# BRITAIN and AFRICA under BLAIR

## In pursuit of the good state

Julia Gallagher

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# List of abbreviations

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| APPG | All-Party Parliamentary Group |
| DfID | Department for International Development |
| EU | European Union |
| FCO | Foreign and Commonwealth Office |
| G8 | Group of Eight (industrialised nations) |
| GNI | Gross National Index |
| IFI | International financial institution |
| ILP | Independent Labour Party |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| INGO | International non-governmental organisation |
| IPPR | Institute for Public Policy Research |
| IR | International Relations |
| MDG | Millennium Development Goal |
| NEPAD | New Partnership for African Development |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NLC | Nigerian Labour Congress |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| UN | United Nations |

# Preface

When Princess Diana died in August 1997, Sierra Leone's elected Government was holed up in a disused Chinese restaurant in Guinea. The British High Commissioner, Peter Penfold, who had gone into exile with President Kabbah and his ministers, and was advising them to act as much as possible like a government, suggested that the Foreign Minister write a letter of condolence to the Queen. He hoped that this would project a picture of a government in control, even though in reality it had been pushed out of Freetown by a ragged and disorganised rebel movement, leaving Sierra Leone in chaos. At the same moment, Tony Blair was making one of his most famous and statesman-like speeches. Speaking movingly of the 'people's princess', he managed to embody British reaction to and emotion at Diana's death, and at the same time represented a focus of containment and reassurance. This brief and relatively slight moment in Blair's prime ministership is nevertheless one of the best examples of his ability to express a sense of the capacity of his government to embody Britain. It occurred in the days before Britons had learned to distrust him, when his newness and ambition to unite the country still appeared credible.

This book is about the idea of state capacity – in particular, state capacity to embody and represent good. It looks at the ways in which New Labour harnessed a broader British imagination of Africa in order to do this, pursuing it through Blair's attempts to 'do good' in Africa. At the time this story begins, the state of Sierra Leone barely existed. It had collapsed, unable to meet any basic functions; the Government had fled, and was being supported in exile by the British. It represented utter failure, its feeble attempts to demonstrate capacity under the direction of a British official. In contrast, Britain under Blair appeared to have a new moral strength: New Labour had breathed it back into the idea of the British state. There was a reinvigoration of morality in public life; the New Labour Government appeared able to encapsulate a sense of British brilliance and assertiveness; the state itself was at the heart of a far happier British national story. The significance of the idea of the moral strength of the state, the difficulties of maintaining it, and the way in which the stories of Britain and Sierra Leone became entwined, lie at the heart of this book. In particular, it explores the way in which people in Britain – and particularly the political elites that represent

them – collectively imagine Africa and project an idealised Britain onto it, in order to conceive a sense of their own 'good state'.

The idea for this book came about through my own observation of New Labour in power when I worked at the Foreign Office in the early 2000s and saw the way in which Africa policy was set apart from the rest of foreign policy. I became fascinated by the idea of Africa as a 'good project' and what this might mean. This built on a lifelong interest around the question of 'doing good' in Africa, which began with questions to my exiled South African mother about white, or non-African, involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle, and then in my own time working in a rural secondary school in Zimbabwe in the early 1990s. It continues today, when I hear from my children that they are being taught in school about starvation and poverty in Africa, and from my students that their ambition is to work for a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and solve Africa's development problems. I, and they, and many other millions of British people, grow up believing that Africa is somehow special and apart, particularly desperate and needy, and that we can and should help. Why and how did a continent come to occupy this particular place in the collective imagination; and why and how is this preoccupation expressed through politics?

