

TRANSCRIPT OF LECTURE
GIVEN BY THE FOREIGN OFFICE MINISTER, MR KIM HOWELLS
IN LONDON
ON MONDAY, 9 OCTOBER 2006

MR HOWELLS

Thanks very much Gwyn. It is absolutely true, I remember nothing about the cricketers in Cambridge, they were fierce days. I am sure none of you drink at all, and you will be very glad to know I have given it up, not all the time, but not before 6.00.

And it is a great honour to kick off this series of lectures. For me, the IOC has always had a very special place for me. I was actually banned from here for a while. I can't remember whether it was 1967 or 1968, and it is always nice to be welcomed at the door instead of being thrown out. Those days seem like yesterday actually.

What I would like to do this evening, if I could, is to make a case for the United Nations, and it is a good time to make it. We are going through some extraordinary moments I think. The Security Council I understand this morning have recommended a new General Secretary to the General Assembly, Ban Kimun (phon), and just two weeks ago I saw Kofi Annan's last address to the General Assembly in New York, just before President Bush spoke, and then an extraordinary, a very, very skilful lecture - because that is what it was - from President Ahmadinejad, the President of Iran. And for anyone who was there for those speeches it is quite clear that first of all the UN matters, that is the first thing to say, and sometimes we have to say those simple things and say them very clearly, it matters and it matters very much.

As Professor Prins just told us, the first meeting of the UN was here in London in Church House. It was attended by 51 members of the United Nations. The 61st meeting of the General Assembly, held in New York last month, brought together all 192 countries who make up today's United Nations. The Foreign Secretary, Geoff Hoon, David Treisman and I had over 70 meetings with world leaders and with Foreign Ministers. We discussed every major issue facing the UN today, including Darfur, Iraq, the Middle East., Africa, Afghanistan, climate change, terrorism and the arms trade.

Now critics of the UN say that it is very good at organising meetings, but incapable of reaching agreement, strangled by its own bloated bureaucracy and ill-adapted to meet the global and common challenges the world faces today.

Well I don't agree - not with all of it at least. So this evening I want to try and set out what those challenges are and how the United Nations, the UN, is dealing with them. Despite the fact that the world was a very different place 60 years ago when the UN was founded, its purposes and principles, enshrined in the UN Charter, remain as relevant and urgent today as when they were written in 1945 - to maintain international peace and security, to develop friendly relations amongst nations, to promote and encourage respect for human rights.

A written transcript of a recent television interview on the Ministerial meeting in New York described it - thanks to a typing error - as the Annual Untied Nations General Assembly. Now I think, and I am going to argue, that the truth could not be more different. The nations of the world are now inextricably connected and bound together. This means that global issues are no longer the challenge of the few, no longer are they bound to any one nation. Today's challenges are transnational - migration, crime, terrorism, disease, environmental degradation - all threaten international security and encourage poverty and

under-development. All harm basic human rights. The only way to tackle them in today's inter-dependent world is through collective action. But too often the UN fails to take collective action because its members cannot master sufficient political will to reach agreement.

It is often said that if the UN did not exist, it would have to be invented. No other organisation embraces all states, no other organisation has the political legitimacy and moral authority necessary for solving the most pressing problems facing the world today.

As ever greater demands are made on the UN we sometimes forget just how much the organisation has changed, particularly since the end of the Cold War. Between 1989 and 1996 the Security Council approved over twice as many UN peacekeeping operations as during the previous 40 years. Over the past 15 years the UN has organised elections or helped and advised local organisers in more than 100 countries, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Cambodia, Namibia, el Salvador, Eritrea, South Africa, East Timor and most recently in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Peacekeeping is not in the UN Charter, yet today there are over 90,000 UN personnel working in 18 UN peacekeeping operations, compared to just 14,000 in 1998. These missions involve not just military forces keeping the peace, they are highly complex and multi-dimensional operations trying to rebuild basic social and economic infrastructure, create political and legal institutions, demobilise former combatants and reintegrate them into society.

The logistical and financial hurdles alone the UN must overcome to get these operations going and maintain them are immense. But it is critical they succeed. Without sustainable peace, countries risk sliding back into conflict, making long term development and growth an impossibility.

Some people were disappointed that the UN World Summit in New York in September 2005 did not take bolder action to tackle conflict and poverty. But as the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, said after the summit, if we did what we have agreed on, doubling aid, on opening up trade, on debt relief, on HIV-Aids and malaria, on conflict prevention, there would be more democracy, less oppression, more freedom, less terrorism, more growth and less poverty.

The summit endorsed the commitments made by G8 leaders last year to increase global aid by \$50 billion by 2010, with \$25 billion going to Africa. It agreed to create a new central emergency relief fund to help the UN mobilise resources quickly and effectively to tackle humanitarian crises and natural disasters, and it recognised the urgency and scale of the climate challenge.

But one year on our actions are not even close to meeting the task. The latest science tells us that we need a step change in our global response over the next 10 years, starting now, or it may be too late. The only way we will be able to protect ourselves and each other from the destabilising consequences of climate change is by working together on a global basis. This goes to the heart of the UN's mission, and the UN must be at the heart of the solution.

The UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, is looking at how to improve co-ordination between all the UN's humanitarian development and environmental agencies. The value and effectiveness of their work has too often been bedevilled by fragmentation, duplication of functions and multiple agencies competing for donor funds. There are now more than 90 global health programmes. The UN alone has 23 agencies working on water, 11 different UN agencies working in Vietnam account for only 2% of the country's aid receipts. As the third largest contributor to the UN's budgets, the United Kingdom has every interest in ensuring the UN's work

is as efficient and effective as possible.

Central to the UN's ability to establish lasting peace and security is equally effective co-ordination of conflict prevention resolution and reconstruction work. A significant achievement at the World Summit was agreement to establish a peace building commission which will bring together all UN bodies, major financial donors and troop contributors, international financial institutions and other organisations engaged in peace building, whether through political, security or development support.

