

**FPC Conversation Piece: Labour's Next Foreign Policy. A Response.**  
Jason Ralph and David Clark<sup>1</sup>

In this double-headed paper Jason Ralph examines the principles that might inform the kind of foreign policy that might be expected from a Labour government led by Ed Miliband. Ralph focuses on a Fabian Society paper, *Labour's Next Foreign Policy*<sup>2</sup> by David Clark, to discuss the historical and theoretical context of Miliband's approach and to provide a framework for a wider discussion about Labour foreign policy. David Clark then provides a response to Ralph's analysis in this new format Foreign Policy Conversation Piece briefing paper. It aims to prompt further debate and reflection on the challenges and opportunities facing centre-left foreign policy makers.

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<sup>2</sup>David Clark, *Labour's Next Foreign Policy*, in John Denham (ed.) *The Shape of Things to Come*, Fabian Society, June 2012, <http://www.fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Labours-next-foreign-policy.pdf>

## Jason Ralph

The Labour Party has been here before. Its principled stance on unilateral nuclear disarmament was one reason why its credibility as a government in waiting was questioned in the early 1980s and why it spent more than a decade in opposition. The issues may have changed – Labour has more recently been committed to *multilateral* nuclear disarmament<sup>3</sup> – but the question of credibility and foreign policy lingers. This stems of course from the Iraq War ‘hangover’ and the view that the worst foreign policy decision since Suez flowed from a misplaced sense within the Labour Party that a state can ‘do good’ through its foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> There is, from this viewpoint, a causal line that can be drawn linking an ‘ethical foreign policy’ to ‘regime change’ in Iraq. Indeed, evidence produced by the Iraq Inquiry strengthens this link. Writing to his Chief of Staff Jonathan Powell in March 2002, for instance, Prime Minister Blair admitted that public opinion on the question of whether to use force against Iraq was ‘fragile’ and that international opinion was ‘sceptical’. But, he added:

*from a centre-left perspective the case should be obvious. Saddam’s regime is a brutal, oppressive military dictatorship. He kills his opponents, has wrecked his country’s economy, and is a source of instability and danger in the region. I can understand a right-wing Tory opposed to ‘nation-building’ being opposed to it on grounds it hasn’t any direct bearing on our national interest. But in fact a political philosophy that does care about other nations – e.g. Kosovo, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone – and is prepared to change regimes on the merits, should be gung-ho on Saddam.*<sup>5</sup>

Of course, the brutal and oppressive nature of the regime was not the only reason contributing to the Iraq decision, and it was not only the centre-left (or parts of it) that supported the war. The view that Iraq’s WMD programme was a threat to the region, that it was in breach of UN Security Council resolutions, and that it was in the UK’s interests to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Americans, all informed the case for war.<sup>6</sup> But Blair’s distinction between a ‘right-wing, Tory’ policy based on the ‘national interest’ and a ‘centre-left’ policy that ‘does care about other nations... and is prepared to change regimes on the merits’ does suggest there was an additional reason for war that was unique Labour.

This is why a clear articulation of the kind of foreign policy that stems from Labour’s values is now important and why David Clark’s contribution to the volume *Shape of Things to Come* is so valuable as a starting point for discussion.<sup>7</sup> By examining what ‘Ed Miliband has said publicly, the decisions he has already taken on foreign affairs and his choice of domestic priorities, insofar as they have an international dimension’, Clark identifies principles that will likely inform a distinctive Labour foreign policy in the run up to the next election.<sup>8</sup> The purpose of this paper is to focus on several of these

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<sup>3</sup> Des Browne, ‘Laying the foundations for multilateral disarmament’ Speech to the Conference on Nuclear Disarmament, 5 February 2008 at [http://www.labour.org/des\\_browne\\_conference\\_on\\_nuclear\\_disarmament](http://www.labour.org/des_browne_conference_on_nuclear_disarmament)

The Shadow Defence Secretary Jim Murphy more recently ‘reiterated Labour’s manifesto commitment to the minimum possible independent deterrent while fighting for multilateral disarmament, working for a world free of nuclear weapons’. The Labour Party, *National Policy Forum Report 2012* at <http://www.leftfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/2012-NPF-Annual-Report-to-Conference.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> David Chaplin, ‘Ed Miliband’s Post-New Labour Foreign Policy’, 29 July 2012 at <http://prog-int.org/2012/07/29/ed-milibands-post-new-labour-foreign-policy/>

