



# The UNITED KINGDOM PARLIAMENT

[Previous Section](#)[Index](#)[Home Page](#)

---

17 Mar 2003 : Column 725—continued

**17 Mar 2003 : Column 726**

## Personal Statement

**9.44 pm**

**Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston):** This is the first time for 20 years that I have addressed the House from the Back Benches. I must confess that I had forgotten how much better the view is from here. None of those 20 years were more enjoyable or more rewarding than the past two, in which I have had the immense privilege of serving this House as Leader of the House, which were made all the more enjoyable, Mr. Speaker, by the opportunity of working closely with you.

It was frequently the necessity for me as Leader of the House to talk my way out of accusations that a statement had been preceded by a press interview. On this occasion I can say with complete confidence that no press interview has been given before this statement. I have chosen to address the House first on why I cannot support a war without international agreement or domestic support.

The present Prime Minister is the most successful leader of the Labour party in my lifetime. I hope that he will continue to be the leader of our party, and I hope that he will continue to be successful. I have no sympathy with, and I will give no comfort to, those who want to use this crisis to displace him.

I applaud the heroic efforts that the Prime Minister has made in trying to secure a second resolution. I do not think that anybody could have done better than the Foreign Secretary in working to get support for a second resolution within the Security Council. But the very intensity of those attempts underlines how important it was to succeed. Now that those attempts have failed, we cannot pretend that getting a second resolution was of no importance.

France has been at the receiving end of bucketloads of commentary in recent days. It is not France alone that wants more time for inspections. Germany wants more time for inspections; Russia wants more time for inspections; indeed, at no time have we signed up even the minimum necessary to carry a second resolution. We delude ourselves if we think that the degree of international hostility is all the result of President Chirac. The reality is that Britain is being asked to embark on a war without agreement in any of the international bodies of which we are a leading partner—not NATO, not the European Union and, now, not the Security Council.

To end up in such diplomatic weakness is a serious reverse. Only a year ago, we and the United States were part of a coalition against terrorism that was wider and more diverse than I would ever have imagined possible. History will be astonished at the diplomatic miscalculations that led so quickly to the disintegration of that powerful coalition. The US can afford to go it alone, but Britain is not a superpower. Our interests are best protected not by unilateral action but by multilateral agreement and a world order governed by rules. Yet tonight the international partnerships most important to us are weakened: the European Union is divided; the Security Council is in stalemate. Those are heavy casualties of a war in which a shot has yet to be fired.

I have heard some parallels between military action in these circumstances and the military action that we took in Kosovo. There was no doubt about the multilateral

**17 Mar 2003 : Column 727**

support that we had for the action that we took in Kosovo. It was supported by NATO; it was supported by the European Union; it was supported by every single one of the seven neighbours in the region. France and Germany were our active allies. It is precisely because we have none of that support in this case that it was all the more important to get

agreement in the Security Council as the last hope of demonstrating international agreement.

The legal basis for our action in Kosovo was the need to respond to an urgent and compelling humanitarian crisis. Our difficulty in getting support this time is that neither the international community nor the British public is persuaded that there is an urgent and compelling reason for this military action in Iraq.

The threshold for war should always be high. None of us can predict the death toll of civilians from the forthcoming bombardment of Iraq, but the US warning of a bombing campaign that will "shock and awe" makes it likely that casualties will be numbered at least in the thousands. I am confident that British servicemen and women will acquit themselves with professionalism and with courage. I hope that they all come back. I hope that Saddam, even now, will quit Baghdad and avert war, but it is false to argue that only those who support war support our troops. It is entirely legitimate to support our troops while seeking an alternative to the conflict that will put those troops at risk.

Nor is it fair to accuse those of us who want longer for inspections of not having an alternative strategy. For four years as Foreign Secretary I was partly responsible for the western strategy of containment. Over the past decade that strategy destroyed more weapons than in the Gulf war, dismantled Iraq's nuclear weapons programme and halted Saddam's medium and long-range missiles programmes. Iraq's military strength is now less than half its size than at the time of the last Gulf war.

