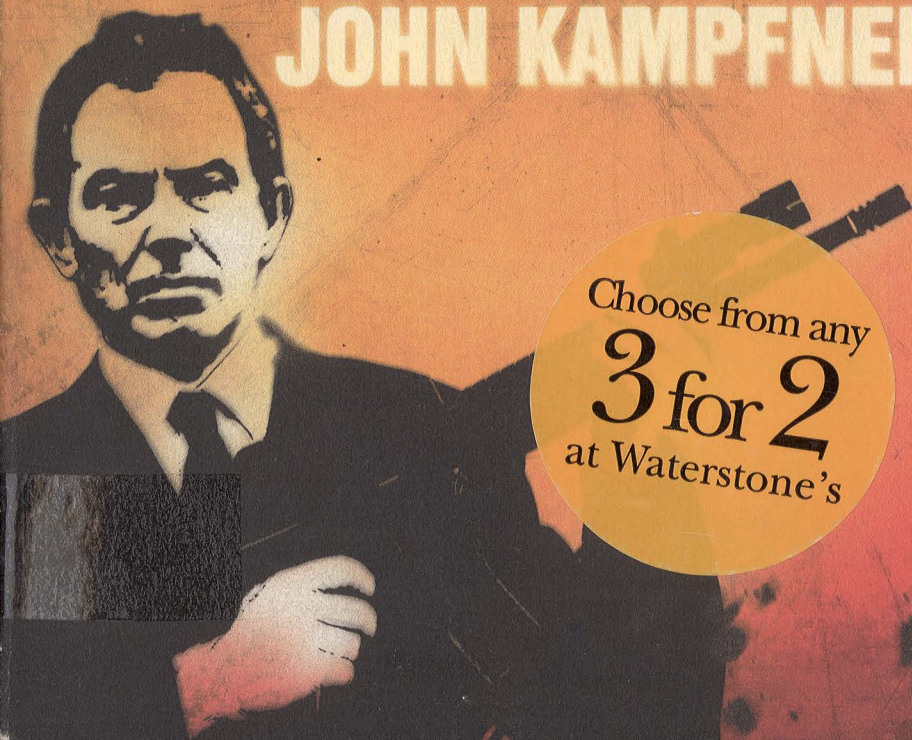


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# BLAIR'S WARS

JOHN KAMPFNER



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# BLAIR'S WARS

JOHN KAMPFNER



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# PREFACE

It is some feat to go to war five times in six years. That statistic impelled me to write this book. No British Prime Minister and few world leaders come close, and none of these five wars could be defined through the traditional concepts of national interest or repelling an invader. So what is it about Tony Blair that has given him such a taste for the battlefield?

This is the story of a man who came to office in 1997 knowing precious little about foreign affairs, who within a year had defined a new mission for Britain overseas. The idea of humanitarian intervention was developed as he went along. It came awry when confronted by the new realities after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, and by George W. Bush's strategic doctrine of pre-emption and primacy for the United States. As Blair struggled to maintain his authority on the global stage, as his approach unravelled, the mismatch between his ends and his means became ever more stark. This is the story of a man who had convinced himself that his powers of persuasion could overcome all problems and defy all logic – only to see those powers ebb away.

*Blair's Wars* traces the evolution of the relationship between

the Prime Minister and war in three sections. Part I looks at his approach to foreign affairs in opposition and then in Downing Street, taking in his first military conflict, the air strikes against Saddam Hussein in 1998; the Kosovo war a year later and the despatch of British troops to Sierra Leone in 2000.

The second part takes in Blair's response to the rise of the neo-conservatives in the US, the events of September 11, the war in Afghanistan, and the early diplomatic manoeuvres against Iraq, culminating in the passing of Resolution 1441 by the United Nations Security Council. It was during this period that Britain and the US agreed on war. It was during this period that British and American intelligence pointed up the threat posed by Saddam's weapons of mass destruction – a threat they would later struggle to sustain. How much did Blair really know? How accurate was the story he told?

Part III tells the dramatic story of the road to war. It gives an insider's account of the failures in British diplomacy and the tensions at the heart of government. It reveals the extent of the concern in much of Whitehall at the speed with which Blair dismissed the efforts of UN weapons inspectors and embraced the strategy of the White House. After the war, as the reconstruction of Iraq faltered and as evidence of WMD proved elusive, it shows how an increasingly fraught government machine battled to vindicate its approach.

*Blair's Wars* is the culmination of more than sixty interviews conducted over six months with more than forty people. These include senior ministers, senior advisers and senior civil servants across government – from Downing Street to the Foreign Office to other Whitehall departments and security agencies. These officials were all players in the five military conflicts and the processes that led up to them. Most are still serving in their posts, some are not. My enquiries also led me to senior figures in the US, France, Germany, Russia, the Middle East, the UN and Nato.

The rules of engagement throughout were 'strict background': no attribution that could identify the source. All those who spoke to

me know who they are, but I hope they do not know whose company they keep. I am very grateful to them all for speaking to me so candidly on sensitive subjects in obviously difficult circumstances, especially given the events that transpired over the summer of 2003. My publisher and I took the view that, since note numbers in the text would often lead only to references to 'private conversations', we would not encumber the narrative with source notes on each page. All open-source material derives from speeches, newspaper interviews and the like.

When I began the task in January 2003, my intention was to fill a gap in the bibliography of Blair studies – foreign policy. Neither I nor my interlocutors had any idea at the time how sensitive the subject would over the course of the year become. For all the acrimony around the Iraq war, I have sought in this book to play it straight, to tell it as it is, rather than as either the government or its opponents would want it told. As the news story on Iraq developed on a day-to-day basis, I sought to include the salient points, not to follow it slavishly. This is a book as much about the motivation of Tony Blair as his actions.

My thanks go to all those interviewees who gave me their time – sometimes for several hours in one session – and to friends and colleagues who helped fill in the background or pointed me in particular directions.

At the *New Statesman* I received considerable support, notably from Peter Wilby, the Editor; Cristina Odone, the Deputy Editor; and Geoffrey Robinson MP, the owner. Dougal Stenson was always on-hand to provide back-up. For six months I have been lucky to have such an assiduous and talented researcher as Abbie Fielding-Smith.

I am particularly grateful to my agent, Bruce Hunter at David Higham Associates, for encouraging me in the venture and for linking me with Simon & Schuster. I would like to thank Tim Judah for giving me invaluable help on Kosovo and Sierra Leone. I am indebted to several former special advisers who provided insights,