Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

"We will continue to fight against terrorism wherever it rears its head"

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My Lord Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are certain years that stand out because of the confluence of events of extraordinary significance that may change the course of history. By any standard, 2011 is already such a momentous year.

The eruption of democracy movements across the Middle East and North Africa is, even in its early stages, the most important development of the early 21st century, with potential long term consequences greater than either 9/11 or the global financial crisis in 2008.

The death of Osama Bin Laden this week was a devastating but not a terminal blow to Al Qaeda. We will continue to fight against terrorism wherever it rears its head with renewed determination, and in Afghanistan now is the time for the Taliban to make a decisive break from Al Qaeda and engage in a political process.

But in the long run it is the people of the Muslim world who will inflict the greatest defeat of all on Al Qaeda and its ideology. Some people wrongly thought that 9/11 was the expression of Muslim grievances; but it was not. The true expression of what the people of the Muslim world want was seen in Tahrir Square in 2011, not at Ground Zero in 2001.

There are already three lessons that we can learn from what has happened in the Middle East and North Africa.

The first is that the forces that led to the Arab Spring will sweep more widely across the globe. Demands for open government, action against corruption and greater political participation will spread by themselves over time - not because Western nations are advocating them, but because they are the natural aspirations of all people everywhere.

The second is that Governments that set their face against reform altogether - as Libya has done and Syria sadly is beginning to do - are doomed to failure. Simply refusing to address legitimate grievances or attempting to stamp them out will fail. The idea of freedom cannot be confined behind bars, however strong the lock.

The third is that these political changes will now reveal an immense economic task. While the people of Egypt and Tunisia made a monumental effort to bring change in their countries, the economic challenges they now face will be at least as great. There is a potentially explosive tension between people's expectations of immediate economic benefits from their revolutions and the need for these new governments to take difficult measures to open their economies and offer more opportunity to their citizens. We have to do our utmost to help the Arab world make a success of more open political systems and economies, and it is massively in our own interest to do so.

If the Arab Spring does lead to more open and democratic societies across the Arab world over a number of years, it will be the greatest advance for human rights and freedom since the end of the Cold War. If it does not lead to these things, we could see a collapse back into more authoritarian regimes, conflict and increased terrorism in North Africa on Europe's very doorstep.

That is why we are engaged in Libya with our allies, responding to the call of the Arab League for military action to prevent the loss of countless lives. We have gone to great lengths to ensure that we have a legal mandate from the UN Security Council and that militarily and politically we are working as one with Arab states to protect civilians and support a legitimate opposition. At the Contact Group meeting in Rome tomorrow we will further intensify the diplomatic, economic and military pressure on the Qadhafi regime. Today's report from the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court on the crimes committed by the Qadhafi regime should leave no one in any doubt of the importance of this work.

In Syria, we are mustering international diplomatic action to pressure President Assad to stop the killing and repression and to take the path of genuine reform. I have instructed our diplomats to begin discussions with our partners at the UN in New York to seek UN condemnation of the situation in Syria. And we are working this week on European sanctions on those responsible for the violence.

Across the region we urge Arab nations to address grievances through dialogue and democratic reform, not through violence. Long-term stability requires real steps towards representative institutions, political pluralism, a free media and economic fairness.

Each country is sovereign and we must always respect that. Each country has the right to develop in its own way and in accordance with its own culture and traditions. But we can also encourage positive change by being open ourselves to a dramatic new level of engagement with the countries of the Arab world. This would bring huge benefits for these countries and for our own security and prosperity.

Our government will use Britain's weight and influence in the European Union, the United Nations, the G8 and the International Financial Institutions to call for a transformative new

relationship with the countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

We have already begun this work ourselves through our new Arab Partnership Initiative on democratic and social reform, which we intend to expand. And when the G8 Summit countries meet in France this month we will call for a new plan to coordinate and expand international financial assistance to the region.

