

# The Future of Labour's Foreign Policy

Sam Hardy and James Denselow

December 2011

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83 Victoria Street,  
London SW1H 0HW  
Tel: 020 3008 8180  
Fax: 020 3008 8181  
Email: [office@progressives.org.uk](mailto:office@progressives.org.uk)  
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# 1. Introduction

Like many administrations before it, the government entered office intending to concentrate on domestic affairs. Early indications of its foreign policy seemed to amount to a propensity for placing ministers at the heart of securing international trade deals, a preference for bilateral rather than multilateral relations, and a new aloofness from world affairs after a decade of perceived overseas misadventure. Like its predecessors, however, events conspired to see the coalition adopt a more activist position, in its case over the Arab Spring. For Labour, the Libyan intervention changed the immediate circumstances for the party's policymakers in opposition, but it has not altered the overall dynamic. The coalition's insular tendency has manifested itself once more in a distinct reluctance to lead the way in resolving the global debt crisis, consigning the UK once again to the sidelines as the world changes around it.

As the policy review enters its second year, the Labour party has an opportunity to grasp the initiative on foreign affairs and take on the challenge of scrutinising a government foreign policy which is neither clear nor coherent and which is failing to command the confidence of voters: according to a recent Chatham House Survey, the UK public overwhelmingly believe that the coalition government has changed UK foreign policy for the worse.<sup>1</sup>

1. The Chatham House-YouGov Survey 2011: <http://web1.chathamhouse.org/research/europe/current-projects/chatham-house-yougov-survey>

It is against this backdrop that we aimed to publish a report outlining a potential foreign policy platform for the Labour party in opposition. Over a three month period in the spring and summer of 2011 we interviewed over 30 MPs; former ministers and political advisers; newspaper editors; foreign policy specialists; and former civil servants to garner their opinions on Labour's record in office over the past 13 years; what its foreign policy focus should be; and how it can reclaim its position as the agenda-setting party on international affairs. This report is based on the evidence from those interviews.

Interviewees included the former foreign secretary David Miliband; the former defence secretary Bob Ainsworth; the current shadow defence secretary Jim Murphy; and the former No 10 chief of staff Jonathan Powell. We were also able to call on the opinions of a group of non-party political foreign policy specialists including Robin Niblett, director of Chatham House; Mark Leonard, director of the European Council on Foreign Relations; and Alexander Nicoll, editor of Strategic Survey at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. Interviewees also included journalists from The Guardian, the Financial Times and The Economist; MPs from the House of Commons foreign affairs, international development, and defence select committees; and political advisers and analysts who are working, or have worked on, numerous foreign policy briefs.

In addition to the policy issues discussed in this paper it is worth noting that we gathered a huge and, at times, seemingly overwhelming amount of information both from interviews and our research, only a fraction of which has been addressed in this report. For example, we acknowledge that there is scant reference to climate change and resources; the complexities of the war in Afghanistan; or the management of the global economy. This is partly because these issues fall into the briefs of other shadow departments and partly because interviewees did not highlight these issues as consistently as others.

## A Labour party foreign policy

The interviews revealed a number of emerging themes important to the future foreign policy direction of the Labour party.

### More than a 'European Singapore'

The necessity for a strong defence of multilateralism was repeated time and again, with participants underlining the UK's need, more so than for the US and emerging powers, for a strong multilateral system. Linked to this was the call for the UK to take a lead in pressing for reform of multilateral institutions, particularly the United Nations. Most respondents were also particularly concerned about the current government's focus on bilateralism, specifically on trade. Few saw a long-term strategic goal here, apart from the apparent desire of the government to reduce the UK to a 'European Singapore'; a regional trading hub but little more than that.

### Being pro-European is being pro-British

Besides identifying an emerging preference for bilateralism there was near-unanimous despair, even among non-Labour affiliated interviewees, about Europe. The shortsightedness of the government's rhetoric and action on Europe was highlighted as a cause for concern. Ministers' comments on the euro and the Human Rights Act; the European Union Act; and the ongoing diplomatic gamesmanship with the EU were viewed as fundamentally contrary to the UK's long-term national interests, resulting only in the country enjoying less leverage inside the EU and less power globally. Equally, the lack of immediate clear response to these issues from the Labour party was seen, at best, to be politically expedient in the short-term and, at worst, as cowardly and politically lazy from a progressive pro-European party.

### Clearer rules on intervening abroad

On defence and security views were more mixed. As expected, Iraq proved hugely divisive, though the majority of respondents believed Ed Miliband's election as leader allowed the Labour party licence to move on from Iraq. Even after Iraq, the majority of interviewees were still committed to liberal interventionism, supporting the Libyan campaign and underlining the need for the Labour party to remake the progressive case for interventionism while endorsing the need for a Labour-led review of the criteria for 'how and when' to intervene.

### The impact of foreign policy on domestic policy

Away from specific policy issues there was also a sense, highlighted by almost every interviewee, that the critical nature of foreign policy was simply not understood by the public or even policymakers in Westminster. No doubt this is caused at least in part by the sheer range and complexity of the challenges facing the UK in the era of globalisation, linked to the public perception of a world becoming more dangerous, more unpredictable and more unfavourable to the UK – a perception several interviewees felt the government was doing little to counter. Indeed, there was a strong sense that Labour must fill the void left by the current government and grapple with the foreign policy agenda. This is not because it will necessarily be a key electoral issue, but because it is natural ground for Labour and a policy area for which the party has the time and space to lead the debate, project confidence and imagination in policy formulation, and ultimately prove its ability to govern.

### Labour's foreign policy values

Alongside identifying policy priorities we also wanted to test whether participants felt Labour had a distinct set of foreign policy values and query how these diverged from those of the Conservative

party. Jonathan Powell said that ‘values can be placed on a matrix that defines principled idealists against pragmatist realists, and open internationalists against closed little Englanders.’ For Labour, the challenge is to keep the party firmly towards the ‘values’ and ‘open internationalist’ end of this matrix while acknowledging that these principles will always be challenged by events. This is the essence of a values-based foreign policy.

The previous Labour government’s foreign policy values were defined by a consistent adherence to open internationalism, with greater UK engagement with the international community through multilateral institutions and adherence to international law; and by the twin pillars of former foreign secretary Robin Cook’s claims of an ‘ethical dimension’ to foreign policy and the values of liberal interventionism set out in Tony Blair’s Chicago speech. This outlined an activist approach to foreign policy, the core of which was the doctrine of intervention by both military and humanitarian means which seeks to combat massive infringements of human rights taking place inside, and often by, sovereign states. In practice, these values were evident in the UK’s re-engagement with Europe, the global multilateral governance process, and the focus on international development. In parallel, there was a near-linear process of liberal interventionism leading up to the hugely controversial Iraq war which, at best, marred and, at worst, destroyed Labour’s ethical foreign policy aspirations.

Analysts may question the context and interpretation of Cook’s declaration of an ‘ethical dimension’ to UK foreign policy, but the reality is that for many Labour voters foreign policy under the last government is judged against this declaration. And while a huge amount was achieved on the international front between 1997 and 2010, interviewees agreed that it is now important for Labour to reappraise its overarching approach to foreign affairs.

