Conference 2002d); "unhelpful for him", as one observer put it (P. Riddell 2002e). Privately, ministers and officials were aware that the situation was complicated. Jack Straw, Jeremy Greenstock, and David Manning had each accepted at different times (both publicly and privately) that resolution 1441 envisioned a further Security Council *decision*, and not just a discussion, before military action (Straw 2002c, Straw 2002d, Straw, Hansard 2002r, c437, Greenstock 2002e, Manning 2002). Although ministers had argued that the key passage in OP12 of UNSCR 1441 "does not stipulate that

² The signatories of the 'gang of 8 letter' were Spain, Portugal, Italy, UK, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Denmark; this was followed by the 'Vilnius letter' signed by Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

there has to be a second Security Council resolution to authorise military action in the event of a further material breach by Iraq” (Straw, Hansard 2002s, c53), they had privately been warned repeatedly by Lord Goldsmith that, in his opinion, some form of Council decision *was* required; this despite the instructions given to Greenstock during the negotiation of this point (Goldsmith 2002b, 2002c, 2003a, 2003b). Publicly, Blair maintained his line, despite knowing it was not consistent with the government’s own legal advice. Seeking to justify this apparent dishonesty, he subsequently argued at the Chilcot Inquiry that he “was less making a legal declaration, as it were, because I could not do that, but a political point” (Blair 2011, 74). In effect, he claims that when he made public statements about Britain’s legal position which he knew contradicted advice given by the Attorney General, he was not making false statements, but was rather not making legal statements at all. He claims the coincidence of the diplomatically convenient claim that no second resolution was required with his own view of the legal position (which differed from Goldsmith’s despite the latter’s advice) is irrelevant (Blair 2011, 61). Most subsequent observers have rejected Blair’s assurances on this point.

What was not irrelevant was the way the government dealt with legal advice which did not support ministers’ own views, or which threatened to create insurmountable obstacles to their policies. Advised by FCO lawyer Sir Michael Wood that there was “no doubt” a further resolution was required (Wood 2003b), Jack Straw responded, in a note which prompted a reprimand from the Attorney General (Goldsmith 2003c), that he “hope[d] (for political reasons) we can get a second Resolution”, but that international law was “uncertain” and so he did not accept the substance of the advice (Straw 2003a). It is apparently not unheard of for ministers to challenge legal advice. The additional admission here, that a further SCR would offer much-needed political, if not necessarily legal, cover, is consistent with what is known about the diplomatic position in early 2003. Straw’s rejection of Wood’s advice was not necessarily inappropriate, therefore, but it did clearly conflate political and legal priorities, at the risk of undermining the ability of law officers to offer impartial opinions. Prior to his visit to

Bush on 31 January, Blair had underlined Goldsmith's statement that UNSCR 1441 "does not authorise the use of military force without a further determination by the Security Council", scribbling "I just don't understand this" in the margin of the text, despite the apparent simplicity of the statement (Goldsmith 2003b). Instead of accepting the Attorney-General's legal advice as it was first advanced, Downing Street sought to change his mind. It was arranged that Goldsmith should meet Jeremy Greenstock in late January, and then that he would travel to Washington to see William Taft IV, State Department legal adviser, in early February. Jack Straw raised an additional point in a note warning that he had "some doubts about the negotiability" of a second resolution (Straw 2003b). Finally, on 12 February, Goldsmith came up with the answer ministers had been looking for, accepting there was a "reasonable case" that war was legal on the basis of UNSCR 1441 alone (Goldsmith 2003d).

At the Chilcot Inquiry, Goldsmith explained the thinking behind his ultimate position by arguing, with reference to UK and US accounts of the negotiations leading up to UNSCR 1441, that "it was, frankly, quite hard to believe, given what I had been told about the one red line that President Bush had, that all these experienced lawyers, and negotiators in the United States could actually have stumbled into doing the one thing that they had been told mustn't happen" (Goldsmith 2010, 127). This conclusion chimes both with what is known about the instructions given to negotiators, and with some of the public statements made by ministers and officials at the time resolution 1441 was announced. Clearly, however, Goldsmith had faced pressure of a sort, improper or otherwise, until his legal view changed to coincide with what was thought politically and diplomatically feasible. In effect, the impartiality of legal advice had been compromised for political communication purposes, just as had been secret intelligence assessments during the period covered by Chapter 4.

British ministers won legal approval to launch military action against Iraq without explicit UN authorisation at around the time it became most clear that a further Security Council Resolution remained essential to the generation of political legitimacy. An increasingly

desperate domestic situation, the ongoing complications of Britain's diplomatic balancing act, and the very real risk that the newly-minted legal argument could be undermined by subsequent developments at the UN each impacted upon the decision to return to the Security Council. Blair was convinced during his 6 February *BBC Newsnight* grilling that "a second resolution would go a long way towards tempering domestic concerns about the impending war" (Dunne 2008, 354). As he told Jeremy Paxman, "I think if there were a second UN resolution then I think people would be behind me. I think if there's not then there's a lot of persuading to do" (Blair, *BBC Newsnight* 2003). The fact he was on *Newsnight* in the first place, before a studio audience deliberately selected to be hostile, was significant. He had launched a "masochism strategy", an effort to win over critics by facing tough questions head on (Campbell 2010b, 39). As one observer pointed out, however, the main effect of such exchanges was the reinforcement of Blair's repeated commitment to producing "some kind of 'second resolution'...to the point where it does not matter too much what the piece of paper says, so long as he can produce it" (Maddox 2003a). He may have won converts to the pro-war line, but at the cost of promising them a UN resolution he no longer needed legally and would probably not be politically able to deliver.

So concerned was the Prime Minister with the constraining effect of domestic Public Opinion at this stage that it formed a major element of his 31 January appeal to President Bush to support a return to the Security Council (Campbell and Stott 2007, 660). At the time, he could refer also to Goldsmith's advice that Britain required a second resolution to cement its legal base, which was not revised until 12 February. There were very real concerns in both the US and UK about affording France and Russia a second chance to withhold UN approval from military action; as has been noted, such concerns motivated the public refusal to accept the legal necessity of a further UNSCR. While the Council debated a US-UK draft text, however, it could not also discuss a Franco-Russian alternative; a significant benefit given the likely levels of support an alternative draft would have gathered, especially had it praised UNMOVIC and

called for inspections to be given enough time to 'work' (Greenstock 2009a, 13, Straw 2010b, 82). The passage of a counter-resolution explicitly ruling out immediate military action, even if it was vetoed by Britain and the US, would have exploded the legal argument upon which Lord Goldsmith had by then alighted, since the 'revival argument' held only in the absence of a specific expression of the Security Council's view. Ultimately, it appears that "Bush realised that no second resolution might mean...no Britain" (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 147), and elected to compromise by allowing Blair to seek one out, despite never having accepted the desirability of such an exercise in its own right. He remained clearly lukewarm about the prospect of additional negotiations in New York, conceding in public only that "should the United Nations decide to pass a second resolution, it would be welcomed", while maintaining that "1441 gives us the authority to move without any second resolution" (Bush 2003b). So stark was the difference of emphasis between Bush and Blair on this point, and so focused was the media on reporting it, that the Prime Minister felt compelled to travel to the press section of his plane during the return flight to London, in order to highlight the success he had just had. As Nick Robinson put it, this was "a journey he makes only when told that the media thinks his day went badly" (Robinson 2003a). Coming just two days after Bush had told Congress, in a line which "produced wild cheering" (Ashley 2003a), that "the course of this nation does not depend on the decisions of others" (Bush 2003a), the President's tepid stance towards a second resolution appears unsurprising. He was utterly and publicly committed to war, regardless of events at the UN (C. Meyer 2009, 55), and vulnerable to serious domestic criticism should he appear to backslide. Unfortunately for Blair, it was impossible for Bush to talk separately to US and UK publics on the subject of the UN, and forced to decide between the two, it was the British he chose to antagonise. Just as Blair's rhetoric constrained his substantive policy options, so too Bush had already closed off the prospect of a genuine US effort to gain a second resolution by making his position so unequivocally clear in the State of the Union.

Having returned home, Blair struggled to refute suggestions that the decision to refer back to the Security Council reflected the US and UK having agreed all along to follow a two-resolution route (The Guardian 2003a). In doing so he highlighted the government's established position that proceeding with a second resolution was preferable to going without, but that it was ultimately unnecessary, especially in case of an "unreasonable" veto (Straw, Hansard 2002r, c435, Blair, Hansard 2002s, c39, Press Conference 2003a, Hansard 2003d, c292, *BBC Newsnight* 2003). As with the broader second resolution argument, government law officers had advised here, too, that the position being taken was not consistent with international law; a veto was a veto, whether or not British policymakers considered it 'reasonable' (Goldsmith 2002d, Wood 2003a). Even Jack Straw, who publicly advanced the claim at this time that certain types of veto were 'unreasonable' and so illegitimate, accepted at the Chilcot Inquiry that it was invalid (Straw 2010d, 47). It seems that ministers were again asserting political positions, knowing they lacked legal authority, for diplomatic advantage; it is hardly surprising that commentators were confused.

Clever linguistic contortionism was no longer enough, however, to win public support. By February 2003 it was clear, as one newspaper put it, that many in Britain had thought the deployment of UNMOVIC would "postpone the prospect of a military campaign indefinitely", and that the fact "that the inspectors might become irrelevant if Baghdad failed to provide a credible inventory of its materials has come as an unwelcome surprise" (The Times 2003a). Hans Blix had observed as early as September 2002 the belief amongst journalists that "inspection was the alternative to war" (Blix 2004, 79). Certainly debating inspection was an alternative to debating war; by early 2003 a number of commentators were warning about an undue focus on events at the UN, to the exclusion of broader considerations such as the pros and cons of removing Saddam Hussein from power (D. MacIntyre 2003a, The Independent on Sunday 2003a, Tisdall 2003a). Only a handful of those public actors who doubted the necessity, morality, or practicality of military action were willing to reject a UN-backed campaign outright

(cf. Sheridan 2003, Benn 2003). Some had assumed the negotiations in the Autumn of 2002 that led to UNSCR 1441 would be unsuccessful (A. Watkins 2002). Others rejected possible violations of 1441 as mere “technicalities” (The Guardian 2003b), and constructed a comprehensive series of arguments which delegitimized military action under almost any circumstances (Tisdall 2003a). Opponents of military action sought to strike a balance between expressing their commitment to upholding the authority of the UN, and avoiding having to endorse the use of force even in defence of that authority. Clearly, then, and despite similarly circular claims being made on the pro-war side (Hames 2003a), the British government was in some considerable trouble by mid-February 2003. Pinning its hopes of legitimising an armed conflict that was all but inevitable on developments at the UN, it had talked itself into a position in which almost no course of action could have achieved that legitimacy.

Quantitative indicators

On 11 February *The Times* argued that its own evidence of public opinion suggested that voters were divided, that they accepted that inspections alone could not disarm Iraq, yet preferred to call for more time when faced with accepting the inevitability of war as the alternative (The Times 2003b). The implication was that, faced with a stark choice, most would prefer that their support for the UN should lead to war, rather than that no effort should be made to enforce UN resolutions, although the paper admitted that this was far from certain short of a clear point of decision. Journalists opposed to war alternately lamented that wider public “unease remains anchored to the sofa” (M. Riddell 2003) and reported having witnessed increasing levels of public activation (Fisk 2003b).

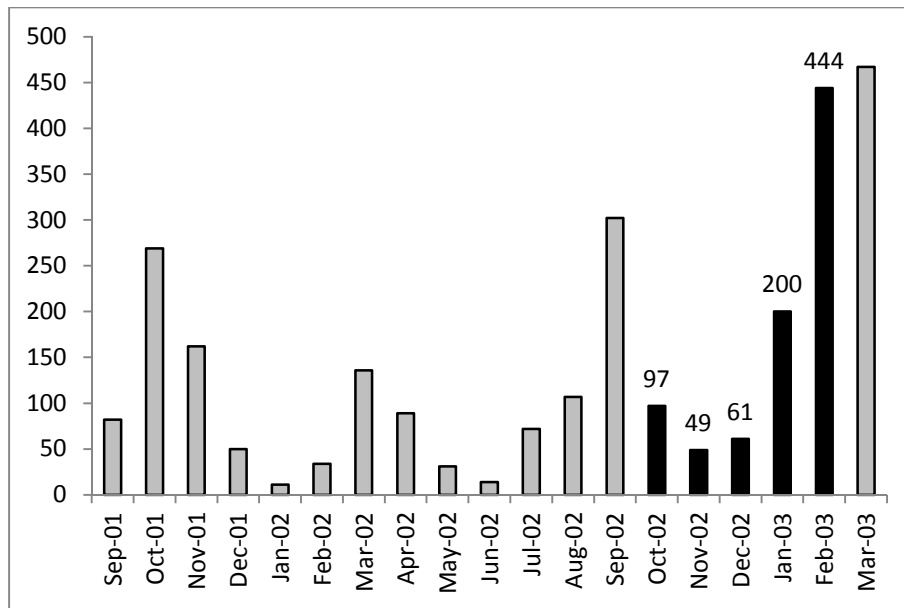


Figure 19: Volume of commentary articles in UK newspapers relating to Iraq, October 2002 – February 2003.

Figure 19 shows that the volume of public debate over Iraq grew towards the end of this period. The number of Iraq-related commentary articles published in leading newspapers spiked upwards in January, and then boomed in February. Rising media interest meant pressure on the passive public to pay attention. *The Mirror* launched a petition on 22 January, calling on readers to sign and return a pro-forma printed in the paper. By the first post on 23 January, 15,000 forms had been received (The Mirror 2003a), a figure which reached 181,500 by 6 February (Fisher 2003). This was clearly a large number, but at the same time it equally clearly represented only a minority of the population, and indeed a minority of *The Mirror's* readership of over two million. Nevertheless, the mere existence of a varied and lively public debate, to which ordinary citizens were willing actively to contribute, over the legitimacy of military action demonstrated that Public Opinion was increasingly engaged in the issue, and that it had some real concerns with the position put forward by the government (Michalski and Gow 2007, 204).

As figure 20 shows, a clear plurality of the British passive public, when asked, continued to oppose the use of force against Iraq during the period covered by this chapter. What was new about the public debate at this time was, however, the increasingly urgent

question of just how far these latent levels of passive concern might be mobilised into an active anti-war campaign. *Channel 4 News* noted that “the same old faces, like Tony Benn and George Galloway...dominate the anti-war movement”, and wondered “can they galvanise the British public?” (*Channel 4 News* 2003a).

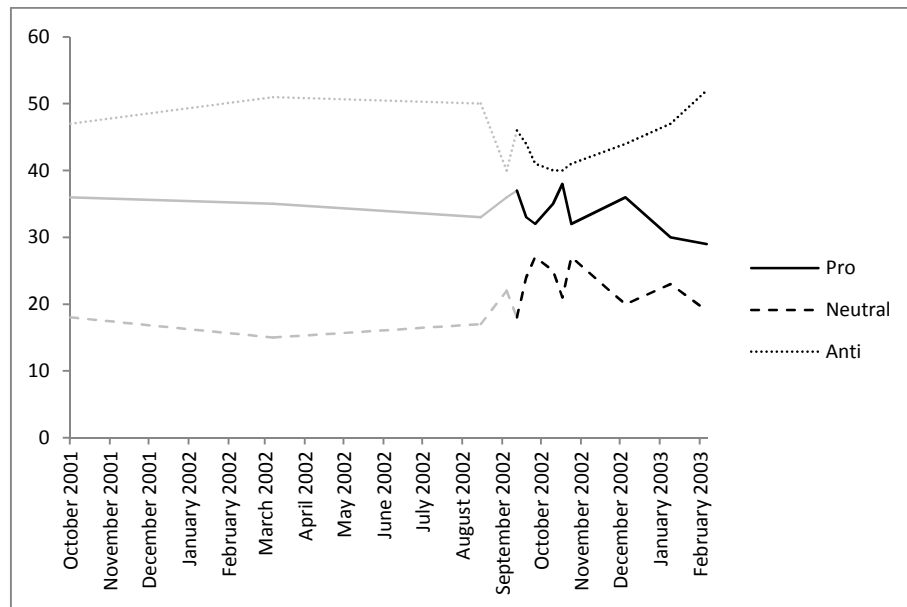


Figure 20: Opinion poll data showing support for military action against Iraq, 1 October 2002 – 15 February 2003.

Interestingly, as figure 21 sets out, the balance of views in newspaper commentary articles at this time was generally more anti- than pro-war.

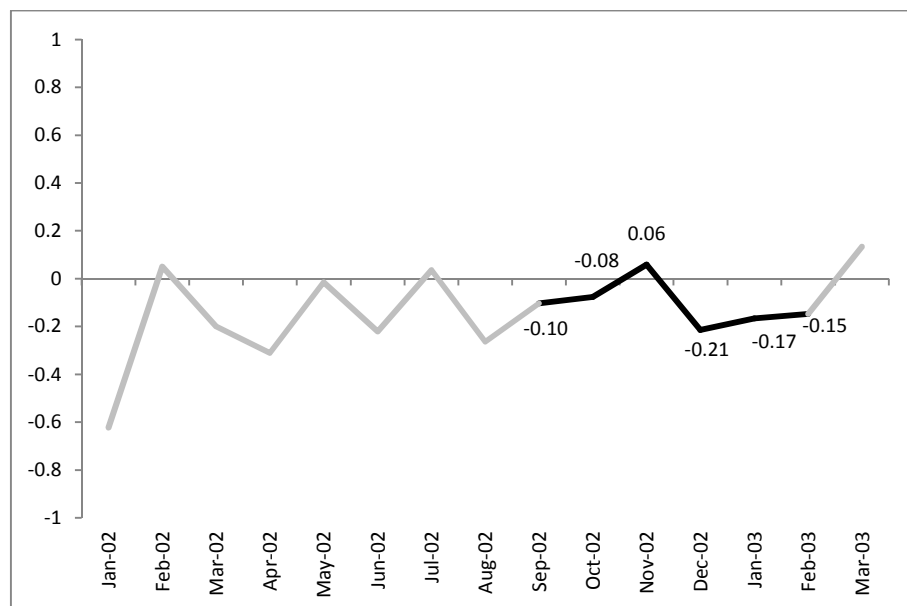


Figure 21: Average editorial positions adopted by leading UK newspapers towards military action in Iraq (1 = pro-war, 0 = neutral, -1 = anti-war), controlling for circulation, October 2002 – February 2003 (n = 851).

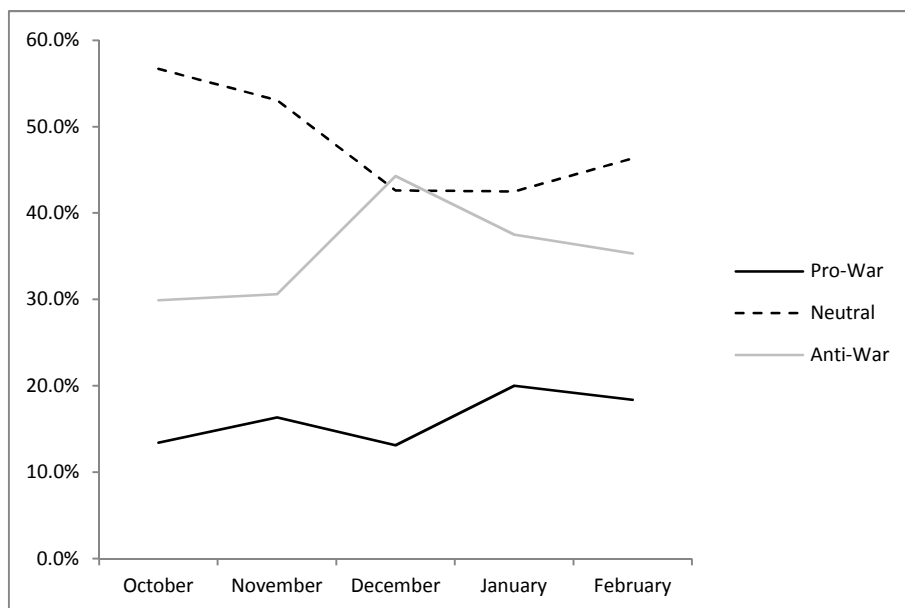


Figure 22: Average proportional distribution of newspaper commentary on the prospect of military action against Iraq ($n = 543$).

It is instructive to compare *figure 21* to *figure 22* on this point, however. *Figure 22* demonstrates that a clear majority of the newspaper comment articles *written* (as opposed to *figure 21*, which focuses on articles *circulated* and so gives more weight to those in more popular newspapers) at this time took a neutral position on the question of the use of force. Anti-war views were strong, while pro-war commentators remained very much in the minority; the breakdown is more similar to that seen in Parliament.

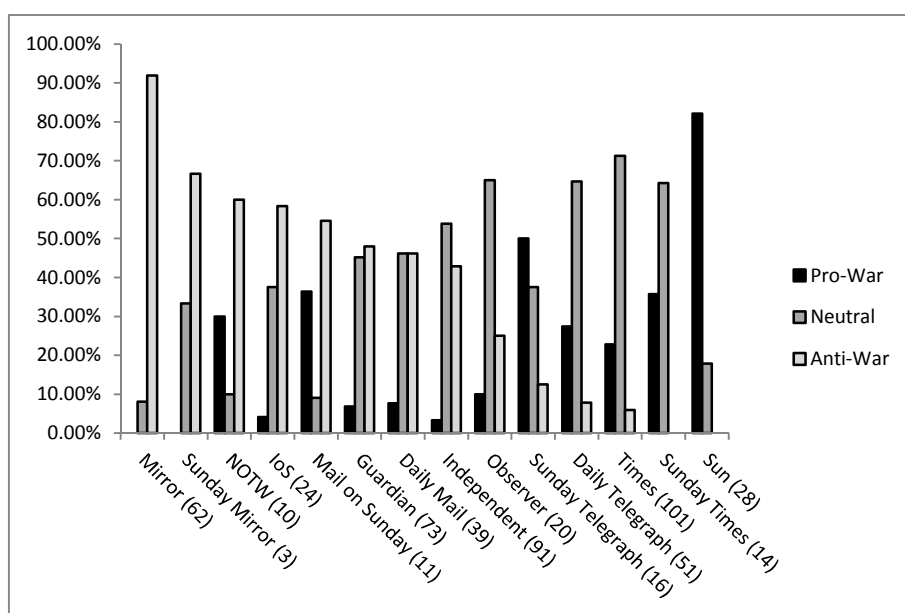


Figure 23: Proportional distribution of newspaper commentary on the prospect of military action against Iraq, by publication ($n = 543$, individual n -numbers in brackets).

Looking at *figure 23*, we can start to explain the difference between *figure 21* and *figure 22*. The publications with the strongest pro- and anti- war lines were *The Sun* and *The Mirror*, which achieved during this period average market share of 34.95% and 20.5% respectively, for a total of 55.45% of commentary within the British newspaper market taking a strong line one way or another. *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*, which both carried a high proportion of neutral commentary on the Iraq question, achieved just 15.46% market share between them, and so had far less influence over the proportional distribution of commentary in terms of the number of copies of articles circulated, despite having made up a far higher proportion of the number of articles written. Again, this should not be surprising; it reflects the focus in the higher-circulating tabloid press on clear-cut positions and limited levels of extended argument, compared to the more sober and nuanced approach adopted by the broadsheets (measures for the *News of the World* and *Sunday Mirror* may be unreliable, due to a very low number of relevant articles – $n = 10$ and 3 respectively – but have been included for the sake of completeness). Chapter 8 discusses the implications of these relationships in more detail.

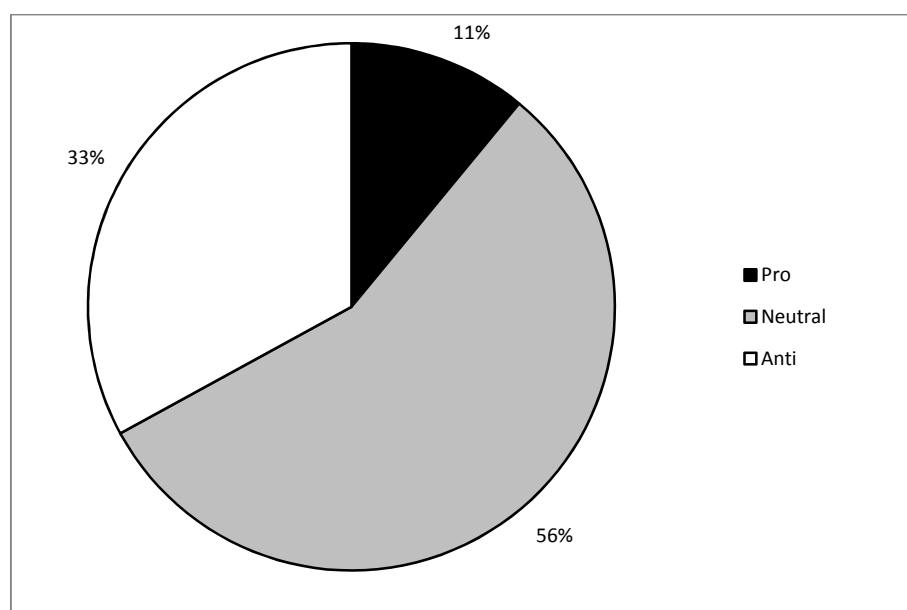


Figure 24: Distribution of speeches by British MPs in debates on Iraq policy between 1 October 2002 and 15 February 2003 ($n = 63$).

Parliamentary support for war was hit hard by the UN process, the proportion of pro-war speeches made in this period falling to just 11%, as *figure 24* shows. Most earlier hawks were willing at least to let the UN process play out, something which explains the high proportion of neutral contributions to debates held at this time (and also the similar pattern seen in the press). The significance of Parliament continued to be in some doubt because of the Conservative party's support for war, a stance which, it was widely observed, left it effectively "neutered" (Richards 2002, Richards 2003a, M. Brown 2003). Public Opinion instead discussed the extent to which the press had taken on the role of opposition (Rawnsley 2002b, Ashley 2002b). Regardless of the reality, the belief that Iraq was an issue increasingly contested between government and journalists irked many parliamentarians, and fuelled complaints from MPs about the government's tendency to brief the media before the House on key announcements (Ancram, Hansard 2002s, c70, Howarth, Hansard 2002t, c846, Knight, Hansard 2003c, c47). Such complaints usually went unanswered. Right-wing newspapers struggled, meanwhile, as the Conservatives had, trying to balance their pro-US and pro-military instincts with the "automatic impulse of their editors to undermine a Labour government". The result was often support on substance but criticism on process, with editors focussing on stories about the government's failure properly to equip troops, or the fate of Labour's pro-EU policies in the face of mounting disagreements with France and Germany (Summerskill 2003).

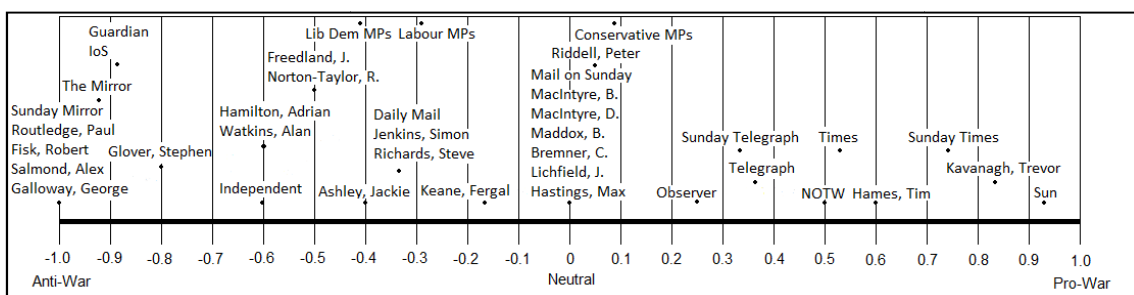


Figure 25: Basic two-dimensional factor analysis of British public actors' positions towards war with Iraq between 1 October 2002 and 15 February 2003.

As *figure 25* highlights, and as was the case in Chapter 4, the most regular contributors to British Public Opinion during this period tended to prefer anti- to pro- war positions. Indeed,

active Public Opinion remained for the most part opposed to war throughout the UN inspection process. The government was not helped by the fact that it had succeeded in setting the agenda for public debate by going to the UN, but that far more pro-war than anti-war opinion was neutralised by the move. Only the editorials of the previously anti-war *Observer* followed resolutely the logic of its own pro-UN line, agreeing with the government that military action should be taken to ensure that SCRs were upheld.

Conclusion

During the latter part of 2002 and opening months of 2003, a series of political, legal, and diplomatic battles over the level of UN approval for military action against Iraq played out in a complex multi-level game ranging between Britain, Washington, Moscow, Paris, Baghdad, and New York. Seeking both legality and legitimacy according to standards set by contributors to Public Opinion, the Blair government balanced Bush administration unilateralism against European scepticism to secure the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1441. UN weapons inspectors returned to Iraq, and after initial delays the regime slowly began to co-operate with the demands made of it. Whether this co-operation would ever have satisfied UNMOVIC remains debatable; Hans Blix approached his task with a sceptical, but open, mind. His initial 27 January report was scathing, but he was somewhat more muted on 14 February. With enough time, he would have reached a definite conclusion; either Iraq's disarmament could be verified, or it could not. But he was not to have enough time. US military planners had targeted early 2003 to launch an invasion of Iraq. Bush administration unilateralists disliked anyway the notion that they might be constrained from acting against a perceived threat by the efforts of an international institution to promote peace. The President had committed personally and publicly to overthrowing Saddam Hussein, to a doctrine of launching pre-emptive strikes against perceived threats to national security, and to the unashamed use of military might in imposing *pax Americana* on the world. There thus emerged a disconnect

between the diplomatic and military schedules which British rhetorical efforts could never realistically have overcome. A fundamental clash had developed between the structural imperatives of the 'special relationship', and those of Public Opinion.

From the Blair government's perspective the war, when it came, had legal approval from the government's law officers, but lacked clear-cut domestic legitimacy. Ministerial efforts to reconcile American impatience, Franco-Russian scepticism, Iraqi intransigence, and UNMOVIC inspections, had largely backfired in the face of challenging conditions established by the nature and operation of Public Opinion. By seeking UN approval for war, but refusing to be constrained if that approval was withheld, or even too slow in coming to meet the (entirely artificial) deadlines set by the American military timetable, the Blair government demonstrated conclusively that it *was* acting without UN support (Ralph 2011, 130). For the Bush administration, which had alternative legal arguments and sources of legitimacy (including of course multilateral backing from Britain), there was little cause for concern. But a complex legal argument that found, on balance, that the use of force against Iraq in early 2003 would (probably) be legal was not enough alone to legitimise, in the eyes of the British public, a war with limited international support. The contrast with what had happened over Afghanistan, discussed in Chapter 2, is striking. Going to the UN had always been an exercise in both policy and politics, an effort to obtain legal backing, to be sure, but also an opportunity to achieve legitimacy through a well-worn route to multilateral consensus. Legal, diplomatic, and domestic political concerns are interwoven throughout the government's private exchanges and public statements from this time, underscoring the close relationship between policy substance and policy communication. That so few official aims in going to the UN were achieved reflects in large part the very complexity that this interweaving implies, and the opportunities it creates for the development of irresolvable conflicts.