At its first meeting in June this year the Secretary General said that few issues had generated greater consensus or higher expectations than the responsibility of the United Nations to help states and societies recover from the devastation of war. Indeed the Secretary General has called on members of the Commission to act as like-minded supporters and as allies who would remain engaged in a country beyond the lifespan of a peace keeping mission.

As well as working for peace we need to work to reduce the severity and impact of conflict in the first place, and a clear way to do this is to reduce the flow of irresponsibly traded arms which fuel and prolong fighting. We believe we can do this by working together at the UN to negotiate a legally binding treaty on the trade and conventional arms. Agreeing such a treaty and ensuring it is a treaty that will make a real difference, and not just be a token gesture, won't be easy but we are confident that with a strong global commitment and a process open to all, it will be possible.

In New York three weeks ago I shared a platform with Gareth Thomas - Minister from DFID - and with the Foreign Ministers of Australia and Costa Rica, to make a case for a treaty, and we are working together, along with many countries, to secure support to begin a UN process towards an arms trade treaty.

Getting concerted UN action to fight international terrorism is another key objective for the United Kingdom. Just three weeks ago the General Assembly adopted its first ever global counter-terrorism strategy. It is a strategy that condemns terrorism in all its forms and reaffirms the central role of the UN in countering terrorism which threatens to undermine the UN's most fundamental values - the rule of law, the protection of civilians and the principles of mutual respect between people of different faiths and cultures. The strategy specifically commits member states to making incitement to terrorism illegal while upholding the right of free speech and it sets out recommendation and measures to tackle terrorist financing.

The UN can help states develop legislation and provide a framework to work in partnership with civil society and in support of our ongoing efforts.

But Ladies and Gentlemen, this is just the beginning. Such action by governments alone is not going to be enough to defeat the terrorist threat, we need to be more robust about promoting the open, tolerant, inclusive and prosperous societies we enjoy, particularly amongst those young people most vulnerable to the warped ideology peddled by extremists. Only by convincing people to reject the extremist message will we win this battle. The strategy recognises that promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law must form the fundamental basis for the struggle against terrorism.

Recent progress on strengthening the non-proliferation regime has been less successful. Although the UK worked hard in the run-up to the summit to try to secure strong language on non-proliferation and disarmament,

this proved impossible to achieve. Our next opportunity to make progress is the first preparatory commission of the new review cycle of Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in May 2007 and we are already preparing the ground in New York, and we keep trying to build consensus towards strengthening the regime in all international fora.

One vital task, if we are to have a strong multilateral system, is to address cases where countries break the rules - like Iran. For years Iran has failed to cooperate fully with the IAEA - the International Atomic Energy Agency. It has refused to take the steps the IAEA Board has said are essential, and that is why the Security Council is now involved in support of the Atomic Energy Authority. And I regret that Iran is not taking the positive path on offer by suspending its enrichment activities and returning to talks on the basis of the generous proposals put forward by the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, China and the US - the so-called E3 Plus 3.

Iran should not under-estimate the unity and determination of the international community, confirmed at the Foreign Ministers Meeting in London last Friday, to see the non-proliferation system upheld. Equally the North Korean government should be in no doubt as to the strength of the international condemnation of the nuclear tests which took place, I believe, yesterday. The international community repeatedly has urged North Korea to refrain from both missile and nuclear testing. As the Prime Minister said this morning, this further active defiance shows North Korea's disregard for the concerns of its neighbours and the wider international community, and contravenes North Korea's commitments under the Non Proliferation Treaty and UN Security Council Resolution 1695. We and our partners on the Security Council are now working on a robust response to this clear threat to international peace and security.

Another major challenge facing the UN today is the ever more complex nature of its peace keeping operations, as I mentioned earlier. In the Lebanon alone, UNIFIL is set to expand from 2200 personnel to some 15,000. Getting military and civilians personnel together quickly from all over the world and ensuring they can work effectively on the ground is an immensely difficult task. They need to deploy peace keepers, and those needs arise at very short notice. So the UN is working closely with other organisations, including the European Union, the African Union and NATO, to build up regional peace keeping capacity and to share respective experience, capability and resources.

In Afghanistan, NATO's largest operation to date with over 30,000 troops from 37 nations is working under UN authority to support the Afghan government's reconstruction and development efforts. With help from NATO, Afghanistan increasingly is taking responsibility for its own security, and since the Taleban were removed from power 5 years ago over 4 million refugees have returned to their homeland, 11 million Afghans voted in the Presidential elections in 2004, and 12.5 million in the parliamentary elections in 2005. 5 million Afghan children, one-third of them girls, are now in school.

But improving security and rebuilding a country ravaged by 25 years of conflict is a major long term challenge. It is critical that the international community remain fully engaged and the United Kingdom will continue to work alongside the Afghan government, in partnership with the UN, to help secure lasting peace and stability.

And of course the challenge in Iraq is no less great. The international Compact on Iraq is an important step in increasing multilateral support for Iraq on its path towards greater stability and prosperity. The way ahead is far from easy, but since the election earlier this year of the new government the international community has been more willing to step up its support for Iraq. The Iraqi government and the UN are now working

together on the details of the Compact, launched this summer, and are identifying areas where early progress can be made on key economic and security goals.

The UN, the UK, and our G8 partners are also working closely with the African Union to expand the African Union, the AU's peace keeping capacity, including the development of a fully operational African standby force by 2010. The EU has been helping the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo to help secure peace and ensure that the democratic process takes firm root there following last July's election, the first for 40 years. The African Union's mission in Darfur has done a remarkable job in very difficult circumstances, but the deteriorating situation there is one of the greatest challenges facing the international community and the UN at present. The African Union recognises that only the UN can provide the sustainable and comprehensive international peace building support which Darfur needs. The UN took the lead in getting the resolution through the Security Council to authorise a UN force in Darfur, and is now at the forefront of international efforts to persuade Sudan to accept its deployment. Until that happens, we are working with the UN and others to ensure that the African mission in Sudan has the support and reinforcements that it needs to continue with its mandate.