It is also crucial that the European Union's response matches the epochal nature of these events. I have never believed that the EU could or should act as if it were a nation state with a national foreign policy. Any attempt by EU institutions to do so would end in embarrassing failure. But I do believe that it is very much in the nations of Europe's interests to use their collective weight in the world to advance common goals and values and changes in the Arab World are exactly such an instance.

Europe's reaction to the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe was far-sighted and an astonishing success. In 1990 the EU and NATO allies offered "the hand of friendship" to the new democracies of central and eastern Europe. Twenty years later, countries that laboured under communism have become free, democratic states and members of the EU and of NATO.

Our challenge now is how we mirror that achievement to the south, helping to transform countries whose success is closely tied to European security and prosperity but whose future will not lie within the EU.

We believe it is time for our generation to offer its own hand of friendship to the people of the countries on the southern borders of Europe. We should show, in the words of our Prime Minister, that "we stand today with the people and governments who are on the side of justice, of the rule of law, and of freedom".

The EU already has the tools and the resources for the task. What it has lacked is the will to use them well. We should use the EU's economic magnetism to encourage and support real political and economic reform. That means a new partnership with the southern neighbourhood with a simple proposal at its heart: that the EU will share its prosperity and open up markets in return for real progress on political and economic reform.

The EU should offer broad and deep economic integration, leading to a free-trade area and eventually a customs union, progressively covering goods, agriculture and services, as well as the improvement of conditions for investment. All of this must should be accompanied by our partners achieving clear and sustainable reforms.

This level of ambition would be in accordance with our beliefs, in line with our national interest, and support international peace and security.

We call on governments of the region to join us in this approach. We do so as a country that has many long-term and historic friendships in the Middle East and North Africa. We value and are committed to our cooperation in security, defence, diplomacy and trade. We are working alongside Arab nations to counter terrorism, to support the people of Libya, to resolve political deadlock in Yemen and to bring stability in Afghanistan, and there is potential for even greater cooperation in the years ahead.

But to those who think there is another road - one of repression, tightening security, and a hardening grip on citizens - we offer a word of caution.

No government on earth can resist demands for democratic change forever, if their people want it and demand it. Nowhere in the world has the attempt to preserve dictatorship without consent succeeded; not in Europe, not in Africa, Latin America or Asia. As President Reagan said in 1982 of the Soviet Union “any system is inherently unstable that has no peaceful means to legitimise its rulers”. There is no single model for democracy, but in our view there is no greater legitimacy that any government can acquire than through free elections that consult the will of all its people.

Reform is not a threat to stability, it is the guarantor of it over the long term.

It is not credible or acceptable to repress now and suggest that reform will follow later, or to use public order as an excuse to oppress critics.

Nor will it be sustainable over the long term to promise economic reform without steady political development.

Governments that curb human rights and roll back reform are stoking up anger and frustration that will spill over in the future.

Those like the Government of Iran, who show the breathtaking hypocrisy of claiming to support peaceful protest abroad, but brutally suppress it at home, will find that their people see through this position.

We are not starry-eyed about this. There are risks ahead. All change brings the risk of instability and there are some who will seek any opportunity to create chaos. But legitimate grievances have to be addressed.

This includes in our view an urgent need to revive the Middle East Peace Process, which must not be allowed to become a casualty of uncertainty in the region. We see a compelling need for urgent process on a two state solution between Israelis and Palestinians. Essential compromises that are difficult and painful now may become impossible in the future unless the moment is seized, and we call on both sides to re-enter negotiations. Britain hopes that the announcement of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas will lead to the formation of a

government that rejects violence and pursues a negotiated peace leading to a Palestinian state living in peace and security alongside a secure Israel. We will judge a future Palestinian administration by its actions and its readiness to work for peace.

The changes taking place in the Middle East and North Africa reflect global trends that are shaping the world around the United Kingdom. We need to adapt our foreign policy to the networked world of the 21st century in which economic might and influence is moving away from the handful of states that were dominant after the Cold War to a range of nations large and small; and in which no one nation can solve any global problem alone, from climate change to nuclear proliferation - with what the Deputy Prime Minister has called “the globalisation of many of our problems”.

