

Tony Blair's image repair discourse in response to the Iraq Inquiry Report: A critical analysis⁽¹⁾

Maha El-Seidi

Associate Professor of Linguistics, Department of English,

Faculty of Arts, Minufiya University

Abstract:

The present study aimed at analyzing the discursive image repair strategies employed by Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister (1997-2007), in the statement that he made on the 6th July, 2016 in response to Iraq Inquiry Report (IIR). The Iraq Inquiry was commissioned in June 2009 by the British government to examine the UK's involvement in Iraq from 2001 to 2009. The Inquiry's findings have been severely critical of Tony Blair, whose reputation has been considerably damaged since it turned out that his case for going to war on Iraq in 2003 was based on flawed intelligence information. The analysis was carried out mainly within the framework of the theory of image repair discourse developed by Benoit (1995, 2015). Benoit's framework of image repair discourse consists of five general strategies: *denial*, *evading responsibility*, *reducing offensiveness*, *corrective action*, and *mortification (apology)*. The first three broad strategies comprise each a number of variants or sub-strategies. The analysis of Blair's (2016) statement focused on

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identifying the strategies employed in response to each of the criticisms presented in the IIR, examining the arguments made in each of these repair messages critically in terms of their (in) congruity with other instances of Blair's discourse in the same statement and/or established facts, and critically analyzing the linguistic constructs demonstrated in each of these messages. The analysis indicated that Blair employed (variants of) the following image repair strategies: *apology*, *reducing offensiveness*, *evading responsibility*, and *denial*. It was argued, generally speaking and based on certain features of these strategies, that they might not have been very effective in redeeming Blair's damaged reputation. One of his two apologies, lacked one of the two crucial elements of a valid political apology. The arguments involved in the other repair messages were mostly inconsistent with the established facts. The statement also demonstrated some instances of self-contradiction. Some of his arguments were based on hypothetical situations, which could potentially trigger more criticism.

Keywords:

Iraq Inquiry Report, Tony Blair, image repair discourse, political apology

المخلص،

هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى تحليل الأساليب الخطابية التي استخدمها توني بلير (رئيس الوزراء البريطاني في الفترة من ١٩٩٧ إلى ٢٠٠٧) لإصلاح صورته في البيان الذي ألقاه بتاريخ السادس من يوليو ٢٠١٦ في رده على التقرير الذي أصدرته الهيئة المكلفة من

الحكومة البريطانية للتحقيق في تدخل المملكة المتحدة في العراق في الفترة من ٢٠٠١ إلى ٢٠٠٩. وكان التحقيق قد خرج بنتائج انتقادية للغاية لتوني بلير، والذي تعرضت سمعته لضرر بالغ منذ أن اتضح أن قراره بالمشاركة في شن حرب ضد العراق عام ٢٠٠٣ استند على معلومات استخباراتية خاطئة.

وتم إجراء التحليل الخطابي للأساليب التي استخدمها توني بلير لتحسين صورته في إطار نظرية خطاب إصلاح الصورة الذي قدمه ويليام بنوا (William Benoit) في عام ١٩٩٥ وطوره في عام ٢٠١٥. ويتألف نموذج بنوا لخطاب إصلاح الصورة من خمسة أساليب رئيسية وهي: الإنكار والتملص من المسؤولية والتقليل من الإساءة والإجراءات التصويبية و الأعتذار. ويندرج تحت كل من الأساليب الثلاثة الأول عدد من الأشكال المتنوعة.

وقد عُنيَت الدراسة بتحديد الأساليب التي استخدمها توني بلير في بيانه لعام ٢٠١٦ في رده على الانتقادات التي تضمنها تقرير هيئة التحقيق، وكذلك بفحص الحجج التي قدمها في سياق كل من تلك الأساليب فحصاً نقدياً فيما يتعلق بانسجامها أو عدم انسجامها مع خطاب توني بلير في مواضع أخرى من نفس البيان والحقائق التاريخية الثابتة. كما عُنيَت الدراسة بالتحليل النقدي للأساليب اللغوية التي ظهرت في هذه الرسائل.

وقد أشار البحث إلى أن توني بلير قد استخدم أربعة أساليب رئيسية (بعضها بأشكالها المختلفة) لتحسين الصورة وهي: الأعتذار والتقليل من الإساءة والتملص من المسؤولية و الإنكار.

وبناءً على ملامح معينة لاستخدام بلير لهذه الأساليب فإنه يمكن القول بأنها في عمومها لم تكن فعالة إلى حد بعيد في علاج التلف الذي أصاب سمعة بلير. فقد افتقد أحد الاعتذارين اللذين قدمهما إلى واحد من المكونين الأساسيين للاعتذار السياسي الفعال. وجاءت معظم الحجج التي قدمها في سياق أساليب إصلاح الصورة متعارضة مع الحقائق الثابتة. كما أظهر البيان عدة حالات من الإقرار بالشئى ونقيضه. كما استند بلير إلى بعض المواقف الافتراضية وهو ما يمكن أن يؤدي إلى مزيد من النقد.

الكلمات الدالة:

التحقيق في تدخل المملكة المتحدة في العراق، توني بلير، خطاب إصلاح الصورة، الاعتذار السياسي

On the 18th of March, 2003 the then British Prime Minister, Tony Blair managed to get the House of Commons approval of taking part in the USA-led war on Iraq that was launched two days later. Blair's case for war was based on intelligence information about the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein's possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the imminent threat it posed for Britain. Shortly after the invasion, this information was proven false.

The revelation that the war decision was based on flawed intelligence has triggered severe criticism of Tony Blair, who had to resign as a prime minister and Labour Party leader in July 2007. The resignation, however, has not put an end to the criticism. Instead, Blair has been constantly under fire, with his "ongoing career in public life" being haunted with the war (Lowe, 2016). His "legacy has been defined in Britain almost entirely, and almost entirely negatively, for his decision to go into Iraq alongside the United States" (Erlanger & Sanger, 2016).

In response to this criticism Blair has remained defiant, insisting that he has taken the right decision and that the "world is safer as a result" of removing Saddam Hussein (Blair, 2010). He has, however, on occasion issued apologies for the wrong intelligence information. His apologies have been characterized by the British media and public as "partial,"

"qualified," "pseudo-/non-apologies" (Greenslade, 2015; Jeffries, 2007), as will be discussed below. It was not until the publication of the Iraq Inquiry Report (IIR) on the 6th of July, 2016 with findings severely critical of Tony Blair, that he made a lengthy statement in an attempt to repair the damage incurred to his image. The present study aimed at analyzing the discursive strategies employed by Blair in this statement to restore his tarnished reputation.

The analysis was carried out mainly within the framework of the theory of image repair discourse developed by Benoit (1995), building on previous research in religious discourse (Burke, 1970), sociology (Scott & Lyman, 1968), and rhetorical criticism (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). In Benoit (1995), the theory is referred to as *image restoration*. In his later work, Benoit has started to refer to the theory as *image repair*. The term 'restoration', as Benoit (2015) explains, might imply that a complete restoration of a damaged reputation is possible or should be expected, whereas, actually, in some situations a partial restoration or repair is the best expected goal. With this updated concept, Benoit (2015) presented the theory again, with additional insight from more case studies grouped according to the types and contexts of the image repair discourse.

As Benoit (2015) explains, the image repair message has a key communicative goal, i.e., repairing a social actor's reputation that has been subject to attack as a result of the occurrence of an undesirable act for which he/she is held responsible. In other words, image repair messages are "persuasive messages" that aim to "change audience's

attitudes concerning accusations or suspicions about the target of attack" (p. 31).

Benoit's (1995, 2015) framework of image repair discourse consists of five general strategies: *denial*, *evading responsibility*, *reducing offensiveness*, *corrective action*, and *mortification (apology)*. The first three broad strategies comprise each a number of variants or sub-strategies. (The framework will be presented in full in the Method section below.)

Research of image repair discourse has been increasingly interested in politicians' repair messages. Benoit and his colleagues have examined the image repair discourse of the American presidents, e.g., Ronald Reagan on the Iran-Contra affair (Benoit, Gullifor, & Panici, 1991), George W. Bush on the Federal Government's lack of preparation for and slow response to Hurricane Katrina (Benoit & Henson, 2009), also examined in Liu (2007). Eriksson and Eriksson (2012) tackled the image repair discourse of two former Swedish ministers who had been charged with mismanagement of public funds.