This will have to balance an ambitious and progressive agenda with a clear acknowledgement of the unpredictable nature of foreign affairs. As we are seeing with ongoing events in the Middle East and the reaction of the international community, an ethical or values-based foreign policy must be tempered by a realisation about the realities of diplomacy. Ian Kearns, senior associate research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, warned

that ‘events while in power can test and show up a hypocritical set of principles.’ Arguably, the current government has already fallen victim to the clash of events – talking up the UK’s continued global role while simultaneously cutting budgets

related to the UK’s foreign policy. In early August 2011 the defence select committee warned that spending cuts will prevent the armed forces from carrying out military operations and will lead to a decline in the UK’s influence and role in the world, with Jim Murphy arguing that ‘events have exposed the mismatch between policy ambition and resources provided by the ministers.’<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most pertinent comment on this eternal foreign policy challenge came from David Miliband who argued that ‘circumstances challenge your values and sometimes these clash – that is what politics is about. The point about a value is that you apply it to a circumstance; a circumstance can’t contradict a value, it can only challenge it.’

So what are Labour’s values that will inevitably be challenged by events? The sense that Labour should be the party of ambitious and open internationalism permeated almost every interview. This point was often made in order to contrast the Labour and

“ An ethical or values-based foreign policy must be tempered by a realisation about the realities of diplomacy ”

2. ‘Cross-party committee attacks defence cuts’, Richard Norton-Taylor, The Guardian, 3 August 2011.

Conservative parties, the latter of which even non-Labour affiliated interviewees saw both historically and currently as often parochial, lacking in confidence on the international stage, and deeply realist in its approach to foreign policy.

Linked to this point, while Iraq has muddied the waters of liberal interventionism, this should by no means stymie Labour's ambition to put in place an ethical foreign policy. And these 'ethics' need not be any different to those espoused in 1997, namely, a party which is humanitarian, pro-development and pro-democracy in its values, and strongly in favour of an open, interlinked, globalised world. What is needed is for these values to be re-emphasised in opposition.

## 2. Improving the UK's Foreign Policy Machine

'I am increasingly convinced that it is no longer possible to sit in an office in Whitehall and produce credible analyses of what might happen in Egypt, or China, or on terrorism'

*Carne Ross, director of Independent Diplomat and former UK diplomat<sup>3</sup>*

Defining how the UK can best protect its national interests while making a positive impact on international relations should be a central goal for the Labour party. But for a number of reasons, not least the acute strain on finances, there is also a need to reappraise how the UK manages foreign policy. The key question is whether the three main relevant ministries – the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence – are able to manage UK policy in a rapidly changing world. Other important questions concern where money can be saved in a time of austerity, and where we should make the case for continued spending. How can we ensure that policymakers in both the legislature and the executive have the best possible understanding of the issues on which they are making decisions?

3. 'What the UK Foreign Office can learn from the State Department', Carne Ross, *Civil Service World*, 24 May 2011.

## Who makes the UK's foreign policy?

The UK's foreign policy architecture has changed considerably over the past 20 years. Until relatively recently the FCO enjoyed huge power over policymaking. But as politics has become globalised and the office of the prime minister has emerged as the central player, FCO influence over foreign policy has waned. A recurring theme in the interviews was the rise of DFID and the relative demise in influence of the FCO. The reasons offered for this perceived change were mixed but there was near-unanimity in the belief that it had occurred. That policymaking power under Labour had also continued to seep away from the FCO, a trend begun in the Thatcher era, towards Downing Street was also highlighted by a significant number of the participants.

Governments often create, rename or split ministries, but rarely do such initiatives herald as big an institutional change as the birth of DFID. Labour's decision in 1997 to create an independent government department with its own international development budget and policymaking arm significantly changed the UK's approach to foreign policy. It also met the new Labour government's strategic goal of underlining its progressive and internationalist credentials – setting the UK on the path to becoming one of the most influential development actors in the world. The strategy was arguably so successful that it has forced the Conservative party to follow Labour policy, with the current government ringfencing the DFID budget and stating its ambition for the UK to be a 'development superpower'. Participants questioned for this report, including David Miliband and former shadow foreign affairs minister Stephen Twigg, stated that the creation of DFID is one of the greatest legacies of the 1997-2010 Labour government, while others, including Jonathan Glennie, senior fellow at the Overseas Development Institute, claimed that the soft-power projection DFID afforded the UK was immeasurably valuable,

positioning the UK as a progressive, responsible and supportive actor in the developing world. Indeed, a senior foreign correspondent from a leading UK broadsheet found from his experience ‘both on the street and in diplomatic negotiations ... at the very least DFID’s actions took the edge off a simmering level of animosity towards the UK in the Middle East and Africa.’<sup>4</sup>

Yet DFID’s creation has not been without problems. The coherence of British foreign policy has been repeatedly questioned as the country’s development activity has expanded. Jonathan Powell recalled that ‘we took our eye off the ball on DFID ... before we knew it we’d woken

up and realised Clare [Short] had effectively created an NGO inside government and given the UK a new foreign policy.’ The sense that, on occasions, DFID complicated, or even undermined, UK foreign policy

“ Rarely do initiatives herald as big an institutional change as the birth of DFID ”

was echoed by other respondents who argued that at points it looked like the UK had ‘two foreign policies’. Indeed, the opening of DFID country offices and the strong promotion of DFID activity in developing countries was seen as confusing and, in some cases, damaging to the lines of communication and negotiation between the UK and these respective states. Noting this point, Sir Peter Ricketts, former FCO permanent secretary, has said that ‘for some years we went about our ways rather differently, and DFID set up some offices separately around the world. We saw ourselves as pursuing two rather different policy agendas.’<sup>5</sup>

There were also reservations about the level of DFID’s expenditure, especially at a time when both the MoD and the FCO were dealing with reductions in their budget. The idea of folding DFID back into the FCO was rejected by the majority of participants for this

4. Off-the-record interview, May 2011.

5. Comments by Sir Peter Ricketts, permanent secretary to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2006–10; speaking at a DFID Speaker Series event on 28 January 2009.

report. However, a number did suggest bringing DFID policy into closer alignment with or – where it was felt to negatively affect British national interests – subservient to the FCO. This qualified criticism of DFID, however, does not take away from the fact that the department's creation was one of the most important policy decisions taken by the Labour government and, while political and institutional problems have arisen, DFID still epitomises Labour's progressive approach to foreign policy.

As for the FCO, interviewees agreed that it has indeed ceased to be the assertive policymaking machine of the past and that power has shifted to the office of the prime minister. A respondent close to senior analysts within the FCO observed that 'on a good day, even senior FCO civil servants will tell you they don't really do policy any more.'<sup>6</sup> A number of interviewees pointed the finger at a continued deterioration in FCO funding while some, including Carne Ross, said that 'the problem with the FCO is a management culture which disincentivises risk-taking and dynamism in policymaking.' The marginalisation of the FCO arguably continued under Labour, successive foreign secretaries finding themselves superseded by the prime minister on key foreign policy decisions. The power balance with No 10 is unlikely to move back in favour of the FCO, but that does not mean it should resign itself to being little more than an administrative body. There is still space, even in the face of the coalition government's cuts, for the department to regain its role as a core source of expertise and policymaking, but the culture and management of the department will need to adapt to allow this to happen. Respondents highlighted the need for senior civil servants to be more willing to encourage risk-taking in the department and to allow policy staff to produce evidence-based policy proposals rather than simply carrying out top-down policy implementation. This call is perhaps relevant for all civil service departments but was seen as imperative for the FCO.