<sup>5</sup> Memo from the Prime Minister to Jonathan Powell, ‘Iraq’ 17 March 2002, emphasis added, at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/50751/Blair-to-Powell-17March2002-minute.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> See the author’s ‘After Chilcot: The doctrine of international community and the UK Decision to invade Iraq’, *British Journal of Politics*

<sup>7</sup> David Clark, ‘Labour’s Next Foreign Policy’, in John Denham (ed.) *The Shape of Things to Come* (The Fabian Society and Foundation for European Progressive Studies, June 2012), pp.105-14 at <http://www.fabians.org.uk/publications/the-shape-of-things-to-come>.

<sup>8</sup> Clark, ‘Labour’s Next Foreign Policy’, p.108.

principles in order to prompt further reflection on the challenges and opportunities facing the Labour as it formulates its foreign policy.

### **A values-based foreign policy**

The first principle identified by Clark begs the question of what, if anything, has changed. When he writes that ‘Ed Miliband’s approach to foreign policy is values-based’, for instance, it suggests continuity with the Blairite approach quoted above. The same applies when Clark writes that ‘this is not to say he regards the national interest as being of secondary importance’. The point is

that he [Miliband] dismisses the distinction between interests and values as artificial and false to our instincts as a country. The idea that Britain is a force for good in the world is an essential part of our identity as a nation. We see it every time there is a major humanitarian crisis. The British people want to help, partly because they understand the reality of interdependence, but mostly because they are generous in their desire to support those who need it.<sup>9</sup>

Compare this for instance with the famous ‘doctrine of international community speech’ that Blair gave in April 1999 during the Kosovo crisis. In an age of global interdependence he noted

our actions are guided by a more subtle blend of mutual self interest and moral purpose in defending the values we cherish. In the end values and 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.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, Clark’s formulation of Miliband’s philosophy seems even more idealistic than Blair’s doctrine. A values-based foreign policy stems not only from a broad definition of the nation’s *interest*, it stems from the British *identity* and its ‘desire to support those who need it’. For this reason, Clark concludes, ‘Realism isn’t a realistic basis for Britain’s foreign policy.’<sup>11</sup>

Of course, there is nothing about a values-based foreign policy that necessarily leads to an Iraq-type scenario. But one of the ideas that can stop the impulse to help others from evolving into costly wars like Iraq is Realism. Clark’s use of the term Realism in this respect needs revising. Indeed, when Miliband told his Party that it had been wrong to support the US invasion in Iraq he was echoing the sentiments of well-known Realists; thinkers who (rightly as it turned out) attacked neoconservatives for their naive assumption that military means could deliver democratic ends at little cost.<sup>12</sup> Realism, in this respect, is not simply a term associated with interest-based foreign policies. It can also be applied to ‘ethical’ or ‘values-based’ foreign policy. What Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman called ‘ethical realism’ is ‘not cynical, indifferent to the long-term interests of humanity, or attracted to ruthlessness for its own sake.’<sup>13</sup> It shares Blair’s and Miliband’s other-regarding sensitivity but it qualifies this with due regard to virtues such as prudence, humility and a decent respect of the views and interests of other nations.

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<sup>9</sup> Clark, ‘Labour’s Next Foreign Policy’, p.109.

<sup>10</sup> Tony Blair, Speech to the Chicago Economic Club, 22 April 1999 at <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/international/jan-jun99/blair-doctrine4-23.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Clark, ‘Labour’s Next Foreign Policy’, p.108.

<sup>12</sup> John Mearsheimer ‘Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq war: realism versus neo-conservatism’, 18 May 2005 at [http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-americanpower/morgenthau\\_2522.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-americanpower/morgenthau_2522.jsp); see also Brian Schmidt and Michael Williams, ‘The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War, neoconservatives versus realists’ *Security Studies* Vol.17 No.2 (2008), pp.191-220.

<sup>13</sup> Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman, *Ethical Realism. A Vision for America’s Role in the World* (New York and Toronto: Pantheon Books, 2006), p.53.

Indeed, it would appear from Clark's own description of Miliband's evolving approach that realism is a key characteristic. His third point is that the government should not only have a 'principled' approach to the use of force, it should be 'judicious'.