I was fortunate to have the support of many people to help me realise this project. Donal Cruise-O'Brien was the first to encourage me to pursue my ideas academically. I am particularly grateful to Stephen Chan, my supervisor at SOAS, for setting an example in adventurous scholarship and encouraging me to persist with ideas and approaches that strayed from the conventional. Other members of the SOAS politics department offered support and many helpful comments, particularly Tom Young, Laleh Khalili, Rochana Bajpai, Matt Nelson, Stephen Hopgood, Marie Gibert, Henrik Aspengren, Hannes Baumann, Sambaiah Gundimeda, Dan Large, Dave Harris, Polly Pallister-Wilkins, Manjeet Ramgotra and Dan Neep. Thanks too to Kimberly Hutchings, Andrew Williams, Radha Upadhyaya, Susan Newman and Crispin Branfoot for suggestions and advice; and to the friends I made in Sierra Leone and Nigeria, particularly Maude, Prince and James. I am very grateful to the British MPs and officials and Nigerian and Sierra Leoneans who agreed to be interviewed. This project has been helped in different ways by my whole family; my parents who first excited in me many of the ideas that propel it; Sophie who helped me understand Melanie Klein; and Christina who became my 'big sister'. Finally, thank you to Shona and Connie who came home from school and made me stop, and Shaun without whom I never would have begun.

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# 1

# New Labour: doing good in Africa

## Introduction

This book is about fantasy and idealisation, about how international rela-
tionships provide opportunities to create and pursue them, and why they
are essential for political communities. In its transcendence of the domestic,
political realm, the field of international relations (IR) provides fantasy and
idealisation in a variety of ways: for realists, it depicts a place of anarchy
and free-flowing aggression; for liberal-utopians, it is potentially a place of
harmony and idealism. In both cases, the international realm is thin enough
(empty, even) to enable an escape from the moral complexity and banality
of the normal, allowing the projection of extremes.

Of course this is a crude depiction. Many attempts have been made to
qualify or reconcile the classic dichotomies of IR theory, to find ways for-
ward in describing a thicker conception of an ethics of the international
(see in particular, Cochran, 1999; Linklater, 1998). But still, for theorists
and practitioners, some areas of IR remain a potentially rarefied realm, into
which ideas can be projected in purer forms than would be allowed in a
messier domestic context.

Britain's policy in Africa can be viewed in such terms. By practitioners
themselves, it can be seen as distinct from 'politics as usual', an example of
an ethical approach to politics, in which self-interest and power have little
share. It is described in terms of certain and universal conceptions of what
it means to be 'good', enabling a sense of the transcendence of a grubbier
conception of politics. And, although much of the analysis of the policy
has questioned this depiction, it too, in different ways, has attempted to
understand it within a flattened context which focuses exclusively on power
and self-interest to the exclusion of an ethical or humanitarian dimension.

Coming from a more pragmatic, social democratic perspective, which
accepts as inevitable the complexities, the lack of conclusions and the
chaotic quality of politics, I start out with the question of what role such
idealisations play in political communities. To what degree is the creation of
an ideal space, apart from 'politics as usual', a necessity; in what ways might
the international realm provide one; and how can we begin to understand
the ways such a space underpins the health of the political community?

I begin from a constructivist position. This roots ideas, actions and

motivations within wider society, meaning that any examination of the way political communities approach foreign policy assumes that policies emanate from the ideas and culture of the community, and are not imposed by a distinct stratum of political elites. Instead, under investigation is a complex web of state actors who are reflecting and attempting to shape wider community ideas. It is meaningless, within this paradigm, to examine the motivations of politicians in isolation, as for example Grainger does (Grainger, 2005).[1] Instead my approach is to assume that Tony Blair's interest in Africa, his conception of what it is and what Britain does for it, are entwined with British approaches and conceptions, taking in historical experiences of Britain's role there, and responding to contemporary political pressures and ideas.