One of the most significant agreements made at the UN World Summit was the concept of responsibility to protect, first put forward by the Prime Minister in 1999 when he set out the case for so-called humanitarian intervention. The concept has since developed and was taken forward by the Secretary General in his 2005 report in larger freedom. At the summit world leaders agreed for the first time that governments had the responsibility to protect their populations, protect them from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. But more significantly, the summit also agreed that where states are unwilling or unable to protect their populations from such crimes, the international community, through the UN Security Council, has collective responsibility to do so. Sovereignty is no longer an excuse for indifference.

It is manifestly clear that Sudan is not protecting its people in Darfur. The international community has a moral imperative to be involved. As the Secretary General said last month, can the international community, having not done enough for the people of Rwanda in their time of need, just watch as this tragedy deepens? And the answer of course is no it can't. We are therefore redoubling our efforts at the UN, the AU, the EU, the Arab League, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, to convince the government of Sudan that peace will bring huge economic political security and humanitarian benefits to all of the people of Sudan.

The commitments made at the UN World Summit on Peace and Security, human rights and on humanitarian assistance, are all being put to the test in Sudan. We cannot afford to fail to deliver on any one. Strengthening the UN human rights machinery was, and remains, a key objective for the UK. The World Summit agreed to create a new Human Rights Council to replace the existing and much criticised Commission on Human Rights. At the Council's first session in June, many expressed their commitment to pursuing human rights for all in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation, moving beyond the politicised divisions of the past.

The challenge remains to transform that promise into a reality. The Council's two regular and two special sessions since June have underlined the extent of that challenge. At its most recent session, which was adjourned last Friday, the Council held constructive debates on a wide range of human rights issues, but we were all disappointed that it could not agree statements on some of the most pressing issues,

including Darfur. Nevertheless we will continue to work hard with Council members, with non-members, NGOs and others, to ensure that the Council realises its potential to make a real difference to the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms around the world today.

Respect for human rights goes hand in hand with the promotion of justice and the rule of law, both essential components of sustainable peace and security. The absence of the rule of law undermines public confidence, it obstructs development, it facilitates organised crime and terrorism and in the worst cases it leads to a return to conflict. The United Kingdom has taken the lead, and we will continue to do so, to press for greater capacity within UN peacekeeping missions to promote the rule of law.

For the UN to be able to deliver the reforms agreed at the summit and meet the challenges of the 21st century, whether they relate to security, development or human rights, there must be major improvements in governance and the management of personnel and resources, and that is why it is a great privilege to share the stage with Professor Gwyn Prins because he has been at the heart of this agenda. The Secretary General has put forward ambitious proposals to make the Secretariat more efficient, more effective and more accountable. If the UN is to work properly, the Secretary General himself needs the flexibility to manage the organisation in a way which allows him to respond quickly to emergency priorities and urgent needs. Member states are also reviewing the UN's 9,000-plus mandates and to cut duplication and free up valuable resources for priority action, including development. This will be a slow and a difficult process, but it could go a long way to improving the UN's effectiveness.

Major reform, which will benefit all member states, is a process, it is not an event, it will not happen overnight. The key is to focus on those areas where progress is possible in the short term, without losing sight of the longer term reform agenda.

One of the most difficult areas where change is essential, but has not been achieved, is the composition of the Security Council itself. The Council is not representative to today's world. It needs to be. Unity on such a divisive question will never be reached, but we need to keep up the momentum for change and continue to work towards a future settlement. In the absence of expansion we are encouraging the Council to be more open in its deliberations and to engage more widely with all UN members and organisations outside the UN who bring experience and expertise to the table.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as John F Kennedy said: " The UN is our last best hope." Progress may sometimes be painfully slow. There will be many setbacks along the road, but we must not forget the great work done by the UN that often goes unrecognised. We can't repeat this enough I believe. UNICEF works in 157 countries, spends over \$1 billion a year on child protection, immunisation, fighting disease and HIV-Aids and promoting children's education. The International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards nuclear facilities in 70 countries. More than 50 million refugees fleeing war, famine or persecution, have received aid from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees since 1951 - 50 million refugees. The 13 year effort by the World Health Organisation resulted in the complete eradication of the terrifying disease of smallpox in 1980.

So there is a great deal for the UN and its member states to be proud of, but the UN must look forward, not backwards, it must strive to tackle the appalling situation in Darfur, it must work to bring lasting peace to the Middle East, it must continue to help countries to address the threat of terrorism, it must reduce poverty in Africa and elsewhere,

and it should bring cultures and faiths closer together. All are issues critical to our future security and our prosperity. The government is committed to a UN helping all those in need to be secure, to be protected and to be prosperous. That is why we need the United Nations.

(END OF SPEECH)

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QUESTION:

I am a student of international relations here and actually I am a constituent of yours, Kim, back in Pontypridd. I find nothing objectionable in your speech but I can't help but ask the question in two parts. Do you not see the irony of having a representative of the new Labour government here speaking about multilateralism after what happened with your unilateral actions in Iraq? And do you not think that the unilateral actions of the coalition over the Iraq war have actually lessened the ability of the UN to revitalise itself in a multilateral system, as the title suggests?

QUESTION:

I just wondered, given your combined experience working with the UN and the colossal budgets that are obviously involved, not least from the UK, whether you felt a frustration in terms of reaction from the ground in situations like Bosnia and Darfur which clearly could have been dealt with sooner?

QUESTION:

Thank you very much. My name is Mike Harvey and I am a former Masters student at Warwick. You mentioned the defiance of the UN by Iran and also North Korea. There is of course another country in the Middle East which has been in defiance of UN resolutions for decades - that is Israel - in terms of the 1967 borders. Also they have an atomic weapon which is threatening other countries in the Middle East, including Iran. What is the government's position on that?

