

The British Left and the Road to Military Intervention in the Former Yugoslavia, 1991–99

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I Confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This study examines the British Left's engagement with the prospect of military intervention during the collapse of Yugoslavia between 1991 and 1999. It argues that the Yugoslav Wars were a watershed moment for the Labour Party and extra-Parliamentary Left, as they led to the development of an increasingly interventionist consensus and thus profoundly contributed to the transformation of the Left's political identity in the 1990s. It situates this changing consensus within broader schisms on the Left on salient issues, notably, the consequences of globalisation; the meaning of anti-racism and 'anti-imperialism'; the 'modernisation' of Labour; and the rise of a hegemonic United States following the end of the Cold War. This study joins a small body of revisionist scholarship which challenges the 'conventional wisdom' that Britain's interventionist trajectory can be solely attributed to 'New' Labour and Tony Blair's leadership from 1997. While accepting that 'New' Labour was instrumental in putting intervention into practice during the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, it nonetheless holds that a significant minority interventionist current developed on the British and wider European Left long before 'New' Labour took power or showed particular interest in the issue. Drawing on internal Labour party records, the Parliamentary record, private collections from activists, agitprop produced by left-wing groups, and the left-wing press, this study approaches the Left's international thinking from the perspective of those who fought to shape the narrative on a changing Left in changing times.

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List of Abbreviations

Left-Wing Organisations

ADBH – Alliance to Defend Bosnia-Herzegovina

AWL – Alliance for Workers Liberty

CND – Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

CfPB – Committee for Peace in the Balkans

END – European Nuclear Disarmament

ISG – International Socialist Group

IWA – International Workers Aid

JSG – Jewish Socialist Group

NLR – New Left Review

RCP – Revolutionary Communist Party

SWP – Socialist Workers Party

WAfB – Workers Aid for Bosnia

WRP – Workers Revolutionary Party

Misc

EC – European Community

EU – European Union

KLA – Kosovo Liberation Army

MEP – Member of the European Parliament

MP – Member of Parliament

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

OAF – Operation Allied Force

PLP – Parliamentary Labour Party

UN – United Nations

UNPROFOR – United Nations Protection Force

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

US – United States

VOPP – Vance-Owen Peace Plan

Introduction

On 26 March 1999, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Tony Blair, addressed the British public on television. He announced that he had committed the armed forces to Operation Allied Force (OAF), a NATO bombing campaign against Serbia with the intention of preventing its further ‘ethnic cleansing’ of the ethnic Albanian population of Kosovo, a formerly autonomous region of Serbia.¹ The context of this action was the decade long disintegration of the former Yugoslavia – a multinational state which the international community had taken half-measures to keep together over the course of the 1980s, only for it to collapse violently over the course of 1991–99.² The first wave of secessionist wars in Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, and then Bosnia from Spring 1992–95, were the deadliest European conflicts since the Second World War. Characterised by genocide (but largely masked by the euphemism, ethnic cleansing) and broadcasted consistently via the television news to an international audience, these conflicts caused concern among the British public and led to demands that ‘something must be done’ to stop the violence.³ While these demands were met with scorn from the Conservative leadership in 1991, over the course of the decade, the consensus surrounding non-intervention broke down.⁴ From 1997, the ‘New’ Labour leadership argued that it was Britain’s moral duty to use force for humanitarian means

¹ “‘It is Simply the Right Thing to Do’”, *Guardian*, 27 March 1999

<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/mar/27/tonyblair>> [Accessed 25 May 2025].

² Sabrina Ramet, *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the Fall of Milosevic*, fourth edn. (Boulder, 2002); Jasna Dragović-Soso, ‘Why did Yugoslavia Disintegrate?: An Overview of Contending Explanations’, in *State Collapse in South-Eastern Europe*, ed. by Lenard J. Cohen and Jasna Dragović-Soso (Purdue, 2007), pp. 1–40.

³ Conservative Foreign Secretary, 1989–95, Douglas Hurd, was particularly critical of calls that ‘something must be done’, see: ‘Hurd Tells How Media Can Hinder Diplomacy’, *Herald*, 9 September 1993 <<https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/12719836.hurd-tells-how-media-can-hinder-diplomacy/>> [Accessed 12 September 2025]; Charlotte McKee, ‘British Media Representation of the War in Bosnia Herzegovina: Avoiding the Duties to Prevent and Protect’, in *Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Genocide and Memory*, ed. by Jutta Lindert and Armen T. Marsoobian (Springer, 2018), pp. 119–218.

⁴ For a critical study of the Conservatives’ anti-interventionism during the war in Bosnia, see: Brendan Simms, *Unfinest Hour: Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia*, e book edn. (Penguin, 2001 [2002]); breakdown of non-interventionist consensus during the decade explored in: David McCourt, ‘Embracing Humanitarian Intervention: Atlanticism and the UK Interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo’, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 15 (2013), pp. 246–62, doi:10.1111/j.1467-856X.2012.00532.x.

– in that its principal motivation was to protect a civilian population from crimes against humanity.⁵

The focus of this study is to explore the British Left’s engagement with this changing consensus on military intervention. It contends that the collapse of Yugoslavia was a watershed moment for the Left, driving many former sceptics of the use of force to controversially take up interventionist politics over the course of 1991–99. It argues that the growing acceptance of military intervention on the Left contributed to – and reflected – the Left’s broader transformation and realignment during the 1990s, representing a struggle over the Left’s political identity at a time of domestic crisis and international change. This perspective challenges the ‘conventional wisdom’ that Britain’s turn toward interventionist politics can be credited solely to ‘New’ Labour – despite it being instrumental in putting the idea into practice – highlighting the role of changing attitudes and fierce conflict within the British Left as a whole for making this changing consensus possible.⁶

It is first crucial to define the Left. From an organisational perspective, this study defines it as the Labour Party and the organisations and individuals which comprise the broader British labour movement. This includes trade unionists, scholar activists, certain journalists, fringe political parties and single-issue campaigns like the peace movement.⁷ What it means to be left-wing is, however, complex. While the Left is most simply understood on economic terms – promoting the reform, or in fringe cases, the

⁵ The term ‘New’ Labour denotes the rebranding of the Labour Party during Blair’s leadership and is referred to with quotation marks in this study; for an outline of the ‘ethical’ dimension of ‘New’ Labour’s foreign policy post-1997, see: Daniel Keohane, ‘The Debate on British Policy in the Kosovo Conflict: An Assessment’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 21.3 (2000), pp. 78–94, doi:10.1080/13523260008404269; Paul Williams, *British Foreign Policy Under New Labour, 1997–2005* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 16–20.

⁶ Two scholars have already described and challenged this ‘conventional wisdom’, see: McCourt, ‘Embracing’; Oliver Daddow, ‘“Tony’s War”? Blair, Kosovo and the Interventionist Impulse in Britain’s Foreign Policy’, *International Affairs*, 85.3 (2009), pp. 547–60 (p. 547), doi:10.1111/j.1468-2346.2009.00813.x.

⁷ Other scholars have taken a similar organisational definitional approach, see: Anastasia Chartomatsidi, ‘The British Left’s Attitude Towards the Battle of Athens, December 1944–February 1945: Commonalities and Divisions’, in *Labour United and Divided from the 1830s to the Present*, ed. by Emmanuelle Avril and Yann Béliard (Manchester University Press, 2018), p.122; Tom Buchanan, *East Wind: China and the British Left, 1925–1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.ix; Parker, Bishop and Lindstrom, *Europe and the British Left*, pp.18–20; Evan Smith and Matthew Worley, ‘Introduction: The Far Left in Britain from 1956’ in *Against the Grain: The British Far Left from 1956*, ed. by Evan Smith and Matthew Worley (Manchester University Press, 2014), pp. 1–22 (p.2).

abolition of capitalism – it is much more difficult to define its broader political programme.⁸ Given this study’s focus on international issues, the Left is ideologically defined by its shared commitment to internationalism. In the British context, this tradition dates back to nineteenth-century liberal radicalism and, as Luke March and Cas Mudde argued, emphasises ‘cross-national networking and solidarity’, viewing ‘national and regional socio-political issues’ as having ‘global structural causes’.⁹ In policy terms, internationalism is generally multilateralist, in that it promotes international cooperation through organisations like the United Nations (UN).¹⁰ Internationalism also entails ‘solidarity with the global oppressed’, though it will become clear throughout this study that the Left is rarely united on who counts as the genuinely ‘oppressed’ and who are considered to be the ‘imperialists’ and aggressors.¹¹

Ultimately, the British Left has long been divided over international issues. Relevant to the focus of this study is that questions of war, conflict, and the changing international order caused recurring schisms during the twentieth century.¹² Following the Second World War, the Left was confronted by Britain’s imperial decline, the onset of the Cold War, and the creation of the United Nations, support for which became a central pillar of the Labour party’s post-war international thinking.¹³ However, a significant divide emerged between the Labour Right, which embraced Atlanticist thinking – the idea that Britain ought to respond to the decline of imperial power by positioning itself as the closest ally of the United States – and the anti-nuclear, anti-NATO Left which argued that Britain ought to take a non-aligned

⁸ Marko A. Hoare, ‘What Does Left Wing Actually Mean?’, *Guardian*, 29 October 2013 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/29/what-does-left-wing-mean-redistribution-wealth>> [Accessed 10 August 2025].

⁹ Luke March and Cas Mudde, ‘What’s Left of the Radical Left? The European Radical Left After 1989: Decline and Mutation’, *Comparative European Politics* 3 (2005), pp. 23–49 (p. 25); echoed by: Jakub Wondreys and others, ‘My Enemy’s Enemy Is My Friend? European Radical Left Parties’ Response to Russia’s War in Ukraine’, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* (2024), pp. 696–719 (p. 698), doi:10.1177/13691481241284204; for its roots in Liberal thought, see: Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume One: The Evolution of Labour’s Foreign Policy 1900–1951* (Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 193.

¹⁰ Wondreys and others, *Ibid*; Tapio Raunio and Wolfgang Wagner, ‘The Party Politics of Foreign and Security Policy’, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 16.4 (2020), pp. 515–31 (p. 519), doi:10.1093/fpa/oraa018

¹¹ Wondreys and others, *Ibid*.

¹² Dan Keohane argued that international policy was Labour’s ‘most divisive issue’ in the twentieth century, in: Dan Keohane, ‘Labour’s International Policy: A Story of Conflict and Contention’, in *The Labour Party: A Centenary History*, ed. by Brian Brivati and Richard Heffernan (Macmillan, 2000), p. 363; see also: Mark Phythian, *The Labour Party, War and International Relations, 1945–2006*, e book edn. (Routledge, 2007).

¹³ Importance of UN to Labour’s post-war identity emphasised in: Phythian, *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 23.

position in the Cold War.¹⁴ Across the 1980s and early 1990s, Left-Right disagreements over nuclear disarmament and military action created deep divisions on the Left, especially when Labour leader, Michael Foot, supported Margaret Thatcher's retaking of the Falkland Islands in 1982 and when his successor, Neil Kinnock, supported the Gulf War, 1990–91, while serving as leader of the opposition.¹⁵ Yet these Left-Right divisions blurred as an ideologically broad interventionist coalition, including some figures on the British Left who had recently opposed the Gulf War, developed in response to the ethnic cleansing and genocide accompanying the collapse of Yugoslavia during the 1990s.¹⁶ A key task for this study is therefore to explain how and why Yugoslavia's disintegration caused a seeming realignment of left-wing attitudes on military intervention.

By returning to the 1990s, this study joins the steadily growing body of scholarship on the British Left's historically divided engagement with international issues.¹⁷ Additionally, it aligns with the, albeit limited, historiographical focus on dynamics on the wider Left inspired by Jeremy Corbyn's unapologetically left-wing leadership of the Labour Party from 2015–19.¹⁸ In doing so, it challenges the 'New' Labour centrality of the historiography on the Left's engagement with the collapse of Yugoslavia, while acknowledging why scholars and commentators were drawn to its foreign policy

¹⁴ For the argument that the Labour Right was 'the most Atlanticist wing of the political class into the twentieth century' see: Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, 'From the Cold War to the Kosovo War: Yugoslavia and the British Labour Party', *Revue d'Études Comparatives Est-Ouest*, 1.5 (2019), pp. 115–45 (p. 121); echoed by Andrew Gamble, *Between Europe and America: The Future of British Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 190, 230; For a broader outline of this Left-Right divide, see: Phythian, *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14; Keohane, 'Labour's International Policy', pp. 373–74; Peter Seyd, *The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1987), p. 14.

¹⁵ For discussion of the infighting between Left and Right in the 1980s see: Keohane, *Ibid.*, p. 376; Seyd, *Ibid.*, pp. 159–161, 176; Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World*, Volume Two: *Labour's Foreign Policy Since 1951*, e book edn. (Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 125–33; for exploration of the left-wing arguments made against the Gulf War see: Phythian, *Ibid.*, pp. 97–108.

¹⁶ Labour MPs like Ken Livingstone, Clare Short, Max Madden, and Andrew Faulds who opposed the Gulf War became some of the most prominent interventionists over Bosnia, see Phythian, *Ibid.*, pp. 100–108.

¹⁷ Buchanan, *East Wind*; Chartomatsidi, 'The British Left's Attitude'; Paul Kelemen, *The British Left and Zionism: History of a Divorce* (Manchester University Press, 2012); Andrew Mullen, 'The British Left: For and Against Europe, A Survey', *Capital and Class*, 31.3 (2007), 217–31; Ihab Shabana, 'From an Understanding to a Securitizing Discourse: The British Left's Encounter with the Emergence of Political Islam, 1978–2000', *Religions*, 13.206 (2022), pp. 1–24, doi:10.3390/rel13030206; Evan Smith, and Matthew Worley, *The British Left and Ireland in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 2021).

¹⁸ For examples of this historiography, see: Unkovski-Korica, 'From the Cold War'; Smith and Worley, *Against the Grain; Labour United and Divided*, ed. by Avril and Béliard; Matt Bolton and Frederick Pitts, *Corbynism: A Critical Approach* (Emerald, 2018); Hannah, Simon, *A Party With Socialists In It: A History of the Labour Left* (Pluto, 2018).

following the controversy surrounding ‘Blair’s Wars’ in Afghanistan, 2001–14, and Iraq, 2003–11.¹⁹

This study intervenes on a limited historiographical debate concerning the Left’s engagement with the collapse of Yugoslavia. The ‘conventional wisdom’ which was promoted by the Blair government and endorsed by some scholars holds that Britain’s interventionist trajectory was driven chiefly by ‘New’ Labour’s desire to defend human rights and to avoid repeating the international failure to prevent genocide in Bosnia in 1995.²⁰ It contends that Britain’s road to military intervention was the result of a change from the ‘profoundly conservative philosophical realism’ which motivated the Major government’s response to the Bosnian War, 1992–95, to the idealistic internationalism of Tony Blair.²¹ There are several major issues with this view. The first is that it ignores dynamics within Labour before Blair became the leader. For one, as Ann Schreiner and McCourt highlighted, Labour backbenchers and certain left-wing newspapers adopted interventionist positions during the Bosnian War which were rejected by both party leaderships at the time, only to be ‘mirrored’ by ‘New’ Labour following its embrace of intervention by 1999.²² Secondly, it underplays the fact that the Labour leadership did begin to take a subtly more assertive position on Yugoslavia during the relatively short leadership of John Smith from July 1992–May 1994. Regardless, scholars have overwhelmingly passed off his leadership’s handling

¹⁹ For a case in point, see: John Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars*, second edn. (Free Press, 2003 [2004]); for some of the vast scholarship on ‘New’ Labour foreign policy, see: *British Foreign Policy: The New Labour Years*, ed. by Oliver Daddow and Jamie Gaskarth (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); *New Labour’s Foreign Policy: A New Moral Crusade?* ed. by Mark Wickham-Jones and Richard Little (Manchester University Press, 2000); Williams, *British Foreign Policy*; Stephen Benedict Dyson, *The Blair Identity: Leadership and Foreign Policy*, e book edn. (Manchester University Press, 2009); Keohane, ‘Labour’s International Policy’; Christopher Hill, ‘Putting the World to Rights: Blair’s Foreign Policy Mission’, in *The Blair Effect, 2001–2005*, ed. by Anthony Seldon and Dennis Kavanagh (Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 384–409; Vernon Bogdanor, ‘Commentary: Foreign Policy’, in *The Blair Effect, 2001–5*, pp. 445–52; Daddow, “‘Tony’s War’”; Journalistic, but nonetheless empirically rigorous accounts include: Andrew Rawnsley, *Servants of the People: The Inside Story of New Labour* (Penguin, 2001); John Rentoul, *Tony Blair: Prime Minister* (Time Warner, 2001).

²⁰ ‘Conventional wisdom’ outlined by: Daddow, “‘Tony’s War’”, p. 547; and McCourt, ‘Embracing’, p. 246; refers broadly to views expressed by: Keohane, ‘Labour’s International Policy’, p. 378; Simms, *Unfinest Hour*, p. 654; Brian Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions: European Party Politics and Peace Enforcement in the Balkans* (Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 47–48.

²¹ Quote from, Simms, *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 654; see also: Rathbun, *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.

²² Ann Schreiner, ‘Humanitarian Intervention, the Labour Party and the Press: The Break-Up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s’, in, *The British Labour Party and the Wider World: Domestic Politics, Internationalism and Foreign Policy*, ed. by Paul Corthorn and Jonathan Davis (Tauris Academic Studies, 2008), pp. 190–208 (p. 207); see also: McCourt, ‘Embracing’, p. 250.

of the collapse of Yugoslavia as broadly aligned with the non-interventionist government, which the first chapter of this study will qualify to some degree.²³

The ‘conventional wisdom’ is also limited by its focus on British domestic politics. For McCourt, Britain’s interventionist trajectory was only possible because of ‘wider shifts’ in thinking on the use of force ‘in Washington, not in London’.²⁴ McCourt, alongside Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, therefore contended that Britain’s Atlanticist tradition provided the strongest theoretical framework for understanding Britain’s interventionist trajectory.²⁵ McCourt argued that, during the end game of the Bosnian War, the United States and NATO superseded the UN as the guarantor of European security when it authorised a bombing campaign in the late Summer of 1995 and took the lead diplomatically, thus laying the groundwork for OAF in 1999.²⁶ This international circumstance intersected with British domestic politics as the Atlanticist Labour Right (‘New’ Labour) took control of the party in 1994 and easily adapted to this new consensus.²⁷ Linked to this view that intervention was the result of a rightward shift, was Brian Brivati’s observation that, as ‘New’ Labour abandoned its socialist principle of intervention in the domestic economy, it took up military intervention abroad.²⁸ In other words, Labour’s domestic and international ‘modernisation’ were intrinsically connected.²⁹ However, while this approach is very useful to understanding how intervention became politically possible over the course of 1991–99, it is less useful for understanding the motivations of interventionists themselves. This study shows that many left-wingers who supported military intervention were not Atlanticists and held views far to the Left of ‘New’ Labour. Thus, while an Atlanticist government was necessary for putting interventionism into practice in 1999, Atlanticism *per se* did not explain why some of the Left took up the interventionist cause.

²³ See: McCourt, *Ibid.*, p. 250; Paul Anderson and Nyta Mann, *Safety First: The Making of New Labour* (Granta, 1997), p. 349; John Rentoul, *Tony Blair: Prime Minister* (Time Warner, 2001), pp. 509; Mark Stuart, ‘Managing the Poor Bloody Infantry: The Parliamentary Labour Party Under John Smith, 1992–94’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 59.3 (2006), pp. 401–19 (p. 412), doi:10.1093/pa/gsl012; Phythian, *The Labour Party*, pp. 109–19; Simms, *Unfinest Hour*, pp. 572–76.

²⁴ McCourt, *Ibid.*, p. 247.

²⁵ McCourt, *Ibid.*, pp. 248–49; Unkovski-Korica, ‘From the Cold War’.

²⁶ McCourt, *Ibid.*, pp. 252–55; for a critical view of this process from the anti-NATO Left, see: John Rees, *Imperialism and Resistance*, e book edn (Routledge, 2006), chapter one.

²⁷ Unkovski-Korica, ‘From the Cold War’.

²⁸ Brian Brivati, ‘Internationalism’ in *The Struggle for Labour’s Soul*, pp. 229–45 (p. 243).

²⁹ For the idea of Labour’s ‘modernisation’ as a right-ward shift, see: Eric Shaw, *The Labour Party Since 1979: Crisis and Transformation* (Routledge, 1994), p. 13.

Instead, this study views the divides on intervention through two broadly competing internationalisms: the first, associated with interventionism, was ‘cosmopolitanism’, described by Levy and Sznajder to be ‘internal globalisation’ where ‘issues of global concern are able to become part and parcel of every day local experiences’.³⁰ As a proponent argued:

If the term ‘globalization’ had to a remarkable extent been appropriated to refer to the deregulation of markets and the triumphant march of capitalism, ‘cosmopolitanism’ suggested that human beings could relate to the world not only as consumers, or members of a labor force, but also as citizens.³¹

Cosmopolitanism favoured the idea that humans were all, essentially, ‘citizens of the world’ and increasingly interconnected due to globalisation which, in turn, undermined the sanctity of the sovereign state.³² Combined with an increased emphasis on ‘human rights’ and anti-nationalism, this idea had security implications, legitimising humanitarian military interventions.³³ This cosmopolitanism would form the crux of ‘New’ Labour’s international thinking, inspiring Tony Blair’s justification for OAF in 1999 and his broader, pro-globalisation politics.³⁴ However, cosmopolitanism certainly had its sceptics – especially on the far Left across Europe.

³⁰ Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, ‘Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5.1 (2002), pp. 87–106 (p. 88), doi:10.1177/136843100200500100.

³¹ Ulf Hannerz, ‘Two Faces of Cosmopolitanism: Culture and Politics’, *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 1073 (2005), pp. 199–213 (pp. 201–202).

³² *Ibid.*, p. 202.

³³ *Ibid.*; Anthony Giddens, ‘Dimensions of Globalisation’ in *The New Social Theory Reader: Contemporary Debates*, ed. by Steven Seidman, Jeffrey C. Alexander (Routledge, 2001); Anthony Giddens, ‘Globalisation: The Runaway World’, Keynote Address, Prix Latsis Universitaires, 6 November 1998, p. 7–8 <https://fondationlatsis.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/guest_1998.pdf> [Accessed 23 April 2025]; Mary Kaldor, ‘Benign Imperialism’, *Prospect* (1999) <<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/opinions/55885/a-benign-imperialism>> [Accessed 10 June 2025]; Anthony Giddens, ‘The Rise and Fall of New Labour: The Architect of the Third Way On the Blair-Brown Years’, *New Statesman*, 17 May 2010 <<https://www.newstatesman.com/long-reads/2010/05/labour-policy-policies-blair>> [Accessed 23 April 2025].

³⁴ Blair explicitly linked globalisation to his thinking on intervention, see: Tony Blair, *Tony Blair: A Journey* (Hutchinson, 2010), pp. 223–24; Scholars have also made the connection, see: Judi Atkins, ‘A Renewed Social Democracy for an “Age of Internationalism”: An Interpretivist Account of New Labour’s Foreign Policy’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 15.2 (2012), pp. 175–91, (p. 175), doi: [10.1111/j.1467-856X.2012.00536](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2012.00536); Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume One*, p. 5; Anthony McGrew, ‘Globalisation’, in *The Struggle for Labour’s Soul*, pp. 137–63 (p. 144).

These sceptics viewed globalisation as an instrument of ‘imperialism’, structural inequality, and capitalist hegemony under the veneer of human rights.³⁵ These two views were clearly incompatible, and this cosmopolitan / sceptical divide intersected with the broader debate surrounding Atlanticism in shaping divisions on the Left on intervention.

In contrast to the depth of this body of theoretical literature on globalisation and cosmopolitanism, the empirical side of the Left’s foreign policy activism during the 1990s lacks detail, with the notable exception of sporadic studies of specific left-wing groups.³⁶ One particularly neglected area of study was the role of scholar activists in shaping the Left’s response as Yugoslavia’s disintegration became a divisive *cause célèbre* in Western academic circles. On the one hand, there were those like Branka Magaš and Mark Mazower who condemned Serbian nationalism for ending the Yugoslav state, framing the conflicts as Serbian wars of aggression against states with a legitimate right to self-determination.³⁷ On the other hand, there were those tied to the peace movement who strongly opposed intervention, publishing condemnations of the Western ‘imperialist’ plot to dismantle Yugoslavia from the outside.³⁸ These divides were not confined to the seminar room as this study will explore how scholar activists spoke at protest marches, worked alongside trade unions, and actively contributed to changing the broader consensus on the wars in the former Yugoslavia as the decade wore on.

³⁵ McGrew, *Ibid.*, p. 144; Ray Kiely, ‘Imperialism or Globalisation? Or Imperialism and Globalisation: Theorising the International after Rosenberg’s “Post-Mortem”’, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 17 (2014), pp. 274–300; Wondreys and others, ‘My Enemy’s Enemy’, p. 698; Smith and Worley, ‘Introduction’, p. 13.

³⁶ For the exceptions, see: Martin Shaw, *The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament*, e book edn. (Agenda, 2025), chapter four; Jack Hepworth, *Preparing for Power: The Revolutionary Communist Party and Its Curious Afterlives, 1976–2020* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), pp. 101–19; Nicholas Moll, *Solidarity Is More Than Just a Slogan: International Workers Aid During and After the 1992–1995 War in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2021); Tom Griffin and others, *The Henry Jackson Society and the Degeneration of British Neoconservatism: Liberal Internationalism, Islamophobia and the ‘War on Terror’* (Public Interest Investigations, 2015), pp. 11–12.

³⁷ Branka Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking the Breakup, 1980–1990* (Verso, 1993); London, London School of Economics (LSE), ‘Faulds; Andrew Matthew William (1923–2000), Politician and Actor’, FAULDS/3/1/4/2, Mark Mazower, ‘The War in Bosnia: An Analysis’, Action for Bosnia, December 1992.

³⁸ *Masters of the Universe: NATO’s Balkan Crusade*, ed. by Tariq Ali (Verso, 2000); Michael Parenti, *To Kill a Nation: The Attack on Yugoslavia* (Verso, 2000); *Degraded Capability: The Media and the Kosovo Crisis*, ed. by Philip Hammond and Edward Herman (Pluto, 2000); Kate Hudson, *Breaking the South Slav Dream: The Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia* (Pluto, 2003).