Ironically, it is only because Iraq's military forces are so weak that we can even contemplate its invasion. Some advocates of conflict claim that Saddam's forces are so weak, so demoralised and so badly equipped that the war will be over in a few days. We cannot base our military strategy on the assumption that Saddam is weak and at the same time justify pre-emptive action on the claim that he is a threat.

Iraq probably has no weapons of mass destruction in the commonly understood sense of the term—namely a credible device capable of being delivered against a strategic city target. It probably still has biological toxins and battlefield chemical munitions, but it has had them since the 1980s when US companies sold Saddam anthrax agents and the then British Government approved chemical and munitions factories. Why is it now so urgent that we should take military action to disarm a military capacity that has been there for 20

#### **17 Mar 2003 : Column 728**

years, and which we helped to create? Why is it necessary to resort to war this week, while Saddam's ambition to complete his weapons programme is blocked by the presence of UN inspectors?

Only a couple of weeks ago, Hans Blix told the Security Council that the key remaining disarmament tasks could be completed within months. I have heard it said that Iraq has had not months but 12 years in which to complete disarmament, and that our patience is exhausted. Yet it is more than 30 years since resolution 242 called on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. We do not express the same impatience with the persistent refusal of Israel to comply. I welcome the strong personal commitment that the Prime Minister has given to middle east peace, but Britain's positive role in the middle east does not redress the strong sense of injustice throughout the Muslim world at what it sees as one rule for the allies of the US and another rule for the rest.

Nor is our credibility helped by the appearance that our partners in Washington are less interested in disarmament than they are in regime change in Iraq. That explains why any evidence that inspections may be showing progress is greeted in Washington not with satisfaction but with consternation: it reduces the case for war.

What has come to trouble me most over past weeks is the suspicion that if the hanging chads in Florida had gone the other way and Al Gore had been elected, we would not now be about to commit British troops.

The longer that I have served in this place, the greater the respect I have for the good sense and collective wisdom of the British people. On Iraq, I believe that the prevailing mood of the British people is sound. They do not doubt that Saddam is a brutal dictator, but they are not persuaded that he is a clear and present danger to Britain. They want inspections to be given a chance, and they suspect that they are being pushed too quickly into conflict by a US Administration with an agenda of its own. Above all, they are uneasy at Britain going out on a limb on a military adventure without a broader international coalition and against the hostility of many of our traditional allies.

From the start of the present crisis, I have insisted, as Leader of the House, on the right of this place to

vote on whether Britain should go to war. It has been a favourite theme of commentators that this House no longer occupies a central role in British politics. Nothing could better demonstrate that they are wrong than for this House to stop the commitment of troops in a war that has neither international agreement nor domestic support. I intend to join those tomorrow night who will vote against military action now. It is for that reason, and for that reason alone, and with a heavy heart, that I resign from the Government.  
[Applause.]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I have motions to put before the House.

**17 Mar 2003 : Column 727**

**17 Mar 2003 : Column 729**

## DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation)*

## Immigration

That the draft Asylum (Designated States) Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 11th February, be approved.—[*Mr. Jim Murphy.*]

*The House divided:* Ayes 328, Noes 43.

**Division No. 116**

[9:56 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane  
Adams, Irene (*Paisley N*)  
Ainger, Nick  
Ainsworth, Bob (*Cov'try NE*)  
Alexander, Douglas  
Allen, Graham  
Anderson, rh Donald (*Swansea E*)  
Anderson, Janet (*Rosendale & Darwen*)  
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary  
Atherton, Ms Candy  
Atkins, Charlotte  
Austin, John  
Baird, Vera  
Banks, Tony  
Barron, rh Kevin  
Battle, John  
Bayley, Hugh  
Beard, Nigel  
Begg, Miss Anne  
Benn, Hilary  
Benton, Joe (*Bootle*)  
Berry, Roger  
Best, Harold  
Betts, Clive  
Blackman, Liz  
Blears, Ms Hazel  
Boateng, rh Paul  
Borrow, David  
Bradley, rh Keith (*Withington*)  
Bradshaw, Ben