The political community mediates and concentrates such ideas upon the state itself; state actors, as the chief protectors and representatives of the state, embody a distillation of the ways in which these processes can be related to the state in much the same way that the formal state itself can be thought of as a distillation of the wider state defined by Hegel as 'the community as a whole with all its institutions' – including the family and civil society as well as the political institutions (Hegel, 1991: xxv). Community at the state level carries a particular significance and is at once vital and problematic. First, in a Hegelian sense, the political state as the highest organising authority confers an essential part of identity and source of wellbeing. This is realised both in the degree to which the state embodies society's ideas and values, and in how well the state projects itself internationally. Second, in its wider meaning, the state is the community we all belong to and, aside from the small numbers of people who emigrate, membership is involuntary. The degree of involvement also varies, but overt support does not necessarily entail more involvement than resistance: both recognise the importance of the state. I agree with David Miller's description of the origins and complexity of national identity. 'One is forced to bear a national identity regardless of choice, simply by virtue of participating in this way of life' (Miller, 1995: 42). The virtue in this is that, like a family, despite periods of frustration and unhappiness, we remain engaged with the state. This iterative, unending and often painful process has been described by Michael Walzer as constituting a 'thick' ethical dimension (Walzer, 1994). Within states, people must develop ways of distributing goods. Walzer says they can do this, more or less well, because they share deep cultural and moral norms by virtue of their having lived together for so long. Walzer I think tends to over-simplify cultural homogeneity and glosses over the multiple and diverse types of community which under- and overlay the state community. We must allow for the fact that members of the state community bring complex identities to their membership (Adler, 2005) – a fact that makes sorting out distribution even messier, but no less thick. Because membership is inescapable, we have to resolve, or reconcile, or find a way to live with our differences to make the state work. However, the extra complexity makes the Hegelian notion

of the 'good state', which successfully embodies society's norms and then reflects them out to the wider world a deeply difficult process.

Beyond the state lies the state-system, a collection, in classic IR terms, of self-contained entities which interact independently of any higher authority. From the orthodox communitarian perspective, there is little shared between different state communities. Relations between states are voluntary, or at least fluid, shared norms are at best weak or, in Walzer's terms, 'thin', because they are basic, fundamental and ideal.[2] They can allow us to identify intensely at times with people from other parts of the world who are struggling to achieve goals we share – self-determination or freedom from oppression, for example – but they cannot be the basis for sorting out complicated distributive issues because they are idealised and not rooted in thick community norms.

What interests me is the relationship between the two spheres – the state and the international; the thick and the thin – and the importance of the ideal in the state's ability to inspire wellbeing. If domestic issues are clogged up with thick, complicated and messy negotiations, what happens to ideals, to the sense we all share of reaching for something grander, more profound?

Emile Durkheim's work on the role of religion in the creation and nurturing of community is helpful here. Durkheim argues that individuals together conceive of an ideal society by way of shared religious belief and practice. 'It is a simple idea that consciously expresses our more or less obscure aspirations towards the good, the beautiful, the ideal. Now these aspirations have their roots in us; they come from the very depths of our being' (Durkheim, 2001: 315). In a discussion of modern secular society's search for a replacement for religion, Durkheim dismisses science as a possibility, giving a clear insight into the particular role religion has played. Faith, he argues, includes 'an impulse to act', in which speculation is essential. 'Science is fragmentary, incomplete; it progresses slowly and can never finish: life cannot wait' (*Ibid*: 325). In the religious life of the community, 'the obscure intuitions of sensation and sentiment often take the place of logic' (*Ibid*: 326). In the end, science will not do because it is an expression of collective opinion and not outside social life at all. Durkheim then suggests a number of ways in which people collectively imagine an ideal society, including the need for speculation, the importance of sensation and sentiment, an impulse to act and the search for something beyond our social life.

This search for an ideal community is, Durkheim maintains, 'not a kind of luxury that man might do without but a condition of his existence' (*Ibid*: 318) and, as such, a necessary part of a community's health. If a state community's imagination of itself must have a strong ideal element, isn't this most easily achieved in relation to the wider world? Can we transcend – by escaping or enhancing – our messy, thick domestic social life by reaching up to the thin and pure international realm?

The classic way for a state community to reinforce itself is through war, and war has been the preoccupation of many IR theorists (Waltz, 1959; Bull,

1995; Kagan, 2003). Hegel writes that war is necessary for states to prevent the stagnation that he argues perpetual peace would bring: 'The state is an individual, and negation is an essential component of individuality ... Not only do peoples emerge from wars with added strength, but nations troubled by civil dissension gain internal peace as a result of wars with their external enemies' (Hegel, 1991: 362). War as an 'ethical moment' confers and reinforces subjectivity; it is part of the way in which states are aware of each other as different, but also related. It is through mutual recognition that states become subjects.