Chapter 6 – “We need to be ready to climb the mountain of conflict”³: February – March 2003

On 15 February 2003 the largest political protest in British history took place in London. As many as one million people marched across the capital to express their opposition to a military attack on Iraq. Just over a month later the British government, with the support of Parliament, committed the country’s armed forces to Operation Iraqi Freedom, a US-led invasion that rapidly removed Saddam Hussein and the Ba’ath party from power in Baghdad. This chapter explores the way public debate over the appropriateness of military action played out in the final weeks before the war. Building on the discussion of policymaking processes, communication methods, and diplomatic pressures in the previous chapters, it considers how leadership psychology and domestic political circumstances interacted with Public Opinion in shaping the government’s behaviour. It asks how far Tony Blair’s beliefs about the necessity of military action against Iraq, and the desirability of public support for that action, influenced his willingness to risk his own political survival by exposing the unpopular decision to go to war to a constitutionally unnecessary parliamentary vote. It investigates the impact on that decision of Conservative Party support, Labour Party scepticism, and Liberal Democrat weakness. Finally, it seeks to understand how it was that the wave of vocal and organised anti-war protest which surged through the streets of several cities and the corridors of Westminster seemed to have so little impact.

Three crucial points emerge from the analysis. Firstly, the ‘moral turn’ in the official case for war that took place on 15 February both won converts from instinctively anti-war left-wing elements of Public Opinion, and underscored the Prime Minister’s deep personal faith in the need to take military action. Blair’s beliefs, in humanitarian intervention, in his own judgement, in the threat posed by Saddam Hussein, and in the proper role of leaders in foreign policymaking together limited the scope for conditions imposed by Public Opinion to influence

³ (Hollander 2009)

his decisions. Secondly, the government's ability to exploit latent popular prejudices in blaming France for the failure of the 'second' UNSCR helped soften its impact. Much of what support had been garnered for military action prior to February 2003 had been dependent on its legitimisation by way of unequivocal UN backing. As Chapter 5 describes, this was why a 'second' UNSCR had been sought at all. By playing on images of the 'perfidious French' already well-established in the minds of tabloid editors, however, ministers successfully directed attention away from the absence of explicit UN approval for the campaign that launched in March 2003. Finally, the domestic political circumstances were such that, in reality, the only way the government could have been forced to change its stance towards Iraq was if its own backbench MPs had brought it down. When it came to it, if Labour MPs really wanted to prevent an invasion, they would first have to overthrow a Labour Prime Minister. It proved a sacrifice few were willing to make.

The 'moral turn': 15 February 2003

When Tony Blair stood up to defend his Iraq policy at the Labour Party Spring Conference in Glasgow on the afternoon of 15 February, he did so knowing the scale of public opposition ranged against him. With a million people protesting on the streets of London, he cannot have mistaken the importance of the occasion, nor the unusually high salience of the issue to many ordinary people. Yet, rather than changing course under pressure, he sought instead to change the terms of the debate. Insisting that "the moral case against war has a moral answer" (Blair 2003e), he engaged directly with those critics who accused him of rushing unthinkingly to war, and began to argue seriously for the first time that removing Saddam Hussein from power would benefit the Iraqi people far more than it would harm them. It was a significant shift (Coates and Krieger 2004, 57). Blair had strongly implied that he was personally committed to humanitarian 'regime change' in Iraq during his April 2002 visit to Crawford. His private statements were even more explicit. In ideological terms, he observed that "from a

centre-left perspective, the case should be obvious...a political philosophy that does care about other nations – eg Kosovo, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone – and is prepared to change regimes on the merits, should be gung-ho on Saddam” (Blair 2002). The Attorney General had, however, warned repeatedly that if military action was to be taken in line with international law, “regime change cannot be the objective” (Goldsmith 2003e). For this reason Blair had worked from Crawford onwards to construct a case against Iraq based primarily on the threat posed by its weapons of mass destruction and its violation of UN Security Council Resolutions dating back to the Gulf War. What was proven by the 15 February protest was that this approach had failed to win the public debate in Britain. Too many people did not buy it. As far as the British public was concerned, WMD were dangerous, and Iraq’s violation of UNSCRs a concern, but the case for what would inevitably be a devastating war had not been made. Blair therefore fell back on a familiar trope of New Labour foreign policy; liberal interventionism (Gaskarth 2006, 325-326, Kennedy-Pipe and Vickers 2007, 205, Hollis 2010, 2-3, Dunne 2008, 344-345, Williams 2005). As his memo of 17 March 2002 suggests, he was finally expressing in public his true, private views on why Saddam Hussein simply had to be removed.

Blair held a moralistic, even simplistic, view of the nature of international affairs which might have predisposed him to favour the use of force against Iraq, even without his having had wider experience of intervention (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 86, Dyson 2009, 235-236, Bromund 2009, 260, Dyson 2011, 64, 71). His decision, however, to encourage and participate in military action against Serbia over the Milosevic regime’s treatment of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo in 1999 had hardened his underlying instincts (Kampfner 2003, 36, Daddow 2009, 548). Speaking at the Chicago Economic Club in an effort to encourage Bill Clinton to deploy US air power to the region, Blair had elucidated a new foreign policy stance, the “Doctrine of International Community” (Blair 1999). Drawing together themes of global interdependence and individual morality, and building on work done by Professor Lawrence Freedman, Blair described humanitarian intervention as a tool of what he later termed

“enlightened national self-interest” (Blair 2010b, 228). Ostensibly ‘humanitarian’ intervention was, in Blair’s formulation, not so much a charitable act as a prudent investment in global stability. In an interdependent world, as he put it, “[national] values and [national] interests merge. If we can establish and spread the values of liberty, the rule of law, human rights and an open society then that is in our national interests too. The spread of our values makes us safer” (Blair 1999). Clinton was won over, Serbia bombed into submission, Kosovo placed under UN protection, and Milosevic (eventually) driven from power and put on trial for war crimes. Britain’s actual role in achieving each of these outcomes is debatable. What is clear, however, is that he regarded Kosovo as a personal triumph. In particular, he thought the success of his strategy proved that he was a better judge of foreign policy matters than those domestic voices who had disagreed with him (Blair 2003f, Kennedy-Pipe and Vickers 2007, 210). Roundly opposed again in 2003, his thoughts returned to Kosovo.

Blair could not avoid responding to the 15 February protest; that had been the organisers’ intention in scheduling it for the same day as his Glasgow speech. The marchers were too numerous, and too mainstream to be dismissed. They were the sort of people who did not usually go on marches (The Daily Mail 2003b, White 2003a, Parris 2003, The Mail on Sunday 2003), rather than the ‘usual suspects’ who could be relied upon to protest (Cook 2003, 298, Kampfner 2003, 272-273). Reporters described the crowd as “middle-class, middle-aged, politely-mannered and jolly angry” (Ellam 2003, cf. Moreton 2003). Many of the large number of eye-witness despatches that appeared in the next few days’ newspapers underlined the fact that the average protester was reasonably affluent, politically centrist, and often a Labour voter who had been won to the party for the first time in its 1997 landslide. The marchers, then, were Tony Blair’s most significant supporters, the people whose votes made him such an electoral force, who might otherwise for cultural or economic reasons have voted against Labour, were they not so personally impressed by him. Such was the penetration of anti-war feeling through the government’s core constituencies that even within Downing

Street, most of Blair's closest colleagues had family members who marched against him (Campbell 2010b, 54). Although a handful of observers on the pro-war side of the debate attacked the marchers as "knee-jerk rent-a-mob agitators...a ragbag of second-rate no-hopers" (The News of the World 2003a, cf. Amiel 2003), such views were not mainstream. Ministers and officials were certainly concerned (Press Conference 2003b, Blair, Hansard 2003e, c130, Campbell and Stott 2007, 667, Campbell 2010b, 52-53, Blair 2010b, 424, Straw 2010b, 102-103). What was interesting, however, was how the Prime Minister in particular chose to respond. Instead of altering his substantive commitment to increasingly imminent military action, Blair simply shifted his rhetoric (The Independent on Sunday 2003c, Gallagher & Knowsley 2003, Tisdall 2003b, Waugh 2003a). Suddenly war with Iraq was not just a matter of self-defence or UN resolutions or the 'special relationship'. Suddenly it was 'the right thing to do'.

By altering the focus of the official line towards the question of right and wrong, Blair did shore up some support. Doubters within Downing Street drew comfort from the ethical arguments put across (Seldon, Snowdon and Collings 2007, 153). Although the effect was far from universal (Watkins 2003a, The Independent 2003d), backbenchers in Parliament and opponents in the media were generally impressed by the claims made (George, Hansard 2003f, c306, Carr 2003c), particularly in light of the government's past successes in Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. The moral argument contained logical flaws, however, which limited its success as a tool for winning over Public Opinion. Although Blair claimed he did not "pretend to have a monopoly of wisdom in these issues" (Blair 2003f), he acted quite differently. One Downing Street aide told Seldon that "this is a man who, in terms of the judgement of right and wrong, would think that his own judgement was at least as good as that of the Archbishop of Canterbury, of the Cardinal of Westminster, and of the Pope combined" (Seldon, Snowdon and Collings 2007, 153-154). The choice of these three ecclesiastical leaders was not accidental. No sooner had Blair begun to set out his moral case,

than Archbishop Rowan Williams, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, and Pope John Paul II were each challenging it publicly. Anti-war commentators thought the government's new moral argument had been immediately undermined, and noted critically Blair's lack of humility in the face of such eminent authorities (The Mirror 2003c, The Guardian 2003d, The Independent 2003b, Chancellor 2003). Blair did not, however, back down. It has been further suggested that the willingness of ministers to admit the difficulty of reaching a clear moral position on Iraq (cf. Straw, Hansard 2003f, c272) somewhat weakened their claim to have done just that. One cannot credibly accept that a moral question is finely balanced, and simultaneously argue with complete conviction that one's own solution is unequivocally correct (Bulley 2010, 454). That was, however, exactly what the government tried to do in these final weeks. Ministers could hardly ignore the strength of anti-war opinions, and Blair had explicitly recognised their basis in value judgements in explaining his own moral turn. This recognition, however, then undermined his claim to have himself reached the 'right' answer, especially as he continued to deny thinking that he possessed any particular moral authority. Finally, the official case continued to be constrained by the need to balance ministers' desire to see Saddam Hussein displaced against the fact that an approach based on regime change alone remained evidently illegal. Although by this point, as Campbell observed, "whether we liked it or not, we were moving towards a regime change argument" (Campbell and Stott 2007, 666), the government still needed to show respect for international law, both practically in terms of what actions civil servants could perform, and politically to shore up Labour Party support. For this reason, Blair was forced to concede that Saddam Hussein might yet be left in power if he co-operated fully with the UN; regime change became a welcome consequence of war, rather than a reason for war in its own right (Blair, Hansard 2003e, c124, Press Conference, 2003b, Blair 2011, 45). He could take no other position without risking a serious clash with his own Attorney General. But having so determinedly excoriated Saddam on 15 February, the quick reversal left Blair looking opportunistic in his choice of arguments, if not

outright confused. How, critics asked, could the Prime Minister take so strong a view on the moral imperative to overthrow the Iraqi dictator, and in the same breath pledge to leave him in power should he only co-operate with UN weapons inspections (McSmith 2003, D. MacIntyre 2003b)? It was a question to which Blair offered no answer.

The ‘Messiah complex’

“The best lack all conviction, while the worst / are full of passionate intensity” (Yeats 1928, 1970).

The significance of the ‘moral turn’ in the communication of British foreign policy at this time goes beyond the impact that anti-war Public Opinion had on the agenda of the national debate. It was noted above that, faced with rising opposition to his proposed policy, Blair responded by changing how he sought to ‘sell’ it, while leaving the policy itself substantively unchanged. In his autobiography, he admits to “a somewhat weirdly optimistic view of the power of reason, of the ability to persuade if an argument is persuasive”, and notes that Jonathan Powell used to refer to his drive to convince others as a “Messiah complex” (Blair 2010b, 117, 157, Powell 2010b, 56). What the Glasgow speech showed, and what his conduct over the following weeks underlined, was that the Prime Minister’s instinctive reaction to public opposition over Iraq was to try harder to get his point across. He never considered that he might be wrong; he thought only in terms of how best to convince others that he was right. Explicitly adopting the position, first discussed in Chapter 3, that it was the role of governments to lead rather than follow when facing difficult decisions (Blair 2003f, Blair 2010b, 486-487), he launched himself in these final weeks into the ‘masochism strategy’ mentioned in Chapter 5, making his case directly and repeatedly to hostile audiences, of journalists, MPs, Labour Party activists, and ordinary people. Although some opponents accepted that he might yet win the argument (Toynbee 2003a), this period was marked more than anything else by the emergence of “Mark 2” Tony Blair, “a man who was once known as consensual, accommodating, even insecure at times”, now “possessed of certainty” in the face

of concerted antipathy (Stothard 2003, 13, 3). In Glasgow he had told the Labour Party that unpopularity was “the price of leadership and the cost of conviction” (Blair 2003e). Shortly afterwards he told *The Guardian* that, whatever contemporary Public Opinion might say, ultimately history would be his judge (Ashley 2003b). He knew the risks. He knew, as he told Campbell repeatedly, that he might lose his job, or the broad coalition of public support upon which his power depended (Blair 2003f, Campbell and Stott 2007, 669-672). By late February “there was talk of mass resignations from party activists, of meltdown in the local elections, of several resignations from the Cabinet – perhaps even of Blair having to stand down” (Kampfner 2003, 283). He was not oblivious to this, as Robin Cook later suggested he might have been (Cook 2003, 314). He was simply unperturbed. He had made his choice, and he planned to see it through. From a purely rational perspective, such a position makes little sense. It becomes explicable only in light of the overwhelming strength of Blair’s belief at this stage in the rectitude of his chosen course. As Campbell put it, “somebody who has been elected Prime Minister and wants to get re-elected, does not do something as difficult and controversial [as this] unless they really, really, really believe that they should be doing it” (Campbell 2010b, 54, cf. Dumbrell 2009, 278, Powell 2010a, 137). Blair had not been so incautious in the face of hostile Public Opinion in domestic matters (Chandler 2003, 302-303). But when it came to confronting Iraq, he was a ‘true believer’ (Cox 2005, 218).

Chapter 1 introduced the idea that the beliefs held by key policymakers might affect the ability of public opinion to influence foreign policy. Tony Blair’s beliefs affected in at least three distinct ways the level of public input into the decision to take Britain to war in Iraq, by supporting him in choosing not to accept the structural pressures being placed upon him. As noted above, Blair trusted the superiority of his own judgement over that of others, regardless of their station or experience, when faced with a difficult moral dilemma. He believed in the need for regime change in Iraq as a matter both of conscience and of national interest, and even that those two motivators were indelibly linked. He believed that the role of political

leaders was to *lead* the public debate; to take positions ahead of the consensus and to bring people along with them through logical argument and sheer force of will, rather than to listen to alternative views and seek to strike a compromise. The first way in which this constellation of views affected Iraq policy was in terms of its substance. It is unsurprising that a policymaking process “driven from the top by an ideological-minded leader” (Fawn and Hinnebusch 2006, 323) should result in a policymaking outcome that reflected that leader’s core beliefs. Blair’s faith in the capacity of armed intervention to represent a “force for good in the world”, an idea first introduced into the British foreign policy lexicon by Robin Cook just after his appointment as Foreign Secretary (Cook 1997), clearly influenced, maybe even determined, the development of the government’s substantive policy towards Iraq. This effect was reinforced by a second interaction between belief and policymaking. Blair’s unwillingness to accept others’ judgements as viable alternatives to his own, and his repeated insistence on the proper precedence of decision-making over public debate, dramatically constrained the access routes by which the conditioning factors established within Public Opinion might have gained direct traction over British foreign policy. As a number of studies have pointed out, public influence in a representative democracy is inevitably indirect (Foyle 1997, 141, 148, Shannon and Keller 2007, 82, Keller and Yang 2008, 687). The public cannot *force* politicians to change course. Instead, Public Opinion creates conditions in which they might think it desirable to do so. Blair’s conviction that he was right meant he did not anticipate that pressures emanating from Public Opinion would change his mind. His preference for a public debate that followed rather than informed policymaking represented not simply a desire to suppress dissent, but a genuine sense that dissent was misguided, and would evaporate in the face of a proper elucidation of the official line. He did not see Public Opinion as a source of potential policy alternatives, and a source of constraints on his freedom of action, but as a target for persuasion that he could then ignore if he failed adequately to persuade it. He wanted public support, and indeed may well have thought it necessary for a policy to be a

success. He did not want public input. Public input was unnecessary, since he himself already possessed the necessary judgement to make the right decision. That was, after all, why he had been elected. This self-belief underpinned the third mechanism by which Blair's beliefs affected the public-policymaking interaction. Because he was right, and his opponents were wrong, and the need to deal with Iraq was so pressing, Blair was unwilling to change course even if the result was severe or even terminal damage to his political position. He was willing to sacrifice himself, and his government if necessary, rather than concede the substantive point. Nearly every existing model of public influence over policymaking assumes that a rational office-seeking politician will weigh the anticipated future political costs of a course of action against his own belief in its utility. Such was the significance of Blair's 'messiah complex' for his Iraq decisions, however, that he made no such calculation. Listening to Blair discussing his situation in early March, Campbell recalled having "lost count of how many times he said – 1. We are right on this issue, 2. We have to see it through, 3. I'm philosophical about what it means for me and whether I survive or not" (Campbell and Stott 2007, 672).

Blair's certainty actually had a positive impact on Public Opinion. In the final weeks before the war, the suggestion that the Prime Minister was a presidential 'poodle', meekly following his master's orders, became more and more untenable as he risked everything politically, and exhausted himself physically, seeking converts to the pro-war party line. Several observers, including some who had attacked Blair for his slipperiness in taking public stances in the past, were forced to conclude that on this issue "the public Blair is the true Blair" (P. Riddell 2003a, cf. Ahmed 2003, Sieghart 2003a, The Times 2003e, The Sunday Times 2003b, Jenkins 2003a, Osborne 2003, The Independent 2003h, Howard 2003). Not only was he beginning to gain plaudits for the sheer effort he was making to change opponents' minds, Blair was also (finally) dominating the agenda of public debate. Writing after a particularly brutal televised Q&A session with anti-war members of the public, the then ITV political editor Nick Robinson explained the extraordinary journalistic appeal of the situation; "Blair believes

in the rightness of his cause, the logic of his case and his ability to convert people to it. And, for once, there is little downside for the media. The public wants to watch him try" (N. Robinson 2003b). The result was huge media interest in every step of the 'masochism strategy', both in terms of the substantive arguments advanced, and the significance of the strategy itself, particularly for the increasingly shattered premier. Andrew Marr, wondering at the Prime Minister's willingness to endure the punishment meted out by hugely hostile crowds, even asked whether "he is still convinced by his ability, whatever the odds, to win people round? Or is it subtler - that he will gain respect for tackling the genuine critics and not ducking arguments?" (Marr 2003). Blair did gain respect. One observer, who was himself agnostic about military action, wrote that "never again will it be possible to portray this Prime Minister as a politician who would not put on a tie without first consulting a focus group" (Rawnsley 2003). Another, opposed to war, marvelled at Blair's "pure, unadulterated conviction", noting it was "mesmerising...to watch such awesome blind integrity in action" (Orr 2003b). Although there remained a handful of cynics, who rejected the moral argument as just another attempt to 'spin' the coming conflict (cf. P. Hitchens 2003, Watkins 2003b), most commentators agreed with *The Observer* that "even [Blair's] critics should acknowledge the remarkable leadership he is exhibiting" by sticking, quite literally, to his guns, in the face of widespread and vocal hostility (The Observer 2003d, cf. The Daily Mail 2003e, The Guardian 2003e, Malone 2003).

Public hostility was not, however, the only challenge to the Prime Minister's conviction. Despite his evident faith in the case for war, the argument he advanced contained a series of substantive internal weaknesses which came increasingly into focus as the time for action approached. The first weakness lay with the legal grounds for war. Although Lord Goldsmith had confirmed that military action would be legal without a second UNSCR (Brummell 2003), his detailed advice was finely balanced, warning for example that he would not "be confident that [a] court would agree with this view", and maintaining that "the safest legal course would be to secure the adoption of a further resolution" (Goldsmith 2003e). There

was no room for nuance in the government's public communications profile, and such was the concern with "the problem of leaks" that Goldsmith was advised to withhold his detailed commentary even from the Cabinet (Straw 2003e). Instead of the carefully weighed argument received by the Prime Minister, most of his colleagues saw only the summary letter prepared for Parliament, which confirmed that the legal case was sound, but did not allude to the difficulties behind the position (Goldsmith 2003f). The later revelation, discussed in Chapter 7, that there existed two versions of the Attorney General's legal advice prompted suggestions that Downing Street had sought to mislead the Cabinet by pressing for amendments to the original (Short 2010). In fact, as the memo from Jack Straw cited here shows, Goldsmith *had* been asked to rewrite his advice to make his approval of the use of force more categorical between the 7 March note to the Prime Minister and the 17 March version released to MPs and the public. Cabinet was not the primary target audience for the rewrite, however; rather the concern expressed by Straw was with the way the legal case would be perceived by the public if it appeared to be uncertain. So equivocal had been Goldsmith's conclusion that the FCO deputy legal adviser felt unable to concur with it, and resigned (Wilmshurst 2003). The fear expressed by Straw was that Public Opinion would interpret any uncertainty in the government's case as a sign of weakness. The fact remained, however, that the legal case *did* contain an element of uncertainty. A second UNSCR would have been preferable, Goldsmith made clear. It simply was not deliverable.

In addition to this legal shakiness, Blair's belief that Iraq posed a threat to international peace and security, and even directly to the UK, was being challenged by early 2003. Having taken advantage of a personal intelligence briefing from John Scarlett, Robin Cook came to the conclusion "that Saddam probably does not have weapons of mass destruction in the sense of weapons that could be used against large-scale civilian targets". He even thought Blair "did not believe it himself" by this stage (Cook 2003, 299, 312). The claims made in the September dossier remained the official position. They had begun to look less certain in these final weeks,

however. For example, two major elements of the case against the Iraqi nuclear programme were dismissed by the IAEA at the UN on 7 March. Updating the Security Council on the nuclear component of the UNMOVIC inspection process, Mohamed El-Baradei reported that aluminium tubes identified in the dossier as potential components in Iraqi nuclear centrifuges were nothing of the sort, and that documents released by the British government purporting to show efforts by Iraq to purchase yellowcake for refinement into enriched uranium were (blatant) forgeries – by whom remains unclear (Blix 2004, 211). The nuclear threat had always been the strongest component of the case against Iraq; nuclear weapons are by far the most destructive of the WMD trio. The IISS had estimated in September 2002 that Iraq could be nuclear-armed within nine months if left unsupervised, although it was unclear whether it could produce a credible delivery system in that time. In March 2003, however, the IAEA was preparing to announce that no Iraqi nuclear threat existed. The absence of a ‘smoking gun’ could be explained away (more or less effectively, depending on the audience) as a consequence of Iraqi deception. Had the IAEA reached a settled conclusion that no Iraqi nuclear programme existed, however, that would have been far harder for the British government to dismiss. At the same time, questions were beginning to be asked about the suggestion that Saddam Hussein’s rule was an inherently destabilising force in an already volatile region. Having listened to Blair’s 25 February statement, Cook wrote that “whatever else we might say about the Iraqi regime, it is not unstable. Indeed, the problem with Saddam is that the regime is proving only too damn stable” (Cook 2003, 303). Cook apparently did not keep this observation to himself; it was reported in the following day’s press, albeit with no specific source identified (Carr 2003b).

Despite all this, Blair remained convinced that Iraq posed a threat. He was psychologically predisposed to distrust Saddam Hussein by this stage. His experience of dealing with dictators since coming to office, and Iraq’s evident failure to engage fully with UNMOVIC had convinced him that there was no alternative to military action if the threat was to be

alleviated. The existence of a clear predisposition on Blair's part here helps explain his failure to update his position in light of new evidence established by UNMOVIC, and new ideas being generated within British public debate. In addition, it again supports the suggestion that the capacity of the public to influence British policy towards Iraq was constrained by the Prime Minister's personal beliefs. Blair was both unprepared to change position, and unwilling even to consider the validity of others' views. Critics from outside of the government stood little chance, in such circumstances, of getting a fair or effective hearing.

Freedom fries

It has been suggested that, forced to choose between the US and Europe, Blair showed his pro-US leanings in moving against Iraq (Gamble and Kearns 2007, 121). His government certainly put considerable effort into attacking the position taken by President Chirac during the final weeks of the build-up to war. Ministers' efforts represented a last-ditch effort to win public support by playing on the prejudices of a British press primed to respond favourably to an anti-French narrative (cf. H. Evans 2003, Rees-Mogg 2003, The Sun 2003a, 2003c, The News of the World 2003b, The Times 2003d). There was, at the same time, genuine frustration within Whitehall at Chirac's behaviour (Blair 2010b, 119). On 5 March, Russia, Germany and France had issued a joint declaration noting the successes of the inspection programme, and calling for more progress. It stated "in these circumstances, we will not let a proposed resolution pass that would authorise the use of force. Russia and France, as permanent members of the Security Council, will assume all their responsibilities on this point" (Ehrenberg, et al. 2010, 143). It was a strong statement, but it reflected known disagreements, and did not rule out the possibility of some common ground yet being reached. Blair still hoped to find his way to consensus, but he had all along hedged his bets in dealing with the UN, as Chapter 5 discusses, by introducing the concept of an 'unreasonable' veto. He was, however, caught unprepared when Chirac told French television on 9 March that, faced with a

UN resolution authorising the use of force against Iraq, “whatever the circumstances, France will vote no” (Chirac 2003). The French President had perhaps been “emboldened by the Security Council victory [on 14 February, an anti-war statement by Dominique de Villepin had drawn a spontaneous round of applause from delegates], buoyed by the support of two permanent members and a preponderance of nonpermanent members, and encouraged by the tone of European public opinion” to speak as he did (Marfleet and Miller 2005, 339). He may also have felt pressure to avoid inflaming tensions within France’s restive Muslim population (Hill 2007, 272). Whatever the reason for Chirac’s statement, it meant for Britain the end of the second resolution. Non-permanent members of the Security Council, desperate to avoid falling out with supporters and trading partners among the divided P5, were unlikely to risk going out on a limb to support the US if any resolution would be vetoed regardless. The moment Chirac spoke, the “situation” with regard to the second resolution “became terminal” (Straw 2010a, 19).

French intransigence had thus scuttled the centrepiece of the British government’s frantic search for legitimacy. It also offered a way out, however. Ministers and spokesmen moved quickly to accuse France of wrecking the UN process. Clare Short has labelled this tactic “one of the big deceptions” of the government’s case for war (Short 2010, 104), and it is true that, “whatever the subsequent spin...at no point was [the outcome at the Security Council] even close to being determined by the French vote” (Kampfner 2003, 287). Britain never secured the nine votes needed to pass a resolution, irrespective of a veto (Greenstock 2009b, 72). However, “it was now down to political survival and, in Blair’s eyes, the ends justified the means” (Kampfner 2003, 288). If he could not have a second resolution, he needed at least to find a reason that Public Opinion would accept as to why Britain should proceed without one. Anti-war actors took little notice of the attempt to blame France for what had occurred (The Guardian 2003h, 2003i, 2003j, The Independent 2003g, Cornwell 2003c, The Mirror 2003d), but the overall impact on the debate was huge. Respected Labour MP and Chairman of the

Foreign Affairs Committee Donald Anderson complained that “so long as ‘immediate’ is not defined as ‘immediate’, and ‘final’ not defined as ‘final’, the Security Council will lose credibility for its own resolutions” (D. Anderson, Hansard 2003g, c175). *The Sun* compared Chirac to “a cheap tart who puts price before principle, money before honour”, maintaining a steady stream of similar abuse through to the start of military action (The Sun 2003d, cf. Cunningham 2003, The Sun 2003e, 2003f, Kavanagh 2003a, Wooding 2003). Other commentators on the pro-war side of the debate were less colourful but no less critical in their characterisation of the French President (The Daily Telegraph 2003e, 2003f, The Times 2003g, 2003h, 2003i, The Sunday Times 2003c). Although the main immediate impact was on the pro-war press, by 15 March reports suggested “several MPs who intended to oppose Mr Blair have been won round by the government's campaign to blame France for scuppering the efforts to reach agreement at the UN” (Grice 2003b), while an ICM poll published on 16 March showed 51% of respondents thought Chirac “has poisoned the diplomatic process” while 61% said “France has put its own interests above the rest of the world by opposing war” (The News of the World 2003d, cf. Smith & Speed 2003). Clearly the case against France had considerable popular resonance, particularly when emphasised in this way by poll results, in a rare example of such figures actually being helpful to the pro-war argument.