This study examines the Left's engagement with military intervention in Yugoslavia through the perspectives of the individuals and groups who shaped the debate within the Labour Party and beyond. As one of its principal aims is to show that the Left's realignment on military intervention began to occur long before 'New' Labour took power, it does not position Blair's post-1997 government as the primary actor and focus of analysis. It does not intend to construct a detailed empirical picture of 'New' Labour's foreign policy machinery or to write a diplomatic history of the build-up to OAF.³⁹ Accordingly, it does not draw on National Archives material relating to the Blair government. Where it does engage with the evolution of Blair and 'New' Labour's interventionist instincts, it does so primarily to situate its thinking within the context of the Left's broader ideological evolution on military intervention, and thus relies primarily on analysis of public communications – speeches and policy documents, for example – embellished with insights from insider accounts from within the 'New' Labour project.⁴⁰

The first contribution made by this study to understanding the Left's evolving international thinking comes from shedding new light on John Smith's leadership of Labour during the Bosnian War. It draws on the available minutes of meetings of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) and the Parliamentary Committee (hereafter referred to as the shadow cabinet).⁴¹ The shadow cabinet – an elected committee of opposition spokespersons each with the duty of shadowing and questioning the government minister of the opposite rank – was a forum to discuss party strategy with

³⁹ Accounts of 'New' Labour's foreign policy are plentiful, see: *British Foreign Policy*, ed. by Daddow and Gaskarth; Williams, *British Foreign Policy*; Dyson, *The Blair Identity*; Daddow, "'Tony's War?"; journalist authors who conducted extensive interviews of 'New' Labour insiders also provide an excellent window into Blair's government, see: Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*; Rentoul, *Tony*; Rawnsley, *Servants*; The diplomatic side of the build-up to OAF is outlined in: Foreign Affairs Committee, 'Fourth Report: Kosovo', online (Session 1999–2000, HC 28-II)

⁴⁰ For example, speeches printed in: Tony Blair, *New Britain: My Vision of a Young Country* (Fourth Estate, 1996); Blair's memoir is also a key source: Blair, *A Journey*; Other insider accounts from within Blair's government and advisory team include: Alastair Campbell, *The Alastair Campbell Diaries: Volume One – Prelude to Power, 1994–1997*, ed. by Alastair Campbell and Bill Hagerty (Hutchinson, 2010); Alastair Campbell, *The Alastair Campbell Diaries: Volume Two – Power and the People, 1997–1999*, ed. by Alastair Campbell and Bill Hagerty (Hutchinson, 2011); Robin Cook, *The Point of Departure: Diaries from the Front Bench*, second edn. (Pocket Books, 2004); Lance Price, *The Spin Doctor's Diary: Inside Number Ten with New Labour* (Hodder and Stoughton, 2005); Clare Short, *An Honourable Deception: New Labour, Iraq and the Misuse of Power* (Free Press, 2004).

⁴¹ Found in: Manchester, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, 'British Labour Party Papers, 1968–94', 1330, available online at: *British Online Archives* <<https://britishonlinearchives.com/collections/2/british-labour-party-papers-1968-1994/volumes>> [Accessed 15 August 2025].

a frankness not possible in public. Crucially, the shadow cabinet minutes of the Smith leadership have not been explored in relation to the Bosnian War, despite them containing detailed discussions of the leadership's strategy. The PLP is also a vital source because it provides an insight into the party mood behind closed doors. By allowing private debate in the PLP on a fortnightly basis, it was thought that MPs would not oppose their frontbench in Parliament.⁴² Obviously, this was naïve: the existence of the PLP failed to stop backbenchers from voicing complaints about the party line inside Parliament, on television and in the columns of daily newspapers – a trend which certainly continued into the 1990s as the PLP failed to contain divisions within Labour over the prospect of military intervention in the former Yugoslavia.⁴³

This study also constructs a detailed account of foreign policy activism and intra-Left debate during the 1990s. It draws on the papers of the interventionist Labour MP, Andrew Faulds, who collected extensive interventionist agitprop from groups like the Alliance to Defend Bosnia-Herzegovina (ADBH) and Labour Friends of Bosnia before he retired from Parliament in 1997.⁴⁴ Other collections include the papers of Jill Craigie, the interventionist feminist activist and documentary maker, alongside the records of the anti-interventionist Labour Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (Labour CND), together providing a rich base of material pertaining to the competing activism surrounding Yugoslavia's disintegration.⁴⁵ Further insights are drawn from the diaries of Tony Benn, MP, the veteran Labour backbencher who reflected on Yugoslavia's disintegration in real time and was actively involved with the Labour CND, documenting his role in anti-interventionist activism in considerable detail.⁴⁶

Given that lobbies intending on persuading Parliamentarians and the public developed on both sides of the intervention debate, public communications – especially from left-wing newspapers such as the Labour centre-Left affiliated Tribune, The New Statesman, and The Guardian – are also key sources. Smaller publications from revolutionary and far-Left groups like the Socialist Workers Party

⁴² Stuart, 'Managing the Poor Bloody Infantry', p. 402.

⁴³ Noted in *Ibid*, p. 403.

⁴⁴ 'Faulds; Andrew Matthew William (1923–2000); Politician and Actor', FAULDS.

⁴⁵ London, LSE, 'The Jill Craigie Archives, c.1800–c.1999', 7JCC; Warwick, Modern Records Centre (MRC), 'Labour Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, 1984–2000', MSS.483; Leeds, Special Collections, Feminist Archive North, 'Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament', FAN/HJ/CND.

⁴⁶ Tony Benn, *Free at Last: Diaries 1991–2001*, ed. by Ruth Winstone (Hutchinson, 2002).

(SWP), the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL), the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) will also provide a window into lesser-known schisms which developed on the fringes of left-wing politics in response to the collapse of Yugoslavia.

The study begins by exploring the Left's engagement with the Bosnian War, 1992–95, as this is where existing empirical coverage is at its weakest. The first chapter scrutinises the motivations behind Labour's response to the crisis, situating its engagement with the war within the *long durée* of the party's international thinking. It argues that the Bosnian War challenged Labour's multilateralist identity, which – alongside the tense international and domestic dynamics which constrained Britain's response – forced the leaderships of John Smith and Tony Blair to develop a limited form of interventionism. Signalling that the party would support the use of force to prevent humanitarian disaster, this was an important precursor to the fully-fledged interventionist philosophy that 'New' Labour developed in the following years.

The second chapter shifts focus to the realignment of the Left on military intervention. It outlines how the Bosnian War prompted the development of an international cosmopolitan interventionist coalition alongside exploring the pushback against its ideas from others on the Left. This realignment is situated within the broader context of globalisation, the end of the Cold War, and the Left's domestic crisis. It argues that the Bosnian War was a prism through which left-wingers on both sides of the intervention debate defined themselves. It became an object of projection and insight into the changing ideological landscape on the Left as interventionists saw in the Bosnian Muslims their own cosmopolitan ideals, while anti-interventionists viewed the Serbs as anti-imperialists fighting Western domination.

Building on the previous chapters' work on globalisation and the realignment of the Left prompted by the wars in the former Yugoslavia, the final chapter engages with 'New' Labour's interventionism in practice, framing OAF as the zenith of cosmopolitan interventionism. It charts the course of the Labour leadership's interventionist turn between 1995–99 and shows that the embrace of globalisation and machismo post-imperial leadership came to characterise 'New' Labour's international thinking. Finally, it establishes the longevity of OAF, especially in relation to Blair's more

controversial interventions in Afghanistan, 2001–2014, and Iraq, 2003–2011, reflecting on the contrasting ways in which OAF was incorporated into the Left’s internationalist historical memory.

Chapter One: The Labour Party and Military Intervention During the Collapse of Yugoslavia, 1991–95

The collapse of Yugoslavia came at distinct low point for the Labour Party and the British Left. In April 1992 – the same month that the newly internationally recognised Bosnia-Herzegovina descended into violent conflict – Labour lost its fourth General Election in a row since 1979 to John Major’s Conservative leadership.⁴⁷ Reeling from this shock defeat, and adjusting to its new leader, John Smith, Labour was forced to reckon with this growing European crisis which would come to cause significant concern and anxiety within the British public and the PLP. It was not the first time in the 1990s that the party would wrestle with the use of force: during 1990–91, the leadership of Neil Kinnock had supported the Conservative government in committing British troops to the Gulf War, rolling back the invasion of Kuwait by the leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein.⁴⁸ But while this was a defining moment in the emerging post-Cold War world, Yugoslavia’s collapse would bring the threat posed by nationalism and aggression closer to home in Europe.⁴⁹ Despite initial scepticism toward armed intervention, by 1995 when a fragile peace was settled in Bosnia, an increasingly interventionist consensus had been forged across the continent, the United States, and crucially to this study, within the British Left.⁵⁰

Over the course of the Bosnian War, April 1992 to November 1995, Labour developed a limited interventionist policy, holding that force was necessary to prevent atrocities so long as it had the backing of the UN Security Council (UNSC), the most senior policy organ of the UN. While this view was not motivated by the idealistic interventionism which would come to characterise ‘New’ Labour’s international thinking once it came into government in 1997, it was nonetheless a historiographically overlooked step towards a more assertive position, and thus, a significant moment in Labour’s foreign

⁴⁷ Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, third edn. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 235.

⁴⁸ Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars*, pp. 20–21.

⁴⁹ A view which came to be expressed by the Labour leadership, see: Tony Barber, ‘Saving Sarajevo / Interview: “A Complete Failure of Political Will”: Jack Cunningham MP tells Tony Barber Why the EC is Most to Blame’, *The Independent*, 29 July 1993

<<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/saving-sarajevo-interview-a-complete-failure-of-political-will-jack-cunningham-mp-tells-tony-barber-why-the-ec-is-most-to-blame-1487921.html>>

[Accessed 10 March 2025].

⁵⁰ McCourt, ‘Embracing’.

policy trajectory. This chapter will first establish chronology, outlining Labour's response to the crisis, before its final portion accounts for the leaderships' evolving positions on the use of force. It will situate Labour's changing policy towards the Bosnian War within the party's history of engagement with international issues and by examining the role of domestic political factors – especially how the Smith (1992–94) and Blair (1994–95) leaderships responded to media and backbench pressure to take tougher interventionist action.

Tracking Labour's Response, 1991–95

The collapse of Yugoslavia attracted little attention from Neil Kinnock, who led the Labour Party until its defeat in the General Election of April 1992. It was not discussed in the PLP or the Shadow Cabinet during the crucial period of Slovenia, Croatia and eventually, Bosnia's secession from Yugoslavia during from the Summer of 1991 onward. His leadership accepted the view of the Conservative government which Junior Minister, Douglas Hogg, made clear in Parliament on 14 October 1991 following Croatia's unilateral secession: 'the only solution that can last is a political one' and Britain would not intervene with armed force.⁵¹ Both frontbenches framed the war as a 'civil war' and the Labour leadership accepted the Conservative view of maintaining the UN imposed arms embargo on all sides.⁵² This fundamental framing was readily applied to the incoming Bosnian War and did not change from 1991–95 across three successive Labour leaderships.⁵³

Following the General Election defeat in April 1992, Kinnock was replaced as party leader by John Smith, a pragmatist with a lawyer's background.⁵⁴ Bosnia declared independence from Yugoslavia at the beginning of that March following a controversial referendum in February, boycotted by its Bosnian Serb minority. On 7

⁵¹ Douglas Hogg and Gerald Kaufmann in: 'Yugoslavia', HC Deb, 14 October 1991, 196, cc. 40–47.

⁵² Kaufman, *Ibid.*, c. 41; George Robertson, 'Croatia', HC Deb 12 December 1991, 200, cc.1163–64.

⁵³ Support for arms embargo and UN effort reiterated in: PHM, 1330-PM, Jack Cunningham, 'Minutes of the Parliamentary Labour Party, 1992/1993 Session, Minutes of a Meeting of the PLP', 18 November 1992 (*Microform Academic Publishers*, 2005), item 86; Jack Cunningham, 'Minutes of a Meeting of the PLP', 21 April 1993, item 173; Robin Cook, 'Bosnia', HC Deb 19 July 1995, 263, cc. 1740–84 (cc. 1749–50).

⁵⁴ Tam Dalyell, 'A Life in Focus: John Smith, Labour Leader, 1992 to 1994', *Independent*, 20 January 2019 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/lifeinfocus/john-smith-labour-leader-politics-death-obituary-kinnock-blair-a8732851.html>> [Accessed 15 August 2025]

April, only two days before the General Election, the European Community (precursor to the European Union) and the United States recognised the new state's sovereignty as a full-scale war began between the recognised government of Alija Izetbegovic and a breakaway Bosnian Serb entity, the Republika Srpska.⁵⁵

Susan Woodward argued that recognition trapped the international community into a vice of its own making, as it turned a civil war within Yugoslavia's former borders into an international war of aggression against new sovereign states as Serbia backed the Bosnian Serb minority in its struggle for an additional breakaway state.⁵⁶ This contradiction caused a serious 'trans-Atlantic rift' to develop during the war between the divergent positions of the largely non-interventionist Britain and Bill Clinton's US government which largely believed that it was characterised by Serbian aggression.⁵⁷ Those who favoured the 'civil war' frame were much more likely to favour diplomatic partition of Bosnia between Croat (twelve per cent of population), Serb (thirty-one per cent) and Muslim (fourty-four per cent) communities, whereas those on the 'war of aggression' side were more inclined to believe that a unitary, multi-ethnic Bosnia could be salvaged with armed intervention through lifting the arms embargo and pursuing air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs (known as 'lift and strike').⁵⁸

This tense international dynamic constrained Labour's response to the war as a growing interventionist coalition in the party sided with the American government against their own in support of lift and strike, catching the Smith leadership off guard. As the Junior Minister, John Denham, recalled when he resigned from Tony Blair's government over the Iraq War in 2003, he would:

⁵⁵ For an overview, see: Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War* (Brookings Institution, 1995), pp. 273–332.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

⁵⁷ Simms, *Unfinest Hour*, pp. 131–32.

⁵⁸ For an overview of this debate see: Christine Gray, 'Bosnia and Herzegovina: Civil War or Inter-State Conflict? Characterization and Consequences', *The British Year Book of International Law*, 67.1 (1997), pp. 155–97; Matjaž Klemenčič, 'The International Community and the FRY/Belligerents, 1991–1997', in *Confronting the Yugoslav Controversies: A Scholars' Initiative*, ed. by Charles Ingrao and Thomas Emmert (Purdue, 2009), pp. 154–201 (p. 176); Phythian, *The Labour Party*, p. 111; for the demographic statistics see: 'Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1992–1995', *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* (2013) <<https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/countries/bosnia-herzegovina/1992-1995>> [Accessed 15 September 2025].

Never forget the surprised and bemused expression on John Smith's face when some twenty newly elected Labour Members of Parliament went to see him to demand Labour support for a foreign war [in Bosnia].⁵⁹

In the war's early months, Labour's Europe spokesperson, George Robertson (later Blair's Defence Secretary from 1997), doubled down against this view in the left-wing press. He told the interventionist *Tribune* in August 1992 that the international community was 'impotent' to stop the war.⁶⁰ Only a few months later, on 16 November 1992, the Labour leadership boycotted the only motion on the adjournment (Parliamentary vote) concerning the conflict in Bosnia, called by the Liberal Democrats, who took a more interventionist view than either Labour or the Conservatives.⁶¹ Clearly, the leadership's sense of impotence was at least partially manufactured by its own choice to evade discussing the conflict. George Galloway – a Labour MP at the time – suggested this was a party-political jab at the Liberal Democrats who had failed to support an earlier Labour adjournment debate on coal mine closures, and evidence from the shadow cabinet corroborates this: in October, it concluded that the Liberal Democrats 'must not be allowed' to hold their debate.⁶² Complicating matters, and sending a mixed signal to the PLP was that, two days following the debate, Smith allowed the first meeting of the PLP under his leadership to debate an interventionist motion submitted by backbencher, Max Madden, calling for 'safe havens' and a defence of a single, multi-ethnic Bosnia.⁶³ Beyond narrow party-political considerations, it is difficult to explain why Smith avoided discussing the Bosnian War in public while letting the PLP debate it privately.

The first and only substantial change in Labour policy came on 17 April 1993 when John Smith called on the UNSC to deliver an ultimatum to the Bosnian Serbs: sign the most recent diplomatic offer, the Vance-Owen Peace Plan (VOPP), or face NATO air strikes.⁶⁴ VOPP was a joint UN-EC initiative introduced by British mediator, Lord

⁵⁹ John Denham, 'Iraq', HC Deb 18 March 2003, 239, cc. 761–912 (c. 798).

⁶⁰ Robertson quoted in: Caroline Rees, 'No Military Intervention in Bosnia, Say Labour', *Tribune*, 21 August 1992, p.3.

⁶¹ Noted by: Carole Hodge, *Britain and the Balkans* (Routledge, 2010), p. 58.

⁶² PHM, 1330-SC, 'Minutes of the Parliamentary Labour Party Shadow Cabinet, 1991/1992 Session, Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee', 21 October 1992, (*Microform Academic Publishers*, 2005), item 15; George Galloway cited in: Hodge, *Ibid.*, pp. 58–59.

⁶³ PHM, 'Minutes of a Meeting of the PLP', 18 November 1992, item 86.

⁶⁴ Stephen Bates, 'Hurd Sticks to Sanctions Line', *Guardian*, 17 April 1993, p.10.

David Owen, and American diplomat, Cyrus Vance, which was presented to Bosnian, Serb, and Croat leaders in February 1993. It proposed to partition the Bosnian state along confessional lines, guaranteeing the Muslim population a 'reservation' in central Bosnia, offering the Bosnian-Croats a generous settlement, while failing to meet the demands of the Bosnian Serb leadership to link up with Serbia proper.⁶⁵ The government had welcomed VOPP, but when Smith announced his ultimatum, it joined pro-lift and strike interventionists in arguing that air strikes alone were unlikely to be effective.⁶⁶ Regardless, Labour never saw its proposed ultimatum come to fruition as VOPP collapsed in May following its rejection by the Bosnian Serb Parliament. Subsequently, the international community made no attempt to salvage it.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the ultimatum was a significant moment in Labour's foreign policy history: it broke its consensus with the government on the Bosnian War and it was the first indication from a Labour leadership of the tougher interventionist philosophy which it would develop over the course of 1991–99.

The international context of Labour's ultimatum was the further degeneration of the Bosnian War during the Spring and Summer of 1993. When VOPP was presented to the belligerents it was not intended to be imposed by force, so the Bosnian Serbs responded by going on the offensive in Eastern Bosnia in April to shore up diplomatic leverage.⁶⁸ This offensive led to the town, Srebrenica, being designated as a 'safe area' by the UNSC on 16 April 1993 as it was nearly overrun, entirely cut off from Bosnian government troops, and overcrowded with Bosnian Muslim refugees who had been expelled by the Bosnian Serbs from surrounding areas.⁶⁹ The 'safe area' was to be protected by the multilateral peacekeeping effort, the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), established by a UNSC Resolution in February 1992.⁷⁰ In similar

⁶⁵ Quote from: FAULDS/3/1/4/2, 'Peace Proposals for Bosnia-Herzegovina: Research Paper no. 93/35', House of Commons Library, 23 March 1993, p.1–9; see also: Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*, revised edition (Penguin, 1997), pp. 276.

⁶⁶ Douglas Hurd, 'Bosnia', HC Deb, 19 April 1993, 223, cc. 21–36 (c.26); for critique, see: Yigai Chazan and Maggie O'Kane, 'NATO Air Strikes "Bound to Fail"', *Guardian*, 23 April 1993, p.7; 'A Lamentable Labour Performance on Bosnia', *Tribune*, 23 April 1993, p. 2; PHM, John Home Robertson, Mike Watson, Bernie Grant in 'Minutes of a Meeting of the PLP', 21 April 1993, item 173.

⁶⁷ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp. 276–88.

⁶⁸ 'Peace Proposals for Bosnia-Herzegovina', pp. 10–11.

⁶⁹ UN Security Council, S/RES/819, 16 April 1993.

⁷⁰ First established by UNSCR 743 to provide a buffer between the Croatian and Serbian militaries and to provide basic humanitarian protection of the Serbian minority in Croatia, UNPROFOR's mandate expanded throughout the Croatian and Bosnian Wars to include the protection of humanitarian

circumstances, the UNSC had created a ‘safe haven’ for Iraqi Kurds following the 1990–91 Gulf War, and both designations had similar underlying motivations: a regional refugee crisis, or potential humiliation for the UNSC, could be avoided by fixing refugees in place (in appalling conditions) under Western air cover.⁷¹ Both the Kurds in Iraq and the fate of Srebrenica had been the subject of significant international media coverage which no doubt shaped international policy and also surely contributed to Labour’s push for the ultimatum announced on the following day that Srebrenica received its designation.⁷²

When VOPP collapsed in May, the response of Britain, the US, and its European allies was to expand the number of ‘safe areas’ to six.⁷³ The fact that the international community had immediately disengaged from VOPP following its rejection led George Robertson to argue that the extension of the ‘safe areas’ was a ‘diplomatically phrased climbdown’ following Bosnian Serb refusal to sign the plan.⁷⁴ Labour’s Foreign Affairs spokesperson, Jack Cunningham, told the *Independent* that the policy effectively gave the green-light for a Serbian and Croatian ‘carve up’ of Bosnia, adding that that there had been ‘a complete failure of political will’ in Europe to send a message to likeminded nationalists elsewhere in the world that aggression should not be allowed to pay.⁷⁵ The leadership also prophetically warned that the UN should deploy eight-thousand additional personnel to defend the ‘safe areas’ if the policy was to be remotely workable – a warning which was tragically vindicated as the ‘safe areas’ began to fall in 1995,

convoys (UNSCR 770 and 776), and the ‘safe areas’, outlined in: Hodge, *Britain*, pp. 42, 54, 56–57; for the resolutions in question, see: UNSC, S/RES/743, 21 February 1992; UNSC, S/RES/770, 13 August 1992; UNSC, S/RES/776, 14 September 1992.

⁷¹ David Romano, ‘Safe Havens as Political Projects: The Case of Iraqi Kurdistan’, in *States-Within-States: Incipient Political Entities in the Post-Cold War Era*, ed. by Paul Kingston and Ian Spears (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 153–66 (p. 157); Kristy Siegfried, ‘Look Back and Learn: Safe Zones in Iraq and Bosnia’, *The New Humanitarian*, 15 March 2016

<<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2016/03/15/look-back-and-learn-safe-zones-iraq-and-bosnia>> [Accessed 9 September 2025].

⁷² For discussion of how media coverage shapes policy, see: Peter Viggo Jakobsen, ‘Focus on the CNN Effect Misses the Point: The Real Media Impact on Conflict Management is Invisible and Indirect’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 37.2 (2000), pp. 131–143, doi:10.1177/00223433000370020.

⁷³ Warren Christopher, ‘Announcement of the Joint Action Program in Bosnia’, *US Department of State Despatch*, 4.21, 24 May 1993

<<https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/dsptch8&div=184&id=&page=>>> [Accessed 7 April 2025].

⁷⁴ George Robertson, ‘Bosnia’, HC Deb 24 May 1993, 225, c. 571.

⁷⁵ Barber, ‘Saving Sarajevo’.

exposing just how ill-equipped UNPROFOR was to defend them all along.⁷⁶ Echoing this, the interventionist MP, Malcolm Wicks, warned in the following months that the consistent acceptance of aggression had left Bosnia's fate up to 'the good will of the Serb aggressors'.⁷⁷

The Labour leadership's position remained essentially the same until John Smith passed away in May 1994. It reiterated in Parliament and the shadow cabinet that air strikes were 'regrettably necessary', in contrast to a prevailing view in the Conservative leadership that the Bosnian government would need to 'accept military defeat when it stares them in the face'.⁷⁸ Following Smith's passing, the Labour Defence spokesperson, David Clark, reiterated in Parliament that 'if safe areas mean anything' they should be adequately protected to 'maintain the reputation of the United Nations and NATO'.⁷⁹ Across 1993 and 1994 Labour had clearly developed a form of limited interventionism and this rhetoric foreshadowed Tony Blair's in the build-up to OAF in 1999.⁸⁰ For example, when Blair spoke to the South African Parliament in January 1999, he claimed that 'when the international community agrees certain objectives and then fails to implement them, those that can act must'.⁸¹ Even upon assuming the Labour leadership during the Bosnian War in the Summer of 1994 following John Smith's death in May 1994, Blair continued his predecessor's pragmatic policy, as he told the shadow cabinet in June 1995 that Britain's objective should have been to 'avoid being sucked into fighting a Balkan war', while not 'caving-in to the Bosnian Serbs'.⁸² Contrasting the utopian tone which Blair deployed in 1999 to frame OAF as an act of

⁷⁶ For the leadership's view, see: Barber, 'Saving Sarajevo'; for critique of the 'safe areas' policy see: Michael Barutciski, 'Safe Areas in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Some Reflections and Tentative Conclusions', *Refuge*, 14.10 (1995), pp. 18–19; Calum Macdonald, HC Deb, 26 July 1993 vol. 229, cc. 837–42; George F. Will, 'A Dog in That Fight? The Secretary of State, A Sweet Man Sadly Miscast, Is Puzzled', *Newsweek*, 12 June 1995, p. 21.

⁷⁷ Malcolm Wicks, 'Bosnia, Appeasement and the Left', *Fabian Review*, 106.1 (1994), pp. 1–3.

⁷⁸ Jack Cunningham, 'Bosnia', HC Deb 25 April 1994, 242, c. 23; PHM, Jack Cunningham, 'Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee', 20 July 1994, item 176.c; for the Conservative view, see: Douglas Hogg, quoted in Jane Sharp, *Honest Broker or Perfidious Albion: British Policy in the Former Yugoslavia* (Institute for Public Policy Research, 1997) p. 45.

⁷⁹ David Clark in, 'Bosnia', HC Deb 21 November 1994, 250, cc. 341–48 (c. 342).

⁸⁰ Labour supported a NATO ultimatum to ease the shelling of Sarajevo in February 1994, see: Jack Cunningham, 'Air Strikes (Bosnia)', HC Deb 10 February 1994, 237, cc. 447–58 (cc. 448–49); And later called for strikes to be used to defend the Gorazde safe area in April 1994, see: HC Deb 25 April 1994, cc. 22–23.

⁸¹ Tony Blair, 'Speech to South African Parliament', 8 January 1999 cited in Matthew Jamison, 'Humanitarian Intervention Since 1990 and "Liberal Interventionism"', in *Humanitarian Intervention: A History*, ed. by Brendan Simms and David Trim (CUP, 2011), pp. 365–80 (p. 376).

⁸² PHM, Tony Blair, 'Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee', 7 June 1995, 139.a.

