

[Jump to content](#)

BritishPoliticalSpeech

GO

[Home](#)[About](#)[Why Rhetoric?](#)[Resources](#)[Academic Research](#)[Speech Archive](#)[Blog](#)[Donate a Speech](#)[Contact](#)

Speech Archive

[Jump to comments](#)

Speech at Labour's local government, women's and youth conferences, Glasgow 2003

Tony Blair (Labour)

Location: Glasgow

For hundreds of years, Europe was at war, the boundaries of many nations shifting with each passing army, small countries occupied and re-occupied, their people never at peace. Large countries fought each other literally for decades at a time with only the briefest respite to draw breath before the resumption of hostilities. For my father's generation that was the Europe they were brought up in. Today in Europe former enemies are friends, at one, if not always diplomatically. The EU is a massive achievement of peace and prosperity now set to welcome in the nations who suffered from the other great tyranny of my father's life time and my own: the Soviet Union. For the first 40 years of my life, the reality was the Communist bloc versus the West. Today the Cold War is over. The EU is set to grow to 25, then 30 then more nations. Russia is our partner and we, hers, in her search for a new and democratic beginning. China is developing as a Socialist market economy and is the ally of Europe, and the US.

We don't wake up and fear Russia or China as we did. America is not focussed on the struggle for ideological hegemony between Communism and liberal democracy. The issue is not a clash for conquest between the big powers.

But the old threat has been replaced by a new one. The threat of chaos; disorder; instability. A threat which arises from a perversion of the true faith of Islam, in extremist terrorist groups like

Al Qaida. It arises from countries which are unstable, usually repressive dictatorships which use what wealth they have to protect or enhance their power through chemical, biological or nuclear weapons capability which can cause destruction on a massive scale.

What do they have in common these twins of chaos - terrorism and rogue states with Weapons of Mass Destruction? They are answerable to no democratic mandate, so are unrestrained by the will of ordinary people. They are extreme and inhumane. They detest and fear liberal, democratic and tolerant values. And their aim is to de-stabilise us.

September 11th didn't just kill thousands of innocent people. It was meant to bring down the Western economy. It did not do so. But we live with the effects of it even today in economic confidence. It was meant to divide Muslim and Christian, Arab and Western nations, and to provoke us to hate each other. It didn't succeed but that is what it was trying to do.

These states developing Weapons of Mass Destruction, proliferating them, importing or exporting the scientific expertise, the ballistic missile technology; the companies and individuals helping them: they don't operate within any international treaties. They don't conform to any rules. North Korea is a country whose people are starving and yet can spend billions of dollars trying to perfect a nuclear bomb. Iraq, under Saddam became the first country to use chemical weapons against its own people. Are we sure that if we let him keep and develop such weapons, he would not use them again against his neighbours, against Israel perhaps? Saddam the man who killed a million people in an eight year war with Iran, and then, having lost it, invaded Kuwait? Or the other nations scrabbling to get a foot on the nuclear ladder, are we happy that they do so?

And the terrorist groups already using chemical and biological agents with money to spend, do we really believe that if Al Qaida could get a dirty bomb they wouldn't use it? And then think of the consequences. Already there is fear and anxiety, undermining confidence. Think of the consequences then. Think of a nation using a nuclear device, no matter how small, no matter how distant the land. Think of the chaos it would cause.

That is why Saddam and Weapons of Mass Destruction are important.

Every time I have asked us to go to war, I have hated it. I spent months trying to get Milosevic to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, delaying action while we negotiated endlessly. I agreed with President Bush not to strike Afghanistan after September 11th but instead to offer the Taliban, loathsome though they were, an ultimatum: yield up Al Qaida and we will let you stay. We used force in the end, but in Kosovo only as a last resort, and though I rejoiced with his people at the fall of Milosevic, as I rejoiced with the Afghan people at the fall of the Taliban, I know that amid the necessary military victory there was pain and suffering that brought no joy at all.

At every stage, we should seek to avoid war. But if the threat cannot be removed peacefully, please let us not fall for the delusion that it can be safely ignored. If we do not confront these twin menaces of rogue states with Weapons of Mass Destruction and terrorism, they will not disappear. They will just feed and grow on our weakness.

When people say if you act, you will provoke these people; when they say now: take a lower profile and these people will leave us alone, remember: Al Qaida attacked the US, not the other way round. Were the people of Bali in the forefront of the anti-terror campaign? Did Indonesia 'make itself a target'? The terrorists won't be nice to us if we're nice to them. When Saddam drew us into the Gulf War, he wasn't provoked. He invaded Kuwait.

So: where has it come to? Everyone agrees Saddam must be disarmed. Everyone agrees without disarmament, he is a danger.

No one seriously believes he is yet co-operating fully. In all honesty, most people don't really believe he ever will. So what holds people back? What brings thousands of people out in protests across the world? And let's not pretend, not really that in March or April or May or June, people will feel different. It's not really an issue of timing or 200 inspectors versus 100. It is a right and entirely understandable hatred of war. It is moral purpose, and I respect that.

It is as one woman put it to me: I abhor the consequences of war.

And I know many in our own Party, many here today will agree with her; and don't understand why I press the case so insistently. And I have given you the geo-political reason - the threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction and its link with terrorism. And I believe it.