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the government stuck by its line despite frantic efforts by French officials to qualify Chirac's position. On 12 March Matthew Rycroft emailed Powell, Manning, Campbell and others in No. 10 to report a conversation with Gerard Errera, the French Ambassador to London, in which the latter insisted Chirac's remarks had been taken out of context, and “it is not the case that he said that he would vote no against any resolution” (Rycroft 2003b). The following day, British Ambassador to France Sir John Holmes cabled London to report a “complaint from the Élysée about our beginning to criticise France more openly, particularly Chirac's remarks about the veto...[and] our repeated taking out of context of the President's remarks on the veto in all circumstances. We must be well

aware that he had been talking about the particular position that evening, with the draft then on the table". Holmes records having responded that "our position can hardly surprise the French, nor the fact that we are using Chirac's words against him when the stakes are so high – he did say them, even if he may not have meant to express quite *what we have chosen to interpret*" (Holmes 2003, emphasis added). Further evidence that British officials knew they were playing a game, and felt comfortable playing it, comes from a response to Holmes sent by Sir Peter Ricketts, FCO Political Director, describing an exchange with Errera that closely mirrored Holmes's report; "he began with some remonstrating...I brandished *Le Monde* at him with the quotation prominent on the front page. The French should not be surprised if Ministers were contrasting this with the constant efforts we were making to build common ground in the Security Council" (Ricketts 2003). British diplomats and, through their reports, ministers, were thus aware that the French believed Chirac had been misquoted, and that it had not been the President's intention to terminate the negotiation process entirely. At the same time, those same diplomats were well aware of the political value to the government of *choosing* to interpret Chirac's statements in a particular way. The characterisation of a Security Council veto, whether threatened or actual, as 'unreasonable' might have no legal force, but its value to a government struggling to establish the legitimacy of its chosen course could prove immeasurable. Ministers must have known, indeed they clearly did know, that France remained officially open to compromise. No actual veto had been cast at the UN, and two French warships were en route to the Gulf region as part of Chirac's own contingency plan for military action. They were desperate, however, to reconcile the US military countdown, which had nearly reached its end, with their own earlier promises that Britain would act only with a UN mandate. Blaming France for wrecking their own honest attempts to reach a consensus gave them a potential out. At ministerial level, Jack Straw had told De Villepin "that Chirac's statement...had caused great difficulties. It was clear that France would veto. Villepin said that Chirac had never said that. Chirac had not meant that France would not try to find common

ground. He had not meant that, whatever happened, France would vote no". In a telling phrase, the note of Straw's discussion with de Villepin records that "the Foreign Secretary said that he read the comments differently" (Straw 2003d). Having been told by the French Foreign Minister that his interpretation of French foreign policy was wrong, Straw nevertheless stuck to it. Just as Blair was psychologically unprepared to update his views on the Iraqi threat in response either to public protest or new evidence, so too Straw may have been unable to accept the failure of the UN process, without at least the comfort of an alternative narrative in which that failure resulted from the unreasonableness of the French. More than any other member of the British government, Straw was associated with the attempt to work through the UN. Just as Colin Powell's advocacy of the UN route in the US had left him vulnerable to attacks from within the administration (Stelzer 2003), so too Straw's past positions were such that any outcome other than a second resolution, or an 'unreasonable veto', would have damaged his credibility and may even have been literally unthinkable for him.

Chirac's statement was not the only example of apparent French obstructionism upon which Straw (and Blair) could draw, and it is important in noting the impact of the apparent spin placed on the President's words to acknowledge also the genuine spirit of Gallic intransigence in which they had been delivered. Seeking a compromise on a second resolution, Jeremy Greenstock had worked with Hans Blix to draw up 'six tests' by which Saddam's willingness to comply immediately with his obligations could be measured. The idea was to create a crisis, forcing Iraq either to meet or to refuse to meet a set of clear, UN-mandated, short-term targets. Presented on the night of 13 March, the six tests were denounced by de Villepin before they had even been seen by Iraq. Alastair Campbell seized on de Villepin's hastiness as creating an opportunity "to go to an aggressive position re French intransigence" (Campbell and Stott 2007, 677). On 17 March, Jack Straw ordered the withdrawal of the second resolution without a vote, stating "President Chirac's unequivocal announcement last Monday that France would veto a second resolution containing that or any ultimatum

‘whatever the circumstances’ inevitably created a sense of paralysis in our negotiations...France has thereby put a Security Council consensus beyond reach” (Straw, Hansard 2003h, c703). He had Conservative support both for withdrawing the draft resolution, and for blaming France for its failure (Ancram, Hansard 2003h, c705). Even Bill Clinton spoke up in Britain against Chirac (Clinton 2003). Although the claim had no legal effect (Goldsmith 2003e), and had already been widely challenged as a possible source of legitimacy for action taken without explicit UN support, the government’s final position was thus that France had unreasonably vetoed efforts to agree a collective UN decision to use force against Iraq.

The opposition

“Thomas Jefferson once argued that ‘a little rebellion now and then is a good thing’. He did not, however, have to lead the British Labour party” (The Times 2003c).

By March 2003 the British public was increasingly attentive to the issue of Iraq, and indeed becoming increasingly active in its opposition to military action, as the scale of the 15 February protest suggested. Ordinarily passive actors were expressing opinions on the prospect of war with growing regularity “in the pub, at the school gates or on the radio”, as more established commentators noted (Moore 2003, cf. Chaytor, Hansard 2003g, c228, Odone 2003, Greenslade 2003, Woolf 2003, Routledge 2003d). Some observers maintained, in line with the Almond-Lippmann consensus view discussed in Chapter 1, that “most people are less interested in foreign wars than in their quality of life at home” (The Sunday Telegraph 2003b, Routledge 2003b), but the sheer scale of the 15 February marches largely undermines the notion that the Iraq issue failed to capture the public imagination. An attentive public is soon a more active public, and the more active the public becomes, the greater the volume of Public Opinion on a given issue. The case against war was weakened, however, by a number of internal shortcomings. People may have distrusted Bush, or even Blair, but no-one wanted to stand up for Saddam Hussein (The Daily Telegraph 2003c). This meant there was no positive agenda for the broad coalition of anti-war voices to advance (Hari 2003b). Polls may have

showed majorities opposed to military action *without a specific UN mandate* in March 2003, but they never suggested the passive public would reject the prospect of war outright. Indeed, the picture painted by opinion polls in the media at this time was likely distorted by journalists' focus on the UN. The government bothered to blame France for the collapse of negotiations over the second resolution largely in order to counteract media efforts to frame the UN process as all-important. Getting acceptance for a line which justified the missing second resolution could make the difference between having a majority of voters in favour of war, and having a majority against.

Meanwhile, anti-war sentiment was confused, based around dissatisfaction with government communication efforts and with the impact of the US military timetable on efforts to achieve peaceful disarmament in Iraq, outlined in Chapter 5, rather than any sense that Saddam Hussein deserved sympathy or support. Much of the active opposition, particularly that of the apolitical individuals who took to the streets in February, represented more "a howl of rage over lies and spin" (The Daily Mail 2003c), a protest against official communications rather than a considered critique of the substantive policy being advanced (cf. Kennedy, Hansard 2003e, c129, Ancram, Hansard 2003f, c280, Cormack, *ibid.*, c299, Savidge, Hansard 2003g, c200, Chaytor, *ibid.*, c228, Keane 2003a, Parris 2003, Dobbie 2003, The Mail on Sunday 2003, The Sunday Mirror 2003a, D'Ancona 2003b, The Daily Mail 2003c, 2003d, McKay 2003, Phillips 2003, Carr 2003a, Whittam Smith 2003, The Daily Telegraph 2003d, Daley 2003b, Iannucci 2003, Norton-Taylor 2003b, Barnett 2003b, Orr 2003a, Dejevsky 2003, Hattersley 2003, B. Anderson 2003a, The Independent on Sunday 2003d, Galloway 2003, Honderich 2003, The Mirror 2003d, Williams 2005, 192-193). In addition, anti-war protesters at every level found their position undermined by the impression, as one commentator noted, that "many of them are not really opposed to wars of intervention at all" (Hume 2003, cf. The Sun 2003b, Humphrys 2003b, S. Shakespeare 2003). For example, in moving an amendment to the government's motion during the 26 February debate, anti-war MP Chris Smith conceded that

he did “not take the view that military action is never, ever likely to be required. There may well be a time when it becomes necessary” (Smith, Hansard 2003f, c286, cf. Rogers 2003). He argued that such a time had not yet been reached, rather than that it never would be reached. Of the 199 MPs who supported Smith’s amendment, 76 failed to oppose the main motion, and of those 20 even voted in favour of it, having accepted the proposition that Iraq should comply with the will of the UN even as they rejected the argument that its failure to comply warranted war.

The anti-war camp also lacked leaders. The government’s ‘official’ opposition, the Conservative Party, supported military action, and had in any event a weak public profile. Press coverage, when it considered the Conservatives worthy of comment at all (which was rarely), frequently dismissed them as “irrelevant” (Collins 2003, cf. Hames 2003b, Travis 2003, M. Brown & O’Grady 2003, The Guardian 2003c, Hattersley 2003, P. Riddell 2003b, White 2003b, Finkelstein 2003d, Buckland 2003). Opposition leader Iain Duncan Smith, in theory the leading alternative to Tony Blair as Prime Minister, was labelled “Mr Thing”, “baldilocks”, and “a disaster” (Carr 2003d, Routledge 2003a, Stewart 2003b). One poll found 71% of respondents thought “there is no real political opposition in this country” (The Sunday Times 2003a); as usual, it is unlikely such a question would even have been asked had journalists not already come up with their own answer. Certainly there was no credible alternative to Labour as the party of government. This was significant for the public’s ability to influence policymaking. Politicians need only fear their policies becoming unpopular if their rivals offer credible alternatives, so that a choice might be established at a future election. Absent that fear, the threat that even an unpopular position might be used against them is greatly mitigated.

As it was, the greatest political challenge to Tony Blair’s position came from within his own party. That Labour MPs were less willing to countenance military action than their Conservative opponents has been discussed. The Liberal Democrats were anti-war, but they were too few in number seriously to affect parliamentary arithmetic. With a commanding

overall majority in the Commons, the government could only be prevented from carrying out its policy by a massive Labour revolt, a position strengthened still further by Conservative support. The government might alternatively have collapsed as a result of internal divisions, should these reach a sufficient degree of intensity. In the Cabinet, International Development Secretary Clare Short, and Leader of the House (and former Foreign Secretary) Robin Cook had each expressed doubts about the course to war. Short moved first. On 10 March she gave a radio interview attacking Blair as “reckless” and threatening publicly that she would resign in the event of war (Short 2003). In violation of both the convention of collective Cabinet responsibility, and the Labour Party’s own communications policies, she had given the interview on her own initiative, without consulting even her own department, let alone Alastair Campbell (Chakrabarti 2003). Crucially, too, she had failed to discuss the extent of her concerns in private with the Prime Minister, before expressing them on air. To Blair, Short was merely “being her usual self” (Blair 2010b, 428). He might have sacked her, but instead she became another target for his persuasion efforts. At first this lenience appeared a sign of weakness, of a desire to avoid making martyrs at a time of great tension in the Labour Party (Cook 2003, 316, Stothard 2003, 7, Glover 2003, Routledge 2003c, Jones 2003a, The Times 2003f). Some commentators noted, however, that a more Machiavellian spin could be put on Blair’s behaviour, suggesting his goal was to discredit Short by convincing her to make a u-turn (White 2003c, Jones 2003c). Whether it was Blair’s intention or not, Short was definitely discredited. Her interview was described as “self-serving, personalised and incompatible with her position as a member of Mr Blair’s Cabinet” (The Independent 2003e, cf. P. Riddell 2003c, Lee-Potter 2003, The News of the World 2003c). “The pointed contrast with Robin Cook” was noted (D. MacIntyre 2003d). When she then failed to resign, she became “a laughing stock” (Wilson 2003b); literally, in fact. In writing his satirical cinematic take on the Iraq war, 2009’s *In the Loop*, the comedian Armando Iannucci drew on Short’s autobiography to construct the central character, a hapless International Development Minister. One scene repeated Short’s

words almost verbatim (Iannucci 2009). Contemplating resignation in the face of war in the Middle East, which he opposes, the minister asks “ is it braver to do the wrong thing, and not resign?”. His callow special adviser equivocates; the cynical civil servant travelling with them answers simply, exasperated, “no!” (Hollander, Addison and McKee 2009). British Public Opinion took a similarly dim view of Short’s behaviour. When she finally resigned in May 2003, her reputation lay in tatters.

Robin Cook was potentially more dangerous to Blair, if only because he had managed to use the media as a conduit for making his private concerns public without destroying his own credibility in the process. Cook, however, was determined to avoid damaging Blair as far as possible; he remained a supporter of the Prime Minister’s domestic policies and, perhaps more importantly, a sworn enemy of his likely successor, Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown. Cook had expressed concerns throughout the build-up to war, and at Cabinet on 13 March he strongly hinted he would not remain in government once the fighting began (Stothard 2003, 38). The next day, he met Alastair Campbell to discuss “rules of engagement” for his leaving office, and the pair agreed the text of both Cook’s resignation letter and the Prime Minister’s response (Cook 2003, 322, Campbell and Stott 2007, 677). They also agreed the timing of the announcement, and that Cook would make his resignation statement to the House on 17 March, the night before the main parliamentary debate on Iraq, rather than during the debate itself. Although the entire exchange demonstrated unwillingness on Cook’s part to damage Blair, this latter agreement was particularly important. Despite maintaining “I have no sympathy with, and I will give no comfort to, those who want to use this crisis to displace [Blair]”, in explaining his decision to step down, Cook proceeded in his statement to challenge systematically the Prime Minister’s core arguments in favour of war. Had he spoken directly before the Prime Minister at the start of the following day’s debate, the effect could have been devastating. Applauding the “heroic efforts” made to get a second resolution, Cook argued “the very intensity of those attempts underlines how important it was to succeed”.

Recalling government efforts to portray France as wreckers of the UN process, he noted “it is not France alone that wants more time for inspections. Germany wants more time for inspections; Russia wants more time for inspections; indeed, at no time have we signed up even the minimum necessary to carry a second resolution”. Considering the level of the threat from Iraq, he observed “ironically, it is only because Iraq's military forces are so weak that we can even contemplate its invasion”, insisting with some incredulity that “we cannot base our military strategy on the assumption that Saddam is weak and at the same time justify pre-emptive action on the claim that he is a threat”. As for WMD, “Iraq probably has no weapons of mass destruction in the commonly understood sense of the term”. The US had sought a UN process only to make “the case for war”, hence “why any evidence that inspections may be showing progress is greeted in Washington not with satisfaction but with consternation” (Cook, Hansard 2003h, cc726-728). The speech prompted a standing ovation from assembled MPs. Unlike most parliamentary speeches, it was not interrupted by heckling or interventions. Cook was left to elaborate his argument for ten minutes unfettered and without rebuttal. Blair was not present, but Straw sat impassive on the government bench throughout. The press thought Cook’s performance “electrifying” (Waugh & Woolf 2003, P. Riddell 2003d). He had delivered a “masterclass in foreign policy analysis” (Brogan 2003) which had “swept away the cobweb of lies and obfuscation” constructed by the government (Routledge 2003e), delivering a “dynamite blast of dissent...without self-pity” (Letts 2003a), “dignified and measured, yet all the more coruscating for that” (Waugh 2003b). Only *The Sun* refused to join the praise, dedicating its 18 March leading article to describing Cook (and Short) as “the enemy within” (The Sun 2003g).

Cook’s statement had hit the official case for war hard, but his decision not to risk undermining Blair blunted its impact. Short had proven not to be credible as an anti-war leader. The Liberal Democrats opposed war, but struggled to be heard, and their parliamentary clout was constrained by their limited numbers. There were, furthermore, divisions among

those public figures traditionally on the political left who might have been expected to oppose military action. Several found themselves reviving the 'hard liberal' line devised by Polly Toynbee in October 2001 and discussed in Chapter 2. *The Observer* newspaper, for example, took a pro-war stance, calling in effect for regime change on humanitarian grounds. Labour left-winger Ann Clwyd MP, a respected and established parliamentary authority on Iraq, pushed the same position (Clwyd, Hansard 2003f, c321, cf. *The Observer* 2003c, Cohen 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, Hari 2003a, Aaronovitch 2003). Although the moral case for war put by the government was dismissed in some quarters as "a confidence trick" (Plesch 2003), the fact that it was adopted independently by a number of actors who might otherwise have been expected to oppose military action was of great significance for the overall tenor of Public Opinion. It also reinforced the fact that there was no coherent anti-war alternative.

Opponents of military action were further discouraged from speaking out by a desire to support British troops, either through genuine belief (Cordingley 2003, *The Daily Mail* 2003f), or fear of media opprobrium, possibly mindful of *The Sun's* lists of "traitors" during the Afghan campaign (Robinson, et al. 2009, 537). Many also appeared to accept that military action had, by March 2003, become inevitable. If a million marchers could only convince the Prime Minister to redouble his efforts at persuasion, there was a sense that nothing would change his substantive position. Indeed, the protesters' choice of 'not in my name' as a primary slogan reflected this fatalism. They thought war would probably happen regardless. They wanted simply to register their disagreement before it began (Keane 2003b, cf. Woods 2003, Harris 2003). As the *Daily Telegraph* put it on the day of the war debate: "the time has passed when war could be averted, so any vote against war cannot be effective or persuasive. Such a vote turns, then, from being an expression of principle to being an act of defeatism" (*The Daily Telegraph* 2003g). Blair had insisted all along that no debate could take place on the use of force against Iraq until a firm decision had been taken. By denying a role for Public Opinion in the decision-making process in this way, he had drawn criticism. What the manner

in which the 18 March vote was approached reveals, however, is the clear strategic advantage gained by the determined refusal to engage in public debate, at least in terms of the Prime Minister's ability to implement his chosen policy. Asked to comment on hypothetical scenarios, such as the failure to get a second UN resolution to authorise military action, he had always refused, insisting that he remained confident no such scenario would arise (cf. Finkelstein 2003c). The motion debated in Parliament on 26 February simply proposed support for the government's efforts to work through the UN, making no mention of military action. It was thus not until 18 March that MPs were given the chance to debate and vote on the particular combination of circumstances which actually pertained when war began, namely the absence of a clear conclusion to the UN process, but also the imminence of an unstoppable US assault. By this point, it probably *was* too late for opposition to be effective. Just as small states at the UN saw little point in sticking their necks out to support a doomed Security Council Resolution once France had confirmed it would veto, so too backbench MPs, by mid-March 2003, recognised that the US was going to war regardless, and that the British government would almost certainly go along with it. Why risk standing out?

There was a further sense that Labour MPs opposed to war, but otherwise supportive of the government (and the Prime Minister in particular), found themselves effectively having to choose between the two positions; this had been Cook's dilemma. Once the government had committed to a vote authorising the use of force, the possibility arose that MPs could prevent at least British involvement in the Iraq campaign. They could do so, however, only at the cost of bringing down the government, a position underscored when the left-wing Campaign Group of MPs began calling for an emergency Party conference to replace Blair (Kampfner 2003, 294). By 12 March, a number of Labour Parliamentary Private Secretaries were backtracking from earlier suggestions that they might resign over Iraq, fearful of the negative impact on the government (Watt & Perkins 2003). Public Opinion concluded that Labour might disagree with Blair on Iraq, but was unwilling to sacrifice him to see that

disagreement through (Jones 2003b, cf. Watson & Webster 2003, Sparrow 2003, Sieghart 2003b, C. Brown & Elliott 2003, Kavanagh 2003b). At a dramatic PLP meeting on 13 March, “the enormity of it dawned on the rank and file: the most successful Labour prime minister ever, the only one to win two huge majorities, was facing open rebellion” (Carr-Brown et al. 2003). Diana Organ, who was sceptical about the need for war, nevertheless led a number of anti-war MPs in standing up for Blair. His harshest critics were shouted down; Tam Dalyell stormed out. On 15 March a meeting at Downing Street involving Blair, Labour Party Chairman John Reid, and a number of key advisers agreed to give MPs a chance to get back to their constituencies, where “local Labour leaders, chairmen of constituency parties, may remind them why they were elected in the first place, why, without Tony Blair, there would not be a Labour government” (Stothard 2003, 52). As Matthew D’Ancona put it, in the final week before the war began, most Labour MPs had remembered something he thought “blindingly obvious...the public did not vote for Labour in 1997 and 2001: it voted for Blair” (D’Ancona 2003c). Ironically, then, for all his conviction, for all his persuasive efforts, Blair approached the 18 March debate with a reasonably good chance of success *both* because of *and* in spite of the strength of his commitment to action against Iraq.

Path dependence

Chapter 5 hints at the damage done to the government’s efforts to win public support by the continued public perception that the US had decided at an early stage to wage war come what may, and that Britain was simply struggling to justify tagging along. Ken Clarke summed up the thoughts of many during the 26 February parliamentary debate, expressing the belief “that the course to war upon which we are now embarked was decided on many months ago, primarily in Washington, and there has been a fairly remorseless unfolding of events since that time” (Clarke, Kenneth, Hansard 2003f, c294). Concerns of this sort, which were distinct from dissatisfaction with excessive spin, abounded during the final weeks (cf.

Smith, *ibid.*, c286, Gummer, *ibid.*, c310, Clarke, Tom, *ibid.*, c349, Illsley, Hansard 2003g, c192, The Mirror 2003b, M. Campbell 2003, Sardar 2003, The Independent 2003a, 2003c, 2003h, The Guardian 2003e, 2003f, D. MacIntyre 2003c, Morgan 2003, Dawkins 2003, Hastings 2003a, 2003b, The Sunday Mirror 2003b, The Independent on Sunday 2003e, Richards 2003c, La Guardia 2003, Howard 2003, Maddox 2003b, Jenkins 2003b, Kaletsky 2003). As well as worrying whether the government was telling the truth, Blair admitted, “people want to know that war is not inevitable” (Blair 2003f). He apparently told Bush “the public opinion problem stemmed from people feeling the US wanted a war” come what may, rather than from any real disagreement with the objective of disarming Iraq and overthrowing Saddam Hussein (Campbell and Stott 2007, 674). This certainly was part of the problem. Further issues resulted, however, from the undeniable fact that the Prime Minister believed that standing “shoulder to shoulder” with the US was *both* in the British national interest *and* inherently right (Blair 2010b, 352). By February 2003 Blair’s evident *belief* in the Iraq policy had mitigated the “poodle problem” (Campbell and Stott 2007, 669) to a degree, in that commentators had largely accepted that, whatever his motives, he was not blindly following presidential orders. Nevertheless, the conflation of values and interests in Blair’s view of the ‘special relationship’ continued to cause confusion. The public would likely have accepted that the government was supporting the US out of pure *realpolitik*, seeking to stay close to Britain’s most powerful ally (Hollis 2006, 38, Stothard 2003, 107). Blair however made it clear (Blair 2003f, Blair 2010a, 62, 129) that, rather than making a rational calculation of interest, he had been driven primarily by values. He *believed* in the US alliance; it was “an article of faith” (Blair, Hansard 2002m, c21, cf. Dumbrell 2009, 275, Dyson 2006, 289, Kennedy-Pipe and Vickers 2007, 207, Kramer 2003, Campbell 2010a, 32). The British people might have understood *realpolitik*. They did not, indeed could not, share Blair’s fervour (Tyrie, Hansard 2003g, c217, Humphrys 2003a).

It was faith in the special relationship which had, however, effectively “trapped” the Prime Minister into military action (Coates and Krieger 2009, 248-249). By early 2003, the fact

that he could turn back only at great cost, in terms both of domestic and international credibility, was widely noted (The Mail on Sunday 2003, Stott 2003, Clark 2003, Alexander 2003, The Guardian 2003g, Cornwell 2003b, Richards 2003b). The effect was compounded by ministers' continued insistence that the choice they faced was solely between war and capitulation (Straw 2003c, Blair, Hansard 2003e, cc124-125). Chapter 5 notes the growing sense that the confrontation with Iraq was developing independent momentum towards war. As the moment of decision drew closer, observers began to express concerns about that sense of unstoppable escalation. One columnist referred to the US experience in Vietnam, warning that states commit themselves to military action far earlier than they might intend, with small decisions establishing positions from which the only credible way forward is war (Finkelstein 2003b). By arguing in April 2002 that Saddam Hussein almost certainly had to be removed from power, in September that he posed a direct threat to the UK, and in early 2003 that he was threatening to undermine the UN, Blair had systematically not just rejected but utterly dismissed the main arguments against British involvement in military action. Only one remained; the fact that the US did not need British military support. By March 2003 the Bush administration was going to war with Iraq regardless, even, of British participation. When Donald Rumsfeld announced on 11 March that Britain might not take part in the initial invasion because of difficulties within the Labour Party, and insisted that the US could and would proceed regardless, it had thus the effect of "reinforcing in the minds of opponents of the war that [Blair] was scampering to give the Americans help they did not really need" (Kampfner 2003, 291, cf. The Independent 2003f, Waterhouse 2003). Despite the potential for political and diplomatic embarrassment, the Prime Minister could have taken Rumsfeld's comments as an opportunity to pull out. The problem was that he "*believed* in military action" (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 161, emphasis in original).

Although the decision to focus the government's communication strategy on the threat from Iraqi WMD, and on the need to uphold UN resolutions, was probably the best that

could have been made at the time, in the end the failure to make the case earlier that removing Saddam was simply ‘the right thing to do’ probably damaged public support (Hollis 2010, 86, cf. B. Anderson 2003b). Chapter 7 discusses the long-term effects of public dissatisfaction with the communication campaign in more detail. Britain’s inability to influence the US timetable (Wallace 2005, 54) might have appeared less problematic had senior ministers’ genuine belief in the need to act against Iraq been established in the public mind at an earlier stage, even though the position itself would have been unpopular. The Prime Minister’s unwillingness to try to restrain the President would at least have been explained. US officials were well aware of Blair’s domestic difficulties, and keen to help if they could. They had accepted the September dossier and the involvement of the UN; they might yet accept a further delay, if Blair asked (Kampfner 2003, 273-274, Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 152, Campbell and Stott 2007, 672). Tony Brenton, Deputy Ambassador in Washington (Meyer having retired by this point), cabled London to report having briefed senior officials (the names are redacted in the declassified paper) on the position in Parliament, observing that “the only event which might significantly affect [the US] timetable would be problems for the UK”, and that for this reason, the Americans were “pulling out all the stops in the UN” (Brenton 2003a). Some British observers suggested Blair could use his domestic situation to apply leverage to Bush (Toynbee 2003b, D. MacIntyre 2003c, White & Wintour 2003, Rawnsley 2003). As Chapter 5 discusses, however, Bush had domestic concerns of his own, having established expectations with his repeated denunciations of Saddam Hussein. The extent to which he would have risked retribution to help his ally was never tested to destruction, in the end.

Endgame

So it was that Tony Blair stood up in Parliament on the afternoon of 18 March 2003 to propose that the House “supports the decision of Her Majesty’s Government that the United Kingdom should use all means necessary to ensure the disarmament of Iraq’s weapons of mass

destruction” (Blair, Hansard 2003i, c760). He knew defeat would mean the end of his premiership (Stothard 2003, 55), but as Chief Whip Hilary Armstrong recalled, “in the end he just thought it was the right thing to do”; another example of the triumph of instinct over calculation in Blair’s policymaking approach (Seldon, Snowdon and Collings 2007, 159). Alastair Campbell thought Robin Cook’s statement had marked “the high point of the rebellion” (Campbell and Stott 2007, 680-681), but Blair still knew he was making “the most important speech I had ever made” (Blair 2010b, 436). He rose to the occasion, mounting a passionate defence of the positions he had taken over the preceding months, and concluding that,

“in this dilemma, no choice is perfect, no choice is ideal, but on this decision hangs the fate of many things...To retreat now, I believe, would put at hazard all that we hold dearest. To turn the United Nations back into a talking shop; to stifle the first steps of progress in the middle east; to leave the Iraqi people to the mercy of events over which we would have relinquished all power to influence for the better; to tell our allies that at the very moment of action, at the very moment when they need our determination, Britain faltered: I will not be party to such a course. This is not the time to falter. This is the time not just for this Government—or, indeed, for this Prime Minister—but for this House to give a lead: to show that we will stand up for what we know to be right; to show that we will confront the tyrannies and dictatorships and terrorists who put our way of life at risk; to show, at the moment of decision, that we have the courage to do the right thing” (Blair, Hansard 2003i, cc773-774).

By insisting “I will not be party to such a course”, Blair spoke to the fears of many Labour MPs that a vote against war would mean the end of their most successful leader ever. He was helped, again, by the lack of strong opposition voices. Iain Duncan Smith argued that “the Prime Minister is acting in the national interest” (Duncan Smith, *ibid.*, c779) in pledging his full support for war. Even the anti-war amendment moved by Peter Kilfoyle was soft, arguing “the case for war against Iraq has not yet been established” before going on to concede that, “in the event that hostilities do commence”, the House should support British forces (Kilfoyle, *ibid.*). A long and serious debate followed; aside from Blair’s opening statement and Straw’s concluding remarks, fifty five MPs spoke. Twenty three opposed war, twenty seven supported it, and five remained unconvinced. The final shape of parliamentary opinion encompassed a broad range of themes. Clare Short was mocked for failing to resign as promised (Hague, *ibid.*,

c791). France was more often blamed for the failure at the UN (Bayley, *ibid.*, c764, MacKay, c804, David, c844, Burnett, c849, Bradley, c856, Jack, c865, Davies, c871, Ancram, c891) than it was defended (Salmond, *ibid.*, c820, Sedgemore, c836, Banks, c880). American unilateralism was attacked (Denham, *ibid.*, c798, Savidge, c817, Marshall-Andrews, c852, Curry, c883, Hoyle, c887), but the point also made that for all the Bush administration's diplomatic heavy-handedness, Saddam Hussein remained the real enemy (Winnick, *ibid.*, c795, Soley, c813). Government communication efforts were criticised (Johnson, *ibid.*, c812, McDonnell, c876) while the Prime Minister's own speech was praised (Mawhinney, *ibid.*, c815). Some MPs reported having been convinced of the need for war (George, *ibid.*, c801, MacKay, c804), others, if not won over, had at least wobbled in their anti-war convictions as a result of Blair's arguments (Quin, *ibid.*, c805, Randall, c827, Hoyle, cc884-885). One particularly confused MP concluded "I cannot vote against a motion that offers support to Her Majesty's armed forces who are now on duty in the middle east. Of course, there are matters in the Government motion with which I do not agree and which I cannot support...[if the amendment fails] I will make my position quite clear. I shall probably have to abstain" (which he did) (Burnett, *ibid.*, c850, cf. Pike, c889). Deciding one will probably not vote, it was pointed out, is a poor way of making one's position quite clear. Crucially, it was acknowledged that "the choice tonight is not whether to prevent war...we cannot prevent war. The choice is either to go in alongside the Americans to topple Saddam Hussein, or to let the Americans go in on their own" (Davies, *ibid.*, c867, cf. Tyrie, c869). By 18 March, when the only real chance opponents had to stop the war arrived, it was already too late to stop the war. The same fatalism which had characterised the final days of public debate in the press descended over Parliament in these final hours. In the end, the amendment was defeated by 396 to 221 votes, and the motion authorising war passed by 412 to 149. Just nine MPs voted for the amendment before switching to support the motion. Unlike during the 26 February vote, when the motion discussed had called only for the

government to support the UN, there remained on 18 March no doubt that MPs were voting for war.

