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Blair's Kosovo Campaign Political Communications, the Battle for Public Opinion and Foreign Policy

RHIANNON VICKERS

This article describes how Tony Blair used the political communication techniques developed while Labour was in opposition to help speed up the ending of the Kosovo conflict by strengthening NATO's resolve. While NATO had military superiority, the battle for public opinion was in danger of being lost as the conflict dragged on. NATO leaders were concerned that Milosevic was winning the propaganda war and setting the media agenda. Tony Blair and his press spokesman, Alastair Campbell, played a vital role in getting the battle for public opinion on course, setting a clear agenda that could be relayed to the public, and launching a massive political campaign aimed at shoring up public opinion both in Britain and abroad, of the type usually used by presidential candidates running for office. Campaigning techniques were also used to bolster the resolve of the NATO leaders which was in danger of cracking in the run up to the Washington summit of April 1999.

Kosovo presented many challenges to NATO. Not only was this the first time in its history that NATO had gone to war against a recognised state, but the campaign was outside of its own borders and aimed at preventing a humanitarian tragedy rather than a military threat to one of its member states. Operation 'Allied Force' began on 24 March 1999, after Richard Holbrooke had declared that the final attempt to get Milosevic to sign the Rambouillet peace agreement had failed. As NATO Secretary General Javier Solana explains, the decision to intervene was not taken 'lightly' by the allies:

For the first time in Nato's history there would be sustained military action outside Nato territory against a sovereign state. Everyone involved knew about the risks: there would be inadvertent civilian casualties no matter how meticulous our planning, the operation

would inevitably burden our relationship with Russia, and finally, we would end up with a long and expensive commitment to the future of Kosovo.¹

The stakes were very high. On the one hand, 'Inaction in the face of the Kosovar plight would have undermined our policies, the credibility of Western institutions, and the transatlantic relationship.'² On the other hand, debate still rages on over whether it was ethical to intervene or not, and whether by doing so NATO saved lives or merely led to the speeding up of the ethnic cleansing.

The decision to intervene was also based on the experience of Bosnia, where the West's reluctance to get involved early on exacerbated the ethnic conflict and the situation deteriorated to the point when public opinion was demanding that something be done in response to the images being shown on the media of concentration camps and evidence of ethnic cleansing. By the time the West did get involved, the options available to it had narrowed, thousands of people had died, and it was left looking ineffectual and weak. As Clinton and others asked, what have we learnt from Bosnia?

We learned that if you don't stand up to brutality and the killing of innocent people, you invite the people who do it to do more of it. We learned that firmness can save lives and stop armies. Now we have a chance to take the lessons we learned in Bosnia and put them to work in Kosovo before it's too late ...³

However, as Blair has put it, 'It was unclear as to exactly how Milosevic would react.'⁴ It is clear that NATO expected its military campaign to have an immediate impact, that Milosevic would back down in the face of limited air strikes, that this had to be done without loss of life to NATO troops. This seems to have been the view held by the politicians, even though strategic air strikes had not in the past been effective alone in determining the outcome of military intervention.

NATO AND THE KOSOVO CAMPAIGN

The decision to intervene in Kosovo was not clearly thought through, and this was largely because of the difficulty in reaching agreement between and within member states. For some, NATO's actions, which did not have a UN mandate, were illegitimate, and NATO was the aggressor rather than Milosevic. Because of this, political leaders wanted the campaign to be over quickly, and felt that public opinion would not accept NATO casualties, further circumscribing NATO's actions. NATO expected its military

campaign against Milosevic to be over quickly, requiring only a limited series of air strikes.⁵ As Lieutenant General Michael Short, the NATO Air Commander, has subsequently said:

I had been told – I can't tell you how many times – the instruction I got was 'Mike, you're only going to be allowed to bomb two, maybe three nights; that's all Washington can stand, that's all some members of the alliance can stand, that's why you've only got ninety [bombing] targets. This will be over in three nights.'⁶

The war was fought with a constant concern for public opinion. It was thought that public opinion would not support unrestricted or prolonged aerial warfare, and concern over the need to hold the alliance together largely determined the parameters of the military action.⁷ According to General Short,

We fought this conflict incrementally, for all sorts of reasons, and we all understand that – holding the alliance together, certainly the belief that many of our leaders had going in to this conflict that Milosevic only needed 'a couple of nights bombing' and then he would accept NATO terms. I am not personally convinced that all of our leaders had come to grips with the possibility of a prolonged air campaign, that they genuinely thought that all NATO had to do was to 'demonstrate resolve'.⁸

It was thought in Washington that Milosevic was a bully who would back down when faced with military force, and NATO's political leaders expected the campaign to be over very quickly. Indeed, 'the politicians had been so sure that Milosevic would sue for peace, that after three days the pilots had hit all the approved targets'.⁹

Concern for what the alliance could stand, and for what NATO thought public opinion would accept, dictated both NATO's belief in a quick and short campaign, and Clinton and Blair's early rejection of the use of ground troops. Clinton said on his broadcast to the nation on the first day of action, 'I do not intend to put our troops in Kosovo to fight a war.'¹⁰ Blair said just before the decision to start air strikes that ground troops might be used in support of the Rambouillet Agreement, but made it clear that 'We do not plan to use ground troops in order to fight our way into Kosovo.'¹¹ He emphasised that 'I do not accept that land troops are necessary to curb repression in Kosovo. Air strikes properly targeted – directed against the military capability of the oppressor – can achieve the objective that we set ourselves.'¹²

It seems likely that the rejection of ground troops had an impact on Milosevic, arguably prolonging the conflict. General Klaus Naumann,

Chairman of the NATO Military Committee during 1999, put it this way: 'I do not hesitate to say, all those politicians who ruled out in public the use of ground forces, made it easier for Milosevic to calculate its risk, and this may have encouraged him to make the attempt to ride it out, and by this we prolonged the war.'¹³ Richard Haas (US National Security Council 1987–93) had concerns that,

the White House is allowing its strategy to be dictated by public opinion, or what they perceive public opinion to be. So they took ground forces off the table, not because they were not militarily necessary but simply because the Administration, it was afraid it would not have the requisite domestic political support. That's no way to run a war.¹⁴

The problem was that NATO leaders could not reassure their people that there would be no ground troops while sending the separate message to Belgrade that there would be ground troops because of the access of the media to both messages. Thus, as an exercise in coercive diplomacy, Kosovo was largely a failure because Milosevic knew from the Western media that NATO's resolve was not absolute, and that they were not prepared to risk loss of life among NATO troops – the whole air campaign was based on this premise, accuracy being downgraded in favour of safety for air crews.

Kosovo was a war that was played out through the media, and the media had an impact in many ways and in many directions. NATO was simultaneously trying to send out messages to multiple audiences via the media – to the Serb opposition and to the people of the alliance's member states – while Milosevic thought the impact of images of the bombing on TV in the West would turn people against NATO and divide the NATO countries.¹⁵ The spokesman for the US National Security Council has said that there was clear media manipulation in Belgrade – 'The media strategy in Belgrade was geared towards breaking the unity of the alliance ... This is very much an aspect of modern warfare.'¹⁶

The media coverage of the operation also had an impact on NATO policy. Once the images of the massive refugee movements were shown on television, this hardened the resolve of shocked politicians and public, and was used to harden the resolve of both opinion leaders and the general public. But in turn, this impacted on NATO policy, as the military leaders were then told to go after the perpetrators of ethnic cleansing. There was a new policy introduced for pilots to 'take out', to bomb the Serbs doing the killing in Kosovo rather than the strategic military targets. This increased the risk of killing refugees, and some military leaders have said that they

thought this was a bad idea as it would prolong the war and was based on political rather than military targets.¹⁷

POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS AND THE PROMOTION OF FOREIGN POLICY

Foreign policy publicity traditionally has two public faces. In the US, the term public affairs is used to describe the domestic face of foreign policy, while public diplomacy refers to the attempts to persuade and influence foreign audiences. There has tended to be a separation of these two forms of foreign policy information and propaganda activities. Indeed, in the US they are kept separate by statute. However, with the challenges of an increase in number of media outlets and in demand for instant news with a 24-hour news cycle, the co-ordination of these two dimensions of foreign policy information becomes increasingly important. As Brown points out, 'Spatially, it makes the separation of audiences more difficult – it becomes more difficult to say different things to different audiences.' 'Integrating the spatial and temporal [of a 24-hour news operation] aspects means that the news environment becomes increasingly unruly.'¹⁸ Thus, there is greater need to co-ordinate overall foreign policy presentation. This requires intervention from the centre.

