

Editorial

Legacies of Harm

The British press has already celebrated the departure of Tony Blair from Number Ten Downing Street with appropriate pomp. A high sense of relief throughout the country meant that his resignation was received, by and large, rather charitably. There will be plenty of time to recall his incompetence, his authoritarianism, the manifold abuses of his conduct of office.

There are innumerable British people who have reason to remember their former Prime Minister with rancour. On the other hand, Casino operators and other bandits will mourn his loss. There are a number of beneficiaries of his rule who will, for a little while, celebrate his kindness, his winning smile, his decency. But these pleasant qualities have not been widely noticed in Iraq. There, the dead speak more loudly than the beneficiaries. One small thing of note is the report that Gordon Brown, newly installed in the premiership, was reported to have telephoned the family of a young man, who had just been killed, to commiserate. If this is true, it is something which Mr. Blair apparently never found it in himself to do.

We do not yet know how far the British Government will change its policies towards Iraq. The newspapers speculate on slight evidence, grasping at straws. Some straws may be rather thin, such as the rumour that the new Foreign Secretary has doubts about the war. He has apparently also had doubts about expressing those doubts, so we have to wait for more tangible evidence. Are other straws more reliable indicators, such as the appointment of Mark Malloch Brown? This has apparently distressed the American administration, because Lord Malloch-Brown has not always been an obedient man. How far might he be relied upon to parrot the necessary untruths so crucial to the conduct of the alliance? The egregious Mr. Bolton has already signalled his displeasure. The appointment was an 'inauspicious beginning', he said.

Another useful indicator of changing Government policy is the abandonment of the sick phraseology of the war on terror, used to describe the various criminal onslaughts of Jihadists in Britain. Undoubtedly the arrangement of explosions in public places generates terror. But it is not a war: wars are conducted between States, and indeed this is not their proudest accomplishment. The explosions to harm the civilian population which have recently been prevented in London and Glasgow, were attempted criminal acts, punishable under the criminal law. Had they been part of a genuine war, then their perpetrators, now arrested, would qualify as prisoners of war and would escape criminal sanction. But their patrons, by contrast, might qualify for bombardment or other military punishment. Not for the first time, Mr. Blair impaled himself on his own heady rhetoric. That he had willing followers does not validate that rhetoric: it merely establishes that foolishness can sometimes be fashionable.

We certainly live in stirring times, and just for a moment it looks as if there

might be a window of choice. Should Britain withdraw from the obscene adventure in Iraq, then the political landscape would be profoundly changed. Everyone knows that the British commitment to the war cannot last indefinitely, and must soon be brought to an end. But if it were brought to an end decisively, by resolute action, then the Government would face a real wave of relief and hope. If things meander on, dithering to an exhausted collapse, the military result may well be the same, but the political impact will be very different.

Meantime, even if the dreadful legacy of Blair in Basra and Baghdad is lifting, and it requires an almost superhuman optimism to hope for this, the mutated legacy of Blair in Palestine is only now beginning to show its capacity for harm.

* * *

Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl now find themselves securely in history. Tony Blair is about to join them, although they may not find him inspired company. Nonetheless, the story is the thing, and all Blair's peccadilloes may indeed make colourful reading for future generations. The legacy of George Bush II shows its own capacity for harm on an even wider stage. It is unfortunate that the agreements reached by Kohl and Gorbachev have themselves been honoured more securely in the breach than they have in the observance. Lesser men have not hesitated to flout them, even to negate them, and to leave us, therefore, in a more perilous and precarious world.

A careful account of the negotiations between Gorbachev and Kohl has been given by Hannes Adomeit,¹ in a working paper delivered at the Sorbonne in June 2006.