Press coverage attributed the government's success above all to the quality of the Prime Minister's argument, and the passion with which it had been made. Blair had been "furious with intent, fizzing with conviction, at times imploring, at others raging against the recklessness of inaction", "roaring, alive, quivering with ferocious tension, like a sub-lieutenant about to lead a battalion into battle...passionate yet coherent, furious while icily controlled" (Letts 2003b, Hoggart 2003). The speech was "raw, simple, dignified, and bleak: a promise, a plea, and a warning" and "the most persuasive case yet made by the man who has emerged as the most formidable persuader for war" (B. MacIntyre 2003, The Independent 2003i). It was noted that "on the eve of unstoppable war, for some it was too late to be worth damaging the government" (Toynbee 2003c), but also argued that "it was not only the vote that Tony Blair won in the House of Commons last night. It was the argument, too" (The Daily Telegraph 2003h, The Times 2003j). Although *The Guardian* maintained that war was "both unnecessary and avoidable" (The Guardian 2003k), while John Pilger called for open rebellion against the government (Pilger 2003), a general sense that the point had been lost pervaded the anti-war press, which began to focus instead on hopes for Iraq's future (The Independent 2003i). Military action was launched on the night of 19/20 March.

Quantitative indicators

As *figure 26* indicates, once war became imminent, initially anti-war passive public responses to poll questions gave way to a sound pro-war majority, in place by the morning of the 18 March debate, and so in advance both of the final decision by MPs to support war, and the start of hostilities. This shift reflects both a decline in the number of respondents reporting anti-war views, and also in the number of "don't know" responses.

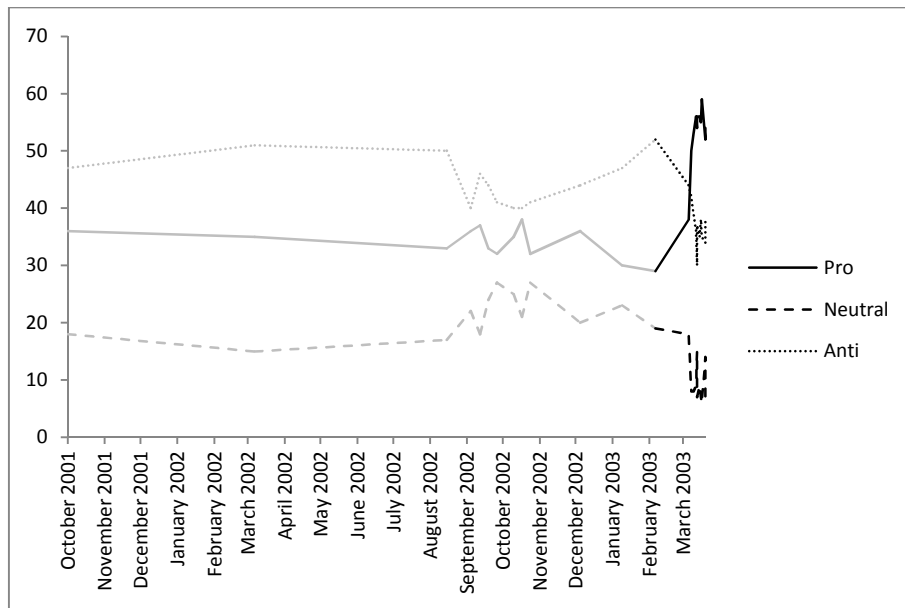


Figure 26: Opinion poll data showing support for military action against Iraq, 15 February – 30 March 2003.

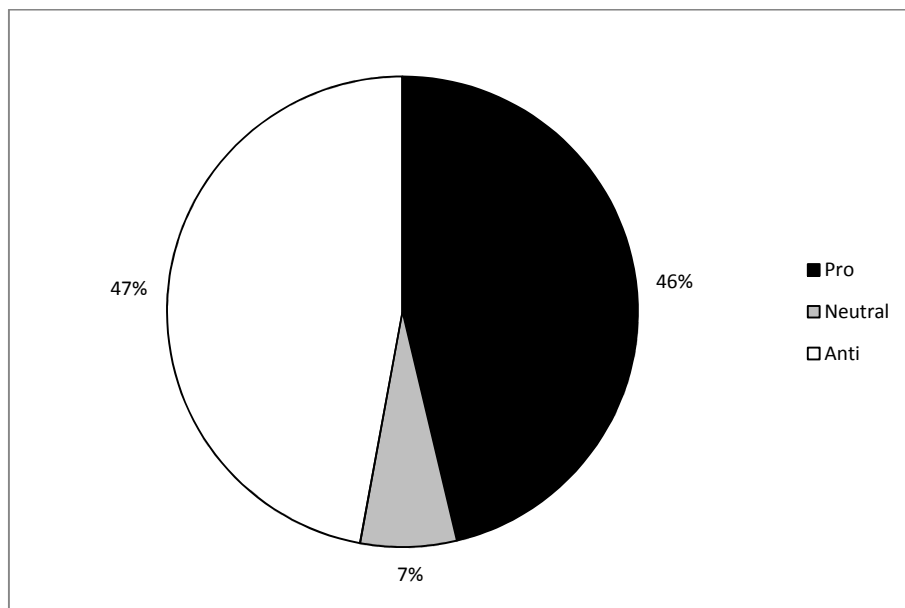


Figure 27: Distribution of speeches by British MPs in debates on Iraq policy between 15 February and 18 March 2003.

The parliamentary debate was more evenly split. What is notable from *figure 27* is the very small proportion of speeches, just 7%, which took a neutral line at this stage. This likely reflects, again, the imminence of a decision, and shows a marked shift from the position reported in Chapter 5, when large numbers of MPs appealed to the judgement of the UN rather than adopting a specific pro or anti-war position for themselves.

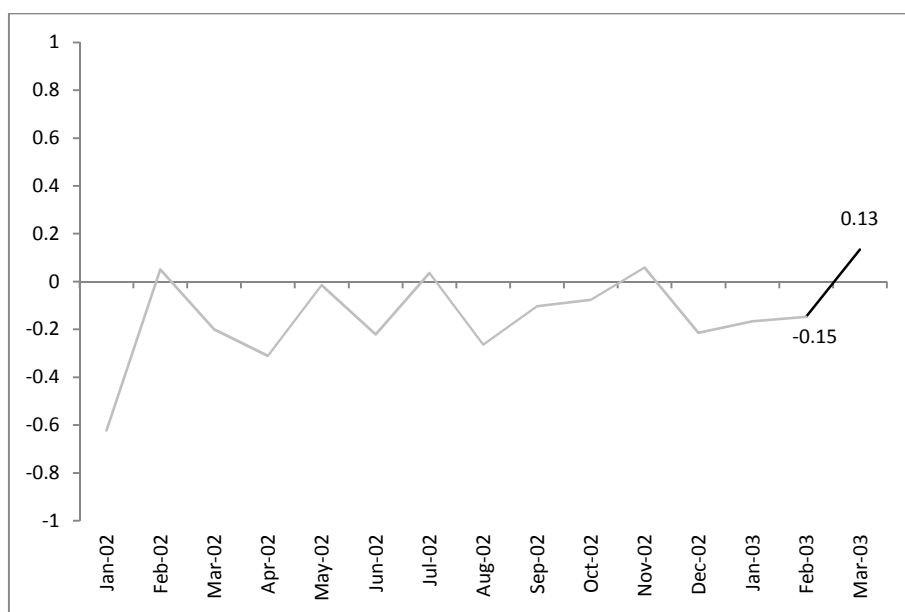


Figure 28: Average editorial positions adopted by leading UK newspapers towards military action in Iraq (1 = pro-war, 0 = neutral, -1 = anti-war), controlling for circulation, October 2002 – February 2003 (n = 911).

Trends in press commentary, outlined in *figure 28*, show a similar pattern to that visible in opinion polls. Anti-war sentiments declined from over 40% of commentary circulated in mid-February, to below 20% at the start of the invasion; the average position reached its strongest pro-war level during the entire debate. Interestingly, it was only at the very end of the period that ‘pro-war’ overtook ‘neutral’ as the most popular position, suggesting that much media analysis retained a degree of balance even in the final weeks before war.

Figure 29 meanwhile demonstrates the extent to which British Public Opinion was activated by the issue of Iraq. Over nine hundred commentary articles were published between 1 February and 20 March 2003; in total March saw nearly double the volume of commentary on Iraq as was published in relation to Afghanistan in October 2001. The contentious nature of the Iraq debate had made it more worthy of comment in the eyes of the British media than the better-supported earlier conflict.

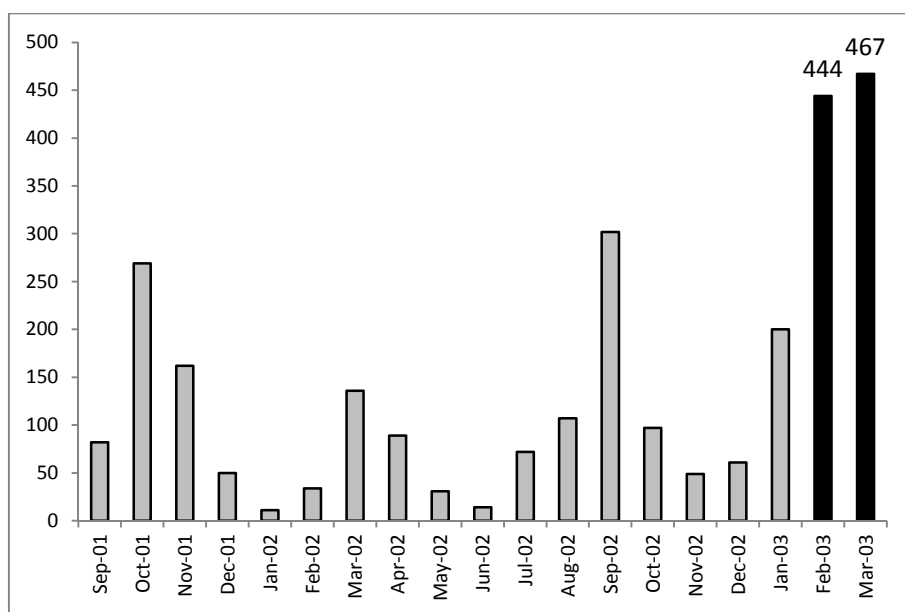


Figure 29: Volume of commentary articles in UK newspapers relating to Iraq, 1 February – 20 March 2003.

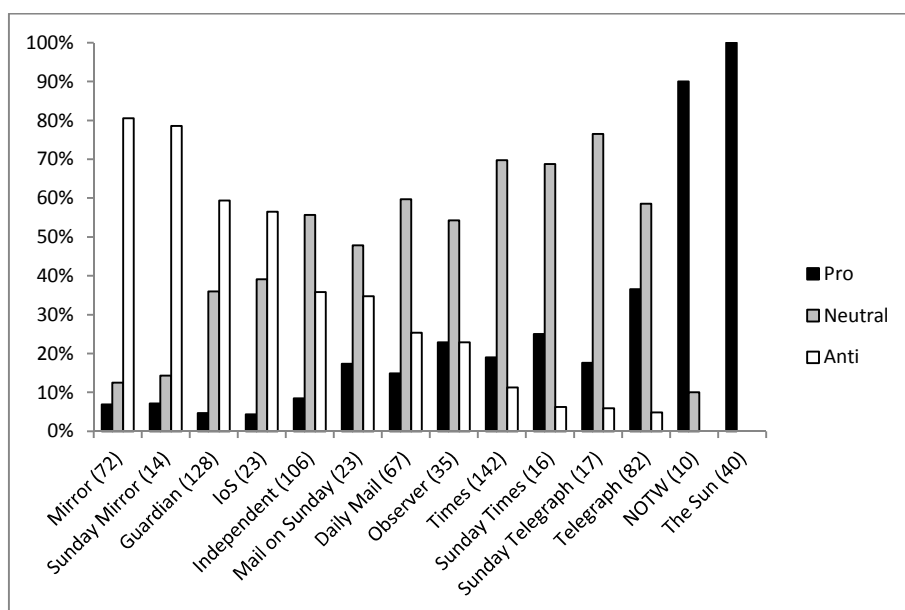


Figure 30: Proportional distribution of newspaper commentary on the prospect of military action against Iraq, by publication, 15 February – 20 March 2003 (n-numbers in brackets).

Figure 30 illustrates the overall position towards war taken in these final weeks by commentary published in each of the major newspapers considered in this study. As with previous chapters, the tabloid press dominates the edges of the scale, with the ‘quality’ press publishing a wider range of views and a greater proportion of neutral analysis. Of most note here is the position of *The Observer*, far removed toward the pro-war camp, away from its sister paper, the strongly anti-war *Guardian*. As noted above, *The Observer* took an editorial

line which broadly supported war for humanitarian reasons; this placed it closer to the pro-war end of the scale than the traditionally right-wing and pro-military *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*. Just as *The Observer* had taken on the ‘hard liberal’, pro-intervention argument, so the *Mail* had adopted a ‘soft realist’, anti-intervention stance.

Finally, *figure 31* presents a basic factor analysis of the positions taken by leading public actors during the period of interest. Here, in a change from Chapter 5, a greater spread of individuals is visible across the full range of views from 100% anti-war to 100% pro-war.

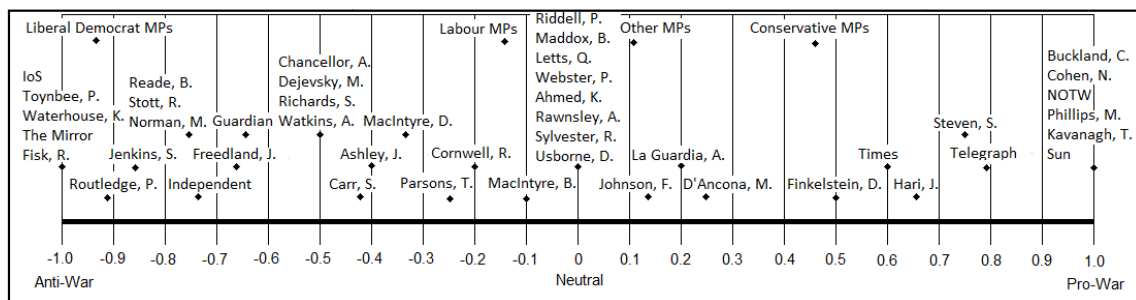


Figure 31: Basic factor analysis of positions taken by leading public actors towards war with Iraq, 15 February – 20 March 2003.

Again, the presence of *Observer* columnist Nick Cohen and *The Independent's* Johann Hari towards the pro-war end of the scale is noteworthy. Their placing illustrates the very real divisions which had opened up on the British left by the time military action commenced.

Conclusion

By the time the US and UK launched military action against Iraq, the British public had debated the prospect for more than eighteen months. It was only in the final weeks discussed here, however, that it became clear that the considerable anti-war sentiment expressed in that debate would not prevent the Blair government from taking the decision to use force against Saddam Hussein. There were significant moments in the campaign against military action; a million ordinary citizens marching through London in protest at government policy on 15 February; massive Labour party rebellions in parliamentary votes on 26 February and 18 March; the resignation of a Cabinet Minister and another's dramatic failure to resign. There was no breakthrough. In large part this reflected the personal conviction of Prime Minister

Tony Blair, the driver of the policy from the beginning, certain that his chosen course best reflected both Britain's interests and her values. He was never likely to be swayed by the views of others; the way he responded to the 15 February march, in particular, shows this. Dealt a blow but clearly unbowed, he redoubled his persuasion efforts and held to his substantive position. His conviction did not win him the argument. Opposition remained. But Blair's evident certainty blunted several of his opponents' key criticisms, not least that he had failed to cleave a sufficiently independent line from that pursued by the United States.

Having introduced a 'moral case' for war in response to pressure from the 'Stop the War' marchers, the government struggled to make it stick. Regime change, long avoided as a military objective in public statements, remained evidently illegal. Far more success came from blaming France for the US and UK failure to secure a firm UN mandate for military action. By 18 March, the opposition was struggling to articulate a coherent anti-war case. It lacked leaders, with the 'official' Conservative opposition in favour of war, the Liberal Democrats ridiculed in press and parliament, and Labour MPs either unwilling to overthrow their own Prime Minister, or unable to maintain a consistent argument. The opposition camp had also lost heart, in the face of Blair's determination to act. By 18 March, many thought war was inevitable. They were probably right, though Britain could perhaps have pulled out, at some cost to the 'special relationship', and possibly still at the cost of the Prime Minister. These were penalties few of those in a position to influence the government were willing to bear. The Iraq war would not be fought in their name. But it would still be fought.

Chapter 7 – Consequences: March 2003 - present

Six years passed between the first deployment of British troops to Iraq and their final withdrawal from Basra province. Saddam Hussein's armed forces had proven no match for the US-led invasion. His fractious country represented a much greater challenge, and in the years of chaos and insurgency that followed hundreds of British and thousands of American service personnel perished, along with tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians. Although some semblance of stability and democracy eventually emerged in Baghdad, and the dictator's execution removed a potentially destabilising force from the political landscape of the Middle East, British Public Opinion continues to regard the war as a strategic failure. Rather than this simply being a consequence of events on the ground, it represents to a much greater extent dissatisfaction with the way the decision to take military action was 'sold'. Having presented its actions as an essential corrective to Iraq's development of banned Weapons of Mass Destruction, the Blair government found its credibility seriously undermined when no such weapons were ever found. Having upset journalists, by rejecting their anti-war arguments and seeking to 'spin' the source material upon which they based their reports, ministers found themselves unable to present the conflict positively to the public without being challenged relentlessly in the press. Facing the electorate in 2005, New Labour confronted a revitalised Conservative Party that sought with some success to reframe the decision to go to war as a matter of official perfidy rather than one of national interest. In the end the Blair government retained power, winning a reduced but still healthy majority of seats in parliament. Only then did it face the most extreme consequence of its foreign policy for domestic Public Opinion, the July suicide bombings on the London transport network. For those British Muslim voters who withdrew their support for Labour in 2005 in response to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and for the outliers who turned to terrorism, the substance of the continued fighting probably held more significance than its communication. For most of Public Opinion, however, it is to communication, to 'spin', that arguments repeatedly return.

Trust

When Tony Blair decided to go to war in Iraq, he might reasonably have expected that by the time they next came to vote, “the public would forget it and judge the government by their domestic agenda” (Cook 2003, 337). Democratic publics appear not to pay much attention to foreign policy matters most of the time, and there is little evidence that international affairs affect electoral decision-making to any significant extent. Crucially for Blair, however, public indifference to events overseas does not mean leaders escape punishment should their foreign policies appear to go wrong. Few individuals will bother with the details of diplomacy, but most will be interested in evidence of official incompetence, weakness, or dishonesty, since these characteristics are likely to affect every aspect of a government’s performance, not just far-off conflicts (Nincic 1992, 93). The main impact of the Iraq war on British Public Opinion was its contribution to the growing conviction that Blair and his advisers were dishonest (Coates and Krieger 2004, 5, 87, Hollis 2006, 44, Kennedy-Pipe and Vickers 2007, 206, Hill 2007, 276, Dunne 2008, 340). There were other reasons why polls in the years after the invasion found 49% of respondents thought the Prime Minister personally untrustworthy (IPSOS MORI 2003) or showed 63% of likely voters thought his government had not “on balance, been honest” (YouGov 2005). There were other causes of Blair’s inability to challenge Gordon Brown or much of the Labour Party over the Euro or public service reform, both battles originally planned for his second term in office (Cook 2003, 357, Seldon, Snowdon and Collings 2007, 240, 385-386). Above all, however, it was the credibility crisis induced by arguments over Iraq that defined the latter years of New Labour, and which continues to shape its place in history. As the appearance of a lone protester at his Leveson Inquiry appearance demonstrated, Blair’s alleged ‘war crimes’ in Iraq continue to evoke passionate responses, and to colour views of his premiership.

New Labour’s alleged obsession with ‘spin’ had damaged public trust in its probity even before controversies arose around legal advice and WMD (Chandler 2003, 299, Heffernan

2006, 588). The existence of “a perceived record of distortion and manipulation on the part of an administration” can be enough, on its own, to fuel doubts over a conflict (Baum and Groeling 2010a, 475). In the Blair government’s case, this effect was exacerbated by the hostility of large parts of the British media towards any attempt to portray official positions in a positive light. Blair told the Chilcot Inquiry that, even before the actual fighting began, “we [in government] were fighting a constant battle against people [in the media] utterly misrepresenting us, our motives, what we were trying to do” (Blair 2010a, 214, cf. 2012a, 2). Journalists were responsible for numerous examples of ‘spin’ every bit as disingenuous as that put out by the government during the course of the debate preceding the invasion. Certain newspapers displayed a visceral hostility not only to government communications, but often also to each other, with all the detrimental effects for the quality of public debate such conflict implies. The perceived news value of scandal was such that any opportunity to accuse the government of wrongdoing was seized upon by media critics, often with little regard to the substance of the charges made. Because Britain had gone to war to disarm Iraq, and Iraq had turned out not to need disarming, even the least credible charges placed against official claims affected public perceptions to some degree.

The most egregious example of the enthusiasm shown for publishing material damaging to ministers came in the aftermath of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. *The Mirror* received photographs purporting to show British troops abusing Iraqi prisoners of war, and published them prominently without waiting for comment from the Ministry of Defence. Shortly thereafter, officials were able to confirm that the pictures were in fact fakes; they showed men apparently from units not stationed in Iraq, carrying equipment not used there, abusing a ‘prisoner’ in a type of truck never deployed outside of Europe. *Mirror* editor Piers Morgan initially refused to retract the story, insinuating that even if the particular images were fake, they still represented actual conduct by British troops. The following day he was forced to resign by the newspaper’s publishers, apparently fearful of further antagonising both the

government and the wider public. *The Mirror* had been the most consistent and vocal of anti-war publications prior to the invasion, but its mistakes over the prisoner abuse images demonstrated the damaging effects of pre-war dissatisfaction leading to post-invasion distrust, and so clouding journalists' critical faculties (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 270). They also undermined its credibility, and damaged its confidence. Ministers hardly benefitted from Morgan's disgrace and his employers' embarrassment, however. Even with the original report withdrawn and an apology issued, public perceptions of the ongoing military campaign had been negatively affected.

Two major post-invasion developments accelerated the collapse of public trust in the British government over Iraq. To begin with, the deterioration of the situation on the ground meant that, by the time of the 2005 election, British and US troops were engaged in a protracted counter-insurgency campaign with no end in sight. Iraq thus became the 'quagmire' that policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic had sought above all to avoid. During the Vietnam war, US leaders believed bad news from the front could be enough on its own to undermine public support for a military campaign (Mueller 1973). More recent studies have found the effect of individual setbacks is qualified where audiences still believe success is possible overall, although it should be noted that the press itself plays an important role in the establishment of such beliefs (Taylor 1992, 274, Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler 2005, Eichenberg 2005, 141, 163, Gelpi, Reifler and Feaver 2007, 158). Ministers might have been able to ride out the unpopularity associated with continued instability (and rising casualties) in Iraq had they successfully maintained an overall impression in the public mind that the conflict was going well. Two key criteria determine the ability of an administration to dominate the way the success of a military campaign is assessed in public debate. Firstly, the narrative that the government seeks to promote must be congruent with well-established and commonly-held criteria for success. It is difficult to re-define the goals of a military operation once it has been launched; they become crystallised the moment shooting starts. Whether, therefore, the Blair

government would be able to present the results of the invasion of Iraq in a positive light depended in large part on how far it had established realistic criteria for gauging success prior to the fighting starting. Secondly, the government must be able effectively to subsume contradictory developments into a broader positive narrative (Graham 1994, 194). This is more a matter of post-invasion than pre-invasion 'spin', although undoubtedly having been successful in earlier debates makes policymakers' subsequent tasks easier. An inability to frame unexpected setbacks as undesirable but fundamentally irrelevant glitches on the road to success left the British government struggling to maintain the line that the decision to use force against Iraq had been the right one, and had produced desirable outcomes. Unfortunately for Blair and his ministers, it was clear to most observers, particularly those in the media, primed to focus their reporting on stories inimical to the government line, that by 2004 Iraq was in crisis. With ministers privately being warned of imminent "strategic failure" in Iraq (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 262), they were in no position to claim that things were going well.

Public Opinion soon accepted that the Iraq campaign was unlikely to prove an unqualified success. What support there was for continuing the fight might have held up better had it still been thought legitimate. Unfortunately for the government, investigations after the invasion revealed that Saddam Hussein had not in fact been hiding WMD. Although, in the US, "15-30 percent of the public thought during the period from May 2003 to April 2004 that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction had actually been found" (Everts and Isernia 2005, 266), in the UK the picture was different. Helped in large part by a media primed to reach and then to highlight such a conclusion, the British passive public widely recognised at a much earlier stage "that Iraq no longer appeared to have even the chemical weapons it was known to possess when UN Inspectors had last been allowed access in 1998". The effect was devastating for the government's credibility; "once it was clear that this particular emperor had had no clothes, not even old ones, perceptions of the legitimacy of the action against Iraq,

already imbued with significant amounts of scepticism, became critically damaging” (Michalski and Gow 2007, 145). WMD had been the centrepiece of the case for war. However much Tony Blair had personally believed in the moral virtue of regime change for its own sake, publicly he had described it only as either a necessary cause or an inevitable consequence of Iraqi disarmament. The alleged development of illegal weapons by Iraq had underpinned the legal basis for the invasion, and had been used to explain why a country thousands of miles away posed such a direct threat to Britain as to warrant war. With varying degrees of success, the government had framed the action taken by the ‘coalition of the willing’ as simply the enforcement of outstanding UN Security Council judgements relating to Iraqi WMD. The realisation that Iraq did not in fact have WMD raised serious questions about both the presentation and the substance of the decision to invade, and critically undermined the legitimacy of the entire campaign.

The impact of the missing weapons on public perceptions of the conflict was exacerbated by the ongoing chaos in Iraq, and by rising British casualty rates (Daddow 2011, 230). Blair himself recalls the double blow suffered by the government, as the absence of WMD “seemed to disintegrate the *casus belli*” while the ongoing violence “served to keep the fact and consequence of it constantly in our thoughts” (Blair 2010b, 374). Most voters are willing to accept even costly military action as a necessary evil provided they regard it as the best mechanism to stave off even greater anticipated future losses. A counter-trend emerges, however, if arguments about the negative impact of inaction come to be proved unfounded (Wolfe 2008, 76). For the British public, the missing WMD meant not only that the government’s credibility was damaged, but also that the increasing cost of battling the Iraqi insurgency seemed less and less of a justifiable investment in future security. At the start of the conflict, ministers had considerable freedom to present developments favourably. Over time, journalists gained better access to the various small battlefields that sprang up during the following years, gathering first-hand accounts that contradicted the government’s

overarching narrative of gradual stabilisation. Official rhetoric thus fell victim to a phenomenon dubbed “the elasticity of reality”, under which leaders who seek to ‘spin’ foreign policy developments find any success they have rebounds upon them once “reality asserts itself” (Baum and Groeling 2010a, 474). The realisation that the British government’s case for war with Iraq had been based on incorrect assumptions and inaccurate statements both damaged public trust and prompted many observers to reconsider, retrospectively, their own pre-war expectations. The result was that large numbers of those who had supported, or at the least grudgingly accepted the necessity of military action began to view it more negatively. Post-invasion developments “do not change the facts about the war, but they can alter how the public recalls and evaluates it” (Mueller 1973, 168). Although in the build-up to the Iraq campaign, ministers had considerable power to present their goals, and to describe the likely consequences of war for public consumption, once discrepancies emerged between rhetoric and observable reality the result was a significant decline in that power over time. Ultimately, it is for this reason that Iraq is remembered with such negativity. The media’s general propensity to seek out scandal, and hostility to ‘spin’, helped motivate journalists’ focus on missing WMD after the invasion, raising their salience in Public Opinion’s efforts to define the conflict. Additionally, as Blair observed, “the problem with a military campaign to which a large part of opinion – public and most important media – is opposed is that this part continues to have a point to prove...they approach the conflict with a strong desire, conscious and subconscious, to see it fail” (Blair 2010b, 441, 454). Journalists were primed to look for negative stories by their own unresolved qualms about the decision to go to war in the first place. Ministers had been able to get the policy through Parliament while ignoring significant elements of Public Opinion, but in the process sacrificed their freedom to present the consequences of war in a positive light. New Labour may have come to office concerned about media hostility, but by 2003 what hostility it faced stemmed in large part from the failure of its own news management activities.

To the extent that the British government made the most of the evidence it had in framing Iraq as a threat to the UK, it had not significantly transgressed the bounds of 'normal' official behaviour. There is "a long tradition of overstatement" on the part of ministers seeking to justify involvement in overseas conflicts (Freedman 2004, 7). A particular problem arose in this case from the fact that not only were claims about Iraq's WMD presented in the strongest possible light, they were also based on inaccurate intelligence. Although the US and UK governments faced "anger that they sought to hoodwink both national and international opinion", arguably "the real problem was that first they hoodwinked themselves" (Freedman 2004, 39). Discrepancies between the description of Iraq's WMD programmes in the 'dossier' of September 2002, and the post-invasion findings of the Iraq Survey Group, stemmed from *both 'spin' and genuine intelligence failures*, as Chapter 4 recounts. The latter were explicable just as the former were predictable. Even senior Iraqi military officers (one of whom had unwittingly provided the information, via an intermediary who was an MI6 source, upon which several of the British dossier's claims were based) were apparently unsure of the extent of Iraq's WMD capacity. Saddam Hussein hinted repeatedly that he was hiding weapons that would only be brought out in the event of an attack. The reality, however, was that all WMD activities had been "essentially destroyed in 1991", although Iraq did retain the expertise, and apparently the intent, to have reconstituted its full programme had it succeeded in getting international sanctions lifted (Iraq Survey Group 2004, 1). It might have been possible to explain the reasons for intelligence misjudgements, and so for the government to escape significant public punishment. Its good faith was already doubted by large sections of the public even before the invasion, however, largely as a result of its own obfuscation, disingenuousness, and repeated shifts in emphasis between different components of its case. Robin Cook thought "the public is mature enough to know that in the real world governments make mistakes", and suggested that the real problems over WMD stemmed from "subsequent attempts to deny that anything was wrong and to cover up any evidence to the contrary"

(Cook 2003, 336). Blair, by contrast, considered “it was never enough, in today’s media, for there to have been a mistake... a mistake doesn’t hit the register high enough. So the search goes on for a lie, a deception, an act not of error but of malfeasance. And the problem is, if one can’t be found, one is contrived or even invented” (Blair 2010b, 454). Scandals *were* invented, if not by journalists themselves, then as a logical consequence of their readiness to believe that any evidence of improper conduct must be accurate, a readiness built up by frustration with the outcome of the debate that preceded the war, and exacerbated by the obvious problem of missing WMD. Just as the government had fallen victim to a combination of hubris and groupthink in mistaking the intelligence material it had received for concrete evidence of an Iraqi threat, and had then compounded its mistake by placing an unduly heavy amount of emphasis on this ‘evidence’ in its public communications stance (Kampfner 2003, 210, Freedman 2004, 24-25), so too journalists would fall victim to exaggerated claims based on inaccurate source material. The problem from the government’s perspective, however, was that it suffered just as much damage from incidents such as the *Mirror* prisoner abuse photo scandal as did the media, since each accusation of misconduct, even those subsequently disproven, contributed to a more general negative discourse steadily undermining public perceptions of the entire campaign.