Brennan, Kevin  
Brown, rh Nicholas (*Newcastle E Wallsend*)  
Brown, Russell (*Dumfries*)  
Browne, Desmond  
Bryant, Chris  
Buck, Ms Karen  
Burden, Richard  
Burnham, Andy  
Byers, rh Stephen  
Caborn, rh Richard  
Cairns, David  
Campbell, Alan (*Tynemouth*)  
Campbell, Mrs Anne (*C'bridge*)  
Campbell, Gregory (*E Lond'y*)  
Campbell, Ronnie (*Blyth V*)  
Caplin, Ivor  
Casale, Roger  
Caton, Martin  
Cawsey, Ian (*Brigg*)  
Challen, Colin  
Chapman, Ben (*Wirral S*)  
Chaytor, David  
Clapham, Michael  
Clark, Dr. Lynda (*Edinburgh Pentlands*)  
Clark, Paul (*Gillingham*)  
Clarke, rh Charles (*Norwich S*)  
Clwyd, Ann (*Cynon V*)  
Coaker, Vernon  
Coffey, Ms Ann  
Cohen, Harry  
Colman, Tony  
Connarty, Michael  
Cook, Frank (*Stockton N*)  
Cook, rh Robin (*Livingston*)  
Cooper, Yvette  
Corston, Jean  
Cousins, Jim  
Crausby, David  
Cruddas, Jon  
Cryer, John (*Hornchurch*)  
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack (*Copeland*)  
Cunningham, Jim (*Coventry S*)  
Cunningham, Tony (*Workington*)  
Darling, rh Alistair  
Davey, Valerie (*Bristol W*)  
David, Wayne  
Davidson, Ian  
Davies, rh Denzil (*Llanelli*)  
Davies, Geraint (*Croydon C*)  
Davis, rh Terry (*B'ham Hodge H*)  
Dawson, Hilton  
Dean, Mrs Janet  
Denham, rh John  
Dhanda, Parmjit  
Dismore, Andrew  
Dobbin, Jim (*Heywood*)  
Dobson, rh Frank  
Dodds, Nigel  
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.  
Donohoe, Brian H.  
Doran, Frank  
Dowd, Jim (*Lewisham W*)  
Drew, David (*Stroud*)  
Drown, Ms Julia

Eagle, Angela (*Wallasey*)  
Eagle, Maria (*L'pool Garston*)  
Edwards, Huw  
Efford, Clive  
Ellman, Mrs Louise  
Ennis, Jeff (*Barnsley E*)  
Farrelly, Paul  
Field, rh Frank (*Birkenhead*)  
Fisher, Mark  
Fitzpatrick, Jim  
Flint, Caroline  
Follett, Barbara  
Foster, rh Derek  
Foster, Michael (*Worcester*)  
Foster, Michael Jabez (*Hastings & Rye*)  
Foulkes, rh George  
Francis, Dr. Hywel  
Gapes, Mike (*Ilford S*)  
Gardiner, Barry  
Gerrard, Neil  
Gibson, Dr. Ian  
Gilroy, Linda  
Goggins, Paul  
Griffiths, Jane (*Reading E*)  
Griffiths, Nigel (*Edinburgh S*)  
Griffiths, Win (*Bridgend*)  
Grogan, John  
Hall, Mike (*Weaver Vale*)  
Hall, Patrick (*Bedford*)  
Hamilton, Fabian (*Leeds NE*)  
Hanson, David  
Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
Harris, Tom (*Glasgow Cathcart*)  
Havard, Dai (*Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney*)  
Healey, John  
Henderson, Ivan (*Harwich*)  
Hendrick, Mark  
Heppell, John  
Hesford, Stephen  
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia  
Heyes, David  
Hill, Keith (*Streatham*)  
Hinchliffe, David  
Hodge, Margaret  
Hoey, Kate (*Vauxhall*)  
Hood, Jimmy (*Clydesdale*)  
Hoon, rh Geoffrey  
Hope, Phil (*Corby*)  
Hopkins, Kelvin  
Howarth, rh Alan (*Newport E*)  
Howarth, George (*Knowsley N & Sefton E*)  
Howells, Dr. Kim  
Hughes, Beverley (*Stretford & Urmston*)  
Hughes, Kevin (*Doncaster N*)  
Humble, Mrs Joan  
Hurst, Alan (*Braintree*)  
Hutton, rh John  
Iddon, Dr. Brian  
Illsley, Eric  
Ingram, rh Adam  
Jackson, Glenda (*Hampstead & Highgate*)  
Jackson, Helen (*Hillsborough*)  
Jamieson, David  
Johnson, Alan (*Hull W*)

