



10 DOWNING STREET

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Prime Minister's speech to TUC conference in Blackpool

[10 September 2002]

Tomorrow, September 11, is the anniversary of the worst terrorist act in history. Let us today, once again, remember and mourn the dead. Let us give thanks to the fire fighters, the police, the ambulance and medical services, the ordinary citizens of New York. Their courage was the best answer to the terrorists' cruelty. Terrorists can kill and maim the innocent, but they have not won and they never will.

We should never forget the role played by trade unions in the struggle for justice. Today we welcome Wellington Chibebe of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. Your opposition to the regime of Mugabe is the ultimate riposte to his fraudulent nonsense about fighting colonialism. People here, including myself, fought the detestable apartheid system of South Africa and we know the difference between the cause of freedom and a leader abusing that cause to conceal incompetence and corruption on a catastrophic scale.

We welcome, too, the Colombian CUT's Hector Fajardo. Your nation is fighting the ugly scourge of narco-terrorism, in which the drugs trade and terror destroy the life chances of a country. You have our solidarity in that struggle.

Thank you also to the trade unions of Northern Ireland - who, throughout the worst and even at the best, are symbols of the non-sectarian future that Northern Ireland needs.

Around the rest of world too, trade unions are at the forefront of campaigns to end child labour, to remove discrimination, to bring democracy in place of dictatorship.

On September 11 last year, with the world still reeling from the shock of events, it came together to demand action. But suppose I had come last year on the same day as this year - 10 September. Suppose I had said to you: there is a terrorist network called Al Qaida. It operates out of Afghanistan. It has carried out several attacks and we believe it is planning more. It has been condemned by the UN in the strongest terms. Unless it is stopped, the threat will grow. And so I want to take action to prevent that.

Your response and probably that of most people would have been very similar to the response of some of you yesterday on Iraq.

There would have been few takers for dealing with it and probably none for taking military action of any description.

So let me tell you why I say Saddam Hussein is a threat that has to be dealt with.

He has twice before started wars of aggression. Over one million people died in them. When the weapons inspectors were evicted from Iraq in 1998 there were still enough chemical and biological weapons remaining to devastate the entire Gulf region.

I sometimes think that there is a kind of word fatigue about chemical and biological weapons. We're not talking about some mild variants of everyday chemicals, but anthrax, sarin and mustard gas - weapons that can cause hurt and agony on a mass scale beyond the comprehension of most decent people.

Uniquely Saddam has used these weapons against his own people, the Iraqi Kurds. Scores of towns and villages were attacked. Iraqi military officials dressed in full protection gear were used to witness the attacks and visited later to assess the damage. Wounded civilians were normally shot on the scene. In one attack alone, on the city of Halabja, it is estimated that 5,000 were murdered and 9,000 wounded in this way. All in all in the North around 100,000 Kurds died, according to Amnesty International. In the destruction of the marshlands in Southern Iraq, around 200,000 people were forcibly removed. Many died.

Saddam has a nuclear weapons programme too, denied for years, that was only disrupted after inspectors

went in to disrupt it. He is in breach of 23 outstanding UN obligations requiring him to admit inspectors and to disarm.

People say: but containment has worked. Only up to a point. In truth, sanctions are eroding. He now gets around \$3 billion through illicit trading every year. It is unaccounted for, but almost certainly used for his weapons programmes.

Every day this year and for years, British and American pilots risk their lives to police the No Fly Zones. But it can't go on forever. For years when the weapons inspectors were in Iraq, Saddam lied, concealed, obstructed and harassed them. For the last four years there have been no inspections, no monitoring, despite constant pleas and months of negotiating with the UN. In July, Kofi Annan ended his personal involvement in talks because of Iraqi intransigence.

Meanwhile Iraq's people are oppressed and kept in poverty. With the Taliban gone, Saddam is unrivalled as the world's worst regime: brutal, dictatorial, with a wretched human rights record.

Given that history, I say to you: to allow him to use the weapons he has or get the weapons he wants, would be an act of gross irresponsibility and we should not countenance it.

Up to this point, I believe many here in this hall would agree. The question is: how to proceed? I totally understand the concerns of people about precipitate military action. Military action should only ever be a last resort. On the four major occasions that I have authorised it as Prime Minister, it has been when no other option remained.

I believe it is right to deal with Saddam through the United Nations. After all, it is the will of the UN he is flouting. He, not me or George Bush, is in breach of UN Resolutions. If the challenge to us is to work with the UN, we will respond to it.

But if we do so, then the challenge to all in the UN is this: the UN must be the way to resolve the threat from Saddam, not avoid it.

Let it be clear that he must be disarmed. Let it be clear that there can be no more conditions, no more games, no more prevaricating, no more undermining of the UN's authority.

And let it be clear that should the will of the UN be ignored, action will follow. Diplomacy is vital. But when dealing with dictators - and none in the world is worse than Saddam - diplomacy has to be backed by the certain knowledge in the dictator's mind that behind the diplomacy is the possibility of force being used.

Because I say to you in all earnestness: if we do not deal with the threat from this international outlaw and his barbaric regime, it may not erupt and engulf us this month or next, perhaps not even this year or the next. But it will at some point. And I do not want it on my conscience that we knew the threat, saw it coming and did nothing.

I know this is not what some people want to hear. But I ask you only this: to listen to the case I will be developing over the coming weeks and reflect on it.

And before there is any question of taking military action, I can categorically assure you that Parliament will be consulted and will have the fullest opportunity to debate the matter and express its view.

On Kosovo, on Afghanistan, we did not rush. We acted in a sensible, measured way, when all other avenues were exhausted and with the fullest possible debate. We will do so again.

But Saddam is not the only issue. We must restart the Middle East Peace Process. We must work with all concerned, including the US, for a lasting peace which ends the suffering of both the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and the Israelis at the hands of terrorists. It must be based on the twin principles of an Israel safe and secure within its borders, and a viable Palestinian state.

This must go alongside renewed efforts on international terrorism. That threat has not gone away. I cannot emphasise this too strongly.

Put it alongside India and Pakistan, climate change and world poverty, and it is a daunting international

agenda. But the most difficult thing is to persuade people that all issues are part of the same agenda. A foreign journalist said to me the other day. "I don't understand it Mr Blair. You're very Left on Africa and Kyoto. But you're very Right on weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. It doesn't make sense."

But it does. The key characteristic of today's world is interdependence. Your problem becomes my problem. They have to be tackled collectively. All these problems threaten the ability of the world to make progress in an orderly and stable way. Climate change threatens our environment. Africa, if left to decline, will become a breeding ground for extremism. Terrorism and weapons of mass destruction combine modern technology with political or religious fanaticism. If unchecked they will, as September 11 showed, explode into disorder and chaos.

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