Kosovo was not the first war to be played out via the media, the 1991 Gulf War had already shown the importance of monitoring the media and attempting to influence not only audiences, but also events, through it. While it is the case that the domestic media will tend to rally round the flag during times of conflict, this positive boost only lasts for a short time before stories and articles appear questioning the government's policy. Indeed, news reporting values mean that journalists are always looking for the 'real story', which invariably is based on conflict between players, or reading between the lines and finding the story behind the story.

This results in a search for inconsistencies between comments from politicians and officials. 'Journalists write stories as if total consistency should be the norm – any hint of disagreement between two national leaders or senior figures in the same party can become the basis for headlines of the "NATO Split" or "Labour in Chaos" variety. Such stories damage credibility and reduce the leverage of actors.'¹⁹ What was new about Kosovo was the degree to which member states and NATO attempted to use political communications techniques usually reserved for domestic politics and election campaigning to bolster public support for their actions. This happened both in the US and in Britain.

In the US, Clinton went from photo-call to photo-call to 'sell' his war, with commentators noting during the crisis that 'The White House has

worked hard to make sure the American public supports the war – too hard say critics, who claim it is being fought more like an election than a military conflict.²⁰ Indeed, Ivo Daadler, a Clinton adviser in 1995 and 1996, said that, ‘One gets the impression that what is happening is the continuation of the permanent campaign – in which there is a new message every day – in which the President comes out with a new statement every day.’ Part of the problem for Clinton was that he appeared to have three, by no means complementary, goals. First, victory on the battlefield. Second, to try and salvage a Clinton legacy for history. Third, to give Al Gore a strong foreign policy platform for Campaign 2000. All this was to be done while keeping public opinion polls as high as possible.²¹

The situation was different in Britain in that Blair had only one overall aim – having started military action, to see it through and finish it, while not damaging the government’s ability to govern and see its domestic programme through. In order to do this, Blair took the impressive media machine developed to deal with domestic politics, and turned it over to the war effort. Indeed, it has been argued that ‘the execution of British policy had more to do with the media skills of Alastair Campbell and New Labour than the diplomatic skills of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’.²² As Blair himself puts it, ‘When you fight an action like this in modern politics, in our modern media world, you’re fighting it on television.’²³

BLAIR AND THE BRITISH MEDIA CAMPAIGN

For the Labour government it was necessary to prepare the ground for acceptance of military action on several fronts. In Britain the media, the general public, and the Parliamentary Labour Party needed to be kept on-board for this extraordinary campaign. For Blair, Kosovo then became a test of strength both for himself and for the Labour government. Having presented intervention as a moral imperative, he could not then back out when it became apparent that the military campaign would not be over in a few days. However, having promised that there would be no ground troops and hence implied that there would be no British casualties, he could not then openly push for military action over and above the air strikes in order to try and speed up the ending of the Kosovo campaign. Rather, he had to bolster support within Britain and the NATO alliance in order to carry the military campaign through. This became more important the longer the bombing campaign lasted as people increasingly questioned whether the alliance could hold out, and whether the bombing campaign was worsening the plight of the refugees seen on television every day. This bolstering of

support occurred through an unprecedented publicity and propaganda campaign from the Labour government.

Labour was able to launch its massive publicity campaign because of the way that it had transferred the publicity and media management techniques developed in opposition into the government apparatus.²⁴ Many of the press officers and advisors who worked for front-bench Labour MPs in opposition became policy advisers to them as ministers. Once in power, Labour's strategists, spin-doctors and policy advisers 'could not ease up. They seemed unwilling or unable to forgo the buzz which they had derived from their ability to influence the news media and to manipulate political journalists, who had often been only too eager to comply with expectations in return for exclusive access and information.'²⁵ Ready to use the skills and techniques developed in opposition to tackle media coverage on any area of domestic policy and politics, New Labour's publicity machine could also be applied to the Kosovo crisis. Indeed, during the Kosovo campaign Blair utilised the same media techniques developed during more peaceful times. Blair was at the Berlin Summit on the day NATO's bombing campaign started in Kosovo. Osborne points out that 'Even though mainstream media were clamouring for Blair to talk on the war', Alastair Campbell, Blair's official press spokesman, made sure that West Country Television, who were in Berlin to cover a funding matter of concern to local farmers, 'got their Prime Ministerial soundbite', rather than the more high profile media outlets.²⁶ This ensured that there would be no particularly difficult questions on the issue of Kosovo.