If I am honest about it, there is another reason why I feel so strongly about this issue. It is a reason less to do with my being Prime Minister than being a member of the Labour Party, to do with the progressive politics in which we believe. The moral case against war has a moral answer: it is the moral case for removing Saddam. It is not the reason we act. That must be according to the United Nations mandate on Weapons of Mass Destruction. But it is the reason, frankly, why if we do have to act, we should do so with a clear conscience.

Yes, there are consequences of war. If we remove Saddam by force, people will die and some will be innocent. And we must live with the consequences of our actions, even the unintended ones.

But there are also consequences of "stop the war."

If I took that advice, and did not insist on disarmament, yes, there would be no war. But there would still be Saddam. Many of the people marching will say they hate Saddam. But the consequences of taking their advice is that he stays in charge of Iraq, ruling the Iraqi people. A country that in 1978, the year before he seized power, was richer than Malaysia or Portugal. A country where today, 135 out of every 1000 Iraqi children die before the age of five - 70 percent of these deaths are from diarrhoea and respiratory infections that are easily preventable. Where almost a third of children born in the centre and south of Iraq have chronic malnutrition.

Where 60 percent of the people depend on Food Aid.

Where half the population of rural areas have no safe water.

Where every year and now, as we speak, tens of thousands of political prisoners languish in appalling conditions in Saddam's jails and are routinely executed.

Where in the past 15 years over 150,000 Shia Moslems in Southern Iraq and Moslem Kurds in Northern Iraq have been butchered; with up to four million Iraqis in exile round the world, including 350,000 now in Britain.

This isn't a regime with Weapons of Mass Destruction that is otherwise benign. This is a regime that contravenes every single principle or value anyone of our politics believes in.

There will be no march for the victims of Saddam, no protests about the thousands of children that die needlessly every year under his rule, no righteous anger over the torture chambers which if he is left in power, will be left in being.

I rejoice that we live in a country where peaceful protest is a natural part of our democratic process

But I ask the marchers to understand this.

I do not seek unpopularity as a badge of honour. But sometimes it is the price of leadership. And the cost of conviction.

But as you watch your TV pictures of the march, ponder this:

If there are 500,000 on that march, that is still less than the number of people whose deaths Saddam has been responsible for.

If there are one million, that is still less than the number of people who died in the wars he started.

Let me read from an e-mail that was sent by a member of the family of one of those four million Iraqi exiles. It is interesting because she is fiercely and I think wrongly critical of America. But in a sense for that reason, it is worth reading. She addresses it to the anti-war movement. In one part, she says:

"You may feel that America is trying to blind you from seeing the truth about their real reasons for an invasion. I must argue that in fact, you are still blind to the bigger truths in Iraq. Saddam has murdered more than a million Iraqis over the past 30 years, are you willing to allow him to kill another million Iraqis? Saddam rules Iraq using fear - he regularly imprisons, executes and tortures the mass population for no reason whatsoever - this may be hard to believe and you may not even appreciate the extent of such barbaric acts, but believe me you will be hard pressed to find a family in Iraq who have not had a son, father, brother killed, imprisoned, tortured and/or "disappeared" due to Saddam's regime. Why it is now that you deem it appropriate to voice your

disillusions with America's policy in Iraq, when it is right now that the Iraqi people are being given real hope, however slight and however precarious, that they can live in an Iraq that is free of its horrors?"

We will give the e-mail to delegates. Read it all. It is the reason why I do not shrink from action against Saddam if it proves necessary. Read the letter sent to me by Dr Safa Hashim, who lives here in Glasgow, and who says he is writing despite his fears of Iraqi retribution.

He says the principle of opposing war by the public is received warmly by Iraqis for it reveals the desire of people to avoid suffering. But he says it misses the point - because the Iraqi people need Saddam removed as a way of ending their suffering.

Dr Hashim says:

"The level of their suffering is beyond anything that British people can possibly envisage, let alone understand his obsession to develop and possess weapons of mass destruction. Do the British public know that it is normal practice for Saddam's regime to demand the cost of the bullet used of in the execution of their beloved family members and not even to allow a proper funeral? If the international community does not take note of the Iraqi people's plight but continues to address it casually this will breed terrorism and extremism within the Iraqi people. This cannot be allowed to happen."

Remember Kosovo where we were told war would de-stabilise the whole of the Balkans and that region now has the best chance of peace in over 100 years?

Remember Afghanistan, where now, despite all the huge problems, there are three million children in school, including for the first time in over two decades one and a half million girls and where two million Afghan exiles from the Taliban have now returned.

So if the result of peace is Saddam staying in power, not disarmed, then I tell you there are consequences paid in blood for that decision too. But these victims will never be seen. They will never feature on our TV screens or inspire millions to take to the streets. But they will exist nonetheless.

Ridding the world of Saddam would be an act of humanity. It is leaving him there that is in truth inhumane.

And if it does come to this, let us be clear: we should be as committed to the humanitarian task of rebuilding Iraq for the Iraqi people as we have been to removing Saddam.

[Back to top](#)

Comments:

You can submit a comment to us about the above speech using the form below.

Please note that at present, comments are not automatically displayed publicly on the site.

There are currently no comments available for viewing for this speech

Name: