

The Struggle for the Soul of the 21st Century

by Bill Clinton

I'm delighted to be here, delighted to be part of this distinguished lecture series at a time when every American is especially grateful for our long friendship with the United Kingdom; one that we see manifest now in the partnership that President Bush and Tony Blair have demonstrated in the fight against Afghanistan; one that touched every American heart when the Queen instructed her band to play the American national anthem in the grounds of Buckingham Palace the day after September 11th. One that I came to appreciate deeply when we worked together for peace for Northern Ireland and the Balkans. Lord Keynes once said how difficult it is for nations to understand one another, even when they had the advantage of a common language; "everyone talks about international co-operation, but how little of pride, of temper, or of habit." Tonight I want to talk a little bit about the prospects for international co-operation, and the problems of pride and temper and habit standing in the way, knowing that co-operation is the living legacy of Richard Dimbleby and the continuing mission of the BBC. In the poetic words of its motto "nation shall speak peace unto nation". The BBC first spoke to another nation in an experimental broadcast to the United States in 1923. At the time it was questionable that we spoke the same language, it took a team of translators a week to figure out that "bangers and mash" were not some veiled British threat. By the end of the Second World War, the BBC was broadcasting globally in more than forty languages, setting the standard for the kind of international reporting we see down to the present day in Afghanistan.

It was exactly a year ago today, near the end of my tenure as President, on my final trip overseas, that I went to Warwick University with Tony Blair to deliver a speech. As Mr Dimbleby said just a few moments ago, none of us at that time could have foreseen the exact difficulties of this time, but what many of us could see even then and what Prime Minister Blair and I talked about, was a larger battle brewing, one that made it clear to us, at least, that we could no longer delude ourselves that the harsh realities a world away are without real consequence for our own people.

On that day a year ago, I said "we have seen how abject poverty accelerates conflict, how it creates recruits for terrorists and those who incite ethnic and religious hatred, how it fuels a violent rejection of the economic and social order on which our future depends". The world has now witnessed a tragic, graphic illustration of that new reality, one that, as Mr Dimbleby implied, has made a lot of people rethink their rosy projections for this new century. I come here to tell you that on balance, I remain quite optimistic. I am absolutely confident that we have the knowledge and the means to make the twenty first century the most peaceful, prosperous, interesting time in all human history. The question is whether we have the wisdom and the will.

The terrorists who struck the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre believe they were attacking symbols of corrupt power and materialism. My family and I have a different view of that, I was Commander-in-Chief of the people who worked at the Pentagon. My wife represents the people of New York in the Senate, I knew people who were on those airplanes. My daughter was in lower Manhattan. I met one of her friends who lost her fiancé. I talked to victims who lost their loved ones who were Jews and Christians and Hindus and Muslims, who came from every continent, including over 250 from the United Kingdom. I talked to children in schools who lost their school buildings on September 11th in lower Manhattan, whose parents come from over eighty different national racial and ethnic groups. To me, all these victims represent the world I worked very hard for eight years to build, a world of expanding freedom, opportunity and citizen responsibility,

a world of growth in diversity and in the bonds of community. The terrorists who killed all these people, they thought they had the truth and because they had the whole truth, anyone who didn't share it, was a legitimate target. They thought that the differences they have with us, political and religious, were all that mattered and served to make all their targets less than human. Most of us believe that our differences are important and make our lives interesting but that our common humanity matters more. The clash between these two views over this simple question more than any other single issue, will define the shape and the soul of this new century.

I think victory for our point of view depends upon four things. First we have to win the fight we're in, in Afghanistan and against these terrorist networks that threaten us today. Second, we in the wealthy countries have to spread the benefits of the twenty first century world and reduce the risks so we can make more partners and fewer terrorists in the future. Third, the poor countries themselves must make some internal changes so that progress for their own people becomes more possible. And finally, all of us will have to develop a truly global consciousness about what our responsibilities to each other are and what our relationships are to be. Let me take each of these issues quickly in turn.

First, terror. The deliberate killing of non-combatants has a very long history. No region of the world has been spared it and very few people have clean hands. In 1095, Pope Urban II urged the Christian soldiers to embark on the first crusade to capture Jerusalem for Christ. Well, they did it, and the very first thing they did was to burn a synagogue with three hundred Jews, they then proceeded to murder every Muslim woman and child on the Temple Mount in a travesty that is still being discussed today in the Middle East. Down through the millennium, innocents continued to die, more in the twentieth century than in any previous period. In my own country, we've come a very, very long way since the days when African slaves and native Americans could be terrorised or killed with impunity, but still we have the occasional act of brutality or even death because of someone's race or religion or sexual orientation. This has a long history.

Second, no terrorist campaign apart from a conventional military strategy has ever succeeded. Indeed the purpose of terrorism is not military victory, it is to terrorise, to change your behaviour if you're the victim by making you afraid of today, afraid of tomorrow and in diverse societies like ours, afraid of each other. Therefore, by definition, a terror campaign cannot succeed unless we become its accomplices and out of fear, give in.

The third point I want to make is that what makes this terror at the moment particularly frightening, I think first is the combination of universal vulnerability and powerful weapons of destruction. Both those airplanes on September 11th, the anthrax scare and all the other speculation that all of you have seen in the days since. Now, in any new area of conflict, offensive action always prevails in the beginning. Ever since the first person walked out of a cave millennia ago with a club in his hand, and began beating people into submission, offensive action prevails.

