

SPEECH TO IISS BY DR AYAD ALLAWI, PRIME MINISTER OF IRAQ

29 SEPTEMBER 2004

**“Building Peace and Democracy in Iraq”**

Director of Studies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful for your invitation to speak here today. As an ordinary resident of this country, I was a great admirer of this institute. It is a great honour to come back here today and to address you as Prime Minister of Iraq.

There can be few here today who remember the last time an Iraqi leader visited the United Kingdom, let alone attended a forum such as this. Saddam Hussein was not renowned for his willingness to face tough questions from an honest audience.

As President, Saddam never left Iraq, because he was too frightened that his position would be usurped in his absence. He ruled for himself and by himself. His only goal was power. And he and his cronies – now behind bars – held on to their power through tyranny, through fear, through torture and through repression.

Today, Iraq's new government is working for the Iraqi people, not for itself. Our goal is to build freedom, rule-of-law, democracy and human rights. And we are mindful of where our legitimacy lies: we both reflect and represent the full diversity of Iraq's citizens.

Above all, we are mindful of the most important task entrusted to us: to prepare Iraq for full, free and fair elections, in which every citizen will have an equal say.

We will have those elections in Iraq on time, next year – because that is what the vast majority of Iraqis want.

Those elections will mark the achievement of what millions of Iraqis dreamed of over many long years of repression...

What people like me worked for over many long years of opposition...

What countries like yours struggled for over many long years of diplomacy:

And eventually – and rightly – went to war for:

A democratic Iraqi government which threatens neither its people nor the world.

In time, I believe Iraq will become both a model and a leader in the Middle East. At the moment, those days seem rather far off.

It is all too easy to focus on the violence being committed by the minority, and not the new freedoms being enjoyed by the majority. Indeed, for too many Iraqis, and for some foreigners too, that violence is all too present at the moment. For many families now in Iraq, the taste of freedom and opportunity is being soured by the fear of violence. I am determined to change that.

I know that the decision to remove Saddam was a difficult and divisive issue here in Britain. And I understand how the current difficulties in Iraq have added to the controversy, leading many now to question if Britain and other countries were right to go to war.

Let me assure you that Saddam and his regime were a real threat to the region and to the world. Some have said that Saddam was really just an Iraqi problem. Only really a threat inside Iraq. Try telling that to a Kuwaiti family who lost loved ones in the 1990 invasion, that Or an Iranian family who lost their son in the ten year Iran-Iraq war.

As I worked in exile to remove Saddam, I did so because I knew just how much damage he had wrought on his country. I knew of the wars he had already started, and of the weapons of mass destruction he had used against his neighbours and against his own people. And I knew of his determination to rearm to fight again.

But when I returned to Iraq after liberation, I was truly shocked to see for myself just how much damage Saddam had really done in his thirty years in power. Today, we are witnessing all too vividly the true extent of the damage which Saddam inflicted on our society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The current difficulties also underline what is really at stake in Iraq today. The conflict in Iraq is about freedom and democracy in a very troubled region: a region which – (I hardly need to tell this audience) – is of huge strategic importance to the world.

We Iraqis cannot afford to lose this struggle. Nor can you, nor indeed any other people who cherish our common values. Foreign terrorists like Zarqawi and others have chosen to make Iraq their battleground for they understand this all too clearly. They have made common cause with members of the former regime. They try to portray themselves as “resisting occupation”, using language they know will resonate with many in the Middle East.

Sadly, they have managed to dupe even some outside Iraq who should know better, and whose ambivalence only fuels the hopes of the terrorists.

Despite this unholy alliance between members of the former regime, and foreign terrorists, despite the emotive and politically-charged language they use, and despite the barbaric nature of their acts, designed to break our will,

we are making serious progress in defeating these extremists, and ensuring that democracy wins out in Iraq.

And we must continue to stand firm together as we face their challenges over the coming months.

The kidnap of Kenneth Bigley by Zarqawi is one of those challenges. The videos his captors have released show not only their brutality, but also their ruthlessness and their vile. It is repugnant to take an innocent man such as Kenneth Bigley and to use him as a political pawn in this way. The anguish and pain inflicted on his family and friends are indescribable. My heart goes out to them, and my prayers are with them and with Kenneth.

But I must say that it has saddened me to see how the media has reacted to this issue. Let us not forget that this sort of terrorism depends entirely on publicity. We therefore need to think long and hard about the way this kidnapping has been covered by the media. A few sober voices have questioned whether the media should itself be feeding the crisis on which it is reporting and asking whether they have consistently behaved responsibly.

Can we justify showing videos of hostages or groups of armed and hooded men? Is this not exactly the publicity that the terrorists seek? Should we play their game? We should all be asking if, by doing this, we not only make it harder to resolve the cases we deal with today, but invite more cases for tomorrow."