All of these studies have had one observation in common; that is, the strategies of *denial* and *evading responsibility* are generally ineffectual. What is more effective in repairing a damaged reputation, according to these scholars, is *mortification (apology)*, often in combination with corrective action and/or bolstering (a variant of the *reduce-offensiveness* strategy). In the same vein, Benoit (1995) has pointed out that *mortification* may best serve to redeem a damaged reputation. However,

politicians are generally less willing than other celebrities to use this strategy in their self-defence discourse.

Benoit's (2006) study of President George W. Bush's image repair discourse against criticisms related to the Iraq War, as demonstrated in the latter's February, 2004 television interview, is particularly significant for two reasons. First, it tackled the charge of going to war based on intelligence information that turned out to be wrong, one of the main charges directed also to Tony Blair. In this regard, Benoit has emphasized that it is "difficult to imagine many events more important than a president justifying the invasion of another country based on reasons that turned out to be false" (Benoit, 2006, p. 285). Second, Bush's discursive strategies appear generally similar to those of Tony Blair in his statement under examination in the present study. As Benoit explained, Bush employed three main image repair strategies: *denial*, *reduce offensiveness*, and *evading responsibility*. Bush first denied having misled the Americans, indicating that he had taken the war decision based on the best available intelligence at that time. Second, he used the *transcendence* variant of the *reduce offensiveness* strategy, when he claimed that the war was justified if viewed within the context of the danger posed by Saddam Hussein. Third, Bush attempted to evade responsibility by claiming that WMD were not found because they had probably been secretly destroyed, hidden, or moved to another country.

Benoit (2006) concluded by commenting on the "morality of shifting from one justification of the war with Iraq, 'weapons of mass destruction', to a new one 'Saddam was evil,'" characterizing this shift as

"reprehensible." He indicated that the president had an "obligation to admit" the mistaken deed "rather than to offer new rationalization ... other than the fact" (p. 303). Accordingly, for Benoit (2006), all of Bush's strategies were largely ineffective in repairing his image.

In sum, the final remark of Benoit (2006) is in line with the above mentioned consistent observation of political image repair studies that admitting the wrongful act (an element of *mortification/apology*) is an essential and probably the most effective image repair strategy. Apology,⁽²⁾ in addition, "across the political spectrum on a global scale has, arguably, become one of the most prominent of 'public' speech acts." (Harris, Grainger, & Mullany, 2006, p. 732). Despite this significance, political apology has only recently started to gain attention in linguistic and pragmatic research (Harris et al., 2006; Jeffries, 2007; Lakoff, 2015; Murphy, 2014). By political apology is meant "apologies which centrally involve a politician (or other prominent public figure associated with political life) as the perceived apologizer" (Harris et al., 2006, p. 719).

Harris et al. (2006) distinguished between historical apologies and apologies issued for current highly offensive events "with significant political implications" (p. 726). Historical apologies involve politicians apologizing for historical injustices, or offensive past events that had taken place long before the apologizer assumed office. Numerous cases of these apologies have been produced in the last two decades, hence the label "age of apology" referring to this period (Harris et al., 2006; Lakoff, 2015).

Since politicians issuing historical apologies cannot be held responsible for the offensive events in question, this type of political apologies cannot be categorized as a strategy of image repair discourse, which is the concern of the present study. It is the second type of apology, generated by politicians who have been criticized for being involved with gravely offensive acts,⁽³⁾ which represents a strategy of image repair discourse. This is the type of apology investigated in (Harris et al., 2006; Jeffries, 2007; Lakoff, 2015; Murphy, 2014). With their differing perspectives, these studies focused on the form and substance of certain cases of political apology and, particularly in the first three, the media and public reaction to these apologies.

Murphy's (2014) study tackled four different contexts of British politicians' apologies: apologies produced in debates and statements in the House of Commons, the ones issued in a courtroom-like setting, i.e., during an official inquiry, apology exchanges in news interviews, and historical apologies. These different contexts with their various communicative practices and norms, influence the nature of apologies, thereby generating different types of them.

Politicians apologizing tend to use certain linguistic devices to reduce the force of regret and mitigate their responsibility for the offensive act, as observed by Lakoff (2015). In her analysis of the former US president Bill Clinton's September 1998 statement with regard to an act of personal misconduct, she noted that he used the reported speech and past-tense verbs rather than performative ones. She pointed out that "[t]he past-tense reports of his earlier speech acts sound at first like apologies,...[but

are actually] mere[ly] reports of apologies, and therefore have no interactive value" (p. 302).

The Iraq-War related apologies have been studied by Harris et al. (2006) and *Jeffries* (2007). Harris et al (2006) analyzed two apologetic statements produced by two ministers in Tony Blair's government related to the Iraq War. The two statements, which were issued in different contexts, targeting different audiences, were both evaluated largely negatively by the target addressees, the media, and the public at large. The reasons were related to the lack of an expression admitting responsibility for the offenses and/or being issued by the wrong person for the wrong offence. The right person in this regard was Tony Blair, and the right offence was the war decision itself, for which Blair has ever since declined to apologize.⁽⁴⁾

The study that has directly tackled a Blair's apology is *Jeffries* (2007). She examined the journalists' evaluations of Blair's apology issued on the 13th of October, 2004 in the House of Commons, which reads as follows: "I take full responsibility and apologise for any information given in good faith which has subsequently turned out to be wrong" (Blair, 2004, as cited in *Jeffries*, 2007, p. 57). *Jeffries* focused on the *metadiscussion* of whether Blair had actually performed an apology in terms of the journalists' concept of this act. She concluded that there was a consensus that Blair's statement in form and substance did not constitute a genuine apology. *Jeffries* added that Blair formulated his statement in this way "in order to deflect criticism and baffle his opponents by obfuscation" and "to not apologize for the wrong thing" (*Jeffries*, 2007, p. 63).

Apart from apology, the last two decades have witnessed a noticeable interest in studying Tony Blair's discourse, whether before the Iraq War was launched (e.g., Fairclough, 2000, Pearce, 2001) or after that (e.g., Fairclough, 2007; Martins, 2012). Fairclough (2000) evaluated Blair's style in his speeches and interviews as "immensely successful," due to the fact that Blair has the capacity of "anchor[ing] the public politician with the 'normal person,'" as he "mixe[s] between the vernacular language of the normal person and the public language of politics" (Fairclough, 2000, pp. 6-7). Similarly, Pearce (2001), which was concerned with Blair's communicative style in his 1997 campaign for premiership, indicated his use of devices to claim solidarity with the audience. For this purpose, Blair particularly employed colloquialisms and switching from the first-person singular to the second-person pronouns.

With a different focus, Fairclough (2007) investigated four speeches delivered by Blair in the period from April 1999 to March 2003. He explored Blair's contribution to "develop[ing] and diffuse[ing] a new hegemonic discourse of international relations and international security" (p.37). This discourse is an essential element of the political project of reshaping international relations and fostering new notion of international security that allows the military intervention by the "'international community' in the affairs of sovereign states" (p.42).

Blair's September 2003 speech, delivered amidst criticism of the Iraq War and the established nonexistence of Iraq's WMD, was investigated by Martins (2012) within Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) transitivity

systems. The author demonstrated how Blair attempted to divert the audience attention from the core issue of going to war for a case that turned out to be mistaken by focusing on Saddam Hussein and terrorists as doers of negative actions. On the other hand, the commonly used mental processes, e.g., 'believe,' 'know,' 'see,' and 'understand' were all related to interpretation or viewpoints. This ultimately reflected Blair's "uncertainty" with regard to the war.

Despite this interest in Blair's discourse, no attempt has been made yet, to the best of my knowledge, to investigate his image repair messages in the (2016) statement. The present study attempted to conduct a critical analysis of Blair's self-defence discourse in this statement, while addressing the following two main questions:

- (1) What image repair strategies were employed by Blair in response to each of the criticisms included in the IIR?
- (2) What linguistic and rhetorical devices did Blair use in formulating his repair messages?

Data and Method

Data

To answer the above mentioned questions, the present study attempted an analysis of the statement delivered by Tony Blair in the press conference which he held on the 6th of July, 2016 in response to the publication of the IIR. The analysis focused on the discursive strategies and linguistic devices employed by Blair in his attempt to repair his seriously scathed reputation. A background of the statement and the IIR

to which it came in response is in order. The Iraq Inquiry, also referred to as the Chilcot Inquiry, after its chairman, Sir John Chilcot, was commissioned in June 2009 by the then British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown to examine the UK's involvement in Iraq from 2001 to 2009. The final Inquiry report which was published on the 6th of July, 2016, came in 12 volumes, comprising 2.6 million words. In addition, immediately before the publishing of the final report, a statement was given by the Inquiry chairman summarizing the key findings of the Inquiry and lessons to be learned.

