What was the foreign policy described as 'Liberal Interventionism' and did it work in the years 1997-2001?

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The Blair Years

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Introduction

Tony Blair became Prime Minister in May 1997 after never holding office, making it his first and only job in government.[1] He entered office on a mandate for a modern domestic agenda following almost two decades of Conservative government, initially having little experience or personal interest for foreign affairs.[2] However, this position evolved rapidly as he became increasingly convinced of the morality of 'appropriate humanitarian intervention', resulting in a decade-long premiership that would see him break all records for the usage of the armed forces for international actions in modern times.[3] In his own words, Blair claimed that 'if you had told me on that bright May morning as I first went blinking into Downing Street that during my time in office I would commit Britain to fight four wars, I would have been bewildered and horrified'.[4] However, he insisted throughout the length of his tenure that he was a liberal interventionist, an ideal he was committed to and which guided his decisions surrounding the various military actions he oversaw.[5] From the beginning of his premiership in 1997 to just four years later in 2001 we see several key examples of this foreign policy taking shape, with the two most notable being British military intervention in Kosovo in 1999 and Sierra Leone in 2000. In order for us to understand liberal interventionism and how effective it was during this period, we must first identify it and its role in the period before we explore the impact of Blair and Anglo-American relations in the development of the policy, after which we can establish whether it achieved its intended outcomes in the major cases of

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[1] Tony Blair, *A Journey* (London: Hutchinson, 2010) p.1

[2] Andrew M. Dorman, *Blair's Successful War: British Military Intervention in Sierra Leone* (New York: Routledge, 2016) p.3

[3] Ibid

[4] Blair, p.224

[5] Raymond Plant, *Blair's Liberal Interventionism* in M. Beech et al (eds.), *Ten Years of New Labour* (Macmillan, 2008) p.151

Kosovo and Sierra Leone as a means of understanding its overall success in the period of 1997 to 2001.

The concept of liberal interventionism is recognised as the modern iteration of the nineteenth-century foreign policy doctrine often associated with the former British Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister, Henry Temple, who stated that the 'real policy of England' is to be the 'champion of justice and right, pursuing that course with moderation and prudence'.[6] Its intellectual foundations therefore reside in liberal optimism and the belief that people, institutions, states and relationships can be reformed in a manner often reflective of western notions of liberalism, democracy and governance.[7] This doctrine advocates the idea that liberal states ought to intervene in other sovereign states to uphold liberal values, wielding the use of humanitarian aid and military force, in order to encourage a liberal world order of democracy, free trade and the rule of law.[8] Moreover, the post-cold war period provided a 'propitious environment' for the policy to take form, with widely-accepted international belief until the 2008 global credit crisis that 'neo-liberal prescriptions had universal application to the needs of developing and post-conflict societies'.[9] This was demonstrated with interventions in Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Bougainville, Timor Leste, the Solomon Islands and many others during the period, displaying the extension and further refinement of the liberal interventionist model.[10]

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[6] Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, & Dangerous People?: England 1783-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.561

[7] Roger Mac Ginty, *The Liberal Peace at Home and Abroad: Northern Ireland and Liberal Internationalism*, in *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations Vol.11 no.4* (2009) p.693

[8] Ibid

[9] Ibid

[10] Ibid

Part One: Blair and Liberal Interventionism

We must first look at the role of Blair's advocacy for the policy and Anglo-American relations to understand the context of liberal interventionism in this period. It is important to note that Blair's increasing involvement with foreign affairs and belief in the benefits of utilising Britain's effective military power did not spring forth without warning, there were early indicators that a New Labour government would take steps to dispel the narrative of the Labour party being soft in its approach to defence. This is particularly evident in the 1997 Labour Party Manifesto, where it outlined intent to be 'strong in defence' and resolute in standing up for Britain's interests, the integrity of human rights and democracy across the world.[11] It also highlighted the desire for Britain to take a leading role in the international community, including a 'more effective role in peacekeeping, conflict prevention, the protection of human rights and safeguarding the global environment', as well as place the protection and promotion of human rights at the centre of British foreign policy going forward.[12] This was a product of the belief that prior interventions, such as in the Balkans in the mid-90s, were examples of leaving it 'too late' to intervene and allowing atrocities to occur, as well as the realisation that trans-Atlantic unity was crucial to rectifying international issues, even in Europe.[13]