Of course, *The Mirror’s* error had been several degrees less severe than the government’s, and had been mitigated to an extent by Morgan’s departure and by the paper’s immediate apology. Tony Blair neither resigned nor apologised for the missing WMD. Indeed, he remains unapologetic (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 560, Blair 2010b, 374). Given an opportunity at the Chilcot Inquiry, he expressed “responsibility but not a regret for removing Saddam” (Blair 2010a, 246). In many ways this consistency is unsurprising. Blair would never have led Britain to war in Iraq had he not been utterly convinced that it was the right thing to do. That very conviction helped drive the policy into effect in the face of determined opposition. At the same time, however, his obstinate defence of decisions now known to have

been based on inaccurate information has only served to reinforce the divide between Prime Minister and Public Opinion already evident in the build-up to war. As Chapter 4 concludes, there is good evidence, seen in the Hutton and Butler reports and in documents released by the Chilcot Inquiry, showing that few official or public actors doubted that Iraq represented a threat prior to March 2003. British ministers continued to expect a significant weapons find well into 2003 (Campbell and Stott 2007, 693, 731). In terms of Public Opinion, however, it did not matter that the government was genuinely surprised at the Iraq Survey Group's inability to turn up anything to indicate WMD production (Coates and Krieger 2004, 4, Scott and Ambler 2007, 84). The legitimacy of the invasion had already been undermined, with the result that even as he left office years later observers still felt it necessary to consider whether the Prime Minister could be trusted (Kennedy-Pipe and Vickers 2007, 212). For much of British Public Opinion, dissatisfaction with the communication of the decision to go to war in 2003 ensures that the answer remains 'no'.

David Kelly

"As Dr Kelly was leaving I said to him: what will happen if Iraq is invaded? And his reply was, which I took at the time to be a throwaway remark – he said: I will probably be found dead in the woods" (Hutton 2004, 101, quoting a British diplomat named Peter Broucher).

Although the absence of WMD in Iraq was bad for the Blair government, it was not until the death of Dr David Kelly in an Oxfordshire wood in the early hours of 18 July 2003 that the issue became truly poisonous. Dr Kelly's death came six weeks into a bitter public dispute between Downing Street and the BBC over a 29 May report casting doubt on the veracity of one of the central claims of the WMD 'dossier'. Prompted by *Today* programme presenter John Humphrys, the journalist Andrew Gilligan reported having "been told by one of the senior officials in charge of drawing up that dossier...that, actually the government probably erm, knew that the forty five minute figure was wrong, even before it decided to put it in...Downing Street, our source says ordered a week before publication, ordered it to be sexed up, to be

made more exciting and ordered more facts to be er, to be discovered” (Gilligan 2003). A further report by Gilligan in *The Mail on Sunday* named Alastair Campbell as the author of this alleged government manipulation. It was an explosive claim. The government, and specifically Campbell, were being accused of falsifying evidence of an Iraqi threat in order to justify a controversial war. The relationship between No. 10 and the BBC was already tense, thanks to what many in Downing Street saw as the corporation’s “one-sided and negative” approach to the Iraq issue (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 194). New Labour was allergic to media criticism anyway, but in reacting to Gilligan’s claims it reached new heights of sensitivity (Robinson, Goddard, et al. 2009, 535). Campbell was furious. The BBC was “twisting” the facts, “trying to move the goalposts”, and unreasonably refusing to accept even the possibility of an error in the original story (Campbell and Stott 2007, 703, 711). His psychological state was poor by this point. He had admitted to Blair in February that he was struggling with stress, probably clinically depressed, and seeking to leave Downing Street (Campbell and Stott 2007, 606). Responding to Gilligan became an obsession.

Campbell went on the attack, demanding a retraction of the original story, and a full apology from the BBC. He had the authority as Downing Street Director of Communications to mount such campaigns on his own initiative, and there is no evidence that he acted with the direct consent of the Prime Minister; the communication system that Blair had authorised was, by 2003, able to operate entirely independently of him. The BBC held its line, determined to fulfil its commitment to neutrality, and struggling to avoid simply repeating the government line in the absence of an effective political opposition (Hollis 2010, 66-67). Its Chairman Gavyn Davies and Director-General Greg Dyke each had Labour Party connections, and thus may have felt under particular pressure to resist Campbell’s demands (Powell 2010, 205). The stakes were high on both sides. Gilligan had hit upon a story that resonated with his audience, that brought together dissatisfaction with the way the war had been ‘sold’, general consternation with the use of ‘spin’, and the facts on the ground in Iraq, to challenge the legitimacy of an

operation that had only ever enjoyed a narrow margin of public support at best. With no WMD having been found, any accusation of official dishonesty tended to stick (Campbell and Stott 2007, 700). Campbell struggled to shake off Gilligan's claims until 4 July, when David Kelly admitted to his superiors at the Ministry of Defence that he had spoken to Gilligan, and so could be the journalist's source. Kelly had served as a UN Weapons Inspector and was considered one of the government's most knowledgeable biological warfare experts. He was apparently under consideration for a knighthood at the time of these events in recognition of his work in the area (Hutton 2004, 5). Crucially for the government case, Kelly said he had waited so long before coming forward because the comments in Gilligan's report did went so far beyond what he had actually said that he assumed the journalist must have heard them from someone else. As Campbell wrote in his diary, with evident glee, "it would fuck Gilligan if that was his source" (Campbell and Stott 2007, 713).

With the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee having cleared Downing Street of improper conduct over the inclusion of material in the dossier (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee 2003), a judgement later repeated by Lords Hutton and Butler (Hutton 2004, Butler 2004), by July the government was grappling towards firmer ground. The decision was taken to announce that Gilligan's source had come forward, that he had not been involved in drafting the dossier, and that he denied having made the statements attributed to him. Although Campbell had expressed a desire to ensure a "clear win" by totally discrediting Gilligan, there apparently had been no formal decision to identify the source (Campbell and Stott 2007, 714, 716). With Downing Street leery of being caught lying to the press, however, departments were instructed to confirm Dr Kelly's name if it was put to them by journalists, which of course it was. There were very few possible candidates, and informed reporters simply called up various government press offices and worked their way through lists of names until they got a result. On 9 July, therefore, Kelly was 'outed' by the MoD. The following week, he was called to testify publicly at a somewhat pressurised session of the Foreign Affairs

Committee, where he repeated what he had told his superiors. He had spoken in general terms to Gilligan (without authorisation), but he had not made the statements attributed to Gilligan's anonymous source. Although the BBC continued to stick by the original story, the wider furore might have subsided had Kelly not been found dead three days later. It appeared (as Lord Hutton later concluded) that he had committed suicide (Cook 2003, 336).

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Figure 32: Front page of The Daily Mail, 19 July 2003.

The Daily Mail ran the headline “proud of yourselves?” over pictures of Campbell, Hoon, and Blair, alleging that they had driven “a decent, shy civil servant who had been savagely chewed up and spat out by a malign, amoral Downing Street machine” to a “tormented and tragic end” (The Daily Mail 2003g, *figure 32*). What was already a hostile public debate had taken on a considerably darker tone. Kelly's death “was an event that would shake Blair to his core...one of the most shocking reversals of the premiership” (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 201). Campbell considered resigning immediately, though was talked out of it. He complained that the media should have asked what exactly an experienced civil servant working with the highest security clearance in a sensitive area was doing talking to a journalist about secret intelligence matters, rather than criticising ministers for themselves asking that question (Campbell and Stott 2007, 723, 727). There was little, however, that he

could effectively do at this stage to regain the initiative in the public debate. The human interest angle of Kelly's death, combined with the recurring bogeyman 'spin', ensured that the story achieved total media dominance. Jonathan Powell recalls having "felt physically sick" watching the coverage. Against Powell's instincts, Blair "felt that he had little choice but to set up an inquiry" (Powell 2010, 222). Lord Hutton began work on 21 July.

When the Hutton Report was published in January 2004, it totally and systematically cleared the government of each of the key charges levelled by Gilligan (Hutton 2004, 144-145, 152, 172). Downing Street had sought to make the strongest possible case for war in publishing the dossier, but the document had been written and approved by the Joint Intelligence Committee, without interference from Downing Street. Far from being dishonest, it reflected accurately the best assessments available at the time. The clearest evidence against the veracity of Gilligan's claims was the fact that David Kelly was not part of the JIC assessments staff which had drafted the dossier. Although a section he had written on the history of the UN inspection programme was used in the final document, he had never been in a position to know one way or another what influence Alastair Campbell, or anyone else, had exerted on its contents. With Kelly himself unable to testify, and Gilligan's inconsistent evidence ruled unreliable, Hutton was unable to reach a position on what exactly the weapons expert had said to the reporter (Hutton 2004, 163). He did note that members of the Defence Intelligence Staff, to whom Kelly had unrestricted and regular access, had raised concerns during September 2002 about the phrasing of the '45-minute claim', a point highlighted by Gilligan as having been 'sexed up'. It was possible Kelly was aware of the existence of such concerns. At the time, however, they had been referred to the Chief and Deputy Chief of Defence Intelligence, both of whom, as members of the JIC, had seen the original MI6 reports on which the claim was based, and both of whom thought no further action necessary. Hutton implied, therefore, that Kelly may have told Gilligan about qualms that did exist within DIS about the inclusion of the '45 minute claim', without himself being aware that they had been

considered and addressed in the proper manner (Hutton 2004, 112-126). Gilligan had then drawn, and broadcast, his own conclusions about the role of Downing Street.

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Figure 33: Front page of The Independent, 29 January 2004.

The Hutton Report “plunged the BBC into crisis” (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 256). Although Gilligan was not explicitly said to have lied, the strong implication was that he had at the very least embellished inaccurate source material, in an ironic parallel of the government’s own behaviour in presenting the dossier. Like Piers Morgan before them, both Davies and Dyke resigned. The British public was not, however, well primed to accept an outcome that exonerated the widely distrusted Campbell and criticised the much-respected BBC. One Ipsos MORI poll found just 14% of respondents thought Campbell reliable, compared to the BBC’s 59% (IPSOS MORI 2003). As a result, far from the government being exonerated, efforts by some parts of the press to label the Report a “whitewash” (see *figure 33*) largely stuck in the public mind, something which continued to rankle with former Downing Street insiders long after Blair left office (Blair 2010b, 463, Powell 2010, 223, Campbell 2010a, 119).

Although the BBC’s disgrace and a misjudged call from Michael Howard for Blair to resign helped to unite previously rebellious Labour MPs behind the government (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 255, Powell 2010, 223), a bitter aftertaste remained in the wider

public debate. Powell believes “the lesson from Hutton is that, no matter how clean a bill of health a prime minister is given, an inquiry is not going to vindicate them in the eyes of the media and therefore of the people” (Powell 2010, 223). He has a point. The very existence of an inquiry raises suspicions which no conclusion can dispel. In this specific instance, there was an additional problem, namely that Hutton felt constrained by his terms of reference to focus narrowly on issues to do with David Kelly and the process by which the September dossier had been produced. He largely avoided the wider and arguably more fundamental issue of why the government had incorrectly judged Iraq to have WMD in the first place. Blair in due course felt compelled to establish a second inquiry under Lord Butler, partly responding to public pressure, and partly to President Bush’s having launched his own exercise in the United States. Again the government was exonerated of wrongdoing (Butler 2004, 76, 82, 110), although specific criticisms were raised about the way the dossier had brought about a conflation of policy advocacy and intelligence analysis (Butler 2004, 114, 127). Public doubts consequently remained, later leading Gordon Brown to launch a further inquiry under Sir John Chilcot, this time tasked with considering the entire background to and conduct of the war. Blair has expressed “no doubt” that after the Chilcot Inquiry “there will still be calls for more” (Blair 2010b, 407). He has some grounds for cynicism in this regard. British Public Opinion clearly only values inquiries which reach the conclusions it wants and expects them to reach. When public actors call for an inquiry, they do so not to get at the truth, but to get confirmation for their existing views. No other outcome will satisfy critics.

As with the release of the dossier itself, then, what matters from a historical perspective is not so much the content of the various post-invasion inquiries, but the fact that they happened at all. Powell’s reluctance to subject Kelly’s death to independent scrutiny stemmed in part from the expectation that an inquiry would be seen as a partial admission of guilt. As it turned out, he was right to be wary. The procession of witness statements to the various inquiries, and the associated media coverage, has kept the question of whether

ministers lied to take the country to war in 2003 central to the public debate. Given the volume of 'real' news emerging from Iraq during the difficult years of the insurgency, this consistency is impressive. Clearly the 'official perfidy' narrative had staying power, both in the minds of editors, and their readers. The inquiries thus represented not just evidence of public trust in the government having been undermined by Iraq, but also one of the means by which that erosion continued to take place. They also illustrate the corollary of the "elasticity of reality" effect. Journalists' insinuations about ministerial dishonesty stuck because events did not contradict them, even when it proved difficult actually to demonstrate that the government had done wrong. *Contra* Cook, the public did not see a significant difference between erroneous judgements based on intelligence, which is itself necessarily partial and incomplete, and outright lies. What emerges from considering these phenomena is the clear suggestion, discussed in more detail in Chapter 8, that winning the argument before military action takes place is not enough to maintain support. The argument must be proven right in practice, even if the action itself is relatively successful, and especially if it is not.

The 2005 general election

Considerable doubt remains amongst foreign policy analysts as to whether overseas matters are sufficiently salient to democratic electorates to affect voting behaviour. For every suggestion that "policymakers are held accountable by the electorate if their policies, foreign as well as domestic, fail" (Sobel 2001, 24) there exists an equally categorical counter-claim. This uncertainty is significant, for it is the prospect of future electoral punishment that is said to motivate politicians to take account of public views in making major decisions (Knecht and Weatherford 2006, 705). Public influence is not only constrained by the willingness of policymakers to ignore arguments emanating from non-official channels, but also by the possibly accurate belief that voters will not exact retribution against leaders who pursue foreign policies with which they disagree. The Blair government may not have thought itself

particularly vulnerable to electoral punishment when it decided to go to war in Iraq. After all, the last general election before March 2003 had been in June 2001; the next one need not be called until the summer of 2006. There was plenty of time for other issues to rise to prominence, and for progress to be made on stabilising Iraq. Evidence available as early as 2003 suggested that most British voters were more concerned about immigration than about the war (Stothard 2003, 197-198). At the same time, however, there was little room for complacency. Blair's ally Jose Maria Aznar lost the 2004 Spanish election at least partially on the back of public opposition to Spain's involvement in the 'coalition of the willing' (Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2005, 45). Although President Bush was re-elected later that year, his campaign was hampered by lingering dissatisfaction with his foreign policy stance (Eichenberg 2005, 28, Gelpi, Reifler and Feaver 2007, 151, 158, Karol and Miguel 2007, 633, Robinson 2008, 141). By considering together the experiences of these three leaders we can begin to see why it was that, despite concerns over Iraq, Blair won an historic third term of office in 2005, with a sizeable parliamentary majority to boot.

Bush, Blair, and Aznar each faced the same problem with respect to the situation on the ground in Iraq, namely that the expected quick victory over Saddam Hussein's forces had not given way to the promised rapid stabilisation and rebirth of the country as a functioning democracy. The descent into 'quagmire' destabilised official narratives about the war, opening up space in the public debate for even past supporters of military action to become critics. When Iraq came to be contested by participants in subsequent elections, it was introduced not only as a matter of prospective consideration, but of retrospective judgement. That the invasion had gone awry was seen by the British public not only as evidence that the implementation of the war policy had been mishandled, but that the entire enterprise had been a mistake. Public Opinion is fickle in this regard, which is why it is so potentially dangerous; "short-term support is an unreliable indicator of the eventual political ramifications of a policy" precisely because "many of today's supporters are likely to become tomorrow's

opponents should a policy be perceived as failing” (Baum 2004b, 191-192). In Spain the main opposition party, led by Jose Luis Zapatero, had objected to the use of force against Iraq from the beginning. It was easily able to capitalise on the war’s apparent failure. Polls taken before the invasion had shown just 4% of Spanish voters in favour of action without explicit UN support, and only 23% even with the UN fully on board (Campbell and Stott 2007, 670). American Democrats had a harder time, particularly given President Bush’s success in linking the campaign to the 11 September attacks. Senator Kerry challenged Bush over their respective Vietnam records, but was hamstrung when it came to the more immediate conflict by having himself voted in favour of invading Iraq. Britain’s Conservatives had similarly supported the government line. Iain Duncan Smith’s avowedly pro-American, pro-military foreign policy stance potentially provided some cover to the government. Certainly any assessment in 2003 of the likely future electoral significance of military action would have been coloured by the fact that the leaders of both major parties agreed on the substantive policy (Leblang and Chan 2003, 387, Hollis 2006, 45, Aldrich, et al. 2006, 478, Chan and Safran 2006, 149, Kreps 2010, 199). Politicians who offer too much support to their rivals tend to be punished (Colaresi 2004, 556), and indeed Iain Duncan Smith was removed from the Conservative leadership in late 2003. Although his Party remained generally supportive of the international use of force, and specifically convinced that removing Saddam Hussein from power had been the right choice, Michael Howard’s replacement of Duncan Smith, and the clear opportunity for electoral gains that criticising the government over Iraq now offered, created space for a change of heart (Adams, et al. 2004, 590). Aznar’s problem was that, faced with a united opposition, he lacked a sufficient power base to survive an election. Both Bush and Blair faced their respective publics able to rely on a far broader coalition of support. Blair in particular benefitted in terms of Labour Party politics from the Conservatives’ efforts to discredit him. Many Labour members, and voters, who might have disagreed with the specific

decision, were nevertheless sufficiently supportive of the Prime Minister in general that they rallied behind him at the first sign of effective opposition.

A leaked set of internal Labour poll results dating from shortly after the 2005 election sheds some light on the significance of this internal 'rally effect'. By 2005, and in stark contrast to the position in 2003, responses by Labour voters tended to be more positive about Iraq than those by Conservatives. Although overall respondents were evenly split on the question of whether Britain should have participated in the invasion, more than two thirds of Labour supporters had a positive retrospective opinion, compared to 53% opposition amongst Conservatives and 63% amongst Liberal Democrats. 54% of voters disapproved of Tony Blair's handling of the ongoing conflict, but that figure fell to 24% amongst Labour voters compared to 73% for Conservatives and 75% for Liberal Democrats. Even on the contentious question of whether voters trusted Blair to handle Iraq in future (overall 54% did not), 73% of Labour voters backed the Prime Minister while 84% of Conservatives and 77% of Liberal Democrats distrusted him. What is unclear from these figures is whether the surveyed voters were simply repeating the 'official line' of the parties for which they had already cast their vote, or whether they expressed independently-held views that had influenced their voting behaviour. The poll's focus on *actual* voters introduces the possibility of a selection bias. The suggestion that Labour voters agree with the Labour Party's policies is somewhat tautological. At the same time, "many people use their party identification as a shortcut method for arriving at a position on an issue" (Mueller 1973, 116), so it may have been that people who were culturally, economically, or socially predisposed to vote Labour subsequently formed a positive view of Iraq simply because it was their party's war. Either explanation is thus possible. What matters here is the fact that, just as party politics serves as an intervening variable affecting public influence over foreign policymaking, so too party identification intervenes between voters' views of a given issue and their ultimate electoral choice (Shapiro and Jacobs 2000, 228, Sobel 2001, 23-24, Ramsay 2004, 460, Schuster and Maier 2006, 223, Kreps 2010, 199). In Spain, this

effect counted against Aznar. In the US and UK it helped mitigate the impact of public dissatisfaction over Iraq on the re-election chances of both Bush and Blair.

Although the Conservative Party had supported the decision to go to war, they had naturally not been involved in communications exercises such as the WMD dossier or the failed effort to secure a second UN Security Council Resolution. Consequently, Blair was left to face alone the accusation that the way the invasion had been 'sold' had undermined its legitimacy. Even before the end of 2003, Iain Duncan Smith had introduced the refrain "you can't believe a word he says" into his public portrayals of Blair (Kampfner 2003, 336). During the 2005 campaign, Conservative billboards warned "if he's prepared to lie to take us to war, he's prepared to lie to win an election" (see *figure 34*).

<Image removed for copyright reasons>

Figure 34: Conservative Party election poster, 2005.

Naturally such attacks referred most frequently to the missing WMD; the weapons' prominence in pre-invasion government rhetoric heightened their significance in post-invasion public debate. A further element was introduced when on 27 April 2005 *Channel 4 News* obtained a leaked copy of the Attorney General's full legal advice to the Prime Minister. As Chapter 6 discussed, Lord Goldsmith had told Blair on 7 March 2003 that the case was far from watertight, but that on balance he thought military action was legal without a further UN Security Council Resolution. Parliament, the Cabinet, and so the wider public saw only a more condensed version of this advice in the form of a letter sent to the Chairman of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee on 17 March. This document was far less equivocal,

focussing only on the reasons why action was legal, and leaving out the detailed analysis of the difficulties with the case. *Channel 4* framed the discrepancy as further evidence of official perfidy, and the charge was taken up in Parliament, raising the salience of pre-war communication practices during the election campaign (Seldon, Snowdon and Collings 2007, 340-341). There was some truth to the accusation that ministers had sought to influence the form in which the Attorney General's advice would become public, with their motivation being to limit the scope for further controversy at a politically difficult time. Once again, then, accusations of dishonesty largely stuck.

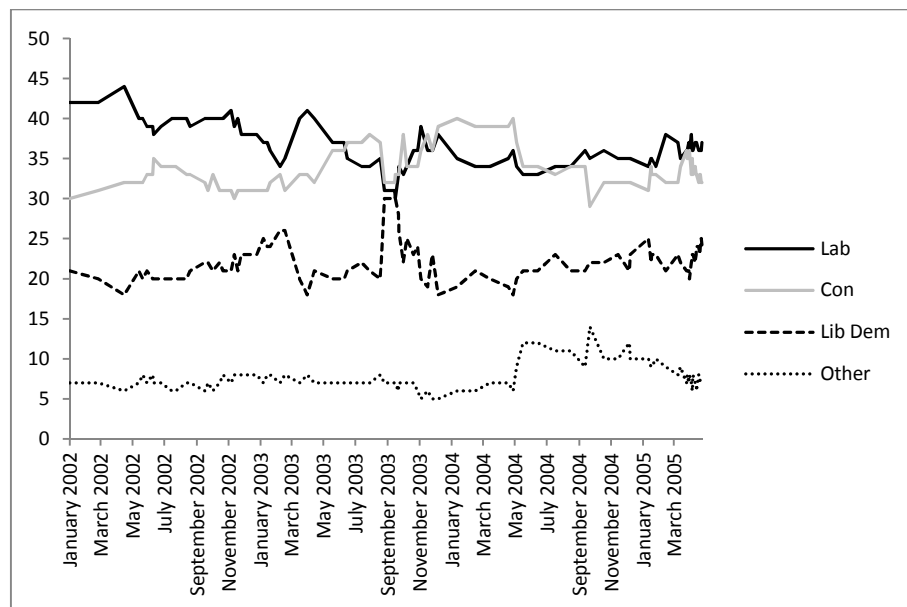


Figure 35: Voting intention polls, January 2002 – May 2005 (YouGov).

Within Downing Street the degree of attention paid to Iraq during the early summer of 2005, particularly by the media, was seen as entirely unwarranted (Powell 2010, 195, Blair 2010b, 522). It was clearly the case, nonetheless, that the public still thought issues relating not just to the ongoing conduct of the war, but to the way it had been 'sold', significant for making electoral judgements over two years after the first shots had been fired. Although Labour had experienced a dip in the polls from mid-2003 onwards in the aftermath of David Kelly's death, by late 2004 it had largely regained its lead over the Conservatives (with the exception of one possibly anomalous poll on 6 April 2005 which showed the parties neck-and-neck), as *figure 35* illustrates.

In the end, Labour won 356 of the 646 seats available in 2005, managing a respectable majority of 66. It lost 47 seats, and saw its majority cut from the 167-seat landslide margin achieved in 2001. The Conservatives gained 33 seats, and the Liberal Democrats 11, mainly at Labour's expense. Speaking to voters in his Sedgefield constituency, Blair acknowledged that Iraq had cost the government significant electoral support. At one stage on election night he had taken Campbell and long-term political adviser Sally Morgan into the garden to escape the tension of the various vote counts going on across the country. Morgan later recalled him "muttering things like 'it's all my fault' and 'Iraq'" while pacing around in the cold (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 343-344).

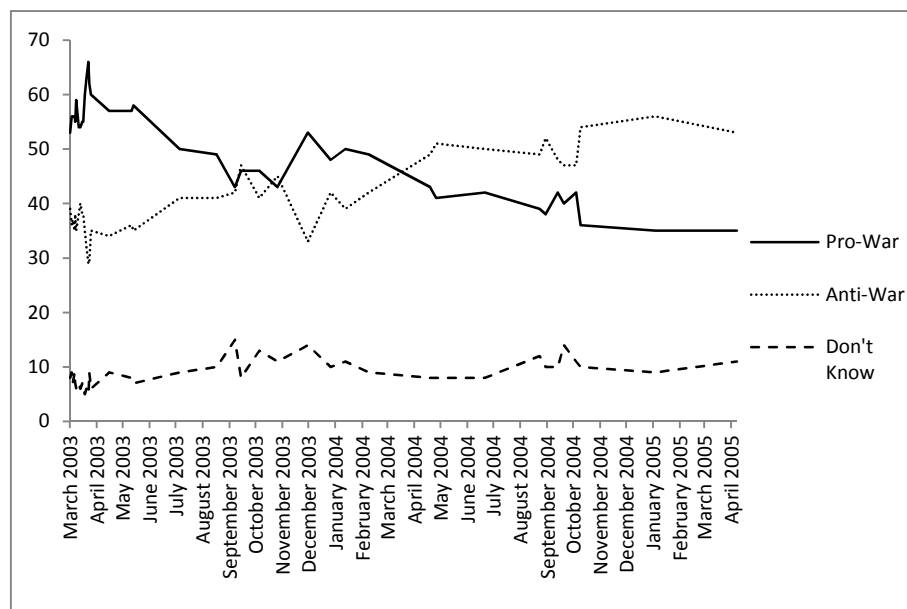


Figure 36: Passive public approval of the decision to take military action in Iraq, March 2003 – May 2005. Data from ICM and YouGov.

Explaining exactly how far Iraq actually did hit Labour's vote share is far from straightforward, however. It is true that, as *figure 36* shows, passive opinion on the rectitude of the Iraq war had dropped away markedly from early 2004, with data from May 2005 showing 40% approval against over 50% disapproval amongst polled likely voters. It is also true, however, that an ICM poll conducted on 3 May 2005 for *The Guardian* found just 4% of likely voters describing Iraq as one of the most important issues influencing their voting decision, compared to 21% for health services, 15% for the economy, 15% for education, and

13% for law and order, all issues on which Labour out-performed its rivals (ICM Research Limited 2005b). An earlier poll for *The News of the World* had found 48% of likely voters considering Iraq at least somewhat important in determining their vote, although again this was a lower proportion than that selecting nearly all of the other options available. 62% of likely voters thought Tony Blair less honest than most politicians, and 57% that he was untrustworthy. 30% nevertheless expected Blair to make a better Prime Minister than his rivals, compared to 24% for Charles Kennedy and 21% for Michael Howard (ICM Research Limited 2005a). Honesty was important, then, but it was not the only or even the most important characteristic the British expected their Prime Minister to demonstrate.

The best available information on the actual significance of Iraq for voting trends in 2005 comes from the leaked Labour polling reports referred to above. Included within the material were two post-election analyses prepared by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research and by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates. The first observed a big, late surge of voting intention in favour of the Liberal Democrats in certain marginal seats, accounting for as many as a quarter of the seats lost by Labour, and driven in large part by the controversy over Iraq (Greenberg and Rosner 2005). The lateness of the surge is interesting, as it cannot be explained alone by dissatisfaction with the ongoing conflict. It must rather be related to a combination of the Conservatives' efforts to raise the 'trust issue' and the role played by the media with its focus on questioning the legal basis for war. Indeed, the second paper estimated that 4% of the overall vote had switched from Labour to the Liberal Democrats towards the end of the campaign as a direct result of views on Iraq, and specifically in the aftermath of the Goldsmith leak (Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, Inc 2005a). This finding provides further support for the claim that it was the communication rather than the substance of the decision to go to war that damaged the government in the long term.

Penn, Schoen & Berland's research goes into more detail than these simple headline figures indicate. A series of specific questions were asked of *actual* (as opposed to likely)

voters. By speaking soon after the event to those who had participated in the election, this survey was able both to drill down into the motivation underpinning real-world (as opposed to hypothetical) voting behaviour and, significantly, to identify the distribution of different positions across voters for each of the major parties. It therefore meets the criteria for validity discussed in Chapter 1. Looking at responses on Iraq, it is clear there was ambiguity about the perceived rectitude of the war. 47% of voters surveyed agreed that Britain should have been involved, and 47% disagreed. Considerable concern was expressed about Tony Blair's personal management of the ongoing conflict, with a slim plurality of 42% thinking the situation in Iraq getting worse compared to 38% who thought it was getting better. On the other hand, 55% of respondents agreed that the people of Iraq were glad to see the fall of Saddam Hussein, compared to 22% who thought the Iraqis would rather have been left alone. Crucially, 50% of voters thought "the political campaign provided plenty of debate about the war and whether the country was misled or not, and we should now just get on with the business of calming and rebuilding Iraq". The question is notable in itself, with its focus on "whether the country was misled or not". Even in the Labour Party's own polling, the focus was on the pre-invasion communication of the war at least as much as on the post-invasion management of the occupation, where the government actually fared somewhat better. 76% of respondents agreed that the Iraqis deserved British support in rebuilding their country, 70% that terrorists were to blame for the ongoing instability and that they should be resisted by British forces, 69% that Britain should be proud of its role in bringing democracy to Iraq, and 64% that fighting al-Qaeda in Iraq reduced the likelihood of needing to fight al-Qaeda in Britain. Overall, 67% concluded that Britain had to "stay the course". There was agreement, too, with the notion that the war in Iraq had shown rogue leaders the dangers of violating international norms and international law (68% agreed), and that the war in Iraq had proven the resolution of the international community in taking enforcement action against rogue states (60% agreed). The most negative voter assessments came in the area of communications. 60%

agreed with the statement that “the issue is not whether we were right to go to Iraq or not. The issue is that the people and the Parliament were lied to about the reasons for going”. 53% still thought the invasion had been illegal, 59% that it had turned the Muslims world against the West, and 47% that Saddam Hussein had never been a real threat to the region and so “we had no real reason to go in”. In each case, the real cause of public dissatisfaction lay in the government’s efforts to win support for the conflict, rather than in the reality of the conflict itself. Voters were hardly happy about the lack of progress in Iraq, but they were for the most part willing to give British (and allied) forces time to work, having been convinced that continuing the campaign was the lesser of two evils. They were not happy about, as they saw it, having been lied to over the decision to go to war in the first place.

