

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a further statement on Iraq.

Let me again, for the benefit of the House, briefly recap the history of this crisis. In 1991, at the conclusion of the Gulf war, the true extent of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction programme became clear. We knew that he had used these weapons against his own people, and against a foreign country, Iran, but we had not known that in addition to chemical weapons, he had biological weapons, which he had denied completely, and was trying to construct a nuclear weapons programme.

So on 3 April 1991, the UN passed the first UN resolution on Saddam and weapons of mass destruction, giving him 15 days to give an open account of all his weapons and to co-operate fully with the UN inspectors in destroying them. Fifteen days later, he submitted a flawed and incomplete declaration denying that he had biological weapons and giving little information on chemical weapons. It was only four years later, after the defection of Saddam's son-in-law to Jordan, that the offensive biological weapons and the full extent of the nuclear programme were discovered. In all, 17 UN resolutions have been passed. None has been obeyed. At no stage did he co-operate as he should have done. At no stage did he tell the full truth.

Finally, in December 1998, when he had begun to obstruct and harass the UN inspectors, they withdrew. When they left, they said that there were still large amounts of weapons of mass destruction material unaccounted for. Since then, the international community has relied on sanctions and the no-fly zones policed by US and UK pilots to contain Saddam. But the first is not proof against Saddam's deception and the second is limited in its impact.

In 2001, the sanctions were made more targeted, but around \$3 billion a year is illicitly taken by Saddam, much of it for his and his family's personal use. The intelligence is clear: he continues to believe that his weapons of mass destruction programme is essential both for internal repression and for external aggression. It is essential to his regional power. Prior to the inspectors coming back in, he was engaged in a systematic exercise in concealment of those weapons.

That is the history. Finally, last November, UN resolution 1441 declared Saddam in material breach and gave him a "final opportunity" to comply fully, immediately and unconditionally with the UN's instruction to disarm voluntarily. The first step was to give an open, honest declaration of what weapons of mass destruction he had, where they were and how they would be destroyed. On 8 December, he submitted the declaration denying that he had any weapons of mass destruction, a statement, frankly, that not a single member of the international community seriously believes. There have been two UN inspectors' reports. Both have reported some co-operation on process; both have denied progress on substance.

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So how to proceed? There are now two paths before the United Nations. Yesterday the UK, along with the US and Spain, introduced a new resolution declaring that

"Iraq has failed to take the final opportunity afforded to it in Resolution 1441".

But we will not put this resolution to a vote immediately. Instead, we will delay it to give Saddam one further final chance to disarm voluntarily. The UN inspectors are continuing their work. They have a further report to make in March, but this time Saddam must understand: now is the time for him to decide. Passive rather than active co-operation will not do. Co-operation on process but not substance will not do. Refusal to declare properly and fully what has happened to the unaccounted for WMD will not do. Resolution 1441 called for full, unconditional and immediate compliance: not 10 per cent., not 20 per cent., not even 50 per cent., but 100 per cent. compliance. Anything less will not do. That is all we ask: that what we said in resolution 1441, we mean; and that what it demands, Saddam does.

There is no complexity about resolution 1441. I ask all reasonable people to judge for themselves. After 12 years, is it not reasonable that the UN inspectors have unrestricted access to Iraqi scientists? That means no tape recorders, no minders, no intimidation, and interviews outside Iraq, as provided for by resolution 1441. So far not one of those interviews has taken place.

Is it not reasonable that Saddam provides evidence of destruction of the biological and chemical agents and weapons that the UN proved he had in 1999? So far he has provided none. Is it not reasonable that he provides evidence that he has destroyed 8,500 litres of anthrax that he admitted possessing, and the 2,000 kilos of biological growth material, enough to produce over 26,000 litres of anthrax? Is it not reasonable that Saddam accounts for up to 360 tonnes of bulk chemical warfare agent, including 1.5 tonnes of VX nerve agents, 3,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals, and over 30,000 special munitions?

To those who say we are rushing to war, I say this: we are now 12 years after Saddam was first told by the UN to disarm; nearly six months after President Bush made his speech to the UN accepting the UN route to disarmament; nearly four months on from resolution 1441; and even now, today, we are offering Saddam the prospect of voluntary disarmament through the UN. I detest his regime—I hope most people do—but even now, he could save it by complying with the UN's demand. Even now, we are prepared to go the extra step to achieve disarmament peacefully.