Moreover, Blair described at Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, during his only General Election campaign speech on foreign policy, his belief that Britain's declining military power was responsible for its reduced standing in the world, and argued that its place in the international community was for centuries that of a leader of nations, and should be again.[14]

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[11] 1997 Labour Party Manifesto, *New Labour: Because Britain Deserves Better* (Accessed via http://www.labour-party.org.uk/manifestos/1997/1997-labour-manifesto.shtml)
[12] Ibid
[13] Kevin Tebbit, "Liberal Interventionism", in Jon Davis, "7SSPP205: The Blair Years", King's College London, 8th March 2021
[14] John Kampfner, *Blair's Wars* (London: Free Press, 2004) p.3

He claimed that John Major's tenure presided over 'the largest reduction in our military capability since the war', leading to his years in power becoming 'synonymous with national decline, weakness and uncertainty', whereas New Labour recognised that Britain was 'a leader of nations or nothing'.[15] Since becoming party leader in 1994, Blair followed the path set by John Smith and sought to remove foreign policy as a contentious issue for Labour by dismantling the idea of it being a 'unilateralist party that was weak on defence', instead stressing that any government under him would be in favour of fighting when necessary and willing to use Britain's nuclear arsenal, thus turning away from the left's 'talismanic' issue of opposition to Trident from the 1980s.[16] It is also significant that Britain was uniquely disposed to military expeditions, as it had not lost a war in living memory and therefore did not suffer a loss of confidence like the US did in Vietnam, which, when coupled with its significant military capabilities, contributed to Britain being the European leader of NATO.[17] This sentiment was further reinforced with the triumph in the Falklands and the ultimately successful long-term peacekeeping and counter-terrorism efforts in Northern Ireland.[18] Therefore, it soon became clear that Labour's 1980s internationalism of unilateral nuclear disarmament, hostility towards American foreign policy and withdrawal from the European Community 'meant nothing to Blair'.[19] We can discern from this, therefore, the roots of what would develop into the New Labour foreign policy of liberal interventionism after they entered government.

Furthermore, as John Rentoul points out, Prime Ministers always run their own foreign policy, a fact that often complicates the role of Foreign Secretary, yet Robin Cook was impacted more than most due to his exclusion from the inner core of Blair's decision-

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[15] Ibid, p.4
[16] Ibid
[17] Tebbit
[18] Ibid
[19] Kampfner, p.4

making.[20] Blair respected the 'sharpness of his intellect' and his formal position as head of Labour's policy-making machinery, however the Foreign Secretary ultimately 'arrived in Whitehall as passenger rather than pilot'.[21] Cook did however deliver an 'ill-considered' ethical foreign policy mission statement just ten days after entering government, which promised to 'spread the values of human rights, civil liberties and democracy which we demand for ourselves'.[22] This highlights the significance of the agenda from the beginning, as it underpinned the renewed approach to defence of having a responsibility to act as a force for good in the world.[23] We can therefore establish that the foundations of New Labour's liberal interventionism mindset were present from its inception, and that Blair's personal involvement with the foreign policy shaped it immensely.

Blair was also equipped with a 'strong moral outlook' throughout the duration of his premiership, a theme rooted as far back as his days as an undergraduate, during which he took part in discussions on 'ethical Christianity' and the Scottish moral philosopher John MacMurray, who emphasised the importance of action.[24] Peter Riddell argues that Blair was truly committed, in an ideological sense, to 'addressing the ills of the world' in terms of objective right and wrong, 'almost regardless of the strategic implications'.[25] In the case of Kosovo, for example, the approach was not opportunistic or 'focus-group-driven', instead the driving force was Blair's moral conviction about the need to act to prevent moral atrocities, with these beliefs being tempered only by his determination to maintain close ties to Washington.[26] Furthermore, we see from his concerns for Africa that Blair did not subscribe to the traditional leftist theory of dependence, which states that the continent was

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[20] John Rentoul, *Tony Blair: Prime Minister* (London: Warner Books, 2001) p.420
[21] Ibid
[22] Ibid, p.421
[23] Tebbit
[24] Peter Riddell, *Hug Them Close: Blair, Clinton, Bush and the 'Special Relationship'* (London: Politico, 2004) p.6
[25] Ibid, p.7
[26] Ibid, p.12

underdeveloped purely as a result of western exploitation, as he believed there were systemic issues that needed addressing and so wished to assist leaders in Africa who he believed were 'modernisers' that could 'clean up corruption, open up their economies and work towards some form of democracy'.[27]

