



BRITISH POLITICS REVIEW

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Contents

Anglo-Norwegian relations seen from London

Bjarne Lindstrøm

Hong Kong ten years on

John-Ivar S. Olsen

Sierra Leone: the ideal type of efficient intervention?

Atle L. Wold

Linking idealism and *realpolitik*

Kristin M Haugevik

British diplomacy: a virtuous alternative to enforcement

Øivind Bratberg

Remembering Suez

Jan Erik Mustad

Diplomacy and intervention: British foreign policy assessed



Military prestige. British Sea Harrier FA2 in preparation for take-off.

From the flight deck of the aircraft carrier HMS *Illustrious*. © Crown Copyright, the Ministry of Defence (MOD)

European Union, but also the rise of a number of challenges from a brave, new world.

Foreign policy, always a centrepiece of British politics, has seemingly taken on increased significance during the last decade and a half. Since the end of the Cold War, Britain has been involved in armed conflicts across the world, in countries such as Iraq, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, with the remnants of the British Empire dismantled, Britain itself must accommodate not only a strengthening role of the

*This second newsletter of the British Politics Society, Norway discusses the experience of British intervention abroad, from Suez in 1956 to Sierra Leone in 2000. Furthermore, we sum up the current status of post-colonial Hong Kong, and study the concepts of diplomacy, idealism and *realpolitik* from a more theoretical angle.*

Anglo - Norwegian relations seen from London

By Bjarne Lindstrøm, Ambassador of Norway to the United Kingdom - October 2006

I was fortunate enough to be appointed ambassador to London in 2005 - the year we commemorated Norway's hundred years of independence and hundred years of diplomatic relations between our two countries.



*Bjarne Lindstrøm,
Norwegian Ambassador to London.*

It is a relationship which - of course - did not begin in 1905.

The Norse attack on the monastery at Lindisfarne in 793 might not have been the beginning of a relationship in the proper sense, but the alliance in the tenth century between King Athelstan of England and King Harald Fairhair definitely was. Since then our relations have developed, and I dare say, matured.

Today, our relationship covers practically every bilateral field of cooperation and activity. We share the same values, ideals and culture. We believe in the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We are politically and economically united in numerous ways. To mention a few: For decades - even longer than that - we have been close allies in the defence and security policy fields.

We are working together and with other countries to defeat international terrorism. The attacks in London last year and in other parts of the world have demonstrated that no country is immune.

Both our Governments are pre-occupied with environmental issues and are committed to working actively to reduce harmful emissions and secure a sustainable economic develop-

ment. We are partners in the international efforts to harvest marine resources in a responsible way and in our efforts to stop illegal activities taking place.

Last, but not least, our Governments, oil companies and maritime industry are working together to exploit the oil and gas resources on our respective continental shelves. The opening of the Langeled pipeline from Norway to the United Kingdom in October this year illustrates the significance of this: Norway is now in a position to supply the United Kingdom with more than 30 per cent of its annual gas requirements.

As Norwegian ambassador in London, it is my privilege to be contributing to the maintenance and further development of these ties.

British Politics Society, Norway, established in June 2006, is politically neutral and has no collective agenda apart from raising the interest and knowledge of British politics among the informed Norwegian public.

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Hong Kong ten years on

By John-Ivar Svinsås Olsen

Democratisation on hold. With the tenth anniversary for Britain's return of Hong Kong to China fast approaching, London looks anxiously at developments in Hong Kong. Will the former Crown colony manage to maintain its status as a haven of political and civil rights and the rule of law within a China determined not to allow experiments with democracy?



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Both the British government and Parliament have kept a close eye on Hong Kong since the take-over in 1997, typically by way of the government's biannual report on its status. In July this year, however, it was a report on China by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons that spurred the debate. The overall tone of the report is optimistic. Hong Kong still maintains its thriving economy and serves as a vital bridge for UK investments and activities in mainland China. A low level of corruption and efficient administration are elements of a system that is very much adapted to the needs of international trade. When it comes to recent political developments, however, the Committee is far more critical and finds reason to express its concern. Over the past

couple of years, Beijing has, according to the report, intervened for the sole purpose of slowing down Hong Kong's path towards democratisation.