All military interventions cost lives and involve risk, so the threshold for action must necessarily be high. A Miliband-led government would therefore be clear about the principles that ought to guide the responsible use of military force. It should not be used unilaterally, as first resort *or to impose a preferred system of government*. It should only be used under multilateral authority, as a last resort and for a just cause, such as self-defence or overwhelming humanitarian need.<sup>14</sup>

Within this formulation then there is an outright rejection of 'regime change' as the ultimate expression of an ethical foreign policy. That does not mean the ethical foreign policy of the future will be toothless, it will merely recognise that democratic change has to be rooted in local circumstances, evolves organically and takes place gradually; and having acknowledged this more emphasis is placed on the efficacy of 'soft power'. Indeed, Clark quotes Miliband's insistence that 'the neocons were wrong to think we could impose democracy at the point of a gun. In this new era, soft power will often be a better way to achieve hard results'.<sup>15</sup> In this respect Clark identifies the BBC World Service as an example of a British institution that should be protected because it provides a public space in which British ideas and interests prosper. Likewise Shadow Foreign Minister Douglas Alexander, responding to the obvious power of social networking sites, has advocated supporting civil society organisations by promoting unrestricted access to the internet.<sup>16</sup> These ideas are of not new. They are in fact an extension of former Foreign Secretary David Miliband's articulation of a 'civilian surge' and the capacity of communication technology as 'enabling networks that challenge the power of traditional incumbents'.<sup>17</sup>

### The "special relationship"

There is also recognition in Clark's second point that the UK under a Miliband government would stick to this conception of a values-based foreign policy even if the US insisted otherwise. Indeed, Ed Miliband himself nicely captured this in his first Conference speech as Labour leader. 'Our alliance with America', he said, 'is incredibly important to us but we must always remember that our values must shape the alliances that we form and any military action we take'.<sup>18</sup> Miliband, writes Clark,

is the last person who could reasonably be accused of reflexive anti-Americanism. He has spent a lot of time in the country and talks passionately in private about its politics, sport, culture and ideas. But he refuses to allow his admiration for the United States to cloud his judgement about what is right and wrong. What Miliband wants is a close and constructive partnership with the United States based on mutual respect and give and take, not one based on blind loyalty. No alliance should become an end in itself.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Clark, 'Labour's next foreign policy', p.110.

<sup>15</sup> Clark, 'Labour's next foreign policy', p.110.

<sup>16</sup> Douglas Alexander, Labour's Shadow Foreign Secretary speech to the Royal United Services Institute 10 October 2011 at <http://www.labour.org.uk/autumn-perspective-on-arab-spring,2011-10-10>

<sup>17</sup> Martin Bright, 'Interview: David Miliband. The Foreign Secretary explains he has identified four great progressive cause for the world', *The New Statesman* 17 January 2008 at <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2008/01/interview-miliband-progressive>; and David Miliband, *New Diplomacy. Challenges for Foreign Policy*, Speech to Royal Institute of International Affairs and Avaz Chatham House, 19 July 2007 at <http://davidmiliband.net/speech/new-diplomacy-challenges-for-foreign-policy/>

<sup>18</sup> Ed Miliband, 'The New Generation', Speech to the Labour Party Conference, 28 September 2010 at <http://www2.labour.org.uk/ed-miliband---a-new-generation>

<sup>19</sup> Clark, 'Labour's next foreign policy', p.109.

This is seemingly swimming with the political tide. It used to be the case that criticising US behaviour was one of those moves that risked being equated with a radical (and therefore unelectable) foreign policy. Indeed, it has been suggested that Blair's enthusiasm to establish good relations with Bush, as well as Clinton, stemmed from a domestic imperative, which was to demonstrate to the electorate that the Labour party could deal with Presidents from both parties, thereby strengthening its claim to be the new natural party of government.<sup>20</sup> Yet since the Iraq War both major parties in the UK have seen political capital in distancing themselves from the US. Establishing a 'solid' but not 'slavish' relationship with the US was, for instance, central to Prime Minister Cameron's elaboration of what he called a 'liberal conservative' position.<sup>21</sup> So, in this respect, there are few electoral risks, and probably some benefits, in maintaining a position that qualifies any commitment to support US foreign policy. This was confirmed in a recent survey of the defence and security community by the Royal United Services Institute, which indicated doubt about whether UK interests were taken into account in Washington decision-making. The policy implication, according to Malcolm Chalmers, was that 'the UK needs to do more to ensure it is not taken for granted in Washington. This involves distinguishing the capabilities the UK has to the US. It also means that the UK needs to be clear that, sometimes, it is willing to say no.'<sup>22</sup>

