



News from Westminster

16th November 2007 Phil Hope MP

Hard headed internationalism and better security at home

PM outlines foreign policy and security priorities



"I believe that our ties with America - founded on values we share - constitute our most important bilateral relationship. And it is good for Britain, for Europe and for the wider world that today France and Germany and the European Union are building stronger relationships with America."

Gordon Brown, speech to Lord Mayor's Banquet, 12 November 2007

This week saw Gordon Brown outline foreign and security policy in two major speeches.

The Prime Minister gave a speech at the Lord Mayor's Banquet in London about Britain's place in the world on Monday and then made a statement on security to Parliament.

The PM took the opportunity of his appearance at the traditional annual event to stress the importance of the UK's relationship with the US. He also spoke about non-proliferation, building stronger international relationships and other major issues facing the world.

The PM said there was a great opportunity to

build a stronger relationship between the US and the EU.

On Iran, the Prime Minister said that the country could enjoy a "transformed relationship" with the world if it abided by its Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations and accepted international assistance with its civil nuclear programme. Iran's nuclear ambitions were "the greatest challenge to non-proliferation" in the world today, he said.

The Prime Minister added that stronger international relationships should be used to help build stronger international institutions to deal more effectively with global issues such as climate change and state failure. He also set out his views on Darfur and the struggles of the pro-democracy movement in Burma.

And after Prime Ministers Questions on Wednesday I listened to Gordon tell Parliament details of new security measures.

Gordon said that our Labour Government would focus on how to "root out terrorism" and how to "strengthen communities" to prevent extremism growing within society.

A National Security Strategy will be published in the next few weeks and a Counter Terrorism Bill, which was announced in last week's Queen Speech. (*Continued on page 2*)

"There is no greater priority than the safety and security of our people and building the strongest possible relationships across all faiths and communities - and I believe it possible to build a stronger consensus that will both root out terrorist extremism and build more vibrant and cohesive communities."

Gordon Brown, Commons statement on security, 14 November 2007

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The PM also listed a number of measures to be taken to improve security in public places in light of Lord West's report on security to ministers. These include the construction of "robust barriers" and parking exclusion zones as well as upgrading the blast resistance of buildings such as train station, airports, hospitals and sports venues.

Plans also exist to provide detailed guidance to businesses, such as theatres and restaurants, and training for civilian staff from a team of 160 counter-terrorism officers. The security budget will increase from £2.5 billion to £3.5 billion by 2011, the Prime Minister said.

The Prime Minister also signalled a relaxation of baggage restrictions at airports to be announced by Transport Secretary Ruth Kelly.

In his statement, the Prime Minister stressed the importance of engaging with communities and vulnerable young people to counter "extremist influences". The battle for "hearts and minds" will require action through schools, community, sports and faith groups across the country, he said.

He also gave details of a new 25,000-strong Border Agency with the power to detain people on suspicion of criminal activity including terrorism.

Over the coming weeks I'll be talking to Government Ministers about the Counter-Terrorism Bill, so I'll make sure the views of <<INSERT AREA>> on this vital issue are made clear.

Tory plans could lead to higher council tax

This week David Cameron pledged to abolish central government capping of council tax increases, while requiring local authorities to hold referendums on council tax increases above a certain level.

But under the Tory proposal central government would still recommend to Parliament the level by which council tax should not rise beyond - as happens now with capping. So basically his "new power" is a PR gimmick.

Labour is already giving local communities more power to decide how the money they get from central government is spent locally. And powers for local councils to hold a referendum on the level of council tax increase already exist, and have been used before in Bristol, Milton Keynes and Croydon.

The reality is, it is Tory councils across the country that are driving up levels of council tax, it is Tory councils that are cutting local services, they are not asking local people what they think about that, and that is the real issue David Cameron needs to address. This is just another empty David Cameron PR gimmick.



A bit of parliamentary history.....

This week saw the introduction of new "open questions" and "topical debates" in the House of Commons. In an effort to make Parliamentary business as topical as possible, regular question times for major departments will now include a 15 minute slot when MPs can put questions to ministers without giving them any prior notice.

Previously, questions to departmental ministers had to be tabled at least three days in advance, which meant issues that cropped up in the meantime could go undiscussed. The new innovation, alongside weekly topical debates on Thursdays, means that ministers can be held accountable by MPs on the hot topics of the day.

The Labour government has supported these new measures as part of its broader commitment to strengthen Parliament and make the executive more accountable to the British people.

Landmark Climate Change Bill published



The Labour Government has published its landmark Climate Change Bill, the first of its kind in the world. It sets out Britain's plans to tackle climate change for the next 50 years, and includes legally binding targets to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by at least 60 per cent by 2050 against 1990 levels.

This Bill is a landmark in environmental legislation and will set us firmly on the path to the low-carbon economy we know is

fundamental to our future. We need to provide the framework that will give Government businesses and individuals a clear idea of how we're going to tackle climate change.

We also need to show the world that we're taking decisive action within our own borders, particularly ahead of crucial talks in Bali next month where we want to launch formal negotiations on a comprehensive future climate deal that involves every major country on earth.

This Bill shows the world that we're serious, and that we're not asking other countries, and in particular poorer countries, to do what we're not willing to do ourselves. This is vital to our ambition to get a future deal agreed by the end of 2009.

The Bill also includes a requirement for the Government to report at least every five years on the current predictions for climate change impact, as well as policy proposals to tackle the issue. I'll keep you posted on developments.

Homelessness scheme expanded

Getting people not just off the street but back into work is a major challenge. While homelessness is at its lowest level for twenty years, we need to press on for further improvements.

Labour's Housing Minister this week announced a new £70 million expansion of the Government's homelessness scheme to help people to make a permanent move away from the streets.

Yvette Cooper said that the investment will fund more than 100 new or upgraded hostels with training facilities to help the vulnerable people who need them.

The expansion of this scheme - which is proving a major success - will transform the life changes of thousands of homeless people.

The hostels programme has already achieved positive results, changing the facilities from just a place for the night to a place where people can get back into work so I'm pleased we are putting more resources into it.