This moral focus was demonstrated in April 1999, when Blair gave a speech in Chicago titled 'The Doctrine of the International Community', in which he made the case for liberal interventionism in the 'internal affairs of nation states' on humanitarian grounds, a move which Riddell believes had 'conscious echoes of Gladstone's protests over the Bulgarian atrocities in the late 1870s'.[28]. Blair described the intervention in Kosovo as a 'just war, based not on any territorial ambitions but on values', and claimed that appeasement does not work, for if you 'let an evil dictator range unchallenged, we will have to spill infinitely more blood and treasure to stop him later'.[29] The speech also outlined the considerations that Blair believed were vital to ensuring that any intervention was legitimate, as many regimes around the world were undemocratic and engaged in 'barbarous acts' yet 'if we wanted to right every wrong that we see in the modern world then we would do little else than intervene in the affairs of other countries'.[30] These conditions included ensuring that armed intervention was the only resort, the prior exhaustion of all diplomatic options, making the judgement on the sensibility and logistics of military operations, ensuring preparations are made for potential long-term deployments and being certain that any actions taken are done with regional interests in mind.[31] In the case of Kosovo, Blair claimed that this criteria was fulfilled, and described how although the mass-expulsion of ethnic Albanians there demanded the notice of the rest of the world, it was also taking place in a 'combustible part of Europe',

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[27] Kampfner, p.65
[28] Riddell, p.7
[29] Tony Blair, *Chicago Speech*, 22nd April 1999
[30] Ibid
[31] Ibid

and therefore represented a prime example of justifying a considered approach to an international situation.[32]

Moreover, with references to international solidarity and responsibility throughout, the speech was geared towards securing US engagement with the intervention in Kosovo, and highlighted Blair's willingness to push beyond Cook's non-military language of ethical foreign policy.[33] A major example of efforts to bring in the Americans came soon after the beginning of NATO's bombing campaign against Serbian forces in Kosovo when it became clear an air campaign was not sufficient on its own to end the conflict, as Blair took the decision to 'go for broke' and stake his reputation on winning by convincing President Bill Clinton into agreeing to ground deployments.[34] Blair admired Clinton, however the relationship between them was akin to 'older brother to younger brother' prior to Kosovo, until Blair had his 'coming of age' in understanding how to handle relations with the US.[35] Furthermore, his outreach to Clinton came from a crucial belief that was key to the practise of liberal interventionism in this period, which was that America should not be left to act alone in foreign interventions, as its allies have a 'duty and a responsibility to act with it' in order to avoid a unilateralist US acting against the interests of its allies.[36] This was significant, as other than to use as a bulwark against Soviet advances during the Cold War, Africa had always been at the bottom of American priorities.[37] Moreover, Clinton previously wished to act in accordance with Presidential Decision Directive PDD-25, ever since the catastrophe of American intervention in Somalia in 1993, which outlined sixteen factors to consider when deciding on intervention and consequently satisfied the US desire for 'zero degree of

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[32] Ibid
[33] Tebbit
[34] Blair, p.237
[35] Riddell, p.13
[36] Ibid, p.14
[37] Kampfner, p.63

involvement and zero degree of risk and zero degree of pain and confusion'.[38] Therefore, Blair's personal involvement with the cause of liberal interventionism was clearly vital to its success from 1997 to 2001, as his relentless advocation for the policy and ability to encourage participation from the Americans and other international partners was of paramount importance, particularly in the cases of Kosovo and Sierra Leone.

Part Two: Kosovo

Kosovo was the first major instance of liberal interventionism in the period and was described by Blair as his 'abrupt' awakening to foreign policy, particularly as it highlighted to him the blurred lines between foreign and domestic issues as the development of global media allowed for events to be viewed around the clock in even the most remote parts of Britain, exposing the populace to war and encouraging them to push for action.[39] Blair knew little about contemporary foreign affairs before becoming Prime Minister, however he believed the new challenges facing the world required new global solutions, thus emphasised the importance of global alliances based on shared values rather than 'narrow national self-interest'.[40] When discussing Kosovo, Clare Short makes note of the fact that, despite his later interest in the region, Blair expressed no support whilst in Opposition for the sizeable cohort of Labour MPs who were 'deeply troubled by President Slobodan Milosevic's ethnic cleansing and the mass rape in Bosnia', as well as the failure of the UK to put a stop to it.[41] This observation is consistent with Blair being relatively disconnected from foreign affairs prior to becoming Prime Minister, and indicates how his liberal interventionist stance