The basis for the current political system of Hong Kong dates back to the Basic Law, which was drafted and negotiated by a committee of Chinese and Hong Kong members following the joint Sino-British declaration of December 1984. After years of negotiation, the Basic Law was finally adopted by the national congress of the Chinese Communist party in 1990. With the Chinese takeover in 1997, the Law became operational. The procedures for choosing Hong Kong's Chief Executive and Legislative Council (LegCo) prescribe that the former will be elected by a "representative" election committee of 800 Hong Kong residents from "all walks of life". The current LegCo, meanwhile, is set as a body of 50% elected members from different geographical constituencies and 50% selected by functional constituencies, mainly drawn from business and professional sectors.

Under the rules stipulated by the Basic Law, these institutions are supposed to move gradually towards elections by universal suffrage. However, the standing committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in April 2004 ruled out the possibility of choosing the Chief Executive of Hong Kong by universal suffrage in 2007, and further stated that the

50:50 ratio in the LegCo would apply even for the elections in 2008. This appears to be a blatant violation of the Basic law, and the House of Commons report concludes that the government of Hong Kong and Beijing should be committed to a timetable for introducing universal suffrage for both institutions. Beijing's intervention brought about 250,000 citizens to the streets of Hong Kong in late December 2005 in a powerful show of force for the pro-democracy camp, to which the road towards universal suffrage still remains blocked.

Could this have been different if the British has chosen an alternative strategy for post-colonial Hong Kong? One should note that in spite of the efforts by successive British governments, including the colony's last governor Chris Patten, to prepare for a smooth transition and a steady path towards democratization, Hong Kong under colonial rule was hardly a role model for democracy. If the institutions of a fully representative democracy had been in place before the joint Sino-British declaration of 1984, the process would, conceivably, have been more difficult to reverse. Politics being the art of the possible, however, the present development in Hong Kong must be addressed by Britain along the path that it has taken since 1997. To rule an empire, even in the past tense, remains a strenuous affair.

Sierra Leone: the ideal type of efficient intervention?

By Atle L. Wold

Action when called for.

In light of Tony Blair's announced step-down before the next party conference, it now seems increasingly clear that it was Britain's involvement in Iraq which broke his popularity as Prime Minister. Yet, to a degree, it can be held that it was in the realm of military intervention that the New Labour government of the past nine years scored some of its greatest initial successes. When the government's popularity began to falter from around 2000 due to problems on the domestic front, what appeared to keep Blair's ministry afloat was its successes abroad. Along with the Kosovo crisis in 1999, the military intervention in Sierra Leone in 2000 played a major role in this.



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The West African country of Sierra Leone - where Britain arguably had a special "responsibility" as the former colonial master - had been engulfed in a vicious civil war since 1991. In July 1999, a third peace accord was signed in Lome between the official government and the "rebel" Revolutionary United Front (RUF), due to be overseen

by the UN. Set up as the basis for a power-sharing government, the accord was, however, viewed as little more than a stepping-stone to full control of the country by the RUF. The latter marched on the remaining government stronghold of the capital Freetown in May 2000, capturing 500 UN troops on its way and causing a frantic evacuation of British civilians. Blair's government responded by sending about 1,500 British troops to bolster the defence of the capital. Within days, the RUF had been driven back into the interior of the country, the UN troops released, and the situation stabilised. In June, the main bulk of the British intervention force was pulled out, though a small number of officers remained.