The main findings of the IIR, as listed in the chairman's statement about the report, are all severely critical of Tony Blair:

- Military action at that time was not a last resort.
- The judgements about the severity of the threat posed by Iraq's weapons of mass destruction – WMD – were presented with a certainty that was not justified.
- The consequences of the invasion were underestimated. The planning and preparations for Iraq after Saddam Hussein were wholly inadequate.
- In the absence of a majority in support of military action ... the UK was ... undermining the Security Council's authority.
- Policy on Iraq was made on the basis of flawed intelligence and assessments. They were not challenged and they should have been. (Chilcot, 2016, paras. 4, 5, 22, 41, respectively)

Although Iraq War has always haunted Tony Blair, as indicated above, it is the IIR that has caused the most serious damage to his reputation, as has been widely reported in the media. Journalists have considered the report "Tony Blair's eternal shame" (Wheatcroft 2016) and "the most scathing official verdict on any modern British prime minister" (Harding 2016); therefore, it "is hard to imagine how much more damage can be done to the tarnished reputations of Tony Blair" (Gardner 2016). Accordingly, within hours from the publication of the IIR, ⁽⁵⁾ Blair responded by holding a two-hour press conference in which he delivered the longest (about 6446 words, delivered in about 50 minutes), most detailed, highly publicized statement he has ever made in response to the Iraq War criticism. The video files of the statement (Blair, 2016a) and the Question and Answer session (Blair, 2016b) have been available online. The two video files were transcribed with the transcription software, VoiceBase; then checked and edited carefully.⁽⁶⁾ The analysis focused on the statement delivered at the beginning of the conference, though reference is made to the Question and Answer session where necessary. Henceforth, the statement will be referred to as Blair's 2016 statement.

Framework of analysis

The analysis of Blair's 2016 statement was conducted within the framework of Benoit's (1995, 2015) theory of image repair discourse. In addition, the analysis of *apology*, the highly controversial image repair strategy used by Blair, was based on Harris et al.'s (2006) catalogue of

the characteristics of political apology. Murphy (2014) was also consulted for the analysis of the component parts of political apology.

As indicated above, Benoit's framework of image repair discourse comprises five general strategies, the first three of which have each a number of variants. The broad strategies and their variants are presented in Table 1 below (based on Benoit, 1997, 2015).

Table 1: Image repair discourse strategies and their variants

Strategy	Key characteristic
<i>Denial</i>	
Simple Denial	Did not perform act
Shift the Blame	Act performed by another
<i>Evade Responsibility</i>	
Provocation	Responded to act of another
Defeasibility	Lack of information or ability
Accident	Act was a mishap
Good Intentions	Meant well in act
<i>Reducing Offensiveness</i>	
Bolstering	Stress good traits
Minimization	Act not serious
Differentiation	Act less offensive than similar ones
Transcendence	More important considerations
Attack Accuser	Reduce credibility of accuser
Compensation	Reimburse victim
<i>Corrective Action</i>	Plan to solve/prevent problem
<i>Mortification</i>	Apologize for act

It has to be noted that in Benoit's research, the three terms: 'image', 'reputation', and 'face' are used consistently interchangeably to mean "perceived character." Goffman (1967) defined face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes..." (p. 5). Similarly, Benoit treats face threats as events that threaten reputation, and image repair efforts are the same as facework. Benoit's notions of face, face threats, and facework are based on Goffman (1967) and Brown and Levinson (1987). In this context, image repair strategies can generally be understood as *corrective facework* (Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish, 2010). As Goffman (1967) explained, corrective facework serves to restore face after it has been damaged. Blair's image repair messages in the 2016 statement appear to belong to this kind of facework. The IIR constituted further, more serious threat to his face, which had already been damaged since the revelation of the nonexistence of WMD.

The analysis of *apology* in Blair's 2016 statement was based on the characteristics of political apology that were outlined by Harris et al. (2006) as follows:

- (1) *Political apologies are in the public domain and, as a consequence, are highly mediated.*
- (2) *Political apologies are often generated by (and generate further) conflict and controversy.*

(3) Both an explicit IFID (illocutionary force indicating device) and a form of words which indicates the acceptance of responsibility and/or blame for the 'offence' by the apologizer appear to be crucial component parts of political apologies in order for the media and viewers to perceive them clearly as valid apologies.

(4) Because they are usually in the public domain and, thus, highly mediated as well as often involving substantial differences in status and power between the apologizer and the 'victim', it is rare for the response to a political apology to contain any explicit form of absolution.⁽⁷⁾ (Harris et al., 2006, pp. 720-723, original italics)

The IFID, one of the two key elements of an apology, is defined in Searle and Vanderveken (2005) as "[a]ny element of a natural language which can be literally used to indicate that an utterance of a sentence containing that element has a certain illocutionary force or range of illocutionary forces" (p. 110). Murphy (2014) argues that of the verbs listed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984, p.207), namely, '(be) sorry, 'excuse,' 'apologize,' 'forgive,' 'regret,' and 'pardon,' only 'apologize' used as a performative verb or the nouns 'apology/apologies' functioning as a direct object can be considered an explicit IFID of apology. This is because, unlike other verbs in the list, 'apologize,' used performatively, "cannot carry the force of another speech act" (Murphy, 2014, p.52).

The analysis of the linguistic devices employed by Tony Blair in his image repair discourse was carried out within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, guided in particular by the following sources: Fowler, Hodge, Kress, & Trew, (1979), and van Dijk (1993, 1995, 2002).

Procedures of analysis

The analysis of Blair's 2016 statement consisted in two main stages. First, the strategies employed in response to each of the criticisms presented in the IIR were identified. The arguments made in each of these repair messages were critically investigated in terms of their (in)congruity with Blair's previous discourse and/or established facts. This was followed by a critical analysis of the linguistic constructs demonstrated in each of these messages.

Findings

This section presents the findings of analyzing the image repair strategies employed by Blair in his response to the severe criticisms stated in the IIR. Blair has addressed these criticisms individually, using topic announcers to indicate explicitly which one he is about to address. However, with regard to the *apology* strategy, it is used first at the outset of the statement when he has not yet referred to the IIR. Instead, he presents a list of the offences for which he issues the apology. The second case of apology appears in the conclusion of his retort to the criticisms, where he apologizes for "failures" in general. Accordingly,

this section is organized as follows. The first subsection discusses the two cases of apology. Then the remaining sub-sections will deal each with the image repair strategies employed by Blair with regard to each of the IIR criticisms, in much the same order in which they occur in the statement.

Apology

The two cases of apology are made for other offences than the war decision itself, as Blair has emphasized that he believes it to be the right decision and that he stands by it, and accordingly, he uses other image repair strategies to defend it, as will be discussed below. The following two extracts demonstrate the two apologies:⁽⁸⁾

- (1) I recognise the division felt by many in our country over the war and in particular I feel deeply and sincerely- in a way that no words can properly convey- the grief and suffering of those who lost ones they loved in Iraq, whether they were members of our armed forces, the armed forces of other nations, or Iraqis. The intelligence assessments made at the time of going to war turned out to be wrong. The aftermath turned out to be more hostile, protracted and bloody than we ever imagined. The coalition planned for one set of ground facts and encountered another and a nation whose people we wanted to set free and secure from the evil of Saddam became instead victim to sectarian terrorism. *For all of this I express more sorrow, regret and apology than you may ever know or can believe.*⁽⁹⁾

(2) *None of this [that the state of Iraq today is not as offensive as it appears if compared with that of Syria] excuses the failures, for which I repeat I take full responsibility and apologise.⁽¹⁰⁾*

Blair's apology here appears to represent the first two characteristics of political apology outlined by Harris et al. (2006) pointed out above. First, the apology was made in public and was highly mediated. As indicated above, the statement including the apology was made in a press conference, which was broadcast live and covered widely by various media outlets. The media coverage and comments, have since been accessible online. As indicated above, video files of the statement have been available online and an almost complete transcript was published by the *Mirror's* 6th July, 2016 online version. In addition, large excerpts of Blair's statement have been quoted in many news outlets.

Second, as indicated above, Tony Blair's press conference and the statement came as an immediate response to the published IIR with its severe criticism of him and the controversy it had aroused even before its publication. In addition, Blair's statement has generated a huge media attention and controversy. Many of the press comments focused on the apology issued at outset of the statement. Whereas some commentators categorized it as a "grovelling apology" (e.g., Dathan, Tapsfield, Robinson, & Spillett 2016), other journalists quoted what Blair had said without even categorizing it as an apology, contrasting it with the apology given by Jeremy Corbyn, the current Labour Party leader, in the same regard: "Mr Blair said he expresses 'more regret, sorrow and

apology than you can ever know or can believe'... But anti-war Mr Corbyn [went] a step further, as he apologized to the people of Iraq, the families of soldiers who were killed or wounded and the British public" (Watson, Wilkinson, & Boyle 2016). Corbyn's apology was highlighted in the headline of this article as "sincere".