6. Off-the-record interview, April 2011.

Finally, there was one further key issue for interviewees on the subject of who manages foreign policy, namely the newly formed National Security Council. Respondents generally endorsed the concept but few thought the current government has gone far enough in formalising the body, with a number of people stating that it is effectively the same as the one set up by Labour in all but name. Several respondents, including Bob Ainsworth, also questioned how much power the NSC actually had. He said ‘the NSC is not revelatory; it is also much overstated and much overlooked. On the big decisions – Afghanistan withdrawal, Libya – it is still overlooked.’

## Knowledge and expertise

Besides looking at government departments, we also explored the issue of the ‘foreign policy community’ in the broader sense. In the US there is a constant revolving door of ‘around 5,000 foreign policy specialists going in and out of government and thinktanks.’<sup>7</sup> In addition to a vibrant thinktank community, in Congress there is a committee structure with real power where bodies such as the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations have the policy experience, expertise and clout to make a substantive difference. In the UK the situation is very different, with foreign policy too often being an addendum to domestic policy analysis and, while we have three big and influential thinktanks in Chatham House, IISS, and RUSI,<sup>8</sup> there is comparatively little staff interchange between government and thinktanks.

More worrying still is the lack of foreign policy expertise among MPs. The British political system and culture do not incentivise MPs to become policy specialists and, should they become ministers, MPs are too often not given time to become an expert in their field, especially in foreign affairs. Their brief

7. Robin Niblett, interview with authors, May 2011.

8. Chatham House (The Royal Institute for International Affairs); IISS (International Institute for Strategic Studies) and RUSI (The Royal United Services Institute).

is simply too diffuse to get to grips with all the policy issues. There are, of course, exceptions, with several elder statesmen expanding government or parliamentary briefs into long-term specialisms, such as Liberal Democrat Malcolm Bruce chairing the international development select committee, and former foreign secretaries Sir Malcolm Rifkind and David Miliband remaining authoritative figures on world affairs. But these exceptions prove the rule.

In the wake of the scandal at News International and the flexing of the muscles of the parliamentary committee system there is an opportunity for all three major foreign affairs committees<sup>9</sup> to assert their scrutiny role in parliament. The

“More worrying still is the lack of foreign policy expertise among MPs”

defence select committee is arguably leading the way, with regular interventions that cause both policymakers and the media to sit up and listen. This can only be a positive thing and should be built upon. Overall, interviewees for this report did not want further powers for parliamentary committees but they did call for them to be enhanced and for committee membership to be seen as an aspiration for MPs. This is a cultural challenge for Westminster, although young MPs such as the Conservatives’ Rory Stewart on the foreign affairs select committee and Labour’s Anas Sarwar on the international development select committee are proving that the committee system can be used effectively. The leadership of all parties could help address this cultural challenge by making a minimum one year of service on a relevant select committee a prerequisite to future entry to ministerial or shadow ministerial posts in order to enhance the status of parliamentary committees.

9. The international development select committee; the foreign affairs select committee; the defence select committee.

## Making the right cost savings and improving the UK's foreign policy machine

Since the new government came into office three foreign policy spending issues have caught the media and policymakers' attention: the decision to ringfence the DFID budget; the decision to restate the government's commitment to renewing Trident; and the decision to cut the BBC World Service budget by 16 per cent. While DFID has been addressed above, and surprisingly few respondents for this report brought up the issue of Trident, a large number did identify the reduction in the BBC World Service budget as a particularly regressive and counterproductive move. As David Watts, a member of the foreign affairs select committee, noted 'cutting off the BBC World Service to millions of people during a time when we are seeing the emergence of new democracies is crazy. We should be looking to influence people through networking, not through the gun.'<sup>10</sup> In contrast, there was praise for the government's approach to strategically closing some embassies and consulates while opening others in 'emerging priority regions' for the UK.

Another recurring theme from respondents was the concern over cuts to the armed services outlined in the government's Strategic Defence and Security Review. Alexander Nicoll of the International Institute for Strategic Studies remarked that we 'already get huge value for money from our military. For starters, they are deployable, unlike many other EU member state forces.' Several other respondents, including Charles Grant of the Centre for European Reform and Gisela Stuart of the defence select committee, also highlighted that, rather than the Conservative party, Labour has historically been the party that has defended the military from excessive cuts. Indeed, spending on defence grew faster under the last Labour government than it did under any of

10. Since interviews for this report were conducted the government has reviewed its funding policy for the BBC World Service, which has been amended to make another £2.2m available for Arabic service provision in response to the Arab Spring.

the last four Conservative administrations.<sup>11</sup> And while Labour's focus on international development is always highlighted, its willingness to empower military figures in policymaking, such as appointing Admiral Lord West as minister for security and counter-terrorism, was indicative of Labour's support of the armed forces.

On spending Labour has to accept that it is in a very difficult position. Ringfencing DFID's budget, already a toxic issue for the government in the rightwing press, is a position shared by Labour and it would be wrong for the party in opposition to press for a reduction in the spending or influence of DFID even in the light of a growing need for funds in the FCO and MoD, though this was suggested by a number of interviewees. But on defence it is clear that there is both concern among the public and tension within government over the cuts to defence spending.

Labour should make the case for slowing the pace of MoD cuts and for a more reasoned approach to what to cut and when – highlighting and scrutinising what are increasingly looking like arbitrary funding cuts in departments. Getting the balance right between seeking to protect the UK's armed services and appearing opportunistic will be a critical challenge over the next four years. One area where Labour should legitimately put public pressure on the government is on the issue of procurement. In opposition, the Conservative party criticised the Labour government for not procuring enough Chinook helicopters. However, in office the coalition government is overseeing a disjointed and counterproductive decommissioning process of the UK's only aircraft carrier and delays in the procurement of a new one which, bizarrely, will have no planes to carry even once built. Jim Murphy has continually highlighted this weakness within the government.

11. Institute for Fiscal Studies Public Spending Briefing 2005. Coedited by Robert Chote and Carl Emmerson.

The spending cuts are also an opportunity to once again underline the need to move towards greater military burden-sharing within the EU and to integrate further with the fledgling European External Action Service. Labour shadow ministers, primarily Jim Murphy, have already started to make this argument publicly.<sup>12</sup> The current government rightly won positive media reports for its efforts to streamline the UK's diplomatic missions, but Labour could go further by suggesting EU-pooled embassies in less strategically vital countries. The EEAS has effectively created EU embassies, meaning that this transition could be easily enacted.

