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TEXT

Blair's Address to a Joint Session of Congress

WASHINGTON, July 17 - Following is the text of Prime Minister Tony Blair's address to a joint session of Congress as transcribed by the Federal News Service.

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: (Sustained applause.) Thank you.

Mr. Speaker and Mr. Vice President, honorable members of Congress, I'm deeply touched by that warm and generous welcome. That's more than I deserve and more than I'm used to, quite frankly. (Laughter, sustained applause, cheers.) Thank you.

And let me begin by thanking you most sincerely to award me the Congressional Gold Medal. But you, like me, know who the real heroes are: those brave servicemen and women, yours and ours, who fought the war and risk their lives still. And our tribute to them should be measured in this way: by showing them and their families that they did not strive or die in vain, but that through their sacrifice, future generations can live in greater peace, prosperity and hope. (Applause.)

Let me also express my gratitude to President Bush. Through the troubled times since September the 11th changed our world, we have been allies and friends. Thank you, Mr. President, for your leadership. (Applause.)

Mr. Speaker, sir, my thrill on receiving this award was only a little diminished on being told that the first Congressional Gold Medal was awarded to George Washington for what Congress called his wise and spirited conduct in getting rid of the British out of Boston. (Laughter, applause.)

On our way down here, Senator Frist was kind enough to show me the fireplace where in 1814 the British had burned the Congress Library. I know this is kind of late, but: Sorry. (Laughter, applause.)

Actually, you know, my middle son was studying 18th century history and the American War of Independence. And he said to me the other day, "You know Lord North, Dad, he was the British prime minister who lost us America. So just think; however many mistakes you'll make, you'll never make one that bad. (Laughter.)

Members of Congress, I feel a most urgent sense of mission about today's world.

September the 11th was not an isolated event, but a tragic prologue, Iraq another act, and many further struggles will be set upon this stage before it's over.

There never has been a time when the power of America was so necessary or so misunderstood; or

when, except in the most general sense, a study of history provides so little instruction for our present day. We were all reared on battles between great warriors, between great nations, between powerful forces and ideologies that dominated entire continents. And these were struggles for conquest, for land or money. And the wars were fought by massed armies, and the leaders were openly acknowledged; the outcomes decisive.

Today, none of us expect our soldiers to fight a war on our own territory. The immediate threat is not conflict between the world's most powerful nations. And why? Because we all have too much to lose. Because technology, communication, trade and travel are bringing us ever closer together. Because in the last 50 years, countries like yours and mine have trebled their growth and standard of living. Because even those powers like Russia, China or India can see the horizon of future wealth clearly and know they are on a steady road toward it. And because all nations that are free value that freedom, will defend it absolutely, but have no wish to trample on the freedom of others.

We are bound together as never before, and this coming together provides us with unprecedented opportunity, but also makes us uniquely vulnerable.

And the threat comes because in another part of our globe, there is shadow and darkness, where not all the world is free, where many millions suffer under brutal dictatorships, where a third of our planet lives in a poverty beyond anything even the poorest in our societies can imagine, and where a fanatical strain of religious extremism has arisen that is a mutation of the true and peaceful faith of Islam; and because in the combination of these afflictions, a new and deadly virus has emerged. The virus is terrorism, whose intent to inflict destruction is unconstrained by human feeling and whose capacity to inflict it is enlarged by technology.

This is a battle that can't be fought or won only by armies. We are so much more powerful in all conventional ways than the terrorists. Yet even in all our might, we are taught humility. In the end, it is not our power alone that will defeat this evil. Our ultimate weapon is not our guns, but our beliefs. (Applause.)

There is a myth that though we love freedom, others don't; that our attachment to freedom is a product of our culture; that freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law are American values or Western values; that Afghan women were content under the lash of the Taliban; that Saddam was somehow beloved by his people; that Milosevic was Serbia's savior. Members of Congress, ours are not Western values. They are the universal values of the human spirit, and anywhere -- (applause) -- anywhere, any time ordinary people are given the chance to choose, the choice is the same: freedom, not tyranny; democracy, not dictatorship; the rule of law, not the rule of the secret police.

The spread of freedom is the best security for the free. It is our last line of defense and our first line of attack.

And just as the terrorist seeks to divide humanity in hate, so we have to unify around an idea. And that idea is liberty. (Applause.)