‘justice’ against ‘barbarity’, his initial thinking indicated a substantial degree of continuity from Smith.⁸³

Continuities aside, the context on the ground in Bosnia markedly changed during the Summer of 1995 which precipitated a seismic shift in the international response as UNPROFOR lost control over the situation and US leadership, through NATO, filled the void.⁸⁴ As McCourt argued, these developments provided the blueprint for the NATO intervention in 1999 and triggered a major shift in attitude towards the use of force for future interventions.⁸⁵ The first serious event in this evolving situation was a Croatian offensive in Western Slavonia in early May, 1995, which expelled its Serbian population and was condemned by both the government and the newly appointed Labour foreign affairs spokesperson (and later Foreign Secretary, 1997–2001), Robin Cook.⁸⁶ The military balance was finally changing against the Bosnian Serbs, but the surrounded Eastern ‘safe areas’ of Zepa, Goražde and Srebrenica grew increasingly vulnerable.⁸⁷ At this juncture, in June 1995, the international community faced the prospect of withdrawing UNPROFOR from the ‘safe areas’: UNPROFOR’s commander, the French General, Bernard Janvier, seemed to favour this option and the British government also wrestled with the idea, while the newly elected French President, Jacques Chirac, personally lobbied Clinton to take tougher action – a significant shift in French attitude, which before had been more aligned with cautious Britain.⁸⁸

Srebrenica fell between 6–11 July 1995 and the ensuing massacre was the first legally recognised genocide in Europe since the Second World War.⁸⁹ Labour’s position grew

⁸³ “‘It is Simply the Right Thing to Do’”, *Guardian*.

⁸⁴ McCourt, ‘Embracing’, pp. 252–55.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ George Packer, *Our Man: Richard Holbrooke and the End of the American Century*, second edn. (Vintage, 2019 [2020]), p. 306; ‘Bosnia’, HC Deb 3 May 1995, 259, cc. 325–34 (cc. 325–27); It was condemned across the EU and by Russia. The US issued also issued a half-hearted condemnation, see: Julian Borger and others, ‘Serb Missiles Spread Panic in Zagreb’, *Guardian*, 3 May 1995, p. 1.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁸⁸ For the shift in French attitudes see: Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (Basic Books, 2002), p. 393; Packer, *Our Man*, p. 311; McCourt, ‘Embracing’, p. 255; For an insight into how the ‘safe areas’ policy strained Britain’s alliances, see: Owen Bowcott and Caroline Davies, ‘Papers Reveal Anglo-French Distrust before Srebrenica Massacre’, *Guardian*, 31 December 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/dec/31/papers-reveal-anglo-french-distrust-before-srebrenica-massacre>> [Accessed 20 August 2025].

⁸⁹ ICTY, ‘Judgement Summary: Appeal Judgement Summary for Popović et al’, 30 January 2015 <https://www.icty.org/x/cases/popovic/acjug/en/150130_summary.pdf> [Accessed 24 August 2025].

significantly tougher in response: David Clark condemned this ‘outrageous act of aggression’ in the House of Commons, adding that the newly created Rapid Reaction Force close to Goražde should have been sent, alongside NATO air power, to defend it.⁹⁰ The following week, at Prime Minister’s Questions, Tony Blair, now Leader of the Opposition, argued that: ‘it is our duty to pursue all practical means to uphold the UN’s mandate and prevent further ethnic cleansing’.⁹¹ Robin Cook also penned a strongly worded condemnation of the international failure to protect Srebrenica from ‘genocide’ in *The Guardian*.⁹² However, the leadership’s position on the arms embargo did not change, as Cook reminded interventionist Labour backbenchers – and the similarly interventionist future Conservative leader, Ian Duncan Smith – that UNPROFOR would have to be withdrawn if it was lifted.⁹³ Days following the fall of Srebrenica, Zepa fell, leaving only Goražde standing with a small British contingent defending it. Writing in *Tribune*, the interventionist journalist and UN correspondent, Ian Williams, argued that this exposed the ‘flaccid impotence’ of the international community – the credibility of the UN was ‘terminally destroyed’.⁹⁴

Srebrenica must be viewed in light of the broader threat to the UN’s authority and credibility in the 1990s. During Smith’s leadership, Cunningham, especially, feared the consequences that failure in Bosnia would have for the UN’s eighteen new peace operations worldwide created between 1989 and 1994.⁹⁵ His fears were not unfounded as genocide under the UN’s watch occurred not just in Bosnia, but in Rwanda, 1994.⁹⁶ Cunningham took events in Rwanda more seriously than most in Britain, expressing ‘deep disappointment’ to the shadow cabinet at the lack of Parliamentary appetite to debate it and he accused the Speaker of the House of Commons of blocking urgent questions to the government on its handling of the crisis.⁹⁷ The leadership advocated for UN military force to end the genocide, though it took Cunningham until weeks into

⁹⁰ David Clark, ‘Bosnia’, HC Deb 12 July 1995, 263, cc. 947–67 (cc. 949–50).

⁹¹ Tony Blair, ‘Engagements’, HC Deb 18 July 1995, 263, cc. 1445–1451 (c. 1446); Echoed by Cook in Parliament the following day, see: Robin Cook, ‘Bosnia’, HC Deb 19 July 1995, 263, cc. 1740–84 (cc. 1746–47).

⁹² Robin Cook ‘Time for a Little Truth’, *Guardian*, 19 July 1995, p. 15.

⁹³ Ian Duncan Smith and Robin Cook, HC Deb 19 July 1995, c. 1749; Kate Hoey and Max Madden in ‘Bosnia’, HC Deb 12 July 1995, cc. 955–56, 965.

⁹⁴ Ian Williams, ‘Bosnia Betrayed’, *Tribune*, 28 July 1995, p. 1.

⁹⁵ Barber, ‘Saving Sarajevo’; Linda Melvern, *A People Betrayed, The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Zed, 2000 [2024]), p. 90.

⁹⁶ Melvern, *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ PHM, ‘Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee’, 4 May 1994, 124.b; ‘Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee’, 25 May 1994, 140.b; ‘Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee’, 20 July 1994, 176.e.

the massacres, 15 June 1994, to challenge the Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, on why an international force had yet to be deployed.⁹⁸ Regardless, Cunningham was certainly more attuned to the situation than Blair, who was preoccupied by his bid for the leadership during the genocide, despite his post-hoc regret that this ‘preventable’ disaster was allowed to happen: failure in Rwanda, he argued, shaped his attitudes towards his humanitarian interventions to come.⁹⁹

But it would be Srebrenica, not Rwanda, which changed the international ‘zeitgeist’ on the use of force.¹⁰⁰ On 21 July, 1995, a conference held in London established that an attack on Goražde would trigger an overwhelming NATO response, regardless of the threat to the peacekeepers, and Goražde never fell.¹⁰¹ The American diplomat, Anthony Lake, recalled that, in 1993, British officials were extraordinarily reluctant to use force, but that by the Summer of 1995, he found himself ‘walking through an open door’ when he pushed for a more assertive response.¹⁰² There was clearly a growing acquiescence to the need for further intervention within the British Government now that British troops in Goražde faced a similarly perilous situation to the Dutch contingent at Srebrenica.¹⁰³

The situation on the ground changed significantly once again the following month, when, during the Summer Parliamentary recess, on 4 August, a second Croatian offensive – Operation Storm – expelled the Serbian population of the Krajina region.¹⁰⁴ This was met with condemnation from both Labour and the Conservative

⁹⁸ Jack Cunningham, ‘Rwanda’, HC Deb 15 June 1994, 244, cc. 613–614 (c. 614); Melvern, *A People*, p. 276; A month before, the Junior Labour defence spokesperson, John Reid, called for the UN to ‘organise immediate deployment of military forces to try to end the genocide’, see: ‘The Army’, HC Deb 4 May 1994, 242, cc. 723–816 (c. 755).

⁹⁹ ‘Tony Blair: Rwandan Genocide was “Preventable”’, *BBC*, 7 April 2014 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-africa-26918573>> [Accessed 21 July 2025]; Blair, *A Journey*, p. 61.

¹⁰⁰ McCourt, ‘Embracing’, p. 256.

¹⁰¹ UN Secretary General, ‘Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35: The Fall of Srebrenica’ (1999), p. 89 <<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/372298?ln=en&v=pdf>> [Accessed 1 July 2025]; NATO Secretary General, Press Statement by the Secretary General Following North Atlantic Council Meeting on 25 July 1995’ <<https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1995/s950725a.htm>> [Accessed 20 July 2025].

¹⁰² Quoted in McCourt, ‘Embracing’, p. 254.

¹⁰³ Hodge, *Britain*, p. 140.

¹⁰⁴ UN Secretary General, ‘Report’, p. 93.

frontbenches.¹⁰⁵ Anti-interventionist Labour backbencher, Tony Benn, was especially appalled at the media, which he believed took ‘pleasure really that the Croats have done what the United Nations are not able to do’.¹⁰⁶ His characterisation was not entirely unfair: the interventionist Tribune newspaper had spent the entire war condemning Serb ethnic cleansing, yet welcomed the offensive because it turned the tide against the Bosnian Serbs.¹⁰⁷ Despite the fact that ethnic cleansing did take place, this argument had some truth. As George Packer argued, it was Storm which ended the Clinton administration’s three year ‘paralysis’ over how to respond to the Bosnian War.¹⁰⁸ With the military balance altered, the US could take the lead on the diplomatic ‘end game’.¹⁰⁹

Weeks later, on 28 August, a Bosnian Serb mortar shell landed in the Markale market place in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which had been under siege for the previous three years, killing thirty-seven people and prompting a NATO bombing campaign against Bosnian Serb targets.¹¹⁰ The Major government welcomed the strikes, but the Labour leadership was seemingly pre-occupied by its shadow cabinet elections and made no statement to the press.¹¹¹ As McCourt argued, there is little doubt that this NATO campaign was made possible because, over the course of the summer, the main sceptics of acting outside the UN – General Michael Rose, the British UNPROFOR commander, along with Douglas Hurd and Lord Owen – had all left their posts.¹¹² Fresh strikes came on 11 September, which John Major supported, despite admitting that he was not consulted by the US, while Blair, once again, was preoccupied with a communications disaster revolving around a leaked document the day before a speech to the Trade Union Congress.¹¹³ The culmination of the strikes and

¹⁰⁵ Michael Foot, ‘New Hope in the Balkans’, *Tribune*, 25 August 1995, p. 1; Robin Cook, ‘Former Yugoslavia’, HC Deb 22 November 1995, 267, cc. 659–71 (c. 661); five years later Cook called on the Croatian government to hand over documents on Operation Storm to the war crimes tribunal, see: Richard Norton-Taylor, ‘Cook Urges Croatia to Offer War Crimes Proof’, *Guardian*, 14 March 2000, p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Benn, *Free*, pp. 327–28.

¹⁰⁷ Foot, ‘New Hope’, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ George Packer, *Our Man*, p. 315.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ UN Secretary General, ‘Report’, p. 94.

¹¹¹ Ed Vulliamy, ‘Serbs Defy New NATO Air Strikes’, *Guardian*, 6 September 1995, p. 1; Rebecca Smithers, ‘Battle Begins for Post of Labour’s Chief Whip’, *Guardian*, 6 September 1995, p. 5.

¹¹² McCourt, ‘Embracing’, p. 255.

¹¹³ Seamus Milne, Lawrence Donegan and Michael White, ‘Blair Hit by New Row over Wages’, *Guardian*, p. 11 September 1995, p. 3; Patrick Wintour, ‘Leak Hits Blair on Eve of TUC Speech’,

the changing military balance forced the eventual signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in November 1995, which formally ended the Bosnian War.¹¹⁴ Highlighting what had been a significant shift in attitude on the Labour frontbench since the war began, Robin Cook warmly welcomed Dayton as a success of ‘international intervention’.¹¹⁵

Explaining Labour’s Foreign Policy, 1991–95

But what explained Labour’s increasingly interventionist line? And why was the leadership so adamant in its defence of the United Nations, even as it seemed to lose control on the ground as the war went on? To answer these questions, it is vital to first situate Labour’s engagement with the collapse of Yugoslavia within the context of its foreign policy history. Firstly, the United Nations had been at the core of the party’s ideological identity since its first operations in the 1950s.¹¹⁶ When the UNSC authorised the use of force for the first time to repel the North Korean attack on South Korea in June 1950, the Labour Government of Clement Attlee immediately supported the action.¹¹⁷ Six years later, the lack of UN authorisation for sending British troops into the Suez Crisis led Labour to oppose military action in the only instance of disagreement between government and opposition over the deployment of British troops in the twentieth century.¹¹⁸ Decades later, in 1990–91, Neil Kinnock made similar justifications for supporting the Gulf War that Smith and Blair’s leaderships later used to defend their Bosnia policy: he informed the shadow cabinet that ‘we should base our actions upon the principle of support for the UN and that aggression must not pay’, in a decision which caused fifty-five Labour MPs to vote against their leadership.¹¹⁹ This decision was significant for two major reasons. Firstly, it served as a reminder that Labour contained a distinctly ‘restrictionist’ faction – ‘the usual suspects’ – which would consistently oppose the use of force, no matter the

Guardian, 12 September 1995, p. 2; Seumus Milne and Patrick Wintour, ‘Secrecy Row Shakes Labour’, *Guardian*, 13 September 1995, p. 1; this preoccupied Blair’s media strategist, Alastair Campbell, completely, see: Campbell, *The Alastair Campbell Diaries: Volume One*, pp. 269–279.

¹¹⁴ UN Secretary General, ‘Report’, pp. 98–100.

¹¹⁵ HC Deb 22 November 1995, cc. 659–62.

¹¹⁶ Pythian, *The Labour Party*, p. 39.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 49–57.

¹¹⁹ Quote from: PHM, ‘Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee’, 5 December 1990, item 612; see also: Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars*, p. 21.

justification.¹²⁰ Secondly, it showed that Labour's deference in terms of its international thinking was, in fact, to the UN, and not, as the Tribune editor, Paul Anderson, suggested, emblematic of Labour's 'slavish adherence to the British government line'.¹²¹

Labour's multilateralism was largely a response to Britain's imperial decline. When debating the Bosnian War in the shadow cabinet in 1993, Jack Cunningham exclaimed that Labour was: 'the opposition in a medium sized power. The rationale that existed 50 years ago and gave Britain a permanent seat on the Security Council has gone'.¹²² For Cunningham, the loss of imperial military muscle came with the opportunity to reorient towards peaceful diplomacy backed by 'moral authority'.¹²³ This contrasted with what the scholar, Ian Linden, described as the 'macho post-imperialism' of the Conservatives who maintained that Britain was 'punching [...] above its weight' internationally.¹²⁴ Smith's Labour also sought to follow the consensus within the Party of European Socialists in the European Parliament, of which Labour MEPs were members; the lack of desire to intervene among Labour's European allies, especially in the first years of the war, certainly contributed to Labour's cautious position.¹²⁵ As a result of this cautious multilateralism, the Smith leadership ultimately felt powerless in the face of what it increasingly recognised as Serbian aggression. For instance, when VOPP broke down in May 1993, all Jack Cunningham had to say to the shadow cabinet was that 'maybe Serbia has got away with it' and that it was a 'sad story for the UN'.¹²⁶

Post-imperial Labour also looked to Europe and here there was both continuity and change between the Smith and Blair leaderships. The Kinnock and Smith leaderships rebranded Labour as the pro-European party – an attitude which Smith had held enthusiastically for decades, being one of only a few Labour MPs who defied the party

¹²⁰ Phythian, *The Labour Party*, pp. 96, 110, 120; the phrase 'the usual suspects' describes this faction of the Labour Left, including figures like Tony Benn, MP, Tam Dalyell, MP, Alice Mahon MP, and Jeremy Corbyn, MP, who opposed all military interventions, see: Unkovski-Korica, 'From the Cold War', p. 133.

¹²¹ Anderson and Mann, *Safety First*, pp. 349, 347.

¹²² PHM, 'Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee', 15 February 1993, item C. ii.

¹²³ PHM, Jack Cunningham, 'Minutes of a Meeting of the PLP', 2 February 1994, item 301.

¹²⁴ FAULDS 3/1/4/2, Ian Linden, 'Trading with the Devil', *Christian Socialist*, 158 (1995), p. 6.

¹²⁵ PHM, Jack Cunningham, 'Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee', 2 December 1992, item 59.c; *Ibid.*, 16 December 1992, item 69. b.

¹²⁶ PHM, Cunningham, 'Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee', 26 May 1993, item 185.

whip to vote in favour of joining the European Community in 1971.¹²⁷ Blair continued this trend, and while scholars have questioned the extent to which he had any history of interest in Europe, he nonetheless positioned himself as a Euro-ophile from 1995.¹²⁸ He told the Royal Institute for International Affairs in London on 5 April 1995 that Britain had a post-imperial burden to be a ‘major global player’, and that it was Britain’s ‘destiny’ to lead in Europe.¹²⁹ It will be shown in the final chapter how these basic instincts heavily contributed to the development of Blair’s interventionism in the years to come.

The second pillar of Labour’s post-imperial politics was Atlanticism.¹³⁰ This tradition can be traced back to Labour’s post-Second World War Foreign Secretary from 1945–51, Ernest Bevin, who played a crucial role in establishing the NATO alliance.¹³¹ Membership of NATO, the ‘special relationship’ and possession of nuclear weapons became, as Anne Deighton argued, the pillars of Britain’s ‘great power status’ and ‘none of these characteristics of British foreign policy have yet been seriously contested’ – except by the Benn-ite, ‘New Left’ tradition which flourished in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but never fully grasped power.¹³² Following this power struggle over Labour’s identity in the 1980s, Kinnock distanced himself from his former support for the pacifist Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament by pushing Labour towards a more moderate Atlanticist position, embracing NATO alongside his shadow foreign secretary, Gerald Kaufmann.¹³³ Even Labour sympathisers accepted that the party’s perceived weakness on Defence contributed to its General Election defeats in 1983 and 1987, causing the leadership to abandon any lingering semblance of anti-nuclear, anti-NATO radicalism from its agenda from 1987 onward.¹³⁴

¹²⁷ Mark Stuart, *John Smith: A Life* (Politico’s, 2005), p. 64.

¹²⁸ Julie Smith, ‘A Missed Opportunity? New Labour’s European policy 1997–2005’, *International Affairs* 81.4 (2005), pp. 703–72 (pp. 707–08).

¹²⁹ Tony Blair, Speech to the Royal Institute for International Affairs, London, 5 April 1995, in Blair, *New Britain*, p. 280; also claimed in: Tony Blair, Speech to *Time Magazine*, 30 November 1995, printed in Blair, *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹³⁰ Anne Deighton, ‘The Past in the Present: British Imperial Memories and the European Question’, in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe*, ed. by Jan-Werner Müller (CUP, 2009), pp. 100–20 (p. 112); Unkovski-Korica, ‘From the Cold War’.

¹³¹ Unkovski-Korica, *Ibid.*, p. 123; Anderson and Mann, *Safety First*, p. 332.

¹³² Quote from: Deighton, ‘The Past’, p. 112; echoed in: Unkovski-Korica, *Ibid.*, pp. 122–23; Anderson and Mann, *Ibid.*, pp. 333–34.

¹³³ Anderson and Mann, *Ibid.*, pp. 341–45.

¹³⁴ For left-wing critiques of Labour post-1987 see: John Lloyd, ‘How to Win in 1991’, *New Statesman*, 19 June 1987, p. 3; Ian Aitken, ‘The Double Fudge Factor on Disarmament’, *Guardian*, 22 June 1987,

The Bosnian War ultimately tested Labour because it was forced to navigate an international and domestic political dynamic that strained the central pillars of its international thinking. Most notably, the leadership was forced to contend with the unilateralist tone of the Clinton administration which significantly contributed to Labour's decision to back an ultimatum on air strikes on 17 April 1993. Only a few days before Smith's announcement, Clinton's special envoy, Reginald Bartholomew, threatened to unilaterally lift the UN-imposed arms embargo if the Bosnian Serbs failed to sign VOPP.¹³⁵ As was the historical norm, the leadership's priority was to maintain the UN's credibility, and thus it strongly opposed this prospect.¹³⁶ Clinton further strained Labour's Atlanticist loyalty when his administration was poised to unilaterally invade Haiti in July 1994. Cunningham argued in the shadow cabinet that even if an invasion was a 'regrettable necessity', the leadership could not support the action 'without a UN mandate'.¹³⁷ Therefore, Smith and Cunningham's multilateralist pragmatism clearly trumped their Atlanticism. However, this did not stop the left-wing anti-interventionist, Tony Benn, from instinctively – and incorrectly – assuming that the leadership's position on air strikes was yet further proof that 'the Labour leadership does whatever America wants'.¹³⁸

Labour's loyalty during the most crucial juncture of the war in the Spring of 1993 lay, instead, with the UN-EC envoy negotiating the Vance-Owen plan, Lord Owen. The Smith leadership had strongly supported his plan from its inception and pushed for the air strikes ultimatum as a means of enforcing it without resorting to lifting the

p. 21; Labour's shift to the Right post-1987 outlined in: Anderson and Mann, *Safety First*, pp. 343–47; Joanna Spear, 'The Labour Party and Foreign Policy', in *The Changing Labour Party*, ed. by Joanna Spear and Martin Smith (Routledge, 1992), pp. 185–200 (pp. 185–197).

¹³⁵ Colin Brown, 'Government Gives Ground Over Air Strikes', *The Independent*, 15 April 1993 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/government-gives-ground-over-air-strikes-thatcher-s-criticisms-of-bosnia-policy-strike-a-chord-as-serbs-resume-shelling-of-srebrenica-1455261.html>> [Accessed 12 July 2025].

¹³⁶ PHM, Jack Cunningham, 'Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee', 21 April 1993, item 154.a; it was publicly reiterated that any force must be UNSC authorised, see: 'On the Record: Jack Cunningham Interview', Recorded from Transmission BBC 1, 2 May 1993 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/otr/intext92-93/Cunningham2.5.93.html>> [Accessed 20 May 2025]; Jack Cunningham, 'Bosnia', HC Deb 19 April 1993, c. 24.

¹³⁷ PHM, Jack Cunningham, 'Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee', 20 July 1994, item 176.d.

¹³⁸ *Benn, Free*, p.170

arms embargo and withdrawing UNPROFOR.¹³⁹ In fact, Labour's announcement to support an ultimatum was not an original policy, and reflected Owen's calls for strikes and an ultimatum as early as August 1992.¹⁴⁰ Jack Cunningham had also been extensively in conversation with Owen over the same weekend that Smith announced his air strikes policy and believed him to be significantly 'better informed' than Clinton on the situation.¹⁴¹ Cunningham's trust of Owen was, perhaps, surprising. Owen had previously been a Labour Foreign Secretary, only to split from the party in 1981 as part of the 'gang of four' which formed the short-lived Social Democratic Party.¹⁴² Jack Cunningham euphemistically maintained that Owen was 'not always my favourite person', but nonetheless backed his 'outstanding attempt' to secure peace.¹⁴³ Clearly, by April 1993, domestic rivalries were subordinate to the leadership's desire to definitively pacify the Bosnia issue.

Mediating the 'trans-Atlantic rift' with the party's multilateral commitments also intersected with the leadership's need to manage rifts within the party. Throughout 1992–94 Smith faced particular pressure from the Tribune newspaper, a growing chorus of his backbenchers surrounding the Labour Friends of Bosnia Parliamentary group, and the former Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, to support more extreme interventionist measures.¹⁴⁴ This led the scholar, Mark Phythian, to suggest that Smith's policy on air strikes was moulded by backbench pressure, but the evidence for this is not clear-cut.¹⁴⁵ Interventionist pressure arguably peaked when, on 17 April

¹³⁹ Support for VOPP first expressed in shadow cabinet: PHM, Jack Cunningham, 'Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Parliamentary Committee', 15 February 1993, item C. II; Labour's strategy on air strikes, the arms embargo and the UN effort outlined days following Smith's ultimatum announcement: 'Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee', 21 April 1993, 154.a.

¹⁴⁰ David Owen, 'When It is Right to Fight', *The Times*, 4 August 1992, p. 10; Ian Black, 'Owen Backs Air Strikes', *Guardian*, 17 April 1993, p. 10.

¹⁴¹ PHM, Jack Cunningham, 'Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee', 21 April 1993, item 154.a.

¹⁴² Dean Blackburn, 'Facing the Future? David Owen and Social Democracy in the 1980s and Beyond' *Parliamentary Affairs*, 64.4 (2011), pp. 634–51, doi:10.1093/pa/gsr015.

¹⁴³ Jack Cunningham, 'Bosnia', HC Deb 29 April 1993, v. 223, cc.1167-248 (c.1177); Cunningham also praised Owen on the radio: Cunningham, 'On the Record'.

¹⁴⁴ 'A Lamentable Labour Performance', *Tribune*, p. 2; Labour Friends of Bosnia had roughly fifty members, see: *Socialist Campaign Group News*, October 1995, p. 8, cited by Boris Kagarlitsky, *The Twilight of Globalization: Property, State and Capitalism* (Pluto, 1999), p. 98; 120 MPs, mostly Labour, demanded that Britain defend 'the existence of Bosnia as a multi-national, multi-cultural state', see: 'Next Steps in Bosnia', EDM 670, 23 February 1994; 54 MPs, mostly Labour, demanded 'an entirely new strategy to provide all necessary military support to the Bosnian Government', see: 'Government Policy on Bosnia', EDM 147, 29 November 1994; for Thatcher's interventionist position see: Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 'TV Interview for BBC (Attacks British Policy Towards Bosnia)', *Thatcher Archive*, 13 April 1993 <<https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110821>> [Accessed 18 May 2025].

¹⁴⁵ Phythian, *The Labour Party*, p. 117.

1993 (the same day that Smith announced support for his air strikes ultimatum) seventeen Labour backbenchers published an open letter in *The Guardian* calling for 'lift and strike'.¹⁴⁶ The PLP meeting of 21 April was hastily turned over from a discussion of electoral reform to discuss Smith's statement in support of air strikes and the leadership lectured the insubordinates. Cunningham described the prospect of lifting the arms embargo as 'absurd' while reminding the PLP that 'the leadership does not need to be communicated with through the columns of newspapers'.¹⁴⁷ While the Smith leadership favoured open debate within the PLP, it would not tolerate public insubordination. Smith had already sacked Kate Hoey, MP, from his shadow cabinet in 1992 after she voted against European integration, and the journalists Paul Anderson and Nyta Mann argued that he reshuffled Michael Meacher, the shadow cabinet spokesperson for Overseas Development, in Autumn 1993 as a 'punishment' for his public interventionist advocacy.¹⁴⁸ Far from giving in to backbench pressure, the evidence suggests that Smith stuck to his position in spite of it.