QUESTION:

Hi there Minister, thanks very much for your remarks. I was just wondering what you would consider a robust response by the Security Council to the nuclear test this morning, and why the global community has been put in a situation where we are responding to, rather than preventing, such a test?

DR HOWELLS
Inaudible.

CHAIRMAN
Well this is the LSE, what did you expect?

DR HOWELLS
What constitutes a robust response.

CHAIRMAN
Inaudible.

DR HOWELLS
... that is enough. Well first of all we could be here for days I suppose arguing about whether Iraq constituted a multilateral or unilateral action. I think it was a multilateral action and I find it

extraordinary really that people look at Iraq through a particular prism, and the prism is a very precise and a very narrow one I think. I have been to Iraq many times now and I can see the strengths and the weaknesses of our presence there, and in a sense I get a bit impatient in my old age and I wonder why we can't just seem to get on with the job of trying to work with the material that is there, and I guess try our best to build that country up from where it is now. I was recently for example in the north Ramallah (phon) oilfield near Basra, and this is one of the most benign oilfields in the world, I mean you kick a pebble over down there and oil bubbles out. And in Basra itself there are 100,000 young people who need jobs, and yet when you go to the Basra oilfield, as I did, the security, people went absolutely bananas but I wanted to try and see it for myself. You see this old Soviet oil technology there which through some miracle, or probably good Soviet engineering, has managed to continue to produce through the Iran-Iraq war as the battlefields were down there, through the first Gulf war and through the second Gulf War, and even survive attempts to blow it up now. And as I looked around that town it seemed to me that what was required there was really one thing, and that was to rebuild the Basran oil industry. It is producing at the moment and it is putting out enough oil to accumulate some very large reserves of capital, but it is ridden with problems. The bureaucracy in Baghdad is completely hopeless, they are trying very hard to make a new hydrocarbon law now and to try to start tapping the potential of that, but what we need is we need a way of trying to get that industry working again so that those young men that I met in Basra who said to me that what they wanted to do was get married, but they couldn't get married because they didn't have jobs, can actually get jobs. Now that oilfield has been shambolic for a very, very long time. I don't know about the debates we could have here on multilateralism or unilateralism, but what I know is that there are people in that little bit that I know of Iraq, as there are people in another bit that I know up in the Kurdish administered areas in the north, that want to see some movement. They are very glad that Saddam Hussein has gone, they are terrified of sectarianism and of the murders that are going on there at the moment. When I was in Basra very recently it reminded me of nothing more than Belfast in about 1988 - crooked politicians, private armies, death squads, smugglers, gangsters everywhere. It is almost exactly the same, and what those people want is they want a degree of stability in order that they can start to rebuild those industries and their lives.

Now sure, I think we can debate this from now until the end of time, but it seems to me that the great thing that the United Nations is trying to do as far as Iraq is concerned at the moment, and I think we are very much a part of that, is to try to use the expertise that there is in the Gulf, huge expertise in the oil and gas industries, to try to rebuild that industry and get those young people back to work from Basra. And if we could do that, and if we can do that in the Kurdish administered north, and if we could start to develop the east Baghdad field so that people could begin to reconstruct Iraq on the basis of the money that they have started to earn from those industries, then I suspect that many of these problems would start to go away. But it is a kind of statement of faith on my part, I have got no way of proving this scientifically.

CHAIRMAN

Minister, before you go on, I know we have got a lot of people with a lot of questions, but I think the questioner was asking a rather more direct question, he was suggesting specifically that the Resolution 1441 was actually not a competent resolution, and of course we all know the Attorney General's view, now published, was that it was. Do you want briefly to answer that question?

DR HOWELLS

Sure, that is what I am saying, we could argue this until next year I suppose. And I think it was a resolution that had sufficient strength to warrant what happened, but I don't think for one moment I am going to convince people in this room.

CHAIRMAN

Well somebody might. Shall we carry on?

DR HOWELLS

Can I go on to the question of Bosnia and Darfur and frustration? Yes it is frustrating. I was in Nepal the week before last and there has been a very nasty civil war going on in Nepal and a lot of people have died, 30,000 people have died in this civil war, and at the moment there is a cease-fire and we are very much hoping that the Maoists and the coalition of seven political parties, plus the King, can carve out of this chaos that there has been in Nepal some kind of peace. But it is enormously frustrating when you go there and you have in your mind a blueprint for how this could happen and you know that everybody who is there - the UN, the Indian government, the United States - everyone who I met said well this is the way to do it. And yet I kept hearing about how this chance is slipping through the fingers of the government of Nepal, and I think that that is something that is immensely frustrating.

But I would say the same thing as I have said on Iraq. We have got nothing else to work with, this is what we have, we have the United Nations, there is nothing else. We have to work as imaginatively as we can to try to inspire people, to cajole them, to put steel in their backbone to continue with peace negotiations, but it is not easy, and it never has been easy. This is not a time when there are more conflicts around than ever, there are probably as few conflicts around now as there have been in my lifetime, but they are certainly ones which we have to address as seriously as we have ever addressed any in the past. Yes it is frustrating, it is hugely frustrating, it is very frustrating for example to me that there are countries that talk the talk, but don't walk the walk, and there are far too many of them. There was for example a great clamour for an immediate cease-fire in Lebanon. I didn't see a great clamour amongst those very same countries to put their troops and their resources forward when there was a chance to put a UN stabilisation force in there, and I think that that is something which is frustrating certainly.