This is also seemingly swimming with the geopolitical tide as well. Global power shifts mean US interests are less Eurocentric and more focused on the Pacific region. As a consequence the familial language of the 'special relationship' has sometimes been absent from the Obama administration's rhetoric.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, the coalition government in Westminster has regularly emphasised the importance of bilateral ties with new economies like, China, Brazil and India, which suggests there is a repositioning of national priorities in ways that give more scope for distancing the UK from US foreign policy.<sup>24</sup> This too is recognised by Miliband according to Clark. 'The shift in relative wealth and power to the east and south', he writes, 'means that ... we need to maintain diplomatic influence in a world in which countries of a continental scale, like India, China and Brazil, will join the top rank of world power.'<sup>25</sup>

The re-election of President Obama is perhaps of marginal significance here. As Christopher Coker put it shortly before the election, both candidates would be constrained by the same strategic choices. As in Obama's first term, 'retrenchment will be the dominating theme for US foreign policy'.<sup>26</sup> And with US public opinion likely to insist that nation-building should begin at home the President will likely look to forge special relationships with the new in Latin America and Asia as a means of kick-starting the economy. Again, the long-term suggests a distancing of the countries in ways that provide great scope for the kind of critical friendship that both the main political parties have suggested is appropriate.

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<sup>20</sup> John Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, (The Free Press, 2003), p.161

<sup>21</sup> David Cameron, Speech on Foreign Policy and Security Policy to the British-American Project, 11 September 2006 at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2006/sep/11/conservatives.speech>

<sup>22</sup> Royal United Services Institute, *Defence and Security Survey 2012*, October 2012, p.6 at <http://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/Survey2012.pdf>; see also YouGov poll which shows that 83% of the public think Britain has no influence over US policy. Bonnie Garnder, 'The Special Relationship' 21 March 2012 at <http://yougov.co.uk/news/2012/03/21/britains-special-relationship-us/>

<sup>23</sup> Philip Sherwell, P. 'Barack Obama upgrades 'special relationship' for White House welcome to David and Samantha Cameron', *The Telegraph* 10 March 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/9136318/Barack-Obama-upgrades-special-relationship-for-White-House-welcome-to-David-and-Samantha-Cameron.html>.

<sup>24</sup> For elaboration see the author's 'The "special relationship" in British foreign policy', *International Politics* forthcoming 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Clark, 'Labour's next foreign policy', p.111.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Coker, 'US Power: Both candidates will be constrained by the same strategic choices', *RUSI Analysis* 23 October 2012 at <http://www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C508670CC7892A>

## Multilateralism

The argument that Miliband would only use force ‘under multilateral authority, as a last resort and for a just cause, such as self-defence or overwhelming humanitarian need’ is ambiguous.<sup>27</sup> Few would disagree that force should only be used as a last resort and for a just cause, but that does not answer the question of who decides when peaceful options have been exhausted or when a humanitarian need has become overwhelming. Reference to ‘multilateral authority’, moreover, disguises a range of options. Does it mean the United Nations Security Council, including a respect of the great power veto? Or would Miliband be willing, like Blair was, to dismiss the Security Council as ‘unreasonable’ if it did not vote for what he thought was ‘the right thing to do’? And where would multilateral authority come from in order to follow this kind of conviction? NATO, the EU, a coalition of democracies, a coalition of the willing?

Answers to these questions are not fully developed either in Clark’s paper or in wider foreign policy discourse. This is acknowledged by Lord Malloch-Brown, for instance, when he told Jamie Gaskarth that there are ‘less developed thoughts around ethical foreign policy’ such as the question ‘whose ethics?’<sup>28</sup> It is important to develop answers to these questions, however, not least because the argument that the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, can act unreasonably lay behind what Malloch-Brown called the ‘liberal interventionism’ or ‘liberal adventurism’ of the Blair years. As Gaskarth notes, there is a tendency here to see this argument as a new tradition within centre-left thinking, which had traditionally insisted on the primacy of the United Nations and a respect for international legal procedure. These flowed from what Mark Phythian identifies as the Party’s retained reservation to the use of force and its anti-imperialism, both of which were, arguably, jettisoned by the decision to invade Iraq.<sup>29</sup> Does Ed Miliband’s repudiation of that decision extend to an acceptance of this more traditional view of Labour foreign policy, one that prioritises the United Nations and its decision-making procedures?