Away from military spending Labour should also seek to highlight one large symbolic cut that crystallises the sense that the government's cuts agenda on foreign affairs is shortsighted and contrary to the UK's national interests. Several interviewees suggested the cuts to the BBC World Service would fulfil this function. For Labour, becoming a champion of the BBC World Service is not only the right thing to do, it also underlines the party's internationalist credentials and belief in soft power. The eruption of the Arab Spring forced the government to backtrack on cuts to the World Service's Middle East operations, and the new BBC chairman Chris Patten has succeeded in stalling any further loss of funding, but the reduction in World Service budget is still set to take place. Labour should not counter the push for efficiency savings at the wider BBC, but should champion the World Service as a core part of a progressive Labour foreign policy agenda.

There may also be a case for Labour to put pressure on the government to further explain the institutional make-up and power of the National Security Council. Rather than questioning its creation there is space for the party both to remind voters that it was the Labour government that sowed the seed of the NSC, and to call for it to be strengthened and established as the primary coordinating body for cross-departmental action on foreign policy. Jonathan Powell also

12. Public Service Europe: 'Must Look to European Military not US': <http://www.publicserviceeurope.com/article/84/-must-look-to-eu-military-and-not-us>

suggested going further by creating ‘a national security adviser, within the NSC, along the lines of the US structure, who could coordinate and liaise with his or her global counterparts.’ Labour could also call for the NSC to be used as a further check on the growing foreign policy decision-making power of Downing Street.

For Labour in opposition, showing imagination and a willingness to make bipartisan suggestions on issues like the strengthening of foreign policy-related select committees can

serve to make the party look like a government in waiting. Reaffirming the need for junior MPs to serve time on relevant select committees to get policy experience would be both a symbolic and practical first step.

“For Labour in opposition, showing imagination and a willingness to make bipartisan suggestions on issues like the strengthening of foreign policy-related select committees can only make the party look like a government in waiting”

## Building foreign policy capacity

While the imperative in opposition must be to create coherent Labour positions on the key foreign policy issues of the day, a period out of government also gives the party a chance to suggest innovative ways of improving how the UK makes and scrutinises foreign policy.

Seeking to build greater foreign policy expertise in the UK is a way in which Labour can demonstrate its dynamism on foreign affairs, just as it transformed the way we do foreign affairs after 1997 with the creation of DFID. Ian Kearns believes that ‘the financial crisis, and acts of transnationally organised terrorism, have demonstrated that events beyond our borders can impact the life of every family in this country. The [Labour] party should therefore look to build, under Douglas Alexander’s leadership, a stronger cadre of

politicians with in-depth knowledge of foreign policy issues. It should set up a Britain in the World policy academy, where party supporters and former ministers with defence, foreign policy, and development expertise can offer their time to help build capacity on these issues among current and future Labour parliamentarians.'

Labour should take the time in opposition to foster a set of foreign policy thinkers within the party who can set the agenda on issues that the government and the public are currently not focused on. David Clark, former special adviser to Robin Cook, went further, suggesting that all UK parties, like their counterparts in Germany, should create 'stiftungs', or institutes, linked to each party to look specifically at foreign policy and the international implications of policymaking. There is, of course, a financial implication to this and it may be that in the first instance such institutes could be incubated in established thinktanks. Clark added that future rule changes on party financing should be aimed at facilitating the stiftung model in the UK. He suggested that the cap on personal donations should allow an equivalent amount to be donated to a party-affiliated institute dedicated to international work.

Finally, an interesting approach was suggested by Bob Ainsworth: 'Departmental ministers often don't have the time to really get to grips with a specific foreign policy issue, so why not designate issue ministers ... Why not have a minister for Afghanistan and Pakistan, for instance, to really allow a politician to get to grips with the issue?' This recommendation was also put forward by Jonathan Powell, who remarked that 'too many junior ministers don't really do anything – better to give them an issue brief with a timeframe. The problem is where the budget would come from and who would manage it.' In opposition Labour could go further than a simple mirroring of government positions by creating, to take the example suggested, a shadow minister for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

## Conclusion: policy coherence, spending cuts, and improving expertise

Our evidence suggests that while there is no appetite for institutional change, Labour should be willing to talk about greater transparency and policy coherence between the three foreign affairs ministerial departments and about how the UK can present a more unified approach to foreign affairs.

On government spending, this report suggests the need for Labour to scrutinise robustly the government's approach to defence and to expenditure on soft power tools such as the BBC World Service. Like other areas of public expenditure, savings need to be made but it is Labour's job to highlight harmful or counterproductive spending decisions which, especially on defence, voters would value Labour questioning.

Finally, Labour has the opportunity to make the most of opposition by formulating its own policy positions but also by making the case for strengthening foreign policy expertise in the UK, and empowering the FCO, parliamentary committees and thinktanks to regain their role of providing dispassionate and robust policy advice to government.

## 3. Labour's Responsibility to Protect

'The backlash against liberal interventionism is relatively limited. Every day people are reminded that this is a small planet and an interdependent world'

*David Miliband MP, former foreign secretary*

### The Responsibility to Protect

There can be few greater tests of a government's values than a decision over whether or not to intervene militarily overseas. As Tony Blair outlined in his 1999 Chicago speech 'the most pressing foreign policy problem we face is to identify the circumstances in which we should get actively involved in other people's conflicts.'<sup>13</sup> The last Labour government oversaw military interventions in the former Yugoslavia, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Iraq. Yet, despite the successes of earlier interventions, Labour's foreign policy record is dominated by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These conflicts should not be ignored or forgotten, but neither should the controversy over Iraq be allowed to eclipse all other aspects of Labour's foreign policy decisions.

13. <http://keepTonyBlairforPM.wordpress.com/blair-speech-transcripts-from-1997-2007/#chicago>

The doctrine of liberal interventionism represents one of the fundamental principles underpinning the ‘Responsibility to Protect’. R2P was endorsed by the United Nations in 2005 in order to promote a mechanism to prevent the repeat of events such as the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The opening pages of R2P state that ‘where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect.’ In 2009, UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon released a report called ‘Implementing the responsibility to protect’, which outlined the three principles of R2P, including a focus ‘on the responsibility of international community to take timely and decisive action to prevent and halt mass atrocities when a state is manifestly failing to protect its populations’.<sup>14</sup>

Tony Blair has admitted that ‘no decision I have ever made in politics has been as divisive as the decision to go to war in Iraq.’<sup>15</sup> This report does not aim to debate the rights and wrongs of this defining decision, but rather explores whether or not interviewees believed that the invasion was a case of liberal interventionism. We found no consensus on this issue, with opinion split between those who believed that liberal interventionist thinking underpinned the decision and those who saw other motives for going to war. Robin Niblett saw Iraq as ‘about the US-UK alliance, not about liberal interventionism or democratic change in the Middle East or even WMD’.

Regardless of this lack of consensus over the war, Iraq will forever be tied to the party. As the Foreign Policy Centre’s director of policy, Adam Hug, explained, ‘the arguments for liberal interventionism played a critical role in winning the support of Labour MPs. But by linking the idea to the Iraq war, it tied it to a conflict that predominantly wasn’t a liberal intervention in nature.’ Labour MPs

14. <http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/edward-luck/2124-ban-calls-for-threepronged-strategy-to-implement-responsibility-to-protect>

15. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2004/mar/05/iraq.iraq>

who voted for the Iraq war will remain linked to it regardless of the benefit of hindsight. This was highlighted when David Miliband turned on Harriet Harman at the 2010 Labour party conference when she clapped Ed Miliband's criticism of the Iraq war, saying 'you voted for it, why are you clapping?'