By July 2000, it therefore seemed as if a relatively limited military operation, well-organised and conducted by a fairly small number of highly professional British troops, had achieved its (also relatively limited) aim in a successful manner, and for a purpose which fitted well into Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's doctrine of an "ethical foreign policy". However, when a renegade paramilitary group, the West Side Boys, managed to kidnap 11 British soldiers in late August 2000, the British government had to stage yet another direct military intervention. This time the operation was on an even smaller scale, conducted by a contingent of elite SAS soldiers

supported by paratroops. Again the outcome seemed to indicate that Britain and British armed forces had the capacity to conduct successful small-scale military interventions, since all the hostages were rescued at the cost of fairly minimal losses (one SAS soldier was killed), and all the 25 members of the WSB-group were killed in the confrontation.

The British military presence in Sierra Leone later had to be increased to keep the situation under control, but by May 2001 the RUF had finally began to disarm, and by March 2003, the first indictments for war crimes against leaders on both sides in the conflict were made. Such was the apparent success of the British involvement in Sierra Leone, and of the WSB-operation in particular, that some even suggested the use of a similar kind of special forces-operation to remove Robert Mugabe from power in Zimbabwe. In that case, however, the ghosts of Britain's imperial past prevented any action from being taken. The position of "militarily feasible, but politically unpalatable", which applied for Zimbabwe, could perhaps have restrained the government from subsequent military adventures. Instead, it appears, it was the success of interventions such as in Sierra Leone that provided the guidelines for later military operations under Blair.

Linking idealism and *realpolitik*

By Kristin M. Haugevik

Values at stake. While the British press and his political contenders are busy debating whether his time in 10 Downing Street is up, Tony Blair himself has attempted to put renewed focus on his once celebrated doctrine of value-based intervention. In the pamphlet "A Global Alliance for Global Values", recently published by the Foreign Policy Centre in London, the Prime Minister reconfirms his conviction that what he calls "the battle of values" needs to be won.



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He was, of course, referring to the ongoing situation in Kosovo. One month earlier, NATO had launched "Operation Allied Force" in order to, in the words of then Secretary General Javier Solana, "halt the violence and stop further humanitarian catastrophe". It was NATO's first broad-scale military operation, and it involved a broadening of the organisation's traditional approach to security. While the refugee situation in Kosovo certainly could have represented a potential danger to European security, it was the threat to European values that was most frequently emphasised. This evening Blair argued that the case of Kosovo ought to be seen in a wider context. Then he outlined what has later been referred to as "the Blair doctrine" – the idea that international intervention should take place not on the basis of interests, but on values. "We are all internationalists now", he insisted.

Blair's attempt to establish a link between "idealism and *realpolitik*" was well achieved. Thus, it was not unexpected that just war, humanitarian intervention, and global values became recurring issues in his speeches on foreign policy. In October 2001, around the same time as military action against Afghanistan began, he delivered a passionate speech on the international community's moral obligation to intervene in situations of humanitarian suffering. Referring to Kosovo, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone, he argued that Afghanistan too was a case where vital global values were at stake.

Two years later he attempted to make the same connection on the more controversial case of Iraq. "Kosovo, with ethnic cleansing of ethnic Albanians, was not a hard decision for most people; nor was Afghanistan after the shock of September 11; nor was Sierra Leone", he recalled in a 2004 speech. He admitted that the decision to intervene in Iraq had been "immensely difficult" to make, but concluded that sometimes intervention is necessary even if one's own security is not directly threatened. "The best defence of our security", he said, "lies in the spread of our values". In the new pamphlet he reconfirms this position: "It is our values that link our military action in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Iraq, with our diplomatic action on climate change, world trade, Africa and Palestine."

Unfortunately for Blair, his arguments about value-based intervention are met with less acclamation and more scepticism today than seven years ago. Whereas Kosovo, Sierra Leone, and Afghanistan without too much difficulty could be seen in such a context, Blair and George W. Bush have been accused of focusing on democracy, freedom, and human rights only to divert attention from the embarrassing lack of WMDs in Iraq. Blair's dedication to a value-based foreign policy may very well be founded on true idealism. Sadly for the Prime Minister, the case of Iraq appears to have weakened his credibility on this issue.

