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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

IRAQ

SPEECH

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Page 12881
Questioner
Speaker Entsch, Warren, MP

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Mr ENTSCH (Leichhardt—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources) (10.54 am)—In the seven years that I have been in this place this government has faced many tough decisions. I guess such decisions started in 1996 with the gun law reform. Other difficult decisions have included tax reform, dealing with border control and illegal migration and, of course, there has been East Timor. During that period, there has been a concerted effort by those opposite to criticise many of these difficult decisions and to attack the government at every opportunity. But at the end of the day these difficult decisions have proven to be the right decisions for the Australian people. East Timor is a classic example of where governments of a range of persuasions sat on their hands and bit their tongues for many years and allowed the atrocities to continue because it was not quite in their backyard. But we had the courage to go in there and liberate the East Timorese people, and for that I am very proud.

However, the decision we have had to make this week has certainly been the most difficult of all the issues we have had to face. As was the case in East Timor, I do not believe that we have the option to sit on the fence and hope that Saddam will just disappear. Iraq has had some 12 years to comply with multiple UN resolutions, 17 of them, and it has failed to do so. There is no question that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction. There is no question that it has the capacity and the will, as it has demonstrated on numerous occasions, to use these weapons, not only on its neighbours but also on its own people. The risk of chemical and biological weapons falling into the hands of terrorists, in my view, is simply too great.

If we as part of the international community fail to make Iraq comply with UN resolutions, then what chance do we have of being able to challenge countries like North Korea and others that are of a mind to go down a similar path? Anyone who thinks that these countries have not been sitting back and watching how the world community has dealt with Iraq over so many years is kidding themselves; of course they have been and still are. There is no doubt in my mind that how we deal with Iraq will certainly, in a very significant way, work towards how countries like North Korea will continue to challenge others and act in the future.

I also accept the legal basis on which we have joined the coalition task force, led by the United States and the United Kingdom. But I do not do so lightly. In the end I believe that the government's decision is being taken in the best interests of international security and in the best interests of Australia. There certainly are very strong views, some extreme views, out in the community—arguments on both sides. Like the previous speaker, the member for Melbourne Ports, I also make good use of my delete button when I get the conspiracy theorists and the bigots arguing both sides; I remove them from my emails. I certainly appreciate their concerns, and they weigh very heavily in making this decision; nevertheless, this is a decision that we have to make. Faced with the facts that have been presented to me, I feel very strongly that I need to support the way in which the government and the Prime Minister are going.

One of the things that really convinced me was the arrogance of the French with the veto that they hold. Work was done by the United Kingdom last week in presenting an alternative, which was to be the 18th resolution, and the French in their arrogance said, 'Well, we don't even want to look at it.' Before it was even presented to Iraq or anywhere else they said that they did not want to look at it, that they would veto it immediately. That convinced me that there was no way in the world that anything could be done that would not be affected by a veto from the French.

So I believe that we had no choice but to go along the course of action that we have. When you look at the French, you wonder about their hypocrisy. I find it totally unbelievable that France, along with a number of countries, has certainly been a major supplier of arms to the Middle East and Iraq. France is the only country to cut a deal on oil with Iraq, in breach of UN sanctions. That says a hell of a lot. When the conspiracy theorists argue that it is about oil, for France it is. For the United States, I believe it is about September 11. But for France, it is about oil.

The hypocrisy from France continues. It recently deployed thousands of troops to the Ivory Coast. There was no UN backing there, and their history of doing such things goes back to Rwanda. Who can forget the bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland Harbour and then the French putting the bombers up in a South Pacific resort until they liberated them as heroes? Then there is Mururoa—something very important to me—and the arrogance of the French continuing to nuke our area in the best interest of France. Quite frankly, when you start to compare America as the eagle, China as the tiger and Russia as the bear, in my view France is the vulture. It circles around and does nothing for itself. It waits for an opportunity to go and peck the benefits from other people's hard work. Quite frankly, I believe that this is what will happen in this particular case.

A policy of ongoing containment is certainly not going to work. It has been destructive over the last 12 years. We talk about the impact on Iraqi citizens. The *Washington Post* recently reported that, based on UNICEF estimates, the ongoing policy of appeasement with Iraq backed by the United Nations—the sanctions—kills about 5,000 Iraqi children per month. That is about 60,000 a year, and that is not counting the numbers who have their tongues cut out et cetera by Saddam, his sons and their henchmen. This is an ongoing thing that we are talking about here, and at some stage it has to stop. Sadly, if Saddam goes on his own he has two sons to fill his shoes, and they are equal to, if not worse than, Saddam. So I do not believe appeasement is in any way going to resolve the human rights issues in relation to Iraq. At the end of the day, we have to make a solid stand. The inaction of the United Nations certainly failed the people of Rwanda, as it did those in Croatia, Serbia and Somalia. East Timor is another example where they failed.

In 1991 they had the opportunity. You may remember General Schwarzkopf saying, 'Give me two more weeks. We're on the border of Kuwait. Two more weeks and we'll sort Saddam out once and for all.' It was the United Nations that said no, and it was Bush Sr who said, 'We'll abide by the United Nations.' So they stopped. Saddam promised the world; he gave nothing. It ended in 1991. It is now 2003, and we are still talking about it. Hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqis have died during that period of time. You cannot forget the slaughter of the Shiites, who expected the Americans to come in and liberate them, but the United Nations said, 'No, stop. Stop at Kuwait.' So it is no longer an option. Time has run out. The Iraqi people deserve an opportunity to live some sort of a life where at least they have some guarantee that they are not going to be executed by this tyrant.

In the bit of time that I have left I will say that, as the Prime Minister rightly said yesterday, this has been a difficult decision but it is a decision that has been made by government. As such, if there are people who disagree or are angry with the decision, they must focus their anger on the government, not on the troops who are serving over in these areas. They are there at the command of the government. They are doing a magnificent job. I know they will continue to do a magnificent job over there. Our thoughts and prayers must go with our serving members of the ADF and their families, and I certainly wish them a safe return to this country. (*Time expired*)