Adomeit points out that a principal objective of Soviet policy before 1990 had been the ousting of the Americans from Europe. It could be argued that this objective was somewhat platonic, but it was certainly at odds with the New Thinking, which saw the *de facto* dissolution of Nato as 'destabilising'. After all, if the Americans gave up their European engagement, what would prevent Bonn from seeking to become a nuclear power? So it is to Gorbachev that we owe the decision to sustain Nato, in order not to 'rupture the world fabric'. But if Germany were to be reunited, did this mean that the unification would bring all Germany into Nato, or would there be some artifice by which this could be avoided, without subtracting the Federal Republic from the American alliance?

Historically, there had been two alliances, so that there was a formal problem of convergence between Nato and the Warsaw Pact. But the Warsaw Treaty was disintegrating, and it became increasingly obvious that it was in no position to take over a negotiating role.

Prime Minister Modrow, from the German Democratic Republic, hoped to obtain a commitment to German neutrality. Then the federation between the GDR and the FRG could be negotiated on the basis of military neutrality between both.² Gregor Gysi, at that time the Leader of the East German PDS, presented these arguments at a meeting in Moscow on the 2nd February 1990. Present were

Gorbachev, Yakovlev and Falin. This proposed that a unified Germany should be both neutral and demilitarised, but the Russian news agency, significantly, did not report this latter stipulation. Here was an indication of the fluidity which became a continuous feature of these talks.

This revealed itself when James Baker met with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze a week later on the 8th and 9th of February. During that meeting, Baker volunteered that if Germany were, by consent, to remain part of Nato during the unification process, ‘there would be no extension of Nato’s jurisdiction for forces of Nato one inch to the east’. Apparently Baker then asked Gorbachev ‘whether he would rather see an independent Germany outside of Nato and with no US forces on German soil, or a united Germany tied to Nato but with assurances “that there would be no extension of Nato’s current jurisdiction eastward”’. Gorbachev replied that he was still giving thought to these options ... One thing was clear, however: “Any extension of the zone of Nato is unacceptable.” “I agree” Baker replied.’

Adomeit chronicles the hesitations and doubts of Gorbachev during this process of negotiation. Should Germany be a member of Nato politically, but stay outside its military organisation? That would give it a status analogous to that chosen by France. Or how could the Atlantic alliance define its jurisdiction to precisely exclude any widening of scope by Nato? Should Germany be completely demilitarised? In the end, Gorbachev agreed with Kohl to let the Germans determine the shape and speed of unification, but left open the question of Germany’s alliances.

Then, on the 24th February, Kohl agreed with President Bush I that

‘a unified Germany should remain a full member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, including participation in its military structure. We agreed that US military force should remain stationed in the united Germany and elsewhere in Europe as a continuing guarantor of stability. The chancellor and I are also in agreement that in a unified state, the former territory of the GDR should have a special military status {that} would take into account the legitimate security interests of all interested countries, including those of the Soviet Union.’

The determination of a clear position by the Americans and the Federal Republic was followed by a period of backtracking by Gorbachev, and equivocation by the leaders of the German Democratic Republic. But then Parliamentary Elections in East Germany produced a strong victory for the Conservative parties, which won forty-eight per cent of the popular vote. The PDS gained only sixteen per cent, and the SPD, which had been seen as the likely frontrunner, did only slightly better with twenty-two per cent. Unsurprisingly the Soviet position hardened. But a harder position did not reflect an increase in strength: the contrary is true. In terms of popular support, the position in Germany showed a considerable weakening of Soviet influence. In many other East European countries that weakening was commonly more acute, so that it was increasingly difficult to sustain the Soviet arguments on European stability.

Hannes Adomeit describes a process which is uncomfortably like that of

pulling teeth. But yes, Gorbachev did give his consent to Germany's membership in Nato. And yet none of the difficulties involved in that decision can annul the categorical promises that Nato would not begin a runaway advance to the East.

Did all those promises lapse with the fall of Gorbachev? The very great turbulence which accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union certainly distracted attention from a variety of important strategic matters. Both in Russia and in the United States, people were happy to think about something else, at least for some of the time.