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[38] Ibid
[39] Blair, p.223
[40] Ibid, p.225
[41] Clare Short, *An Honourable Deception?: New Labour, Iraq, and the misuse of power* (London: Free Press, 2004) p.76

developed in tandem with his ever-growing interest in foreign affairs. His stance was also born largely from a belief that the traditional foreign policy view, 'based on a narrow analysis of national interest and an indifference unless that interest is directly engaged', was ultimately a flawed and outdated approach.[42]

Kosovo's emergence as an issue towards the end of 1998 and rapid escalation in 1999 meant that 'the jagged edge of foreign policy and decision-making was immediate and painful in effect'.[43] The wounds of the Bosnia conflict were not fully healed and Serbia remained under the dictatorship of Milosevic as 'religious, ethnic and nationalist tensions abounded', particularly regarding the one-million inhabitants of Kosovo, of which a majority were Muslim Kosovan Albanians.[44] Prior intervention had ended the Bosnian conflict with the signing of the Dayton Agreement in late 1995, but over two-hundred thousand people had died in the war and the peace was fragile in Kosovo.[45] Paddy Ashdown warned Blair in December 1998 that the situation was deteriorating as fears of a Serbian invasion grew, and the Kosovan paramilitary liberation army were rearming whilst intelligence reports indicated that Milosevic was about to authorise an assault in the wake of hundreds-of-thousands of civilians being displaced and two-thousand killed in the months leading up to 1999.[46] This ethnic cleansing by a European neighbour was met with international outcry, yet the only response for months was the passing of resolutions, issuing of statements and daily declarations of the unacceptability of the events.[47] Military action was finally authorised in March, in the form of NATO air strikes against the invading forces, which lasted until June when Milosevic's forces retreated in disarray at the prospect of significant Anglo-American

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[42] Blair, p.225
[43] Ibid, p.226
[44] Ibid
[45] Ibid
[46] Ibid
[47] Ibid, p.227

ground deployments.[48] Cook attributes much of the progress in Kosovo to this strong Anglo-American partnership that 'gave the alliance a spine' and prevented NATO's resolve in the conflict from cracking, which Milosevic's ambassadors hoped would happen.[49] These escalations also resulted in the Russians advising Milosevic to back down, which is what Kevin Tebbit largely credits the success to.[50] This led to the erosion of his authority, his eventual removal from power and the subsequent return of over seven-hundred and fifty thousand refugees.[51] United Nations peacekeeping forces were then deployed in Kosovo following the signing of the peace accord, establishing the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo which put the region under UN supervision.[52] This military campaign was significant, as it demonstrated to Blair the 'fundamental, unavoidable and irredeemable limitations of a pure air campaign against a determined opponent who cares little about losing life', therefore highlighting the importance of ground attacks to supplement an air assault and helped to establish what became the 'familiar path for such campaigns' going forward.[53]

Moreover, Blair now claims he marvels at how the situation unfolded and believes the events taught him many things about government, leadership and himself, as well as completely transformed his attitudes towards foreign policy.[54] He identifies in particular how the international community was inclined to act only 'within very tight limits' and with the goal of composing any deal that would remove the issue from the headlines, indicating a 'desire to pacify, but not to resolve'.[55] Significantly, Blair was from the outset

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[48] Ibid

[49] Robin Cook, *The Point of Departure* (London: Pocket Books, 2004) p.103

[50] Tebbit

[51] Blair, p.227

[52] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Kosovo Conflict* (Encyclopaedia Britannica: 12th May, 2008) (Accessed 21st March 2021)
https://www.britannica.com/event/Kosovo-conflict

[53] Blair, p.236

[54] Ibid, p.227

[55] Ibid

'extraordinarily forward in advocating a military solution', to the irritation of allies and 'the

consternation of a large part of our system', as he was 'totally and unyieldingly for

resolution, not pacification'.[56] Blair's personal analysis of Europe following the events of

Kosovo concluded that it was 'brilliant at ringing statements of intent, which then evaporated

into thin air when the consequences of seeing them through became apparent'.[57] These

revelations convinced Blair of the need for strong European leadership and for a 'proper

European defence strategy'.[58] It is therefore clear that the Kosovo conflict was the catalyst for

Blair's liberal interventionism to become fully fleshed out over the coming years, as not only

had he become convinced of the weaknesses of the European inclination for pacification over

action, but he had also seen first-hand the impactful results that could be yielded from

coordinated military interventions.