The third characteristic of political apology catalogued by Harris et al. (2006), as indicated above, is concerned with its two pivotal component parts, namely, an IFID and an expression indicating accepting responsibility/blame for the offending acts. Extract (1) above does show the explicit use of the IFID, the noun 'apology', coordinated with 'sorrow' and 'regret' as the direct object of verb 'express'. The IFID in this case is "direct, unambiguous and unqualified" (Augoustinos, Hastie, & Wright 2011, p. 515).

The expression of "sorrow" and "regret introduces an emotional aspect into the apology, the absence of which ... [would make it] seem perfunctory" (Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish, 2010, p.723). In addition, Blair emphasizes that his feelings of "sorrow, regret and apology" are "more than" what his audience "may ever know or can believe." The 'more-than- ever' structure, a "[c]omparative which [expresses] a superlative meaning" (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 725), can be considered an instance of intensified apology, as indicated by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). In Extract (2), the performative verb "apologise" also stands for an explicit, direct, unambiguous and unqualified IFID.

Despite the intensifier and the emotion related expressions, the apology in Extract (1) lacks the second crucial component of valid political apology, i.e., an expression admitting responsibility. It has to be noted that this extract follows immediately Blair's "accept[ing] full responsibility without exception and without excuse" for the war decision.⁽¹¹⁾ However, he makes it clear throughout the statement that he "took the decision because [he] thought it the right thing to do" and defends it using other strategies of image repair, as will be discussed below. Accordingly, the first apology cannot be considered as "valid" one (Harris et al., 2006). Apologies which lack an expression of admitting responsibility are viewed as "a strategic move in self-representation on the part of the politicians and other prominent figures" (Duguid 2015, p. 165).

This is reflected clearly in the media comments indicated above. This missing expression of accepting responsibility indicates that Blair takes the "sympathizing self" to the exclusion of the "blameworthy" one,⁽¹²⁾ whereas the two are necessary to make the apologizers "worthy of reconciliation" (Goffman 1971, cited in McNeill, Lyons & Pehrson, 2014, p.657). In contrast, in Extract (2) the expression of accepting responsibility immediately precedes the IFID of apology. It has to be noted that this expression, a noticeably brief and generalized one, is issued only after Blair's endeavor to defend his war decision and the other charges presented in the IIR using several (sub)-strategies of image repair and concluding by indicating that the situation in Iraq at present is

less offensive than that in Syria, in which the UK has refused to intervene militarily.

As for the description of offences, which is a distinctive feature of political apology, as indicated by Murphy (2014), in Blair's first apology, the description of the offences being apologized for is given prior to the apology statement itself. However, Blair's description of these offences appears too general, inadequate and/or mitigated. He refers to the loss of life without giving even approximate numbers of the victims.⁽¹³⁾ (This comes in contrast with his mentioning of the number of those who died in the September 11, 2001 and the 2002 Bali attacks.). The use of "more general, abstract terms" renders the description a self-serving one as it helps in positive self-presentation by means of reducing the magnitude of "our" mistakes, as pointed out by van Dijk (1995, p. 27). Moreover, Blair reduces the war consequences over Iraq to the Iraqi nation becoming "victim to sectarian terrorism". No mention is made of the disintegration of the state, the economic deterioration, the huge disastrous humanitarian consequences with regard to public health, the refugee crisis, the tremendous environmental pollution, or the damaged cultural heritage.⁽¹⁴⁾

Furthermore, Blair does emphasize the hostility, bloodiness, and protraction of the aftermath, attributing this to "a set of ground facts" other than the ones for which the coalition planned. In this way, the "shortcomings" and "failures" in planning and preparation stated and detailed in the IIR have been reduced to a difference between the planned for and the encountered facts. Finally, the tremendous financial cost of

the war,⁽¹⁵⁾ one that often follows the death toll in UK press listing of the war decision offences, is not mentioned.

The description of offences also shows Blair's care to distance himself and other leaders of the invading coalition from the blunders, on the one hand, and foreground their 'positive' attitude towards the Iraqi people, on the other, as indicated by his lexical and syntactic choices (van Dijk, 1993). Whereas Blair emphasizes in general terms the hostility, bloodiness, and protraction of the aftermath, the use of the intransitive state verb "turn out" serves to conceal the agency of the war coalition, as if these conditions had emerged out of their own accord. The same device is used in pointing out to sectarian terrorism in Iraq that "*became* victim to sectarian terrorism".

Concealing the agent is also demonstrated in the use of the passive participle phrase (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, pp.596-597) in: "the intelligence assessments *made* at that time turned out to be wrong." It is certainly assumed that these "assessments" were made by Blair depending on the information provided to him by the intelligence services, information that he should have challenged, but he did not, as pointed out in IIR chairman's statement. This comes in contrast with "a nation whose people *we wanted to set free and secure* from the evil of Saddam." The active voice with the subject first-person plural pronoun *we*, most likely referring to Tony Blair, George W. Bush and other leaders of the war coalition, is used to highlight their positive desires for the Iraqi people. In the second apology, the offences are referred to generally and briefly as "failures".

War was "unnecessary."

Regarding the war decision, the IIR finds that the war was "unnecessary," the case for war was presented with "certainty which was not justified" (Chicot, 2016, para. 5), as it was based on flawed and unchallenged intelligence and assessments about Iraq's WMD, and that "there was no imminent threat from Saddam Hussein." (Chilcot, 2016, para. 80). Having stated that he "accept[s] full responsibility for this decision and that he "stand[s] by it." Blair sets out to defend it using mainly the image repair strategies of *transcendence* and *bolstering*.⁽¹⁶⁾

Transcendence. Benoit (2015) points out that *transcendence* consists in presenting the (allegedly) wrongful act in "a different frame of reference" or "a different context", (p. 25), which is not necessarily a "larger" one as originally stipulated by Ware and Linkugel (1973, p. 280). The first case of *transcendence* in Blair's statement, however, is in line with the latter stipulation. He links his war decision with the broader context of what he calls "the defining global security struggle of the 21st century against the terrorism and violence." Thus, viewed from this perspective, the Iraq War was an element of the "global security struggle".

Blair sets out to define the broader context which, for him, made the war necessary using "positive lexicalization" (van Dijk 2002, p.232). In particular, rather than referring to wars launched by the US-led coalitions after the September 11 attacks, in the more common label "global war on

terror,"⁽¹⁷⁾ he talks about "global security struggle." In this way, Blair attempts to place his war decision not only in a broader context, but in a more favourable one as well. The invasion of sovereign states is presented as the assumingly rightful "struggle" for "security".

Within the *transcendence* strategy, Blair asks the audience to "go back ... and look at the history of that time" and "recall the atmosphere [then]". The atmosphere he refers to has three key elements: first, the September 11 terror attacks and the terror attacks targeting twenty different nations in 2002, of which, he names only the Bali attacks; second, Saddam Hussein's record of violence especially using "chemical weapons against his own people" and "in the war he began with Iran," the "still valid" intelligence indicating that Saddam "did indeed intend to go back to developing the programmes [of WMD] after the removal of sanctions" and his record of breaching UN resolutions; third, a speculative link between the perpetrators of terror attacks and Saddam Hussein. This conjectural link underlay the "fear of the US administration, which [Blair] shared, [of] the possibility of terrorist groups acquiring, either by accident or design, chemical weapons, biological weapons, or even a primitive nuclear device" and therefore, they "believed [they] had to change policy on nations developing such weapons in order to eliminate the possibility of WMD and terrorism coming together. Saddam's regime was the place to start".

This third element, the subjective "fear" of a "possibility" of terrorist groups obtaining WMD is, thus, presented as the direct cause of the war decision. Blair has attempted to confer plausibility to this hypothetical

situation by presenting it in the co-text of substantiated events, such as the 9/11 and Bali attacks, the Iraq-Iran War, and Saddam Hussein's atrocities against Iraqis. As Hodges (2011) explains, the embedding of "subjective evaluations within the naming of objective events" is a means of lending them "credibility" (pp. 70-71). However, it is highly unlikely that this attempt on the part of Blair has achieved this credibility; instead, it may have been a rather unhappy one, for the following reason: the alleged link between Saddam Hussein and terror groups, repeatedly emphasized in the discourse of the US administration in the lead up to the war, has been dismissed in the official reports of more than one investigating committee, as has been widely reported in the US and world media (e.g., Gompert, Binnendijk, & Lin, 2014; Pincus & Milbank, 2004; Schor, 2008).