British diplomacy: a virtuous alternative to enforcement

By Øivind Bratberg

The art of restraint. Drawing on the conduct of the last few years, one could easily believe that enforcement overseas is essential to British foreign policy. Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Afghanistan and most blatantly Iraq testify to an activist approach that has been strongly promoted since the end of the Cold War, in particular by the present Labour government. Such activism has been coupled rhetorically with a stronger emphasis on moral concerns.



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the whole picture with regards to Britain's colonial relations, where peaceful restraint was hardly the rule. Nevertheless, one recognises even in imperial policy a preference for profit and cheap administration rather than the French *mission civilisatrice* or the German quest for *Lebensraum*. Military, Britain leaned heavily on naval power to ensure control of the seas. Administratively, the main pillar was the idea of indirect rule. A small governing elite would thus draw on local collaborators to ensure compliance. All in all, the British Empire – for all its glory – was, to a surprising degree a commercial enterprise, where entrepreneurs rather than romantics were the driving force.

Britain as a peaceful hegemon of course rested on a superiority that was historically contingent. The process of decolonisation, although mostly peacefully conducted, also marred British foreign policy with the harshness of intervention such as in India, South Africa (the Boer War) and in the crushing of the Kenyan Mau Mau revolt. Since then, Suez in 1956 and the Falklands in 1982 are rare examples of British intervention overseas. While Britain participated in the UN-mandated Korean War in the 1950s, the Wilson government thus refused firmly to commit British forces to the American venture in Vietnam. Through many twists and turns since the Second World War, British foreign policy has had pragmatic

restraint as a consistent trait. In this respect, the present taste for humanitarian intervention is a break with tradition.

Harold Nicolson, himself a diplomat-practitioner, said in his treatise on *Diplomacy* (1939) that "[t]he worst kind of diplomatists are missionaries, fanatics and lawyers; the best kind are reasonable and humane sceptics. Thus it is not religion which has been the main formative influence in diplomatic theory; it is common sense". The commonsensical is close to British foreign policy tradition. An emphasis on efficient conduct of business can be witnessed today in Britain's relations with the EU, where the delegation in Brussels (UKRep) is renowned for swift and elegant coordination from the Cabinet Office in London. This machinery has made possible a well-coordinated pursuit of British interest even when issues have been highly contentious at home.

Quiet deliberation and restraint has not always been an advantage, as shown by the ill-fated appeasement policy prior to the Second World War. On the other hand, the few rather un-British attempts at bold intervention, such as Suez, have shown what appears to be a classic truth: it is its shopkeeper pragmatism rather than boldness that made British foreign policy efficient, and great.

Whether driven by humanitarianism or *realpolitik*, intervention nevertheless accounts for only a limited part of British foreign policy tradition. What was once the seat of the world's greatest empire has thus been renowned more for prudence and restraint than brutal enforcement. This is clearly valid with regard to Britain's relations with Europe, where the emphasis on commerce and detachment from the continent have implied an opportunist shopkeeper's diplomacy, balancing potential aggressors while reaping the benefits of trade.

Such an analysis does not, admittedly, provide

Remembering Suez

By *British Politics Review* Guest Writer
Jan Erik Mustad

A crisis that changed the world order. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Suez crisis. Judging from Tony Blair's foreign policy, the question is whether Britain has learned anything from these events that changed world politics?

Jan Erik Mustad, since 2004 the publishing director of *Fagbokforlaget*, has taught and published extensively in the domain of British and American studies. He is also a regular commentator on British politics in the media.



It is fair to claim that the Suez Crisis of 1956 changed the power-balance of world politics. In short, it marked the end of an era dominated by the colonial powers of Britain and France, and it moved world authority across the Atlantic Ocean, to the United States of America. The whole event was deemed provocative and was condemned by the United Nations as well as the US. The American President Dwight D. Eisenhower wanted to show his "anti imperialist" attitude and wanted to be labelled the "peace" president. Eisenhower had an election in mind and he would not let this crisis destroy his ambitions. But Eisenhower won the election in 1956 and the Suez conflict was the last time America officially rebuked Israel, the country's main ally in the Middle East.