We must find the strength to fight for this idea and the compassion to make it universal. Abraham Lincoln said, "Those that deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves."

And it is this sense of justice that makes moral the love of liberty.

In some cases where our security is under direct threat, we will have recourse to arms. In others it will be by force of reason. But in all cases, to the same end, that the liberty we seek is not for some, but for all, for that is the only true path to victory in this struggle. (Applause.) But first we must explain the danger.

Our new world rests on order. The danger is disorder. And in today's world, it can now spread like contagion. The terrorists and the states that support them don't have large armies or precision weapons. They don't need them. Their weapon is chaos. The purpose of terrorism is not the single act of wanton destruction, it is the reaction it seeks to provoke: economic collapse, the backlash, the hatred, the division, the elimination of tolerance, until societies cease to reconcile their differences and become defined by them. Kashmir, the Middle East, Chechnya, Indonesia, Africa -- barely a continent or nation is unscathed.

The risk is that terrorism and states developing weapons of mass destruction come together, and when people say that risk is fanciful, I say we know the Taliban supported al Qaeda. We know Iraq, under Saddam, gave haven to and supported terrorists. We know there are states in the Middle East now actively funding and helping people who regard it as God's will in the act of suicide to take as many innocent lives with them on their way to God's judgement. Some of these states are desperately trying to acquire nuclear weapons. We know that companies and individuals with expertise sell it to the highest bidder. And we know that at least one state, North Korea, lets its people starve while spending billions of dollars on developing nuclear weapons and exporting the technology abroad. This isn't fantasy. It is 21st century reality and it confronts us now. (Applause.)

Can we be sure that terrorism and weapons of mass destruction will join together? Let us say one thing: If we are wrong, we will have destroyed a threat that, at its least, is responsible for inhuman carnage and suffering. That is something I am confident history will forgive. But if our critics are wrong, if we are right, as I believe with every fiber of instinct and conviction I have that we are, and we do not act, then we will have hesitated in the face of this menace when we should have given leadership.

That is something history will not forgive. (Sustained applause.)

But precisely because the threat is new, it isn't obvious. It turns upside-down our concepts of how we should act and when, and it crosses the frontiers of many nations. So just as it redefines our notions of security, so it must refine our notions of diplomacy. There is no more dangerous theory in international politics today than that we need to balance the power of America with other competitor powers, different poles around which nations gather. Such a theory may have made sense in 19th century Europe. It was perforce the position in the Cold War. Today, it is an anachronism, to be discarded like traditional theories of security. And it is dangerous, because it is not rivalry, but partnership we need, a common will and a shared purpose in the face of a common threat. (Applause.)

And I believe any alliance must start with America and Europe. If Europe and America are together, the others will work with us. If we split, the rest will play around, play us off, and nothing but mischief will be the result of it.

You may think after recent disagreements it can't be done.

But the debate in Europe is open. Iraq showed that when, never forget, many European nations supported our action. And it shows it still when those that didn't, agreed Resolution 1483 in the United Nations for Iraq's reconstruction. Today, German soldiers lead in Afghanistan. French soldiers lead in the Congo, where they stand between peace and a return to genocide.

So we should not minimize the differences, but we should not let them confound us either.

You know, people ask me, after the past months, when, let's say things were a trifle strained in Europe, "Why do you persist in wanting Britain at the center of Europe?" And I say, "Well, maybe if the U.K. were a group of islands 20 miles off Manhattan, I might feel differently. But actually, we're 20 miles off Calais and joined by a tunnel." We are part of Europe, and we want to be. But we also want to be part of changing Europe.

Europe has one potential for weakness, for reasons that are obvious: we spent roughly a thousand years killing each other in large numbers. The political culture of Europe is, inevitably, rightly based on compromise. Compromise is a fine thing, except when based on an illusion, and I don't believe you can compromise with this new form of terrorism. (Applause.)

But Europe has the strength. It is a formidable political achievement.

Think of the past and think of the unity today. Think of it preparing to reach out even to Turkey, a nation of vastly different culture, tradition, religion, and welcome it in. But my real point is this: now Europe is at a point of transformation.