On several occasions during the 2010 Labour leadership race the issue of Iraq drew uncomfortable and often unconvincing responses from the contenders. Ed Miliband, by calling Iraq a 'mistake', has now, to an extent, drawn a line under the issue. Indeed, many interviewees for this report argued that his election to the Labour leadership has made the necessity to have a drawn-out debate about Iraq less pressing. We believe, however, that the key message is that Labour should not shy away from talking about Iraq, but that the reasoning, process and public communication over Iraq should be debated. What is critically important, as many of the interviewees confirmed, is that Iraq does not prove or disprove the legitimacy and value of liberal interventionism and R2P.

## The Libya dilemma

Both the strengths and weaknesses of R2P were on display in the coalition government's decision to intervene in Libya. Although there was initially a deep and generalised scepticism towards what appeared to be its sabre-rattling over the creation of a no-fly zone, the majority of interviewees agreed that the coalition should be congratulated for leading the way towards the passing of UNSCR 1973.<sup>16</sup> Charles Grant described the decision to intervene in Libya as proof that liberal interventionism 'can be done legitimately', while Jonathan Powell argued that, as was the case with Tony Blair, David Cameron 'believed he wouldn't do foreign policy, but Libya surprised him'.

16. UN Security Council Resolution 1973 sanctioned the establishment of a no-fly zone and the use of 'all means necessary' to protect civilians within Libya.

The Labour shadow cabinet supported the decision to intervene in Libya; Jim Murphy praised David Cameron for handling the early stages well and warned that ‘Labour does not look bigger by trying to make people look smaller.’ Douglas Alexander explained that ‘as the opposition, we thought hard about the original decision to vote for the mission; we knew the dangers but we judged the alternatives were worse ... We needed an approach from the government that was practical as well as principled.’<sup>17</sup>

“Both the strengths and weaknesses of R2P were on display in the coalition government’s decision to intervene in Libya”

However, other interviewees reported unease with the longer-term plans for Libya. Indeed, a critically important component of R2P is that liberal interventionism should not be used as a cover for regime change. There can be little doubt that the intention of UNSCR 1973 was stretched from its original aim of protecting the citizens of the city of Benghazi. The consequences of this are not just limited to Libya – an intervention that George Osborne claimed in March would cost ‘in the tens of millions, not hundreds of millions’ but is now projected to have cost over £260m but also for events elsewhere. In Syria, for example, Chinese and Russian distrust over western intentions led to President Medvedev warning that ‘we do not want the events in Syria to unfold as they did in Libya. That is why we are cautious here.’<sup>18</sup> This apprehensive approach to intervention by states such as China and Russia is often interpreted in the west as obstructionist but, as Carne Ross commented, ‘the fallout of Iraq is that states such as China and Russia at the UN hear “right to protect” and translate it as “regime change”.’ As Jonathan Powell observed the main issue with R2P ‘is not with the doctrine itself

17. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/apr/23/douglasalexander-libya>

18. <http://www.businessweek.com/ap/financialnews/D9OIOTLGO.htm>

but rather the UN and the UNSC veto'. Equally, the lesson from both Iraq and certainly the expanded involvement in Libya is that if the public feels that it has not been given an honest set of reasons for intervening then it will be hard to persuade people to support it.

## Labour and R2P

A July 2011 Chatham House poll showed scepticism about interventionism, with nearly half of all respondents saying the UK should not involve itself in any way in uprisings like those in Egypt and Libya.<sup>19</sup> James Crabtree, comment editor of the Financial Times, warned that despite the current unpopularity 'an increasingly global world facing new sources of instability, including new regional conflicts and the effects of climate change, will see increasing demands for western intervention — and Labour must have a line on this'. Jim Murphy appears to be preparing exactly that, arguing that 'in extraordinary circumstances and as a last resort' the UK should be 'a force for good through the occasional use of legal state violence'. Jonathan Powell believes that 'liberal interventionist proponents need to offer leadership, make a case and explain the counterfactual argument that where we didn't intervene, say in Bosnia, Rwanda, Sudan, there are consequences of not doing things.' Stephen Twigg agreed, arguing that 'we need to build a new coalition around liberal intervention and the right to protect.' In opposition Labour should form a taskforce made up of former ministers with relevant responsibilities, respected bipartisan experts and potentially even a citizen jury with the aim of setting out the criteria or parameters which can help guide policymakers when deciding on how and when to intervene.

Labour's foreign policy team should also set up a working taskforce in partnership with appropriate thinktanks to investigate how to restore credibility and legitimacy to ideas of intervention, and particularly the concept of liberal interventionism enshrined in R2P, among the public.

19. The Chatham House-YouGov Survey 2011: <http://web1.chathamhouse.org/research/europe/current-projects/chatham-house-yougov-survey>

## Conclusion: learn from Iraq, remember foreign policy successes, and embrace R2P

There remains an opportunity for Labour to advocate the acceptance of R2P as a universal, not simply western, global principle. Why? Because, as history has shown and this report has highlighted, in an interconnected and globalised world there are very real consequences of not taking action in the face of massive abuses of human rights. Labour can define its foreign policy as different from the Conservatives' if it can show that only a party that engages with the forces of globalisation can hope to shape them, and that the UK should look to use all the tools of government to defend universal principles beyond our borders.

Iraq was an ill-fated aberration, in which several interviewees saw the principles of liberal interventionism used to cloak a pragmatic decision to support the United States. Afghanistan was a legitimate act in the national interest that suffered massive mission creep as the scale and difficulty of the task became clear, yet Kosovo and Sierra Leone remain important examples of what a Labour government should be doing – basing its foreign policy on helping protect people and on being able to support democracy and human rights across the globe. Labour needs to comprehensively reframe its position on intervention, building on Tony Blair's Chicago speech and subsequent experiences in government. This will give the party a clear narrative on intervention and will also further underline to the public that the party has learnt and understood the lessons of Iraq.

## 4. Labour's Defence of Multilateralism

'No state can shape global events by itself; we need to cooperate with others and make sure that multilateral institutions work and are not underfunded'

*Ian Kearns, associate research fellow, Royal United Services Institute*

### The challenge ahead

Since beginning his tenure as shadow foreign secretary Douglas Alexander has continually stressed the importance of a multilateral approach to foreign policy, with the UK engaging with states through the EU, UN and other global bodies. Yet at first glance the prospects for multilateralism look bleak. Far from becoming more homogenous, the world is arguably becoming more atomised with not only states but multinational companies and even cities reasserting their power. At the same time, the near-total breakdown of global negotiations such as the Doha trade talks have only harmed multilateralism's reputation further. According to James Crabtree 'the world we live in now is making multilateralism a lot harder.' This trend is reflected at home with the coalition government focusing on bilateral rather than multilateral relations, as illustrated by, for example, David Cameron's preference for fostering direct trade relations with states such as Brazil, India and

China, and the government's surprise announcement of a bilateral defence treaty with France. The UK government also pulled no punches in its 2011 Multilateral Aid Review which was highly critical of the UN in terms of its bureaucracy and its impact on international development.<sup>20</sup>

Robin Niblett emphasised the changing face of diplomacy: 'I see a future where the nation-state is being empowered, not disempowered ... in terms of global governance we also have a world where power is shifting to the south and the east. This is a critical challenge to the current multilateral system.' And while rising powers such as China, India and Brazil increasingly change the dynamics of traditional global forums like the UN and the G8 and G20 there has also been a trend of US retrenchment on multilateralism, one begun by the George W Bush administration but arguably continued under Barack Obama, not least in its strong reluctance to taking a leading role in multilateral negotiations and action against the Libyan government of Colonel Gaddafi.