### Mutual recognition and doing good in Africa

New Labour's was an era of the language of idealism in foreign policy, beginning with Robin Cook's 'ethical element', and continuing through Blair's 'humanitarian wars'. It is at best questionable how far British subjectivity under New Labour was enhanced by war. Blair's wars – among them interventions in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Iraq – had a mixed record in terms of creating the 'Dunkirk Spirit' effect that Chris Brown suggests is the essence of Hegel's 'cleansing feature of war' (Brown, 1992: 70). Blair's approach to Africa, however, grounded in utopian and cosmopolitan ideas and highly idealised, in a different way offered a grand, heroic identity for Britain. It embodied Durkheim's 'more or less obscure aspirations towards the good, the beautiful and the ideal' and was firmly predicated on the 'impulse to act'. Moreover, in a very concrete way, it offered escape into a realm 'beyond social life'. My argument is that the idea of Africa and Britain's help for Africa has worked as a way to create the sense of an ideal society in Britain, and most particularly to affirm the 'good state'.

To understand Britain's approach to Africa, I want to find a place for it within international relations theories on state-systems. I will look at two IR debates. The first is the traditional utopianism/realism debate which held sway through most of the twentieth century. Although this debate no longer dominates IR discourse, it is useful here because the utopian approach which characterised late nineteenth-century colonial policy – Britain's era of 'do-good' imperialism[3] – has strongly influenced the Labour Party's foreign policy and echoes strongly through current ethical approaches to foreign policy. Moreover, in the tradition of unearthing latent interests, examining current policy on Africa within the utopian/realist paradigm helps towards a richer conception of how British interests are defined and sheds light on the benefits of the policy for Britain.

However, although the realist/utopian discussion helps us think about the way a state looks out at the world, it is less useful in explaining how foreign policy reflects back *within* a state, a key objective of this book. Therefore, I want to look at a second theoretical framework, contemporary IR theory on cosmopolitanism and communitarianism. As Brown suggests, a communitarian approach helps us see how the way we look out at the world underpins wellbeing within the state: foreign policy is no longer seen as

purely externally focused but as a positive good that a state can offer its citizens (Brown, 1992). Second, New Labour rhetoric is strongly cosmopolitan: an examination of the cosmopolitan approach should help towards an understanding of the way the Government – and I will argue Britain more widely – sees itself in relation to Africa.

But none of this allows a sufficient development of ideas about what it means for its members that the state is 'good'. They set off the idea of a relationship between individuals and the 'good state', but conventional IR approaches constrain further exploration along this path in two ways. First, they have traditionally sidelined the personal and the emotional; and second, where they have examined ideas of projection, have tended to privilege the destructive and the negative elements, particularly in their focus on war. In my attempt to explore how state engagement in 'good' internationally underwrites the emotional as well as physical wellbeing of the community, I will draw on the psychoanalytic work of Melanie Klein. Klein deals with the development of individual subjectivity through relationships. Most compelling is her analysis of the way in which thin, far-off relationships can be used to support and mend more fraught, thick, close relationships, something she argues is done through the splitting and projection of aggression and idealisation. Against a background of European political thought about the nature of 'good', of where it is imagined to be, and of the essential importance of making a connection to it, Klein's work helps locate the immanent need for good, its source and corruption within relationships, and the ways in which individuals attempt to recreate, recapture and use it to resolve the difficulties of human ambiguity.

The rest of this chapter is divided into three sections. The first outlines the basis of the book, giving an account of how New Labour's interest in Africa grew between 1997 and 2007. The second explores the book's argument in more depth and outlines the theoretical context. Finally, there is a brief discussion of its methodology.