On the question you asked about Israel, I quite agree with the questioner. Israel should be abiding by the International Atomic Energy Agency's dictum and there should be a nuclear-free Middle East. I quite agree with that questioner. And we have pressed Israel very, very hard to abide by that, and we will continue to do so, and we recognise the centrality of that conflict of the heat that is generated by what is perceived to be this fundamental case of injustice of the Palestinian people and we will continue to try to bring some peace to that area. And yes it is a problem. I haven't noticed mind that any Israeli Prime Minister has ever said that they want to wipe Iran off the face of the map, and I think that that is a significant statement that was made by President Ahmadinejad and by others and we shouldn't forget that one either. This is not an easy situation, it is a complex one and it demands I think now a huge amount of imagination to try to get over this. I don't think it is an insoluble situation. Gaza is about as big as from Merthyr to Cardiff and about the same width as the valley, it is on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, they have beautiful beaches, I have walked on them. They have got examples within Gaza of wonderful agricultural advances, but they can't get their products out because Israel has blockades left, right and centre. There are ways of building that economy and giving those kids the opportunity of a decent education and the dignity of a decent job in the future, and there are many things that we can berate Israel for, and we are doing precisely that, and I

don't think that that should diminish what we see as a very, very great and very immediate threat of an Iranian nuclear bomb. I think that is something we have to take very seriously too.

And the fourth question, what constitutes a robust response? Well that is the best question of all in a way because the short answer is I don't know what constitutes a robust response, it is going to be a very difficult one. The discussion over what should happen to Iran has been one which has bedevilled the international community for a very long time. I remember in the run-up to the Iranian Presidential election seeing one of the candidates, the former President Rafsanjani (phon), admit in a television interview on BBC World Service that yes, he said, of course we have told lies about our nuclear programme, and he laughed as if it was a joke. And I don't think there is any question that it has been a lie. I am somebody who has always been very interested in nuclear issues and it is something that troubles me a great deal, I am troubled for everybody that lives in that region, and it should trouble everybody who lives in the world. But what do we do about it? The Russians are building a nuclear power station there, they have the promise I understand of a programme of nuclear power station construction. The other countries around the area are terribly worried about this. The Chinese buy a lot of oil from Iran, they are very worried about the possible effect perhaps on those supplies of sanctions. This is a very, very difficult situation, and that is why when I gave my talk I tried to emphasise that none of these questions is easy and there is no easy answer to a question like what are going to be the appropriate sanctions, if there are going to be sanctions, or what should be the appropriate action. One would love to think that we could win by force of argument, but that is going to be difficult too because of course there are many countries, including Iran, who say yes it is all right for you, you have got nuclear weapons. And I heard somebody, an Iranian, say to me about six months ago that Iran has an ancient and great history and along with China is the primary power in Asia and it should be armed and equipped to exert that authority around the world. Well it is a big problem for the international community and it is going to take some sorting, and the only body that can do that, it seems to me is the UN, nobody else. So it is not an answer to your question, the short answer is I don't know. It has got to be effective to be robust I suppose.

QUESTION:

Minister, Sir, you mentioned Basra. I was just wondering if you could help me with something. Just over a year ago in September of last year in that Iraqi city two members of the British special forces, not actually the SAS, a kind of offshoot of them, were stopped in a car by a local Iraqi policeman, they were detained and the episode ended with a jail break led by the British army and scenes of violence on the streets of the city. I was just wondering, some early reports of that incident, including on the BBC, stated that our special forces men had explosives in their car. You may or may not know the Arab and Muslim media is full of conspiracy theories about this kind of thing and earlier this year John Reid, the Defence Secretary, announced an investigation into the incident but he was overruled by the head of the SAS.

CHAIRMAN

OK, fine, so the point is there are these conspiracies. Would you like to comment on those?

DR HOWELLS

Well very quickly, I can't imagine John Reid being overruled by anyone, especially not the boss of some agency quite frankly.

QUESTION:

There were lots of articles about it.

DR HOWELLS

I have no doubt there are lots of articles about it. Al Jazeera carry stories like that ever hour.

QUESTION:

Inaudible.

DR HOWELLS

Well that is objective.

QUESTION:

Good Morning, I am ... I am a visiting student from the University of Virginia and I am staying here for one ... at the LSE. I am an Iranian American and I don't like my current Iranian government, or my current American government very much, and I didn't like the former government of Iran which your country and my country supported. The 21st century is the century of energy and it seems like the same arguments that the United Kingdom was making 60 years ago that Iran doesn't need oil, Iran doesn't use oil, and in fact overthrew the democratically elected Prime Minister, Prime Minister Mosadev (phon) are the same arguments that you guys are making now that Iran doesn't need nuclear energy, Iran has oil. And unfortunately we need a diverse economy to help our country, the question is so far there has not been credible evidence that Iran is making nuclear bombs, in fact Hans Blix said that, the IAEA said that and I don't know why the word bomb is everywhere.

CHAIRMAN

So you are sceptical about whether there is ...

QUESTION:

Yes I am.

QUESTION:

In the discussions of the reform of the UN Security Council, do you think there is any possibility of there being an EU seat?

QUESTION:

Good Afternoon Dr Howell. Forgive me, but I would just like to clarify a point that I believe you politically fudged the first question on Iraq. Given the UN did not explicitly allow the war in Iraq, what is your, that is the UK's current government, response that you have undermined the UN and do you feel that this has set a precedent for others to bypass the UN as an institution?

QUESTION:

While the UN is concentrated in Sudan, which is wonderful, thank you, I am just wondering ...

DR HOWELLS

No it is not in there I am afraid. It is trying to.

QUESTION:

What are the chances that the UN will just look a little further south and try to put some pressure on Museveni so that the nearly 2 million IDPs in northern Uganda can go home?