Next year 10 new countries will join. Romania and Bulgaria will follow. Why will these new European members transform Europe? Because their scars are recent, their memories strong, their relationship with freedom still one of passion, not comfortable familiarity. They believe in the transatlantic alliance. They support economic reform. They want a Europe of nations, not a superstate. They are our allies, and they are yours. So don't give up on Europe; work with it. (Sustained applause.)

To be a serious partner, Europe must take on and defeat the anti-Americanism that sometimes passes for its political discourse. And what America must do is show that this is a partnership, built on persuasion, not command. (Applause.) Then the other great nations of our world, and the small, will gather around in one place, not many, and our understanding of this threat will become theirs.

And the United Nations can then become what it should be, an instrument of action as well as debate. The Security Council should be reformed. We need a new international regime on the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction. (Applause.)

And we need to say clearly to United Nations members: If you engage in the systematic and gross abuse of human rights in defiance of the U.N. Charter, you cannot expect to enjoy the same privileges as those that conform to it. (Sustained applause.)

I agree; it is not the coalition that determines the mission, but the mission the coalition. But let us start preferring a coalition and acting alone if we have to, not the other way round. True, winning wars is not

easier that way, but winning the peace is. (Applause.) And we have to win both.

And you have an extraordinary record of doing so. Who helped Japan renew or Germany reconstruct or Europe get back on its feet after World War II? America.

So when we invade Afghanistan or Iraq, our responsibility does not end with military victory. (Applause.) Finishing the fighting is not finishing the job.

So if Afghanistan needs more troops from the international community to police outside Kabul, our duty is to get them. (Applause.) Let us help them eradicate their dependency on the poppy, the crop whose wicked residue turns up on the streets of Britain as heroin, to destroy young British lives as much as their harvest warps the lives of Afghans.

We promised Iraq democratic government; we will deliver it. (Sustained applause.) We promised them the chance to use their oil wealth to build prosperity for all their citizens, not a corrupt elite, and we will do so. We will stay with these people so in need of our help until the job is done. (Applause.)

And then reflect on this: How hollow would the charges of American imperialism be when these failed countries are and are seen to be transformed from states of terror to nations of prosperity; from governments of dictatorship to examples of democracy; from sources of instability to beacons of calm? And how risible would be the claims that these were wars on Muslims if the world could see these Muslim nations still Muslim, but with some hope for the future, not shackled by brutal regimes whose principle victims were the very Muslims they pretended to protect? (Applause.)

It would be the most richly observed advertisement for the values of freedom we can imagine.

When we removed the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, this was not imperialism. For these oppressed people, it was their liberation.

And why can the terrorists even mount an argument in the Muslim world that it isn't? Because there is one cause terrorism rides upon, a cause they have no belief in, but can manipulate.

I want to be very plain. This terrorism will not be defeated without peace in the Middle East between Israel and Palestine. (Applause.) Here it is that the poison is incubated. Here it is that the extremist is able to confuse in the mind of a frighteningly large number of people the case for a Palestinian state and the destruction of Israel, and to translate this, moreover, into a battle between East and West, Muslim, Jew and Christian. We must never compromise the security of the state of Israel. (Sustained applause.)

The state of Israel should be recognized by the entire Arab world, and the vile propaganda used to indoctrinate children not just against Israel but against Jews must cease. (Applause.) You cannot teach people hate and then ask them to practice peace. But neither can you teach people peace except by according them dignity and granting them hope. (Applause.)

Innocent Israelis suffer; so do innocent Palestinians. The ending of Saddam's regime in Iraq must be the starting point of a new dispensation for the Middle East: Iraq free and stable; Iran and Syria, who give succor to the rejectionist men of violence, made to realize that the world will no longer

countenance it, that the hand of friendship can only be offered them if they resile completely from this malice, but that if they do, that hand will be there for them and their people; the whole of the region helped towards democracy; and to symbolize it all, the creation of an independent, viable and democratic Palestinian state side by side with the state of Israel.

(Applause.) What the president is doing in the Middle East is tough, but right.

And let me at this point thank the president for his support, and that of President Clinton before him and the support of members of this Congress, for our attempts to bring peace to Northern Ireland.

(Applause.)

You know, one thing I've learned about peace processes: they're always frustrating, they're often agonizing, and occasionally they seem hopeless; but for all that, having a peace process is better than not having one. (Applause.)