## New Labour, ethical foreign policy and Africa

There were three main elements to New Labour's interest in helping Africa and these can be boiled down to ideology, issues of power and contingency. First, the Government inherited old Labour traditions and ideology, mostly developed during the Party's periods in opposition. Rooted in ideas of internationalism and often antithetical to notions of British power, these explicitly focused on how foreign policy could serve to improve the world, rather than narrowly defined British interests (Gordon, 1969; Vickers, 2003; Callaghan, 2007; Phythian, 2007). From the Party's beginnings in the early twentieth century, ideas on a new role for Britain were developed in an attempt to move beyond Britain's imperial past, and the Party has grappled with them ever since. These developed during the long opposition years of the 1980s in the Party's hostile attitude towards the arms trade and its desire

to promote human rights. Of particular significance to this discussion is the Party's policy on nuclear unilateralism, painfully abandoned in the late 1980s, and for many a deep hole in what had been a highly ethical stance on defence. Could development and the ethical approach to foreign policy help fill it? The personalities, ideas and ambitions of key New Labour figures also drove foreign policy towards both political and morally based objectives. The ambitious Robin Cook wanted to make foreign policy count at home; Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, searching for a moral cause, found it more easily abroad than at home.

Second, the Government wanted to make sure that Britain was a major world player – an ambition sometimes at odds with the old Labour ambivalence towards power. It did this in the context of the British preoccupation with decline and the search for an international role. How could Britain be made to count in the world once again, without recourse to the realist approach of previous governments? Luckily, the international conditions in the late 1990s, post-Cold War, promoted a development discourse which suited both New Labour's ideological direction and the search for a role. This was rooted in the idealised power of the liberal values of human rights, democracy and better governance in effecting material change in the lives of people in the Third World. By wholeheartedly pursuing these values New Labour could become an influential member of the international community – perhaps even a leader in a new moral crusade. Blair's desire to be closely identified with the US reinforced this tendency too, particularly after 9/11, when his ideas on international community and intervention hardened into a far more aggressive manifestation of the ethical foreign policy.

Third was the role of contingency in the shaping of policy. Events in Sierra Leone and Kosovo, and then 9/11, allowed Blair to articulate and begin to effect his ideas on international community and the doctrine of intervention. He successfully used his moments in the world's spotlight to demonstrate his moral commitment to Africa.

### An ethical beginning

Tony Blair's Labour Party was preoccupied by domestic policy while in opposition,[4] but when the Party came to power in May 1997, two early initiatives set the scene for the Government's approach to foreign policy and these were to take on increasing importance. The first was the establishment of the Department for International Development (DfID), now a department in its own right with a cabinet post, filled by the energetic and engaging Clare Short.[5] The second was Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's presentation on 12 May of a foreign policy mission statement with an 'ethical dimension' (Cook, 1997a), immediately labelled 'the ethical foreign policy' by the media.

The new Development Secretary was determined to make development a key government priority. She quickly committed the Government to the UN development aid target of 0.7 per cent of Gross National Index (GNI),[6]

and published two white papers – in 1997 and 2000 – iterating the ethical dimension of development.

> It is our duty to care about other people, in particular those less well off than ourselves. We have a moral duty to reach out to the poor and needy. But we also owe it to our children and our grandchildren to address these issues as a matter of urgency. If we do not do so there is a real danger that, by the middle of the next century, the world will simply not be sustainable... In this area we could give a lead which would make us all very proud of our country and also secure a safe and decent future for us all. (DfID, 1997)

This theme – morality working in tandem with enlightened self-interest – was to become a defining feature of the Government's approach to foreign policy.

Cook, ambitious and highly political, was anxious to maintain his domestic profile as he entered the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). He was driven by the need both to cement his left-wing credentials within the Party and to keep up with his rival Gordon Brown who had grabbed the limelight by granting independence to the Bank of England as his first action as Chancellor (Wickham-Jones, 2000: 107). The ethical dimension was the last of four foreign policy objectives, designed to 'secure the respect of other nations for Britain's contribution to keeping the peace of the world and promoting democracy around the world'. [7] Two months later Cook explained that the foundations of the ethical dimension were based on the doctrine of universal human rights, and mapped out twelve policies which would demonstrate the Government's approach. These included condemnation of governments which 'grotesquely violate human rights', support for sanctions applied by the international community, a ban on military exports to human rights-abusing regimes, support for a new international criminal court, practical assistance to free media working in repressive regimes, human rights training for foreign armed forces and an annual report on government efforts to promote human rights abroad (Cook, 1997b).