In Britain, extensive daily information was produced on the Kosovo campaign. There was a daily press conference given by Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, or George Robertson, the Minister for Defence. Blair, Cook and Robertson reiterated that they were fighting a just war, reminded people of the plight of the refugees and the horrors of ethnic cleansing, and stuck to the line that war was the fault of Milosevic. This message was delivered through these daily briefings, statements made in the House of Commons, and through a very wide range of media interviews. Multiple articles written by Blair, Cook and Robertson appeared in the press, which had the benefit of appearing as whole texts and without the analysis and interpretation of a reporter. For example, on 25 March Robertson had an article in the *Daily Mirror* explaining that there was no greater task than that faced by NATO, while Cook appeared on the *Today Programme* making the point that 'we go on till we win.' On 3 April, Blair gave an interview on Sky News about the attacks on Belgrade, while Cook made a statement at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the humanitarian crisis. On 11 April Blair wrote in the *Sunday Mirror* that Milosevic was 'evil', and said in

Newseek on 19 April that NATO must stand firm. On 15 April, Blair gave another interview to Sky News, and appeared on the doorstep of 10 Downing Street with Koffi Annan.

While much of the media campaign was aimed at the general public, there were also particular groups taken into account. One of the key audiences that Robin Cook spoke to was the Labour Party itself. Cook is able to speak to and for the left of the Party in a way that Blair is not, having been a left-winger and having a track record of speaking out against militarism. Cook gave several interviews to the left-leaning Labour magazine, the *New Statesman*, in which he made comparisons of the Kosovo situation with the Spanish Civil War and the fight against fascism. The Spanish Civil War has symbolic importance for the Labour Party, as it was the key event which put an end to the pacifism of large sections of the party when Labour's initial support for the non-intervention pact came to be seen as a betrayal of their Spanish comrades. In effect it burst the bubble of popularity of pacifism on the left, destroyed the Labour Party's stance on pacifism and paved the way for its acceptance of rearmament in the late 1930s.²⁷ In an interview on 27 April Cook declared that 'Serbia is in many ways the Spain of the nineties. The difference is that then [the Spanish Civil War] the governments of the other European countries did not act – wrongly. It would have been far better if they had made a stand in Spain.'²⁸ He sent a reassuring message to the left of the party, that,

I am absolutely robust that we are right to be fighting this evil. There is no conflict between the traditional values of the left and being against this. What we are witnessing is the resurgence of fascism in Europe... . We have not seen trains used to take men, women and children from their homes since the days of Hitler and Stalin. I do not think that anyone on the left should have any reservations about fighting this evil.²⁹

The attempt to bolster the support of the Labour Party for the military action was actually made easier in that criticism from the left was matched by criticism from the right, and left-wing and right-wing isolationism looked the same to many observers. However, while the Labour government was successfully fighting the publicity war in Britain, the media operation in NATO was seen to be stalling which had the effect of undermining the attempts by leaders such as Blair to shape the media's analysis of the conflict.

The media campaign was not initially regarded as a top priority by NATO's military leaders. All NATO's information came through Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), 'but at SHAPE the media

campaign had low priority, [and] it was run by only mid-ranking officers'.³⁰ Thus, it took time for information about the military activity to filter through to the NATO spokesperson, Jamie Shea, and the military at SHAPE were apparently reluctant to actually share information with Shea and his team. Shea was battling against military bureaucracy and under-funding. He 'was under-resourced, overworked and had no media strategy'. He only had three support staff, and no system for monitoring each day's media coverage of the Kosovo campaign.³¹

There was some success in the media operations, such as publicising NATO's five conditions for Milosevic,³² which Blair repeated in the House of Commons on 13 April.³³ However, it was clear that the NATO media machine could not cope with the demands being made of it, and that any military misjudgements were compounded by its inability to deal with the media and get a clear story out.

The situation was highlighted by the failure of NATO to produce a coherent and credible account of why a convoy of refugees had apparently been bombed on the road from Djackovica to Prizren. Indeed, the first that General Wesley Clark knew about it was from watching a report on CNN as 'we had no real feedback as to what had happened at that point'.³⁴ NATO tried to sort the story out, but there was confusion over what had happened, it did not really stop to think through the impact of what it was saying, and there was a lack of communication within NATO. The military knew this incident might crack the alliance, and so wanted to get the information out as quickly as possible but the chain of command for passing on and checking information was lacking.