DR HOWELL

Very quickly, I don't think, I mean I will be very controversial, I don't think there is a problem. If Iran wants to develop a civil nuclear programme it has got every right to do so and I don't see a problem with that. Many of its neighbours have got a problem with that. I spoke to some Gulf states very recently who said to me, and I don't know whether it is true or not, but they said to me what we are particularly worried

about is a leak into the Persian Gulf. And I said why, the sea is very big, and they said no, we have got desalination plants all around the Gulf and we are drinking our oil, they told me, and they are very worried that if some major accident occurs then they are going to be in a bit of trouble. Now I can see that worry, but I am not particularly worried if you like about the consequences of a civil nuclear programme, but I am certainly very worried about the consequences of a programme which is enriching uranium but it is enriched uranium that won't be used for a civil nuclear programme. And in fact I will just spend a moment explaining why. We are the oldest manufacturer of civil nuclear power stations in the world and we have got a great deal of expertise in producing fuel rods because we were so absolutely useless at planning power, and so every time we built a new nuclear power station we design new fuel rods for it and it is a disaster economically, financially. The people who are building the nuclear power station at Bashir are Russians and the Russians have their own particular designs. If we tried, we couldn't replicate that design, the Americans couldn't do it, and the French couldn't do it and the Germans couldn't do it - impossible. I don't think that the Iranian nuclear engineering capacity is capable of doing it either. Now the argument that President Ahmadinejad has made, and it is an entirely reasonable argument, is that he is not interested in manufacturing a bomb, he wants a civil nuclear programme and he should have the right to do it. The International Atomic Energy Agency doesn't trust that and the rest of the world doesn't trust it because they can't see where that connection between the accumulation of that enriched uranium and the precise engineering required for the manufacture of those fuel rods is where that connection is. I think that is the difficult bit.

Now I think if the Iranians are more open about it, that they allow the International Atomic Energy Agency to go where they need to go, that there is complete transparency, then that could be put back on the rails you know, and part of the package of course is a lightwater nuclear reactor that has been offered by the E3 Plus 3 and that has been recognised. I mean I was in Libya recently and the Libyans said to me, hey hang on a minute, they said, you are offering these guys all of this stuff, we have given up our weapons of mass destruction programme, including our nuclear programme voluntarily and you have given us nothing for it. Why are you doing this? And I would really like to see the consequences of that kind of debate taken more seriously inside Iraq and I think if it was we would probably be talking a very different language to the one that is being talked at the moment.

No, there won't be an EU seat on the Security Council, not if we have got anything to do with it.

CHAIRMAN

Well that's pretty straightforward, isn't it?

DR HOWELL

Yes, and it is a short answer which is a blessing. No I don't believe that we have undermined the United Nations, I think we are actually one of the great supporters and pillars of the United Nations and we will continue to be so, but I recognise the strength of your argument, it is a difficult one, there is no question about it.

On Sudan, Sudan, well! There are UN peacekeepers in other parts of Sudan, it is extraordinary really that the Sudanese government is not allowing the UN to have a real presence inside Darfur. I think that is the great anomaly and it is why I think so many countries have referred to this now as genocide. Now I don't know, I am never happy with the definitions of that term, but it is certainly a very, very serious situation and one which we have to address almost immediately. Now the will seems to be there. I sat in the Security Council three weeks ago

in a debate and everyone on the Security Council agreed that Darfur was probably the biggest single issue facing the Security Council at the moment, but if there isn't sufficient pressure on the Sudanese government from everyone, not just from the UN but from all of the groups and the agencies that Sudan is part of, then I don't think the Sudanese government is going to shift on this. And so I guess the short answer is that the world has got to be a bit more resolute than it has been in applying pressure to the Sudanese, and that includes those countries who have been signing oil deals with Sudan and rampaging around that area in the hope it will bring them economic benefit.

CHAIRMAN

Could we just press that point a little more, because we might as well name names. It is well understood that China has been deeply obstructive in terms of any action being taken, and it is also noticeable that the Chinese not only have a large contract in the Baralgazal (phon), they also have 4,000 armed police in Sudan to protect their oil interests, and they will make it very clear that they will protect the interests of the Sudanese government to allow them to continue what is in the eyes of most independent observers a genocide in the south. Isn't that so?

DR HOWELL

Absolutely so, and the pressure has got to be brought on the Chinese as on everyone else who is obstructing that effort by the UN to try to bring some peace in the borders of that area.

QUESTION:

Hello Minister. My question is also about nuclear proliferation. If the international community was really interested in nuclear proliferation, wouldn't you agree that they would be concentrating their efforts on the US who obviously have by far the largest stockpiles of nuclear weapons and also an attitude which is, well let's say belligerent?

QUESTION:

I welcome the Minister's statements about new strategies for counter terrorism and it is good to hear that sovereignty is no longer an excuse for indifference over Darfur, but with "terrorism" being conducted by so many extra state bodies, be they Hezbollah or if we are talking about extraordinary rendition, what do you think the UN's best reply is to non-state based terrorism?

QUESTION:

I am Marco, I am a student of international relations here too, and my question is actually similar to the other one about Sudan. I agree with the Sudan that sovereignty cannot be an excuse for crimes against humanity, but Kofi Annan himself has said that a UN peace keeping force in Darfur will only be effective with the full support of the Sudanese government. So I am not making an ideological defence to sovereignty but I am thinking practically about strategy in Darfur, how can we have an effective peace keeping mission while the Sudanese government, which is sponsoring the genocide and the jinga weed, will try its best to undermine it?

QUESTION:

While we are on the Sudan theme, firstly you said that the United Nations was committed to stopping another Rwanda taking place in Darfur. About 800,000 people died in Rwanda, about 2 - 300,000 people have already died in Darfur. So firstly isn't it a little bit too late to try to stop another Rwanda happening as it kind of already has? Secondly, bearing in mind that countries like China, but not only China, are never going to authorise an invasion of Sudan, they are not going to authorise oil sanctions against Sudan, is it not the case that in fact it is just

another example of the UN being completely unable to act?

CHAIRMAN

Thank you. Very well put.

QUESTION:

Going back to Iran again, I was wondering, there is a lot of talk about the UN and how it should deal with Iran, but how can one expect the UN to deal with Iran when it couldn't even deal with its client militia, which was Hezbollah, in Iran? How can you expect the UN to deal with Iran, the state, when the UN couldn't even deal with Hezbollah, which is Iran's client ...