Within the strategy of *transcendence*, Blair employs a highly involved style, with a direct appeal to the audience not only to view the war decision in this wider context, but to think about what they would do if they were in his position:

(3) So I ask *people to put themselves in my shoes as Prime Minister*. Back then, barely more than a year from 9/11, in late 2002 and early 2003, *you're seeing* the intelligence mount up on WMD. *You're doing* so in a changed context of mass casualties caused by a new and virulent form of terrorism. *You have* at least to consider the possibility of a 9/11 here in Britain and *your* primary responsibility as

Prime Minister *is* to protect *your* country. These *were* my considerations at the time.

Blair seems to be trying hard to establish solidarity with the addressees in several ways. First, he makes a direct directive addressed to *people*. Second, the use of the idiom "put themselves in my shoes" counts as an instance of colloquialism, thereby "mak[ing] a solidarity claim" (Pearce, 2001, p. 214), in an attempt to gain the audience empathy. Third, the shift from "people" to the second-person pronoun and possessive is a further attempt at claiming solidarity with his audience (de Fina, 1996). The use of the second-person pronoun counts as an attempt to interact "with the audience as a whole" (Reyes, 2014, p. 550). Pronominal choices made by politicians are means of achieving persuasive and strategic political purposes (Allen, 2007). By attempting to gain the audience empathy, Blair aims at persuading them of the validity of his "considerations" in taking the war decision.

Moreover, Blair attempts to make the audience visualize the broader context vividly by means of the historical present, i.e., using present-tense verbs in recounting past events and situations, a device used mainly in "informal conversational narration or in fiction" (Huddleston & Pullum 2002, p. 130). As explained by Huber (2016, p. 9) the use of the present tense "within a largely past-tense context [helps] to render a scene more vivid and heighten its affective impact." Blair refers to the obligation and responsibility of the Prime Minister in the historical present: "You *have* at least to consider the possibility of a 9/11 here in

Britain and your primary responsibility as Prime Minister *is* to protect your country." This is presented in the backdrop of the durative, states/acts at that time, expressed in the present progressive, "*you're seeing* the intelligence mount up on WMD. *You're doing* so in a changed context of mass casualties caused by a new and virulent form of terrorism." This "backgrounding present," is also common in oral narrative (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, pp. 166-167). Finally, Blair shifts to the simple past tense while referring to his "considerations at that time," which he hopes his audience has shared with him through his rather informal involved presentation of the situation.

It has to be noted that Blair reiterates the transcendence strategy later in the statement with a focus on the threat allegedly posed by Saddam Hussein, also employing direct appeal to the audience, this time with the first-person plural pronoun (most likely to be understood as inclusive), second-person pronouns and a rhetorical question:

(4) Now, of course, *we* can never know whether he [Saddam Hussein] would have done this [going back to the nuclear program]. But I ask: if *you* knew that for a fact *this dictator* had used chemical weapons on his own people and those of other nations, for a fact he had lied about having them so he could continue to produce and use them, and for a fact that he had killed thousands of his own people and those in other countries with no respect whatever for human life or norms of civilised behaviour, *would you have wanted to take that risk of leaving him in place, or would you have wanted to eliminate*

it? Saddam *in my view* was going to pose a threat for as long as he was in power.

Referring to Saddam Hussein as "this dictator" is an instance of "overlexicalization" (Fowler et al., 1979), which serves to emphasize his threat. For this purpose, in addition, Blair makes use of three rhetorical devices of emphasizing political messages (Atkinson, 1984; Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986): the 'three-part list', 'contrasts' and rhetorical questions. He lists the three main sources of the threat in a series of three parallel *if* clauses. The rhetorical alternative question about the possible responses to this threat is also formulated in two contrastive parallel clauses. That is, Blair uses two devices in combination, which is supposed to be "indeed the most powerful rhetorical technique of them all" (Atkinson, 2004, p. 200).

Blair then concludes by stating his "view" about the situation. This concluding statement with direct self-reference "*my view*" is in line with the concluding statement of Extract (3): "these were *my* considerations at the time." After inviting the audience to live the situation in which he took the war decision, Blair indicates his view of the situation. When Blair delivered this statement, it had been established, even long before the release of the IIR, that Iraq had possessed no WMD and that Saddam Hussein had posed no imminent threat. Blair's aim at this point appears to be not so much to counter this as to persuade the audience that in his "view" of the situation, he had certain "considerations," according to which and "on the basis of what [he] genuinely believe[d] to be right," he

took the war decision. Actually, Blair makes a frequent use of these "subjectively modalized" arguments (Fairclough, 2007, p. 50). He qualifies several of his arguments with hedging expressions such as "I believe," "in my judgement," "in my view," "the wisdom of the judgement I made," and "my point of view." This is spelled out in the following extract:

(5) I only ask with humility that you the British people accept that *I took this decision because I believed it was the right thing to do based on the information that I had and the threats I perceived*, and that my duty as prime minister, at that moment in time in 2003, was to do *what I thought was right* however imperfect the situation or the process.

Bolstering. Blair's mention of his "duty as a prime minister" is related to the second strategy he uses in defence of his war decision, namely, *bolstering*. This strategy consists in the actor's attempt to identify him/herself "with something viewed favorably by the audience" (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 277), thereby "mitigate[ing] the negative effects of the act ... by strengthening the audience's positive affect for the actor by relat[ing] positive attributes they possess or positive actions they have performed in the past" (Benoit, 2015, p. 24).

Blair's ultimate goal of bolstering in this context appears to be to present himself as the responsible prime minister who took "the hardest, most momentous, most agonizing decision [he] took in [his] ten years as British Prime Minister," which he "knew was not a popular decision"

motivated by his "duty" and "obligation" to serve the interests of his nation, putting aside any political ramifications:

(6) [M]y duty as prime minister at that moment in time in 2003 was to do what I thought was right however imperfect the situation or the process. At moments of crisis such as this, it's the profound obligation of the person leading the government of our country to *take responsibility and to decide*, not to hide behind politics, expediency or even emotion. But to recognise that it is a privilege above all others to lead this nation. But the accompaniment of that privilege, when the interests of our nation are so supremely and plainly at stake, is *to lead* and not to shy away, *to decide* and not to avoid decision, to *discharge that responsibility* and not to duck it.

To emphasize this positive self-presentation, Blair contrasts his 'positive' attitude within which he took the war decision with the 'negative' one which would have prevented him from taking this decision. Blair's contrasts are complex ones. First, he emphasizes that the "profound obligation" of the government leader is to "take responsibility and decide"(which is what he has done) as contradictory to "hid[ing] behind politics, expediency or even emotion." This negative hiding is then contrasted with the recognition that "it is a privilege above all others to lead this nation," which is, in turn, in a concessive relation with its "accompaniment," namely, leading, deciding, and discharging responsibility (which is what he has done). These three positive acts are

emphasized again by contrasting them each with its opposite, shying away, avoiding decision, and ducking responsibility, respectively.

Here again, Blair makes use of two rhetorical devices conjointly. Two cases of contrast are used in combination with the device of the three-part list: "to take responsibility and to decide, not to hide behind *politics, expediency or even emotion*" and "*to lead and not to shy away, to decide and not to avoid decision, to discharge that responsibility and not to duck it.*" It seems that Blair is at pains, while employing the strategy of bolstering, to emphasize his political message and persuade the audience of the positive underpinnings of his decision. It is again highly unlikely that this goal has been achieved. Having heard the statement of the IIR chairman, Blair's audience might not have been easily convinced that the "the interests of [the British] nation [were] so *supremely and plainly* at stake" at that time.

War was not the last resort

The second key finding of the IIR which represents severe criticism of the war decision relates to going to war before the "peaceful options for disarmament had been exhausted." That is, "Military action at that time was not the last resort" (Chilcot, 2016, para. 4). Blair attempts to counter this criticism, claiming that "there was no rush to war," depending mainly on the strategy of *bolstering* and, to a less extent, on *defeasibility*.

Before explaining how Blair employs these two strategies, it may be interesting to note how he reports this finding in his statement. He refers to it twice:

- (7) Now the inquiry *finds* that as at the 18th of March war was not and I quote "the last resort."
- (8) Now the inquiry *claims* that military action was not a last resort, though it also says it might be necessary later.

So, for no obvious reason, Blair presents the same conclusion of the IIR once as a 'finding' and another time as a 'claim.' This is actually the only instance in Blair's statement of referring to IIR conclusions as 'claims'.