That being said, while Smith, and later Blair, resisted calls to support lifting the arms embargo, the policy on strikes was broadly appreciated by the PLP, at least according to the interventionist, Max Madden's speech at the PLP meeting on 21 April 1993.¹⁴⁹ Anti-interventionist attempts to scupper the policy also failed: an emergency resolution opposing air strikes put forward by Tony Benn in April 1993 to Labour's senior policy making unit, the National Executive Committee, was rejected by a large majority.¹⁵⁰ Further indications of the general shift in the party mood towards accepting an interventionist response came in August 1995, when the only opposition to NATO's bombing campaign came from Tony Benn, Tam Dalyell, MP, and a small group of Labour backbenchers who unsuccessfully called for the recall of Parliament to debate it.¹⁵¹ Those who resolutely opposed all military intervention in the former Yugoslavia had dwindled to an insignificant voting bloc by the end of 1995.

¹⁴⁶ 'The Left's Duty to Act', *Guardian*, 17 April 1993, p. 22.

¹⁴⁷ PHM, 'Minutes of a Meeting of the PLP', 21 April 1993, item 173; also outlined by: Stuart, 'Managing the Poor Bloody Infantry', pp. 412–13.

¹⁴⁸ Stuart, *Ibid.*, p. 411; Anderson and Mann, *Safety First*, p. 349; For Meacher's advocacy, see: Michael Meacher, 'Time to Stop the Hand-Wringing', *Tribune*, 18 December 1992, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ PHM, Max Madden, 'Minutes of a Meeting of the PLP', 21 April 1993, item 173.

¹⁵⁰ Benn, *Free*, p. 172.

¹⁵¹ Rebecca Smithers, 'Labour MPs Ask for Recall of Parliament to Debate Crisis', *Guardian*, 31 August 1995, p. 8; Tony Benn and others, 'The Day they Dropped the Bombs', *Guardian*, 1 September 1995, p. 14.

When Tony Blair succeeded Smith as leader, he both led a party which was mostly willing to accept limited intervention and made a much more cogent effort than Smith to formulate a line which would make his leadership appear tougher than the government without altering the substance of Labour's policy. Ultimately, Blair's interest and skillset lay in political communications— or 'spin', which had been described by John Smith as a 'black art' that had 'taken over politics' – not in foreign policy, which he was largely ignorant of at the time.¹⁵² When seriously confronted by the Bosnian War for the first time before an emergency debate on the hostage taking of British peacekeepers on 31 May 1995, he confided in his media strategist, Alastair Campbell, that it was the 'mother of all nightmares'.¹⁵³ But despite his anxiety surrounding how to respond, his agreed strategy with Cook and Campbell of presenting the government's position, only in stronger language, may have worked at the debate.¹⁵⁴ His ally, Giles Radice, MP, claimed that he sounded 'more Prime Ministerial' than Major.¹⁵⁵ Ultimately, soundbites and rhetoric came naturally to Blair, as he had already cultivated a strong image during his previous role as home affairs spokesperson through his motto: 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime'.¹⁵⁶ When he challenged Major in the Commons on 31 May he superimposed this language onto Bosnia, framing it as a fight against Serbian 'blackmail'.¹⁵⁷ Blair and Cook also abandoned the constrained language which characterised Smith and Cunningham's leadership by going on the offensive. As UNPROFOR's mission became increasingly untenable, they pointed to the 'isolationist' tendency within the Conservative Parliamentary Party calling for the withdrawal of British troops, which Labour portrayed as tantamount to Britain shirking its international responsibilities.¹⁵⁸ In re-framing Labour policy around supporting and backing British troops, and

¹⁵² Smith, quoted by: Rentoul, *Tony*, p. 196; In his own words, Blair 'knew little' about 'contemporary foreign affairs' before becoming Prime Minister and 'the 1997 campaign was fought almost exclusively on a domestic policy basis', in Blair, *A Journey*, p. 224; this ignorance was also noted in: Short, *An Honourable Deception*, p. 76; Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p. 9.

¹⁵³ Campbell, *The Alastair Campbell Diaries, Volume One*, pp. 210–211.

¹⁵⁴ Strategy outlined in: Campbell, *The Alastair Campbell Diaries: Volume One*, p. 211; for the debate in question see: 'Bosnia', HC Deb, 31 May 1995, 260, cc. 999–1102.

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Pythian, *The Labour Party*, p. 118.

¹⁵⁶ Rentoul, *Tony*, p. 192.

¹⁵⁷ Tony Blair, HC Deb 31 May 1995, c. 1007.

¹⁵⁸ Emphasised in Tony Blair, Speech to Time Magazine, 30 November 1995, printed in Blair, *New Britain*, pp. 259–68 (p. 259); PHM, 'Minutes of a Meeting of the PLP', 7 June 1995, item 139.a; Blair, HC Deb 31 May, cc. 1007–09; Commitment to UN troops reiterated in: Robin Cook, HC Deb 19 July 1995, c. 1747.

emphasising national unity, Blair had turned an area of ignorance and apprehension into a strength.¹⁵⁹

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By the end of 1995, the collapse of Yugoslavia had posed a fundamental challenge to the Labour Party's international thinking and fomented a seismic shift in international attitudes towards the legitimate use of force for humanitarian ends, more broadly.¹⁶⁰ When the wars began, both major party leaderships believed it to be totally beyond the national interest to intervene with force to prevent ethnic cleansing; over the Bosnian War, this consensus changed. Faced with the impending collapse of the UN on the ground in the Summer of 1995, the US asserted control over the conflict. By this time, it had clearly degenerated to such a considerable degree that even the British government, which had adamantly opposed intervention throughout the war, acquiesced to the NATO bombing campaign that contributed to its end.¹⁶¹

But the Labour leaderships of Smith and Blair can be credited for being consistently a step ahead of the Conservative frontbench on the use of force during the Bosnian War, which was best exemplified by the decision to back air strikes in 1993. This chapter has shown that Labour's policy was more sophisticated than merely doing 'whatever America wants'.¹⁶² Nor was it designed solely to half-heartedly give way to increasingly interventionist sentiment in the party. The Smith and Blair leaderships' development of a limited interventionist policy was, in fact, the result of a pragmatic appraisal of the international and domestic situation. Therefore, this chapter has further elucidated how attitudes towards using force during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia began to change on the Labour frontbench and the Left before 'New' Labour came into government. In doing so, it argued that Labour's policy toward the Bosnian War was a significant, if largely overlooked, fulcrum in the party's foreign policy history.

¹⁵⁹ Blair, *Ibid.*; Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁰ McCourt, 'Embracing'.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 254; Power, *A Problem*, p. 398.

¹⁶² Quote from: Benn, *Free*, p. 170.

Chapter Two: The Bosnian War and the Rise of Cosmopolitan Interventionism

Attitudes towards the use of force also changed on the wider Left during the Bosnian War as figures on the Labour backbenches, and left-wingers beyond Westminster party politics became some of the most vocal advocates lobbying their colleagues, the press, and the major party leaderships to lift the arms embargo and defend the Bosnian state.¹⁶³ However, little is known about these interventionist activists, including what motivated them and what they represented as a force of the Left in the 1990s. This chapter shifts focus towards the debate on the Left during the Bosnian War. It shows how the growth of an interventionist coalition caused major schisms within the already crisis-ridden British Left, which in turn tangibly contributed to its organisational and ideological realignment in the 1990s. Widening its analysis to the further fringes of the British and European Left, this chapter demonstrates that these schisms were inextricably linked to broader divides on the Left over how to respond to the immediate aftermath of the Cold War and the realities of globalisation in the early 1990s. As such, they were emblematic of a wider struggle over the very identity of the Left.

First this chapter explores how the interventionist coalition developed as a product of the Left's sectarianism and tendency towards single-issue organisation which hampered its ability to become an effective political force before it found a political home in 'New' Labour. It then explains the realignment of the Left through the lens of globalisation, pitting cosmopolitan narratives against sceptical, anti-interventionist ones to show the ways in which the Left debated the collapse of Yugoslavia and who was principally responsible. Finally, it asks the question: 'Why Bosnia?', explaining why cosmopolitan-minded left-wingers found in the Bosnian Muslims a cause worth fighting for. It contends that the Bosnian War became a comparative node for the Left's internationalist historical memory as cosmopolitans situated the plight of the Bosnian Muslims within the Left's broader tradition of fighting fascism, racism, and apartheid.

¹⁶³ See: 'A Call to Lift the Arms Embargo Against Bosnia-Herzegovina', *Boston Review*, online (1993) <<https://30-let.mirovni-institut.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Boston-Review-Call-to-lift-embargo-BiH-1993.pdf>> [Accessed 14 May 2025]; 'The Left's Duty', *Guardian*, p. 22.

Sectarianism, Single-Issue Politics, and the Realignment of the Left

The scholars Smith and Worley argued that, by the 2000s, the extra-Parliamentary ‘far Left’ had prioritised ‘short-term political point-scoring’ over ‘sustainable party building’, specifically in reference to the anti-war and anti-globalisation movements.¹⁶⁴ Alliances formed in the wake of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, such as the Stop the War Coalition and George Galloway’s Respect Party struggled to be an effective political force owing, at least partially, to the ‘marriage that was based on opportunism’ between Islamic groups and the secular Left.¹⁶⁵ Interestingly, a decade earlier, when a coalition of activists mobilised, instead, to support military intervention in the former-Yugoslavia, it suffered from similar afflictions. Without a common political agenda, and divisive on the Left, the ‘strange bedfellows’ of the interventionist coalition were set back by characteristically left-wing infighting, thus presenting an overlooked case study of the limitations of left-wing single-issue organisation.¹⁶⁶

The interventionist coalition came about in the first place because of a series of organisational splits. The first, on the intellectual Left, created the Alliance to Defend Bosnia-Herzegovina (ADBH), which was, in many ways, the interventionists’ centre of gravity.¹⁶⁷ ADBH was formed following a split of the editorial board of the *New Left Review* (*NLR*) – a longstanding journal of the British Left – in 1993. Nineteen of twenty-seven of its editorial committee resigned in protest when they alleged *NLR*’s shareholders had encroached the editorial committee’s right to decide the journal’s line democratically.¹⁶⁸ Two of the editors who resigned were Quintin Hoare and

¹⁶⁴ Smith and Worley, *Against the Grain*, p. 13.

¹⁶⁵ Sarah Glynn, ‘Muslims and the Left: An English Case Study’, *Ethnicities*, 12.5 (2012), pp. 581–602 (p. 582), doi:10.1177/1468796811435315.

¹⁶⁶ For an exploration of this in an American context, see: Norman Podhoretz, ‘Strange Bedfellows: A Guide to the New Foreign-Policy Debates’, *Commentary* (1999), pp. 19–31.

¹⁶⁷ Supporters of ADBH included Labour MPs, Clare Short, Michael Meacher, Calum Macdonald, Kate Hoey and Malcom Wicks and the historians Noel Malcom and Mark Mazower, see: ‘Alliance to Defend Bosnia Herzegovina’, *Wake Up Europe* (2022) <<https://wakeupeurope.ba/shop/alliance-to-defend-bosnia-herzegovina/?lang=en>> [Accessed 10 May 2025].

¹⁶⁸ Legal secrecy surrounding the split means that most accounts are in blog posts and interviews, see: Chris Bertram, ‘Hoare on the Left on Yugoslavia’, *Crooked Timber* (2003) <<https://crookedtimber.org/2003/12/16/hoare-on-the-left-on-yugoslavia/>> [Accessed 30 May 2025]; Tariq Ali, ‘Neo-Liberalism and Protectorate States in the Post-Yugoslav Balkans’, *Counterpunch* (2008) <<https://www.counterpunch.org/2008/02/26/neo-liberalism-and-protectorate-states-in-the-post-yugoslav-balkans/>> [Accessed 10 May 2025].

Branka Magaš, and although this was not mentioned in their resignation statement, much of their reasoning stemmed from their divergent analysis of the unfolding situation in Yugoslavia.¹⁶⁹ Hoare was fluent in Serbo-Croat because of his profession as a literary translator, and Magaš, a British-Croatian, was writing a book about Yugoslavia's disintegration before the wars even began.¹⁷⁰ Hoare and Magaš were married, and their son, Marko Attila Hoare – now a historian of the region – joined his parents in their activism and criticised others on the Left for what he perceived as their apologia for Serbian nationalism.¹⁷¹ This led to personal attacks from others on the Left: Magaš was painted as a 'Croatian nationalist' and Marko Hoare – who was studying at Cambridge at the time – as emblematic of the intellectual Left's 'upper class arrogance'.¹⁷² Tariq Ali, another *NLR* editor, recalled in an interview that he was 'glad we got rid of' Magaš and Hoare, who had ultimately discarded their left-wing credentials in apology for Western imperialism.¹⁷³ By leaving *NLR* and forming ADBH, this family had severed ties with many of their former comrades and relegated themselves to single-issue advocacy.

This was emblematic of the Left's wider tendency toward ideological gatekeeping, and in relation to its engagement with the Bosnian War there was no better example than the ill-fated first months of the the Manchester-based aid group, Workers Aid for Bosnia (WafB). WafB was founded in 1993 with support from the Trade Union Congress, and both the Manchester Labour Party and branch of the National Union of Students.¹⁷⁴ The British trade unionist, Rob Myers, formed the organisation after receiving 'a series of letters' from a Serbian socialist pleading for British solidarity with

¹⁶⁹ Ali, *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ 'Quintin Hoare', *Lawrence Wishart*, n.d <<https://lwbooks.co.uk/person/quintin-hoare>> [Accessed 28 May 2025]; for Magaš' scholarly interest in the former Yugoslavia, see: Branka Magaš, 'The Destruction of Bosnia-Herzegovina', *New Left Review*, 196 (1992), pp. 102–12 (p. 103); Branka Magas, 'Letters: The Kosovo Question', *London Review of Books*, 12.6, online (1990) <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v12/n06/letters>> [Accessed 15 May 2025]; Branka Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking the Breakup, 1980–1990* (Verso, 1993).

¹⁷¹ Marko Atilla Hoare, 'On Bosnia and the Left', *Against the Current*, 57 (1995)

<<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/atc/2632.html>> [Accessed 28 May 2025].

¹⁷² Quote from: International Committee Fourth International, 'Marxism, Opportunism and the Balkan Crisis', *World Socialist Website*, 7 May 1994

<<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/1999/04/balp-m07.html>> [Accessed 16 September 2025]; echoed by: Michael Barratt-Brown, *The Yugoslav Tragedy: Lessons for Socialists* (Socialist Renewal, 1996), p. 17.

¹⁷³ Ali, 'Neo-Liberalism'.

¹⁷⁴ 'Manchester Prepares for Report Back Meeting', *Workers Press*, 23 October 1993, p. 1.

his proudly ‘multi-ethnic’ city of Tuzla under siege by Serb forces.¹⁷⁵ Myers noted he was inspired by Manchester’s similarly multi-ethnic character, and that recently arrived Bosnian refugees spurred much of the initial interest at the group’s first public meeting which attracted a surprisingly large attendance of two-hundred.¹⁷⁶ WafB’s solidarity was reciprocal: during the Miners’ Strike in 1984–85, Tuzla miners had donated a day’s pay once per month to British workers.¹⁷⁷ Its organisers did not come from an aid background and Myers was ‘pessimistic [...] especially given the state of British of trade unions’ – presumably referring to the decade of Thatcherism which had severely weakened their organisational capacity.¹⁷⁸ WafB was supported by fifty-one Parliamentarians, almost entirely Labour (including later Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn), in a 1994 Early Day Motion and Marko Hoare from ADBH worked as a translator for the group in 1995.¹⁷⁹ It made continuous missions to Bosnia and continued its operations beyond into the Kosovo War.¹⁸⁰ Clearly, WafB was an impressive feat of organisation and solidarity.

But what doomed the mission, according to Myers, was that it was dominated by two Trotskyite groups – the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) and the International Socialist Group (ISG) – who each wanted to play the role of intellectual ‘vanguard’.¹⁸¹ This led WafB to split in two during its first aid convoy when the WRP refused to cooperate with the UN, claiming it was an ‘imperialist’ organisation supervising the partition of Bosnia by the ‘Stalinist-fascist, nationalist alliance of [Serbian President] Milosevic’.¹⁸² On the other hand, the ISG contingent was willing to cooperate, and it

¹⁷⁵ AngryWorkersWorld [Rob Myers pseudonym], ‘Internationalism Series – Some Reflections on the Workers’ Aid to Bosnia Campaign’, *Libcom* (2020) <<https://libcom.org/article/internationalism-series-some-reflections-workers-aid-bosnia-campaign>> [Accessed 7 October 2024].

¹⁷⁶ Rob Myers in, ‘Taking Sides: The Story of the Workers Aid Convoys’, *Labournet TV*, (2020), 7:30–8:30 <<https://labournet.tv/en/videos/taking-sides-story-workers-aid-convoys>> [Accessed 27 May 2025].

¹⁷⁷ Moll, *Solidarity*, p. 18.

¹⁷⁸ Myers, ‘Taking Sides’, 6:30–6:45.

¹⁷⁹ ‘Workers Aid for Bosnia’, EDM 869, 15 March 1994; FAULDS/3/1/4/3, ‘Tuzla Trade Unions Greet Workers Aid for Bosnia and Appeal for International Solidarity’, *Bosnia Report*, 7 (1994), p. 4; Marko A. Hoare, ‘About’, *Greater Surbiton*, n.d <<https://greatersurbiton.wordpress.com>> [Accessed 10 May 2025].

¹⁸⁰ See the documentary film *Workers Aid for Kosova* dir. By Rachel Robertson, 1999 <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2175609/>> [Accessed 30 May 2025].

¹⁸¹ AngryWorkersWorld, ‘Internationalism Series’.

¹⁸² Quote from the WRP’s newspaper: Dot Gibson ‘The Split on the Convoy to Bosnia’, *Workers Press*, 4 December 1993, p. 5; echoed in: Peter Jeffries, ‘UN Shown as Tool of Ethnic Cleansing’, *Workers Press*, 10 April 1993, p. 8.

accused the WRP of 'hijacking' Workers Aid.¹⁸³ In turn the WRP chastised the ISG as 'centrists' and Serbian sympathisers.¹⁸⁴ Another rival Marxist group slammed the 'bourgeois' and 'reactionary' WRP in its newspaper because of its support from Labour MPs, ADBH and the Trade Union Congress.¹⁸⁵ But at least the convoy drivers for Workers Aid were doing more for their Bosnian comrades than sloganeering in their small Marxist newspapers. Workers Aid member, Mick Woods, summed up this characteristically left-wing issue in hindsight, criticising the schism-ing WRP: 'It's a damned site easier to play with slogans such as "arm the Bosnian resistance" than ensure the "rolling-convoy" had spare-parts'.¹⁸⁶ Following the split, the ISG's contingent, along with other European sub-organisations formed International Workers Aid (IWA), leading Rob Myers – who stayed with WAFB – to reflect that 'I think at that time we could and should have lived with the different perspectives in one campaign'.¹⁸⁷ Ultimately, the limited portion of the British Labour movement which tried to help besieged civilians found itself hindered by rivalry and internal tension, leading Woods to argue that: 'if the war in Bosnia was a test for the left, most of it failed.'¹⁸⁸

Even those who were unified around intervention were hampered by the unexpected alliances fostered by single issue politics, as observers noted that 'Left' and 'Right' seemed not to track with the divides on the use of force.¹⁸⁹ Amazingly, the former Labour leader, Michael Foot, and former Conservative Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, who fought a bitter General Election in 1983, became allied in their interventionist views.¹⁹⁰ On the other side, Labour Left figurehead, Tony Benn, MP, shared non-interventionist views with former Conservative Prime Minister, Edward Heath, while others on the Labour Left like Ken Livingstone, MP, and Clare Short, MP,

¹⁸³ 'Workers Aid and Internationalism', *Workers Press*, 20 November 1993, p. 2.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Quotes from: Eddie Ford, 'Who Are the Good Guys in Bosnia?', *Weekly Worker*, 10 August 1995 <<https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/106/who-are-the-good-guys-in-bosnia/>> [Accessed 16 May 2025]; echoed by: International Committee Fourth International, 'Marxism, Opportunism'.

¹⁸⁶ Mick Woods, 'A Balance Sheet of Solidarity', *Socialist Outlook* n.d <<http://www.labournet.net/so/2obosnia.html>> [Accessed 5 May 2025].

¹⁸⁷ AngryWorkersWorld, 'Internationalism Series'.

¹⁸⁸ Woods, 'A Balance Sheet of Solidarity'.

¹⁸⁹ This was striking enough to be noted by the Prime Minister at the time, see: John Major, *The Autobiography* (Harper Collins, 1999), pp. 535–36.

¹⁹⁰ Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 'TV Interview'; For Foot's interventionist position, see: Foot, 'New Hope', p. 1.

took up interventionism despite earlier opposition to the Gulf War, 1990–91.¹⁹¹ These alliances perplexed the interventionist Guardian journalist, Ed Vulliamy, who observed that ‘the very words left and right are melting into each other’.¹⁹²

Beyond Westminster, interventionists came from a similarly diverse array of countries and political inclinations, including the author of the controversial *Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie; billionaire philanthropist George Soros; German Green MEP, Eva Quistorp; editor of the Catholic journal *The Tablet*, historian and theologian Adrian Hastings; prominent rabbis; even the American organisation, Vietnam Veterans Against War: the list could go on.¹⁹³ This was not a group of people with a coherent political programme and solidarity efforts reflected this. It took until after the capture of Srebrenica in July 1995 for a coherent, multi-organisational ‘Bosnia Solidarity Campaign’ to form as a joint initiative of ADBH, WafB, the Muslim Solidarity Committee and the Jewish Socialist Group.¹⁹⁴ The group organised a twenty-four hour picket outside Downing Street and organised a march attended by a few thousand people in London on 22 July 1995, with speakers such as Michael Foot, Calum Macdonald, MP, Ed Vulliamy, and Branka Magaš.¹⁹⁵ A further march in Bradford was held on 26 August.¹⁹⁶ But despite the Campaign representing a broad cross section of the Left, it was not a major news item, nor a significant force with widespread appeal. Ultimately, the journalist (and later leader of the Canadian Liberal Party), Michael Ignatieff concluded that the interventionists failed because of the ‘collapse’ of a [left-wing] political project at home’ which ‘left internationalism without any of the institutional supports necessary to make it effective’ like political parties and trade

¹⁹¹ Major, *The Autobiography*, pp. 535–536; John Carvell, *Turn Again Livingstone* (Profile Books, 1999), pp. 240, 244; Short, *An Honourable Deception*, p. 33.

¹⁹² Ed Vulliamy, ‘For Whom Does the Bell Toll Now?’, *Guardian*, 15 July 1995, p. 23.

¹⁹³ LSE, JCC1/9, Proposed open letter to *The Times*, supported by Michael Ignatieff, George Soros and Salman Rushdie rallying against Serbian ‘genocide’, n.d; Michael Foot, Adrian Hastings and Eva Quistorp, among others, signed open letters such as: ‘Open Letter on Bosnia to the United Nations, President Clinton and the Congress’, *The Veteran*, 23.1 (1993), p. 12

<<https://www.vvaw.org/veteran/article/?id=3064>> [Accessed 25 May 2025]; LSE, FAULDS/3/1/4/3, Branka Magaš, ‘Viewpoint: A Deafening Silence’, *The Tablet*, 249.8082 (1995), p. 826; For Quistorp’s interventionist views, see: LSE, GP/4/1994/a, European Parliament Green Group, ‘Green Briefing on 13–17 September 1993 Plenary Session’, 8, September 1993, p. 3; Adrian Hastings spoke alongside Labour MPs and Ed Vulliamy at a pro-intervention rally in July 1995, see: “‘We Have to Stand and Take Sides’”, *Workers Press*, 29 July 1995, p. 4.

¹⁹⁴ LSE, FAULDS/3/1/4/3, Leaflet for ‘Bosnia Forum’, held on 9 September 1995; LSE, FAULDS/3/1/4/3, ‘Alliance News’, *Bosnia Report*, 11 (1995), p. 1.

¹⁹⁵ ‘Break the Arms Embargo: Stop the Rape of Bosnia’, *Workers Press*, 22 July 1995, p. 1; ‘Join with Non-Stop Bosnia Picket’, *Workers Press*, 29 July 1995, p. 1.

¹⁹⁶ LSE, FAULDS/3/1/4/3, Bosnia Solidarity Campaign, ‘Campaign News’, 26 August 1995.

unions.¹⁹⁷ It is difficult to disagree with his assessment that ‘the demand for intervention in Bosnia joined the doleful list of lost causes on the Left’.¹⁹⁸

The Bosnian War exposed the Left’s organisational crisis across the rest of Europe, too. As Cathleen Kantner, showed: ‘the same set of important frames and arguments’ surrounding military intervention dominated European news cycles throughout the 1990s contributing to a kind of ‘European public sphere’.¹⁹⁹ Unsurprisingly, similar interventionist movements cropped up across the continent where single-issue organisation was similarly ineffective. French philosopher-activists Bernard-Henry Lévy and André Glucksmann were prominent supporters of the ‘Europe Begins in Sarajevo’ list in the 1994 French European Parliament elections.²⁰⁰ The list was initially predicted twelve per cent of the vote, largely from defections from the centre-Left, Parti Socialiste (PS).²⁰¹ Lévy withdrew support from his own party a few days before the election, arguably because the PS leader, Michel Rocard, came out in opposition to the arms embargo: he had kept intervention in Bosnia on the agenda but had no wish to fight the election and the list then received under two per cent of the vote.²⁰² Without political representation, the interventionist movement remained a single-issue force with only the ability to raise awareness on a matter that was already dominating the news. This ultimately reflected Ignatieff’s scathing critique that the interventionist Left would rather make virtuous statements from the side-lines than do the hard work of party-building or offering a broader political program – ‘results were secondary’.²⁰³ But these difficulties of political organisation also indicated a realignment of the foreign policy debate – and more broadly, of the Left’s identity and

¹⁹⁷ Michael Ignatieff, ‘The Seductiveness of Moral Disgust’, *Social Research*, 71.3 (2004), 549–68 (p. 553)

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Cathleen Kantner ‘The European Public Sphere and the Debate about Humanitarian Military Interventions’, *European Security*, 23.4 (2014), pp. 409–29 (p. 416), doi:10.1080/09662839.2014.890595.