The inability of the NATO media operation to deal with the situation was impacting on morale, and the level of dissent within the alliance's member states increased. According to Ken Bacon, Press Spokesman for the Pentagon, 'It was this slow response by NATO, and somewhat fumbled response by NATO, that convinced President Clinton and Prime Minister Blair that we, that NATO, had to do a better job at answering these questions.'³⁵

CAMPBELL OVERHAULS NATO'S MEDIA OPERATIONS

In the wake of the confusion over the bombing of a convoy of refugees travelling from Djackovica to Prizren on 14 April, Blair and Clinton decided that the NATO media machine needed an overhaul, and the information policy needed toughening up. Blair says 'it was a frustration to us ... that Milosevic in a sense had charge of the media agenda'.³⁶ As a consequence, Alastair Campbell, Blair's official spokesperson, was

dispatched on 16 April to NATO to review and bolster the media operation. Campbell took a whole team from the Downing Street Press Office to NATO, as well as putting out a call to his counterparts in Bonn, Paris and Washington and asking them 'to send your best and your brightest' to deal with the media.³⁷

Staff poured into NATO and commandeered the latest in military communications. The result was the Media Operations Centre, with people focusing on tasks such as media monitoring, rebuttal, and the production of appropriate 'lines' for the day. According to Shea, the fact that this initiative had the obvious backing of Clinton and Blair 'helped me incredibly to overcome bureaucratic resistance'.³⁸ Campbell went to SHAPE to see General Wesley Clark, where the two men struck up a good rapport.

Under the new media regime, the twice-daily conference calls between Downing Street, the White House and the other NATO capitals, where political leaders discussed the media coverage of the campaign and the public reaction to it, increased in importance. Ken Bacon, US spokesman for the Pentagon, says of the conference calls:

It helped us mobilise ourselves to focus on various messages we wanted to get out in various capitals, so it wasn't just a question of us talking about the flood of refugees coming out, but we could make sure this happened in London, it happened in Brussels, it happened in Paris, it happened in Bonn as well. So, I think the public was getting a much more unified picture of what was going on.³⁹

Campbell insisted that these calls include press spokespersons,⁴⁰ and had a leading role in them while he was at NATO.⁴¹ According to one commentator, 'Alastair Campbell's team penetrated the heart of the NATO operation. A Downing Street official sat in on the daily meetings where commanders discussed their bombing targets. The military swallowed the Campbell philosophy – it is presentation, not just performance, that matters.'⁴² Campbell's biographer has said that, 'By the end Campbell was one of a handful of people intimately involved in running the war. Tony Blair often left it to Campbell to hammer out important and delicate matters with the US President directly.'⁴³

While it is possible that Campbell's role has been over-emphasised, it is clear that as the war continued, the battle for public opinion increased in sophistication which made it easier for NATO to deal with and rebut criticisms while increasing morale about NATO's actions. Military blunders still occurred, such as the bombing of a train on a bridge in Serbia, but NATO was now more able to deal with the situation and to deal with and contain criticism from the media.

HOLDING THE ALLIANCE TOGETHER: THE WASHINGTON NATO
SUMMIT AND THE ISSUE OF GROUND TROOPS

Somewhat ironically, the summit to celebrate 50 years of NATO was held in Washington on 23–25 April at the height of the Kosovo conflict. This provided the opportunity for Blair to launch an information offensive in the US. The aim appears to have been to support Clinton's position and urge a tougher stance. This was done through an unprecedented media campaign, and through behind the scenes diplomacy with Clinton. Clinton and Blair had ruled out ground troops at the beginning of the military offensive, and maintained this line until the middle of April, arguing that 'the difficulties of such an undertaking, in the face of organised Serb resistance, are formidable... the potential loss of life among our service men and women, ... would be considerable'.⁴⁴

Little over a week later Blair wanted a new position. Blair had a private meeting with Clinton before the start of the summit, where the ground-troops option was discussed. Blair says that it was not so much that he had a message for Clinton, more that they shared the view that 'we had started it [the campaign] and we had to see it through and finish it'.⁴⁵ Sandy Berger, US National Security Adviser, says Clinton and Blair agreed that 'we will not lose, whatever it takes, we will not lose' and they reiterated this at every meeting they went to at the NATO summit.⁴⁶ At the summit, NATO did not agree to a ground war, but did not rule it out. The new line was that 'All options were open.'