Tony Blair’s government did, then, suffer a degree of electoral punishment as a result of its decision to go to war in Iraq. Unlike its Spanish counterpart, that punishment did not lead to its removal from office. As had been the case for Bush in the US, Blair was shielded to an extent by his opponents’ having supported the invasion, and so their inability to attack his decision on principle. Their roundabout attempts to reframe the debate by focusing on the question of whether the government’s pre-invasion statements, particularly about Iraqi WMD and the legal basis for action without a ‘second’ UNSCR, had some success because they chimed with many voters’ views. They also however helped rally Labour Party loyalists to the government’s support. Ultimately the Conservatives in 2005, like the Democrats in the US in 2004, were simply not in a position to capitalise on the unpopularity of the Iraq campaign in order to throw the incumbent government out of office. However contentious the particular policy may have been, it could not alter the broader political landscape.

British Muslims

One traditional Labour-voting section of the electorate did not rally to the government's cause in 2005. Labour's support among British Muslims collapsed. *Figure 37* lists the ten constituencies with the highest proportion of Muslim voters in the country at the 2005 election.

Constituency	Labour Vote Change	Incumbent MP	MP's War Vote	Result
Birmingham Sparkbrook Small Heath	-21%	Roger Godsiff	For	Hold from Respect
Bethnal Green and Bow	-16.5%	Oona King	For	Loss to Respect
Bradford West	-7.9%	Marsha Singh*	Against	Hold from Conservative
East Ham	-19.2%	Stephen Timms	For	Hold from Respect
Birmingham Ladywood	-17%	Clare Short	For	Hold from Lib Dem
Blackburn	-12.1%	Jack Straw*	For	Hold from Conservative
Poplar/Canning Town	-21.1%	Jim Fitzpatrick*	For	Hold from Conservative
West Ham	-18.7%	Lyn Brown	Abstain	Hold from Respect
Bradford North	-7.2%	Terry Rooney	For	Hold from Lib Dem
Ilford South	-10.7%	Mike Gapes*	For	Hold from Conservative

Figure 37: Labour vote trends in constituencies with highest Muslim populations, 2005 general election (BBC News).

In each case, the Labour share of the vote had declined markedly from 2001. Several of those Labour MPs who escaped defeat despite suffering a dramatic drop in their share of the vote might have been in more danger had the anti-war Liberal Democrats, who captured many defecting Labour votes, not started from such weak positions in their constituencies. Included within this group, marked with an asterisk (*) in *figure 37*, is Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, one of the ministers at the centre of British policymaking towards Iraq. Straw had known at the time of the invasion that it would cause him trouble in Blackburn (Stothard 2003, 52, Straw 2010b, 102). This knowledge had not, however, been enough to convince him to change course. Indeed, as Marsha Singh and Clare Short found, even taking an anti-war position was not enough to mitigate the loss of support felt by Labour in areas of large Muslim populations.

Just as voters in general had expressed the position of their favoured Party on Iraq in post-election polling, so too Muslim voters had apparently identified Labour as a whole with

being pro-war, punishing its MPs regardless of their individual attitude towards the invasion. The effect was further exacerbated by the establishment of the Respect Party by rebel MP George Galloway, who had by this point been expelled from Labour over his opposition to the government's actions in Iraq. Respect ran on an anti-war, pro-Muslim platform, and gave several incumbent Labour parliamentarians a close challenge. One, Oona King, was in fact beaten by Galloway himself. Thanking King for her work as a constituency MP, Galloway declared "it was not her defeat, it was a defeat for Tony Blair and New Labour for all of the betrayals" (Galloway 2005). Regardless of Galloway's rhetoric, however, the loss of one MP was never likely significantly to impact upon the Prime Minister.

It is apparent, then, that the 2005 general election was affected, though not decisively, by disillusionment over Iraq amongst British Muslim voters, many of whom had previously supported Labour, but whose party loyalties were weakened by the government's policies towards the Muslim world. Christopher Hill has suggested that while "in the past, ethnic minorities have often felt beleaguered and powerless...discounted by those making foreign policy, with no fear of consequences in the letter-columns or ballot boxes, let alone the streets", in 21st century Britain "this is no longer the case" (Hill 2007, 262). Labour was damaged by Muslim voters' disaffection at the ballot box in 2005. Both the Stop the War Coalition, which orchestrated the 15 February 2003 mass protests in London, and the Respect Party that challenged Labour over Iraq in 2005, were organisations with high levels of Muslim participation at every level. The Blair government's foreign policy decisions (and their consequences) had damaged its domestic political coalition. Interestingly, the effect appears still to be relevant. George Galloway, who had failed to win a seat at Westminster in the 2010 general election, was returned as MP for Bradford West at a by-election in March 2012. Hailing the result as "the Bradford spring" in reference to the 'Arab spring' of 2011, he sought in his victory speech to link the two main themes of his campaign; a continued focus on Arab and Muslim causes (including Iraq, despite the withdrawal of British troops in 2009), and an 'old

Labour' economic line designed to appeal to the underprivileged. With regard to Iraq and Afghanistan, he was explicit. The Labour Party, the main target of his arguments, had to "stop supporting illegal, bloody, costly, foreign wars, because one of the reasons why they were so decisively defeated this evening was because the public do not believe that they have atoned for their role in the invasion and occupation of other people's countries, and the drowning of those countries in blood" (Galloway 2012). Whether Galloway is right on the last point is debatable, but that he was successful in seeking office while repeatedly revisiting the supposedly concluded issue of Iraq suggests the voters of Bradford West (which appears in *figure 37* as one of the constituencies with the highest Muslim populations in the UK) were at least not put off by it.

One key element of the 2004 Spanish election which was not repeated in either the US or the UK was the dramatic series of terrorist attacks carried out on the Madrid train system three days before the vote. Ten remotely-operated bombs on four commuter services killed 191 people and wounded hundreds more. Before the attacks the Aznar government had held a slim lead in opinion polls, although there was substantial public dissatisfaction with its Iraq policy. Despite attempts to frame the bombings as the product of domestic divisions by blaming the Basque separatist group ETA, the government was unable to respond effectively to evidence, which soon mounted, that the attacks were the work of al-Qaeda-inspired Islamists based in Spain. It is unclear to what extent the Madrid bombings directly swung the election in Jose Luis Zapatero's favour, but certainly they raised the salience of the ongoing Spanish presence in Iraq just days before voters cast their ballots. Zapatero ordered Spanish forces out of Iraq shortly after coming to office. In the US, Osama Bin Laden sought to dampen President Bush's re-election chances with a video statement issued in the final days of the campaign. Here, however, the rally effect engendered by Bin Laden's appearance appears to have helped rather than hindered Bush (Burke 2011, 174).

Britain, too, faced terrorist activity linked to its Iraq policy, but crucially not until after the 2005 election, by which point it was too late for voters to be swayed. On 7 July 2005, four British citizens carried out suicide bombings on the London transport network, creating in the process what is still the most striking example of the long-term negative impact of Iraq on British Public Opinion (Bromund 2009, 269-270). Chapter 1 defines Public Opinion as views actively expressed by non-governmental actors through a deliberate effort to influence public debate. Although a particularly violent and extreme form of expression, the 7 July bombings fit within this definition. Video messages recorded prior to the attacks by two of the attackers, Mohamed Siddique Khan and Shezhad Tanweer, were subsequently intercut with al-Qaeda footage and released by jihadist groups for broadcast on al-Jazeera. Khan, who spoke chillingly in a broad Yorkshire accent, justified his action by telling his audience “your democratically-elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible” (Khan 2005). Tanweer was more explicit in linking his actions to the presence of British troops in the Middle East; “what you have witnessed now is only the beginning of a string of attacks that will continue and become stronger until you pull your forces out of Afghanistan and Iraq” (Tanweer 2005). Even before these images had been broadcast, the claim was being made that British involvement in Iraq had provoked the attacks, although Blair worked to resist the argument (Seldon, Snowden and Collings 2007, 377). As he later wrote, “it’s a nightmare of an argument to deal with because, on one level, if you don’t fight these people, it’s possible you don’t feature so much on their hate list...[but] if you give even a sliver of credence to the argument, then suddenly it’s our fault, not theirs, which is, naturally, the very thing they want” (Blair 2010b, 570). Penn, Schoen & Berland were again contracted to determine the wider passive public response. Surveys showed 38% of those polled blaming “the hatred of certain Islamist groups for the West” for the attacks, compared to 30% British involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, and 12% Britain’s relationship with the US. That a plurality would apparently have agreed with Blair’s view may

have been comforting, however if the figures for British policy towards Iraq and British policy towards the US are combined, it is clear that more respondents blamed the government for provoking the attacks than blamed terrorists for carrying them out. A subsequent question showed 49% seeing the attacks as a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and 43% as evidence that the fight against terrorism had to be continued. 68% agreed that “if we let these attacks force us out of Iraq, it will send the wrong message to the terrorists” and, significantly, the proportion of respondents who thought Britain should not have taken military action to remove Saddam Hussein from power fell from 47% in the aftermath of the 2005 election to just 42% after the bombings (Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, Inc 2005b). At the same time, however, a survey of young British Muslims found agreement that British policy had led to the attacks, and that more than 25% felt a conflict between being “British” and being a “Muslim” (Hill 2007, 275). The identity of the ‘British Muslim’ was coming under increasing pressure in the post-Iraq period as a result of the bitter political divisions that conflict had created.

The decision to go to war in Iraq, then, had social as well as political consequences in Britain, although it must be noted that the radicalisation of young Muslim men was far from a new phenomenon (Husain 2007). As the situation on the ground grew more chaotic, and Iraqi civilian and Western military casualties rose, disaffection amongst British Muslims came to affect their voting behaviour, and even to drive some individuals to acts of violence. If the start of the war had triggered a decline in general public trust in the Blair government, and a slide in its electoral fortunes, the effect was particularly marked amongst this section of the British public. Its consequences, particularly the rise of the ‘home grown’ suicide bomber, and the concomitant collapse of the image of Britain as a ‘multicultural’ society, spread much further.

Conclusion

As damaging as the failures on the ground in Iraq were for the Blair government, it suffered greater reputational and electoral costs as a consequence of its own mismanaged 'spin'. Efforts to minimise uninformed press speculation about the prospects of military action in 2002 and early 2003 were widely interpreted as attempts to mislead Public Opinion, a perception compounded as ministers' denials of imminent conflict grew increasingly disingenuous. Much of the support that eventually existed for the invasion was based on grudging acquiescence, with most observers agreeing that Iraq posed a potential threat to international security, and few willing to speak in support of Saddam Hussein's regime. Unfortunately for the government, not only was the war itself costly and unsuccessful, a large proportion of journalists and editors approached it ready not only to be critical in their coverage, but actively looking for failure. So enthusiastic were they about publishing material damaging to ministers that on occasion they went too far, raising accusations of perfidy and misconduct that went beyond what could actually be proven. The basic problem for the government, however, was that it had taken the country to war promising to destroy WMD that Iraq did not actually possess. Winning individual arguments, such as that with the BBC over Andrew Gilligan's *Today* report, did little to arrest the terminal decline in public trust because overall the gulf between pre-war rhetoric and post-invasion reality remained vast. The continued violence in Iraq ensured a constant stream of bad news about the consequences of military action, fuelling an endless debate over whether it had been legitimate in the first place. This further undermined trust in the government, while allowing political opponents who had supported the campaign to revisit their support. Despite having voted in favour of the war, the Conservative Party was able to attack the government at the 2005 election because it could use doubts over presentation to cast aspersions on New Labour's honesty.

Conservative criticism, and the media's continued stoking of public disquiet with the ongoing war in the context of rising costs and casualties, damaged the government's electoral

position. It managed to retain office partly because the Conservatives were limited in terms of how far they could criticise on substantive grounds a decision they had voted for, and partly because once one major political party sought to make Iraq a partisan issue, supporters of its rivals naturally responded. Blair was saved in 2005, as he had been in 2003, in large part by Labour Party tribal loyalties. Left-wingers were no more warlike in 2005 than they had been two years earlier, but they chose to back Blair over Iraq rather than to capitulate to the Conservatives. It was only in the British Muslim community that the war remained unforgiveable, and here the consequences were far more devastating for ordinary people on the buses and tube trains of London than for the government. Only one Labour MP appears to have lost her seat as a direct result of the war in Iraq, although many more fell victim to the general decline in the Party's support evident as it concluded its second four-year term. Fifty-two people died in Britain's first suicide bombings, explicitly linked by their perpetrators to the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Members of Tony Blair's inner circle continue to believe that they are unfairly maligned over Iraq. Blair himself refuses resolutely to apologise for taking the country to war. To an extent this consistency reflects habits learned in opposition and carried into government, underpinned by a view that journalists would report any hint of nuance as evidence of division or doubt. Probably too it represents a sustained belief on the part of former decision-makers that they did the best they could have done with the information available to them at the time. Public inquiries under Lords Hutton and Butler, and Sir John Chilcot, have revealed very little evidence of actual dishonesty in the way the invasion was 'sold'. The decline in public trust discussed in this chapter resulted more from *perceived* than from *actual* wrongdoing, being driven by dissatisfaction with 'spin' and the shortcomings of the official case for war, and exacerbated by military failings. The invasion of Iraq was damaging for the Blair government, but not on such a scale that it lost office. Instead its

reputation was blackened, its power eroded, and the coherence of its vision for multicultural Britain left greatly weakened.

Chapter 8 – Implications

Although it focused originally on public opinion as a potential influence over British foreign policy, this study ultimately grew to encompass the wider range of actors and structures that together comprise the system of public debate. Partly this shift in emphasis follows logically from the constructivist definition of Public Opinion set out in Chapter 1. Constructivism implies that supposedly straightforward foreign policy concepts such as ‘interest’, ‘legitimacy’, and ‘success’ are determined more by rhetoric than by ‘reality’. Partly, too, it reflects the way the Blair government developed and enacted its Iraq policy. It has proven “impossible, even for the toughest-minded historian, to ignore entirely what Tony Blair...said” during the course of the debate, not least because “on many days he [did] virtually nothing else but speak” (Stothard 2003, 173). Every major decision taken in Downing Street during this period involved some consideration of presentational matters, and for long periods *presentation was the policy*. During the early stages of the Afghan war, Alastair Campbell established the Coalition Information Centre, actively driving the global news agenda from three different time zones. When Tony Blair agreed with George Bush that their next step after removing the Taliban from power should be to confront Iraq, he emphasised that presenting the decision properly to the public would be an essential precursor to success. Britain’s WMD dossier clumsily conflated threat assessment and policy advocacy in seeking to convince sceptical Public Opinion of the need to take action against Baghdad. The entire UN process was designed to prove that war was a last resort, though in the end it largely had the opposite effect. The reversion to moral arguments in the final weeks before the invasion allowed Blair finally to present his case as he saw it. By then, however, the legitimacy of the entire enterprise had been undermined by the frequency with which the official line had changed (Williams 2005, 192-193).

Chapter 7 discussed how the Blair government wound up more hindered than helped by its communication efforts during the build-up to war in Iraq. This Chapter explains the

implications of this observation for the study of British foreign policy. It looks at three broad areas covering the actors, structures, and processes at work, and identifies a number of potential considerations for future research. The first area discussed is the system by which the Blair government sought to manage, or 'spin', news coverage of its policy. Although dominated in the popular imagination by one notorious 'spin doctor', Downing Street's PR approach was neither unique nor unprecedented. Governments have long sought to set the agenda for public debate through efforts to influence journalists, and to frame issues, personalities, policies, and events in a positive light. The second area is the other half of the news management equation, the media itself. Journalists undoubtedly come under pressure to repeat the 'official line' put out by ministers. At the same time, however, they face a range of competing interests and imperatives which constrain simultaneously their independence and the degree to which they become beholden to any one set of actors. For the most part these influences, which are both ideological and economic, are endemic characteristics of the way the modern media operates, rather than the product of individual agency in any meaningful way, an observation which raises questions about how plausible the concept of 'news management' actually is. The final area explored by this chapter, and its overarching theme, is the interaction between the imperatives and practices of policymakers and journalists in modern Britain. Gaining favourable coverage for their decisions has become so crucial to leaders that the conceptual distinction between the substance and the communication of foreign policy has broken down. Spin doctors contribute to decision-making. Substantive actions are undertaken for news management purposes. Rhetoric and reality interact in the assessment of policy success and policy failure, and neither alone determines how any one decision plays out. To understand policymaking, media coverage, and public opinion, then, it is necessary to identify their interrelationship. Each area is affected by the others to a greater or lesser degree depending on the specific circumstances. Studies that fail to account for the full range of interactions fail adequately to explain the impact of domestic constraints on British

foreign policymaking. A study of the Iraq war without political communication at its heart would inevitably be incomplete.

News management

The interrelationship between the substance and the communication of foreign policy operates at a practical level as a result of the functional integration of news management into the policymaking process that has taken place over recent decades. Media advisers no longer simply receive fully-formed policies and then set about presenting them to the public through the press. They now contribute actively to policy formation. British journalists' dissatisfaction with the way the Iraq campaign was 'spun' may have reflected an established tension in the relationship between ministers and the media, but New Labour did not invent 'spin' (McNair 2000, 123). Political scientists have recognised for decades the role of "the manufacture of consent" for the favoured policies of powerful actors by specialist professionals (Lippmann 1922, 248). Tony Blair had been "scarred" by the hostility directed by parts of the British press towards his predecessors, and came to office determined to respond (Powell 2010b, 208, 192, Blair 2012a). Analysts often argue that democratic foreign policymakers pay little attention to the daily vicissitudes of public debate, and that they focus instead solely on longer-term trends (Baum 2004a, 606). These accounts neglect the belief common amongst leaders, however, repeatedly evidenced in New Labour's conduct in office, that short-term news management is a prerequisite of longer-term political success (Knecht and Weatherford 2006, 710). Rather than engaging too closely in opinion management on their own account, British ministers employ specialists to handle media relations for them (Hill 2003, 276). One of Blair's first acts as Labour leader had been to hire Alastair Campbell, specifically "to counter hostile media coverage" of the Party's agenda after years in opposition (Moloney 2000, 127). As he later put it to the Leveson Inquiry, Blair believes that "in today's media world, you need a first class media head. Anything else is an act of insanity" (Blair 2012a, 9). During the invasion of Iraq

Blair thought his chief 'spin doctor' so important to his policymaking circle that he preferred his presence at key meetings with President Bush to that of British Ambassador to the US Christopher Meyer. Although he was a career diplomat, Meyer had worked as a senior press officer in the 1980s, and so could presumably have advised Blair on the presentational side of the diplomatic equation. Blair wanted more than a diplomat with news management experience, however. He wanted a news manager, even one (like Campbell) with little knowledge of foreign affairs.

This study's first implication for the future analysis of British foreign policy, then, is that policymakers want favourable news coverage for their policies, and establish powerful mechanisms to seek it out. Reversing the argument, we might equally conclude that the fact that the Blair government went to great lengths in seeking positive news coverage, introducing a range of innovations and placing public communications at the heart of its agenda, *proves* the significance it attached to managing Public Opinion (Cohen 1973, 181). Although many studies frame active news management in negative terms, describing political communication as "manipulation" (Page and Shapiro 1992, 283, 355, Jacobs 1992, 199, Nincic 1992, 17, Kaufmann 2004, 7-8), it is not necessary to make normative judgements in order to assess the impact of the activities themselves. References in Campbell's diary suggest that the Blair government was quite cavalier about describing its own activities as "propaganda" (Campbell and Stott 2007, 572), at least compared to democratic leaders more generally (Cohen 1995, 70). Propaganda is a subjective term, however. The methods by which ministers and officials sought to stimulate support for military action against Iraq did constitute a "*deliberate* attempt to persuade people to think and behave *in a desired way*" (Casey 2008, 5, emphasis in original). At the same time, it is not clear that they strayed across the line between legitimate and illegitimate activity established by the different definitions of 'spin' discussed in Chapter 4. There is apparently nothing wrong with the government presenting its case in the best light possible *without* resorting to dishonesty (McNair 2000, 127, Louw 2005, 143, Gaber 2007,

225). As the Blair government discovered, the credibility of official messages will suffer if the public no longer trusts what it is told. Lying, then, is probably counter-productive as well as illegitimate.

British policymakers do not share the traumatic memory held by some of their American counterparts of the apparent role played by critical media coverage in the US defeat in Vietnam (Hallin 1986, 211, Taylor 1992, 270). That is not to say that journalists are seen as less significant in the UK, however. Christopher Meyer thought that in the US the leading foreign affairs commentators had considerable power to influence policy, but that they had “no equivalent in the United Kingdom” (C. Meyer 2005, 209). Discussions around the WMD dossier, by contrast, show leading journalists were regarded in Downing Street as both “trusted sources” for the development of public opinion and key contributors to Public Opinion (Berinsky 2007, 975). Jonathan Powell, for example, asked Campbell in one email about how best to answer questions raised by Donald MacIntyre of *The Times* (Powell 2002). Blair meanwhile has talked about the difficulty of keeping “the line between persuading the media of a policy; and allowing them privileged access in formulating it” (Blair 2012a, 5). Meyer may not have thought British commentators as well-placed to influence actual foreign policy as their peers in the US, but clearly that scepticism did not translate into policymakers’ behaviour. It may even be that the news management innovations introduced in the early summer of 2002, particularly the Prime Minister’s monthly press conference, increased the government’s exposure to leading journalists, both raising awareness of their concerns, and adding to the pressure to provide them with answers.

News management only influences the passive public if the media influences the passive public. Interestingly, the Blair government’s desire to shape the way its Iraq policy appeared in the press appears to have developed despite limited evidence that media coverage has any effect on ordinary citizens’ views. Foreign policy analysts have historically been sceptical about the existence of a “mass market for detailed information on foreign

affairs" (Almond 1950, 232). As Chapter 1 discussed, ordinary citizens are thought to be far more concerned with matters that directly affect their daily lives than with the more abstract and remote issues arising in the international arena. Several studies of public opinion have even pointed out that, from a purely economic perspective, it is entirely rational for the average voter to ignore foreign policy much of the time (cf. Page and Shapiro 1992). Few individuals have sufficient leisure to justify the level of commitment necessary to gain viable first-hand knowledge of the wider world, and fewer still stand to gain or lose substantially from events overseas. Armed conflict changes the calculus slightly. While "in the ante-bellum period, nobody has to fight and nobody has to pay" (Lippmann 1922, 241), a decision to go to war can mean serious consequences for democratic publics. This effect has been reduced in the postmodern era by the shift away from 'total war', but it still occurs to an extent. In addition, more recent studies of the interplay between public opinion and foreign policy have noted that the lack of information most citizens hold about international affairs cannot be taken as evidence that they do not care about what goes on beyond their state's borders (Risse-Kappen 1991, 481). Ignorance does not necessarily equate to indifference, particularly given that the easy availability of information in the internet age makes finding out about an issue that has suddenly sprung to prominence relatively straightforward. Even where they are dependent on news reports for information, audiences seemingly do not accept uncritically what they are told; they engage actively with reports, generating their own alternative interpretations of policies and events within the limitations of their knowledge. As a result, even where officials win the media over, they may still struggle to maximise public support. When Downing Street sought positive coverage for its positions, it accepted that winning the backing of journalists was an intrinsic good, but it also guessed at their ability to affect voting behaviour in the population at large. British leaders are not alone in undertaking news management activities for reasons primarily to do with fear and ignorance (Cohen 1995, 70, Jacobsen 2008, 339). The Blair government's approach to Iraq reflected *both* the individual-

level desire to win over key voices contributing to British Public Opinion, *and* this brand of blind faith in the trickle-down electoral benefits of such success.

British journalists fulfilled two broader functions relevant to the understanding of this interaction during the Iraq debate. Firstly, they provided information about the policy that might otherwise have been unavailable, particularly once the centre of gravity in the crisis shifted from London and Washington to New York and Baghdad from late 2002 onwards. Information provision is a relatively straightforward media function; journalists fulfil a “gatekeeping role”, determining what ‘facts’ become news and so what material is available to citizens seeking to judge the efficacy of a policy proposal (Hill 2003, 274). There is however limited evidence that the passive public actually gains much knowledge from increased exposure to news about international affairs (Caspary 1970, 541, Page and Shapiro 1992, 283, Hill 2003, 264). Secondly, although journalism “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think”, it can still be “stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*” (Cohen 1963, 13, emphasis in original). Media coverage is held to fulfil an *agenda-setting* role for the wider public. In theory, audiences “learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position” (McCombs and Shaw 1972, 176). Because the media determines the sort of opinion poll data that is generated and made publicly available it is impossible to judge the knock-on impact of the Blair government’s efforts to set the agenda for public opinion more generally during the build-up to the Iraq war. Questions were simply not asked of the passive public on areas beyond the mainstream of public debate as it played out in the pages of the press. In theory, however, government success in setting the media agenda *should* have been mirrored by public opinion more generally. There is good experimental evidence available showing that news coverage does influence what issues audiences think are important (Iyengar, Peters and Kinder 1982, Iyengar and Kinder 1987, Iyengar 1991, Iyengar and Simon 1993, Cohen 1995, 123). Further analyses have suggested both that policymakers

pursue media management strategies primarily in order to influence the news agenda (Pfetsch 1998, 71, Splichal 1999, 26, Esser and Spanier 2005, Silberstein 2005, Heffernan 2006, 583), and that in doing so they actually stand a decent chance of success (Page 2000, 88, Klarevas 2002, 433, Soroka 2003, 27, Knecht and Weatherford 2006, 714). To a degree, then, the Blair government *was* able to influence the agenda of the British public debate over its Iraq policy, although it was constrained by the hostilities latent in the media market. Certain exercises, such as the decision to 'go the UN route', shifted the focus of public debate in policymakers' preferred direction. Others fared less well, especially the attempt, through the 'dossier' exercise, to focus attention on the alleged threat posed by Iraq's WMD.

Agenda setting is only the first part of the news management process, however. Governments compete just as actively to secure positive *framing* for their positions (Gaskarth 2006, 327, T. Solomon 2009, 276). Framing efforts are often subtle, like the repeated juxtaposition of terrorism and Saddam Hussein in public statements, which created the impression that there was a link between the two without anyone actually (dishonestly) asserting it. They involve the careful use of language to establish a certain interpretation of reality as a standard against which alternative arguments are assessed (Hilsman 1987, 229). British ministers and officials benefitted from the considerable leeway all governments have in using selective framing to seek positive coverage for their decisions (Silberstein 2005, 2-3, Wolfe 2008, 2). At times they came close to achieving the ultimate goal of political communication, namely dominance or *hegemony* over public debate, a condition under which alternative interpretations appear unrealistic or illegitimate (Jackson 2005, 19). They failed most notably in the course of debates over the UN weapons inspection process and the necessity of a 'second' UNSCR in early 2003. Perhaps crucially, they never managed to follow up successful agenda-setting efforts with effective framing. By advocating a UN route, the Blair government shifted the focus of the public debate over the confrontation with Iraq onto the issue of the enforcement of UN Security Council Resolutions. From September 2002 onwards,

arguments both for and against military action assumed the need to ensure Iraq complied with its disarmament obligations, differing only over the best way of doing so. The government was unable, however, to get a majority of Public Opinion to accept its interpretations of the proper role of the UN, the significance of UNMOVIC, and the nature of international law. News management is thus multifaceted, and can be effective on some levels while failing on others.

Political leaders are often regarded as having the upper hand in their efforts to lead public discussion of their foreign policy decisions. Governments usually hold the power of initiative in deciding what issues are brought to the media's attention, while their institutional authority enables them to exercise a degree of control over the definition of 'national interest' (Hill 1981, 59-60). They have access to the media, and they are in a position at least to derive influence from that access (Silberstein 2005, 2-3). Outsiders frequently feel unable to question what they are told by ministers. Journalists fear "stigmatisation as traitors and possible legal sanctions" for rejecting the official line (Carruthers 2000, 166-167), and they recognise that "they are in a weak position to second-guess officials who have access to the latest top-secret information" (Casey 2008, 12). Foreign policy may be up for debate within the public sphere, then, but certain aspects of the conduct of statecraft remain beyond the reach of ordinary observers. Interestingly, however, policymakers tend to be "far more convinced of their own limitations in this sphere" compared to journalists' perceptions of them (Casey 2008, 13). Although most models assume the media will be heavily influenced by official positions, particularly during times of war, "those prosecuting wars continue to complain that news media are a 'problem', insufficiently supportive, perhaps even siding with the enemy" (Robinson, Goddard, et al. 2009, 534). Partly this sense of persecution stems from an unwillingness on the part of policymakers to accept that the public simply does not 'buy' the argument they are 'selling'. Few accept evidence of continued hostility to their plans in public debate as a sign of anything other than unduly critical journalism (Stothard 2003, 3). Partly, too, it reflects a mistaken belief that the function of the news is to transmit information from

government to the governed; a belief long challenged in the media studies literature, and analysed in more detail in the following sections.

Political communication requires both skill and luck if it is to be successful (Baker and O'Neal 2001, 682, Entman 2004, 18, 120, Louw 2005, 149). Even then, as this study has found, there are real limits to policymakers' ability to overcome powerful forces operating within the media itself, and few would accept that they exert any real control over what gets reported (Casey 2008, 13). A second implication of the way Blair government communication efforts played out in this case is therefore that the success of news management varies for reasons to do with the nature of Public Opinion that are independent of the communication process itself.

Media logic

As Blair-era officials continue to complain, modern media producers have begun to "add their own spin to stories" in response to government news management activities (Powell 2010, 204). Foreign policymakers are particularly exercised by this development because they believe media support is essential to the effective use of force overseas. During the latter part of the 20th century, it became increasingly clear that "the way in which the mass media represent [a] conflict is part of the conflict" (Brown 2003, 87). British journalists felt they had been placed on the back foot by official news management efforts during first Gulf War. Government spokesmen had dominated the information flow while journalists struggled to access independent source material, resulting in coverage that many in the media subsequently thought insufficiently objective (Bennett 1994, 17, Jasperson and El-Kikhia 2003, 114). The need subsequently identified for news reporters to adopt a more critical stance in future meant that by the time of intervention in Kosovo, in 1999, Blair government officials felt themselves losing influence over public debate. Information provided by Serbian government sources received prominent coverage alongside NATO statements, with both being subject to

sustained critical analysis. Emergency measures were taken, with Alastair Campbell being despatched to NATO headquarters to take charge of the alliance's media-management operations, with the result that the perceived influence of the 'Serb lie machine' over the western press declined (Daddow 2009, 554). During the Afghan campaign, Campbell had sought to relive his Kosovo success, creating the Coalition Information Centre, tasked with co-ordinating press statements and responding rapidly to rebut reports that differed from the official line. The result was a further rise in tensions between policymakers and journalists, however, with the latter striving ever harder to assert their independence, and the former reacting with horror as those efforts led to the use of source material of unquestionable independence but somewhat less marked probity. Even some news commentators acknowledged unreasonable behaviour on the part of their peers, with their demands for daily successes, constant indulgence in speculation, uncritical acceptance of Taliban claims about civilian casualties, pessimism, and preference for stories about divisions within the government or NATO ahead of substantive accounts of the issues.