²⁰⁰ ‘Europe Starts in Sarajevo’, *Wake up Europe* (2022) <<https://wakeupeurope.ba/shop/europe-starts-in-sarajevo/?lang=en>> [Accessed 20 May 2025]; It inspired a similar list in Sweden when it joined the European Union in 1995: ‘Sarajevolistan’, *Wake Up Europe!* (2022) <<https://wakeupeurope.ba/shop/sarajevolistan/?lang=en>> [Accessed 22 May 2025].

²⁰¹ Philip Short, *Mitterrand: A Study in Ambiguity* (Random House, 2014), p. 550.

²⁰² ‘Europe Starts in Sarajevo’, *Wake up Europe*; ‘French Bosnia Group Quits European Race’, *The New York Times*, 31 May 1994 <<https://www.nytimes.com/1994/05/31/world/french-bosnia-group-quits-european-race.html>> [Accessed 2 June 2025]; Julien Nundy, ‘Philosophers Charge into Bosnia Fray’, *The Independent*, 28 May 1994 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/philosophers-charge-into-bosnia-fray-1439138.html>> [Accessed 20 May 2025].

²⁰³ Ignatieff, ‘The Seductiveness’, pp. 552.

organisational structure – which further prevented interventionists from offering a coherent programme.

Globalisation, ‘New Wars’, or New Imperialism?

What processes, then, drove this realignment of the Left? And why did parts of the Left adopt intervention while others rallied against it? First, the nature of warfare seemed to be changing. Some observers, including the academic, Mary Kaldor (who was a founding member of European Nuclear Disarmament, END), argued that the end of the Cold War brought about ‘New Wars’ arising from state collapse in the former Yugoslavia, the Caucasus, Somalia and Rwanda.²⁰⁴ Kaldor claimed she had this revelation when she visited Nagorno-Karabakh and the former Yugoslavia for the first time in 1992.²⁰⁵ She argued that these wars were characterised by ‘identity politics’, being fought between ‘cosmopolitans’ and those with ‘particularist’ tendencies which were ‘national, clan, religious or linguistic’.²⁰⁶ These conflicts also blurred the line between warfare and crime, perpetrators tended to primarily target civilian populations, and they were confused by the presence of international peacekeepers or NATO action – especially the Bosnian War, which Kaldor argued was ‘a laboratory in which experiments in the different ways of managing the new wars have taken place’.²⁰⁷ Crucially, for Kaldor, ‘New Wars’ meant that humanitarian protection – or ‘cosmopolitan law enforcement’ – ought to become a key objective of intervening parties: she formed the Helsinki Citizens Assembly (HCA) in the final years of the Cold War which took an interventionist view during the Bosnian War, clashing with the non-interventionism of END and the British CND.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, third edition (Polity Press, 2012); see also Herfried Münkler, *The New Wars* (Polity Press, 2005); Michael S. Drake, ‘Sociology and New Wars in the Era of Globalisation’, *Sociology Compass* 1.2 (2007): pp. 637–50, doi:10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00032.x; Martin Shaw, *The New Western Way of War*, (Polity, 2005).

²⁰⁵ Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, p. 2.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 7.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12; For an outline of the clash between END and CND, see: Shaw, *The Campaign*, chapter four; Martin Shaw agreed with the HCA’s line at the time, see: ‘Grasping the Nettle’, *New Statesman*, 15 January 1993, pp. 16–17.

Intrinsically tied to these developments was globalisation, which both drove these ‘New Wars’ and fundamentally restructured the world.²⁰⁹ On the one hand, globalisation brought about cosmopolitan opportunities for trans-national solidarity and ‘electronic empathy’ from media coverage of humanitarian crises abroad.²¹⁰ On the other hand, it led to the subjugation of domestic politics to international capitalism, and contributed to the destruction and marginalisation of the organised working class.²¹¹ Even Labour leader, John Smith, understood this challenge when he claimed that: ‘capital movements in Tokyo, New York and London can subvert the economic policies of nation states’.²¹² Globalisation advocates like Anthony Giddens – a major intellectual ally of ‘New’ Labour – emphasised that it was a holistic process which came with technological, social, and political risks and opportunities.²¹³ But sceptics would not acquiesce to international *laissez-faire* and maintained that the economic dimension held primacy over the others.²¹⁴ The resultant undermining of national borders by globalisation, which led Giddens to declare that national sovereignty had ‘lost much of its meaning’, was, therefore, interpreted by sceptics as an attack on states that resisted capitalism.²¹⁵ Globalisation also challenged the Left. For Boris Kagarlitsky, it was a dangerous companion to the ‘moral collapse’ of the European Left following the disintegration of the USSR. The radical ‘anti-imperialist’ solidarity movements of the 1960s and 1970s against American actions in the Cold War had been defining moments for the international Left, and while ‘a general “anti-imperial mood” remained’ on the 1990s Left, ‘no one could formulate a clear, positive programme’ in response to this significant international change.²¹⁶

Within the framework of globalisation and ‘imperialism’ we can understand the view on the anti-intervention far-Left that Yugoslavia’s collapse was aided by Western

²⁰⁹ Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, pp. 4–5.

²¹⁰ For ‘electronic empathy’ see: Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (Routledge, 1996), p. 121; Hannerz, ‘Two Faces of Cosmopolitanism’.

²¹¹ Kenan Malik, *Not So Black and White: A History of Race from White Supremacy to Identity Politics* (C. Hurst and Co, 2023), p. 273.

²¹² Quoted in: Shaw, *The Labour Party*, p. 173.

²¹³ Giddens, ‘Globalisation: The Runaway World’, pp. 7–8 <https://fondationlatsis.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/guest_1998.pdf> [Accessed 23 April 2025]; John Hinkson, ‘Third Way Politics and Social Theory: Anthony Giddens’ Critique of Globalisation’, *Arena*, 13 (1999), pp. 101–123, (p.102); Ulf Hannerz, ‘Two Faces’, pp. 201–02.

²¹⁴ Takis Fotopoulos, ‘Globalisation, The Reformist Left and the Anti-Globalisation “Movement”’, *Democracy and Nature*, 7.2 (2001), pp. 233–80 (p. 234), doi:10.1080/10855660120064592.

²¹⁵ Giddens, ‘The Rise and Fall of New Labour’; for critique see: Kiely, ‘Imperialism’.

²¹⁶ Kagarlitsky, *The Twilight*, p. 98.

interference.²¹⁷ This view was rooted in Vladimir Lenin's 1917 argument that 'imperialism' was a stage of capitalism where the 'oppression of the [Western] financial oligarchy' necessarily led to 'national oppression' and the desire for self-determination for those under colonial rule.²¹⁸ Sceptics of globalisation and intervention applied this understanding to the collapse of Yugoslavia, arguing that that financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund forced Yugoslavia to restructure its waning economy (pre-collapse) to integrate it into the Western neoliberal project.²¹⁹ The Serbian nationalists were resistant, and this was the principal reason they became the enemy of the West.²²⁰ Economic imperialism, they argued, was fundamentally intertwined with the United States' use of hard power throughout the decade: for many on the Left, American policy towards the Bosnian War and the subsequent intervention in Kosovo was viewed essentially as a 'War of NATO Expansion'.²²¹ The NATO bloc had enlarged to include Poland and many former Eastern bloc states in 1999, and it was argued that American oil interests in the Balkans coincided with a desire to control Central and Eastern Europe following the fall of the Soviet Union.²²² For the anti-interventionists, the West's response to the wars in the former Yugoslavia was far from humanitarian, instead being a calculated policy of aggression, bent on regional dominance and economic control.

Euroscepticism, anti-globalisation and anti-intervention went hand-in-hand as some on the Left blamed Germany's push to internationally recognise Slovenia and Croatia

²¹⁷ For this view see: Duncan Blackie, 'The United Nations and the Politics of Imperialism', *International Socialism* (1994) <<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/isj2/1994/isj2-063/blackie.htm>> [Accessed 16 September 2025]; James Petras and Steve Vieux, 'Bosnia and the Revival of US Hegemony', *NLR*, 218 (1996), pp. 3–25; Peter Gowan, 'The Twisted Road to Kosovo', *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, 62 (1999), pp. 17–36 <<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/labour-focus-eastern-europe/LFEE-62-1999.pdf>> [Accessed 1 June 2025].

²¹⁸ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Progress Publishers, 1963), transcribed for Lenin Internet Archive by Tim Delaney and Kevin Goins, 2008, 'Critique of Imperialism' section, para 6, <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/imperialism.pdf>> [Accessed 28 May 2025]; also noted in Bolton and Pitts, *Corbynism*, p. 80.

²¹⁹ Argued in: Hudson, *Breaking the South Slav Dream*, pp. 56–57; Parenti, *To Kill*, p. 18; Gowan, 'The Twisted Road', p. 19.

²²⁰ CND/1996/4, 'The Case Against Military Intervention in What was Yugoslavia: A Trade Union CND Pamphlet', n.d.; Parenti, *To Kill*, p. 18.

²²¹ Robin Blackburn, 'Kosovo: The War of NATO Expansion', *NLR*, 1/235 (1999), pp. 107–23; Rees, *Imperialism*, chapter one, under 'The Roots of US Strategy'; Petras and Vieux, 'Bosnia'.

²²² Rees, *Ibid.*

in 1991 for the violence that followed.²²³ This faction was also deeply sceptical of the Maastricht Treaty which created the European Union, especially its commitment ‘to safeguard the common values, fundamental and interests and independence of the Union [sic]’, which the CND interpreted as its desire ‘to protect the interests of the rich North in exploiting the poor South’.²²⁴ The sense of international foul play around European integration, globalisation and external interference enabled the anti-intervention Left to deflect blame from the nationalists who started the wars by framing them as a ‘Mess Made in the West’ to which there could be ‘No Western Solution’.²²⁵

This faction of the Left’s ‘knee-jerk anti-Western crusade’, ought to be situated within the broader history of the Left’s opportunistic support for nationalist movements – often which had little in common with its socialist objectives.²²⁶ And much like the Provisional Irish Republican Army and other groups internationally who resisted ‘the West’, Serbian nationalists were not ‘good socialists’ as interventionists pointed out at great frustration.²²⁷ Following the wars, Marko Hoare criticised the ‘Left revisionism’ of those who denied Serbian crimes because of their binary, ‘two-campist’ view of the world: the ‘imperialist’ West was assigned agency over its moral failings, yet nationalists in the Global South who were ‘on their side of the metaphysical global barricade’, had their actions excused as reflexive responses to Western imperialism –

²²³ There are numerous examples, see: MRC, MSS/483/9, Alice Mahon, ‘NATO Members Debate Bosnia’, *Socialist Campaign Group News*, June 1993; Leeds, FAN/HJ/CND/03/2, ‘US Blames Germany for Yugoslav Wars’, *Trade Union CND News*, August 1993, p. 3; Tony Benn, ‘Oppose the Despatch of Ground Troops to Bosnia’, *Socialist Campaign Group News*, June 1995, p. 8; Brown, *The Yugoslav Tragedy*, p. 38; for a refutation see: Daniele Conversi, ‘German Bashing and the Breakup of Yugoslavia’, *The Donald W. Treadgold Papers in Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies*, 16 (1998) <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/dab4b59c-3593-4eb5-af55-3007be96f46f/content> [Accessed 10 December 2024]; LSE, FAULDS/3/1/4/3, Noel Malcom, ‘Douglas Hurd’s Bosnian Waterloo’, *Bosnia Report*, 5 (1994), p. 6.

²²⁴ MRC, MSS/483/9, Marjorie Thompson and Carol Turner, ‘Briefing Paper: Defence Issues Within the Treaty of the European Union’, undated 1993; the correct wording from the Maastricht Treaty was ‘to safeguard the common values, fundamental interests and independence of the Union’, see: ‘Treaty on European Union’, *CVCE*, 7 February 1992, p. 95 <https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2002/4/9/2c2f2b85-14bb-4488-9ded-13f3cd04de05/publishable_en.pdf> [Accessed 3 December 2025].

²²⁵ Mick Hume, ‘Editorial: From the Gulf to Bosnia: No Western Solution’, *Living Marxism*, 47 (1992), pp. 4–5; Joan Phillips, ‘Bosnia: A Mess Made in the West’, *Living Marxism*, 56 (1993), pp. 20–22.

²²⁶ Quote from: Tony Taylor, *Denial: A History Betrayed* (Melbourne University Press, 2008), p. 168; critique echoed by: Smith and Worley, ‘Introduction’, p. 13; Martin Thomas, ‘The Left and Bosnia’, *Alliance for Workers Liberty* (2020), <<https://www.workersliberty.org/story/2020-09-09/left-and-bosnia>> [Accessed 21 May 2025].

²²⁷ Quote from: Wicks, ‘Bosnia’, p. 3; echoed by: Vulliamy, ‘For Whom’, p. 23; Marko A. Hoare, ‘Genocide in the former Yugoslavia: A Critique of Left Revisionism’s Denial’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 5.4 (2003), pp. 543–63 (pp. 546), doi:10.1080/1462352032000149495.

or outright fabrications.²²⁸ This is why the prominent American intellectuals Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (who had already denied the Cambodian Genocide in the 1970s because of Cambodia's hostile relationship to the US), alongside fringes of the British Left denied Serbian crimes like the Srebrenica massacre: American neo-conservatives supported the Bosnian Muslims so their story must have been fabricated.²²⁹ It is also what led Tony Benn to believe that the Markale Market place bombings in Sarajevo that precipitated NATO action in August 1995 might have been staged by the Bosnian Government to coax intervention.²³⁰ Blinded by their scepticism, these left-wingers fell into genocide denial and victim blaming.

However, some on the Left who supported armed struggle against colonial rule and considered themselves as 'anti-imperialists' vociferously supported what they viewed as Bosnian self-determination. The far-Left, Alliance for Workers Liberty, lobbied their anti-intervention comrades in favour of lifting the arms embargo on the Bosnian government – a view they framed as consistent with Marxist theory: Freidrich Engels himself argued that forcing a conquered people 'to forget their specific nationality [...] was nothing else but preaching to them submission to the yoke'.²³¹ The interventionist Labour MP, Clare Short, who later played a role in OAF as Tony Blair's Secretary of State for International Development, held similar views. In her memoir, published after she resigned from Tony Blair's cabinet over the 2003 invasion of Iraq, she wrote that despite viewing the use of force as a 'last resort', she had never been a pacifist and particularly supported de-colonial resistance.²³² But even the 'serious pacifist', Ed Vulliamy, became an interventionist during the Bosnian War and was active in the Bosnia Solidarity Campaign in 1995.²³³ Additionally, there was the public intellectual,

²²⁸ Hoare, *Ibid.*, pp. 547–549.

²²⁹ Taylor, *Denial*, p. 168; Wicks, 'Bosnia', p. 3; Hoare, *Ibid.*; Martin Thomas, 'Why Noam Chomsky, Tariq Ali, Arundhati Roy and their Co-Thinkers should Apologise over Mladic and Srebrenica', *Alliance for Workers Liberty* (2020), <<https://www.workersliberty.org/story/2020-09-09/left-and-bosnia>> [Accessed 20 April 2025]; For Cambodian genocide denial see: Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, 'Distortions at Fourth Hand', *The Nation*, 25 June 1977 quoted in Hoare, 'Genocide', p. 547.

²³⁰ Daniel Katz and Chris Reynolds, 'An Open Letter to Tony Benn: The Main Enemy is Serb Imperialism', *Workers Liberty*, 25 (1995), pp. 8–9.

²³¹ Quoted in Chris Reynolds, 'The Left and Bosnia', *Workers Liberty*, September 1995, p. 14; AWL attended the anti-interventionist Parliamentary Committee for Peace in the Balkans, established in 1993, to advocate lifting the arms embargo on 18 September 1995, see: Benn, *Free*, p. 334.

²³² Short, *An Honourable Deception*, p. 33.

²³³ Quoted in Ian Mayes, "'We Know What is Happening, We Cannot Walk Away'": How the Guardian Bore Witness to Horror in Former Yugoslavia', *Guardian*, 6 May 2025 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/06/we-know-what-is-happening-we-cannot-walk-away-how-the-guardian-bore-witness-to-horror-in-former-yugoslavia>> [Accessed 12 May 2025]; He spoke at the BSC's rally in July 1995, see: *Workers Press*, 29 July 1995, p. 4.

Christopher Hitchens, who had previously campaigned against the Vietnam War and the United States' operations in Cold War Latin America, but began his journey to self-confessed 'neo-conservatism' when he developed interventionist views during the Bosnian War.²³⁴ These examples illuminated a fundamental shift in the politics of the Left at this time as the polarities of the discourse moved towards loose camps based on attitudes towards intervention, globalisation, and how to respond to the 'New Wars' of the 1990s.²³⁵

A Rallying Cry for European Cosmopolitans?

Why did the Bosnian War, of all conflicts, spur this shift? After all, it was one of several serious wars in the 1990s, but 'became the focus of global and European attention' above the 'New Wars' in Cambodia, Angola, Nagorno-Karabakh and the Rwandan Genocide.²³⁶ Rwanda, specifically, was more severe in scale, yet too easily passed off by Western observers as just another episode of African civil warfare.²³⁷ For as much as interventionists argued that foreign policy should transcend strict understandings of the national interest, it was nonetheless true that the Bosnian War could only reach its level of significance because it was a war raging in the 'heart of Europe' – a fact reflected in the title of the interventionist documentary co-produced by ADBH members, Jill Craigie and Michael Foot, *Two Hours from London*.²³⁸

Bosnia's European character played a significant role in why the conflict mattered to European interventionists. Interventionist Labour MPs, Andrew Faulds and Calum Macdonald, especially, had a long history of pro-Europeanism – sometimes against

²³⁴ 'Christopher Hitchens: In Enemy Territory', *The Independent*, 22 September 2004 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/christopher-hitchens-in-enemy-territory-550522.html>> [Accessed 20 May 2025].

²³⁵ Argument also made in an American context in: Podhoretz, 'Strange Bedfellows'.

²³⁶ Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, p. 7.

²³⁷ White, Dean, *The Ignorant Bystander? Britain and the Rwandan Genocide of 1994* (Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 71–78.

²³⁸ For Bosnia as the 'heart of Europe', see: McKee, 'British Media Representation', p. 204; Claude Moisy, 'Myths of the Global Information Village', *Foreign Policy*, 107 (1997), pp. 78–87; Nicholas Hopkinson, *Humanitarian Intervention?* (Wilton Park Papers, 1996), pp. 28–29; *Two Hours from London*, dir. By Jill Craigie, 1995, <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0383021/>> [Accessed 30 May 1995]; Craigie joined ADBH in 1995, see: LSE, JCC/1/9, Peter Oakley, Letter to Jill Craigie, 13 June 1995.

the wishes of the party leadership.²³⁹ Interventionists conceptualised the Bosnian War as a battle between two visions of Europe: of democracy and tolerance against fascism, not as a war between rival ethnic groups.²⁴⁰ ‘How far is that from the clash of civilisations!’ Bernard-Henry Lévy later declared in rejection of Samuel Huntington’s thesis that post-Cold War conflicts would be based on inter-ethnic strife.²⁴¹ But this framing went beyond refuting the all-too-common trope that Yugoslavia collapsed under the weight of ‘ancient hatreds’, as also it offered a scathing critique of Europe’s recent dark history, and a bleak warning of its potential future.²⁴²

Ultimately, taking place at the same time as the fiftieth anniversary of the Second World War, the Bosnian War reminded interventionists of the fascistic history of the 1930s and 1940s that it swore to ‘Never Again’ repeat.²⁴³ Historical divides on the British Left over the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, which agreed the division of Poland between the USSR and Nazi Germany in 1939, and the Labour Party’s failure to support Spanish Republicanism in the 1930s became choice comparisons to interventionists drawing warnings from the past.²⁴⁴ Rhiannon Vickers rightly argued that the Spanish Civil War became a particularly powerful point of reference, especially deployed by Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, during the Kosovo intervention in 1999

²³⁹ Faulds, alongside John Smith, defied the whip to vote in favour of joining the European Community in 1971, see: Dalyell, ‘A Life’; Macdonald and Faulds also voted in favour of the Maastricht Treaty, creating the EU, when John Smith ordered them to abstain: Patricia Wynn Davies, ‘Tory MPs in Record Revolt: Lamont Leaves Door Open for ERM Re-Entry’, *Independent*, 21 May 1993 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tory-mps-in-record-revolt-lamont-leaves-door-open-for-erm-reentry-corrected-2324115.html>> [Accessed 24 August 2025].

²⁴⁰ Bernard-Henri Lévy, ‘The Significance of Sarajevo’, *Huffpost*, 23 October 2013 <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-significance-of-saraj_b_4148799> [Accessed 20 May 2025]; ‘The Left’s Duty’, *Guardian*, p. 22; Christopher Hitchens, ‘Why Bosnia Matters’, *London Review of Books*, 14.17 (1992), <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v14/n17/christopher-hitchens/why-bosnia-matters>> [Accessed 8 May 2025].

²⁴¹ Lévy, *Ibid.*; Samuel Huntington, ‘The Clash of Civilizations?’, *Foreign Affairs*, 72.3 (1993), pp. 22–48.

²⁴² The CND, for example, framed the conflicts within the ‘long history of foreign occupation [...] deep-seated religious and ethnic factors’: MRC, MSS/483/9, CND, ‘Suggested Model Resolutions for Labour Party Conference 1993’; For critique of ‘Ancient Hatreds’ myth see: Phillip Hammond, ‘When Frames Collide: “Ethnic War” and “Genocide”’, *Media, War and Conflict*, 11. 4 (2018), pp. 434–45.

²⁴³ Bernard-Henri Lévy, ‘The Spirit of Europe Lives or Dies in Sarajevo’, *Independent*, 31 July 1995, p. 11; Branka Magaš interviewed in ‘Why Bosnia Must Defeat Milosevic’, *Workers Liberty*, 24 (1995), pp. 11–13 (p. 12); For academic discussion, see: Nicholas Moll, ‘Spain, Auschwitz, Munich: The Role of Historical Analogies in the Protest Movements in Europe Against the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1992–1995’, in *Memory and Social Movements in Modern and Contemporary History*, ed. by Stefan Berger and Christian Koller (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), pp. 251–68.

²⁴⁴ For example: Vulliamy, ‘For Whom’, p. 23; also noted in: Moll, *Ibid.*

because of its role in putting ‘an end to the pacifism’ of much of the Left in the 1930s.²⁴⁵ Linked to this history were frequent references made to ‘appeasement’, invoking the infamous 1938 Munich Conference where British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, handed over the Czechoslovak Sudetenland to Adolf Hitler.²⁴⁶ For Michael Foot, this warning came from experience: as a politician during the 1940s he had written the *Guilty Men* pamphlet which was strongly critical of ‘appeasement’ and contributed to Chamberlain’s political demise.²⁴⁷ Younger MPs without this vivid recollection also saw the connection: in a private letter to Andrew Faulds, MP, Calum Macdonald warned that: ‘I think you will agree that the parallels [of Munich] with the Balkans today are haunting’.²⁴⁸ For Macdonald, Bosnia was ‘Spain, Abyssinia and Munich rolled into one’, showing the power these metanarratives have for homogenising the past in the present.²⁴⁹ By now, this ‘lesson’ of appeasement has become a dominant metanarrative in any discourse surrounding international security: from justifying the Kosovo intervention, 1999, the invasion of Iraq, 2003, or to justify fighting Russian aggression in Ukraine from 2022 onward.²⁵⁰

‘Never Again’ also had a powerful moral dimension as interventionists compared Bosnian Muslims to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust.²⁵¹ This phenomenon was tied to globalisation as a ‘Holocaust industry’ developed in the United States in 1993 with the release of the film *Schindler’s List* and the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, which emanated internationally and arguably

²⁴⁵ Quote from: Rhiannon Vickers, ‘Blair’s Kosovo Campaign: Political Communications, The Battle for Public Opinion and Foreign Policy’, *Civil Wars* 3.1 (2000), pp. 55–70 (p. 62); for Cook’s invocation of the Spanish Civil War, see: John Lloyd, ‘Cook Declares Total War on Fascism’, *New Statesman*, 3 May 1999, p. 8.

²⁴⁶ “‘We Have to Stand and Take Sides’”, *Workers Press*, 29 July 1995, p. 4; Wicks, ‘Bosnia’; Moll, ‘Spain, Munich, Auchwitz’.

²⁴⁷ Conrad Landin, “‘Guilty Men’ At Eighty”, *Tribune*, 24 July 2020
<<https://tribunemag.co.uk/2020/07/guilty-men-at-80>> [Accessed 20 August 2025].

²⁴⁸ LSE, FAULDS/3/1/4/2, Calum Macdonald, Letter to Andrew Faulds, 26 August 1993.

²⁴⁹ Quoted in, Vulliamy, ‘For Whom’, p. 23; see also: Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, ‘The History of a Lesson: Versailles, Munich and the Social Construction of the Past’, *Review of International Studies* 29.4 (2003), pp. 499–519.

²⁵⁰ Rasmussen, *Ibid.*; David Edgerton, ‘Myths of Appeasement’, *Prospect* (2006)
<<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/opinions/57175/myths-of-appeasement>> [Accessed 8 April 2024]; for a present example, see: Anastasiia Marushevska, ‘Appeasement Will Only Fuel Vladimir Putin’s Imperial Ambitions in Ukraine’, *Atlantic Council*, 15 January 2025
<<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/appeasement-will-only-fuel-vladimir-putins-imperial-ambitions-in-ukraine/>> [Accessed 1 September 2025].

²⁵¹ See, for example: Magaš, ‘Why Bosnia Must Defeat Milosevic’ p. 12; this point has been raised in the scholarship, for example: Moll, ‘Spain’; Alan E. Steinweiss, ‘The Auschwitz Analogy: Holocaust Memory and American Debates over Intervention in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 19.2 (2005), pp. 276–89.

universalised its lessons.²⁵² For the historian, Tony Kushner, the ‘greater emphasis’ on ‘multiculturalism and anti-racism’ in the 1990s in Britain coalesced with this increasing international prevalence of the Holocaust in public discourse and media.²⁵³ Tony Blair would even later admit that watching *Schindler’s List* in 1994 had a profound impact on his views on the necessity of intervention.²⁵⁴ Bosnian President, Alija Izetbegovic, tapped into this zeitgeist, pleading to the international community: ‘We are the Warsaw ghetto [...] Will the Warsaw ghetto once again be left to die?’²⁵⁵ In this comparison he was joined by Holocaust survivors and some British Jews – and of particular relevance to the Left – the Jewish Socialist Group (JSG).²⁵⁶ It argued in its magazine, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, that the lessons of ‘never forgive, never forget’ lived on during the ethnic cleansing of Bosnia.²⁵⁷ These Jewish voices who opened up the memory of their collective historical trauma to include the Bosnian Muslims certainly granted a sense of legitimacy to the comparison.