DR HOWELLS

The gentleman at the back asked about dealing with nuclear proliferation, can we start with the United States. Well I think there is a good case to be made out for the United States doing what we have been doing, and to a certain extent what other countries have done, which is to shrink dramatically the number of nuclear warheads, delivery systems and everything else. And the problem is I think it is not helped by the events of yesterday in North Korea and an argument for, it is like a chicken and egg thing really, you want the moral authority to argue for, it was Jack Kennedy's prophecy that there would be, did he say 25 nuclear nations by 1980, that it wouldn't come true. And I think that the non-proliferation agreements have actually been very good if you think about that, the number of nations that actually have nuclear weapons is still relatively small. What worries me both about North Korea and Iran, and I recognise the role that A Q Khan played in all this in the way in which he sold or gave away nuclear secrets from Pakistan. I fear that if a round of nuclear proliferation begins it will spread very quickly, there will be a lot of other countries who will say well hang on, if the Iranians have got away with it, if the North Koreans have got away with it, well why shouldn't we do it, and that is a real danger I think. We have got a real problem. And the only tools that we have got at the moment I think are non-proliferation agreements, there are UN agreements and we have really got to stick to them and be very clear about it, but at the same time try to reduce that nuclear arsenal everywhere, and it is being reduced, we have reduced it in this country very dramatically.

On the question of how best to reply to non-state terrorism, maybe if I could take that with the question about Hezbollah. I was in Lebanon during the Israeli bombardment and I talked to an awful lot of people there and I was quite shocked really because the opinion varied dramatically. On one extreme actual Lebanese government Ministers said to me what amounted to we hope the Israelis do the job for us as far as Hezbollah is concerned, to the other end where I heard people who I know not many years ago, like Amal (phon), were fighting Hezbollah in the streets, who were describing Hezbollah as our defence force. Now what I think and what I know is this, you can't have one government in a country which has just to the south of it another government with its own army, it is impossible, that decides when to go to war and when not to go to war. That of all things undermines states like nothing else does and that is what Hezbollah constitutes, it constitutes an alternative government, I think you described it as an Iranian client state. And the UN has tried through its contingent, with a mandate which is incredibly restrictive, with all kinds of caveats on it, to try to ensure that the peace has been kept in southern Lebanon, but it was entirely incapable of stopping armaments coming in from Syria and from Iran. Now the great test for the United Nations and the peace keeping force in Lebanon is going to be whether or not it can stop Hezbollah re-arming itself, and that is going to be a very, very difficult task. So the question is a very good one, it is about the will of an organisation, the only organisation I believe that we have to do this

job, whether that will be strong enough and whether there is a degree of unity there which will tackle very sensitive political questions, because it is a sensitive political question, it is tied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is a question which is like a tripwire, the moment you start talking about it the moment people have very fierce opinions about it. But in my view sooner or later Hezbollah either has to do what the IRA has done, give up its arms, and I hope be persuaded to do that politically, or it has to have those arms taken from it by the Lebanese government, because there can be only one democratically elected government in Lebanon and there may be Hezbollah members of it in the same way as there are Sinn Féin members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and indeed of the British parliament. So it can be done, but it is not an easy task, it is a very difficult task. And the wonderful thing about the UN in my opinion is this, I mentioned Nepal a few moments ago, is that I don't know of any other organisation that has got that breadth of expertise and the ability to mobilise that expertise like the UN does, and that is why we should value that and understand and recognise what a precious thing it is.

And it brings me on to that question again of Sudan. I don't think that the United Nations can fight its way into Darfur, any more than the UN could have fought its way into Lebanon, it would have been impossible, and I don't think that nations would be ready to allow their troops to fight their way into Darfur, even if such a thing was agreed. So yes, the great problems are there about persuading China and persuading other nations who don't want to rock the boat and who are actually physically protecting the Sudanese government against United Nations and international initiatives. But there is no short cut to that and a lot of people have died already, it is true, you are absolutely right to say that, but I don't see the logic of allowing more people to die, and I don't think that is what you are saying.

QUESTION:
Inaudible.

DR HOWELL

Well I can see a way of stopping it if we can persuade the Sudanese government - Catch 22. But I am enough of an optimist to believe that if there is sufficient international pressure, and if the Chinese are made by the rest of the international community to realise what a reprehensible act this appears to be in Sudan, that we can try and help there. And remember, one way of doing it and the way that everybody favours at the moment is through a hugely souped up African Union presence there, that might be a way of doing it. But you are quite right, it is not easy, and as somebody who has been in Bosnia and Kosovo I know what those ethnic divisions can do in terms of generating intransigence, it is absolutely true, and how murderous they become. But I can't see a short cut to it really, I think we have just got to keep plugging away.

CHAIRMAN

Kim, before you go on, the gentleman asks I think a really absolutely central question, and with respect there has been an alternative, it happened in 2000, as you will recollect, because we had a United Nations force which was on the point within days of collapsing before the Revolutionary Front in Sierra Leone and this government, this Prime Minister, authorised sending a British expeditionary force which rescued the United Nations force, rescued Sierra Leone, made the possibility of the elections which have happened. And there is actually a way in which you can do these things.

DR HOWELL

Well you know now we are getting back to this question about Iraq, aren't we? It was all right to go into Sierra Leone, it was all right

for Britain to do this and lead the way in there, and the paralysis of the UN in that situation was shocking, in the same way as it was in a number of other conflicts that we can recall. Do we want to do that, is that the way? We have got General Richards who led the troops is now in Kabul in Afghanistan, General Richards, perhaps you ought to invite him here to talk about the dilemma of that kind of action.

CHAIRMAN

I think David is somewhat preoccupied at the moment.

DR HOWELL

He would be delighted to talk to you.