The issue of ground troops was an extremely difficult one. The political leadership's viewpoint in Washington was summed up by William Cohen, US Secretary of Defense,

Given the fact that we had a lack of enthusiasm for even a peace-keeping mission in Kosovo, it became very clear to me that it was going to be a very hard sell, if not impossible, to persuade the American people that we were going to put up a hundred and fifty thousand or two hundred thousand American troops to go in on the ground.⁴⁷

Opinion polls were the reason for the 'endless back and forth over ground troops'. At the start of the war, opinion polls were overwhelmingly against the use of ground troops, and so was Clinton, but as the humanitarian crisis has unfolded the polls were turning, and the White House conceded the inevitability of some kind of ground force.⁴⁸

In Britain, public opinion was somewhat volatile on the issue, but overall support for the air campaign and for the use of ground troops

increased as the conflict went on, thought to be a result of the nightly television pictures of Kosovan refugees. An ICM/*Observer* poll on 26 March found that 39 per cent of respondents supported sending British army troops into Yugoslavia, whereas on 30–31 March the figures stood at a much larger 58 per cent. Opposition to the use of British ground troops dropped from 49 per cent to 34 per cent.⁴⁹ It seems that Blair's attempts to justify the use of force to the British public were increasingly successful. In this he was helped by both the government's media campaign and by the coverage given by the media to the plight of the refugees.

For Clinton, however, the situation was further complicated by Al Gore coming out as the leading opponent of ground troops, apparently insisting behind closed doors that 'any such move would become an albatross for him come next year's election'.⁵⁰ It was into this situation that Blair arrived with his aim of making sure that the NATO position changed so that ground troops were no longer ruled out.

On 20 April, Robin Cook had rather ambiguously suggested a willingness to insert ground troops without a fully implemented Serb withdrawal.⁵¹ The following day the lead story in the *Daily Mail* was 'Blair is Planning for War on the Ground', while *The Guardian* had 'Blair Pushes for Ground Assault'. The media had obviously been briefed on the angle to take on Blair and Cook's comments as the government attempted to send the message that a ground force was a possibility. On 21 April, the day before he flew to Brussels and then on to Washington, Blair told the House of Commons that, as the State Department had said a short time ago, 'all options remain under review. The difficulties that we have set out in respect of ground forces remain, but as I said in answer to earlier questions and say again now, Milosevic does not have a veto on NATO action.'⁵²

On 23 April, the BBC reported that Blair's position on ground troops had shifted: 'What once seemed to be emphatically ruled out, now being considered, at least in certain circumstances.' His shift in attitude 'may be fuelled by his sense of outrage' at the ethnic cleansing. During Blair's visit to NATO headquarters he told military leaders: 'My generation never thought to see those scenes in Europe again. Our task is very simple and our will in seeing it through must be absolute and total.'⁵³

The day before the Washington Summit, US and British officials were reporting to the media that it was 'prudent' to update the military assessment of the campaign so far, and 'to consider whether NATO's military policy in Yugoslavia should be reversed to allow the deployment of ground troops'. At a State Department news conference with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Robin Cook said, 'We want the military to be ready for contingencies and to make sure that they're ready for all options.'

Though he added, 'But that doesn't mean to say that the policy is changing.'⁵⁴

BLAIR'S US MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Blair's media campaign was a crucial element to his trip to the US as 'British policy makers launched a media blitz on the US more appropriate for a presidential campaign than a diplomatic visit.'⁵⁵ On 21 April, an interview with Blair appeared in the *Washington Post*. On 22 April, the day before the start of the summit Blair gave an interview on *Larry King Live*, attended a meeting with senators and a doorstep with Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott. He also gave an impassioned speech outlining the 'doctrine of the international community' at the Economic Club of Chicago. In this speech, Blair emphasised that globalisation and increasing interdependence meant that 'We live in a world where isolationism has ceased to have a reason to exist... We are all internationalists now, whether we like it or not.' As a result, 'We are witnessing the beginnings of a new doctrine of international community.' And, 'The principles of international community apply also to international security.' Further, 'Non-interference has long been considered an important principle of international order... But the principle of non-interference must be qualified in important respects. Acts of genocide can never be a purely internal matter.' Thus, 'This speech has been dedicated to the cause of internationalism and against isolationism.'⁵⁶

Blair also made use of the time difference to give interviews to the British media on the day before the start of the summit, with interviews for GMTV, Sky News and the *Today Programme*. On 23 April, Blair appeared on the NBC *Today Programme* and on the *Lehrer Newshour*, and did a doorstep with Gerhard Shroeder. Blair's appearances were also backed up by the daily press conferences by Robin Cook and George Robertson.