Interventionists also situated the Bosnian War within wider histories of mistreatment of indigenous, stateless minorities around the world. Commonly this manifested in comparisons of the Bosnian Muslims to the Palestinians or victims of South African apartheid as proposed UN-EC plans to partition Bosnia would leave the Bosnians in a landlocked ‘Bantustan’ surrounded by their ethnic cleansers – a significant comparison given that the South African transition from apartheid was ongoing at this

²⁵² For the idea of a ‘Holocaust industry’, see: Hilene Flanzbaum, ‘The Americanization of the Holocaust’, *Journal of Genocide Research* 1.1 (1999), pp. 91–104 (p. 102), doi:10.1080/14623529908413937; for the globalisation of Holocaust memory, see: Levy and Sznajder, ‘Memory’; Andy Pearce, ‘The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain, 1979–2001’, *Holocaust Studies*, 14.2 (2008), pp. 71–94 doi:10.1080/17504902.2008.11087217; David Campbell, ‘Atrocity, Memory, Photography: Imaging the Concentration Camps of Bosnia – the Case of ITN Versus Living Marxism, Part 2’, *Journal of Human Rights*, 1.2 (2002), pp. 143–72 (p. 155), doi:10.1080/14754830210125656; Luke Summers, ‘Echoes of the Shoah: British Jewry and the Bosnian War’, *Holocaust Studies* (2024), pp. 1–22, doi:10.1080/17504902.2024.2392350.

²⁵³ Tony Kushner, ‘The Holocaust in the British Imagination: The Official Mind and Beyond, 1945 to the Present’, *Holocaust Studies*, 23.3 (2017), pp. 364–84 (p. 377), doi:10.1080/17504902.2017.1296084.

²⁵⁴ Blair, *A Journey*, p. 61.

²⁵⁵ Quoted in Lévy, ‘The Significance’.

²⁵⁶ Summers, ‘Echoes’; Anna Maxted, ‘Rabbis Join Bosnian “Genocide” Protest’, *Jewish Chronicle*, 2 July 1993; John Ezard, ‘The Second Holocaust?’, *Guardian*, 30 April 1993, p. 22; ‘Editorial’, *Jewish Socialist*, 27, May–August, 1993, p. 3.

²⁵⁷ ‘Editorial’, *Jewish Socialist*, 27, May–August, 1993, p. 3.

time, alongside strides in the Israel-Palestine peace process.²⁵⁸ However, there was also a dark side to this tendency for cosmopolitans to overlap various international issues onto one another. For example, the interventionist Labour MP, Andrew Faulds, pointed out in Parliament the ‘considerable dismay’ among the international Muslim community ‘at Britain’s craven conduct’ in Bosnia ‘under a Christian Foreign Secretary and a Jewish Minister of Defence’.²⁵⁹ Faulds already had a troubled relationship with antisemitism: he was dismissed from a government position by Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, in 1973 for accusing Jewish MPs ‘of having dual loyalties’ to Israel.²⁶⁰ Decades later, this comment about Malcom Rifkind’s Jewish identity caused considerable offense. Constituents and Labour colleagues wrote a series of letters to Faulds in complaint, to which he responded by clarifying that he did not mean to suggest that Malcom Rifkind failed in his role because he was Jewish.²⁶¹ Regardless, it was a poor choice of words followed by another when he castigated his detractors in a letter to the Labour MEP, Pauline Greene, claiming that: ‘there seems to be a predilection among Zionists for misapprehension whenever the word "Jewish" is used’.²⁶² In the complaint in question, Greene did not mention Zionism and Faulds was, thus, automatically equating her Jewish constituents with Zionism purely because they were upset by his comments. Overall, this linked to Lévy and Sznajder’s argument that the representation of the Kosovar Albanians (which was equally applicable to the Bosnian Muslims) as both Palestinians and Jews resulted in the discourse over the former Yugoslavia being reductively mapped onto the ongoing conflict in Israel-Palestine.²⁶³

On the other hand, comparisons of the besieged Bosnian Muslims to other groups generated new solidarity and memory and were, therefore, not automatically problematic or generalising.²⁶⁴ In fact, some interventionists came to their views

²⁵⁸ For comparisons to the Palestinians, see: PHM, Michael Meacher, ‘Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee’, 28 October 1992, item 25; Lévy ‘The Spirit’, p. 11; Calum Macdonald, ‘Yugoslavia’, HC Deb, 26 July 1993 vol 229, cc. 837-73 (cc.839-40); for Bosnia as a ‘Bantustan’, see: Hitchens, ‘Why Bosnia Matters’.

²⁵⁹ Andrew Faulds, ‘Bosnia’, HC Deb, 7 February 1994, 237 cc. 19-28 (c. 22).

²⁶⁰ Oliver Kamm, ‘The Fight’s Gone Out of Me’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 17 March 2016 <<https://www.thejc.com/opinion/the-ghts-gone-out-of-me-tpogorex>> [Accessed 16 August 2025].

²⁶¹ LSE, FAULDS/3/1/4/1, Andrew Faulds, Letter, 11 March 1994; LSE, FAULDS/3/1/4/1, Pauline Green, Letter to Andrew Faulds, 7 March 1994.

²⁶² LSE, FAULDS/3/1/4/1, Andrew Faulds, Letter to Pauline Greene, 16 March 1994.

²⁶³ Levy and Sznajder, ‘Memory’, pp. 99-100.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

because of their personal experience with racism and perceived oppression. One of the few Black MPs in Parliament, Labour's Bernie Grant, who had viewed the 1990–91 Gulf War as a fundamentally racist war, highlighted in the PLP that to arm the Bosnian Muslims was to take a broader stand against racism in Europe.²⁶⁵ Andrew Faulds also came to this conclusion from experience: he won the seat of Smethwick in the East Midlands in 1966 which had been the site of appalling racism against Caribbean migrant workers and he took up anti-racist causes ever since.²⁶⁶ For the JSG in particular, standing up for multi-religious democracy and cultivating cultural nationalism in Bosnia was a part of wider wish for Muslims, Jews and other minorities to live in peace, without segregation – not just in Europe, but also within their vision of a single-state, democratic, Israel-Palestine.²⁶⁷ Echoing these views from a liberal perspective, Michael Ignatieff argued that exclusivist nationalisms were 'a language of fantasy and escape'.²⁶⁸ Cosmopolitans, instead, ought to fight for the individuals 'to choose their own frontiers for their belonging'.²⁶⁹ In these comparisons, the besieged Bosnian Muslims became a comparative node for other international struggles and a symbol of wider cosmopolitan aims.

The Bosnian Muslims also attracted particular attention because they reminded European cosmopolitans of themselves and had long attempted to position themselves within a cosmopolitan vision of Europe.²⁷⁰ Many drank alcohol, intermarried with their non-Muslim neighbours and viewed their religion on fairly secular terms.²⁷¹ In

²⁶⁵ PHM, Bernie Grant, 'Minutes of a Meeting of the PLP', 21 April 1993, item 173; for his views on the Gulf War, see: Bernie Grant, '1994 Charles John Cobb Memorial Lecture by Bernie Grant on the Rise of Racism in Britain', *The Bernie Grant Archive* (2016) <<https://berniegrantarchive.org.uk/1994-charles-john-cobb-memorial-lecture-by-bernie-grant-mp-on-the-rise-of-racism-in-britain/>> [Accessed 10 August 2025].

²⁶⁶ Michael White, 'Obituary: Andrew Faulds', *Guardian*, 1 June 2000 <<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/jun/01/guardianobituaries.obituaries>> [Accessed 16 August 2025].

²⁶⁷ 'Editorial', *Jewish Socialist*, 27 September–December 1992, p. 3; 'Editorial', *Jewish Socialist*, 28, January–March, 1993, p. 1; 'Editorial', *Jewish Socialist*, Spring 1994, p. 3.

²⁶⁸ Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*, e book edn. (Vintage, 1994 [Pushkin, 2023]), p. 307.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

²⁷⁰ Christian Moe, 'A Sultan in Brussels? European Hopes and Fears of Bosnian Muslims', *Sudoesteuropa*, 55.4 (2007), pp. 374–94 (p. 385).

²⁷¹ Moe, *Ibid.*; Jonathan Bronitsky, *British Foreign Policy and Bosnia: The Rise of Islamism in Britain, 1992–1995, Developments in Radicalisation and Political Violence* (2010), p.1 <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/British-foreign-policy-and-Bosnia_-The-rise-of-Islamism-in-...-ICSR.pdf> [Accessed 14 April 2025]; Cynthia Simmons, 'A Multicultural, Multiethnic, and Multiconfessional Bosnia and Herzegovina', *Nationalities Papers*, 30.4 (2002), pp. 623–38, doi:10.1080/00905992.2002.10540510.

contrast to more recently arrived Muslim *Gastarbeiter* communities in Western Europe which Ignatieff described as ‘darker skinned and more devout’ and faced ghettoisation and poverty, Bosnian Muslims were, in Bernard-Henry Lévy’s words, the ‘enlightened’ group ‘for which we search widely and so often vainly’.²⁷² But what counted as an ‘enlightened’ European was rooted in centuries of Islamophobia. As the historian, Eric Hobsbawm argued, Europe had long been defined against the Eastern, Islamic, ‘other’.²⁷³ Thus, simultaneous to the early 1990s post-Cold War period, which prompted a broader re-evaluation of European identity (as Hobsbawm argued, former Soviet states re-joined the European ‘club’ once again after having lost their European status to the East/West Cold War binary) interventionists used the Bosnian War to show that Islam was not only welcome in Europe, but native to the continent and, therefore, intrinsically European.²⁷⁴ This explains the interventionist warnings that, to abandon the Bosnian Muslims would threaten the very ‘idea of Europe’, or the morbid claim made by interventionists in the European Parliament that: ‘Europe is Reborn or Dies in Sarajevo’.²⁷⁵

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The collapse of Yugoslavia may have been forced upon a largely apathetic Left at, perhaps, one of its lowest ebbs in British history, but it motivated a relatively small, but broad, coalition of ‘strange bedfellows’ to develop a cosmopolitan form of interventionism in defence of a multicultural and multi-ethnic Bosnia. The ruptures on the Left over these wars had tangible implications even though the debates, at least on the surface, often seemed to be based on applying century old political theory. To this end the Left’s engagement with the Bosnian War became another example of its tendency toward ineffective single-issue organisation, sloganeering and ideological gatekeeping. However, there were deeper ideological implications of the Left’s divided response to the Bosnian War: at the heart of the issue was the Left’s response to a changing world, as some cosmopolitans found in interventionist advocacy a new anti-racist, anti-imperialist cause. For others these cosmopolitans seemed to have

²⁷² Ignatieff, ‘The Seductiveness’, p. 80; Lévy, ‘The Significance; Echoed in: Lévy, ‘The Spirit’, p. 11.

²⁷³ Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1997), p. 291.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 287–300; Moe, ‘A Sultan’, p. 376.

²⁷⁵ “‘We Have to Stand’” *Workers Press*, p. 4: ‘Europe is Reborn or Dies in Sarajevo’, *Wake Up Europe!* (2022) <<https://wakeupeurope.ba/shop/europe-is-reborn-or-dies-in-sarajevo/?lang=en>> [Accessed 20 May 2025].

abandoned the Left to become NATO's newest propagandists. Ultimately, by broadening the scope beyond Labour's political leadership, this chapter showed that the transformation of parts of the Left towards interventionism was a broader process than party politics, being driven by Labour backbenchers, academics, and trade unionists, in a process of realignment beginning before Labour put interventionism into practice in 1999. These activists resisted the apathy of much of the wider Left to put the Bosnian War on the agenda, as many of the lessons that 'New' Labour claimed to have learnt by the time of OAF were forewarned by this interventionist lobby.

Chapter Three: ‘New’ Labour’s Interventionist Turn and the British Left’s Engagement with Operation Allied Force, 1999

Speaking to the Economic Club of Chicago in April 1999, Tony Blair – by now the Prime Minister following Labour’s victory in the 1997 General Election – enunciated for the first time a clear articulation of cosmopolitan interventionism within a broader political programme. Explicitly linking military intervention to globalisation, he told his audience that ‘today more than ever before we are mutually dependent’, and as such, had a moral obligation to prevent crimes against humanity.²⁷⁶ He claimed that ‘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’.²⁷⁷ This speech was delivered at the height of OAF, the NATO bombing campaign waged against Serbia to prevent its ongoing ethnic cleansing of the Kosovar Albanians from the supposedly autonomous Kosovo region.²⁷⁸ It is debated whether the Chicago speech represented a Blair ‘doctrine’, or whether it was essentially war propaganda intended to shape public opinion at a time when Blair was embroiled in lobbying Bill Clinton to support a ground invasion of Kosovo.²⁷⁹ But whatever the motivation, the Chicago speech was certainly a clearly articulated vision of military interventionism retrofitted into a broader ideological framework.

This chapter will explore OAF as a product of the ideological development of ‘New’ Labour and explores the reaction of the Left to it adopting interventionism across 1997–99. It joins the corpus of scholarship which has taken international perspectives on OAF, viewing ‘New’ Labour’s interventionism as intrinsically connected to its thinking on globalisation, Atlanticism, and a fundamental reframing of Britain’s post-imperial international leadership.²⁸⁰ First this chapter lays out a brief chronology of Labour’s engagement with the Kosovo crisis before it frames interventionism as a

²⁷⁶ The Economic Club of Chicago, ‘The Right Honorable [sic] Tony Blair, Prime Minister of Great Britain, 4/22/99’, *The Economic Club of Chicago* (2022) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yri-QhIVbao>> [Accessed 12 May 2025].

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ Foreign Affairs Committee, ‘Fourth Report’, para 71.

²⁷⁹ *Guardian* journalists, Polly Toynbee and David Walker, viewed it as a ‘fully-fledged doctrine’, cited in Daddow, ‘“Tony’s War”’, p. 548; Christopher Hill also leaned towards this view, see: Hill, ‘Putting the World to Rights’, p. 385; John Rentoul took the latter view: Rentoul, *Tony*, p. 526.

²⁸⁰ Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, ‘From the Cold War’ pp. 115–45; McCourt, ‘Embracing’; Anne Deighton, ‘The Past’, pp. 100–120.

natural extension of Blair's longstanding cosmopolitan and Atlanticist instincts. The latter portion of the chapter therefore argues that OAF represented the zenith of cosmopolitan interventionism – and by extension the low ebb of the anti-intervention movement – as this previously politically homeless idea was taken up by 'New' Labour. It shows why much of the Left accepted OAF and argues that the protest against it was emblematic of the broader decline of the British far Left. It will then finish by exploring the legacy of this interventionist moment on the British Left, especially through the lens of 'Blair's Wars' in Afghanistan, 2001–2014, and Iraq, 2003–2011. Analysing the dynamics and the further realignment of the pro- and anti-intervention coalitions following OAF sheds light on why intervention in Kosovo was so attractive, and why intervention would become so controversial only a few years later under different geo-political circumstances.

'New' Labour on the Road to Intervention, 1995–99

Echoing the warnings of interventionists like Branka Magaš during the Bosnian War, the historian, Tim Judah, argued in Spring 1999 that Kosovo was a 'catastrophe waiting to happen'.²⁸¹ Kosovo became the frontline of post-Yugoslav identity politics as Serbian President, Slobodan Milošević, deliberately stirred 'anti-Albanian sentiment' to further his own political position.²⁸² Over the course of 1997–98, an emergent group, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), began an insurgency against Serbian police and security forces which resulted in brutal crackdowns against the Kosovar Albanian population.²⁸³ Overall, across 1997, the prospect of war in Kosovo was, according to Carole Hodge, 'far from the British agenda', and the former Yugoslavia more broadly was described by John Rentoul as a 'peripheral' issue to the British government.²⁸⁴ However, there were indications that the former Yugoslavia appeared sporadically on the government's agenda: Blair and Cook authorised British special forces to arrest two Bosnian Serb War criminals in June 1997, and Robin Cook, now Foreign Secretary, went on a diplomatic visit to post-Dayton Bosnia.²⁸⁵ Over the

²⁸¹ Tim Judah, 'Kosovo's Road to War', *Survival*, 41.2 (1999), pp. 5–18 (p. 5), doi:10.1080/00396338.1999.9688530; Magaš 'Why Bosnia Must Defeat Milosevic', p. 12.

²⁸² Foreign Affairs Committee, 'Fourth Report', paras 13–21; Rentoul, *Tony*, p. 511.

²⁸³ Foreign Affairs Committee, *Ibid.*, paras 24–27.

²⁸⁴ Hodge, *Britain*, p. 167; Rentoul, *Tony*, p. 512

²⁸⁵ Hodge, *Ibid.*, pp. 155–59; Rentoul, *Ibid.*, p. 512.

course of 1998, the escalating crisis in Kosovo began to significantly concern the Blair government as the conflict between the KLA and Serbia degenerated, creating tens of thousands of refugees and ‘hardening [...] attitudes within NATO’.²⁸⁶ British officials, crucially the Defence Secretary, George Robertson, alongside Robin Cook and Clinton’s Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, then played a key role in forging a consensus surrounding a possible NATO intervention between 1998 and 1999.²⁸⁷

The tipping point came in February 1999, following a Serb massacre of Kosovar Albanians at a village called Račak. Britain and the US convened talks in Rambouillet, France, where an ultimatum was presented to Milošević: sign a ceasefire, negotiate with the KLA, and accept the presence of a NATO peace implementation force, or face air strikes.²⁸⁸ Milošević rejected the terms. Some, especially on the anti-intervention Left, argued this was inevitable given that he would never accept NATO troops on Serbian soil.²⁸⁹ Regardless, NATO commenced bombing on the 24 March 1999 without the UNSC’s approval as NATO planners knew that Russia and China would veto the action.²⁹⁰ This lack of approval was also controversial on the Left because of its multilateralist instincts.²⁹¹ The ‘zeitgeist’ had changed towards a NATO-led consensus – a significant development considering that it was only a few years prior that John Smith, Jack Cunningham, and Blair, too, had fiercely defended the credibility and authority of the UNSC during the Bosnian War.²⁹²

On the first day of OAF, Blair told the nation: for ‘the sake of humanity [...] barbarity cannot be allowed to defeat justice’.²⁹³ In response to the bombing, Serbian forces ramped up the forced displacement of the Kosovar civilian population.²⁹⁴ As the bombing failed to produce instant results, Blair became increasingly convinced of the

²⁸⁶ Quote from: Mark Webber, ‘The Kosovo War: A Recapitulation’, *International Affairs*, 85.3 (2009), pp. 447–59 (p.449); see also: Rentoul, *Ibid.*, p. 513.

²⁸⁷ Thorough outline of the international diplomatic response in, Foreign Affairs Committee, ‘Fourth Report’.

²⁸⁸ Foreign Affairs Committee, *ibid.*, paras 54–62.

²⁸⁹ Controversy and different perspectives discussed in *Ibid.*, paras 62–65; expressed in: MRC, MSS/483/15a, CND, ‘Labour CND Annual General Meeting, Saturday 13th March 1999: Policy Resolutions’, [1999], item C.

²⁹⁰ Ved P. Nanda, ‘Legal Implications of NATO’s Armed Intervention in Kosovo’, *International Law Studies*, 75 (2000), pp. 313–37 (p. 321).

²⁹¹ Noted by Phythian, *The Labour Party*, p. 120; For the left-wing view that OAF was ‘illegal’, see: Alice Mahon, ‘Nato’s Unsound Fury’, *Tribune*, 11 June 1999, p. 6.

²⁹² For NATO intervention as a post-Bosnia, ‘zeitgeist’ shift see: McCourt, ‘Embracing’, p. 256.

²⁹³ “It is Simply the Right Thing”, *Guardian*.

²⁹⁴ Foreign Affairs Select Committee, ‘Fourth Report’, paras 71–98.

need for a full-scale ground invasion over the course of April, much to the dismay of Clinton who reprimanded him on the phone, reminding him that American troops would do the bulk of the fighting.²⁹⁵ Despite these tensions, by the 10 June, OAF was officially suspended pending a Serbian withdrawal from Kosovo, and Blair's staking of 'considerable personal prestige' on the operation had paid off.²⁹⁶ Following negotiations, Kosovo was placed under a UN protectorate – a similar set up was put in place in Bosnia, post-Dayton – and four-thousand British troops were deployed in the peace-enforcement mission, KFOR, which set about supervising the reconstruction of its society.²⁹⁷

OAF was, in Blair's words, an 'awakening'.²⁹⁸ It was both a transformative moment in British foreign policy and for Blair, whose lack of foreign policy interest prior to entering government led him to admit that he would have been 'bewildered and horrified' to learn that he would take Britain into four wars during his leadership.²⁹⁹ However, the broader ideological framework which military intervention was adopted into by the Chicago speech was longstanding for Blair. Prior to 1997, his international thinking revolved largely around globalisation, Atlanticism and Europe. He made similar claims to those in the Chicago speech that globalisation was 'not simply economic' but 'also a political, and security phenomenon', as early as 1995.³⁰⁰ As Cerny and Evans argued, adapting 'political strategy' to globalisation had become the norm among 'political elites' by the time of the 'New' Labour government.³⁰¹ Blair was particularly engaged with this trend, as globalisation formed the heart of the international component of his 'Third Way' philosophy. This philosophy, inspired by Bill Clinton and the New Democrats, was formally enunciated by Blair and Anthony

²⁹⁵ Daddow, "Tony's War?", pp. 554–55.

²⁹⁶ Quote from: Anne Deighton, 'European Union Policy', in *The Blair Effect: The Blair Government 1997–2001*, ed. By Anthony Seldon (Little, Brown, 2001), p. 322; see also: Daddow, "Tony's War", p. 555; Stuart Millar and others, 'Peace Deal Ends the War', *Guardian*, 10 June 1999, p. 1.

²⁹⁷ Rebecca Thornton, 'Endgame in Kosovo', *Prospect* (2007), <<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/world/europe/57832/endgame-in-kosovo>> [Accessed 25 May 2025]; 'Remembering Kosovo', *Royal British Legion* (2025), <<https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/events/remembrance-events/kosovo>> [Accessed 25 May 2025]; Webber, 'The Kosovo War', pp. 454–455.

²⁹⁸ Tony Blair, *A Journey*, p. 223.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

³⁰⁰ Quote from: The Economic Club of Chicago, 'The Right Honorable Tony Blair' 18:00–18:30; echoed in earlier speeches: 'Speech to the Newscorp Leadership Conference, Hayman Island, Australia, 17 July 1995', in Blair, *New Britain*, pp. 203–14; Speech to Time Magazine, printed in Blair, *New Britain*, pp. 259–68.

³⁰¹ Philip G. Cerny and Mark Evans, 'Globalisation and Public Policy Under New Labour', *Policy Studies*. 25.1 (2004), pp. 51–65 (p. 52), doi:10.1080/0144287042000208242.

Giddens in various publications throughout 1998.³⁰² The ‘Third Way’ began as principally a domestic political strategy, presenting an economic middle ground between the Thatcherite New Right, and Labour’s traditionally class-oriented, anti-market thinking.³⁰³ However, over the course of 1997–99, Blair would come to see how military intervention could be made entirely consistent with these basic instincts. ‘New’ Labour’s journey thus epitomised the cosmopolitanising of much of the left that was explored in the previous chapter: it abandoned the idea of the sovereign state in both economic and internationalist terms, trading socialism and domestic economic independence – now a pipe dream of the far Left – for an activist foreign policy.³⁰⁴

Part of this internationalist foreign policy was what Curtis Atkins described as Blair’s desire to turn the ‘Third Way’ into a ‘transnational ideological narrative’ to share with potential allies across the West, where other left-wing parties had also won elections by shifting to the centre.³⁰⁵ A crucial first initiative for Blair and his Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, was to reassert the strength of the ‘special relationship’, which had come under strain because of the divergent positions of John Major and Bill Clinton during the Bosnian War and because of Major’s ‘overt’ support for Clinton’s political rival, George H. W. Bush, at the previous US election.³⁰⁶ Blair and the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, had already met Clinton in 1993, were profoundly influenced by his ideas, and soon after winning the election in 1997, Blair invited Clinton to Downing Street.³⁰⁷ In an early sign that the ‘Third Way’ would take on a role greater than just shared economic and domestic strategy, he and Clinton declared at a joint ‘Third Way’ conference in February 1998 that they were committed to ‘internationalism in opposition to the right’s isolationism’.³⁰⁸

³⁰² Tony Blair, *The Third Way: New Politics for a New Century* (Fabian Society, 1998); Giddens, Anthony, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Polity, 1998); for scholarly discussion see.

³⁰³ Cerny and Evans, *Ibid.*, p. 54; Andrew Gamble, ‘Commentary: The Meaning of the Third Way’, in *The Blair Effect, 2001-2005*, pp. 430–38 (p. 431).

³⁰⁴ Also argued in Brivati, ‘Internationalism’, p. 243.

³⁰⁵ Curtis Atkins, ‘The Third Way International’, *Jacobin* (2016)

<<https://jacobin.com/2016/02/atkins-dlc-third-way-clinton-blair-schroeder-social-democracy/>> [Accessed 11 July 2025]; see also: Peter Mair, ‘Route to Nowhere’, *London Review of Books*, 23.1 (2001), <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v23/n01/peter-mair/route-to-nowhere?>> [Accessed 11 July 2025].

³⁰⁶ Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars*, p. 12; Cook, *The Point*, p. 103.

³⁰⁷ Kampfner, *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13; Atkins, ‘The Third Way’.

³⁰⁸ Cited by Cerny and Evans, ‘Globalisation’, p. 56.

Blair's Atlanticism has understandably been a focus of study because of its controversial centrality to his thinking on international politics.³⁰⁹ Clinton and Blair had a powerful personal connection. As Blair would argue in his memoir, they were 'political soulmates'.³¹⁰ When Clinton was replaced by the Republican, George W. Bush in 2001, Blair was loyal to his new ally, even if their political chemistry was not as powerful as it had been with Clinton.³¹¹ Blair's colleagues understood this: Robin Cook wrote in his diaries in 2002 that 'it is a fixed pole of Tony Blair's view [...] that we must be the No 1 ally of the US' – a fact which he believed was crucial to the success of OAF, but devastating when Blair followed George W. Bush into the invasion of Iraq in 2003.³¹² However, while Blair's Atlanticism was particularly extreme, the previous leaderships of Neil Kinnock and John Smith were also pro-NATO, despite their generally multilateralist orientation and their acceptance that Britain had lost its status as an imperial great power.³¹³ Blair's Atlanticism may have been much more emphatic than his predecessors, but this was a difference in degree and not of kind.