Bolstering. To counter this finding or 'claim', Blair employs *bolstering*, and engages in a process of positive self-presentation that lies in listing the diplomatic moves that he has carried out. Having stated his steadfast belief, which he made clear in the July 2002 note to the then American president, that Britain had to be with the US in "dealing with [the Iraq] issue", Blair dwells on his diplomatic efforts:

- (9) I also said [in the above mentioned note] we had to *proceed in the right way* and *I set out the conditions necessary especially that we should then go down the UN route, and avoid precipitate action* as indeed the inquiry report finds. So, as again the inquiry finds, *I persuaded a reluctant American*

administration to take the issue back to the UN. This resulted in the November 2002 UN resolution 1441 giving Saddam I quote "a final opportunity" to come into I quote "full and immediate compliance" with UN resolutions and to cooperate fully with UN inspectors. ... In a final attempt to bridge the division [between the USA, on the one hand, and France and Russia, on the other] I agreed with the inspectors a set of six tests based on Saddam's non-compliance with which he had to comply immediately.... So, again I secured American agreement to a new resolution betting tests, which if he had passed, he would have avoided military action.

Blair's self-praise here is presented through "positive lexicalization" (van Dijk, 2002): "proceeding in the right way", "setting out the conditions necessary, especially going down the UN route", "avoiding precipitate action", "persuading" the American administration of taking the issue back to the UN. The result was the UN Resolution 1441. In this connection, he also tried to "bridge the [US vs. Russia and France] division" by agreeing "with the inspectors a set of six tests" and "secured the American agreement to a new resolution."

What may appear cynical in this context, and may have rendered Blair's bolstering attempt rather ineffectual, is the fact that some of these diplomatic moves in the UN, which Blair is recounting to persuade the audience that "there was no rush to war," were taking place when "the Americans and the UK and other partners from over 40 nations had

assembled a force in the Gulf ready for military action." What is the point of making diplomatic moves in the UN after sending troops to the theatre? This mobilizing of troops "which could not be kept there indefinitely" is one of the reasons that Blair gives for acting without authorization from the UN, as will be explained below.

Defeasibility. This strategy lies in attempting to present factors beyond the actor's control which, at least in part, instigated the wrongful act (Benoit 2015). The following extracts demonstrate Blair's use of the *defeasibility* strategy in defence of going to war before exhausting the peaceful options for disarmament:

(10) Given the impasse in the UN [America wanted action. President Putin and the leadership of France did not] and the insistence of the United States- for reasons I completely understood and with hundreds of thousands of troops in theatre which could not be kept there indefinitely-it was the last moment of decision for us, as the report indeed accepts. By then, the US was going to war and to move with us or without us.

(11) I did not have the option of delay. I had to decide.

Blair's argument shown in Extract (10) seems to reinforce, rather than counter, the IIR finding that war was launched before the exhaustion of peaceful means of settling the issue. As indicated above, and as spelled

out by Blair here, troops had been mobilized in theatre before the UN Security Council negotiations concluded.

Undermining the UN authority

Blair attempts to counter the criticism that going to war without UN authorization undermined the organization's authority, by using *bolstering* and *blame shifting*.

Bolstering. Blair's bolstering attempt is shown in the following extract:

(12) The reality is that we Britain had continually tried to act with the authority of the UN I *successfully convinced* the Americans to go back to the UN in November 2002 as I said and after the initial conflict it was again Britain which *put UN authority back in place* for the aftermath. So from June 2003 British troops were in Iraq *with full UN authority*.

Blair is not actually addressing the charge of taking Britain to war without the UN authorization. He is reiterating his attempts with the US administration to take the route of the UN, which have not after all stopped them from going to war without its authorization. Furthermore, he shifts the time frame (Benoit, 2006) and presents the situation after June 2003, which is also irrelevant to the IIR criticism under discussion. In addition, he says: "after the initial conflict," which simply means 'after

the war had already been launched,' as an attempt at mitigating the charge.

Blame shifting. Blair also implicitly shifts the blame of undermining the UN authority to the Russian and French governments, for refusing to follow through on the UN Resolution 1441, as shown in the following extract.

(13) I say the undermining of the UN was in fact refusal to follow through on 1441. And with the subsequent statement from President Putin and the president of France that they would veto any new resolution authorising action in the event of noncompliance, it was clearly not possible to get a majority of the UN to agree a new resolution.

This extract can also be considered a case of *defeasibility*. What Blair wants to say is that the coalition launched the war without the UN authorization because they were unable to have the UN issue a resolution in this regard due to the stance of France and Russia. According to Benoit (2015) the same statement can represent more than one image repair strategy. Blair's statement in Extract (13) is a case in point.

Planning and the aftermath

The Iraq Inquiry has found that "[T]he consequences of the invasion were underestimated" and that "[t]he planning and preparations for Iraq

after Saddam Hussein were wholly inadequate" (Chilcot 2016, para. 5). Blair's self –defence in this regard is based mainly on the strategies of *defeasibility* and *blame shifting*. In addition, particularly with regard to the state of Iraq today, he employs the strategy of *differentiation*.

Defeasibility. The following three extracts illustrate the *defeasibility* strategy:

(14) I accept that especially in hindsight we should have approached the situation differently.

(15) [T]he terrorism we faced and did not expect would have been difficult in any circumstances to counter.

(16) The consequence was that as we were trying to rehabilitate the country, those elements were trying to wreck our efforts by sectarian violence, and that is what we did not foresee.

In Extract (14) the *defeasibility* is indicated implicitly in the phrase "especially in hindsight". That is, the information necessary for a better planning became available only after the invasion. This claim has been dismissed by the IIR.¹⁸ In addition, Blair mitigates the gravity of the charge through the euphemistic phrase "approached the situation differently," thereby reducing the inadequate planning emphasized in the report to merely a 'different approach'.

Strangely enough, as shown in Extract (15), Blair admits that it "would have been difficult [for the invading troops to counter the terrorism] in any circumstances," i.e., whether they had expected it or not. In other words, he admits that countering terrorism was beyond the ability of the troops of "over 40 countries" "in any circumstances," which can mean one thing: the troops were ill-prepared. This contradicts what he has just said that their failure to handle the aftermath was due to the lack of necessary information. If Blair admits that troops of more than 40 nations "would have found it difficult" to counter terrorism, he appears to be reinforcing the IIR's finding concerning inadequate preparation, rather than retorting it.

In Extract (16), Blair engages in a positive self-presentation versus other-negative presentation (van Dijk, 1993 and elsewhere): whereas the invading troops "were trying to rehabilitate the country," "those elements were trying to wreck [the former's] efforts by sectarian violence." The addressee in this case will have to wonder 'what made the country in need of "rehabilitation" in the first place.'

Blair's arguments in this respect demonstrate another instance of inconsistency. On the one hand, he emphasizes that the violence and huge loss of life have been caused by "unexpected," "unforeseen" sectarian terrorism, which has also spoiled the attempted reconstruction. On the other hand, he accepts the Inquiry finding "that there were warnings about sectarian fighting and bloodletting."

Blame shifting. Blair's attempt to shift the blame of the violence and instability to terror groups and regimes of neighbouring states also shows incongruity with established facts about conflict, as the following extract shows:

(17) Al Qaida ... took the country to the brink of civil war in 2004-2006. ... We also know now know that the Assad regime in Syria was deliberately sending terrorists across the border to cause terror and instability, and this had a major impact on the coalition's ability to make progress in the country.

It is an established fact that terror groups have managed to cross or be sent across the Iraqi borders in the first place as a result of the invasion and its aftermath (Hodges, 2011).

It is important here to note that the strategies of *defeasibility* and *blame shifting* with regard to the planning and aftermath are intertwined. On the one hand, terror groups referred to in Extracts (16) and (17) and outside intervention mentioned in Extract (17) represent factors that have caused violence, instability, and wrecked the reconstruction efforts (*blame shifting*). In other words, the disastrous aftermath was caused by factors beyond the control of the invading forces (*defeasibility*).

A final note about the strategy of *defeasibility* is in order. The strategy, which is categorized in Benoit's (2015) framework as one of *evading responsibility*, appears to be closely-related to that of *mortification (apology)* in Blair's 2016 statement. Blair's second act of apology (Extract (2)) above, is issued in the conclusion to the image

repair attempts in response to the criticism of inadequate planning for the aftermath of the invasion, when he says: "None of this excuses the failures for which I repeat I take full responsibility and apologise." This utterance, as indicated above, shows the two crucial elements of political apology as listed by Harris et al. (2006), i.e., an expression of accepting responsibility and an IFID. A third component/strategy of political apology, listed by Harris et al., based on Olshtain's (1989) pragmatic study of apology, is explanation/account. This component, unlike the first two, is considered "situation-specific" (Harris et al., 2006, p. 722). Blair's arguments about the lack of information and the difficulty of countering terrorism represent an instance of this apology component. This demonstrates another instance that the image repair strategies are interrelated.