This requires us to connect Britain up to the fastest growing parts of the world economy in commerce, soft power and in diplomacy.

Alongside our indispensable relationship with the United States and our role in Europe, we now have to work more closely with countries like Brazil, which now has more diplomats in more countries in Africa than we do, and Turkey, which is Europe’s fastest growing economy and is a crucial partner for us in the Balkans, the Middle East and further afield.

This requires a greater emphasis on bilateral and commercial diplomacy alongside our vital role in multilateral organisations.

Those who say that foreign policy should not have a strong commercial element overlook two essential points.

The first is that diplomatic alliances and political influence can often be built on strong commercial relations.

The second is that since government spending cannot be the engine of growth in EU economies, the expansion of trade is an absolute prerequisite for our success and influence, and an absolute need for the whole world.

The livelihoods of people up and down the country depend on a British economy that is strong and growing. It is the lifeblood of our health service, our schools, our roads, our Armed Forces and our ability to give generously to the development of other nations. Our economy will not be strong without - among other things - taking the best of British goods and services into markets overseas and attracting other nations to invest in Britain.

So we will make no apology for insisting that the whole of Government does its part to support British people and British livelihoods, that our Ministers champion Britain as a centre for trade and investment, and that alongside all that they do to cure the ills of the world our Embassies fight for the British economy too.

As emerging economies look in different directions across new networks of commerce and diplomacy, no country can trade on its past unless it has something to offer in the present, as Britain does in abundance.

We have our own ready-made networks that enable us to plug into the most vibrant markets around the world and to form new partnerships in diplomacy. History has given us membership of the Commonwealth - an association of two billion citizens spanning six continents and some of the world's fastest growing economies. There is huge strategic opportunity open to Britain if we are able to make more of our historic ties in the Commonwealth and other parts of the world, and if we are forge new diplomatic partnerships.

So over the last year we have placed a renewed emphasis on bilateral relations, alongside Britain's role in multilateral institutions. We have increased the number of Ministers in the Foreign Office. I have visited a string of countries where no British Foreign Secretary has set foot in many years, not only in trouble spots such as Yemen and potential new friends such as Tunisia, but also neglected old friends such as Australia and New Zealand.

And next week I will set out in Parliament our plans to strengthen Britain's global diplomatic network, including the opening of some new Embassies and the building up of our diplomatic presence in the emerging economies. We will arrest and in some places reverse the steady shrinking of Britain's diplomatic footprint overseas under the last government.

So the foreign policy of this coalition government has as its starting point the needs and interests of British people. It looks fearlessly at the world as it is now, but also as it is likely to be in decades to come. It rejects any notion of the strategic shrinkage of Britain's role in the world, and instead is bent on diplomatic advance. It asks what we must do as a government and a nation to ensure that our people have prosperity and security, in the broadest sense, long into the future. And it is designed to create, over the coming years, the strongest possible basis for a Britain that is a confident, outward-looking and responsible global power for many years to come. It is the distinctive British foreign policy that we promised on our first day in office and which we will take forward with even greater vigour and intensity in the coming years.

In 1805 my political hero William Pitt addressed the Lord Mayor's Banquet, two days after news had reached London of Nelson's victory over the combined French and Spanish fleets at Trafalgar, saving the country from invasion. His speech was only forty words long, but I think it was one of the finest ever given. In response to being toasted as the saviour of Europe he said to the assembled guests: "I return you many thanks for the honour you have done me; but Europe is not to be saved by any single man. England has saved herself by her exertions, and will, as I trust, save Europe by her example."

And now 206 years later and looking to the future, I am confident that the British people can shape a prosperous future through their exertions, and that the power of our example in international affairs and our influence in the world will continue undiminished in the years ahead.

Will you join me in a final toast, “To the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress”

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/we-will-continue-to-fight-against-terrorism-wherever-it-rears-its-head