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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Iraq

SPEECH

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Speaker Entsch, Warren, MP

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Mr ENTSCH (Leichhardt—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources) (4.49 pm)—The last part of the member for Chifley's speech took me aback a little. I do not believe that the member for Chifley has ever been an active member of the defence forces, but I can assure him that I did nine years in the ADF and am proud of it. I probably would have stayed a lot longer except that a wave came in and started to rip the guts right out of the Defence Force. It was, of course, Gough Whitlam.

I, like many of my very dear friends who served at the time, decided that we could not stay and see the Defence Force totally decimated by Mr Gough Whitlam and the Labor Party at the time. So we pulled the pin and went on and did other things. I know that when we came into government in 1996 the Defence Force was in a dreadful state. There has been a lot done and there is still a lot to be done. We have at least started to rebuild what was destroyed by 13 years of Labor.

I stand here very proud to support the Prime Minister's statement on Iraq. It is timely to remind the House again and again about the person, the individual. When we talk about Iraq we are talking about an individual. The whole country is controlled by one person. It is not a democracy; it is controlled at the whim of one person and his family. I have an article here from *Time Magazine* of 4 April 1988. It is entitled 'Sudden death from the clouds'. It says:

Even by the macabre standards of the Iran-Iraq war, the scene was shocking. The bloated bodies of Kurdish residents littered the silent streets of the northern Iraqi town of Halabja. A dead turbaned man who had tried to shield the porcelain-faced infant in his arms from the cloud of poison gas lay frozen in time on the road. Families died together in their homes or in cars. The dead were among hundreds, and possibly thousands, of victims of one of the worst chemical warfare attacks since World War I.

It goes on to say:

Baghdad's war planes dropped bombs containing mustard gas, cyanide and nerve gas on Halabja and neighbouring towns. The offensive stemmed in part from the desire to punish the pro-independence Kurds, who feel no loyalty to Iraq. The survivors suffered agonising blisters on their faces and in their lungs.

Further on in the article, it says:

In 1986 the United Nations condemned Iraq for using chemical weapons against Iranian soldiers.

That is a long time ago. That is 17 years ago. What has changed? We know that in February 1988 more than 400 prisoners in one prison were executed; a further 100 detainees from other prisons were buried alive. This was part of Saddam's 'prison cleansing' process when he decided that his jails were overcrowded with political prisoners. That is a great way to get rid of them. We know that he poisoned them and there has been a continuous regime of executing political prisoners. Two dozen torture centres were uncovered in Kuwait City when it was liberated by the US-led coalition during the Gulf War in 1991. There is documented fact that Saddam Hussein's regime is engaged in the systematic torture of Iraqi citizens—his own citizens. I am speaking of things like rape, electric shocks, acid baths, branding, mutilation and other actions that can only be described as grotesque.

Recently—in the year 2000—as Minister Downer related in this House last week, a new Iraqi decree was issued authorising the amputation of the tongues of citizens who dared to criticise Saddam Hussein or his government. Little wonder you do not hear any criticism from within Iraq. Little wonder indeed.

It is just amazing that we have those who will say, 'Peace at any cost. We cannot go in there. We cannot challenge this person.' He has had 16 years to do something about this. They say give peace a chance. Of course, we all believe in that. This suggestion that we are warmongers is an absolute nonsense. No country's leadership has the sovereign right to brutalise its people and pose a deadly threat to others.

It is high time that Saddam was stopped from this slaughtering. If people think that it is going to be by giving peace a chance, if they allow Saddam to continue to mutilate and to murder, and if they think that it will not

impact on our region, they are absolutely kidding themselves. There are the comments made by Secretary of State Colin Powell on 6 February and the bin Laden tapes as recently as today. If you do not think there is a connection between terrorism and the likes of Iraq, you have to be kidding yourself. You absolutely have to be kidding yourself.

There is no question that the way to go is the United Nations. There is no argument. Again, this is nonsense that is being peddled by the Labor Party—that the Prime Minister has at some stage suggested that he does not want the United Nations involved, that he wants to get out there and do it with the United States. That is again an absolute nonsense.

I have listened to every comment that he has made. I have never heard anything to suggest that he does not want the United Nations to do the job—and do the job they should, because that is what they were formed for. They face the serious risk of sliding into irrelevance like their predecessor, the League of Nations. Those who want to take on this America bashing which we see quite frequently now have only to look to what the United Nations did when the Serbs decided to move into Bosnia. If it had not been for the United States moving in there and dragging NATO with them, it would have been a hell of a mess; it would have been a hell of a lot worse than it was.