By the time the NATO Washington Summit was coming to an end, some of the American press was running headlines such as 'Blair grabs Role as Alliance Hawk'. It was said that Blair was not only pushing for a stronger line on Kosovo, but was also 'proposing to rewrite the rules of global security for the 21st century' with 'a new doctrine of international community'.⁵⁷ By the end of the summit, some NATO members were complaining about 'King Tony'.⁵⁸ However, the Washington Summit, and the lobbying that Blair and Clinton did both publicly and behind the scenes, was crucial in that it hardened resolve just enough to enable the NATO alliance to stick together for the next few weeks, when it then became apparent that Milosevic was shifting his position.

Blair's media campaign continued throughout May, when he visited several European countries to try shore up opinion about the West's actions. Some of this campaigning seems to have been aimed more at the British domestic audience, such as the photo opportunity on 4 May of Blair sitting in a refugee tent wearing his shirt sleeves rolled up and no shoes. Newspaper coverage in Britain described how Blair, 'the driving force behind NATO's air campaign', was greeted by the refugees with 'chants of "Tony! Tony!"'.⁵⁹ Clinton apparently felt it necessary to complain to Blair about his many media appearances after his refugee camp trip, ordering him 'during a 90-minute phone harangue, to pull himself together and halt the domestic grandstanding that [was] threatening to tear NATO apart'.⁶⁰ The incident was subsequently played down by both governments.

While it is not yet clear exactly why Milosevic backed down, it is clear that the shift in the perception that NATO was moving to prepare for the use of ground troops appears to have been an important factor in this decision.⁶¹ The build-up of NATO troops in Macedonia and Albania suggested that military intervention with ground troops was being planned. It seems likely that the eventual capitulation by Milosevic was because NATO was finally able to project the appearance that it was contemplating a ground war. Certainly 'The successful prosecution of the war was partly dependent on the orchestrated presentation of the war.' The problem was that 'NATO's strategy was to communicate to Serbia its resolve to continue the war but at the same time NATO had to generate the resolve to continue the war'.⁶²

This was largely done through the media campaign, as Blair turned his media team to the task of dealing with the Kosovo conflict. The Labour government's battle for public opinion reflected the strategy that Labour had developed in opposition for dealing with the media, namely to have four or five main policies or aims, to make these clear, and to keep repeating them. Osborne argues that Blair and Campbell gave NATO a sense of direction by setting the minimum requirements that the West demanded, namely that the refugees must return to Kosovo and the Serbian troops must withdraw.⁶³ These demands were then reiterated through a massive media campaign.

The publicity campaign over Kosovo continues. Javier Solana's recent article in *Foreign Affairs* was as much an attempt to justify why NATO intervened and defend its record, as it was to shed any new light on events. He argues that;

Contrary to widespread criticism, the air campaign achieved every one of its goals. Having seriously underestimated allied resolve, Milosevic accepted the alliance's demands on June 3. After 77 days,

with no casualties of its own, NATO had prevailed. A humanitarian disaster had been averted. About one million refugees could now return in safety. Ethnic cleansing had been reversed.⁶⁴

In the end, it appears that it was the renewed resolve of NATO's leaders that persuaded Milosevic to back down. Blair and his media team played a vital role in this, boosting morale by improving NATO's media operation, and by constantly reminding both the general public and the NATO leaders that they were fighting to save the refugees and sticking to the line that the Kosovo War was the fault of Milosevic and his policy of ethnic cleansing. As Jamie Shea has recently said, 'I don't think media campaigns win conflicts... . But an inept media campaign can lose you the conflict, definitely.'⁶⁵

NOTES

1. Javier Solana, 'Nato's Success in Kosovo', *Foreign Affairs* 78/6 (Nov./Dec. 1999) p.117.
2. *Ibid.* p.118.
3. Clinton address to the American Federation of State, Country and Municipal Employees, 24 March 1999, reported by the *Washington Post* at www.washingtonpost.com.
4. *War in Europe*, written and presented by Michael Elliott, Channel 4, Episode 2 (6 Feb. 2000).
5. Julian Borger and Richard Norton-Taylor, 'Leaked Evidence Shows US Expected Swift End', *The Guardian*, 19 April 1999, p.1.
6. *War in Europe*, Episode 2.
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