This behaviour is not, however, simply a reaction to the increasingly sophisticated techniques deployed by Campbell *et al.*, although the threat to journalists' treasured independence posed by 'spin' does naturally provoke some sort of response (Esser and Spanier 2005, 27, Blair 2012c, 21). As Blair himself points out, trends towards less deferential news coverage of government activities, seen in the period covered by this study, began to develop before New Labour came to office (Blair 2012b, 7). They represent rather a broader tendency fuelled by a range of competing normative and economic pressures at work within British journalism, indeed within the western media sphere more generally. Journalists have long subscribed to a set of professional values that govern the way they approach information about foreign affairs. Crucial among these are commitments to independence, balance, the use of authoritative sources, and accuracy in reporting (Baum and Groeling 2010b, 20). They are increasingly constrained in terms of how far they can hold to these values, however, by

economic factors. Cost-cutting efforts reduce the time available to research and write stories. The dependence of media organisations on revenue generated by advertising forces a focus on maximising the audience reached by any one bulletin (Curran 2007, 28). These pressures are exacerbated in Britain by the rapidly shrinking size of the market for news, as audiences seek out information online instead of through traditional formats. Journalists consequently behave not as neutral observers and reporters of reality, but as “strategic, self-interested gatekeepers of public information regarding foreign policy events” (Baum and Groeling 2009, 437). The media “marketplace” thus becomes governed to a greater extent by economic imperatives rather than by its supposed commitment to truth, a factor which explains in part journalists’ failure to identify many of the weaknesses in the government case for war in Iraq, at least until after the invasion (Kaufmann 2004, 5, Zunes 2006, 22).

In recognising that the news is produced not by some objective and disinterested process of gathering and disseminating information, but in response to commercial pressures and professional imperatives, we introduce a crucial element from the critical media studies literature into the study of foreign policy. The modern media market is potentially hugely profitable and immensely competitive. If there ever existed a halcyon age in which ‘facts’ were transmitted to audiences without their being tainted by the profit motive that drives this complex system, it has long since passed (Habermas 1962, 1992, 21). In order to become ‘news’, information must now pass through what Herman and Chomsky called “news filters” established by the economic logic of the industrial-scale media (Herman and Chomsky 2002, 2). These filters have at least the potential to undermine the objective value of what gets reported. Recognising the potential effects of ‘business’ imperatives, Walter Lippmann warned against complacently expecting “the newspaper to serve us truth however unprofitable the truth may be” (Lippmann 1922, 320-321). Rather than representing objective truth, news media products must to an extent reflect the interests, biases, prejudices, and preferences of potential customers (Bauer, Gaskell and Allum 2000, 6). This is a matter of maintaining

editorial lines which match audience views, of designing news formats which appeal to large sections of the population, and of developing news-identification practices that accord with popular rather than professional definitions of what information merits coverage, all while minimising the cost to the end consumer. On each count, the drive for audiences reduces the objective value of news, and adds complexity to the system by which it is produced. This study's third implication, then, is that neither journalists, nor policymakers, nor audiences, necessarily have the last word when it comes to deciding what information will become news, and under what circumstances (Jakobsen 2000, 134, Entman 2004, 94). Each exerts a degree of influence, while their relative power is contingent on a range of outside factors.

In common with their peers in other democratic states, few members of the British passive public are interested in foreign policy when it does not involve matters of life and death. To an extent, however, the global rise of so-called 'soft' news coverage, which presents information about foreign affairs in a light hearted or humorous manner to a mass audience, has increased attentiveness to international relations as an "incidental by-product" of the drive to make news profitable (Baum 2002, 272, Baum 2003, 3-4, Baum and Potter 2008, 51). In the UK this role has largely been taken by the tabloid press, particularly *The Sun* and *The Mirror*, both of which vastly out-sell the more traditional 'broadsheet' papers, underscoring perhaps the comparative weakness of the business case for 'hard' news (Magder 2003, 33, Baum 2006, 127). Although they discussed Iraq less frequently than the broadsheets, the two leading tabloids devoted considerable space and attention to the matter over the course of the period covered by this study. To a degree the larger audience reached by these publications should have democratised the process by which the British public engaged with foreign policy. After all, the reliance of newspapers on purchasing decisions made by millions of individual consumers means that "the newspaper editor has to be re-elected every day" (Lippmann 1922, 321). The problem, however, is that reporting can be popular without necessarily being sufficiently sober (Altheide 1987, 174) or accurate (Powell 2010, 205) really

to improve the quality of public debate (Thussu 2003, 123). Chapter 2 recounts the clash between media competition and information provision that resulted when *The Mirror* and *The Sun* argued over the significance of the fall of Kabul. Instead of considering the substantive impact of the Taliban's apparent demise, Britain's two highest-selling newspapers fought with each other over which was betraying their audiences in presenting it as either a major event (*The Sun*) or an insignificant moment in a failing campaign (*The Mirror*). This tendency of journalists to focus on each other rather than on the subjects of their coverage fuelled the constant speculation over the timing of military action against Iraq during the course of 2002 in particular. As Robin Cook observed, newspapers were so afraid of being beaten in the race to be first to report the start of hostilities, they tended to pounce on anything that could be presented as evidence that it was coming soon (Cook 2003, 113). Clearly the expansion of the media audience did little, in this case, to improve the quality of the information it received. The particular example of media infighting cited here, meanwhile, suggests the greater importance placed by (tabloid) editors on 'beating' their rivals, ahead of promoting any one argument, reporting the truth, or holding the government to account. Operating in a competitive media market, journalists knew who their 'real' enemies were; other journalists. They may have shared common commitments to independence and to the search for 'truth', but their ideological differences (and the perceived differences of their target audiences) drove them into conflict with each other. The intensity of this conflict was then further fuelled by the economic factor; the need to boost audiences in a time of declining news consumption lent an edge sharpened by self-interest to individual arguments.

By the time Tony Blair became Prime Minister in 1997 observers were already growing concerned about the negative consequences of journalists' increased focus on scandal and trivia in the hunt for audiences (Curran and Seaton 5th Edn. 1997). Campbell's famed focus on 'message discipline' arose in large part from a (reasonably well-grounded) belief that the British media would seize on any hint of divisions between ministers to portray the

government as hopelessly mired in crisis (Cook 2003, 351, Kampfner 2003, 125, Campbell and Stott 2007, 756, Blair 2012b, 7). Every time a member of the Blair government so much as implied that disagreements existed within the Cabinet over Iraq, the media reported on the existence and likely political impact of those disagreements, and ignored the substantive issues that had allegedly caused them. In one example of this effect drawn from late 2001, Clare Short made some unguarded public comments about the prospect of the use of force in Afghanistan that prompted dozens of newspaper articles speculating about the impact of divisions in the Cabinet, each one of which ignored the actual question of whether military action was warranted or wise (Campbell and Stott 2007, 569). Alastair Campbell, then, was not just paranoid – and his behaviour towards the BBC over the Andrew Gilligan report demonstrates that he certainly was paranoid – but often justifiably so. Blair's remark at Cabinet in February 2002, that the government had become "more spinned against than spinning" (see Chapter 3), shows that Campbell's concerns were held more widely in Downing Street. What is interesting, however, in light of the way those involved in media management at this time continue to describe the press, is the fact that journalists' engagement in 'spin' did little to hold the government more firmly to account. British newspapers were so busy accusing Blair of being a 'poodle' or writing about potential resignations in the Cabinet that they largely overlooked the less dramatic but ultimately more significant grounds on which they could have been engaging critically with government policy. It is interesting to speculate, then, on whether efforts to limit the media's access to source material for ultimately unfounded 'scandal' stories are actually worthwhile from a strategic news management perspective. Arguably, a government eager to avoid close scrutiny of its substantive performance should actually be *encouraging* journalists to report rumour and innuendo ahead of 'hard' analysis. That the Blair government did not pursue this course suggests that it feared negative coverage more than it feared accurate coverage of its foreign policy agenda, an observation that actually speaks in favour of its good faith.

New Labour's belief that the media was constantly circling in search of a scandal was compounded by fear that the sheer pace of change in the British news business threatened to overwhelm Whitehall's sclerotic civil service press offices. Modern communications have advanced to such an extent that foreign policy no longer plays out in an isolated arena, but in one made immediate on television screens and newspaper pages within hours of events that in earlier eras might have remained distant (Hoffman 2002, Blair 2010b, 446, Blair 2012b, 11). Campbell continues to maintain that all he did was update a system that was no longer fit for purpose in the face of such developments (Hollis 2010, 58, Campbell 2010a, 4). His problem, of course, was that journalists' dependence on crises, the political orientation of individual publications, and the technology-driven development of the media market were each structural characteristics of the modern media, rather than the consequences of individual agency. It is difficult, no matter how effective a government 'spin' operation may be, to out-'spin' the fundamental nature of 21st-century journalism.

British journalists tended to focus their discussion of the Iraq confrontation on its domestic political consequences, and on the personal role of Blair, Bush, and their ministers and advisers, rather than on diplomatic or geopolitical concerns. Personalisation is one of the more common and well-established trends in media coverage of foreign affairs (Lippmann 1922, 13, Knecht and Weatherford 2006, 709, Baum 2006, 124). It is also perhaps the least damaging of the effects seen in Britain over the Iraq campaign. Christopher Meyer argues that, even for decision-makers themselves, "it is impossible to disentangle the personalities, the politics and the policies" involved in foreign affairs (C. Meyer 2005, 218-219). Tony Blair actually was at the heart of policymaking, so the fact that news reports placed him there did not concern Downing Street unduly; indeed, by making the Prime Minister more available to journalists through the monthly press conferences, Campbell arguably encouraged the practice, albeit inadvertently. The search for domestic political divisions, however, caused real difficulties. When Cabinet discussed Iraq on 7 March 2002, for example, ministers expressed a

range of views on the right policy response while agreeing on the basic need to support the US in confronting Iraq. It was, in effect, a genuine debate over the relative merits of different options, exactly the sort of thing the Cabinet is supposed to do all the time. By the time the exchange was reported it had morphed into a major political crisis. Far from this being a consequence of individual vendettas launched by hostile journalists, it in fact reflects the underlying structural logic of the modern news media. Journalists have to produce a certain volume of news each day; there are column inches to fill. As Blair himself concedes, they “have to say something”, and ideally something new (Blair 2012c, 25). Information about routine activity, particularly in a generally low-salience area such as foreign affairs, is not considered interesting enough to attract audiences and so to sell advertising space. It is dismissed as insufficiently newsworthy, therefore, not because of the substance of the issues involved, but because too few people find them interesting. In order to generate sufficient ‘news’, therefore, journalists *create their own crises*, focusing reporting on information which can be *presented* as evidence of divisions, duplicity, or imminent public danger, whether or not that presentation reflects what is actually happening (cf. Blair 2012a, 10, 2012c, 31-32). A number of specific incidents discussed through the course of this study appear more explicable when considered in light of this observation. The effect was amplified where actual events of significance were playing out in Iraq. Chapter 7 notes that the constant stream of bad news emerging from the battlefield kept it high on news agendas, ensuring discussions over the legitimacy of the action continued alongside those on whether it could ever result in success. From the government’s perspective it made no difference why journalists refused to accept nuanced arguments (Blair 2010b, 403, Powell 2010b, 153). All that mattered was that they could not be trusted with subtlety; official communications had to make absolutely categorical judgements otherwise the media would ignore their substance and focus on their uncertainties. As Chapter 4 described, the search for certainty then caused problems of its own.

Media organisations less driven by commercial pressures might have been more willing to accept government statements at face value (a prospect of uncertain desirability). They would also likely have spent less time looking for evidence of Labour Party divisions or Britain's alleged lack of influence over President Bush, and potentially more time considering the general ramifications of an attack on Iraq. There were long periods during the Iraq debate when journalists concentrated their attention almost entirely on Westminster politics, ignoring the wider geopolitical issues at play, and in the process missing their chance to consider directly the substance of what the government was proposing to do. Thus the fourth implication of the Iraq debate for the wider study of British foreign policy arises from the observation that the compulsion journalists felt, as a result of economic pressures affecting their employers, to seek out scandals, forced the Blair government into a constant crisis-management stance. Competitive forces at work in the commercial media market mean that even the most steady administration will occasionally be portrayed as adrift, and the quality of information available to passive publics in considering foreign affairs will always be constrained. Leaders' acceptance of the argument that short-term media support is a prerequisite for long-term public support forces them to engage with the baser elements of the news market, trying to minimise its worst excesses, or at least to shape them using 'spin'. In Britain during the build up to war with Iraq this effect pertained despite the potential for the government to avoid being held accountable for its actions by actively encouraging the media to focus on trivia and invented scandals, and so by directing it away from substantive analysis.

For professional reasons, journalists tend to prefer basing their stories on information gleaned from a range of authoritative sources (Hilsman 1987, 229). Just as the government relies upon the media to transmit its arguments to the public, so too the media relies upon the information the government provides to ground reporting in credible source material. The interaction between journalistic norms and the economic imperatives of the modern media is thus supplemented by the "mutual dependency" of news providers and policymakers (Thussu

2005, 4th Edition, 275). If policymakers want to communicate, they have no choice but to do so through the media, while if the media wants to write political stories then journalists must make some reference to official sources (Blair 2012a, 1). One major result of this is “indexing”, a process by which “the media calibrate news judgements...to the clout of the powerful actors whose remarks or actions are covered”(Entman and Page 1994, 97). Although the effect varies for a number of reasons, generally journalists report the views of individuals in rough proportion to the power of those individuals to influence the actual issues at stake (Althaus, et al. 1996, 412, Baum and Groeling 2008b, 1065). Since government ministers and spokesmen are best placed to influence decision-making, the ‘indexing’ effect ensures that the ‘official line’ naturally serves as a “starting point” for media coverage of British foreign policy (Gamson and Modigliani 1989, 7, Nacos, Shapiro and Isernia 2000, 4). Depending on the nature of the issues at stake, some room remains for a wider range of actors to get their voices heard including opposition politicians, journalists, ‘enemy’ spokespersons, and quasi-neutral figures such as academics and think-tanks, provided they provide views that balance what is already being said (Norris, Kern and Just 2003, 12-13, Entman 2004, 94, Robinson, et al. 2009, 534).

Although they often take little direct interest in political issues, passive publics do expect to see evidence that *someone* is offering alternatives to the official line (Almond 1950, 70, 88, Caspary 1970, 546, Everts and Isernia 2001, 17). In most cases, this expectation will be met as a result of the ‘indexing’ phenomenon; government statements will be reported alongside retorts from opposition politicians or leading members of the active public (Nacos, Shapiro and Isernia 2000, 4, Magder 2003, 36, Thussu 2005, 4th Edition, 277, Casey 2008, 12). If the public is united on an issue, however, journalists will have nothing to gain from informing it of divisions within the governing elite. There is little point in organisations dependent on keeping their audiences’ attention working too hard to change minds. Similarly, if the elite is united and the public divided, journalists’ dependence on authoritative sources will leave them struggling to write stories that reflect a wider range of views (Kern, Levering and Levering

1984, 195, Page and Shapiro 1992, 283, Bennett 1994, 24). It matters little in such circumstances whether the absence of challenge stems from a lack of contradictory information, fear of appearing unpatriotic, or even genuine agreement with the substance of official policy (Norris, Kern and Just 2003, 296-297, Kaufmann 2004, 42, Casey 2008, 12). Britain's part in the Iraq invasion was enthusiastically supported by the Conservative Party, which might ordinarily have criticised a Labour government's policies. Journalists, who were already conditioned to highlight surprising developments such as internal party divisions (Gelpi 2010, 93), thus balanced official statements with criticism emerging from Labour's own parliamentary backbenches. When this approach proved insufficient, many went further, engaging in speculation and eliding the distinction between commentary and news. This provoked in turn an increasingly aggressive effort from Downing Street to influence coverage, and created a spiral of 'spin' that came to define the entire public debate. This effect was most significant during the Summer of 2002.

It is thus not only "when credible elites defect" from the official line that "government efforts to manage public opinion [through the media] become increasingly problematic" (Powlick and Katz 1998, 29, cf. Entman 2004, 20, Casey 2008, 363). Journalists can and do create their own rhetorical competition to the government if the political class fails to provide alternative arguments for them. This effect was enhanced with regard to Iraq because some of those who *did* defect from the official line were members of Tony Blair's Cabinet. Robin Cook appears to have maintained an effective behind-the-scenes briefing operation throughout the build-up to war. The nature and scope of his objections to military action received ample airing in the press, often attributable only indirectly through his 'friends', an approach which ensured he remained insulated from any serious political consequences (at least until the time of his resignation). Clare Short's approach was blunter, involving spontaneous on-the-record interviews that undermined her credibility in the eyes of Public Opinion and so reduced her capacity to influence public debate. In both cases journalists were primed to respond rapidly

and report prominently on such senior dissent. In both cases, also, they focused their coverage on reporting the fact that there *were* disagreements, and on considering their impact, rather than on analysing the substantive issues at stake.

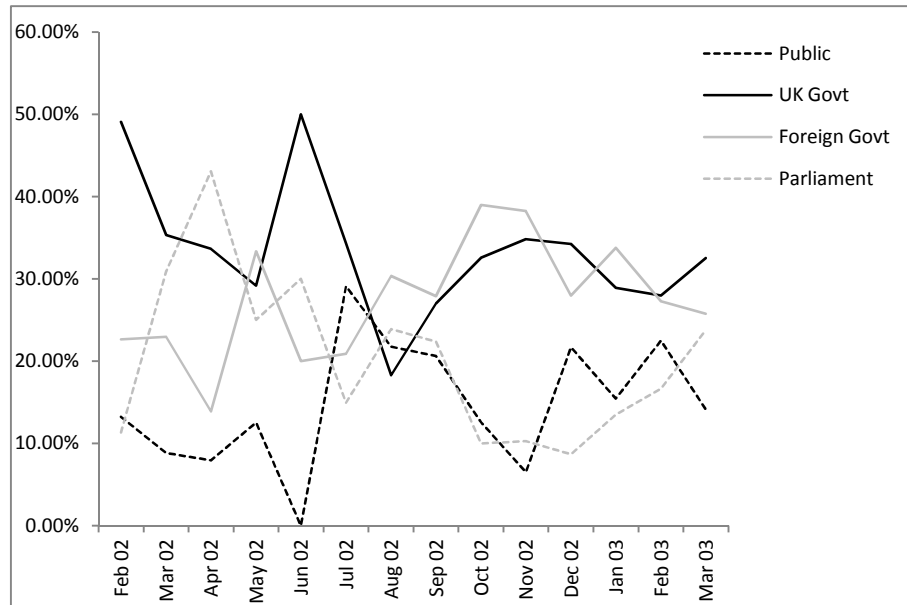


Figure 38: Proportional distribution of sources cited for UK major newspaper news stories on Iraq, February 2002 – March 2003 (n=7,916).

Although British government sources were cited more frequently by newspaper reports than those drawn from any other category during the period of this study, it is clear from the time series analysis in *figure 38* that the relative importance of different types of source varied over time. In part this variation reflects the indexing hypothesis, with journalists reacting to movements in the balance of power in the public debate. It further highlights a possible addition to the indexing model, applicable in states other than the US, where it was developed. Policymakers in Washington have more influence over international affairs than leaders in any other state, democratic or otherwise, by virtue of their position at the helm of the world's last remaining superpower. American journalists thus naturally 'index' their coverage of foreign policy to what the administration of the day is saying, drawing in comments from significant external forces, such as Congress, along the way. From the perspective of a news organisation based in London or Paris, however, Washington remains the centre of global power. British and French journalists will feature their own governments'

positions prominently, but they will usually also refer to what is being said across the Atlantic. The effect does not work both ways. It was unthinkable to an American official during the build-up to war in Iraq that the US media might pay more attention to Jacques Chirac than to Donald Rumsfeld; many incorrectly assumed that the converse would be true in terms of media coverage of events in the capitals of other democratic states. Consequently more effort was devoted by Bush administration officials to firing up the Republican party ‘base’ than on putting out messages that went over as well with public opinion in Europe as they did in the US (Kampfner 2003, 169, Campbell and Stott 2007, 581).

Type	Proportion	<i>n</i>
UK Government	29.94%	2370
Parliament	19.68%	1558
Foreign Government	28.39%	2247
UN	4.84%	383
Public	17.05%	1350
Unnamed	0.10%	8

Figure 39: Proportional distribution of sources cited for UK major newspaper news stories on Iraq, February 2002 – March 2003.

In overall terms, *figure 39* shows that roughly 30% of the 7,916 sources cited in the 2,335 news stories investigated by this study were members of the British government, or official spokespersons. Tony Blair alone accounted for 8.35% of all citations, members of his Cabinet a further 9.8%, and Downing Street officials 4.72%. A total of 28.4% of sources were members of foreign governments, principally officials and senior members of the Bush administration in the US. Just 17% of all sources cited could be categorised as “public”, including civil society representatives (3.31%), retired policymakers and officials (2.6%), journalists (2.44%), and opinion polls (2.32%). Non-governmental actors thus had only a limited ability to influence news reports about British policy towards Iraq during the period leading up to the invasion. Most of the information which became news was supplied by actors working for the British government, foreign governments, or sitting in one of the Houses of Parliament. Two possible explanations for this trend can be advanced. Firstly, it may have been that news stories about

foreign policy inevitably focus on the views of those actually involved in foreign policymaking, in line with the indexing hypothesis. Secondly, and crucially, it should be noted that journalists themselves represented the loudest and most consistent anti-war voices in the British public debate over Iraq. Civil society actors did speak up, notably through the Stop the War Coalition, but for the most part the debate was dominated by politicians and the press. Since quoting other journalists is regarded within the news industry as an admission of failure (Esser and D'Angelo 2003, Esser and Spanier 2005), it may be unsurprising that politicians, who were more likely to adopt pro-war arguments, dominated news coverage. The figures presented in this section do not account for the impact of media commentary, which as *figure 44* (below) demonstrates, narrowly took an anti-war line over the course of the debate.

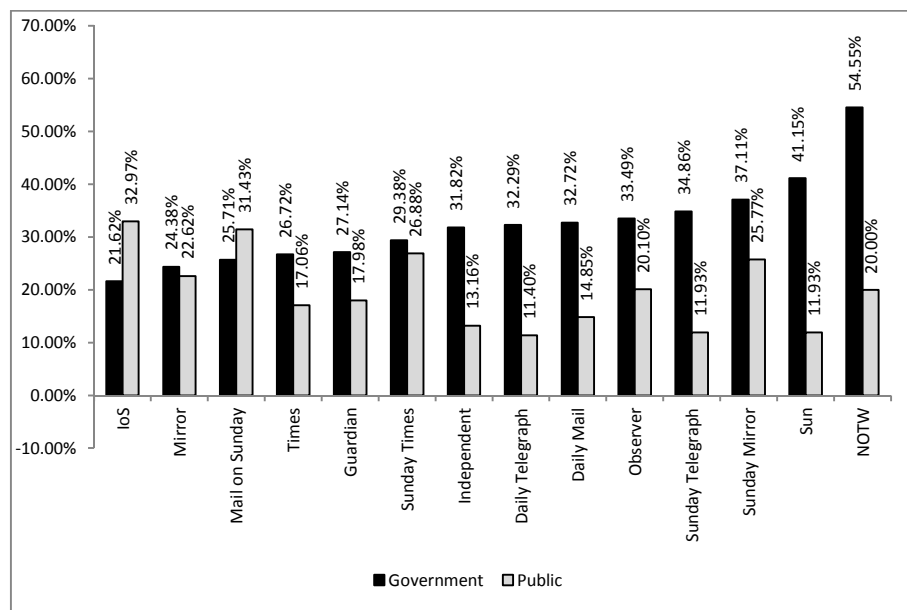


Figure 40: Proportional distribution of sources drawn from UK government and public sources cited in news stories on Iraq in major UK newspapers, January 2002 – March 2003 (n=7,916)

The dependence of the British media on official sources was not uniformly distributed across all news publications, as *figure 40* shows. For example, 55% of sources cited by the pro-war *News of the World* represented the British government, compared to just 22% of those cited by the anti-war *Independent on Sunday*. In order to test the significance of the apparent association between a newspaper's editorial position on the war, and the sources used for its news coverage, a simple regression analysis was conducted using the software package STATA.

Regression is necessary in this case to determine whether the apparent link between a publication’s editorial line and its propensity to use particular types of sources for its news coverage actually reflects an underlying trend, or simply a spurious association apparent in the data but not representative of actual behaviour. Two response variables were created, labelled ‘govsource’ and ‘pubsource’, representing the proportion of citations in each publication that referred to British government and to public sources respectively. The main input variable of interest, labelled ‘position’, described each newspaper’s stance on the war. As Chapter 1 sets out, this study involved the analysis of a large number of newspaper commentary articles published in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq. Each was assessed in terms of whether it explicitly stated a position for or against the use of force, and coded accordingly. Pro-war articles were coded 1, neutral articles (including those which discussed the situation in Iraq without stating a position on the prospect of war) were coded 0, and anti-war articles -1.

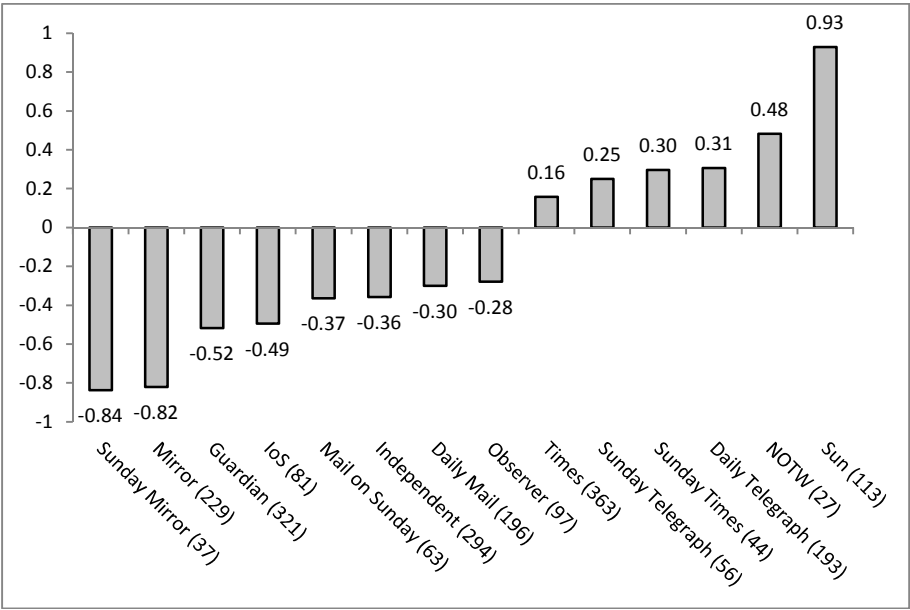


Figure 41: Average position on rectitude of war with Iraq taken by commentary articles in leading UK national newspapers, January 2002 – March 2003 (n-numbers in brackets).

Average figures, set out in figure 41, were then developed for each publication in order to gauge their overall stance on the war with reference to the full spectrum of commentary they carried. A publication which printed only pro-war comment pieces between 1 January 2002 and 20 March 2003 would receive a score of 1.00 on the scale established here, while a solidly

anti-war rival would score -1.00. Two ‘dummy’ variables, ‘sunday’ and ‘tabloid’, were created to introduce a measure of control to the model. Weekly newspapers were coded 1 on the ‘sunday’ variable while their daily equivalents were coded 0. Tabloid publications were similarly coded 1 on the ‘tabloid’ variable while broadsheets were coded 0. Sunday papers tend to be larger than weekday editions, and so to carry a greater volume of more detailed stories. Broadsheets equally contain more detailed stories than tabloids. Either effect could produce spurious associations without these control variables being included. Longer stories contain more space and so may cite a wider range of sources simply by virtue of their greater length, rather than as a consequence of their publication’s editorial line.

	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P
position	0.083817	.0321742	2.61	0.026000
sunday	0.034117	.0321456	1.06	0.314000
tabloid	0.090766	.0356038	2.55	0.029000
α	0.289874	.025102	11.55	0.000000
R ²	0.6005			

Figure 42: Results of the regression analysis of variable ‘govsource’.

The first regression analysis indicated that there *was* an association (significant at the 95% confidence level) between the position of the average commentary article published by a newspaper, and the citation of government sources in its news stories, controlling for publication type (*figure 42*). According to these results, on average we would expect to have seen the government’s share of citations in a newspaper adopting a pro-war editorial line rising by 8.4 and 16.8 percentage points when compared to neutral and anti-war equivalents respectively, holding the other variables constant. Additionally, this model shows that the proportion of sources cited by tabloid newspapers that represented the British government was on average 9 percentage points higher than in than their broadsheet equivalents, controlling for position and whether they were daily or weekly publications (significant at the 95% confidence level). There was no significant association between ‘sunday’ and ‘govsource’, meaning that Sunday newspapers were neither more nor less dependent on government

sources for their information than their daily equivalents, once the other variables were controlled for.

	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P
position	-0.06407	.0282751	-2.27	0.047
sunday	0.082567	.02825	2.92	0.015
tabloid	0.009883	.031289	0.32	0.759
α	0.14736	.02206	6.68	0
R ²	0.5901			

Figure 43: Results of the regression analysis of variable 'pubsource'.

The second regression analysis indicated that there was also an association (significant at the 95% confidence level) between the position of the average commentary article published by a newspaper, and the proportion of citations within its news stories which derived from public sources, controlling for publication type (figure 43). According to these results, we would expect to have seen non-governmental actors' share of citations in a newspaper adopting a pro-war editorial line falling by 6.4 and 12.8 percentage points when compared to neutral and anti-war equivalents respectively, holding the other variables constant. Additionally, this model shows that the proportionate citation of public sources by Sunday newspapers was on average 8.3 percentage points higher than in than their daily equivalents, controlling for the other variables. This perhaps reflects Sunday papers' longer article lengths, and so greater amount of space in which to consider a wider range of sources; data was not collected to allow this hypothesis to be tested on this occasion. There was no significant association between 'tabloid' and 'pubsource', meaning that tabloid newspapers were neither more nor less dependent on sources representing Public Opinion for their information than their broadsheet equivalents.

