THE PLANNING LESSONS LEARNED

1. The Arab Spring uprisings provide further instruction in the difficulties of nation-building and of growing democracy in this region. It is now apparent that in any of the nations there is a huge challenge in nation-building that is not simply about the way the country has been governed. Where military action is to remove the regime of a corrupted and brutal state, assume the worst about its capacity, its governing infrastructure and the integrity of its Government systems. There will be nation building and governance capacity required to be established over a significant time period. The Stabilisation Unit established in 2004 will assist in this process but this is simply within the UK. Such capability also has to be built at multilateral level e.g. In the UN and EU; and with the US, our likely partner in any such effort.

2. The examples of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and other nations where regime change is in prospect, show that the challenge confronting any nation when a powerful, all encompassing grip is taken away, is formidable. There are powerful, interacting religious and tribal elements and influences. These are hard to manage. Everything we take for granted in our countries in Government, public services, institutions and even private sector has to be built or at a minimum, substantially reformed. We simply do not have the international capacity to do this. It needs to be grown. In this case, though the planning questions and criticisms in respect of Iraq may remain, the truth is the scale of the task that needs to be undertaken is far greater than existing capability allows. So such a capability needs urgently to be grown at a multilateral level.

3. The planning for any aftermath should go deep into an analysis not only of Government and governing structures and the readily available information and data, but into the underlying nature of the society, the impact particularly of the regime's brutality and corruption on the social and business capital of the country and any cross currents to do with religious, tribal or other affiliation, as they have been affected by the regime. There are issues to do with the planning process arising out of Iraq. Just as important, in

my view, is not simply the process itself, but the focus of the planning. It's that which we would do differently today.

4. The number and nature of forces required for the aftermath of regime change may be radically different from those required for the removal of the regime, in scale, in type of training, in force posture and deployment. These really are genuinely separate missions and should be treated as such, though in this instance this applies more to the US than to the UK. The counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency methods learnt from experience in Ireland and Afghanistan are plainly relevant here.

5. The creation of indigenous civil policing capacity that is different from the apparatus used for oppression by the regime removed, is in itself a defined workstream requiring special skills, analysis and processes of implementation. With hindsight, it would have been better to have taken civil policing more slowly; but above all, there were weaknesses about our own capability to build that capacity that should be addressed. Again there will be a multi-national dimension to this, especially within the EU.

6. The hardest practical part of the job of Prime Minister is to get the best information at the time you need it. The nature of the job, its all encompassing impact across a range of tasks and the inevitable isolation from the ground reality that it brings, puts a premium on the transmission system for real time information. I was fortunate in having a superb team around me in No 10, and had, through changes, boosted significantly the foreign policy capacity inside No 10. Sir David Manning, and then during the aftermath Sir Nigel Sheinwald provided great and unstinting support to me throughout. However, I think there is a case, in a situation where we have engaged our forces and are then nation-building, for having, within No 10/Cabinet Office, a dedicated team, headed by a senior person on a par with the key foreign policy advisers whose sole task it is to oversee that effort and ensure the Prime Minster has a transmission system for information that is focussed solely on that issue. I know some will say: put a Minister in charge or this is for Departments to do. In my judgement, a Minister without a major Department behind him/her, risks being lost; and the Departments alone and in

isolation won't solve the problem. At this level, and on an issue of this importance, my experience is only the Prime Minister can get the necessary breakthrough and traction, across the system for effective action. I therefore think there is a case for a senior person – they could be from the Civil Service or even the Military – who is full-time on the case right at the centre of decision-making, with direct, daily access to the Prime Minister. In this way, there is at least a better chance of information from the ground level making it to the top.

7. I believe the same is true for the international effort in re-construction. Countries wrecked by long-time policies of repression, economic deprivation and corruption, take an immense amount of re-building and re-construction. Above all, they lack basic capacity and systems with transparency, integrity and efficacy. The leaders in office managing this from afar cannot be expected to have either the time or the on-the-ground knowledge to make this happen. It is worth putting a figure of real stature and executive capacity in charge to do it. It has, of course, to be done in partnership with the new leaders of the nation concerned. But given the money and sacrifice we are expending to help these nations get the change they want, we are surely within our rights to demand that, in return, there is a partnership that is effective. For that, only the best and most senior type of figure with independent political clout will do.