This Atlanticism pushed Blair toward his first authorisation of the use of military force against Iraq in December 1998. Following Saddam Hussein's continued non-cooperation with UN nuclear weapons inspectors, Clinton and Blair authorised a set of limited air strikes.³¹⁴ Blair expressed 'total solidarity' with Clinton despite the ongoing impeachment proceedings which threatened Clinton's political survival owing to the Monica Lewinsky scandal.³¹⁵ The 'usual suspects' protested the intervention: Tony Benn expressed indignation on the *Today* programme, and he joined the CND and Labour CND in opposing sanctions against the state because of the indirect harm

³⁰⁹ Unkovski-Korica, 'From the Cold War', p. 121; Gamble, *Between Europe and America*, p. 230; McCourt, 'Embracing'.

³¹⁰ Blair, *A Journey*, p. 231.

³¹¹ Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, pp. 85–91.

³¹² Cook, *The Point*, pp. 102–04.

³¹³ The Smith leadership ultimately believed that consensus within NATO, the UNSC and the Party of European Socialists was necessary for force to be legitimate, see: David Clark in: 'Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee', 2 December 1992, 59.c; and Jack Cunningham in PHM, 'Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee', 15 February 1993, item C. ii; 'Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee', item 185; 'Minutes of a Meeting of the PLP', 2 February 1994, item 301; For the view that Blair's Atlanticism was a more emphatic expression of a tradition which had already taken hold in the Labour leadership before 1997; see: Unkovski-Korica, 'From the Cold War', p. 121; Gamble, *Between Europe*, pp. 190, 230; Anderson and Mann, *Safety First*, pp. 341–45; Deighton, 'The Past in the Present', p. 112.

³¹⁴ Andrew Glass, 'Clinton Orders Airstrike on Iraq: Dec 16, 1998', *Politico*, 16 December 2016 <<https://www.politico.com/story/2016/12/clinton-orders-airstrike-on-iraq-dec-16-1998-232571>> [Accessed 13 July 2025].

³¹⁵ Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p. 26.

they cause to the civilian population.³¹⁶ Nonetheless, the strikes were over in a few days which prevented anti-interventionists from gaining traction. The bombing of Iraq also exposed tension within Blair's cabinet. The decision was taken in a highly secretive fashion by Blair and his small team of advisers which led Robin Cook to inform the tabloids of his lack of involvement, infuriating Blair.³¹⁷ Blair's advisers also sensed that he was apprehensive about committing the armed forces – he did so with a 'heavy heart' – fearing friendly and civilian casualties.³¹⁸ Thus, intertwined with Blair's devotion to Clinton was a sense of insecurity and unease about the use of force which was not reflected in his public image. Over Kosovo, this trend would repeat as Blair was alleged to have confessed to his team in May 1999 that failure in OAF 'could be the end of me'.³¹⁹

Despite this private insecurity, Blair sought to position Britain as a strong international leader, unbound by any suggestion that Britain's relationship with the United States and Europe were mutually exclusive.³²⁰ 'Third Way' conferences and manifestos were produced with Blairite allies such as German Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder and the Italian former Communist Prime Minister, Massimo D'Alema, over the course of 1998–99.³²¹ The 'Third Way' itself barely touched on foreign policy – it certainly had nothing to say about military intervention – but the alliances developed in Blair's initial period of government would be crucial to the success of OAF: the centre-left leaderships of these states, Germany, France, Italy, formed the 'Quint' of governments who managed Kosovo with the US and Britain.³²² D'Alema's leadership of Italy was particularly crucial because of the country's proximity to the former

³¹⁶ Benn, *Free*, p. 513; MRC, MSS/483/12, CND, '[Draft?] Statement on Iraq', [1997?]; CND, 'Labour CND Annual General Meeting, Saturday 13th March 1999'; MSS/483/15a, Dennis Halliday, 'Sanctions Are Killing, 5-6,000 People a Month', *Socialist Campaign Group News*, February 1999, p. 8.

³¹⁷ Price, *The Spin Doctor's Diary*, p. 62.

³¹⁸ Quote from: Price, *Ibid.*, p. 62; also noted by Campbell on 11 November and 16 December 1998 respectively, see: Campbell, *The Alastair Campbell Diaries: Volume Two*, pp. 560, 596.

³¹⁹ Quoted in Daddow, "'Tony's War'", p. 547.

³²⁰ Tony Blair, Newscorp Speech, in *New Britain*, p. 210; Blair, Speech to Time Magazine, in *Ibid.*, p. 266.

³²¹ Tony Blair and Gerhard Schroeder, 'Europe: The Third Way/Die Neue Mitte', Working Documents, No. 2 (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1998) <<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/suedafrika/02828.pdf>> [Accessed 12 July 2025]; Atkins, 'The Third Way'.

³²² The Blair/Schroeder manifesto had no mention of foreign policy beyond European integration: Blair and Schroeder, 'The Third Way'; For Western European cooperation in OAF, see: Peter Beaumont and Patrick Wintour, 'Kosovo: The Untold Story (Part Two)', *Guardian*, 18 July 1999 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/jul/18/warcrimes.balkans1>> [Accessed 30 June 2025].

Yugoslavia: its air bases became vital to NATO's campaign.³²³ To maintain a strong relationship with the French President, Jacques Chirac, was also crucial, despite Chirac being a politician of the centre-Right. Even though he was not a member of the 'Third Way International', he and Blair committed to creating an Anglo-French 'Rapid Reaction Force' in December 1998.³²⁴ When discussing the agreement, Blair declared that Britain and France were 'both nations that are used to power. We are not frightened of it or ashamed of it'.³²⁵ This ultimately tied back to his longstanding belief, explored in chapter one, that it was Britain's post-imperial 'destiny' to be a 'leader of nations' in Europe.³²⁶ Therefore, while principally focused on domestic politics, the economy and globalisation, 'New' Labour's plans to lead the rest of the continent also clearly contained a machismo, hard power edge.

The broader realignment of the European Left was also intrinsically connected to the changing international mood on military intervention. In fact, some prominent European leaders during OAF were former communists, pacifists, or leaders of political parties with a far Left tradition.³²⁷ The Secretary-General of NATO, Javier Solana, had once been a communist which generated controversy when he was appointed to the role: in 1983 he had called for Spain to exit NATO; by 1999 he was leading the organisation.³²⁸ Perhaps the most instructive case was that of the German Greens. The party's constitutional commitment to pacifism, expressed in its two maxims, 'Never Again War', and 'Never Again Auschwitz' was fundamentally re-interpreted following genocide at Srebrenica.³²⁹ The party's leader, Joschka Fischer, viewed Srebrenica as the turning point where he accepted that the principle of 'Never

³²³ Rosa Balfour, 'Italy's Crisis Diplomacy in Kosovo, March–June 1999', *The International Spectator*, 34 (1999), pp. 67–80 (p. 68).

³²⁴ 'Joint Declaration on European Defence: Joint Declaration issued at the British-French Summit', 4 December 1998, CVCE (2015) <https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2008/3/31/f3cd16fb-fc37-4d52-936f-c8e9bc8of24f/publishable_en.pdf> [Accessed 11 July 2025]; Atkins, 'The Third Way International'.

³²⁵ Tony Blair, cited in: Deighton, 'The Past', p. 117.

³²⁶ Speech to Bridgewater Hall, 27 April 1997, Quoted in Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p. 3; Speech to *Time Magazine*, 30 November 1995, printed in Blair, *New Britain*, p. 263.

³²⁷ For an exploration of left-wing parties' divergent responses to OAF, see: Jonathan Pratschke, 'Kosovo, Imperialism and the Left: A Stratified Analysis of Responses to NATO's War', *Alethia*, 2.2 (1999), pp. 14–19, doi:10.1558/aleth.v2i2.14.

³²⁸ 'Javier Solana', NATO, n.d <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_138048.htm> [Accessed 21 August 2025].

³²⁹ Daniel Brunstetter and Scott Brunstetter, "Shades of Green" Engaged Pacifism, the Just War Tradition and the German Greens', *International Relations*, 25.1 (2011), pp. 65–84 (pp. 68–70), doi:10.1177/0047117810397008.

Again' would require international action – potentially the use of force – to protect.³³⁰ The Greens entered a governing coalition with Schröder's Social Democrats in 1998 and Fischer, being made foreign minister, passionately supported OAF despite significant protest from a minority of his own party.³³¹ Like in Britain, the faction of the German Left which largely opposed OAF was that of the anti-globalisation Left which was equally sceptical of Schröder and Blair's 'Third Way'.³³² But Fischer, and the majority of the party who voted for the intervention were, like 'New' Labour, ultimately faced with the fact that potentially divisive decisions would have to be made in order to effectively govern and cease being a fringe force in politics.³³³ While it would be inaccurate to describe the Left's taking up of interventionism as solely a product of its desire to be credible and electable, these factors certainly played a role in making intervention possible following left-wing parties having fought their way into government.

It is also important to consider the moral dimension and genuine humanitarian impulse behind OAF. Blair, specifically, looked back to internationalists of Britain's imperial past to justify his interventionism. Writing in his memoir, he rejected the 'traditional foreign policy view based on a narrow analysis of national interest', adding that he, like former Liberal Prime Minister, William Gladstone, believed this view to be not just 'flawed' but also 'immoral'.³³⁴ Gladstone, when in opposition in 1876, had condemned massacres of Bulgarians during the Ottoman occupation, and called for armed intervention to protect the Christian minority, much to the dismay of Benjamin Disraeli's Conservative government which warned – like Hurd and sympathetic Conservatives did during the Bosnian War a century later – of the perils of letting the 'letting the heart rule the head' in foreign affairs.³³⁵ A century later, and following the

³³⁰ Joshcka Fischer cited by: *Ibid.*, p. 70.

³³¹ Ian Traynor, 'Greens Back NATO Amid Uproar', *Guardian*, 14 May 1999
<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/may/14/greenpolitics>> [Accessed 20 May 2025].

³³² Tom Gill, 'Euro Left Unity at Risk', *Tribune*, 4 June 1999, p. 2.

³³³ Brunstetter and Brunstetter, 'Shades', pp. 70–75.

³³⁴ Blair, *A Journey*, p. 225; for a comparison of Blair to Gladstone five years before the memoir was published, see: Vernon Bogdanor, 'Commentary: Foreign Policy', in *The Blair Effect, 2001–5*, pp. 445–452 (pp. 445–57).

³³⁵ Quote from: Robert Blake, 'Stay Clear of the Balkans', *The Independent*, 24 August 1992
<<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/steer-clear-of-the-balkans-in-1876-disraeli-came-under-pressure-to-intervene-after-atrocities-in-the-region-we-would-do-well-to-recall-why-he-resisted-argues-robert-blake-1542177.html>> [Accessed 12 July March 2025]; a comparison also made in: Bogdanor, 'Commentary', pp. 446–47; for critical exploration of the invocation of nineteenth century

belated international response to genocide at Srebrenica, lessons had been learned. Notably for Blair, following reading the UN's Srebrenica Report, was that 'Bosnia constituted primarily a failure of nerve'.³³⁶ This was reflected in the government's July 1998 Strategic Defence Review, which made what the historian, David Edgerton, described as 'New' Labour's 'moral imperialism' perfectly clear: Britain would not 'stand idly by and watch humanitarian disasters or aggression of dictators go unchecked'.³³⁷ The 'zeitgeist' that had begun to change when NATO intervention was first authorised in the Summer of 1995 had, by now, fully inflected on 'New' Labour's foreign policy.³³⁸

The Zenith of Cosmopolitan Interventionism?

OAF and the rhetoric surrounding it deeply divided the Left. On the one hand, interventionists who had been frustrated by the British government's lack of desire to decisively intervene in the Bosnian War were, naturally, relieved to hear Blair accepting their view.³³⁹ On the other hand, 'New' Labour's interventionist journey prompted fierce protest from the anti-interventionist, 'usual suspects', who found that OAF was yet another demoralising moment in a decade which had been mired already by setbacks and failure. The CND had almost bankrupted itself protesting the Gulf War in 1990–91; it fruitlessly continued to call for nuclear disarmament as Tony Blair positioned himself as the man who would 'press the button'; campaigns against intervention during the Bosnian War were insignificant, as was opposition to the bombing of Iraq in December 1998.³⁴⁰ Following the failure to turn the public against the government during OAF, an ever 'confident, proactive' Blair would take Britain

Balkan crises in the 1990s, see: Bridget Robison, 'Putting Bosnia in its Place: Critical Geopolitics and the Representation of Bosnia in the British Print Media', *Geopolitics*, 9.2 (2004), pp. 378–401 (p. 390), doi:10.1080/14650040490442908.

³³⁶ Quote from: Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, pp. 37–38; reflected in his memoir: Blair, *A Journey*, p. 229; Clinton expressed similar sentiment, see: Bill Clinton, *My Life* (Arrow, 2004), p. 849; for the report in question, see: UN Secretary General, 'Report'.

³³⁷ David Edgerton, 'Tony Blair's Warfare State', *NLR*, 1/230 (1998), pp. 123–30; George Robertson, quoted in Tom Dodd and Mark Oakes, 'The Strategic Defence Review White Paper', Research Paper 98/91 (House of Commons Library, 1998), pp. 13–15.

³³⁸ McCourt, 'Embracing', p. 256.

³³⁹ For example: 'Courage of Tony Blair', *Tribune*, 7 May 1999, p. 4.

³⁴⁰ Rose Collis, 'CND Faces Bleak Future Unless Funds Pour In', *Tribune*, 13 September 1991, p. 4; for the broader demoralisation of the pacifist Left, see: Shaw, *The Campaign*, chapter four; Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p. 5.

into further interventions in Sierra Leone, 2000, and most controversially, in Afghanistan, 2001, and Iraq, 2003.³⁴¹ It would take until these later interventions for a genuinely troublesome protest movement to develop in opposition as the Stop the War Coalition, created by figures such as *NLR* editor, Tariq Ali, and Tony Benn, MP, organised the largest demonstration in history against the invasion of Iraq.³⁴² The invasion also saw the formation of a new political party in George Galloway's, Respect, which contested multicultural seats, largely on the platform of opposing British foreign policy.³⁴³ Clearly, OAF marked the zenith of humanitarian intervention before the changing geo-political circumstances of the 2000s caused a major pushback against 'New' Labour's interventionist instincts.

The protest movement against OAF was ineffectual and emblematic of the lack of influence of the British far Left which comprised most of its members. It was largely organised by the Committee for Peace in the Balkans (CfPB, set up by the Labour CND in 1993 to oppose the prospect of NATO intervention in Bosnia) alongside specific allies in academia such as the feminist scholar activist, Germaine Greer; fringe political parties like the Green Party, the Socialist Workers Party and the Communist Party of Britain; and several public figures like the playwright, Harold Pinter, and journalist, John Pilger.³⁴⁴ They were joined from the Right, most notably as they had been during the Bosnian War, by Edward Heath.³⁴⁵ Alice Mahon, MP, the CfPB chair, claimed that a non-insignificant number of twenty-five-thousand people attended what was, most likely, the largest anti-OAF demonstration in London on 8 May 1999.³⁴⁶ Sections of the Left also protested OAF within trade unions and at the local level. For one, the

³⁴¹ Daddow, "Tony's War?" p. 548.

³⁴² 'Anti-War Rally Makes Its Mark', *BBC*, 19 February 2003
<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2767761.stm>> [Accessed 10 July 2025].

³⁴³ Glynn, 'Muslims and the Left'.

³⁴⁴ 'UK Politics – Playwright Pinter Challenges NATO', *BBC*, 30 April 1999
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/332117.stm> [Accessed 5 July 2025]; Audrey Gillan, 'Bombing Shames Britain, Pinter Tells Protestors', *Guardian*, 7 June 1999
<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/jun/07/balkans>> [Accessed 10 July 2025]; contributions from Edward Said, Tariq Ali, Peter Gowan in edition titled: 'The Imperialism of Human Rights', *NLR*, 234 (1999); the CND voted to oppose OAF before it began at their March 1999 AGM: MRC, MSS/483/15a, 'Labour CND Annual General Meeting Saturday 13th March 1999', n. d; LSE, JENKINS/2008/5, Jim Addington, 'Bombing Serbia is an Illegal Act', *Labour Action for Peace*, p. 1; Alice Mahon, 'UK Politics – Alice Mahon: Public Opinion Turning', *BBC*, 13 May 1999
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/341946.stm?> [Accessed 10 July 2025]; MRC, MSS/483/15b, CND, Letter to Executive Committee Members, 1 August 1999; John Pilger, 'Humanitarian Intervention', *New Statesman*, 28 June 1999, p. 15.

³⁴⁵ Benn, *Free*, p. 517.

³⁴⁶ Mahon, 'Public Opinion Turning'.

National Union of Teachers condemned OAF, spending significant time at its conference in early April 1999 debating it, largely at the behest of anti-war delegates from the SWP.³⁴⁷ Local campaigns included the Bradford Committee to Stop the War in the Balkans which organised a charity concert to fundraise for the cause, to the more militant example of a group of women who broke into a Royal Air Force base involved with the bombing in protest.³⁴⁸

Without significant Parliamentary opposition to OAF, and lacking the support of the public, these campaigns failed to have an impact. When, on 19 April, Benn and the ‘usual suspects’ forced a Parliamentary vote and registered their opposition to the war, they could muster only thirteen names.³⁴⁹ Ultimately, the British and Western European publics were largely in favour of the operation, as opinion polls revealed consistent support, with one poll even suggesting that a majority of British adults supported committing ground troops both in April and June.³⁵⁰ This relative popularity did not stop Blair’s team from wishing to avoid exposing awkward divisions within the Party, though, as they sought to avoid a vote in the first place.³⁵¹ Perhaps the government did not expect that such a small number of its own MPs would vote against it, but their worries were justified. Alastair Campbell later expressed relief that Labour had avoided the theatrics that accompanied the German Greens’ vote to support the war: protestors threw paint at Fischer and party members heckled him as he spoke in support of OAF.³⁵²

Further adding to ‘New’ Labour’s success at rallying the British Left around OAF was that many supported it not out of loyalty to ‘New’ Labour but because they had been

³⁴⁷ Patrick Murphy, ‘Kosova at NUT Conference’, *Workers Liberty*, 55, April 1999, p. 6.

³⁴⁸ Leeds, FAN/HJ/INT/01, Stop War in the Balkans Leaflet, n.d; ‘UK: Protesters Break into RAF Base’, *BBC*, 16 April 1999 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/321716.stm>> [Accessed 14 August 2025].

³⁴⁹ However, less than forty MPs voted: ‘Kosovo’, HC Deb 19 April 1999, 329, cc. 573–68.

³⁵⁰ Alan Travis, ‘Huge Swing in Support for Ground Troops’, *Guardian*, 2 April 1999 <<https://amp.theguardian.com/world/1999/apr/02/balkans3>> [Accessed 12 July 2025]; Alan Travis, ‘Voters Still Divided in Sending Ground Troops to Kosovo’, *Guardian*, 1 June 1999 <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/1999/jun/01/alantravis1>> [Accessed 12 July 2025].

³⁵¹ Foreign Affairs Committee, ‘Fourth Report’, paras 165–66; Price, *The Spin Doctor’s Diary*, p. 90.

³⁵² Alastair Campbell, ‘Transcript of Alastair Campbell Speech at Royal United Services Institute, 9 July 1999’, *Balkan Conflicts Research Team* <<https://www.balkan-conflicts-research.com/archive/transcript-of-alastair-campbell-speech-at-royal-united-services-institute-9-july-1999/>> [Accessed 12 July 2025]; for the conflict within the German Greens, see: Traynor, ‘Greens Back NATO’; ‘Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer at Green Party Congress on Kosovo (1999)’, *German History Intersections*, n. d <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/germanness/ghis:document-241>> [Accessed 1 July 2025].

interventionists for years. They had undergone the transformation described by Mary Kaldor in which ‘many of us who were peace campaigners in the past have become hawks’.³⁵³ Journalists surrounding *Tribune*, which was generally hostile to ‘New’ Labour, warmly welcomed the intervention, while warning that a ground invasion would be necessary to bring the Serb leadership to heel from the outset.³⁵⁴ *Tribune*’s editor, Mark Seddon, even claimed that Blair described his support for OAF as ‘something of a welcome surprise’ in a private letter of thanks.³⁵⁵ Additionally, some members of Benn’s ‘hard-Left’ Socialist Campaign Group, Lynne Jones and Harry Barnes, and the former member, the prospective independent London Mayoral Candidate, Ken Livingstone, embraced this view of the war as they had already supported intervention during the Bosnian War.³⁵⁶ Despite their alliance over OAF, Blair made a concerted effort to undermine Livingstone’s mayoral campaign that same year, regarding him and Tony Benn as emblematic of the ‘New Left’ which had nearly pushed Labour into ‘extinction’ in earlier decades.³⁵⁷ This mutual hostility between Blair and much of the British Left led Nick Cohen to write in *Tribune* that, for those who were ‘provoked by Kosovo to abandon the principle of opposing whatever the Government does’, defending OAF was still ‘a traumatic and dispiriting task’.³⁵⁸ This echoed *Tribune*’s line from the Bosnian War. When it was confronted with its single-issue alliance with Margaret Thatcher and the US Congress on intervention, it could offer little more than the observation that, like a ‘stopped clock’, these ‘reactionary’ forces sometimes got it right.³⁵⁹

³⁵³ Quoted in: Mike Naughton, ‘Peace Activists Now “Hawks” Over Kosovo’, *Tribune*, 2 April 1999, p. 1.

³⁵⁴ ‘On the Brink in the Balkans’, *Tribune*, 26 March 1999, p. 4; reiterated consistently in: Michael Foot, ‘Confront Enemy Action’, *Tribune*, 2 April 1999, p.1; ‘Morals of the Balkan Story’, *Tribune*, 9 April 1999; Paul Anderson, ‘Now Is a Good Time for Ground Troops’, *Tribune*, 30 April 1999, p. 3; Joan Smith, ‘Two Months of Missed Targets’, *Tribune*, 28 May 1999, p. 5.

³⁵⁵ Mark Seddon, *Standing for Something: Life in the Awkward Squad* (Biteback, 2011), p. 79; Blair was otherwise highly critical of Seddon’s choice to publish minutes of the Labour NEC in *Tribune*, see: John Blevin, ‘“New” Labour Signals Assault on “Dinosaur” Local Parties’, *Tribune*, 28 May 1999, p. 1.

³⁵⁶ Harry Barnes, ‘Letter: Battles Over Kosovo’, *Independent*, 21 April 1999 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/letter-battles-over-kosovo-1088745.html>> [Accessed 3 July 2025]; Livingstone, Barnes and Jones supported a motion declaring OAF to be justified on humanitarian grounds: ‘Kosovo (no. 2)’, EDM 559, 19 April 1999 ><https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/16967/kosovo-no-2>> [Accessed 30 June 2025].

³⁵⁷ Quoted in Ewen MacAskill, ‘Livingstone Attacked by PM After Making Mayor List’, *Guardian*, 19 November 1999, p.1; see also: Price, *The Spin Doctor’s Diary*, pp. 75–79.

³⁵⁸ Nick Cohen, ‘Charge of the Ultra-Light Brigade’ *Tribune*, 9 April 1999, p. 5.

³⁵⁹ Quote from Ian Williams, ‘Wither the United Nations’, *Tribune*, 30 June 1995, p. 4; Echoed in: Williams, ‘Bosnia Betrayed’, p. 1.

In another echo of the Left's engagement with the Bosnian War, this firmly left-wing interventionist current was also present within trade unions and small revolutionary parties. Here, interventionist radicals were forced to contend with what the scholar, Luke Summers, described as the 'ideological murkiness' of mediating 'an aversion to NATO' with the desire to protect stateless minorities from persecution.³⁶⁰ Though Summers' work was focused on Jewish engagement with Yugoslavia, this trend was certainly reflected on the wider Left. One group who captured this contradiction was the Alliance for Workers Liberty. AWL was particularly disappointed by comrades who bandied around slogans such as 'stop the war' in response to OAF.³⁶¹ They declared that, in practice, this would only stop 'one part of the war: for Milošević will not listen and obediently stop his war against the Kosovars'.³⁶² For AWL, the salient fact was that the anti-intervention Left had become the 'the heralds and allies of Serbian triumphalism – although they accepted that bombing was a blunt instrument, designed to mitigate friendly casualties at the expense of the Kosovar Albanians on the ground, and thus questionably humanitarian in practice.'³⁶³ As the National Union of Teachers delegate, Patrick Murphey, reported back in *Workers Liberty* – the AWL's newspaper – following the earlier mentioned annual conference where delegates forced a vote on OAF, the lack of enthusiasm for the rights of Kosovar Albanians seemed to be a far cry from organisations like the SWP's longstanding commitment to the 'Palestinians' "right" to return to all of present day Israel'.³⁶⁴ In an echo of the discourse surrounding the Bosnian War, some on the Left seemed to abandon the principal of defending the persecuted and oppressed, instead embracing a superficial form of anti-imperialism which obscured the complexities of the conflict and 'whitewashed' Serbian ethnic cleansing.³⁶⁵

The scholarly pro-intervention lobby that developed during the Bosnian War also sprang into action over the course of 1998–99, and unlike their co-interventionists in

³⁶⁰ Summers, 'Echoes', p. 3.

³⁶¹ 'Who Will Save the Kosovars?', *Workers Liberty*, April 1999, 55, pp. 3–4; See: MRC, 661/5/4/4, SWP, *Stop the War: Why Bombing Brings More Horror* (Larkham Printing and Publishing, 1999).

³⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 4; similar criticisms came from other left-wing advocates for a ground invasion, see: Mary Kaldor, 'Bombs Away! But to Save Civilians We Must Get In Some Soldiers Too', *Guardian*, 25 March 1999 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/mar/25/balkans8>> [Accessed 5 June 2025]; Anthony Arblaster, 'Protect and Survive', *Tribune*, 9 April 1999, p. 1; Mark Seddon, 'What's Next for Poor Kosovo?', *Tribune*, 21 May 1999, p. 4.

³⁶⁴ Murphy, 'Kosova', p. 6.

