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Opening Remarks

The search for collective security has been the inspiration for some of diplomacy's most noble endeavours. It lay behind Woodrow Wilson's fourteen points and the foundation of the League of Nations. After its collapse with the onslaught of dictatorship in the 1930s, the ideal found new expression in the great post-war institutions: the Bretton Woods System, the United Nations, NATO and the European Community.

With the end of the Cold War we finally had a chance to make the aspiration a reality. But the cruel irony is that as our continent has taken historic steps towards lasting peace and prosperity within its own neighbourhood, grave new threats have emerged.

International terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction threaten to make collective security a redundant concept. How can multilateral institutions guarantee the safety of their members when crazed individuals are prepared to kill themselves in order to inflict mass casualties? How can we protect ourselves against nerve agents, bacilli and viruses which, once released, are almost impossible to contain? How can we claim to enjoy security at home when individuals sheltered by rogue regimes plot mayhem and mass murder in our streets?

Saddam Hussein's regime typifies these threats. He has challenged the international order for well over a decade

Weapons of mass destruction have been a central pillar of Saddam's dictatorship since the 1980s. He has amassed poisons and viruses both to suppress his own people, and to threaten his neighbours. He has relentlessly pursued his ultimate ambition, the acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability, in flagrant disregard of SCRs and Iraq's obligations as a non-nuclear weapon state under the Non-Proliferation Treaty. His pursuit of these weapons has lain at the heart of the UN's stand-off with Iraq for the past 12 years.

In recent months, the international community has taken decisive action to tackle the threat. In unanimously adopting UNSCR 1441 last November, the UN Security

Council sent Saddam Hussein an uncompromising message: co-operate fully with weapons inspectors or face disarmament by force.

Six Arguments

As we enter the final, decisive phase in this long crisis there is, understandably, considerable public anxiety about the prospect of military action. Today I want to examine six of the most commonly expressed arguments about the Government's approach. These are:

First, that the threat from Iraq overstated; that it is no worse than from other rogue regimes? What is the threat to Europe and the United States?

Second: by backing diplomatic efforts with the credible threat of force are we somehow undermining international law?

Third: if the decade-long policy of containment against Iraq is working, why do we threaten disarmament by force?

Fourth: won't military action have a disproportionate effect on Iraq and the wider region?

Fifth, isn't our real motivation to secure control of some of the world's largest oil reserves?

And sixth: in calling for the enforcement of UN resolutions against Iraq, aren't we guilty of double standards in relation to the Israel/Palestine conflict?

Let me take these in turn. First, the view that the Iraqi threat to Europe and the US is overstated - that this is largely an American obsession - and that other rogue regimes present a greater challenge to the international consensus against the spread of WMD.

The fact is that Iraq's weapons do pose a grave threat to international peace and security. It was in recognition of their singular menace, that the UN Security Council unanimously passed SCR 1441 last November.

The determined efforts of the previous UN inspection team, UNSCOM, unearthed some of the truth of Iraq's development of weapons of mass destruction, and it oversaw the destruction of significant quantities of evil weaponry. Yet it should be remembered that it took a high level defection in 1995 to shed light on Saddam's huge biological weapons programme.

Even when inspectors left Iraq in 1998, it is clear that the regime continued to hold vast stocks of deadly weaponry. In his final report to the UNSC in February 1999, the head of UNSCOM Richard Butler, identified the following material which remained unaccounted for:

up to 3,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals;

up to 360 tonnes of bulk agent for chemical weapons;

over 30,000 special munitions for delivery of chemical and biological agents;

and large quantities of growth media acquired for use in the production of biological weapons - enough to produce over three times the amount of anthrax Iraq admits to having manufactured.

The absence of inspectors after 1998 allowed Saddam to accelerate his weapons programmes. As our report on Iraq's WMD published last autumn demonstrated, determined efforts were made by Baghdad in all fields – nuclear, biological and chemical – to enhance its hideous capabilities in direct contravention of UN Resolutions and the UN's own sanctions regime.

Last month's report to the UN Security Council by Dr Hans Blix underlined these concerns. He confirmed that Iraq had imported hundreds of missile engines since 1999 in breach of the UN embargo. He also found that the discovery of undeclared chemical warheads could be the "tip of a submerged iceberg," and expressed his concern at Iraq's failure to account for 6,500 chemical bombs, and its stocks of VX nerve agent and anthrax.

Other regimes in the world share Saddam's ambition to develop WMD, and we must respond with all appropriate means. Through diplomacy, intelligence co-operation, reinforced export controls and interdiction and disruption of supplies of key technologies, we are trying to frustrate their ambitions. That is where we are in respect of North Korea. But in respect of Iraq, we have exhausted all of these options over twelve long years.