But this bleak outlook is not purely driven by external factors. The majority of global multilateral agencies are crying out for reform. The UN, and specifically the UN Security Council, no longer reflects the power balance of the world, while the G8 is almost defunct for the same reason. While the IMF has recently improved the proportion of emerging nation representatives on its board, the election of former French finance minister Christine Lagarde as managing director was for many a reminder of the traditional global powers' reluctance to change the way the world is governed. Lagarde's appointment almost certainly presages another American head of the World Bank next year, continuing western dominance of the world's two big economic institutions. There is also a growing need for clarity on the structure and role of the G20 as it continues its move towards becoming the pre-eminent forum for world leaders after the UN.

20. DFID Multilateral Aid Review, 1 March 2011: <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/About-DFID/Who-we-work-with/Multilateral-agencies/Multilateral-Aid-Review>

And finally there is Europe. It is not long ago that the EU was welcoming 10 new accession countries, eight of which had emerged from decades of authoritarian rule. The eastern expansion of the EU in 2004 heralded a brief golden period for the EU and its espousal of 'soft power'. Speaking to one of the authors of this report in 2007, a Syrian civil society activist said that 'to the east [Iraq] we see the results of old style power politics; to the north [Turkey] we see what happens with the prospect of becoming part of Europe. We want to be the next Turkey, not the next Iraq.'<sup>21</sup>

Today the story could not be more different. The ongoing economic crisis in the eurozone and the possible entrenchment of a 'two-speed' Europe means that the debate is now about nations potentially falling out of Europe rather than joining the club. The first six months of the much-vaunted European External Action Service – which effectively gives the EU a foreign minister and a foreign and diplomatic service – have been, at best, underwhelming and, at worst, a disaster. Among interviewees there was something close to consensus in their criticism of the EEAS, its lack of responsiveness to crises such as in Libya, and its overall lack of policy coherence – a state of affairs that respondents felt typified the current problems within the EU overall.

Interviewees voiced repeated concern over the direction of travel of the UK in Europe. The government's retreat from Europe and the passing of the European Union Act<sup>22</sup> are of particular concern. Among others, David Rennie, political editor of *The Economist*, and Charles Grant both highlighted the anti-European legislative and diplomatic action by the current government. Charles Grant warned that 'Britain has opted not to attend meetings of the 'euro plus' group. Of the 27 EU member states only the UK and two or three others are choosing not to attend these meetings. There is a danger that, when the 'euro plus' group starts to hold summits,

21. Off-the-record-interview, Damascus, February 2007.

22. The European Union Act 2011, which passed into law on 19 July 2011, followed the UK government's coalition agreement to 'ensure that there is no further transfer of sovereignty or powers [to the EU] over the course of the next parliament.'

the UK will arrive at an EU summit and find that 24 countries have already fixed their position on a key economic policy issue. This is damaging for our national interest.’ Rennie echoed these sentiments: ‘We have always been an outlier but we are now risking becoming completely irrelevant.’

## Labour and the multilateral fightback

It is within this context that Labour must remake the case for multilateralism. And while the omens are not good, the field is wide open for Labour to take the initiative on forging a clear narrative on re-energising multilateralism and making the case for it in the UK.

Prior to the 1997 election and during its first term in office, Labour faced a similar challenge: formulating its internationalist agenda and then repositioning the UK as a proactive and collegiate global actor after the years of insularism and Euroscepticism of the Major government. According to Mark Leonard, Labour’s time in office up until the Iraq war can be seen as a period in which the Labour party ‘successfully reversed the negative position the UK had been put in by the previous government, with serious headway being made on promoting a more positive and constructive approach to Europe – for example, rejoining the Social Chapter – and a more multilateralist approach being taken to diplomacy coupled with an adherence to international rule of law.’

Labour’s challenge may be more acute this time round, but behind the haze of negativity there are several key arguments for a defence of multilateralism, an explanation of how it can be done, and why Labour should be at the forefront of the debate.

“Labour must remake the case for multilateralism. And while the omens are not good, the field is wide open for Labour to take the initiative”

First, the case for multilateralism. Three ongoing global issues highlight the need for a multilateral system: the global economic crisis; Libya, Iran and instability in the Middle East; and the rise of the BRICS<sup>23</sup> and other emerging state powers. When looked at in stark terms it is hard, even through the prism of national interest, to see how these big three challenges can be addressed in any other way than through collective debate and action.

For the UK, the need for a functioning multilateral system of governance is pressing. As the majority of interviewees highlighted, the UK is a declining power whose ability to act unilaterally is rapidly diminishing. This reality is proving hard for the current government to ignore. It may talk of focusing on bilateralism and the UK's 'national interest' but David Cameron's strategy was shattered within weeks of the Libyan crisis when both he and Nicolas Sarkozy found themselves at the forefront of the campaign to internationalise the proposed intervention through the UN. Gisela Stuart believes that 'the days of the UK being able to mount sovereign operations like that of the Falklands are gone. In future we need to be clearer what our remaining sovereign capabilities are and working in most instances with partners such as NATO, other European countries and the UN.' Equally, as the government boasts of bilateral trade deals, it seemingly sees no contradiction in calling for collective action from the eurozone and the G20 on the economic crisis.

But it is not just middle-ranking powers that need global governance. Whether it is the creaking UN or the infant G20, multilateral agencies provide the platform for all nations and non-state actors to negotiate and act collectively, whether it is the 2009 London G20 summit, which created the momentum for the action plan to tackle the global economic crisis, or UNSCR 1973, sanctioning the responsibility to protect in Libya. There is

23. BRICS: a broad term usually encompassing Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa. The group also sometimes informally refers to Indonesia, Mexico and South Korea.

also an increasing acknowledgement that global rebalancing – as emerging powers, primarily Brazil, China and India, take up their role as great powers – can only be mediated through robust global governance. It is telling that even after the disastrous episode of Iraq, the UN remains the key international body in times of crisis, as witnessed from the Lebanon war, Sudan, and the intervention in Libya.