Jones, Helen (*Warrington N*)  
Jones, Jon Owen (*Cardiff C*)  
Jones, Kevan (*N Durham*)  
Jones, Lynne (*Selly Oak*)  
Joyce, Eric (*Falkirk W*)  
Kaufman, rh Gerald  
Keeble, Ms Sally  
Keen, Alan (*Feltham*)  
Keen, Ann (*Brentford*)  
Kemp, Fraser  
Kennedy, Jane (*Wavertree*)  
Khabra, Piara S.  
Kidney, David  
King, Ms Oona (*Bethnal Green & Bow*)  
Knight, Jim (*S Dorset*)  
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen  
Lammy, David  
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie  
Laxton, Bob (*Derby N*)  
Lazarowicz, Mark  
Lepper, David  
Leslie, Christopher  
Levitt, Tom (*High Peak*)  
Lewis, Ivan (*Bury S*)  
Lewis, Terry (*Worsley*)  
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen  
Linton, Martin  
Lloyd, Tony (*Manchester C*)  
Love, Andrew  
Lucas, Ian (*Wrexham*)  
Lyons, John (*Strathkelvin*)  
McAvoy, Thomas  
McCabe, Stephen  
McCafferty, Chris  
McCartney, rh Ian  
McDonagh, Siobhain  
MacDonald, Calum  
McIsaac, Shona  
McKechin, Ann  
McKenna, Rosemary  
Mackinlay, Andrew  
McNulty, Tony  
McWalter, Tony  
McWilliam, John  
Mahmood, Khalid  
Mahon, Mrs Alice  
Mallaber, Judy  
Mann, John (*Bassetlaw*)  
Marris, Rob (*Wolverh'ton SW*)  
Marshall, Jim (*Leicester S*)  
Marshall-Andrews, Robert  
Martlew, Eric  
Meacher, rh Michael  
Merron, Gillian  
Michael, rh Alun  
Milburn, rh Alan  
Miliband, David  
Miller, Andrew  
Mitchell, Austin (*Gt Grimsby*)  
Moffatt, Laura  
Mole, Chris  
Moonie, Dr. Lewis  
Moran, Margaret  
Morley, Elliot

Mountford, Kali  
Mudie, George  
Mullin, Chris  
Munn, Ms Meg  
Murphy, Denis (*Wansbeck*)  
Naysmith, Dr. Doug  
Norris, Dan (*Wansdyke*)  
O'Brien, Bill (*Normanton*)  
O'Brien, Mike (*N Warks*)  
Olnier, Bill  
Organ, Diana  
Owen, Albert  
Paisley, Rev. Ian  
Palmer, Dr. Nick  
Perham, Linda  
Picking, Anne  
Pickthall, Colin  
Pike, Peter (*Burnley*)  
Plaskitt, James  
Pond, Chris (*Gravesham*)  
Prentice, Ms Bridget (*Lewisham E*)  
Primarolo, rh Dawn  
Prosser, Gwyn  
Purchase, Ken  
Purnell, James  
Quin, rh Joyce  
Quinn, Lawrie  
Raynsford, rh Nick  
Reed, Andy (*Loughborough*)  
Reid, rh Dr. John (*Hamilton N & Bellshill*)  
Robertson, John (*Glasgow Anniesland*)  
Robinson, Geoffrey (*Coventry NW*)  
Robinson, Mrs Iris (*Strangford*)  
Robinson, Peter (*Belfast E*)  
Roche, Mrs Barbara  
Ross, Ernie (*Dundee W*)  
Roy, Frank (*Motherwell*)  
Ruane, Chris  
Ruddock, Joan  
Ryan, Joan (*Enfield N*)  
Salter, Martin  
Savidge, Malcolm  
Sawford, Phil  
Sedgemore, Brian  
Shaw, Jonathan  
Sheerman, Barry  
Sheridan, Jim  
Shipley, Ms Debra  
Simpson, Alan (*Nottingham S*)  
Singh, Marsha  
Smith, rh Andrew (*Oxford E*)  
Smith, rh Chris (*Islington S & Finsbury*)  
Smith, Geraldine (*Morecambe & Lunesdale*)  
Smith, Jacqui (*Redditch*)  
Smith, Llew (*Blaenau Gwent*)  
Smyth, Rev. Martin (*Belfast S*)  
Soley, Clive  
Southworth, Helen  
Spellar, rh John  
Spink, Bob (*Castle Point*)  
Squire, Rachel  
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis  
Steinberg, Gerry  
Stevenson, George

