

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND RESPONDS TO TONY BLAIR

--Press Release--

--For immediate release, Wednesday, 13 June 2007--



TORY REFORM
GROUP

As he comes to the end of his time in office, Tony Blair has felt the understandable urge to defend his foreign policy record. In an article in the Economist entitled ‘What I’ve learned’, Blair attempts to justify his decision-making. Regretfully, he does not appear to have learnt very much.

As usual, his analysis of the threats and challenges that we face is broadly correct. It has been in his proposals for action that he has fallen down, with terrible consequences for both the UK and the wider world.

It does not help that his starting point is flawed. He points to Bosnia in the 1990s, lamenting that ‘we could not summon the will to act’. This is simply not true, as the thousands of British troops sent to the Balkans in 1992 will attest. They did not go to wage war but their humanitarian mission saved thousands of lives. But Blair has always been very persuasive in his arguments. His assertion, therefore, that regime change must become a central tenet in the UK’s foreign policy has too often gone without question.

Blair criticises those who argue that “by removing Saddam the plight of Iraqis has worsened and terrorism has been allowed to grow”. “This”, he adds, “is a seductive but dangerous argument”. We must not refuse to invade such a country just because “these reactionary and evil forces will fight hard, through terrorism, to prevent those countries and their people getting on their feet after the dictatorships are removed”

This argument is entirely unconvincing. As Blair well knows it is not just human rights that must be considered. A crucial element in any decision to invade another country must involve an analysis of all the likely consequences. Sometimes the arguments are persuasive. In Afghanistan and Sierra Leone, the government got it right. In Afghanistan, where international terrorism was allowed to flourish and Sierra Leone, where human rights were abused with impunity, the balance of the argument favoured intervention.

But neither the British nor the United States Government have opted to invade North Korea, Zimbabwe or Cuba. They have judged that intervention would not only prove very risky, but would plunge the surrounding region into chaos, setting in motion a chain of events that might not be controlled. That was always true in the case of Iraq. A strong case for invading Iraq never existed.

The mayhem that we see before us was both predictable and predicted. Iraq, having been a rogue state, is now a failed state. Two million Iraqis - the middle class - have fled the country and at least 100,000 civilians have been killed. Ominously, Iran is now the new hegemonic power in the region. The charge against Tony Blair does not relate to his integrity but to his incompetence and poor judgement.

Moving forward from here will not be easy and Tony Blair offers no thoughts on how to do so. The fact is that Britain, having gone in uninvited, has a responsibility to stay as long as it can help those trying to restore stability and security. There are certain functions to do with training the Iraqi Army, convoy protection and guarding Basra airport that we can usefully fulfil with less exposure to risk. The current elected Iraqi government deserves our continuing support. But whatever the final policy turns out to be, Gordon Brown has some hard thinking to do.

At the beginning of his piece Tony Blair remarks that “Foreign policy rarely wins votes, and can easily lose them”. Perhaps he has learnt something after all, and the Labour Party will not thank him for it.

This article was commissioned by the Tory Reform Group as part of a series of “By Invitation” articles that are published as part of the TRG’s web presence at <http://toryreformgroup.wordpress.com/trg-thinking>. The author also contributed to the recent TRG publication, “What is Wrong with British Foreign Policy?”, available from <http://www.Amazon.co.uk>.

Seeking to promote the One Nation values of social justice, political progress and prosperity for all, through open-minded debate.

83 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0HW

Tel: 020 3008 4991
Fax: 070 9287 9366
Email: trg@trg.org.uk
Web: www.trg.org.uk

ABOUT THE TRG

The Tory Reform Group (TRG) seeks to promote the One Nation Conservative values of:

- Social Justice
- Political Progress
- Prosperity for All

The TRG is more than 30 years old. It is one of the largest membership organisations within the Conservative Party and is represented across the UK.

The organisation is particularly strong among students, who represent half of all new members joining the TRG over the last three years.

For more information, please visit the TRG website at:

<http://www.trg.org.uk/>

The TRG blog can be found at:

<http://www.toryreformgroup.wordpress.com>

For further information concerning the TRG's activities, please contact:

Timothy Barnes, Chairman, The Tory Reform Group
Email: chairman@trg.org.uk // Mobile: +44 (0) 7903 188 447

--End--