We also have to differentiate between the threat posed by Iraq and other would-be proliferators. No other country shares Iraq's history of deploying chemical weapons in a war of aggression against a neighbour, or against innocent civilians as part of a genocidal campaign.

It is this deadly combination of capability and intent which makes Saddam uniquely dangerous. Iraq's neighbours live under the shadow that one day he could well use his viruses, nerve agents and missiles again to murderous effect.

The threat spreads beyond his neighbourhood. After the initial shock and horror provoked by the terrorist acts of 11 September, one of my first thoughts was that there were – and are - no limits to the terrorists' appetite for slaughter. If they can lay their hands on WMD they will use them. The most likely source of materials and know-how are those rogue regimes which show total disregard for the rule of law, and share the terrorists' hatred of our values.

Some will suggest that this is overly alarmist, that Saddam is far too concerned with self-preservation ever to pass WMD to terrorist groups. Personally, I am not prepared to make any assumptions about the motivation of this dictator. Who would have predicted his ruinous war of aggression against Iran, or his invasion of Kuwait? In 1990, who knew that Saddam was within three years of his ultimate ambition, a nuclear weapon? We cannot afford to assume that we can second-guess his next move. Given Saddam Hussein's longstanding support for terrorist causes, does anyone seriously expect us to rule out the terrifying possibility that his poisons and diseases will find their way into the hands of al-Qa'ida and its sympathisers? After all, his regime sheltered the notorious Palestinian terrorist, Abu Nidal, for many years.

This nexus between international terrorism and WMD is not – as some have assumed – simply a British and American concern. Governments around the world are equally worried. That is why UNSCR 1373 was passed. I attended a meeting in New York last month where Ministers from all members of the Security Council agreed that we must do our utmost to prevent the world's deadliest weapons falling into the hands of terrorists. The United Nations is best placed to tackle this global challenge. It should remain at the centre of our efforts to combat terrorism. And it is the natural authority to look to as we seek to enforce international law in respect of Iraq.

So it surprises me to hear the second argument about our policy, namely that in backing diplomatic efforts with the credible threat of force do we not threaten to undermine international law?

All law requires enforcement. Every lawyer, and certainly every British Home Secretary, knows that. And the UN Charter, by Chapter VII, specifically allows for the authorisation of the use of force to maintain and to restore international peace and security.

Over the past 12 years, the Iraqi regime has done great harm to the UN's credibility. In 1991, the Gulf War ceasefire resolution, UNSCR 687, obliged Iraq to disarm itself of its WMD within 15 days. Twelve years on we are still waiting. At the present count, Saddam has failed to comply with 23 out of 27 separate obligations under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. This Charter is a robust

document. It provides for mandatory decisions taken by the Security Council under various Chapter VII resolutions.

If we fail to back our words with deeds, we follow one of the most catastrophic precedents in history. The descent into war in the 1930s is a searing reminder of the dangers of turning a blind eye whilst international law is subverted by the law of the jungle. The League of Nations ultimately failed because its members lacked the courage and foresight to defend its founding principles with force. Good intentions were no match for aggression in Manchuria and Abyssinia.

If the Security Council were to demonstrate that it was incapable of tackling the new threats of WMD and terrorism, it would risk doing as much damage to the UN as that suffered by the League of Nations when it failed to face up to the challenges of the 1930s.

In failing to hold Saddam to account, other would-be proliferators would rightly draw the conclusion that our commitment to prevent the spread of the world's deadliest weapons amounted to empty rhetoric. In effect, we would declare that it was open season to undermine the global non-proliferation regimes which have helped to keep the peace since the darkest days of the Cold War. Future generations would have to live with the disastrous consequences of our failure of nerve.

The British Government is not prepared to take this risk. The chief UN weapons inspectors, Dr Hans Blix and Dr Mohammed El-Baradei, will report to the Security Council this Friday. If the evidence they present confirms the behaviour which has put Iraq in continuing material breach, then the case for a second Resolution will be overwhelming.

A third argument about our approach is why, if the present policy of containment is working, do we need to consider disarmament by force? If Iraq can be contained indefinitely by the current inspection regime, then why are we moving so quickly towards military action? The logic seems to be that if we allow more time and throw more UN personnel at the problem, we will overcome Iraqi intransigence by sheer weight of numbers.

This question is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of Iraq's obligations. Iraq was found guilty 12 years ago. Yet they built up their WMD; lied and lied again; disrupted and intimidated the inspectors, making their lives so difficult that they were forced out in 1998. It's all in SCR 1441. 1441 repeated the guilty verdict. OP1 states - "Iraq has been and remains in material breach." It's more compliance, immediate compliance which is the key, not more inspectors. As Dr Blix himself said last month, this is not a "game of catch as catch can."