When contemplating the success of what was essentially the debut of liberal

interventionism in the New Labour years, it is important to acknowledge the challenges

encountered with the methods used. The bombing campaign in particular was, although

effective, also a cause of great cost to the people of the region. This was highlighted by

Alastair Campbell in his diaries from May 1999, where he acknowledges that the NATO

campaign had resulted in the accidental bombing of various civilian targets, including a

convoy of Albanian refugees, a bus crossing a bridge in Lužane, a hospital and even the

Chinese Embassy in Belgrade.[59] As Campbell also indicates in a later entry, it caused Blair

and his team to critically evaluate the difference between an accident and a 'deliberate

atrocity', as well as encourage others to appreciate the distinction when put in the context of a

conflict where horrific war crimes were taking place with deliberate intent by the other side,

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[56] Ibid
[57] Ibid
[58] Ibid
[59] Alastair Campbell, *Power & Responsibility: 1999-2001, The Alastair Campbell Diaries Volume Three* (London: Arrow Books, 2012) p.13

thus wishing to 'contrast our regret with the cruelty of the Serbs'.[60] Despite this, the ethical implications of the NATO intervention in Kosovo and the unfortunate human cost do not detract from the successes of the intervention in achieving its objectives.

However, UNMIK was tasked with protecting the human rights of Albanian Kosovars, establishing a stable political system and arranging a settlement with Serbia to begin discussions for independence for Kosovo, yet these objectives proved challenging. Although the violence did not return to wartime levels, it did not vanish, and political institutions largely failed to take hold as the population became increasingly disillusioned with the UN, forcing the EU to take over its role just eight years after.[61] In terms of 'scope and ambition', the mission mandate for UNMIK was almost unprecedented and a 'move into uncharted territory', with some of the major challenges that faced the mission being directly linked to the 'exceptional character of the mandate'.[62] Attempting to establish an international administration to oversee full interim responsibility was therefore always going to have issues regarding legitimacy, limitations of powers, the extent of compromised sovereignty and the failure to specify an end target or transition plan.[63]

If, however, as Alexandros Yannis suggested in 2004, success in Kosovo was to be measured in terms of creating the conditions that would permit for the withdrawal of international administrators, then the declaration of independence in 2008 can be seen as a successful long-term result of the intervention to an extent.[64] This success is of course limited, as international bodies are still involved in the country and, as Albana Kasapi argues, Albanians and Serbs will not reconcile until Serbia recognises Kosovo's independence.[65]

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[60] Ibid, p.14
[61] Ibid
[62] Alexandros Yannis, *The UN as Government in Kosovo*, in *Global Governance 10, no.1* (Brill: 2004) p.67
[63] Ibid, p.68
[64] Ibid
[65] Albana Kasapi, *Kosovo War: The conflict that won't go away*, BBC News, 25th March 2019
(Accessed via: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f55lvc3jhNY)

Overall, we can see that the foreign policy of liberal interventionism played a critical role in the defence of Kosovo. When condemnations and diplomatic actions failed to stem the tide of violence sweeping the region, coordinated military intervention quickly put a stop to it and made room for the chain of administrative and political restructuring necessary over the coming years to facilitate the emergence of the Republic of Kosovo. The relative success of this endeavour, and the comparative failure of other methods, reinforced Blair's belief in the approach and gave clear momentum for future endeavours, therefore demonstrating that Kosovo was ultimately a success of liberal interventionism.

Part Three: Sierra Leone

Kosovo had clearly not diminished Blair's appetite for intervention where he believed it essential to 'resolve a problem that needed resolution' and where 'a strong moral case could be made', as a further challenge presented itself in early 2000 in Sierra Leone, an episode of his premiership that Blair is particularly proud of.[66] In the 1960s, Sierra Leone boasted a strong governing infrastructure and a GDP per head that competed with Portugal, yet by the time of Blair's tenure the country had suffered a 'downward spiral that was as tragic as it was entirely avoidable', with the democratically elected government on the precipice of being toppled by 'a collection of gangsters, madmen and sadists known as the Revolutionary United Front'.[67] The rebel war in the country, that had been raging since 1991, had shocked the world due not only to its 'atypically gruesome violence' but also the favourable prospects for human security and sustainable development in the country prior to the collapse, with abundant natural resources and one of the most developed educational