The same thing goes for later on, when the Serbs decided to do a bit of ethnic cleansing with the Albanians. Again, the United Nations sat on their hands. Again, it was the United States that walked in there, dragging NATO screaming, making them do their job.

The same thing goes when we talk about Rwanda. Who can forget seeing United Nations troops standing there with arms, watching hundreds of thousands of innocent Rwandans being executed in front of them and not lifting a finger to help them? If it had not been for the United States, which went in there and said, 'You will do your job,' it would not have happened. If you want to talk about failures, have a look at Somalia. It goes on and on.

Mr Bartlett—Or East Timor in 1975.

Mr ENTSCHE—Have a look at East Timor. The Labor Party say that they have a very different position from the Prime Minister and this government. Of course they do. What did they do for 13 years for East Timor? Nothing. If we had not gone in there as we did, East Timor would not be the separate country that it is today. There is no question about it. There were lots of opportunities for the government—for Labor—to do something about it, but of course they did nothing. To stand up and criticise now is absolute, sheer hypocrisy.

It is absolutely vital that the United Nations step in and do this job. That is what they are there for. It is absolutely vital that, if they are not prepared to do it, people stand up and remind the United Nations that they have an obligation to do this. There is no question about it. Kofi Annan himself has said that, if it had not been for the United States and Great Britain stepping up and challenging the United Nations, there is no way in the world that we would have had the weapons inspectors in there as we do today.

People should not suggest that the action is not being effective and that things are not happening in trying to deal with this in a peaceful manner. The best chance we have of peace is forcing Saddam to comply.

For 17 years the world has been waiting. Since 1988, what can't we find? What has been concealed? They are looking for 6,500 chemical bombs that have not been accounted for, including 550 shells filled with mustard gas; 360 tonnes of bulk chemical warfare agent, including 1.5 tonnes of the deadly nerve gas VX; 3,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals—300 tonnes of which could only be used for production of VX; and over 30,000 special munitions for the delivery of chemical and biological agents. All of these are not accounted for. When you have madmen like bin Laden and others loose in the world and madmen like Saddam Hussein who have created this stuff, have obviously concealed it and are not prepared to account for it, of course you have to be concerned.

The previous speaker, the member for Chifley, mentioned North Korea. What would the Labor Party do with North Korea? The member for Chifley made the comment about North Korea being a greater threat. 'What are we going to do about North Korea?' he says. Faced with the situation, I wonder what they will do. If we do not deal with the threat that we have in Iraq, then North Korea will be an even greater threat because it will see how ineffective the dealings with Iraq have been to date. Other rogue nations like North Korea will be able to stand up and challenge the United Nations and be able to go down exactly the same path, and that puts us at even greater risk as citizens. Sometimes we just have to stand up and make a statement. I hate war. Most reasonable, thinking people hate war. But sometimes you have to draw a line in the sand, and at the end of the day it is Saddam Hussein that could avert any conflict immediately by stopping playing games and getting out there and doing the job.

There has been criticism about predeployment of troops. We have had people over there since 1991. If you were a betting man or a guessing person and you were asked, 'If there is a likelihood of any sort of conflict anywhere in the world, where is it likely to be?' what would you say? My guess is that it possibly could be in the Middle East. In the event that the United Nations says, 'We need to take those weapons off him; we need to force him to comply,' and our people have to be over there to face those threats, we have an obligation to them and their families to ensure that they have the best possible chance of surviving. To survive, they need to be acclimatised and they need to be prepared for the task at hand. We all hope that they come back without ever having to fire a shot, but I would hate to think that, after the decision has been made by the United Nations that we should be doing this, we then have to drag troops from here that are totally unprepared for the type of environment which they are going to have to work in and put them in there, knowing they are going to be at a much greater risk.

It is absolutely vital that they be there and be totally prepared for what they could face. The troops involved, and their families, would appreciate the opportunity to become acclimatised. Let us hope they come back peacefully; let us hope they come back without having fired an angry shot. But at the end of the day, that decision is entirely up to Saddam Hussein. It is entirely up to him to comply. I hope to goodness that in the ensuing days or weeks commonsense prevails and Saddam Hussein complies. I want to add that it is great to see that Tony Blair and the United Kingdom government have also been able to see the sense of what is trying to be achieved here. At the end of the day I think they will be recognised for what they have been able to achieve here. *(Time expired)*