The levels of variation and association observed in the data generated by this study must have an explanation beyond the professional imperatives of journalists outlined above. The desire to balance competing views and the economic need to attract audiences through coverage of political conflict both encourage the citation of multiple sources, but neither effect should cause the degree of discrepancy in citation rates between publications seen here.

Indeed, the relatively high R^2 values of the two models, with both explaining around 60% of the observed variation in the output variables, suggests that these pressures were heavily counteracted by a more substantial underlying trend. British newspaper reporters apparently focused their coverage on sources likely to agree with their publication's editorial line. The tendency of anti-war publications to emphasise opinion polls, which generated predominately sceptical responses throughout the build-up to war, was only the most visible example of this effect in practice. What this analysis has shown is that similar effects took place across the entire newspaper market. It suggests a fifth implication for this study, that commercial pressures influence what information becomes news more heavily than professional norms around balance and neutrality. British print journalists choose to appeal to their audiences (or their editors) even where doing so means deviating from an objective approach to source selection based on indexing coverage to actors' power to influence events.

The fact that British newspapers apparently paid more or less attention to official statements depending on whether their editorial line favoured confrontation with Iraq or not is intrinsically significant. Its likely impact appears all the more substantial when considered in light of the broadly anti-war stance taken by the British press. *Figure 44* shows that there were just four months during the fifteen month build-up period defined by this study in which the average newspaper commentary article in circulation expressed support for war with Iraq; February, July, and November 2002, and March 2003. Even here there was only ever a narrow margin in favour of military action, and this was with pro-war papers consistently out-selling their anti-war rivals, shifting the mean position of articles in circulation towards the pro-war end of the scale. Complaints by Blair government officials that the media was giving them an unduly hard time may consequently be explained by the combined effect of most newspapers adopting anti-war editorial lines, and journalists 'indexing' news coverage according to the congruence of sources' views with those of their editors rather than to the sources' power to influence events.

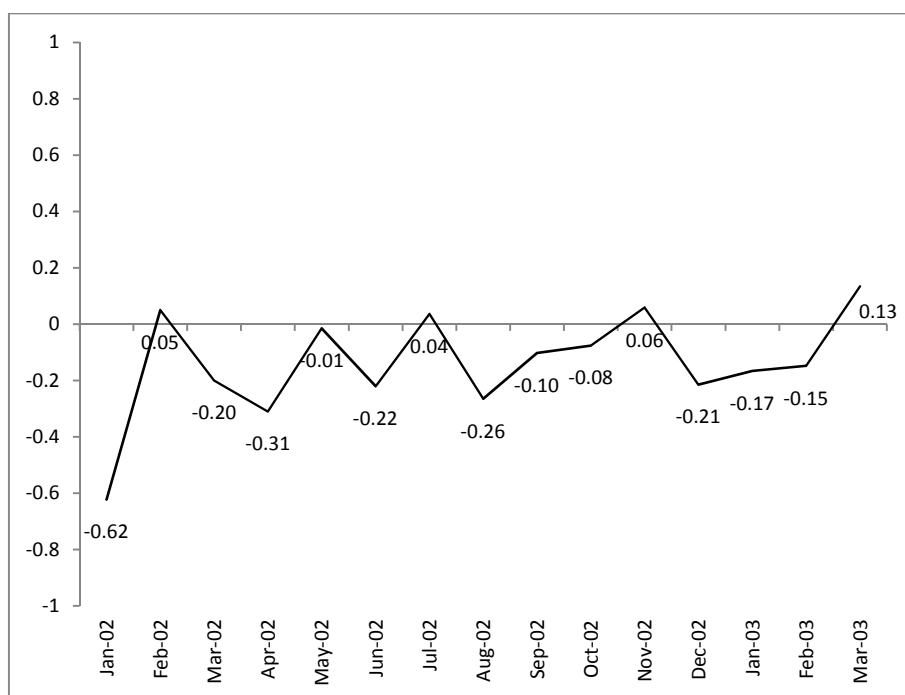


Figure 44: Average position of newspaper commentary (1 = pro-war, 0 = neutral, -1 = anti-war), controlling for circulation, January 2002 – March 2003 (n=2,114).

Understanding the impact of media logic on the public debate helps explain the conflicting pressures at work in the creation and consideration of foreign policy. It helps also to shift the focus from public opinion as the output of actors to Public Opinion as a structure constraining policymaking. Commercial imperatives incline news reporters towards novelty and scandal. They seek evidence of conflicts within political parties, and are interested in official positions only when they are unexpected, show signs of change, or can be presented (however justifiably) as evidence of crisis (Baum and Groeling 2010b, 20). Journalists' professional commitment to using credible sources, generally defined in terms of the actual ability of those sources to affect the decisions under consideration, tends to aid governments in transmitting the messages they seek to transmit. This is qualified, however, by a concurrent tendency on the part of news reporters to cleave to the editorial line adopted by their employers in deciding whose views to report. Both effects exacerbate the impact of actual divisions amongst the governing elite. In New Labour's case, they account for the prominence of anti-war Labour MPs in news coverage relating to Iraq. Rebel parliamentarians generally had limited direct power over foreign policy. They were outnumbered 3 to 1 even after having

secured the concession of a vote to authorise military action. Nevertheless their views were widely-reported in the press both because their rebellion and the government's failure to back down were unusual and thus newsworthy in their own right, and because Labour MPs were the most authoritative anti-war actors available in the circumstances of Conservative Party acquiescence in government policy. The end result was a media environment that imposed itself on policymaking, but as a self-interested force seeking headlines rather than as an objective observer. The fact, then, that Blair government policymakers clearly feared the press, and indeed clearly had good reason to, does not mean that it was actually effective at holding them to account. As this section has shown, it was in many ways structurally incapable of fulfilling such a role.

Communication and substance

This study's sixth broader implication is that it may not be possible meaningfully to distinguish between the substance and the communication of modern British foreign policy. This observation applies equally at the conceptual and the practical levels of analysis. Communication and substance are inseparable conceptually because supposedly substantive actions have communication consequences, while communication decisions affect matters of substance. Tony Blair's three 'conditions' for confronting Iraq, presented to President Bush at Crawford in April 2002, illustrate this. Not only did Blair present recommendations about how best to *sell* the policy as essential components *of* the policy, he also left open the question of whether Britain would still support the US if the 'conditions' were left unmet. This ambiguity in turn created confusion within the British government about what exactly had been agreed, and particularly over the actual conditionality of the 'conditions'. The constructivist approach adopted in this study implies that the rhetoric used to describe foreign policy determines to a significant degree the way it is understood and remembered. Concepts such as 'legitimacy' and 'success' emerge from rhetorical interactions, just as the costs of a conflict, in financial terms

as well as in lives lost, are interpreted by elite actors before ordinary people even hear about them (Baum and Groeling 2010a, 443). In other words, it is not enough actually to win a war, to minimise casualties, and to achieve the goals for which the war was fought in the first place. Rhetoric matters. Governments must win the debate over how a conflict is represented and recalled if they are to shape its consideration by Public Opinion. There are opportunities for successful communicators to frame what it means to 'win' a war, what level of casualties count as 'minimal', and what goals might realistically be achieved by military action. In the 21st century, then, "winning is about narrative, not sheer brute force" (Michalski and Gow 2007, 198). Military success "depends not only on whose army wins, but also on whose story wins" (Nye 2005, Nye 2009, 162-163, Nye 2011a, 19, Nye 2011b, 18). Reality is important still, but "both rhetoric and reality matter" (Baum and Groeling 2010a, 445). For a war to be judged a success, or decried a failure, someone must first define success. Such definitions are rarely objective. They tend to emerge from framing contests between governments and Public Opinion. This is why, as Robin Cook put it, "modern warfare involves as much hand to hand combat in the television studio as on the battlefield" (Cook 2003, 49). It is also why it proves impossible to differentiate at a conceptual level between how aspects of foreign policy are communicated, and what they represent in concrete terms.

From a practical perspective, meanwhile, New Labour's development of a strong, centralised news management system based in Downing Street helped fuel the integration of communication into policymaking. Bringing 'spin doctors' in to advise on decisions before they were made ensured that policy was developed with one eye on how it might be 'sold', potentially improving the government's position in public debate at the cost of some constraint on its substantive freedom to act (McNair 2000, 127). At both conceptual and practical levels, the integration of communication and substance has antecedents going back well before Blair came to power. In 1988 Christopher Meyer came to the end of a four-year stint as head of the Foreign Office News Department, the official centre of British political

communication efforts with respect to foreign policy. Taking the opportunity for a sabbatical, he accepted a one-year visiting research fellowship at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University. During their tenure, all Weatherhead Fellows are expected to produce an extended study of an aspect of international affairs about which they have first-hand knowledge. Meyer chose to write about the work of News Department, and its role in the communication of British foreign policy to the public through the media. Two main conclusions of significance for this study emerge from Meyer's manuscript. Firstly, he described the functional integration of press officers into the highest levels of policymaking; "the frequent need to act, or react, with the utmost speed in dealing with the press means that there is no time to go through the usual bureaucratic channels. More to the point, the importance that ministers attach to their relations with the press leads to their preferring a direct relationship with the press office" (C. Meyer 1989, 9-10). A decade before New Labour came to office, ministers already saw the media in the frenetic terms later described by Alastair Campbell, and had ceased to rely on the 'usual' civil service news management channels. For Meyer, the result of both the need to act and react quickly, and the close interest that ministers tended to take in press coverage, was that in the Foreign Office, "the head of News Department...[was] close to being an unofficial member of the Foreign Secretary's private office, with similar rights of access to the minister; while the department, because of its responsibility to advise on the presentation and presentability of policy, [was] widely drawn into the discussion of the substance of policy" (C. Meyer 1989, 11, emphasis in original). Again the Blair government's integration of spin doctors into policymaking should be seen in the context of these earlier developments. Alastair Campbell told the Chilcot Inquiry that he was involved in policymaking as "the part of that discussion and that operation that is thinking the whole time about communications issues...on something – not just on issues to do with foreign affairs and security, but on any of the major issues and high profile issues, you have to have a communications element, if you like, embedded in those policy discussions"

(Campbell 2010a, 7-8). By virtue of his unparalleled access and capacity to act on the Prime Minister's behalf, it is indeed arguable that Campbell "had more influence over New Labour foreign policy than did the various ministers nominally in charge of the UK's external affairs over the period 1997-2007" (Daddow 2011, 226). His close involvement in substantive decision-making, evidenced throughout the empirical body of this study, was both a *cause* and a *consequence* of its practical inseparability from communication. He was part of policymaking because Blair had accepted the need to shape policy according to what will 'sell' rather than waiting until decisions are made before deciding how they are to be presented. His presence then ensured that communication was factored into the wider policymaking calculus.

Meyer's account of life in News Department may, therefore, have been somewhat dated by 2003, but it was not out of date. Its second main conclusion of significance for this study was that it is no longer "possible to distinguish in any useful way between the substance of policy and its presentation" (C. Meyer 1989, 38-39). Of course the presentation and the substance of foreign policy are, in theory, distinct. Even at a conceptual level, however, the distinction does not long survive contact with reality. It is inconceivable that foreign policy decision-making might not touch upon presentational questions, or that communication activities could take place without at least raising the possibility of substantive diplomatic or political consequences. New Labour is perhaps unfairly maligned for being "wedded to the idea that presentation, and hence image, were indispensable to effective policy-making and implementation". Governments everywhere have accepted that news management is a central component of policymaking. Labour's experiences with Iraq may "serve as a testament to the confusion that can result from according as much importance to the *presentation* of the government's case as to the *substance*" (Hollis 2010, 30, 62). They do not prove that this conflation was necessarily illegitimate, particularly voluntary, or indeed unique. The impossibility of distinguishing between decisions made for 'traditional' foreign policy ends, and those made to better 'sell' those ends to sceptical domestic (and international) audiences,

caused more problems than it solved in the lead up to the Iraq war. This study differs from critics who blame Labour, Blair, and Campbell entirely for this. No one actor (or group of actors) is solely responsible. Policymakers remain free to define the limits of their 'spin' activities, and arguably the Blair government favoured its media advisers over foreign policy experts in deciding to go to war with Iraq. The integration of communication into substantive policymaking, however, is a consequence of the insinuation of Public Opinion into the foreign policymaking process through the rise of news management, itself a reaction to the challenge posed by pressures endemic to the developing commercial media market. It is not something that can be attributed solely to any one group of individuals.

There is nothing controversial about the claim that governments adjust their rhetoric in response to pressure from Public Opinion (Risse-Kappen 1991, 482, Bennett 1994, 34, Graham 1994, 201, Shiraev 2000, 297, Gilboa 2002, 732). Of course they do. Rhetoric is about persuasion. If it is not reactive, it is not effective. The Blair government tried to lead Public Opinion, but it also sought to respond to the challenges it raised. One immediate consequence of the drive on the part of officials to react more effectively to public debate has been increased understanding of what the public thinks. Ministers and officials displayed throughout the period covered by this study a "dual concern with manipulation *and* responsiveness" (Jacobs 1992, 200, 212, emphasis in original). Philip Gould's focus group and poll reports, although greeted with some scepticism by Blair and Powell (Blair 2010b, 298, Powell 2010b, 136-137), were nevertheless a necessary complement to Campbell's 'spin'. A more general implication, this study's seventh, emerges from the observation that since Public Opinion regularly affects the "nature and presentation of policy", so "when intensely focused, [it] may essentially set policy" (Sobel 2001, 239). The integration of policy substance and policy communication, and the iteration between news management and media logic, produce when considered together an indirect channel of influence running between Public Opinion and British foreign policy. Public Opinion acts as a structural constraint affecting what kinds of

policy options are considered viable, limiting a government's substantive freedom to act. It does this in a manner that reflects the values and imperatives of 21st century journalism. This effect was most clearly visible during the period of this study in the UK government's efforts to obtain a 'second' UN Security Council Resolution. Ministers failed at a sufficiently early stage to frame UNSCR 1441 and the UNMOVIC inspection process in line with their own understanding. Many of those writing in the media who opposed the use of force in Iraq responded to the government having successfully met their demand for a UN resolution by demanding a second resolution. The purpose of their demand, after all, was to avoid entirely a war they considered unjustifiable (partly at least because they didn't like members of the Bush administration). They had no interest in the government legitimising its actions through a UN process; they wanted it to change course entirely. By failing to draw a line under the matter after 1441, ministers blew the tactical advantage they had won over their opponents in public debate. Few in the British government had anticipated an inconclusive UN inspection process. Artificial deadlines imposed by the US military timetable, rather than by anything the UN or the Iraqis did, ensured that an inconclusive process was exactly what they got. Having promised to work through the UN, and having been vague in addressing the question of whether a 'second' SCR would be sought, Blair found himself in early 2003 'trapped' by his earlier commitments into entering a fruitless further negotiation without US backing and with little hope of a positive result, however much he apparently backed himself to succeed. What was most interesting about the 'second' SCR fiasco was how actively it had been pursued despite no longer being thought legally necessary. Communication had not only become intertwined with substance, it had arguably exceeded it in significance.

The established Foreign Policy Analysis literature has already identified this indirect route of public influence, without necessarily recognising its significance, in the form of the 'domestic audience costs' model of international bargaining. The model frames public communication as a tool by which democratic leaders signal their unwillingness to

compromise in entering negotiations by creating expectations in the minds of their domestic constituents that they would subsequently face punishment for failing to fulfil (Fearon 1994, 577, Partell 1997, 504, Heffernan 2006, 593). The relative transparency and accountability of democracy enhances the effect by making policymaking increasingly a public act (Leblang and Chan 2003, 387), particularly in the US, as this study found, but also in the UK. The credibility established by the invocation of the potential wrath of a domestic public is not absolute, for example where there is doubt about the government's ability to carry through its proposed course (Putnam 1988, 439, Eichenberg 2005, 9), or where the public has limited direct power over, and/or little interest in an issue area (Trumbore 1998, 545, Clare 2007, 732). The 'domestic audience costs' model nevertheless integrates both government and opposition rhetoric (Ramsay 2004, 460) into a framework that places the very 'hard' rational choice notions of actor credibility and office-seeking at the heart of a 'soft' constructivist account of policymaking (Tomz 2007, 821). When both President Bush and Prime Minister Blair explicitly warned Saddam Hussein that they meant to ensure he gave up his WMD, the power of their messages lay not only in the substance of what they said, but also in the domestic political implications of failing to carry their threats through (Badie 2010, 289). Indeed, Blair tacitly acknowledges in a passage discussed in Chapter 3 that at Crawford he and Bush consciously took a tougher stance against Iraq in public than the "more nuanced" approach they had discussed in private primarily to demonstrate to Saddam Hussein that they were serious (Blair 2010b, 401). His annoyance at Clare Short's clumsy anti-war briefing efforts meanwhile centred on the fact that they "sent exactly the wrong signal...about our seriousness of intent" (Campbell and Stott 2007, 569). Domestic audience costs theory, then, not only makes intuitive sense, it also reflects the way the British government approached Iraq.

It also helps explain what went wrong with that approach, and why. Establishing domestic expectations by making public commitments may well signal seriousness, but "the price of enhanced credibility is that [the policymaker's] hands will be politically tied if the

adversary does not blink” (Baum 2004a, 609). On a number of occasions during the build-up to the Iraq war the British government was “rhetorically manoeuvred into a corner”, largely as a result of its own public commitments (Krebs and Jackson 2007, 42, Steuter and Wills 2008, xiv). The failed attempt to get UN approval for military action saw the unstoppable force of domestic expectations encounter the immovable object of a diplomatic impasse. It was exacerbated by both sides in the developing dispute having established contradictory positions in the minds of their respective publics. Blair signalled to Jacques Chirac by his public statements on Iraq that he was serious about getting UN approval for military action, but also that the US and UK would ignore France if it did not oblige. France thus had the choice of whether its impotence was made explicit through an unauthorised war or left implicit by its unwilling quiescence. Chirac’s response showed that he was not going to qualify his insistence that the UN Security Council must *genuinely* have the final say on the use of force. Both leaders had, by making their positions so explicit and so public, ensured that they could not back down without domestic political costs. Neither would have been satisfied from a foreign policy perspective with the ultimate outcome, a war taking place without clear UN support, and with the US and Europe divided. France, after all, still had military forces en route to the Gulf until the very brink of war, thus retaining the option to participate if a diplomatic truce had been brokered. Chirac, like many opponents of military action in Britain, was never in principle opposed to the use of force in Iraq; he simply argued that it was not a necessary or proportionate response in March 2003 given the level of threat and the length of time that had passed in the revised UN inspection programme. The disagreement between Blair and Chirac was thus one more of style than substance. Nevertheless, that neither leader was satisfied by the outcome of negotiations in New York reflects the real policy constraints both faced as a consequence of their communication efforts. As Baum put it, “all else [being] equal, a policy fashioned under intense public scrutiny is more likely to fail, because public scrutiny reduces the president’s freedom to develop an optimal foreign policy” (Baum 2004b, 188). Both Blair

and Chirac constrained their own freedom in signalling their positions to each other that they were unable subsequently to achieve a compromise. The result was a diplomatic crisis that neither desired nor sought.

Public scrutiny not only constrained the Blair government's diplomatic options, it also limited the coherence and consistency of its official line on Iraq. In attempting to construct their statements in response to daily news headlines, New Labour policymakers not only made bad substantive decisions, they were also forced to proceed without the necessary foreknowledge of how particular concessions might play out (Bennett 1994, 14, Gilboa 2002, 743). In the most notorious example of these effects, media demands influenced the timing, the content, and the impact of the WMD dossier, with negative consequences on each count for the invasion policy as a whole. Pressure from journalists forced the dossier's release earlier than intended. The result was that sufficient time elapsed between its publication, and the invasion, for evidence to arrive contradicting some of its claims about Iraq's WMD. This was an essential pre-condition for the later complaint that the government had lied about the threat. Although there is limited evidence to support the suggestion that the Blair government was actively dishonest, there is far better evidence that it failed to revise its public threat assessment of September 2002 in line with those it made subsequently in private. Blair announced that the dossier would be released imminently during his September press conference, apparently without first discussing this with anyone else in the government. In doing so, he seriously constrained the time available to guarantee consensus on the dossier's contents between the different parts of the British government. Doubts persisted within the Defence Intelligence Staff about the '45-minute claim', despite these having been alleviated in other areas by assurances from MI6. Jack Straw has lamented the Foreign Office's limited contribution to the drafting process, which resulted from its people being preoccupied at the annual meeting of the UN General Assembly in New York, taking place at the same time. Given that Blair was motivated to accelerate the dossier's release by media pressure, the implication

is that timing constraints indirectly imposed by journalists, themselves responding to commercial pressures, lay behind dissatisfaction with the dossier in the Ministry of Defence, and the exclusion of the experienced public communicators of the FCO from its production. The former helped contribute to the scandal around the Gilligan report in May 2003. The latter may explain the failure to spot deficiencies in the text of the dossier itself, by reducing the number of experienced eyes cast over it before release.

The perception that the media would not accept nuanced arguments, meanwhile, had already forced ministers to make categorical statements on the nature of the Iraqi threat (Blair 2010b, 374), which in turn constrained the ability of the dossier's drafters to express their views in the finely-balanced style typical of secret JIC judgements. By the time the document was released, "unequivocal claims had already been made". The JIC could not appear to contradict these by restating the caveats it had offered in the course of its private judgements (Freedman 2004, 27). The dossier had little immediate impact on the public debate because it contained little surprising or novel in light of earlier US and UK government claims, the publicly-available reports of UNSCOM, and the IISS report released just weeks earlier. Because it had little impact on Public Opinion, little effort was made by Downing Street to clear up misunderstandings in what media coverage did arise. This meant, however, that the government was left exposed to later criticism. Similar effects occurred with regard to the questions of whether or not the government intended to seek 'regime change' in Baghdad, of the role of UNMOVIC inspectors, and of the humanitarian rationale for removing Saddam Hussein. In each case it was primarily pressure from journalists, responding to the imperatives of their industry, that undermined the independence of British foreign policymakers.

Blair may not have been "trapped" by his own rhetoric into taking the country to war, as some accounts have suggested (Coates and Krieger 2009, 248-249). He always had a choice, particularly given the decision's unpopularity. Backing down from commitments always makes a leader appear weak, but this effect must surely be qualified when the commitments

themselves are unpopular. At the same time, it is evident that Blair could not have reversed course in March 2003 without suffering some damage to his credibility. He had taken a range of rhetorical positions from which he could not easily disentangle himself. Indeed, looking at the Prime Minister's position in early 2003, we might even suggest the existence of 'international audience costs' as a corollary to their domestic equivalents. He had promised to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with the US in responding to the 11 September attacks. This show of support won him considerable favour in Washington and cemented his close personal relationship with President Bush during the following months. Trying to capitalise on this access, Blair maintained a positive line in public, raising any specific concerns in private. For example, he publicly declared action against Iraq essential while privately urging Bush to work through the UN in challenging Saddam Hussein, and to seek progress on the Middle East Peace Process at the same time. The result was that, as early as April 2002, Blair stood to damage Britain's most significant alliance, not to mention his own diplomatic credibility, should he row back from his commitments. Given it now seems likely that the logic of the 'Axis of Evil' and the 'Bush doctrine' would always have lead US forces to Baghdad, it is arguable that Britain was rhetorically committed to military action as much as a year before the invasion. By March 2003 Blair was indeed boxed into a corner; either he had been wrong in his earlier arguments, or their logic dictated he must proceed to war. In that light his final decision was unsurprising, if not quite inevitable. Even setting aside the impact of his personal convictions, Blair's self-interest (and, in his mind, Britain's national interest) was tied up in a decision to proceed.

Conclusion

The Blair government was no more “spinned against” than it was “spinning” over Iraq. Ministers engaged in news management because they felt they *had* to, or else the news would ‘manage’ them; journalists proved challenging opponents in the battle for hegemony over public debate. Many in the British media were professionally committed to demonstrating their independence, instinctively opposed to war with Iraq, and commercially compelled to seek out crises and scandals at every opportunity. Whenever no ‘official line’ was forthcoming on Iraq, they resorted to speculation. Any evidence of disagreement in Cabinet was reported as a sign of imminent political meltdown. Any hint of escalation in the pressure being applied to Baghdad meant immediate war. Source material was selected and deployed according to each publication’s editorial line rather than because it held any sort of objective ‘news value’. New Labour veterans argue that their association with ‘spin’ simply reflects the systemic realities of the 21st century commercial news market. In doing so, however, they gloss over the particular significance of political communication both for their approach to government, and for their place in popular memory. No other government has been so closely identified with news management. Probably any Prime Minister would have authorised some variant of Alastair Campbell’s techniques, because probably they would have faced similar pressure from the press. Blair nevertheless emerges from this study as a man rightly associated with an approach to policymaking that favoured communication over substance, and who was punished by the interrelationship between the two. His central role in decision making only served to exacerbate the effect. Jonathan Powell accepts that “at the moment the Blair government is more remembered for spin than for strategy”, while arguing “in truth we succeeded in strategy but failed in spin” (Powell 2010, 187). He implies, without conceding the point, that on occasion the failure of ‘spin’ damaged the strategy. Clearly, this was the case with regard to Iraq.

It was for reasons of 'spin' rather than substance that ministers refused to "mention the war" in the early part of 2002, so concerned were they to avoid a premature and necessarily speculative debate on whether the 'war on terror' should be extended to Baghdad. Official reticence in the UK, however, was not matched in the US, and in any event did little to calm concerns about the prospect of further military action. Journalists felt the government's silence stemmed from its fear of facing opposition rather than a genuine lack of interest in Saddam Hussein. To a degree they were right, although arguably also they were cynically creating news where little or none existed, reporting rumours in the absence of ministerial statements. Regardless of how honest media disquiet actually was, during the summer of 2002 it was fanned by debate across the Atlantic, and exacerbated further by ministers' seasonal absence from the political fray during the parliamentary recess. By September the volume of speculation had grown so great that Blair felt compelled to respond, by bringing forward the release of the WMD 'dossier', mooted originally in March but delayed pending a decision in Washington about what shape the coming confrontation would take. The dossier did little to improve the immediate position, and ultimately damaged the government more than any other aspect of the invasion. Partly the long-term damage followed inevitably from the inaccuracy of Britain's assessment of the threat from Iraq's WMD programmes. Partly, too, it resulted from the inaccuracy of Andrew Gilligan's *Today* report, and the effect it had on Public Opinion in an atmosphere of public distrust. In both cases, the accelerated timetable for the dossier's release, forced by the press, artificially increased its significance in post-invasion debates.

There were other examples of efforts to lead public debate that impacted on areas that might have been regarded as part of the 'substance' of British foreign policy. The decision to refer Iraq to the UN is a good case in point, but so too is the agreement between Blair and Bush at Crawford in April 2002. Blair pursued the "UN route" in response to public pressure, and because he thought UN backing might grant the expected conflict much-needed

legitimacy. It was, then, both a reactive and a pro-active strategy. He promised to support the US in taking on Saddam, but maintained that public communication was crucial to the success of any renewed confrontation. At every stage, the inseparability of the communication and the substance of Blairite foreign policy was underlined. Even at a conceptual level, the importance of public debate to the social construction of contested concepts like 'legitimacy', 'success', or even 'threat', made rhetoric vital to policymaking. However poisoned the atmosphere of public debate had been by disagreements prior to the invasion, British journalists might still have been won over during the course of the fighting were it not for the very real difficulties the invading forces faced in establishing stability after the fall of Saddam (Mueller 2005, 109). Crucially, they might also have been won over had the criteria for success been established differently. Ministers could have promised to achieve less ambitious goals, or predicted higher costs. They could have been more frank at an earlier stage about Britain's inability to influence the US military timetable, or less reticent in discussing the 'moral case' for action. They could have avoided a damaging fiasco by not actively consulting the UN. More negative predictions, or a less collegial approach to international allies, might have made the prospect of war harder to 'sell', and arguably Blair could not afford any movement on either point. They would equally however have made it more difficult for journalists writing later to portray the invasion as illegitimate, or its consequences as failure. Such is the nature of warfare in the postmodern age. With victory and defeat no longer objective, subjective interpretation has become crucially important. Here the media, and media management, come centrally into play.

The presentation of foreign policy in Blair's Britain, then, was not only inseparable from its substance, it was potentially *more important*. Iraq was a war of words rather than one of conventional weapons, or even WMD. Ministers shifted focus constantly in searching for an argument that would break through the wall of public scepticism and legitimise, in the eyes of journalists and so their audiences, a war with Iraq in early 2003. In adopting a reactive and inconsistent approach, they undermined their own case; disingenuous opportunism became

the defining theme of the official contribution to public debate. Alastair Campbell complains that the British media focus on missing WMD, spin, and David Kelly came at the cost of proper coverage of the good work being done by British forces in Iraq (Campbell 2010b, 80). He fails to acknowledge that this focus related to, was indeed often a reaction to, government communication efforts which he himself drove. His presence at crucial decision-making sessions, at Blair's personal behest, represented both a cause and a consequence of the functional integration of news management into foreign policymaking.

British Public Opinion was neither ignored nor impotent in the face of the government's determination to go to war. Policymakers *had* to pay attention to public debate if they were ever going to lead it successfully. Their conduct during the months before the invasion, as this study has shown, was influenced repeatedly by demands emanating from the public sphere. Even though this influence primarily affected policy communication, the integration of communication and substance ensured that Public Opinion had at least an indirect effect on substance at every major stage of the build-up to war. In the end, however, Blair was able to take military action against Iraq, in the face of public hostility, because the British public (including those, such as journalists and MPs, who contributed actively to public debate) lacked effective mechanisms to stop him once he had decided he was willing to risk losing his job, and because it was not really sure it wanted to; everyone agreed Saddam Hussein potentially posed a threat to Britain. Blair was able both to implement his preferred course, and to escape serious electoral punishment for disregarding opposition along the way, but he was not immune to the consequences of an unpopular and unsuccessful war. His reputation was tarnished, his political capital diminished, and his freedom to act both at home and overseas undermined by subsequent controversies, themselves related more to communication than to substance. These costs were more subtle than electoral defeat would have been, but they still affect Tony Blair's place in history. Without Iraq, he might not be remembered for foreign policy at all. With it, no other area exerts a comparable influence on

his political legacy. For all his skill as a politician, and as a leader, he was unable to 'manage' the complex, chaotic, system of interaction and rhetorical exchange that comprised British Public Opinion. Perhaps, then, this study's final conclusion should be to observe the near impossibility of a British government successfully fighting postmodern war, with its necessary reliance on rhetoric to shape uncertain reality, in the face of the competitive, fiercely independent, and technologically well-equipped 21st-century press.

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