Of course we should respond positively to any requests for specific additional resources made by the IAEA and UNMOVIC. But there are some fundamentals here. If Saddam bows to the UN's demands and co-operates promptly, what is the need for greater numbers of inspectors? But if he maintains his refusal to co-operate, how will higher numbers help? Lethal viruses can be produced within an area the size of the average living room. In the absence of Iraqi co-operation, even a thousand fold increase in UNMOVIC's capabilities will not allow us to establish with any degree of confidence that Iraq has disarmed.

As Dr Blix said yesterday:

"... the principal problem is not the number of inspectors but rather the active cooperation of the Iraqi side, as we have said many times."

Let me at this point deal with a number of other proposals doing the rounds on the continent, designed – we are told – to make the inspection process more affective.

These are

- (1) the extension of the No-Fly Zones over the whole of Iraq including Baghdad;
- (2) the introduction of thousands of "Blue helmeted" armed UN troops to assist and to protect the inspectors.

As it happens we did examine both of these ideas in the preparations for what became 1441, and there was wide appreciation not just between US/UK but among partners that they were simply not feasible in the absence of complete Iraqi cooperation and not necessary if we had complete Iraqi cooperation.

The fact that those proposals are now being aired is significant for one thing only – they represent the clearest admission yet that Iraq is not cooperating.

And given this, they simply would not work. Consider

- (1) a total No-Fly Zone would require the complete and permanent grounding of the Iraqi Air Force. That would require cooperation by Iraq on an even greater scale than that demanded by 1441, and a continuous capability to inspect their Air Force to ensure that it remained grounded;
- (2) UN Blue Helmeted troops.

“Blue helmeted” troops are peacekeepers. Peacekeeping requires consent, a permissive environment. That in turn would require the Iraqi army to stay in its barracks, and again to concede a degree of active cooperation infinitely greater than any shown so far. There are other practical issues. Where would these blue helmeted troops come from? What would the timescale be?

1441 gave Saddam his “final opportunity”. Nothing in Saddam’s performance can give any confidence that any of these proposals would in any way change his behaviour. Instead they are a recipe for procrastination, indecision. Dealing with Iraq will get harder not easier if we begin to rewrite 1441, and the final opportunity it spelt out.

The fact is that those who put forward these proposals are now making our case for us – which is that Saddam has failed to meet what is required of him under 1441.

UN resolutions place the burden squarely on Iraq to make an immediate, full and honest declaration of its WMD holdings. The role of the weapons inspectors is to verify declarations and monitor subsequent compliance. The Security Council has not employed UNMOVIC and the IAEA to act as a detective agency tasked with securing Iraqi disarmament via a combination of ingenuity and strong arm tactics. The inspectors are there to provide the assurance the world needs that Iraq is complying with its obligations. The terms of SCR 1441 are clear: if weapons inspectors are unable to provide this guarantee, Iraq will have to face “serious consequences”, diplomatic code for disarmament by force.

I was very concerned yesterday that three NATO Allies prevented the Alliance from reaching consensus in the North Atlantic Council on the most basic defensive measures in respect of Turkey. In response, Turkey has invoked its right under Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty to request consultations later today on how the Alliance might help with its defence.

I will not pre-judge the outcome of these discussions. But I would remind you that at the Prague Summit less than three months ago, NATO leaders pledged their full support for the implementation of UNSCR 1441 and their commitment to ensure full and immediate compliance by Iraq, without conditions or restrictions.

It is no more than common sense for NATO to undertake the necessary precautionary planning to enable it to fulfil its responsibility for collective defence, and the enforcement of UN resolutions.

This is a serious issue. Inaction in the face of a threat to an Ally risks eroding the solemn commitments which underlie the North Atlantic Treaty, and undermining

the transatlantic defence relationship which served every Ally so well during the cold war and the turbulent decade which followed. It remains the fundamental basis for our defence against the new threats which confront us today.

Mr Chairman

The UK does not want war and never has. I still hope and pray that Saddam Hussein will recognise the gravity of the situation and embark on the pathway to peaceful disarmament set out in SCR 1441. But when I worked with my Ministerial colleagues on the Security Council in drafting SCR 1441, we all recognised that for the sake of international peace and the authority of the UN, the time had arrived to back our demands with the credible threat of force. But just as we should not shrink from this commitment, nor should we ignore our obligations to the Iraqi people.

This brings me to a fourth popular argument: won't military action be disproportionate in its effect on Iraq and the wider region? How can such a drastic step be justified when the main victims will be long-suffering Iraqi civilians?

If there is military action, people will get killed and injured. That is the brutal and inevitable reality of war. Some of those killed will be innocent civilians; even those killed who are not innocent have souls, and wives, husbands, children who will suffer. This is why we have to strain every sinew, even at this late stage, to avoid war; to force Saddam to face the fact that he has to comply; to offer, as we have already, an escape route to exile for him and his entourage.