I do not want war. I do not believe anyone in the House wants war. But disarmament peacefully can happen only with Saddam's active co-operation. Twelve years of bitter experience teaches us that. If he refuses to co-operate, as he is refusing now, and we fail to act, what then? Saddam in charge of Iraq, his weapons of mass destruction intact, the will of the international community set at nothing, the UN tricked again, Saddam hugely strengthened and emboldened—does anyone truly believe that that will mean peace? And when we turn to deal with other threats that we know confront our world, where will our authority be then? When we make a demand next time, where will our

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credibility be then? This is not a road to peace, but folly and weakness that will only mean that when the conflict comes, it is more bloody, less certain and greater in its devastation.

Our path laid out before the UN expresses our preference to resolve this peacefully, but it ensures that we remain firm in our determination to resolve it. I have read the memorandum put forward by France, Germany and Russia in response to our UN resolution. It is to be welcomed at least in these respects: it accepts that Saddam must disarm fully, and it accepts that he is not yet co-operating fully. Indeed, not a single member of the European Union who spoke at the summit in Brussels on 17 February—not a single one—disputed the fact of his non-co-operation.

But the call is for more time—up to the end of July, at least. They say that the time is necessary to "search out" the weapons. At the core of this proposition is the notion that the task of the inspectors is to enter Iraq to find the weapons, to "sniff them out," as one member of the European Council put it. That is emphatically not the inspectors' job. They are not a detective agency, but even if they were, Iraq is a country with a land mass

roughly the size of France or Spain. The idea that the inspectors could conceivably sniff out the weapons and documentation relating to them without the help of the Iraqi authorities is absurd. That is why resolution 1441 calls for Iraq's active co-operation.

The issue is not time. The issue is will. If Saddam is willing genuinely to co-operate, the inspectors should have up to July, and beyond July—as much time as they want. If he is not willing to co-operate, equally time will not help. We will just be right back where we were in the 1990s. Of course, Saddam will offer concessions. This is a game with which he is immensely familiar. As the threat level rises, so the concessions are eked out. At present, he is saying he will not destroy the al-Samoud missiles that the inspectors have found were in breach of 1441. But he will, under pressure, claiming that this proves his co-operation. But does anyone think that he would be making any such concessions, or indeed that the inspectors would be within 1,000 miles of Baghdad, were it not for the US and UK troops massed on his doorstep? And what is his hope? To play for time, and to drag the process out until the attention of the international community wanes, the troops go, and the way is again clear for him. Give it more time, some urge on us. I say that we are giving it more time. But I say this too: it takes no time at all for Saddam to co-operate. It just takes a fundamental change of heart and mind.

Today the path to peace is clear. Saddam can co-operate fully with the inspectors. He can voluntarily disarm. He can even leave the country peacefully. But he cannot avoid disarmament. One further point: the purpose in our acting is disarmament, but the nature of Saddam's regime is relevant in two ways. First, weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a regime of this brutality are especially dangerous, in particular because Saddam has shown his willingness to use them. Secondly, I know that the innocent as well as the guilty die in any war. But let us at least not forget the 4 million Iraqi exiles, and the thousands of children who die needlessly every year due to Saddam's impoverishment of his country—a country which in 1978 was wealthier than Portugal or Malaysia but is now in ruins, with 60 per cent. of its people on food aid. Let us not forget

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the tens of thousands imprisoned, tortured or executed by his barbarity every year. The innocent die every day in Iraq—victims of Saddam—and their plight, too, should be heard.

I also know the vital importance in all of this of the middle east peace process. The European Council last week called for the early implementation of the road map. Terror and violence must end. So must settlement activity. We welcomed President Arafat's statement that he will appoint a Prime Minister—an initiative flowing from last month's London conference on Palestinian reform. I will continue to strive in every way for an even-handed and just approach to the middle east peace process.

At stake in Iraq is not just peace or war. It is the authority of the United Nations and the international community. Resolution 1441 is clear. All we are asking is that it now be upheld. If it is not, the consequences will stretch far beyond Iraq. If the UN cannot be the way of resolving this issue, that is a dangerous moment for our world. That is why, over the coming weeks, we will work every last minute that we can to reunite the international community and disarm Iraq through the United Nations. It is our desire, and it is still our hope, that this can be done.

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