Any consideration of the place the United Nations has in a values-based foreign policy has to recall the fact that the Blairite critique of the Security Council predated the Iraq crisis. It was driven mainly by the failure to prevent the humanitarian atrocities of the mid-1990s, most notably in Bosnia and Rwanda. Indeed, those on the left like Robin Cook, who would later criticise Blair for dismissing the French veto threat as unreasonable, supported the Kosovo intervention despite it not having a clear UN mandate.<sup>30</sup> This exposes the tension in Labour’s ideals between the moral imperative to protect the humanitarian values and a legal imperative to observe UN procedures; and it indicates why it might be legitimate to act on the authority of a multilateral organisation (such as NATO) that is not legally empowered in the way the UN Security Council is. It is not clear whether Miliband takes this position and any leader would probably avoid committing themselves until they were faced with such a situation.

It is worth recalling in this context that the argument that the P5 have a responsibility not to exercise their veto power in cases involving mass atrocity appeared in the Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), which of course introduced the idea that states and international society as a whole had a responsibility to protect.<sup>31</sup> It did not make it into 2005 World Summit document thanks mainly to P5 opposition but the idea has not gone away.<sup>32</sup> Recently the so-called Small-5 or S5 (Switzerland, Costa Rica, Jordan, Liechtenstein and Singapore)

<sup>27</sup> Clark, *Labour’s Next Foreign Policy* p.110.

<sup>28</sup> Jamie Gaskarth, ‘Interpreting Ethical Foreign Policy: Traditions and Dilemmas for Policymakers’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, early view online 2012, p.6.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Phythian, *The Labour Party, War and International Relations, 1945-2006* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> For elaboration see the author’s ‘After Chilcot. The “Doctrine of International Community” and the UK Decision to invade Iraq’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* Vol.13 No.3 2011, pp.304-325.

<sup>31</sup> International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001) at <http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/ICISS%Report/pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Ariella Blätter and Paul Williams, ‘The Responsibility not to veto’, *Global Responsibility to Protect* 3 (3) 2011 pp.301-22

submitted a draft Security Council Resolution, which included placing limits on the use of the veto. This was part of a package aimed at reforming the working practices of the Security Council. It was cast in terms of “democratizing” the UN and involved proposals for increasing the transparency and accountability of the Council.<sup>33</sup> The draft resolution, however, was withdrawn in May 2012, reportedly because of the pressure again exerted by the five permanent members on the Council.<sup>34</sup> Again, an opposition leader would probably refrain from committing to policy at this level of detail, preferring instead to make the general commitment to “UN reform”. But in many respects the S-5 proposal challenges what it means to promote democracy and the place that has in a values-based foreign policy.

Andrew Hurrell makes this point in his book *On Global Order*. The ‘historical growth of social mobilization in the developing world and the empowering possibilities of globalization’, he writes, means it ‘is unlikely that the democratic genie will easily be put back in the bottle’. More than that, however,

crucial questions are likely to recur as to the proper scope of democratic ideas *beyond the state* and as to how the values of democracy and as to how the values of democracy should be applied to global governance and to global social choices that will shape the life chances of individuals and communities in the twenty-first century. Pressed by revisionist powers such as China and India, the notion that the current distribution of decision-making power can be defended in democratic terms is likely to come under increasing attack. Indeed, such arguments may well come to play the sort of critical role in the twenty-first century that the idea of national self-determination played in the twentieth century.<sup>35</sup>