CHAIRMAN

I am sure he would.

QUESTION:

Good Evening, my question is about private security companies. What is the UN policy on them, is there a policy, should there be a policy, and that also applies to the British government as well?

QUESTION:

Dr Howell, you touched on issues of governance at the United Nations, and I was lucky enough to be in Washington DC this summer and to hear Ambassador Bolton talking about his deep dissatisfaction with the pace of reform, that a lot of the Zolec (phon) reports appear to be ignored, and really it is just this issue of the credibility of the United Nations, particularly in the US where you have got things like the Libya ... Human Rights Committee, and I wondered since you mentioned Britain being the third largest contributor, are you happy with the reform that is taking place?

QUESTION:

Thank you for doing what you can to field these questions, and during your speech you said a lot of very nice things about what the UN should do and what the problems are, but I think you did not discuss really a process of how. What do you think is the number one most important thing that the UN should do right now and how could they do that?

QUESTION:

Chin Park on behalf of the United Nations Society here. I wholeheartedly sympathise with your defensive position tonight Minister, but I am a realist and I would like to ask that because the United Nations has fallen so far short of its Millennium Development Goals and reaching it by the year of 2020, what practical reformations has the new General Secretary proposed? And secondly, what implications will there be of electing yet another South Korean General Secretary when North Korea is causing such problems such as testing its nuclear weapons?

DR HOWELL

Private security companies, yes this is a really problematic question actually. I have come across lots and lots and they have guarded me lots of times in some very dodgy spots, and the easy answer I guess is that some are better than others and some of them are making a lot of money, some not so much money. But what is absolutely certain is that we can never turn the clock back to the days when the UN, just the sight of the UN logo on the side of a vehicle, or on the front of a building, or a blue flag or a blue helmet guarantees the safety of the people there. I lost a very, very good friend in Baghdad when that despicable act occurred and they murdered so many very, very fine people, the A-Team as they were called of the UN, that was a most atrocious act, and I fear that they are going to be with us forever. We don't have the soldiers to provide those kinds of basic services to Embassies and to UN compounds and when people are travelling across country and to airports and so on,

and it is a real growth industry, there is no question about that, but it is in part because of the kind of, I guess the way certainly since the 1960s attitudes have developed towards the UN. They are seen by some organisations as an impediment to their own political progress or to achieving their own aims, and as the UN trains its own force, we are talking for example at the moment of an all Africa standby force, which is a very interesting concept, but they are very, very expensive things to maintain and I think what countries do, and what the UN does increasingly, is to really buy from the market, there is a market out there for them. But I think they have to be very, very strictly controlled and above all they have to understand that the most important criteria which governs any commercial relationship has got to be about human rights.

On the question of governance and the question of how, I certainly tried to explain how some of the initiatives that were taken during the 2005 World Summit I think are real steps forward. John Bolton can become very frustrated with the UN, I think John Bolton was born frustrated with the UN and it is very easy certainly to be frustrated with the UN. Ordinary New Yorkers, and I don't know if you are American or not Sir.

QUESTION:
Canadian.

DR HOWELL

Canadian, well if ever you try to get across Manhattan when the UN General Assembly is sitting, you can understand why New York taxi drivers hate the UN. But I think it comes to the question which was the question just before yours, which was about governance and the reform package. The UN won't function properly if it doesn't accept the kinds of reports, the truth of those reports and implement them that Professor Prins was working on and so many others. It is absolutely vital. And what dismays me most about the UN is that whenever I have been in meetings, like for example when we had the European Presidency I had the privilege of chairing the summit of the non-aligned members and the European Union. There is fantastic mistrust amongst those countries that used to be the sort of non-aligned members as they were called during the Cold War, they believe that any move to reform is a kind of move to disenfranchise them or somehow to rob them of some of the things they have at the moment inside the UN, and sometimes they are very, very important issues obviously, they feel that the process may slow down decision making abysmally but it nevertheless guarantees them a voice, that is the present system, to the fact that undoubtedly there are corrupt governments that just love being in New York and love riding around in big cars, where their own people can't see them. It is that important and it is that trivial as well at the same time. So I don't think it is a case of the blueprint for reform not being there, the blueprint is there, it is the will of the United Nations to adopt and implement those blueprints and turn the UN into something that is fit for the 21st century. That is the difficulty I think and that is why you know the previous question of what do the Americans think about it, you know we may be the third largest contributor to the UN but there are countries, very rich countries, that contribute very little to the UN actually and are punching way below their weight, and they feel like that, and I think the United States feels that it doesn't want the cap on its contribution raised because it doesn't believe that that money is going to be spent properly. So it is a kind of dialogue that is needed. The UN must be reformed and if it is reformed I think the rich countries will be more prepared to spend more on it. So it is a difficult one, there is no question about it, but it has to be reformed. If it isn't reformed we are going to find ourselves I think in these frustrating situations for the next 10 years, and I think a lot of kind of Washington chattering class opinion is already very jaundiced about what they see as the kind of effort of maintaining the UN and that is a very

dangerous mood I think.

Jim's question about Millennium Development Goals and this huge task that Ban Kim Moon (phon) will be faced with, he is not going to find it easy with North Korea on his doorstep, there is no question about that, but I think from the sound of it, the support that he has received from the Security Council on what looks like a general consensus within the General Assembly will mean that he will have a lot of goodwill and he may be able to turn that very difficult neighbourhood to his virtue in terms of what he is able to do. But he has certainly got a huge agenda ahead of him, and a very dangerous one in many respects. I don't know, and somebody asked me what the single most important job that the UN faces now, I think probably, as you hinted, the single most important job is to reform itself. But if you put that to one side for a moment, it is probably ... the question of Sudan and keeping people alive. I think that if he can tackle that one, if Ban Kim Moon can bring a resolution to that and ease some of the appalling murder that is going on in Sudan then that will be a huge achievement and one which will give the UN a tremendous boost.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)