And why has the resolution of Palestine such a powerful appeal across the world? Because it embodies an even-handed approach to justice, just as, when this president recommended and this Congress supported a \$15 billion increase in spending on the world's poorest nations to combat HIV/AIDS, it was a statement of concern that echoed rightly round the world.

There can be no freedom for Africa without justice and no justice without declaring war on Africa's poverty, disease and famine with as much vehemence as we remove the tyrant and the terrorist.

(Applause.)

In Mexico in September, the world should unite and give us a trade round that opens up our markets. I'm for free trade, and I'll tell you why: because we can't say to the poorest people in the world, "We want you to be free, but just don't try to sell your goods in our market." (Applause.) And because ever since the world started to open up, it has prospered.

And that prosperity has to be environmentally sustainable, too. (Applause.) You know, I remember at one of our earliest international meetings a European prime minister telling President Bush that the solution was quite simple: just double the tax on American gasoline.

(Light laughter, applause.) Your president gave him a most eloquent look. (Laughter.)

It reminded me of the first leader of my party, Kier Hardie, in the early part of the 20th century. And he was a man who used to correspond with the Pankhursts, the great campaigners for women's votes. And shortly before the election in June 1913, one of the Pankhurst sisters wrote to Hardy, saying she'd been studying Britain carefully, and that there was a worrying rise in sexual immorality linked to heavy drinking. So she suggested he fight the election on the platform of votes for women, chastity for men, and prohibition for all. (Laughter, applause.) He replied, saying, "Thank you for your advice, the electoral benefits of which are not immediately discernible." (Laughter.) We all get that kind of advice, don't we? (Laughter.)

But frankly, we need to go beyond even Kyoto. And science and technology is the way. Climate change, deforestation, the voracious drain on natural resources cannot be ignored. Unchecked, these forces will

hinder the economic development of the most vulnerable nations first, and ultimately all nations. So we must show the world that we are willing to step up to these challenges around the world and in our own backyards. (Sustained applause.)

Members of Congress, if this seems a long way from the threat of terror and weapons of mass destruction, it is only to say again that the world's security cannot be protected without the world's heart being (one/won?). So America must listen as well as lead. But, members of Congress, don't ever apologize for your values. (Applause.) Tell the world why you're proud of America. Tell them when "The Star-Spangled Banner" starts, Americans get to their feet -- Hispanics, Irish, Italians, Central Europeans, East Europeans, Jews, Muslims, white, Asian, black, those who go back to the early settlers, and those whose English is the same as some New York cab drivers I've dealt with -- (laughter) -- but whose sons and daughters could run for this Congress. Tell them why Americans, one and all, stand upright and respectful. Not because some state official told them to, but because whatever race, color, class or creed they are, being American means being free. That's why they're proud. (Cheers, sustained applause.)

As Britain knows, all predominant power seems for a time invincible, but in fact, it is transient. The question is, what do you leave behind? And what you can bequeath to this anxious world is the light of liberty. That is what this struggle against terrorist groups or states is about. We're not fighting for domination. We're not fighting for an American world, though we want a world in which America is at ease. We're not fighting for Christianity, but against religious fanaticism of all kinds. And this is not a war of civilizations, because each civilization has a unique capacity to enrich the stock of human heritage. We are fighting for the inalienable right of humankind -- black or white; Christian or not; left, right or merely indifferent -- to be free -- free to raise a family in love and hope; free to earn a living and be rewarded by your own efforts; free not to bend your knee to any man in fear; free to be you, so long as being you does not impair the freedom of others.

That's what we're fighting for, and it's a battle worth fighting. And I know it's hard on America. And in some small corner of this vast country, out in Nevada or Idaho or these places I've never been to but always wanted to go -- (laughter) -- I know out there, there's a guy getting on with his life, perfectly happily, minding his own business, saying to you, the political leaders of this country, "Why me, and why us, and why America?" And the only answer is because destiny put you in this place in history in this moment in time, and the task is yours to do. (Sustained applause.)

And our job -- my nation, that watched you grow, that you fought alongside and now fights alongside you, that takes enormous pride in our alliance and great affection in our common bond -- our job is to be there with you. You're not going to be alone. We will be with you in this fight for liberty. (Sustained applause.)

We will be with you in this fight for liberty. And if our spirit is right and our courage firm, the world will be with us.

Thank you. (Applause, cheers.)

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