Clark’s description of Labour’s next foreign policy touches on this issue, but somewhat tangentially. The need ‘to reshape the international community in a way that reflects the emerging reality of a multipolar world, with institutions and decision-making processes broadened and deepened’ is recognised as a pressing foreign policy challenge. Yet in this formulation the driver of international reform is the distribution of power rather than democratic representativeness. How, for instance, would African claims for a greater say in international decision-making processes be dealt with if international institutions were merely to reflect the ‘emerging reality of a multipolar world’?<sup>36</sup> There are no easy answers to these questions. As Hurrell also notes, an increase in the membership of the Security Council would make it more representative, but if that means it is ‘even less able to act effectively than the current arrangement, then how has this increased the legitimacy of the organization?’<sup>37</sup> In addition, a values-based foreign policy based on democratic representation at the international as well as national level adds further pressure on the permanent status of the UK. Some proposals for instance envisage better regional representation by including states like Brazil, India, Japan and an African state while suggesting the British and French seats should make way for a single European one.<sup>38</sup> Could a Labour government justify the UK’s permanent status while insisting that its foreign policy is driven by a national identity committed to democratic values? Support for reform that includes a single European seat would by no means lead to consensus on this issue but it

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<sup>33</sup> Emch, Rita (2012a) ‘Swiss want to “democratise” Security Council’ 29 march at [http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/politics/foreign\\_affairs/Swiss\\_want\\_to\\_democratise\\_UN\\_Security\\_Council.html?cid=32381282](http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/politics/foreign_affairs/Swiss_want_to_democratise_UN_Security_Council.html?cid=32381282)

<sup>34</sup> Rita Emch, ‘Swiss Withdraw Draft Resolution’, 12 May 2012 at

[‘http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/politics/foreign\\_affairs/Swiss\\_withdraw\\_UN\\_draft\\_resolution.html?cid=32719648](http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/politics/foreign_affairs/Swiss_withdraw_UN_draft_resolution.html?cid=32719648)

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Hurrell, *On Global Order. Power, Values and the Constitution of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.297. Emphasis added.

<sup>36</sup> For a recent articulation of these claims see Jacob Zuma, Address to the High Level Meeting of the 67<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels, 24 September 2012 at [http://www.unrol.org/files/Statement\\_SouthAfrica.pdf](http://www.unrol.org/files/Statement_SouthAfrica.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Hurrell, *On Global Order* p.87.

<sup>38</sup> Hans Kundani ‘A single European seat on the UN Security Council?’ European Council on Foreign Relations 11 April 2012 at <http://ecfr.ideas oneurope.eu/2012/04/11/a-single-european-seat-on-the-un-security-council>

is consistent with Clark's understanding of Miliband's pro-European stance.<sup>39</sup> The question that remains is whether that is strong enough to overcome another aspect of British identity – its historic status as a great power – which insists on defending this particular privilege even at the possible expense of bilateral relations with those emerging powers that can lay similar claims.

## Conclusion

Clark's contribution to *The Shape of Things to Come* is a timely reminder of the importance of foreign policy to the Labour Party. It is difficult to disagree with his opening line that foreign policy, barring a major turn in world events, 'is unlikely to be a decisive factor in the outcome of the next election'. But he is also right when he says that articulating a clear vision on how the Party will handle the international agenda is important 'to re-assure voters that it is a credible government in waiting'.<sup>40</sup> This is particularly the case given the electoral fallout from the Iraq War and a recognition that the Party has to 'shake off the Iraq policy hangover'.<sup>41</sup>

The picture Clark presents of Miliband is that of a leader who is determined to do that while remaining committed to a values-based foreign policy. This is in many ways natural territory for a Labour leader. The Party has maintained its founding commitment to a progressive view of international relations, and in this respect Realism – defined as a narrow vision of the national interest which denies the existence of international society – is not a realistic basis Labour or the country. The point argued in this paper, however, is that Realism is not necessarily contrary to an ethical foreign policy, especially if it prevents misplaced idealism doing more harm than good. The progressive commitment to democracy promotion need not necessarily lead to the use of force for the purpose of regime change and the signs are that Miliband has internalised that post-Iraq lesson. The second point being argued is that a values-based commitment to democracy is more complex than it may first appear. This is because there is a growing sense that the institutions of international society, like the UN Security Council, are unrepresentative and that it is hypocritical for western states to talk of democracy promotion without tackling this. This argument becomes increasingly significant as power shifts to those states currently excluded from key international decisions. A general commitment to 'multilateralism' can be in this respect regressive if it maintains the exclusionary hierarchies of the current system. An international policy that flows from a values-based commitment to democracy promotion needs to be more specific in this regard. It may also require answering difficult questions about how the progressive agenda of UN reform impacts on the national interest and the national identity.

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<sup>39</sup> Clark 'Labour's next foreign policy', pp.111-2.

<sup>40</sup> Clark, 'Labour's next foreign policy', p.106.

<sup>41</sup> Chaplin, 'Why Labour must talk about foreign policy'.

## David Clark

I am grateful to Jason Ralph for taking the time to produce a detailed and thoughtful response to my tentative outline of what the foreign policy of an Ed Miliband government might look like. In exploring the implications of my argument he has raised a number of interesting issues and questions that deserve an answer in return.

First, I'd like to clarify an important philosophical point about the purpose of foreign policy and why I argue that realism isn't a realistic basis for conceptualising Britain's relationship with the wider world. The realist tradition shares with neo-classical economics a view of human nature that assumes people to be rational, self-interested, acquisitive, competitive and utility-maximising. In the marketplace, individuals seek to accumulate wealth to the exclusion of other goals. At an international level, the states that represent them seek to accumulate power. But just as the field of behavioural economics has revealed this account to be false and incomplete as it relates to market behaviour, any observation of how states behave in practice shows it to be similarly flawed as a model for explaining international relations, particularly where states are accountable to their citizens.

People certainly care about wealth, power and security, and they are capable of behaving selfishly and aggressively in order to get them, not least when they feel anxious or threatened. But they are also motivated by values like fairness and compassion and frequently exhibit a willingness to forego personal gain in order to advance them. That is why realists find themselves permanently exasperated at the clamour for governments to respond to major international humanitarian crises by assuming costs and responsibilities that go well beyond anything justified by the national interest narrowly defined. The ability to feel compassion beyond our kin group is one of the defining characteristics of our humanity and the realist desire to extinguish it is simply unrealistic.

Take western intervention in the Balkans in the 1990s. According to realist logic this must have had some power-aggrandising motive. The problem is that no one has managed to advance a plausible suggestion for what that might have been given that the region has no real strategic value. One argument is that Western powers intervened because their prestige was challenged by widespread ethnic cleansing and other serious violations of human rights inflicted on civilians in the Former Yugoslavia. But that could be true only to the extent that human rights norms were considered important by the intervening states, otherwise there would have been no loss of prestige. In other words, it was a moral choice.

Besides, if humanitarianism was just a cover for old-fashioned power politics, large-scale intervention would have begun almost as soon as Yugoslavia dissolved into civil war and news of the first atrocities started to emerge. As it happened, intervention proceeded incrementally and reluctantly. That's because interests and values pointed in opposite directions. The narrow interest would have been served by containing the conflict and allowing 'survival of the fittest' to prevail, as our realist Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, wanted. It didn't happen because civilised people were ultimately unwilling to allow injustice and preventable suffering to continue unchecked. Interests and values went head to head and values won.

I should be clear that what I'm taking issue with here is traditional realism derived from Machiavelli and Hobbes. I'm aware of the 'progressive realist' or 'ethical realist' school that seeks to incorporate explicitly moral considerations within its framework. This seems to make fundamentally different assumptions about human nature based on the Augustinian tradition, as interpreted by Reinhold Niebuhr, which acknowledges the human capacity for good as well as evil. I certainly value this as a corrective both to traditional realism's tendency to reduce everything to power and the danger of

grand utopian schemes that take little account of power relations and human imperfection. In the same spirit, I also like Jay Winter's distinction between 'major' and 'minor' utopias as a way of thinking about the limits of the possible.<sup>42</sup> After more than a decade of imperial hubris and overstretch, foreign policy would undoubtedly benefit from embracing conservative virtues of prudence and humility. Having said that, I would prefer to think of Labour's foreign policy as being realistic rather than realist.

Jason is right to point out the risk of a values-based foreign policy morphing into Blair-style liberal imperialism, although I would dispute that Iraq was a values-based intervention (Blair's real motive for getting involved was a desire for proximity to American power and thus thoroughly realist in its calculations). For me the risk is best addressed if governments are clear and consistent about the criteria that determine the use of military force instead of formulating them ad hoc. The clearest articulation of this approach was set out in the Responsibility to Protect report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) which defined a set of threshold and precautionary criteria for humanitarian intervention. Blair was highly selective in accepting these kinds of restraints in his Chicago Speech in 1999, particularly in skating over the problematic issue of right authority. By the time of Iraq he had also abandoned the principle of last resort because President Bush was unwilling to let Hans Blix to complete his work.