So the question is not ‘whether’ they are relevant, but ‘how’ multilateral institutions can be made stronger and work for all nations, not just a few. This is a hard message to sell in the UK which, like France, continues to hold a ‘seat at the top table of every international institution’<sup>24</sup> and sees no immediate benefit in relinquishing that power. And yet Labour should make the case for the democratisation of global governance not only because it is the right thing to do but because, in the long term, it is in the UK’s national interest – something the Conservatives, if not the Liberal Democrats, are not willing to admit. The alternative is a world where countries like the UK will become increasingly marginalised and disempowered as they aim to negotiate bilaterally with more powerful and influential global players. As discussed above, we are experiencing a period of regression on global governance with traditional and emerging powers losing faith and interest in multilateralism or creating their own regional- or interest-based multilateral groups. It is paramount that the UK and its traditional allies make the case for multilateralism by showing emerging powers the value the global system can have.

This leads neatly back to the issue of Europe. While it is experiencing a period of near-existential crisis, for its member states the EU is arguably becoming more, not less, important. As Robin Niblett put it, ‘in every other area of the world the nation-state is being empowered. The only exception is the EU where

24. Gisela Stuart MP, interview with authors, April 2011.

member states will become increasingly reliant on its collective leverage.’ The bottom line for the UK is that as the world’s power shifts east the only way to remain influential is by being at the leading edge of the EU. Charles Grant underlines this point: ‘the Chinese and the Brazilians used to respect and listen to the UK as they saw us as being a leading player in the EU and a key liberalising force when it came to market access. On our own, outside of Europe, they don’t take us seriously.’

For Labour there is an opportunity in opposition to open a debate on the twin issues of the future of multilateralism and the EU.

On UN reform, Labour should call for a debate over the expansion of permanent membership to a group of emerging states or at least to regional representative unions such as the African Union, the Organisation of American States or the Arab League.

And what of the G20 and new multilateral forums? David Cameron was tasked by Nicolas Sarkozy to produce a set of recommendations for this year’s Cannes summit on a potential governance structure for the G20 but he was reluctant to spark debate about the legitimacy and governance of another multilateral group.<sup>25</sup> Labour should ensure that the debate on G20 governance is not forgotten after Cannes – the party, as it did with the G8, should be leading the debate on how the G20 can progress into being a viable platform for diplomacy, taking some of the burden off the UN. Jonathan Powell remarked that ‘the failure of the UN to reform has left the door open to the G20. There now needs to be a process for setting up a secretariat and institutional facilities.’ Meanwhile, speaking at a fringe event at the 2011 Labour conference, former defence secretary Des Browne put forward his analysis that ‘the G20 is not a subset to the UN but rather a

25. Off-the-record interview, May 2011.

much more realistic alternative'. This is a view which has been expressed by other commentators but as yet it is not clear how a newly empowered G20 would work. Through its focus on the BRICS Labour's internal policy review should also go further than the G20 and offer some forward-looking thinking on the future of modern multilateralism and how global architecture can best be fitted to a rapidly changing world.

“‘We are pro-Europeans because we are pro-British’ – David Miliband”

And, finally, Labour needs to grasp the nettle of Europe by being willing to publicly show support for Europe even in a time when political and public opinion is seemingly against it.<sup>26</sup> Simon Buckby, former director of Britain in Europe, remarked that ‘Labour must decide on its position on Europe now so that it can win the argument when it comes up.’ With the dramatic re-emergence of the UK’s political relationship with the EU as an issue in the wake of the Commons vote on a referendum on EU membership, this comment seems more pertinent than ever. Both for Labour and the UK’s national interest, playing a central role in Europe through greater integration of economic and foreign policy must be the answer. The current government’s position must be shown to be shortsighted and counterproductive for the UK in the long term. While the short-term economic environment might be negative, the political and diplomatic momentum is with Brussels, not Westminster. Contributing to a stronger Europe with more global influence will, in turn, lead to greater influence for the UK in the world. As David Miliband commented, ‘we are pro-Europeans because we are pro-British.’

26. As several respondents highlighted for this report, public Euroscepticism is not necessarily as rife as political analysts often argue. It is also rarely a big a political issue when it comes to voting intentions as a new IPPR paper by Will Straw highlights: <http://www.ippr.org/publications/55/8138/euroscepticism-in-the-uk>

## Conclusion: reform the multilateral system

Whether through opportunism or ideology it is clear the current government has decided to distance itself from the institutional and political challenges facing global multilateralism. For Labour, such an agenda is in the party's progressive DNA but this report has found that there is also a deeply pragmatic justification based on what is best for the UK's national interests. Labour must first make the case to voters, explaining why multilateralism is the foundation on which the UK can retain its place in the world and why for international peace and prosperity it is a better long-term strategy than the Conservatives' focus on bilateralism.

In its policy review Labour should aim to set out a series of reforms that would improve the UN system while also taking a position on the G20 – primarily on whether it should become institutionalised with a secretariat and expanded policy scope.

And while perhaps the hardest and most politically sensitive, Labour must address the issue of Europe and be brave enough to make the case for the EU and for the UK's role within it. Ignoring Europe may be preferable in the short term but the reality is that in the long term – whether on the global economy, geopolitics, or diplomacy – the UK's national interests are best served by being a strong player within the EU.

# Conclusion – A Government in Waiting

‘There is potential to use foreign policy as a way to position Labour as a positive and imaginative party on policy issues’

*Stephen Twigg MP, former shadow minister for foreign affairs*

As Lord Malloch Brown, the former Foreign Office minister, has suggested, there is a danger that when in government ‘politicians confront the fact that Britain’s opportunities are global. In opposition they fall back on simpler stereotypes.’ Now in opposition, Labour could ‘follow its Tory predecessors and turn its back on the world.’<sup>27</sup> It is crucially important that Labour proves this hypothesis to be false.

This is not easy and the party will need to engage in imaginative foreign policy thinking in order to be heard in opposition. This thinking will also have to be strategic in nature to ensure its relevance and avoid the party becoming boxed in. In a rapidly changing world, with unpredictable yet highly significant events such as the Arab Spring, Labour cannot afford to be held hostage by commitments that will be to its detriment when it comes to writing a general election manifesto. As Andrew Rawnsley recently wrote, ‘reviews at this stage of parliament cannot sensibly produce reams of detailed policy ... the purpose at this point is

27. The Unfinished Global Revolution: The Limits of Nations and The Pursuit of a New Politics, Lord Malloch-Brown (Allen Lane, 2011)

for a party visibly to demonstrate to the media and voters that it is renewing in an open-minded, free-ranging and intellectually questing way.<sup>28</sup> Labour must avoid the temptation to jump into simple opposition mode and make quick wins at the expense of more thoroughly thought-out strategy. Indeed, a critical consensus, as is the case with Libya, can elevate the opposition to the role of responsible government in waiting.

As the recent Labour report, *Britain's Role in the World*, explained: 'it would be impossible to write, in 2011, a prescriptive foreign policy strategy that could be expected to be 100 per cent relevant in 2015.' The leadership should not pretend to have all the answers but rather should focus on asking the right questions. A range of topics emerged from interviews as future issues worth examining. They include:

- Threats of global pandemics
- The effects of climate change
- Resource conflict
- Migration in the era of globalisation
- The militarisation of space
- Interactions with failed states
- Foreign policy in the era of austerity

David Miliband suggested to us that Labour's time in office was 'born of a particular analysis of the world'. The outward-looking and internationalist character of Labour's foreign policy values has been a cornerstone of this investigation. Interviewees also agreed that this contrasts sharply with the Conservative party. David Rennie argued that 'the Tories are at their worst on foreign policy when they sound miserable and downbeat about the UK and its role in the world', while Mark Leonard believes that Ed Miliband

28. 'To have a hope of power, Labour must turn from dull into dynamic', Andrew Rawnsley, *The Guardian*, 15 May 2011.