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[66] Blair, p.246
[67] Ibid

systems in Sub-Saharan Africa being reduced to widespread poverty and low human development.[68] The RUF 'rampaged' through the country, with amputation becoming their trademark, whilst counter-insurgency government forces also engaged in acts of extreme brutality against civilians, leaving much of the populace endangered and unprotected.[69]

The war raged by the RUF exacerbated the already dire situation in the country as it fought to overthrow the All People's Congress, with a military coup in 1992 that was replaced by a democratic civilian government under Tejan Kabbah in 1996. [70] However, a military junta led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma overthrew President Kabbah's one-year old 'government of national unity' in May 1997.[71] Kabbah was originally elected in democratic elections largely funded by Britain and was a former UN official, which is why the Foreign Office advised Blair that he was a 'modernising' African leader, leading to him committing in principle to bringing Kabbah back to power and having UN Resolution 1132 passed by the Security Council in October to impose sanctions on Sierra Leone.[72] Eventually, the West African Intervention Force, headed by Nigeria under a UN umbrella, drove the rebels out of Freetown and reinstated Kabbah's government in February 1998, however the rebels would attack again in 1999 before signing the Lomé Peace Accord later that year.[73] This last attack was particularly brutal and highlighted the dire situation the country had reached as the RUF force, led by Corporal Foday Sankoh and funded by the illegal blood diamond trade, took over half of Freetown in a bloodbath that 'left hundreds dead and a generation of amputees'.[74]

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[68] Victor Davies, *Sierra Leone: Ironic Tragedy*, in Journal of African Economies Vol.9 No.3 (University of Sierra Leone: October 2000) p.349

[69] Lucy Scott, *A Success Story? The British Intervention in Sierra Leone Revisited* (Oxford Research Group: 26th July 2017) Accessed 24th March 2021
https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/blog/a-success-story-the-british-intervention-in-sierra-leone-revisited

[70] Davies, p.350

[71] Peter Dumbuya, *ECOWAS Military Intervention in Sierra Leone: Anglophone-Francophone Bipolarity or Multipolarity?*, in *Journal of Third World Studies 25 no.2* (University Press of Florida: 2008) p.83

[72] Kampfner, p.66

[73] Davies, p.350

[74] Julian Borger, *'I would not be speaking to you if it weren't for the risks Blair took'* (The Guardian: 26th May 2007) Accessed 25th March 2021

The country was traumatised and the rebels were partially defeated, this permitted the peace accord, however it was soon to be broken in May 2000 with renewed rebel attacks on government troops and the kidnapping of over five-hundred UN peacekeepers.[75] The situation in the country was 'confused', with the RUF holding much of the diamond-producing and northern regions whilst government troops feuded with their political leadership in Freetown, therefore greatly impairing the state's war efforts against the rebels despite over thirteen-thousand UN troops being deployed in support of the state.[76] Blair described this UN force as being 'mightily constrained, both politically and logistically', which is why it demonstrated an inability to deal with the RUF or maintain order.[77] This is why, after Kabbah had come to 'beg for help' from Blair, a decision had to be made between leaving the situation in the hands of the UN force already stationed there or 'decide to act ourselves', the latter was chosen.[78]

Following military intelligence that Freetown was about to be taken again, Cook and the new Defence Secretary, Geoff Hoon, persuaded Blair to send in British troops.[79] A 'spearhead battalion' was scrambled and deployed with the objective of evacuating foreign nationals and maintaining order whilst awaiting UN reinforcements, however it was also seen by Downing Street and the Ministry of Defence as a test of Britain's post-cold war capabilities.[80] David Richards, the Brigadier leading the intervention codenamed Operation Palliser, described how the force was 'ostensibly there to organise an evacuation of UK nationals', however he ignored orders from London and committed his soldiers to leading the fight against the rebels, 'a decision that helped turn the course of the war'.[81] Richards claimed