James A. Baker III came forward with what he called a road map for the extension of Nato eastwards, to include 'not only the States of Central and Eastern Europe, but also a democratic Russia'.³ If Russia were included, any divergence of views would become a matter for internal negotiation rather than military confrontation, he thought. But there was powerful opposition to this proposal from both sides. Many in the West did not wish to dilute what they regarded as their victory in the Cold War, and many in the East were equally sceptical for very different reasons.

Ninety-six per cent of Russians polled during the Kosovo conflict of 1999 thought that Nato's bombardment of Yugoslavia was a crime against humanity, and three-quarters of these people thought that there was nothing to stop Nato from becoming involved in Russian affairs just as it had in Yugoslavia.

In July 2002, when that issue seemed to lie more quietly among the world's unsolved problems, President Putin took up the question of Nato again, shortly before a summit with President Bush II. He challenged the Western alliance either to enrol Russia or to disband, calling Nato 'a Cold War relic that will only continue to sow the seeds of suspicion in Europe as long as it excludes its one time enemy'.

James Baker's liberal approach to this problem has not aroused any feverish mood of support: in his article in the winter issue of the *Washington Quarterly*, 2002, Baker downplayed his call to say: 'My point ... is not that Russia should be admitted to Nato today, but that Russia should be eligible to apply for admission with a firm commitment to membership if and when Russia has substantially satisfied ... five explicit criteria'. Since 2002 the willingness of the Russians to sit any such test has markedly diminished. In one area after another, relations have somewhat deteriorated, and in some areas the deterioration has been marked. Many if not most Russians will insist that the tests should all be applied the other way. They see heavy intervention by the United States and some of its more ideological NGOs in what they regard as 'the near abroad'. Certainly, the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine followed a pattern already established in Belgrade after the cessation of those hostilities.

And all the while, contrary to all those positive assurances during the negotiations about the future of Germany, Nato continuously expanded.⁴ It had already grown into Eastern Europe before the Yugoslav war, and it followed that war by a surge of new adhesions. Just as significant was the transformation of the declared role of the organisation: time was when actions were supposed to be 'in

area', and would be precluded 'out of area'. 'Everything is (now) Nato's area', said Daniel Fried, the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs in April 2007.

But not only is the world Nato's new oyster, but the range of questions which it might address has been conspicuously widened. Today, Russia is deemed to be energy rich, and Europe is energy poor. Any threat to cut the energy resources of Nato members is deemed by some of them to provide an excuse for joint action, up to and including military action. It would be very strange indeed if the Russians could view such developments with equanimity.

Nato fleets are already deployed in the Eastern Mediterranean, in the Gulf, and in the waters around the Horn of Africa. Denmark is capable under this agency of lurching into war against Syria. We have always been cautious in reacting to the warlike noises which the Americans have made against Iran. But we have been hearing these noises and noticing that military planning can seem more audacious and less nuanced than many of the politicians would like.

In July 2007, we clearly face a moment of choice in Iraq, with the war steadily losing support among American voters, and the chaos refusing to yield to any number of new American forces. And the Americans are short of new forces. America's crisis will renew the crises that afflict the different constituents of Nato.

It is highly doubtful whether embryonic peace movements of this tortured world will ever be able to find an effective focus for their activities, until they are able to call an end to Nato and its adventures, and a beginning to the effective regeneration of international co-operation. This is a very big agenda: but the longer we defer our approach to it, the more difficult it will become.

Ken Coates

References

1. Hannes Adomeit: **Gorbachev's Consent to Unified Germany's Membership in NATO**. Paper delivered to the Conference on 'Europe and the End of the Cold War', at the Université de Sorbonne, Paris, June 15th-17th 2006, revised November 1st 2006. A Working Paper of the Research Unit Russia/CIS Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik German Institute for International and Security Affairs.
2. *Ibid*, p. 5.
3. *Russia in Nato? The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2002, pp. 95-103.
4. Unified Germany acceded to the Nato Treaty (Treaty of Washington) in October 1990. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined in 1999. Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia joined in March 2004.