‘should be exposing the current government for selling Britain short, regressing into Euroscepticism and neo-mercantilism’.

Until Libya there was a growing sense that David Cameron’s foreign policy goal was to turn the UK into a ‘European Singapore’. But even the Libyan intervention has not been followed by a public display of any distinctive ‘world view’ from the prime minister. British voters want to see their leaders leading from the front on a global scale, telling a story about the UK to the world. The Labour party will have to work hard to ensure that the review process is not simply a navel-gazing exercise but begins to create a platform for the party and for Ed Miliband to look like global players. A number of interviewees recalled David Cameron’s trip to the Arctic and, while seeing it as ‘policy-light’, they acknowledged that it clearly told the ‘desired story of a statesmanlike figure doing big thinking on global issues.’

Jonathan Powell argued that the Tory leader realised the limits of what he could do in opposition and spent time abroad seeking out knowledge to support his foreign policy credentials. But it remains difficult for senior members of the shadow cabinet to commit time to developing their knowledge of the world. One MP told us how her office hid details of foreign fact-finding missions from her constituents who would rather their MP was fixing potholes than on ‘some international jolly’.<sup>29</sup>

Douglas Alexander’s foreign policy review has focused on examining the UK’s relationship with the BRICS. This is a welcome development that is evidence of Labour looking at relations with countries whose emergence has altered the global balance of power. As we have highlighted, he should now go on to focus on a set of themes which, first, aim to strengthen the UK’s position in the world, and, second, reinforce Labour’s principled and internationalist values.

29. Off-the-record interview, June 2011.

This paper's findings largely dovetail with what has been outlined in the interim findings of the Labour party policy review and complement and follow up on the many helpful debates at this year's party conference. There are, however, several differences. As we have argued, Labour's language on Europe needs to be strengthened. Government infighting on the issue underlines the need for Labour to have a clear and coherent position on our relationship with the EU. We have suggested that this position needs to remain integrationist, with the reasoning being based on realist and pragmatic foundations.

Furthermore, there has so far been a worrying lack of reflection on what the Labour party sees as its approach to intervention. There was a feeling among respondents that we should be emphasising the humanitarian nature of intervention. David Clark, for example, argued that the party's language should be explicitly based around 'humanitarian intervention', disposing altogether of the phrase 'liberal intervention'. He also added that stricter parameters need to be put in place to ensure humanitarian intervention is not used as a justification for regime change. This would help to re-emphasise the original meaning of Tony Blair's Chicago speech, which was about intervening to protect people, not enforce new forms of governance on them. Labour should revisit this debate and explain to the voters how the party sees intervention not only after Iraq and Afghanistan but now in the light of Libya as well.

Finally, there is the conceptual issue of multilateralism. The term is bandied around too freely by politicians who often do not know themselves what they mean by the term. If Labour is going to follow through on its objective of focusing on the emerging powers of the world then deciding what the party feels is the correct global architecture to manage those new relationships is absolutely paramount; what the EU, UN and G20 mean for the UK is critical to Britain's place in the world.

While foreign policy is unlikely to be a key battleground at the next election, there is all the more reason to be more rather than less creative on policy formulation. The Labour foreign policy team in opposition is not tied into the rigid and near-daily grind of adversarial politics on the state of the economy or home affairs and so could make the most of opposition to develop a fully fledged foreign affairs agenda

Labour has the opportunity to take advantage of a government whose vision is mercantilist and inward-looking. If it picks and sticks to set of core issues to build a narrative about Labour's approach to foreign policy it will not only show Labour as a government in waiting, but it will spark the debate needed to answer the myriad challenging questions about the UK's place in the world.

# Appendix

## On-the-record interviewees

1. Rt Hon Bob Ainsworth MP, former secretary of state for defence
2. Simon Buckby, former director, Britain in Europe, and managing director, Champollion PR
3. Matt Cavanagh, deputy director, migration policy, IPPR, and former member, No 10 Policy Unit
4. David Clark, former special adviser to foreign secretary Rt Hon Robin Cook MP
5. Katy Clark MP, member, international development select committee
6. James Crabtree, comment editor, Financial Times
7. Barry Gardiner MP, member, foreign affairs select committee
8. Jonathan Glennie, senior research fellow, Overseas Development Institute
9. Charles Grant, director, Centre for European Reform
10. Adam Hug, policy director, Foreign Policy Centre
11. Ian Kearns, associate research fellow, Royal United Services Institute
12. Mark Leonard, director, European Council on Foreign Relations
13. Rt Hon David Miliband MP, former foreign secretary
14. Seamus Milne, commentator, The Guardian
15. Rt Hon Jim Murphy MP, shadow secretary of state for defence
16. Robin Niblett, director, Chatham House
17. Alex Nicoll, director, Strategic Insight, International Institute for Strategic Studies
18. Jonathan Powell, former chief of staff at No 10
19. David Rennie, political editor, The Economist
20. Paul Rogers, global security consultant, Oxford Research Group
21. Carne Ross, director, Independent Diplomat
22. Anas Sarwar MP, member, international development select committee

23. Gisela Stuart MP, member, defence select committee
24. Stephen Twigg MP, former shadow minister for foreign affairs
25. David Watts MP, member, foreign affairs select committee

Additional interviews carried out off the record.

## About the authors

**Sam Hardy** is a consultant working on foreign and development policy issues. Previously he coordinated UK, European, and global policy and advocacy for Bond, the network organisation which represents over 370 UK international development NGOs. He has also worked and undertaken research for Progress and Chatham House, focusing particularly on the politics and economics of emerging markets. He has also worked as a consultant for the Foundation for International Relations and External Dialogue in Madrid and as a researcher for the Labour party.

**James Denselow** is a writer on Middle East politics and security issues based at King's College, London. He has worked extensively in the Middle East, producing research for foreign policy thinktank Chatham House, writing and reporting for several media publications, and for communications and advocacy work with international NGOs. He writes for The Guardian, The Huffington Post and the New Statesman and appears regularly in the international broadcast media. He is a contributing author to 'An Iraq of Its Regions: Cornerstones of a Federal Democracy?' and 'America and Iraq: Policymaking, Intervention and Regional Politics Since 1958' and currently advises the British government on its policy towards the Arab Spring. He is a board member of the Council for Arab-British Understanding. He is also a Labour councillor in Brent.

Sam and James are also directors of the research institution and consultancy, the New Diplomacy Platform.

# Progressives

## Labour's Progressives

Published by **Progress**  
83 Victoria Street,  
London SW1H 0HW  
Tel: 020 3008 8180  
Fax: 020 3008 8181  
Email: [office@progressives.org.uk](mailto:office@progressives.org.uk)  
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