Differentiation. The final strategy employed by Blair in retort to the criticism regarding planning and aftermath, especially with respect to "the state of Iraq today" is *differentiation*. Using the *differentiation* strategy, the actor attempts to "distinguish the act performed from other similar but less desirable actions. In comparison, the act may appear less offensive" (Benoit, 2015, p. 24). Blair asks the audience to view the current state of Iraq, which he again reduces to being "still engaged in conflict that goes on all over the Middle East," in comparison with two situations, one of which is a real one and the other is speculative. As Extract (18) shows, Blair argues that the state of Iraq today appears less

offensive in comparison with that of Syria, in which the British government has refused to intervene:

(18) [In] Syria, where we failed to intervene, Syria the very opposite of the policy of intervention ... more people have died than in the whole of Iraq with the worst refugee crisis since World War II and with no agreement as to the future. At least for all the challenges in Iraq today there is a government actually fighting the terrorism and doing so with Western support, internationally recognized ... as a legitimate government, and with a Prime minister welcome in the White House and in capitals across the globe.

The other case of differentiation revolves around viewing the situation in Iraq today in comparison with a speculative one related to the Arab Spring revolutions that took place eight years after the invasion:

(19) So, supposing Saddam had stayed in power in 2003, I ask this counterfactual: Is it likely that he would still have been in power in 2011 when the Arab Spring began? Is it likely that the Iraqi people would have joined the Arab spring ...? And is it likely that if the Iraqi people had revolted, if there had been an uprising that he would have reacted like Assad in Syria? Surely it's at least possible that the answer to all of those questions is affirmative. In that case the nightmare of Syria today would also be happening in Iraq. Consider the consequences of that. Even if you disagreed with removing

Saddam in 2003 we should be thankful we're not dealing with him and his two sons now.

The problem with this line of reasoning is that alternative speculative situations can be put forward, which may make the current situation, an actually extremely offensive one, even more so.

Discussion

Tony Blair's 2016 statement came in response to the publication of the IIR that included severe criticisms of his Iraq War decision and its consequences. The analysis of Blair's self-defence discourse in this statement indicated the following main observations. First, to defend his reputation, Blair employed the following image repair strategies: *apology*, *transcendence*, *bolstering*, *defeasibility*, *differentiation*, and *blame shifting*. Second, Blair dealt with the criticisms listed in the IIR individually, selecting certain strategies for each one. In the case of *apology*, however, he issued his first act at the outset of the statement before referring to the IIR. He described the offences for which he gave the apology in a rather mitigated form and then expressed "sorrow, regret and apology" for them. His first act of apology lacked an expression of accepting responsibility for the offences; instead, in his description thereof he employs various linguistic devices to achieve three purposes: to distance himself and the other leaders of the war coalition from the blunders through such devices as the passive construction and intransitive

verbs; to achieve positive self-presentation of these leaders by emphasizing their positive desires for the Iraqi people; and to mitigate the offences by means of euphemistic terms. Due to the lack of an expression of accepting blame, one of the two crucial components of political apology, this first one cannot be considered valid (Harris et al., 2006).

The second apology, which came at the conclusion of Blair's defence of the state of Iraq today, contained the two essential elements, i.e., an explicit IFID and an expression indicating taking responsibility. The offences for which the apology was issued were generalized and referred to briefly as "failures." Despite the lack of the expression of accepting responsibility in the first apology and the tersely described offences in the second, these two cases demonstrated striking differences from Blair's previous apologies concerning the Iraq war both in form and substance. As stated by Blair, "for more than half a decade [he's] apologised for the inaccurate intelligence." As indicated above, these apologies have been characterized as "half-hearted," "semi-apologies," or "non-apologies," as shown in the survey of Greenslade (2015) and the study of Jeffries (2007). Apologizing for the inaccurate intelligence has been considered an apology for the wrong defence on behalf of some unknown intelligence officers. Also, several of these apologies were qualified or hedged, e.g., the case mentioned in Harris et al. (2006), "I can apologise for the information that turned out to be wrong." The use of the modal 'can' in this case "result[ed] in attenuated illocutionary force of the speech act designated by the verb" (Fraser, 2010, p. 18).

In the 2016 statement, it is the first time for Blair to refer to offenses other than the inaccurate intelligence, and to accept responsibility for the "failures." It is also the first time Blair used the word "sorrow." That said, Blair's apologies in this statement did not, for many commentators, appear valid. The reason may be that, except for the inaccurate intelligence, Blair's apologies were made for the "outcomes" of his war decision. In other words, he has not apologized for the act which is "assumed to have brought all of this about" (Hargie et al., 2010, p. 730), or the right offence, i.e., the war decision.

To address the accusation related to the war decision, that Britain was taken to war based on a case that was proven mistaken, Blair employed *transcendence* and *bolstering*. He argued that if viewed in the broader context of the "global security struggle," with its three elements: terror attacks, Saddam Hussein's atrocities and WMD, and the hypothetical link between the two, the war would appear justifiable. As pointed out by Fairclough (2007), Blair mentioned his fear of the speculative link between terror groups and Saddam Hussein in his March 2003 speech at the beginning of the war. Fairclough (2007) also commented on the subjective modalizing of the argument, as indicated in the phrase "my judgement." The 2016 statement abounds in phrases similar to this one. Qualifying arguments with hedges of this sort was related to one of the main concerns of Blair in his self-defence, i.e., he took the war decision in good faith, according to *his own* judgement. In other words, he did not lie or mislead his nation.

Transcendence was also used by George W. Bush in his defence of the war decision (Benoit, 2006). However, whereas Bush focused on the evil of Saddam Hussein, Blair depicted the broader context carefully, naming the two existing dangers and the third speculative one, at least in his first attempt at using this strategy. A third leader of the war coalition, José María Aznar, then prime minister of Spain, used a closely related strategy in a speech delivered in February 2003 to legitimize his support of the USA and joining the war against Iraq (van Dijk, 2005). This speech contained "a schematic category" which van Dijk calls "*Defining the Situation*." This category is used in discourses that aim at justifying or legitimating criticized acts. It consists in "describe[ing] a situation in which such acts appear necessary, logical, comprehensible, unavoidable or otherwise acceptable" (van Dijk, 2005, p.71). The situation that Aznar defined was that of a "crisis" for which Iraq was responsible and which faced the whole international community. In the case of Aznar, with the speech delivered before the war, this strategy can be counted as one of legitimation rather than self-defence. It seems that *transcendence* is the preferred persuasive strategy for politicians while handling controversial issues.

As for Blair's linguistic devices in this context, the analysis revealed that while he was arguing that the necessity of the war would be obvious if viewed within the broader context, he attempted to claim solidarity with the audience. He employed direct directives, direct questions, switching from the formal language of politics to the language of everyday communication, and between the first-person and second-

person pronouns. This finding is line with Fairclough's (2000) and Pearce's (2001) observations about Blair's style.

The second strategy employed by Tony Blair to defend his war decision was *bolstering*. He emphasized that his decision, which he described as " the hardest, most momentous, most agonizing decision [he] took in [his] ten years as British Prime Minister," was instigated by his sense of duty. A similar argument was also made by Aznar in his speech before the war (van Dijk, 2005). In the case of Blair, however, he seemed to be presenting himself, furthermore, as the victim of his war decision. He took the decision, hard and agonizing as it was, in order to deter what he perceived as 'plain' and 'supreme' threat to Britain's interests. In addition, despite realizing that it was not a popular decision, he took it because he believed it was the right thing to do, not heeding any political ramifications.

To emphasize his message, Blair, contrasted his argued resolution with 'shying away,' 'avoiding decision,' and 'ducking responsibility.' Blair's rhetorical skills were demonstrated in this context, where he used several rhetorical devices, e.g., contrasts, three-part lists, and rhetorical questions, conjoining two of them at some points in order to emphasize his message. The bolstering message based on the responsible-prime-minister motivation can easily backfire. The sense of duty and discharging responsibility should have resulted in more careful assessment of the intelligence information and better preparation for the war and aftermath, as indicated in the IIR.