"Suez haunted British foreign policy for many decades. It was referred to as the 'Suez syndrome' and it was not until Margaret Thatcher's premiership that Britain again showed itself on the international scene..."

Suez marked the end of imperialist activity for Britain, but most of all, it was a major humiliation for Prime Minister Anthony Eden who resigned just after. Lies and cover-ups, even in the House of Commons, destroyed much of Britain's standing on the international arena and in many ways put pressure on the country to rid itself with the Empire. The whole episode strengthened America's power over the west European countries. The French lost confidence in any future cooperation with Britain as Britain itself demonstrated that it put "the special relationship" with America first. France realised that it had to look elsewhere for support and, in the aftermath of Suez, created what was later to become the European Union, with the Treaty of Rome signed the following year (France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg).

The Suez Crisis also highlighted the fragility of world peace. All the involved parties were ready to use force when and if necessary, but thanks to the UN, Suez ended without major bloodshed. However, the incident clearly sharpened the divisions between the East and the West, and it furthermore gave rise to a pan-Arabian nationalism that we still see traces of in the region today. Saddam Hussein was one leader who clearly drew inspiration from Nasserism (The Economist, 27 July 2006).

Suez haunted British foreign policy for many decades. It was referred to as the "Suez syndrome" and it was not until Margaret Thatcher's premiership that Britain again showed itself on the international scene. The retaking of the Falklands in 1982 was by many seen as partially an attempt to drive out the demons of Suez, but also re-establish Britain as a world power. In fact, much of Thatcher's political project was to recapture some of the foreign ground lost as a result of the Suez Crisis.

And Tony Blair inherited much of Thatcher's foreign ambitions. He wanted to "make peace" with Europe and at the same time cultivate the

"special relationship" with America. Being close allies with Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, Blair has not been afraid of using British troops on foreign missions. According to the editor of the *New Statesman* John Kampfner, "Blair has committed British forces to action five times in six years. No other British Prime Minister and few world leaders have come close in contemporary history... this mission has taken Blair from the first air strikes against Iraq in 1998, to the Kosovo conflict of 1999; from the deployment of troops in Sierra Leone to George W. Bush's attack on the Taleban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan after 11. September - and then on to the final and decisive war against Saddam Hussein" (press release for Kampfner's book *Blair's Wars*, 2004, Free Press).

There is clearly a development from the years after Suez, via Thatcher, to Blair. Not only did Thatcher pave the way for Blair on the foreign scene, she demonstrated for the world that they lest not forget that Britain was once the world's leading imperial power. Blair took advantage of Thatcher's legacy but did perhaps go "a bridge too far" in proving his points.

The major lesson of Suez, however, is clearly visible in all of Britain's international activity; they play second fiddle to America, and Britain never engage in foreign operations without the blessings of the "big brother" on the other side of the Atlantic. It is America that gives Britain its legitimacy as a power to be reckoned with. And after Suez, the "special relationship" has seemed to be a clear priority, partly in order to avoid such blunders, but also because of the close ties the British feel they have with America.

Hence, it is safe to conclude that the Suez experience has been, and still is, present in British foreign policy. Many commentators in Britain feel that perhaps the lesson has been taken too far; that the relationship to America is too close, both in the war in Iraq and in the recent trouble in the Middle East, where Blair refused to join the other European leaders in calling for an immediate ceasefire. He rather waited for Bush.

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Forthcoming edition of *British Politics Review*

16 January 2007 marks the 300th anniversary of the Treaty of Union, whereby the Kingdoms of England and Scotland were united into one state: Great Britain. The next edition of *British Politics Review* commemorates the tercentenary of the "Union of Parliaments" in 1707, while at the same time raising some questions about the current health of the union. How does Great Britain meet the challenges

emanating from devolution and European integration? What is the ideational basis of this construct today?

Such reflections will constitute the platform of our special jubilee issue, where several guest writers will be invited to contribute.

The winter edition of *British Politics Review* is due to arrive in late January 2007.



Britannia, the mythological representation of Britain.