Jason highlights two of the most interesting and contentious issues here: one concerns the purpose of military intervention, the second the issue of authorisation. The ICISS defined the first of these as its 'right intention' criterion. As Jason notes, I rule out the use of military force to impose a preferred system of government, in other words regime change on the Iraq model. Beyond self-defence and restoring international peace and security under the UN Charter, intervention should only be carried out to prevent serious, widespread and ongoing abuses of human rights, something which might have pertained to Iraq in 1989 or 1991, but not 2003. My one caveat is that although regime change can never be a legitimate motive for intervention, it may be the necessary outcome if a humanitarian mandate is to be properly fulfilled. The ICISS comes to the same conclusion. Once a territory on which crimes against humanity have been carried out is liberated, it clearly makes no sense to hand it back to the authority responsible. The territory either has to be removed from its control or the authority itself has to be dismantled. This unavoidably takes us into the problematic area of state-building.

The second difficult issue concerns the ICISS's 'right authority' criterion. On what authority should humanitarian intervention be considered legitimate? The answer often given is that the UN Security Council should have the final say, which now appears to be the position of David Cameron. I take a different view, regarding an unreformed Security Council as a body where the vested interests of the permanent members are likely to block legitimate action for illegitimate reasons, most probably the desire of the Chinese and Russian governments to limit precedents for intervention on grounds of human rights. The vote in favour of intervention in Libya could well be the last of its kind we are going to see for a long time, irrespective of humanitarian need.

Perhaps reform to limit the use of vetoes by the P5 could restore the Security Council's capacities as an effective decision-making body, but that would seem to be a long way off. Other legitimising mechanisms may be necessary in the meantime. Clearly this cannot be done by ad hoc coalitions of the willing assembled with particular interventions in mind. Resort to war-fighting should require a higher threshold of multilateral legitimacy than that. As Robin Cook pointed at the time of Iraq, Blair and Bush couldn't even persuade a majority of the Security Council, so the issue of the threatened French veto was largely irrelevant. In the case of Kosovo, where a Russian veto genuinely did prevent

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<sup>42</sup> Jay Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the Twentieth Century* (Yale University Press 2006).

a Security Council decision, intervention was unanimously supported by NATO, the EU and all of Serbia's neighbours.

The issue of regional support is critical. For me, the most important legitimising institution in relation to Libya was the Arab League, not the UN. If responsible governments in the affected region cannot be persuaded that intervention is justified, then clearly outside powers lack both the moral authority and practical means to carry out a successful operation. Likewise, if there is strong multilateral regional support for intervention in a particular part of the world, it would be wrong for action to be blocked by the inability of the Security Council to overcome the veto of a permanent member acting out of self-interest. Whether these principles can be satisfactorily codified is open to question, but the support of NATO and/or the EU, together with majority support in the affected region and on the Security Council, would seem to provide a suitably high threshold for action.

Finally, I would like to pick up on Jason's point about whether the driver for reform of international institutions should be changes in the distribution of power or the desire for greater democratic representativeness. I think it is hard to argue in favour of a bigger role for China on grounds of greater democratic representativeness given the nature of the regime. China has to be included because it is now an indispensable nation in solving global problems from financial instability to climate change. As a pragmatic necessity, I tend to agree with Charles Kupchan that "responsible governance, rather than liberal democracy, should be adopted as the standard for determining which states are legitimate and in good standing – and thus stakeholders in the next order."<sup>43</sup>

We have to deal with the world as it is, especially given the multitude of serious problems that can only be addressed collectively. But that does not mean we should give up trying to change it for the better. Democracy promotion should remain an important goal, but it should be done more through the power of example and less through the power of military force. It also requires the established democracies to work more closely together. Although I am critical of the 'special relationship' as it has evolved over the years, one of the major tasks in the coming period will be for Europe and America to develop new ways of working together in order to prevent a combination of America's Asian pivot and European introspection leading to permanent estrangement.

Overall, I think Jason and I are in broad agreement about the kind of foreign policy Britain needs. It should be values-based, but avoid the perils of misplaced idealism leading to more harm than good. It should be ambitious in its desire for change, but with greater emphasis on soft power. And it should embrace substantial reform of the international system to make it more representative and legitimate. Those would seem to be good foundations on which to build.

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<sup>43</sup> Charles A Kupchan, *No One's World: The West, The Rising Rest, and the Coming Global Turn* (Oxford University Press 2012), p187.