The main flavour of Cook's ethical dimension was the curtailment of British interests where they interfered with the ending of egregious human rights abuses elsewhere. Like Short, Cook was keen to stress moral responsibility: 'The Labour Government does not accept that political values can be left behind when we check in our passports to travel on diplomatic business. Our foreign policy must have an ethical dimension and must support the demands of other peoples for the democratic rights on which we insist for ourselves' (Cook, 1997a). The policy was understood to mean that sometimes Britain would be prepared to act at some cost to itself in the interests of wider principle. Cook's recipe for principled action looks rather cautious now, followed as it was by the more assertive international interventions of the Labour Government: he was anxious to work within international legal frameworks, and at this early stage there did not appear to be wider govern-

ment commitment to the ethical dimension to justify anything grander than tough words alongside political and economic sanctions.

If pressed, Cook would argue, like Short, that there was a harmony between British interests and the promotion of 'our values'. For example:

> I am constantly being lectured that the work of the Foreign Office should only be about the national interest. Actually, I agree with that. But I also believe that promoting our values, taking pride in our principles is in the national interest. We will be better able to trade with countries that are stable and free. We will be more secure the more democracy replaces dictatorship. (Cook, 1998)

Africa featured for both DfID and the FCO, but in neither was it singled out for special treatment at this stage. For DfID, African countries made up the majority of the world's poorest, and, as former colonial possessions, many already had close development assistance relationships in place. For the FCO, several African states fitted immediately into Cook's ethical element – notably Nigeria under Sani Abacha's military regime, mentioned specifically in the July speech,[8] Sierra Leone, suspended by the Commonwealth the same month after a coup to oust the elected Ahmad Tejan Kabbah's government and Kenya, where elections which returned Daniel Arap Moi to power were widely criticised as flawed. But Africa has never been a high priority for the FCO, which tends to see the continent in a development rather than diplomatic framework. Cook was more immediately, dramatically and problematically occupied by human rights issues in Indonesia, Burma, Pakistan and Iraq.

Despite New Labour's claims to newness, both the ethical dimension and the enhanced importance of international development can be traced back to older Labour approaches to foreign policy. Development had had a higher profile in the Labour governments in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly under two influential development ministers, both from the left of the Party, Barbara Castle, created Minister for Overseas Development in 1964, and Judith Hart, who filled the position twice in the 1970s. At the same time, Cook's ethical dimension – although 'new' in its terminology – was rooted in two long-held Labour Party ideas: the limiting of arms sales to unsavoury regimes and the promotion of human rights internationally.[9] Both were pursued throughout the 1980s, were included in the Party's 1983 general election manifesto and continued to be a preoccupation thereafter. Neil Kinnock in his introduction to the general election manifesto in 1992 said: 'In this increasingly interdependent world there are no distant crises. The Labour Government will therefore, as a matter of moral obligation and in the material interests of our country, foster the development and trade relationships necessary for the advance of economic security, political democracy and respect for human rights' (quoted in Little and Wickham-Jones, 2000: 96).

Cook and Short could more credibly claim newness in comparison with

the previous Thatcher and Major governments. By 1997, development aid had been whittled down to just 0.26 per cent of GNI and, in line with the approved Cold War approach, development aid was often used to buy political support rather than in support of developmental or human rights-respecting governments (Cumming, 2001). Aid, moreover, had often been linked to promoting British trade, a practice that had become publicly discredited after the Pergau Dam scandal, and was ended by New Labour.[10] Finally, John Major's government had been scarred by secret arms sales to Iraq during Saddam Hussein's repression of the Iraqi Kurds.[11] The ethical foreign policy and focus on poverty reduction in the Third World were a conscious attempt to show that New Labour offered something different from the sleaze and selfishness of its Conservative predecessors.