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I said earlier, the key task of the interim government in Iraq is to prepare the country for elections.

Those elections will cement the momentous changes brought by the coalition's liberation of my country. And they will strike a huge blow to the insurgents and the terrorists.

As we prepare for those elections, I will continue to isolate the hard-core from the disaffected. I am reaching out to those groups in Iraq who either find themselves outside the political process at the moment, or who have chosen themselves to remain outside.

In the new Iraq, I want every community, every group, every minority to feel part of the process, and to hear its voice in the process. My government's message – unlike that of the insurgents – is positive and constructive.

Through dialogue and through the offer of amnesty, I am confident that many of those sitting on the fence at the moment, will turn their backs on violence before the elections.

I am also keen to start the trial of Saddam and other senior regime figures as soon as possible, to accelerate the process of healing and reconciliation. That is why I asked the UN last week to help with the Iraqi Special Tribunal.

Sadly, however successful these efforts are, there will remain a rump of criminals and remnants of the old regime. These we will have to confront militarily. When it comes to this task, more and more, I want Iraqi forces to take the lead.

I have asked both Prime Minister Blair and President Bush to help me accelerate the training of Iraqi security forces. I welcome NATO's offer of help also. Of course, all Iraqis – myself included – would like to see our own forces taking over all responsibility for security in Iraq as soon as possible. This will do more than anything else to isolate the terrorists from the Iraqi people, as they continue to peddle the language of "occupation".

Of course, as Iraqis have seen their police and army officers being repeatedly targeted by terrorist attacks, it is all too clear to most of them who is on whose side.

I am of course grateful that the leaders of the Multi-National Force have promised that they will stay in Iraq for as long as they are needed. This is a brave and a generous promise. Calls for early withdrawal are music to the ears of the terrorists and the insurgents. But as I have said, I look forward to the Multi-National Forces playing an increasingly supportive role, with the Iraqi forces taking on more and more responsibility over the coming weeks and months.

Already in Najaf and in Samarra, the new Iraqi military and police have performed well. As we tackle the insurgents in the remaining problem areas, the Iraqi security forces will grow further in size, stature and experience.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last week at the United Nations, I spoke of the need for the world to put past differences behind us. Many nations opposed the war. And many people in this country took a similar view.

But there is only one side to be on today: and that is to work with us in building security, freedom and democracy in Iraq. At the General Assembly, I called on those nations who stood on one side during the war to lend us their strong support now. For Iraq needs the support of the international community in the challenges it faces.

And I asked the Secretary-General what more we could do to facilitate the deployment of UN personnel to Iraq. Across the board – from elections, to reconstruction, to the Special Tribunal, the UN's expertise and experience will be vital to success in Iraq.

Which sadly means that the UN will be a target of the terrorists, as it was last year, when the world lost a great statesman in the figure of Sergio di Mello. So I also discussed with Kofi Annan the importance of encouraging other countries contributing to the UN protection force, so that UN personnel can operate safely and without fear.

The other big challenge we face is the economy. It is hard to overstate what 35 years of economic mismanagement did to Iraq's economy, its infrastructure and its institutions.

Saddam shouldered Iraq with billions of dollars of debt to finance his wars and his mania. Most countries have recognized that Iraqis have already paid a high enough price for Saddam's mistakes. And most have also recognized that without a generous settlement, Iraq will not be able to finance its future... nor even its short-term challenges such as building new security forces. Without those, it is hard to see how we defeat terrorism. I am therefore looking forward to a generous settlement at the Paris Club.

And I am also looking forward to the donors' conference in Tokyo next month. I hope that this will produce a strong restatement of support for rebuilding Iraq's infrastructure and basic services. Iraq is not an easy place for donor agencies to work at the moment. But those who are there are doing excellent work. And I hope that others who have pledged funds will bring forward the implementation soon. Iraqis need and deserve to feel the benefits of their new-found freedom and democracy.

In conclusion, let me say this. We face an historic struggle in Iraq. The next few months, perhaps more than any others, will shape the future of my country for years to come.

The international community needs to put the arguments of the past behind us, and unite behind the common goals which we all want to achieve. We must deliver on our promises to bring economic regeneration and political freedoms, culminating in successful elections next year. And we must continue to isolate the insurgents and the terrorists, and develop Iraqi's own capacity to build security.

In short, Iraq needs the support of our neighbours and of the whole international community to achieve our aims and realise the ambitions of the Iraqi people who suffered for so many years under Saddam's tyranny.

And of course, it is not just Iraqis who will benefit. The Middle East and the wider world will benefit hugely from stability and prosperity in Iraq. Success will prove that the values of democracy and freedom are indeed universal, and not reserved for Western nations.

Anything less than success is not worth contemplating.

THANK YOU