THE POLITICAL

1. I repeat my strong belief that the crucial factor that brought us close to strategic failure in Iraq (though ultimately we should remember we did not lose) was the external elements – AQ and Iran – linking up with the internal insurgency. What started, therefore, as a campaign to defeat Saddam, evolved into a campaign against terrorism. This terrorism has the precise hallmarks and origins of the broader fight going on in the region and beyond. I mean the Islamist extremism, based on a distortion and perversion of the true faith of Islam. Whatever plans, processes and structures we put in place, where this extremism is an issue, where we are going to get drawn into this much bigger struggle, it is going to be hard, unremitting, relentless and a huge test of our stamina, determination and will. Suicide bombing – aimed at randomly chosen groups of innocents – will de-stabilise. It will, if done with cynical sectarian intent, cause division. The current regime in Iran will seek to promote chaos and bloodshed. Look round the Middle East and beyond, such a struggle is being waged. What these two sources of extremism will do is to insert themselves into any situation in which progress towards open-minded societies and democratic structures is being made; and try to disrupt it. We see this not just in Iraq, Afghanistan or Pakistan, where last year, despite a well functioning Government, more died in terror attacks than in Iraq; but we see it also in Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen, Somalia and many other places. As I say, fortunately the right counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency strategy does seem to be being shaped out of our experience in Iraq and in Afghanistan. But even with it, the battle will be long and bloody and will need constant explanation to a public back home that will be easily demoralised by the protracted nature of the effort. The extremists, whether linked to AQ or helped by the Iranian regime, believe very simply that they can outlast us, that their will is greater than ours. We have to prove them wrong.

2. As an afterthought, given recent events in the Middle East, I would add the following. As someone who has visited almost 70 times in four years and who is now in the region often twice a month, I would say that it is now clear that this is a region in a

deep and long-lasting transition. There are three elements in play. One are regimes that have varying degrees of support and legitimacy but all of whom are under pressure from a combination of political, economic and social causes. The second are modernising and democratic elements who would be similar in outlook to Western type younger, aspirational middle class and working people. They are alienated by lack of opportunity and the indignity as well as the injustice of a lack of political freedom. The third is a broad-based Islamist movement, which has its reactionary and reformist wings, but which wishes to pursue its own path to the future, in which democracy plays a part but one based on Islamism. Corruption is a major issue for both the second and third elements.

Some regimes have kept power by reference to a narrative and ideology heavily influenced by Islamism. Others have strong Western ties at an elite level but, underneath, their societies have been largely unreformed. In particular, failure to modernise socially, linked with lack of economic opportunity and corruption, is creating a toxic political pressure. But the change people want is often not correlated to the policy they advocate, as with economic policies that are often about more state subsidy and control over the economy rather than less.

The factor of religion is constantly under-estimated and under-stated. At a profound level, it shapes and informs attitudes and adds a quite unique dimension to an understanding of the region. There is a struggle of a fundamental nature going on within Islam, essentially about reformation. It is hard, if not impossible, for outsiders to determine its outcome; but we are inevitably affected by it.

What this means – I think, but say with humility given the uncertainty and unpredictability of what is now happening is as follows:

a) We are going continually to face the choice of intervention or not in the region's affairs, wanting to stay out because of all the difficulties, dragged in by a mixture of interests and values.

b) No intervention will be anything other than dangerous and messy, because of the interplay of political and social elements and economic distress.

c) Though there will be immense pressure for regime change (and in certain cases for Western help to change regime), what comes after will not necessarily be agreed upon.

d) There is urgent need for the capability (see elsewhere in this paper) to help build the proper social, economic and political institutions; without them, countries risk stalling and disillusion.

e) In this way, Iraq (and to an extent Afghanistan) becomes a lesson in the challenges facing the whole region.

f) Engaging with the religious and cultural issues is not eccentric or peripheral but of the essence.

The good news, finally, however, is that yes, the people do want real democracy and freedom. They just need help to get it, in the knowledge that it does not necessarily follow the removal of an unpopular regime.

3. For Britain, it has to take an honest and considered view of its relationship with the US. It has to make a frank assessment of the pain/gain ratio. There is no point in urging counsels of perfection – in terms of military hardware and numbers, in terms of financing available, it is an unequal partnership. The US is likely to be in the lead. If Europe decided to revolutionise its joint capability and built proper military capacity for modern campaigns, it might be different. But it has not done so yet. So, in Iraq, the UK was a coveted ally; its military contribution greatly valued, respected and needed; but 95% of the assets were American, as they were in Kosovo. For my part I believed as Prime Minister and believe still that our relationship with the US is an essential part of our own security; that we share values and a commitment to a particular way of life; and that however challenging it was, it would have been wrong and contrary to our interests to have been anything other than shoulder to shoulder with the US in the years following 9/11. But we need to be very clear: the test of

such a relationship is not found, its endurance not strained, the tensile strength of its bonds are not forged, in the times of comfort, but the times of challenge. Are we willing to be that type of ally? Are we able to take the pain that comes with it? I think we should be willing and able; I think it is an invaluable part of our influence and power in the world, despite the disparity in size and resources. But we need to decide it honestly and not fool ourselves that the gain comes pain-free.

Sent to the Iraq Inquiry on 22 July 2011