However, Labour came to power at a time when international approaches, in particular to the Third World, were already being overhauled. Political conditionalities based on human rights and democracy were routinely attached to both multilateral and bilateral aid, part of a strong post-Cold War push to promote liberal ideology in the Third World. Mark Duffield discusses the growing hegemony of 'liberal peace' as an ideological system shared through a network of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), governments and international financial institutions (IFIs) which seeks to transform societies by concentrating on principles – economic liberalism, democracy, human rights – rather than previous efforts to support more prosaic development projects: 'Effecting social transformation is itself now a direct and explicit policy aim' (Duffield, 2002: 39), part of the post-Cold War sense of the end of history and the triumph of western values. The idea was that state–society relations needed to be reformed, in order to make development flow, an approach that has had particular traction in Africa (Young, 1995). The ethical dimension fitted well within these emerging international norms, and the New Labour Government eagerly began to participate in a congenial aid regime.

### Blair gets interested

Both development and the ethical dimension came to be extremely important to New Labour in the way it dealt with foreign policy. This can be seen clearly through Blair's interest in foreign policy, which, during his first year in office, was limited. He made only one speech on the subject – at the annual Lord Mayor's banquet, an occasion traditionally devoted to foreign policy – in which he described his domestic policy agenda in relation to the promotion of Britain overseas (Blair, 1997). His main areas of concern focused on how to keep Britain firmly within Europe and in close partnership with the USA, a theme he returned to in his two foreign policy speeches of 1998 (Blair, 1998a; 1998b).

However, foreign policy was increasingly shaped for Blair by events early on in his first term. In 1997, a British firm, Sandline, was found to have been breaking UN sanctions by supplying arms to Sierra Leone's exiled govern-

ment, with the knowledge of Foreign Office officials including the High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, Peter Penfold. There was a scandal – which was embarrassing for Cook who was unaware of what had been going on – but Blair shrugged off suggestions of impropriety, arguing that it was morally right to help reinstate the democratically elected Kabbah regime.[12] The British Government went on to demonstrate a significant commitment to Sierra Leone by later sending troops and then large amounts of aid to prop up Kabbah's besieged government (Kargbo, 2006; Williams, 2001). A second event was the military action in Kosovo in 1999, where NATO-led forces countered Serbian-inspired violence against Kosovan Muslims by aggressive aerial bombardment. Britain contributed forces and Blair energetically and successfully drew in international support, including that of the US.

Sierra Leone and Kosovo became for New Labour supreme examples of an ethical approach to foreign policy. Blair, on British action in Sierra Leone, said:

> I know there are those, of course, who believe that we should do nothing beyond offer some words of sympathy and condemnation. But that would be to turn our back in effect on those poor defenceless people in Sierra Leone, when we could do something to help them. It's one of the reasons why Britain counts in the world. Britain is seen to have values and be prepared to back them up. (Blair, 2000)

Cook said of the Kosovo action: 'The place where human rights, democracy and freedom have been challenged over this past year has been in Kosovo and we've asserted these values' (*New Statesman* interview, 1999). Both were presented as clear successes, the triumph of 'our values'; both conferred international status. They provided Blair success in a way that messier domestic policy, subject to closer media scrutiny, could not.

Foreign policy came alive for Blair and he increasingly took charge. Cook had been politically weakened by a series of arms scandals and diplomatic blunders (most notably, arms sales to Indonesia, the Sandline affair and gaffes over Israel and Palestine), as well as by the public and humiliating break-up of his marriage. Never a popular figure in the parliamentary Labour Party, these left him dependent on Blair's patronage – which is why, as Wickham-Jones suggests, he began to introduce Blair's pet 'third way' theme into foreign policy speeches from 1998 (Wickham-Jones, 2000: 17). He exerted uneasy authority over the Foreign Office brief, failing to win the trust of his officials, and was demoted after the 2001 election. His successor, Jack Straw, uncomfortable with the Foreign Office brief from the first, proved even less able to wrest control of foreign policy from Blair.

The events in Kosovo informed Blair's most significant statement of foreign policy, his 'doctrine of the international community', made in Chicago in 1999 (*Ibid*: 17). In it, Blair discussed how the world's states increasingly face similar problems, caused by globalisation and environmen-