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https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/may/26/tonyblair.foreignpolicy
[75] Davies, p.350
[76] Ibid
[77] Blair, p.246
[78] Ibid, p.247
[79] Kampfner, p.70
[80] Ibid
[81] David Richards, *Taking Command* (London: Hachette, 2014) p.2

that he knew the MoD did not want his forces to get involved, however as a Brigadier he did not have to opportunity to contact Blair or Cook, and so decided to be driven by his determination to prevent further devastation in Freetown.[82] Much of the credit for the intervention has been attributed to Blair as an example of successful interventionist ethical foreign policy, an outcome that Richards does not resent as although Blair initially knew little of what was unfolding, the actions that were taken were only possible thanks to the conditions Blair had provided.[83] Moreover, Blair was the one who endured the pressure from the Conservatives and media to withdraw due to 'mission creep' and 'overstretch', as the war was viewed as a product of his personal enthusiasm and seen as running the risk of committing British troops to 'an intractable conflict of indeterminate length'.[84]

Furthermore, Hoon, Cook and Short all advised Blair that the situation in Sierra Leone was volatile, with Short telling him that 'it would be disgraceful to pull them out now' as atrocities were taking place.[85] This led Blair to order 'let them stay', as his Principal Private Secretary, John Sawers, informed a succession of ministerial meetings that it was the Prime Minister's decision to 'go for the radical option', as he was confident that the morality of the cause outweighed any dangers or criticism.[86] Therefore, although Ministers did not admit it, the remit quietly changed as the British force 'turned themselves into the only stabilising force that existed in the country'.[87] This remit included armed confrontations with the rebels, securing strategic locations and travel routes, performing unilateral actions against the RUF and training the Sierra Leone army.[88] This expanded British mission in Sierra Leone afforded the UN time to bolster its forces, which led to the arrest of the RUF leader, Sankoh,

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[82] Ibid
[83] Ibid, p.3
[84] Kampfner, p.70
[85] Ibid, p.71
[86] Ibid
[87] Ibid
[88] Ibid

the increase of international presence over the coming months and the consequential collapse of rebel-controlled territories.[89] A programme of comprehensive disarmament took place soon after, with former rebels being gradually absorbed back into the country's society and democracy being restored.[90]

The events in Sierra Leone convinced Blair that a 'proper, well-equipped standing force for Africa', composed of African forces under the UN banner for the purposes of intervention, was necessary to combat the brutal infighting that unfolds with disputes around resources, territory and corruption on the continent.[91] He came to see foreign aid as a 'sticking plaster' that was 'subject to being ripped off and the wounds reopened at any time', therefore being impractical without addressing the inadequacies in 'practical politics', as although development aid may 'salve our conscience', it would not 'save the countries most in need of salvation'.[92] The actions in Sierra Leone also exemplified for Blair what the UK's concept for being a 'force for good' was, as Britain acted alone with no selfish interests and successfully implemented an exit-strategy.[93] We can therefore establish why Blair's view was further reinforced that military intervention was sometimes necessary, particularly when considering the scale of success experienced in Sierra Leone. Although the intervention was not as coordinated or planned as was in Kosovo, the actions of British troops, as well as the increased involvement by the UN following British lead, played a demonstrably crucial role in ending the civil war and preserving the civilian government. It is therefore clear that Blair is proud of this chapter of his premiership because the intervention was a categorical success for liberal interventionism and ethical foreign policy, even if direct action was not his original plan for the country.

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[89] Blair, p.247
[90] Ibid
[91] Ibid
[92] Ibid
[93] Tebbit

Conclusion

To conclude, liberal interventionism developed from nineteenth-century liberalism and notably manifested in the post-cold war era under New Labour as the belief in tangible benefits from interventions took hold. Blair played an instrumental role in the development and implementation of the policy in the modern era, with his influence being wielded to facilitate the moral causes he attached himself to during the period. His input was also vital in the acquisition of assistance from the Americans and the rest of the international community in the multilateral efforts to impose liberal interventionism, thus bestowing the cause legitimacy on the global stage. In the cases of both Kosovo and Sierra Leone, we see case studies of the accomplishments and shortcomings with implementation of the policy in the early years of the Blair government, as well as the lessons learned. Intervention in Kosovo put an end to the widespread ethnic cleansing and war crimes that plagued the region, as well as facilitated the political developments necessary to put Kosovo on the road to independence, however the human cost was great, and the lingering international administrative presence coupled with ongoing disputes of legitimacy are evidence of an unresolved situation despite the success. Sierra Leone, on the other hand, was arguably a greater success than Kosovo, with a gruesome civil war being put to an end and the democratically elected civilian government being safeguarded, although the intervention was largely spawned from heroic improvisation on the ground. Overall, we can therefore conclude that the foreign policy of liberal interventionism was ultimately successful in the majority of its objectives and therefore worked during the period of 1997 to 2001.

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