Blair resumed his *bolstering* strategy while addressing the charges that war was not the last resort and that of undermining the UN authority by citing his diplomatic efforts with the US administration to take the route of the UN. This was not very effective, either, as it has been established that these efforts have not produced the desired outcome. As the Iraq Inquiry chairman indicated, Blair “overestimated his ability to influence US decisions on Iraq” (Chilcot, 2016, para. 83).

The final charge of the inadequate preparation and planning for the war and aftermath was addressed through the strategies of *defeasibility*, *blame shifting* and *differentiation*. The first two strategies appeared intertwined in this context and seemed to have reinforced the charges rather than countering them. The troops of "more than 40 nations" were presented as unable to counter attacks by terror groups and the country was left victim to chaos and violence on the pretext of the former's inability to face the latter.

Finally, Blair employs *differentiation* to reduce the offensiveness of the situation in Iraq today. He first compared the situation in Iraq with that of Syria, which is, for him, more offensive than that of Iraq. Then he compared the current situation in Iraq to a hypothetical one against the backdrop of the Arab Spring revolutions, which again would make the former appear less offensive. It can be argued here that if politicians can use speculations based on events that occurred after their wrongful acts to justify and defend them, they have to be prepared for further criticisms also based on the same sort of 'reasoning.'

It may be significant to point out Benoit's (2006) comment on the morality of president Bush's shifting from one justification for the Iraq War before it was launched, i.e., WMD, to another one, i.e., the evil of Saddam Hussein, after no WMD were found. He considered this shift "reprehensible" (p. 303). It can be argued that the positing of a speculative situation on the basis of events that took place eight years after the invasion in order to make the resultant highly offensive current situation look less offensive is even more reprehensible.

Conclusion

The analysis of Tony Blair's 2016 statement indicated that he employed the following image repair strategies: *apology*, *transcendence*, *bolstering*, *defeasibility*, *differentiation*, and *blame shifting*. He produced two apologies which were obviously different in form and substance from his previous ones in this regard. However, he stopped short from apologizing for the right offence, taking Britain to war on Iraq based on a case that turned out to be mistaken. Instead, he emphasized again that he had taken the right decision. Similar to other leaders of the war coalition, he employed *transcendence* to persuade the audience that the war was necessary at the time. His arguments in this context also echoed some of those he made at the beginning of the war. He also employed *bolstering* and engaged in self-praise, emphasizing that he took an extremely hard, agonizing decision dictated by his responsibility as prime minister, one more argument used by other war coalition leaders.

Bolstering was used again to counter the charges of going to war before the peaceful means of disarmament were exhausted and undermining the UN authority. The self-praise here was focused on diplomatic efforts. The strategies of *defeasibility*, *blame shifting* and *differentiation* were employed in response to the criticisms related to inadequate planning and preparation for the war and the aftermath of removing the regime. *Defeasibility* and *blame shifting* were used conjointly to argue that chaos and violence were caused by factors beyond the control of the coalition troops. The last charge that relates to the state of Iraq today was handled through *differentiation*. The other less desirable situation with which the Iraqi one was compared was once a real situation and another time a speculative one.

It can be argued, generally speaking and based on certain features of these strategies, that they might not have been very effective in redeeming Blair's damaged reputation. Apologies, especially the first one, lacked one of the two crucial elements of a valid apology. The arguments involved in the other repair messages were mostly inconsistent with the established facts. The statement also demonstrated some instances of self-contradiction. The hypothetical-situation arguments could potentially trigger more criticism.

Several aspects of Tony Blair's 2016 lengthy statement can be the subject of further research. It may be interesting to examine Blair's choice of pronouns, in particular, the first-person plural, *we*. His use of metaphors can be examined to further the research of political metaphors. It may also be interesting to compare the apologies issued by Blair with

regard to the Iraq War with apologies he gave concerning other issues, including historical apologies. What may also prove interesting is the comparative study of Blair's apologies and those of other British prime ministers.

Notes:

(¹) An earlier version of this paper was presented at the International Conference of European Languages (French, English, and German): Cultural Communication: Prospects and Challenges, December 3-5, 2017, University of Minufiya, Egypt. The title of the presentation was: Tony Blair's image repair discourse on the Iraq War.

(²) I used italics for *apology*, when referring to it as one of the five strategies of image repair in Benoit's (1995, 2015) framework. The unitalicized 'apology' refers to any speech act that contains an IFID listed for this act in Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984, p. 206). Whether this act has been categorized as a genuine apology or not will be made clear from the discussion.

(³) For Harris et al. (2006), the term 'offence' in the context of political apologies "which usually relate to a level of seriousness for which the term 'offence' seems descriptively inadequate." (p. 723). The authors, however, keep using it throughout the paper. For lack of a better term, 'offence' is used also in the present paper.

(⁴) Harris et al. (2006) mentioned an apology produced by Blair in September 2003, which reads as follows: "I can apologise for the information that turned out to be wrong, but I can't sincerely at least, apologise for removing Saddam" (cited in Harris et al.,

2006, p. 729). The authors, however, have not analyzed this statement. They only cited the comment of a member of the public who indicated that Blair was only declaring his ability to apologize, rather than actually apologizing.

(⁵) Within a process known as Maxwellization, "anyone criticized adversely in an official report is shown the criticisms before publication and allowed to respond." This process was applied to Tony Blair in the case of the IIR, of which he was shown draft passages before publication (Wheatcroft, 2016).

(⁶) The transcripts available online, e.g., the one provided by the *Mirror* newspaper, have some missing parts. Thus, to have the analysis based on a version with the utmost accuracy, it was decided to have the video files transcribed, checked, and edited.

(⁷) A detailed analysis of the "victim[s]" response was considered beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, the discussion of Blair's apologies in the 2016 statement focused on the first three characteristics.

(⁸) Unless otherwise indicated, the quotes in the Findings and Discussion sections are taken from Tony Blair's 2016 statement.

(⁹) In this and other extracts, italics have been added to highlight the constructs under discussion.

(¹⁰) In the British press coverage and in the *Mirror* newspaper transcript of Blair's 2016 statement, the verb is spelled *apologise* consistently. Therefore, this spelling is used here in all the direct quotations from the statement.

(¹¹) In the Question and Answer session of the press conference, more than one journalist raised the issue of the inconsistency between Blair's saying sorry for the mistakes of planning for the war and aftermath on the one hand and standing by his decision on the other. Blair responded by claiming that "there is no inconsistency in expressing [his] sorrow for those that lost their lives ... and [his] apology for the

mistakes but still saying [he] believe[s] the decision was right. There is no inconsistency in that" (Blair, 2016b).

(¹²) Many reporters have commented on the "emotional" attitude of Blair in the press conference, and his "breaking" or "cracking" voice while expressing "sorrow, regret, and apology." However, most of them have not classified this utterance as a genuine apology (e.g., Castle, 2016; Mason, Asthana, & Stewart, 2016; Watson et al., 2016).

(¹³) The death toll of the war, as reported by Askwith (2016) is: 179 - Deaths of UK servicemen and women, 4,488 - US military deaths, 139 - Other Coalition military deaths, and 134,000 - Lower estimate of Iraqi civilian deaths.

(¹⁴)The devastating political, economic, humanitarian, cultural, and environmental consequences of the war on the Iraqi nation have been widely reported. The Global Policy website: <https://www.globalpolicy.org>, for example, provides overviews of most of these issues in addition to links to several relevant articles.

(¹⁵) According to Pickard (2013), "the total cost of UK military operations in Iraq – from 2003 to 2009 – came in at £8.4bn."

(¹⁶) Benoit (1995, 2006, 2015, and elsewhere) has consistently used the term 'strategy' to refer to the five major categories of image repair as well as their variants. This is also followed in the present study. For clarity of exposition, these (sub-)categories are typed in italics, except for sub-section headings, which are typed in bold.

(¹⁷)"War on terror" is the former US president George W. Bush cover term for the military attacks against other nations, in particular, Afghanistan and Iraq, on the pretext of fighting global terrorism. The strategy has been severely and widely criticized (e.g., Cook, 2005; Meacher, 2003; Scotte, 2007, among so many others). The label itself has been challenged as metaphorical. The abstract noun 'terror' cannot refer to any concrete war target (Lakoff, 2006).

(¹⁸) Blair's reference to hindsight, which he has mentioned before, has already been challenged in the IIR chairman statement: "Mr Blair told the Inquiry that the difficulties encountered in Iraq after the invasion could not have been known in advance. We do not agree that hindsight is required. The risks of internal strife in Iraq, active Iranian pursuit of its interests, regional instability, and Al Qaida activity in Iraq, were each explicitly identified before the invasion" (Chilcot, 2016, paras. 53-54).

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