³⁶⁵ 'Who Will Save the Kosovars?', p. 4.

the far-Left had much more success at shaping the narrative on Kosovo. In September 1999, the former members of the Alliance to Defend Bosnia-Herzegovina, alongside the human rights activist, Bianca Jagger, formed the Free Kosova Committee which called for Kosovar ‘self-determination’.³⁶⁶ Earlier, in 1997, its co-chair, Quintin Hoare, founded the Bosnian Institute to continue the work of the ADBH with trustees such as the historian, Noel Malcolm, the interventionist journalist, Melanie McDonagh and historian, Brendan Simms.³⁶⁷ There is limited evidence that, with a more likeminded government in power from 1997, these interventionists played at least a partial role in influencing policy. The journalist, Paul Anderson, credited Mary Kaldor for persuading Robin Cook – who had previously been sceptical about using force in Kosovo – to firm up his position in June 1998 at a conference organised by Kaldor’s HCA at the London School of Economics.³⁶⁸ Whether or not this was an exaggeration, Kaldor certainly contributed to the official narrative of events following the war, joining the Free Kosova Committee in giving evidence to the Foreign Affairs Parliamentary Select Committee’s report on OAF.³⁶⁹ In the years to come this scholarly lobby succeeded in changing the narrative surrounding the Yugoslav Wars more broadly: the historian, Brendan Simms, claimed that his 2001 book, *Unfinest Hour*, which criticised the Conservatives’ perceived inaction during the Bosnian War, played a partial role in shaping a sense in academia and beyond that the wars had been caused by Serbian aggression all along.³⁷⁰ He credited authors like Branka Magaš for defending this view before it became more widespread.³⁷¹ Therefore, interventionist ideas were seemingly vindicated by successful intervention in 1999, and would be further reinforced when the International Criminal Tribunal found key former-Yugoslav leaders guilty of various crimes against humanity – including genocide – in the decades to come.³⁷²

³⁶⁶ ‘Statement of Principles Adopted at the Founding Meeting of the Free Kosova Committee, Held at the National Liberal Club in London on Monday 20 September 1999’, in Foreign Affairs Committee, ‘Fourth Report’, appendix 9; ‘Memorandum Submitted by Free Kosova Committee’, in *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ ‘People’, *Bosnian Institute*, n.d

<<https://web.archive.org/web/20110718010112/http://www.bosnia.org.uk/about/staff.cfm>> [Accessed 1 August 2025].

³⁶⁸ Interview with Paul Anderson in: Melinda Rankin, *The Political Life of Mary Kaldor* (Lyne Rienner, 2017), p. 200.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*; Mary Kaldor, ‘Memorandum Submitted by Dr Mary Kaldor, London School of Economics’, in *Ibid.*, appendix 5.

³⁷⁰ Simms, *Unfinest Hour*; Simms justified this by pointing to positive reviews for the book in the national broadsheets, see: Simms, ‘The End’, p. 53.

³⁷¹ Simms, ‘The End’, p. 5; Magaš, *The Destruction*.

³⁷² ICTY, ‘Judgement Summary’.

The vindication and zenith of interventionism also had political implications as success in OAF would shape a more self-assured Tony Blair who led Britain into further, more controversial, interventions in the 2000s.³⁷³ The interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, especially, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the Global War on Terror have since overshadowed the Balkan moment of the 1990s and turned many interventionists away from the cause.³⁷⁴ By ending this final section further exploring the ‘lessons’ and legacy of Kosovo, it will be possible to understand how OAF fit within a wider sense of the Left’s historical memory. Specifically, it will show how in decades to come, Kosovo would find its own, albeit limited, place in a revisionist left-wing historical memory of intervention.

The previous chapter showed that historical precedent permeates discourse surrounding military intervention and over Kosovo this was no different as activists brought personal memories, especially of the Second World War, into the debate. Before OAF could become a precedent of its own, the experience of figures on the Left like Michael Foot, who criticised ‘appeasement’ in the 1930s, clashed with those like Tony Benn, and Harold Pinter whose aversion to bombing stemmed at least partially from their childhood experience of the London Blitz in the 1940s.³⁷⁵ Or there was the Labour Peer, Lord Jenkins of Putney, who was the only Labour party member to resign the whip because of OAF, and took his principled stance because of his experience as a Royal Air Force pilot during the war.³⁷⁶ Recalling his horror ‘when block-busting descended to mass killing of civilians in Hamburg and Dresden’, he wrote in his resignation letter that he also viewed the bombing of Hiroshima as a ‘war crime of Holocaust level magnitude’.³⁷⁷ For Tony Benn, there was an additional dimension to the use of history, in that it was a reminder to resist the ‘demonisation’ of the Serbs – ‘our wartime allies’ – which led the journalist, John Lloyd, to conclude that an older

³⁷³ Daddow, “‘Tony’s War?’”, p. 548.

³⁷⁴ Iraq placed a ‘veil’ over Kosovo, see: *Ibid.*

³⁷⁵ Michael Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter* (Faber and Faber, 1997), pp. 5–10; Noted by Benn in his speech against the earlier bombing of Iraq: Tony Benn, ‘Iraq’, HC Deb 17 February 1998, 306, cc. 899–990 (c. 928); Personal memories of the Second World War were also argued to have influenced left-wing opposition to bombing during the Vietnam and Gulf Wars in: Phythian, *The Labour Party*, pp. 15–16.

³⁷⁶ His resignation letter was printed in the *Morning Star*, affiliated with the Communist Party of Britain: LSE, JENKINS/2008/5, Hugh Jenkins, ‘Forceful Protest Against Murder’, Cutting from *Morning Star*, 8 April 1999 [originally written 25 March 1999].

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

generation of British politicians viewed them not as fascists and ethnic cleansers, but as the ‘boldest of anti-Nazi warriors’.³⁷⁸ Thus when a new generation of politicians and thinkers, such as Robin Cook and Tony Blair described Kosovo as the ‘Spain of the nineties’, or warned of ‘appeasement’ and the lessons of the Holocaust, they told only one side of a historical story which was readily open for abuse.³⁷⁹

The tangible implications of intervention as historical memory continued into the 2000s. Following OAF, the lesson Blair learned to stand up to ‘gangsters’, to resist blackmail and not to ‘appease’ returned in the justification for his later support for the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.³⁸⁰ But significant for the realignment of the Left was that the invasion of Iraq, in particular, was deeply unpopular with much of the Left as one-hundred-and-ninety-eight MPs – most of them Labour – voted against the war in stark contrast to the relative popularity of OAF.³⁸¹ Labour Ministers Robin Cook, John Denham, and Clare Short, who had all been on the interventionist journey – in Short’s case, after opposing the first Gulf War from 1990–91 – joined the protest by resigning from the government in a seemingly full-circle moment.³⁸² Similarly, the interventionists, Ken Livingstone (who was by then the Mayor of London), Bianca Jagger and Mark Seddon, joined ranks with Tony Benn, Tariq Ali and Harold Pinter, in demonstrating and speaking against the war.³⁸³ Iraq was clearly different to OAF which seemed to have been driven by a sense of moral purpose.³⁸⁴ Without UN approval, and seemingly driven by Blair’s Atlanticist loyalty, the invasion of Iraq proved enduringly controversial, but these trends were already underway during OAF when interventionists decided that the UN did not need to approve the operation to be legitimate: ‘The United Nations is not the embodiment of international law’, wrote

³⁷⁸ MRC, MSS/483/15a, Tony Benn, ‘Kosovo – A Tragedy’, *Socialist Campaign Group News*, March 1999; John Lloyd, ‘The Doves Turned Hawkish’, *New Statesman*, 2 April 1999, pp. 9–10 (p. 9).

³⁷⁹ Blair opened his Chicago speech with the claim that ‘appeasement does not work’: Economic Club of Chicago, ‘The Right Honorable Tony Blair’, 13:20–13:30; for Kosovo as ‘Spain of the Nineties’ see: Cook, cited by Lloyd, ‘Cook Declares Total War’, p. 8.

³⁸⁰ Blair, quoted in: Jackie Ashley and Ewen MacAskill, “History Will Be My Judge”, *Guardian*, 1 March 2003 <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/mar/01/iraq.foreignpolicy>> [Accessed 26 August 2025].

³⁸¹ Matthew Tempest, ‘Labour MPs Revolt Against Iraq’, *Guardian*, 26 February 2003 <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/feb/26/foreignpolicy.uk2>> [Accessed 10 September 2025].

³⁸² John Denham, ‘Iraq’, HC Deb 18 March 2003, cc. 760–858 (cc. 797–98); Cook, *The Point*, pp. 102–104; Short, *An Honourable Deception*, pp. 210–212.

³⁸³ ‘Anti-War Rally Makes its Mark’, *BBC*; Seddon, *Standing*, p. 79.

³⁸⁴ ‘Kosovo: Big Hearts, Soft Heads’, *New Statesman*, 26 March 1999, p. 5; Seddon, *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Melanie McDonagh in the *New Statesman*.³⁸⁵ Those who tirelessly constructed Milošević, accurately or not, as a 1990s Adolf Hitler found their interventionism to be a runaway cause as opposition to the Iraq War became ‘the baseline of left-liberal politics’.³⁸⁶

Nonetheless, interventionists have sought to situate OAF within a wider metanarrative which framed the invasion of Iraq as an aberration in an otherwise proud internationalist tradition, in essence, salvaging OAF from this runaway legacy.³⁸⁷ Beyond symbolism there were tangible implications of this revival, as activists like Tribune’s, Joan Smith, and Marko Hoare invoked OAF to justify further interventions in Libya, 2011, and Syria, 2014 under what they viewed as strictly humanitarian purposes.³⁸⁸ The intervention in Libya, in fairness, was legal and justified by the UN’s ‘Responsibility to Protect’ which itself was justified by the UN’s past failures to prevent genocide in the 1990s, coming into effect in 2005.³⁸⁹ Despite the fact that the application of this principle has been uneven and serious crimes against humanity across the world continued unabated, the 2010s offered at least some hope for advocates of legal and multilateral ‘humanitarian’ intervention.³⁹⁰ Regardless, as Marie-Hélène Labbé noted, discourse surrounding these interventions struggled to escape Iraq’s ‘dark shadow’.³⁹¹

While these internationalists certainly had good intentions framing OAF in this regard, it would ultimately require a selective reading of history to view Iraq as an

³⁸⁵ Quote from: Melanie McDonagh, ‘The Price of Sitting on Our Hands’, *New Statesman*, 26 March 1999, p. 16; For controversy surrounding lack of UN approval in Iraq, see: 13 February 2002 entry, Cook, *The Point*, p. 102; Joan Smith, ‘MPs Are Scarred by the War in Iraq: The Vote on Syria was Dogged by Memories of 2003’, *Independent*, 31 August 2013 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/mps-are-scarred-by-the-war-in-iraq-8792882.html>> [Accessed 28 June 2025]; Clare Short resigned because of the absence of UN approval and involvement post-invasion of Iraq, see: Short, *An Honourable Deception*, p. 177, pp. 210–12.

³⁸⁶ Bolton and Pitts, *Corbynism*, p. 78.

³⁸⁷ Smith, ‘MPs Are Scarred’; Seddon defended his support for OAF when describing his own opposition to Iraq, see: Seddon, *Standing*, p. 79.

³⁸⁸ Smith, *Ibid.*; Marko A. Hoare, ‘David Cameron, The Henry Jackson Society, and the Libya Intervention’, *Greater Surbiton*, 15 September 2016

<<https://greatersurbiton.wordpress.com/category/neoconservatism/>> [Accessed 14 August 2025].

³⁸⁹ Jennifer M. Welsh, ‘The Responsibility to Protect after Libya and Syria’, *Daedalus*, 145.4 (2016), pp. 75–87, doi:10.1162/DAED_a_00413.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁹¹ Marie-Hélène Labbé, Iraq’s Dark Shadow: Tony Blair’s Moment of Truth?, CHES Working Paper No. 2016-03, April 2016 <<https://www.dur.ac.uk/media/durham-university/research-/research-centres/humanities-engaging-sci-and-soc-centre-for/CWP-Labbev2.pdf>> [Accessed 20 August 2025]; echoed by: Smith, ‘MPs Are Scarred’.

aberration. In fact, the awkward alliance of interventionist left-wingers and the similarly internationalist, unilateralist, ‘neo-conservative’ American Right during the Yugoslav Wars forewarned the changing nature of intervention in the 2000s.³⁹² American ‘Neo-cons’ like Paul Wolfowitz had been eager for a confrontation with Saddam Hussein since the USA failed to topple his government following the 1990–91 Gulf War.³⁹³ On the Left, an internationalist like the self-admittedly ‘hawkish’, Anne Clwyd, MP, of Labour was a leading advocate for the Iraqi Kurds in their struggle against Hussein during the 1980s–90s.³⁹⁴ She later claimed in Labour’s Parliamentary Committee in February 1998 that: ‘the political objective [on Iraq] had to be to get rid of Saddam some way or other’.³⁹⁵ It is also crucial to remember that Blair’s first military action was a joint bombing campaign of Iraq with the United States in December 1998, meaning that desire to fight Saddam Hussein was a view held by some interventionists on both the Right and Left long before 9/11. Additionally, interventionists of both Right and Left had been on the same side of the arms embargo debate during the Bosnian War.³⁹⁶ This put left-wingers who had grown frustrated with the United Nations’ seeming moral failure to prevent genocide into agreement with those on the Right who wished to discredit the organisation in service of the cause of American exceptionalism.³⁹⁷ Thus, perhaps a difficult lesson for the interventionist Left was that 2003 was foreshadowed in the dynamics during that Balkan moment of the 1990s.

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Irrespective of its legacy, OAF was a watershed moment, and the result of a decade-long transformation of international attitudes towards the use of force for humanitarian means. It symbolised the short-lived moment whereby many on the European Left embraced ‘making war on dictators’, much to the dismay of some of

³⁹² For the convergence of Left and Right ‘hawks’ during the Bosnian War, see: Justin Vaïsse, ‘Why Neoconservatism Still Matters’ (Lowy Institute, 2010), p. 5
<https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/115876/2010_04_Neoconservatism.pdf> [Accessed 14 August 2025].

³⁹³ Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars*, p. 23.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁹⁵ PHM, Anne Clwyd, ‘Minutes of the Twenty First Meeting of the Parliamentary Committee’, 11 February 1998.

³⁹⁶ Vaïsse, ‘Why Neoconservatism’; Hamza Karčić, ‘US Neoconservative Support and Policy Activism for Bosnia, 1992–1995: Correcting the Record’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 35.3 (2015), pp. 344–58, doi:10.1080/13602004.2015.1080950.

³⁹⁷ Vaïsse, *Ibid.*, p. 5; Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars*, p. 83.

their comrades.³⁹⁸ While it was not solely a ‘New’ Labour story, and much of this study has shed light on the transformation of the whole Left on military intervention, ‘New’ Labour proved to be an effective vehicle for putting cosmopolitan interventionism into practice. Its basic instincts surrounding Britain’s ‘destiny’ to lead in a globalised world translated into a distinctly Blairite, post-imperial, cosmopolitan interventionism inspired liberal imperialists of Britain’s past.³⁹⁹ While Blair’s ideas on Atlanticism, Europe and international moral leadership were not ground-breaking in the party’s history, the way in which Blair retrofitted this cosmopolitan intervention into his Third Way outlook was a decisive break from past consensus, nonetheless.

³⁹⁸ Rawnsley, *Servants*, p. 263.

³⁹⁹ For Britain’s ‘destiny’ to be a great power see: Blair’s Speech to Bridgewater Hall, 27 April 1997, Quoted in Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars*, p. 3; Tony Blair, Speech to *Time Magazine*, 30 November 1995, printed in Blair, *New Britain*, p. 263.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand how the road to military intervention in Yugoslavia contributed to the realignment and transformation of the British Left across the 1990s. It demonstrated that the divides caused by military intervention in Yugoslavia and the transformation of the Labour leadership towards it reflected both changing international norms surrounding the use of force and the broader battle over the political identity of the Left. It challenged existing understanding of the Left's foreign policy trajectory, reframing the Left's realignment and transformation on intervention as part of a decade long process, not an abrupt shift which was solely the responsibility of 'New' Labour.⁴⁰⁰

The first major factor which shaped the Left's engagement with the collapse of Yugoslavia was the string of international failures during the Bosnian War which gave way to a new consensus on NATO intervention following the Summer of 1995.⁴⁰¹ As chapter one showed, the Labour leadership attempted to defend – or perhaps salvage – the United Nations' credibility and authority while holding firm against rising domestic pressure to take tougher interventionist action. This pressure, from a faction surrounding the Tribune newspaper, Labour Friends of Bosnia, the Alliance to Defend Bosnia Herzegovina, the former Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and her former Labour opposite number, Michael Foot, demanded that Britain lift the UN imposed arms embargo on the Bosnian Government. However, the Labour leaderships of John Smith and Tony Blair did not buckle under interventionist pressure, instead offering a pragmatic form of limited interventionism from 1993 onward which held that air strikes could be necessary, but that the arms embargo must stay in place so that the UN peacekeeping effort could continue.

The seismic shock required to change the international community's approach came in the Summer of 1995 when UNPROFOR failed to prevent the Srebrenica massacre, giving way, over the following months, to an American-led peace process and NATO intervention.⁴⁰² But even as the UN came under significant strain, Tony Blair, newly

⁴⁰⁰ Echoes the 'revisionist' view presented in: McCourt, 'Embracing'.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 252–256.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*

elected as leader of the Labour Party, maintained that resisting Serbian ‘blackmail’ required Britain to continue to defend the organisation.⁴⁰³ This was simply the norm at the time: armed force was legitimised by the UN which Labour had long held to be the supreme authority in international security. For all the criticism it received from ‘lift and strike’ interventionists at the time, Labour’s Bosnia policy beyond April 1993 (when it backed air strikes) was certainly a step in the direction of the much tougher response to Kosovo which came later in the decade.

When Blair entered government in 1997, he was well placed to respond to the paradigm shift in international security towards NATO intervention because of his strong Atlanticism and growing sense that the international community had failed to stand up to Milošević during the Bosnian War. There is evidence that these instincts were longstanding: he had called for continued American engagement in Europe and for Britain to realise its post-imperial ‘destiny’ to lead in the continent as early as 1995 when he was Leader of the Opposition.⁴⁰⁴ John Smith’s pragmatism, and belief in a foreign policy based on peaceful diplomacy and moral clout had given way to a much more idealistic conception of Britain in the world. Blair was openly proud of Britain’s historical great power status and replaced the Smith leadership’s admittance of international ‘impotence’ with a vision of a Britain which would not ‘stand idly by’.⁴⁰⁵ Blair combined this post-imperial internationalism and desire for international leadership with a passionate belief in globalisation which ultimately led ‘New’ Labour to put a distinctly cosmopolitan form of interventionism into practice by 1999.

These developments in international security and of the trajectory of the Labour leadership were hugely controversial on the Left. Schisms formed as ardent left-wingers called for NATO to fight ethnic cleansers and different groups presented their own, often contradictory, ideas on who the real imperialists were during the wars in the former Yugoslavia. The philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, claimed that the Yugoslav Wars presented a political optical illusion to the Left: on the one hand, to call for intervention was to promote a basic standard of international citizenship, to oppose

⁴⁰³ Tony Blair, HC Deb 31 May 1995, c. 1007.

⁴⁰⁴ Speech to Bridgewater Hall, 27 April 1997, quoted in Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars*, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁵ Dodd and Oakes, ‘The Strategic Defence Review’, pp. 13–15; harking back to George Robertson’s (then Labour Europe spokesperson) claims that the international community was ‘impotent’ in its handling of the Bosnian War in 1992, quoted in: Rees, ‘No Military Intervention in Bosnia’, p. 3.

ethnic cleansing and aggression and to support the rights of stateless minorities.⁴⁰⁶ On the other hand, it represented an attack on a 'sovereign country', Serbia, under the guise of 'human rights', which turned the Serbs into an underdog resisting 'Western' attack.⁴⁰⁷ Given what was explored in the introduction's framing of what it means to be on the Left, the allure of both sides of this picture are clear: interventionists and anti-interventionists alike believed they were supporting the oppressed against external aggression.

The danger of this discourse was that it led to sloganeering over substance and further divided the Left when it was already embroiled in crisis. In chapter two, the IWA/WAfB convoy debacle and the split of the editorial board of *NLR* showed that the Left's tendency toward ideological gatekeeping had tangible consequences and contributed its own minor part to the overall organisational reshaping of the Left in the 1990s. Schisms were reflected across Europe as the German Green Party similarly struggled to apply its bold 'Never Again Auschwitz', 'Never Again War' maxims to the wars in the former Yugoslavia. Disagreements over OAF in 1999 caused a chasmic rift within the party only a year on since it had entered a governing coalition for the first time. Similar sectarianism also impeded the business of the National Union of Teachers annual conference where jostling between the large anti-intervention group, the SWP, and the small pro-Kosovar, Alliance for Workers Liberty, further undermined whatever existed of 'Left unity' in Britain by 1999. Overall, the crisis in international legitimacy and seismic shift in the role of the United States and NATO as the de facto policeman of European security prompted a parallel crisis of organisation and identity on the British Left.

This meant that the wars in the former Yugoslavia became a contested symbol of different left-wing visions of international solidarity which intersected with ongoing debates within the Left on globalisation, cosmopolitanism and those who resisted these trends. At the heart of the divides on globalisation was whether it was taken to represent the supremacy of neoliberal capitalism following the Cold War or understood in cosmopolitan terms as an opportunity to redefine what it meant to be

⁴⁰⁶ Slavoj Žižek, 'Against the Double Blackmail', *NLR*, 1/234 (1999), pp. 76–82 (p. 79).

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

an international citizen, promoting tolerance and a multicultural future. Much of the British and European far Left which viewed the end of the Cold War and the acceleration of globalisation as the death knell of socialism projected this framing onto the collapse of Yugoslavia, blaming American and European economic interference for the country's destruction. To defend what was viewed as a socialist state, Yugoslavia, resisting Western attack was deemed as an anti-imperialist position. This explains why figures like Tony Benn were quick to blame the complex nexus of views on the Left on the fact that a Left which had moved beyond 'class analysis' was one which had 'just become individuals putting their case'.⁴⁰⁸

The decline of the anti-intervention Left over the decade was intrinsically linked to this conspiratorial thinking. Anti-intervention groups like the CfPB and some of the more overtly pro-Serbian allies of the anti-intervention movement engaged in overt genocide denial because of their intense scepticism towards Western media narratives framing the Serbs as the principal aggressor.⁴⁰⁹ In 1999, during OAF, Tony Benn blamed the lack of salience of the anti-intervention movement on Blair's Parliamentary dominance and control of the media, but evidence from opinion polling suggested that their ideas were simply out of touch.⁴¹⁰ In this sense, the wars in the former Yugoslavia were also a window into the increasing irrelevance and demoralisation of the British far Left.

On the other side of this divide was a very different expression of left-wing political identity, internationalism and solidarity which viewed Yugoslavia as being dismantled from within by the forces of ethno-nationalism. The Bosnian Muslims, especially, became a symbol for these cosmopolitan minded activists surrounding organisations like the ADBH and left-wing (and more liberal) newspapers such as *Tribune* and the *Guardian* of a European future built on tolerance and multicultural pluralism. Simultaneously, the wars in the former Yugoslavia reminded these interventionists of what they understood as the lessons of Europe's past – namely the struggle against fascism in Spain in the 1930s and during the Second World War – which they also connected to the Left's historical memory of anti-racist and anti-colonial struggle.

⁴⁰⁸ Benn, *Free*, p. 532.

⁴⁰⁹ See: Hoare, 'Genocide'.

⁴¹⁰ Benn, *Free*, p. 534.

Some, like Michael Foot, Andrew Faulds and Bernie Grant engaged with these memories from personal experience, while ironically many of the policy makers at the time – Tony Blair, Robin Cook, Joschka Fischer, for example – who invoked Auschwitz and the struggle against racism to justify intervention, had not. The fact that the peoples of the former Yugoslavia became a comparative node for onlookers was intrinsically connected, as Levy and Sznajder argued, to the cosmopolitanising and globalisation of historical memory: the Bosnian Muslims and Kosovar Albanians became a representation of Jews, Palestinians, Black South Africans, and Spanish Republican anti-fascists all interchangeably.⁴¹¹ Yugoslavia became an object of projection for a Left which, as Michael Ignatieff argued, was searching for a cause.⁴¹²

Many of these conclusions resonate into the present day, even though the international security environment has changed significantly since the 1990s.⁴¹³ Today, Ukraine is the victim of a war of aggression in Europe, and at this crucial juncture in the continent's history, the trans-Atlantic 'special relationship' is facing new challenges with Donald Trump's return to the White House.⁴¹⁴ Left-wing foreign policy activism is also increasingly relevant. The ongoing war in Israel-Palestine has become an international *cause célèbre*, as debates surrounding the term 'genocide' have once again returned to the fore and the Palestinian cause has become a rallying point for the activist Left.⁴¹⁵ Nestled in these debates are the legacies of the collapse of Yugoslavia, and this was brought to light by a surprising figure. Writing on *X* in July 2025 to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the Srebrenica Massacre, Jeremy Corbyn reminded his followers that: 'today, politicians will say "never again". But they are letting it happen again, in Gaza'.⁴¹⁶ It is worth a reminder that, when he was a

⁴¹¹ Levy and Sznajder, 'Memory', pp. 99–100.

⁴¹² Ignatieff, 'The Seductiveness of Moral Disgust'.

⁴¹³ William D. James, 'Tony Blair and the Tragedy of Liberal Interventionism', *Engelsberg Ideas*, 23 April 2024 <<https://engelsbergideas.com/essays/tony-blair-and-the-tragedy-of-liberal-interventionism/>> [Accessed 20 August 2025].

⁴¹⁴ Eliot Wilson, 'The Future of the Special Relationship Between the US and the UK', *The Hill*, 20 August 2025 <<https://thehill.com/opinion/international/5459775-the-future-of-the-special-relationship-between-the-us-and-uk/>> [accessed 27 August 2025].

⁴¹⁵ See the recent UN commission findings: David Gritten and Imogen Foulkes, 'Israel Has Committed Genocide in Gaza, UN Commission of Inquiry Says', *BBC*, 16 September 2025 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c8641wv0n4go>> [Accessed 18 September 2025]; Julie Zaugg, 'War in Gaza Causes Rift Within the British Left', *Le Monde*, 7 August 2025 <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/08/07/war-in-gaza-causes-rift-within-the-british-left_6744138_4.html> [Accessed 12 September 2025].

⁴¹⁶ Jeremy Corbyn, *X*, 11 July 2025

<<https://x.com/jeremycorbyn/status/1943624185701384290?lang=en>> [Accessed 20 August 2025].

backbencher, Corbyn was a member of the anti-interventionist faction of MPs in 1995 surrounding Tony Benn and the CfPB who protested even a limited military intervention to prevent the massacre.⁴¹⁷ Perhaps he has changed his mind.

⁴¹⁷ Also noted by: Bolton and Pitts, *Corbynism*, pp. 83–85.

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