If military action does prove necessary, huge efforts will be made to ensure that the suffering of the Iraqi people is as limited as possible. And I know, I am certain, that we will have put an end to the far greater torment and killing which will otherwise be perpetuated by the Iraqi regime. There are never exact parallels, but I do remind my audience that many argued against military action in Kosovo. Who today would question the moral case for the Allied intervention which led to the fall of Milosevic?

Our dispute lies with Saddam Hussein, not his people. Iraq is a country steeped in history and culture. Indeed, it can claim to have been the cradle of human civilisation. With a highly skilled population, Iraq has huge potential and deserves a place in the international community of nations. The Iraqi people deserve the chance to live fulfilling lives free from the oppression and terror of Saddam.

We know that most Iraqis want to see political change in their country. We know that some have spoken out about this, and I applaud their extraordinary courage. Like people in any other part of the world, the Iraqi public has a natural desire to

choose their own destiny and Government, and to pursue a prosperous life within a safe environment for friends and family. The UK wants to help Iraq to achieve this. If we are obliged to take military action, our first objective will be to secure Iraq's disarmament. But our next priority will be to work with the United Nations to help Iraqi people recover from years of oppression and tyranny, and allow their country to move towards one that is ruled by law, respects international obligations and provides effective and representative government.

I know this will be greeted with cynicism in some quarters, particularly by those who suspect us of ulterior motives. A fifth argument raised by many people is whether we are motivated purely by the ambition to control Iraq's vast reserves of oil.

I hope I have demonstrated today that our mission is about disarmament not oil, fear not greed. In the event of military action, Iraq's oil fields would be protected from any acts of environmental terrorism, and the revenue generated would be used to benefit the Iraqi people. I know that some sceptics will never be convinced. But I ask them this. If oil were the issue, would it not be infinitely simpler to cut a deal with Saddam who, I am sure, would be delighted to give us as much oil as we wanted if he could carry on building WMD?

Misplaced cynicism and suspicion of our motives extends to another issue which undermines security in the Middle East. A sixth argument about our approach concerns perceived double standards in our policy towards Iraq and the catastrophe which has engulfed Israel and the Occupied Territories for over two years.

I want to see UN Security Council Resolutions – including those outside Chapter VII - implemented in all parts of the world. We are working tirelessly to achieve this in respect of Israel/Palestine.

These are dark times there. Each new terrorist atrocity and act of violence further damages the prospects for peace. But we must never allow the carnage to breed fatalism. We can take heart from the growing international consensus which has developed over the past 12 months on the shape of a final settlement: an Israeli state, free from terror, recognised by the Arab world, alongside a viable Palestinian state based on the 1967 boundaries.

Both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples want their leaders to secure a just peace. We look to both leaderships to make a renewed effort. We shall support them in this; we know from our recent experience at the London meeting that real engagement by outsiders with the parties can produce results. We have shown that

it is irresponsible and wrong to claim, even with the situation on the ground as it is, that nothing can be done.

To the people in the region a lasting settlement has probably never seemed more distant. But the case for peace has never been stronger. This conflict has long provided terrorists with a convenient rallying point. As long as the dispute remains unresolved, terrorists will secure more recruits for their twisted cause. And the collective security which the people of Israel, the Occupied Territories and the wider world yearn for will remain elusive.

At times over the past decade, Iraqi disarmament has seemed equally beyond reach. Few would have predicted just 12 months ago that UN inspectors would be in Baghdad. Yet a renewed diplomatic effort – backed by a credible threat of force – helped to secure their return. Only by maintaining and, if necessary, activating this threat will we secure the outcome we have been seeking for the past 12 years.

Closing Remarks

Ladies and Gentlemen, international terrorism and the proliferation of WMD are the crucial strategic questions of our time. Our response to these threats will determine the stability of the world for generations to come. This is an awesome responsibility. It calls for courageous leadership. And it requires the vision and foresight to act decisively and – if necessary – with military force before our worst nightmares are realised.

In taking such tough decisions, we are forced to contemplate an eternal moral dilemma. A consequence of military action – however great our determination to minimise the impact on civilian life – is that innocent people may die. Refugees were caught in the crossfire in Kosovo; Afghan civilians died during Operation Enduring Freedom. In weighing up the pros and cons of military intervention, we have to balance the agonising loss of innocent life against the consequences of a failure to act. In Sierra Leone, Kosovo and Afghanistan we made this fateful calculation and decided to act.

We are approaching the moment when the UN will have to make the same calculation in respect of Iraq. Today I have tried to set out the disturbing outcome of a failure to act decisively to secure Iraq's disarmament. For the sake of the Iraqi people, long-term stability in the Middle East, the credibility of the UN, and the cause of international law and collective security it is a challenge we must confront.