Stewart, David (*Inverness E & Lochaber*)  
Stinchcombe, Paul  
Stoate, Dr. Howard  
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin  
Straw, rh Jack  
Tami, Mark (*Alyn*)  
Taylor, rh Ann (*Dewsbury*)  
Taylor, Dari (*Stockton S*)  
Taylor, David (*NW Leics*)  
Thomas, Gareth (*Clwyd W*)  
Thomas, Gareth (*Harrow W*)  
Timms, Stephen  
Tipping, Paddy  
Todd, Mark (*S Derbyshire*)  
Trickett, Jon  
Turner, Dennis (*Wolverh'ton SE*)  
Turner, Dr. Desmond (*Brighton Kemptown*)  
Turner, Neil (*Wigan*)  
Twigg, Derek (*Halton*)  
Twigg, Stephen (*Enfield*)  
Tynan, Bill (*Hamilton S*)  
Vaz, Keith (*Leicester E*)  
Walley, Ms Joan  
Ward, Claire  
Wareing, Robert N.  
Watson, Tom (*W Bromwich E*)  
Watts, David  
White, Brian  
Whitehead, Dr. Alan  
Wicks, Malcolm  
Williams, Betty (*Conwy*)  
Wills, Michael  
Wilson, Brian  
Winnick, David  
Winterton, Ms Rosie (*Doncaster C*)  
Wood, Mike (*Batley*)  
Woodward, Shaun  
Woolas, Phil  
Worthington, Tony  
Wright, Anthony D. (*Gt Yarmouth*)  
Wright, David (*Telford*)  
Wright, Tony (*Cannock*)

Tellers for the Ayes:

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe and  
Mr. Jim Murphy

NOES

Allan, Richard  
Barrett, John  
Breed, Colin  
Burnett, John  
Calton, Mrs Patsy  
Carmichael, Alistair  
Chidgey, David  
Corbyn, Jeremy  
Cotter, Brian  
Doughty, Sue  
Ewing, Annabelle  
Foster, Don (*Bath*)



George, Andrew (*St. Ives*)  
Gidley, Sandra  
Harris, Dr. Evan (*Oxford W & Abingdon*)  
Harvey, Nick  
Heath, David  
Hermon, Lady  
Holmes, Paul  
Hughes, Simon (*Southwark N*)  
Keetch, Paul  
Kennedy, rh Charles (*Ross Skye & Inverness*)  
Lamb, Norman  
Laws, David (*Yeovil*)  
Llwyd, Elfyn  
McDonnell, John  
Moore, Michael  
Oaten, Mark (*Winchester*)  
Öpik, Lembit  
Price, Adam (*E Carmarthen & Dinefwr*)  
Robertson, Angus (*Moray*)  
Salmond, Alex  
Sanders, Adrian  
Taylor, Matthew (*Truro*)  
Thomas, Simon (*Ceredigion*)  
Thurso, John  
Tonge, Dr. Jenny  
Webb, Steve (*Northavon*)  
Weir, Michael  
Williams, Hywel (*Caernarfon*)  
Williams, Roger (*Brecon*)  
Willis, Phil  
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Noes:

Mr. Andrew Stunell and  
Bob Russell

Question accordingly agreed to.

**17 Mar 2003 : Column 731**

**17 Mar 2003 : Column 732**

---

[Next Section](#)

[Index](#)

[Home Page](#)