Then after a time, someone figured out, well I could put two sticks together and stretch an animal skin over it and I would have a shield and the club wouldn't work on me any more.

All the way through to the present day, that has been the history of combat - first the club, then the shield; first the offence, then defence; that's why civilisation has survived all this time even in the nuclear age. So it is frightening now because we are in the gap, and the more dangerous the weapons, the more important it is to close quickly the gap between offensive action and the construction of an effective defence. We have not quite closed the gap and it's especially frightening for young people who didn't even know about the Cold War. When my daughter's generation started thinking about politics, the Cold War

was over, nobody talked to them about Vietnam. They didn't grow up on memories of Korea and World War II or like my generation, having drills at school where we'd go to a bomb shelter to be prepared when the Soviets dropped bombs on us, in the fond illusion that we could actually survive it.

So we have to be sensitive to the fact that there are objective reasons for people to be concerned, and we have to work very hard to close the gap. The modern world has been virtually awash in terror: since 1995 there have been twenty one hundred terrorist attacks. Before September 11th, fewer than twenty had occurred within the United States and only Oklahoma City had claimed a significant number of lives, though we've been dealing with this since the early '80s when over 240 of our Marines were killed by a suicide attack in Beirut.

In the years in which I served as President, we worked very hard to prevent a day like September 11th ever happening. Far more terrorist attacks were thwarted at home and around the world than succeeded, large numbers of terrorists who did commit crimes were brought to justice. We strengthened our defences in chemical and biological areas, we spent more money to protect the nuclear stocks in the former Soviet Union, we dramatically increased our terrorist budgets, we trained several response teams in our largest cities to deal with outbreaks of bio-terrorism. Good people had been working on this a long time but we haven't completely closed the gap.

We still have much more to do to know that all of our transportation, our water supplies, and our computer networks are secure. We have more to do to know we have done everything we can to break into terrorist money networks which keep them going. We have to upgrade and integrate our own information systems so we can keep up with potential terrorists and we have to do more to protect the still massive stocks in the world of chemical, biological and nuclear materials which could become terrorist weapons.

But the larger point holds. In terror's long history, it has never succeeded and it won't this time. The war in Afghanistan will be won shortly, the Al-Qaeda network will be broken up, our defences at home will improve. I can't say there won't be more terrorist attacks, there probably will be, but I can say for sure it won't prevail unless we decide to give it permission and I do not believe we are about to make that decision.

Now that brings me to the second point. We're gonna win this fight - then what? The reason September 11th happened, and it was shocking to Americans, because it happened on our soil, is that we have built a world where we tore down barriers, collapsed distances and spread information. And the UK and America have benefited richly - look at how our economies have performed, look at how our societies have diversified, look at the advances we have made in technology and science. This new world has been good to us, but you can't gain the benefits of a world without walls without being more vulnerable. September 11th was the dark side of this new age of global interdependence. If you don't want to put those walls back up and I don't think you do, and we probably couldn't if we tried. And you watch, if you look at some of the recent elections, we're gonna see some people who try to do that. And if you don't want to live with barbed wire around your children and grandchildren for the next hundred years, then it's not enough to defeat the terrorist. We have to make a world where there are far fewer terrorists, where there are fewer potential terrorists and more partners. And that responsibility falls primarily upon the wealthy nations, to spread the benefits and shrink the burdens.

Very briefly, what are the main benefits of the modern world? The global economy; it's lifted more people out of poverty in the last twenty years than at any time in history. It's

been great for Europe and the United States, in the last few years I was President. It led to huge declines in poverty even as more people were getting rich.

Second, the information technology revolution: when I became President in 1993, there were only fifty sites on the worldwide web - unbelievable - fifty. When I left office, the number was three hundred and fifty million and rising. Even before the anthrax scare, there were thirty times as many messages delivered by email as by the postal service in the United States.

Third, the advances in science. Scientists from the UK and the United States and other countries finished the sequencing of the human genome in a project funded largely with government funds during the time I was President. It was thrilling to me. We've already identified the major genetic variances that predict breast cancer, we're very close on Alzheimer's and AIDS and Parkinson's. We're developing diagnostic tools using something called nano-technology, super-microtechnology that will enable us to identify tumours when they are just a few cells in size, raising the prospect that we will be able to cure all cancers. Researchers are working on digital chips to replicate sophisticated nerve movements in spines, raising the prospect that they will work for damaged spinal cords the way pacemakers do for hearts, and people long paralysed will be able to stand up and walk. There's no question that quite soon the women in this audience who are in their childbearing years will be able to bring children home from the hospital with little gene cards and life expectancies in excess of ninety years.

And finally, the great blessing of the global age is the explosion of democracy and diversity within democracy. You can argue that those changes make all these other good things possible. This is the first time in history when more people live under governments of their own choosing than live under dictatorships. It has never happened before.

But what are the burdens of the twenty first century? They are also formidable. Global poverty - half the people on earth are not part of that new economy I talked about. Think about this when you go home tonight. Half the people on earth live on less than two dollars a day. A billion people, less than a dollar a day. A billion people go to bed hungry every night and a billion and a half people - one quarter of the people on earth - never get a clean glass of water. One woman dies every minute in childbirth. So you could say "don't tell me about the global economy, half the people aren't part of it, what kind of economy leaves half the people behind?"

Second big problem, the global environment. The oceans that provide most of our oxygen are deteriorating rapidly. There's a huge water shortage. I already said a quarter of the people never get any. It could change everything about how we grow food and where we live.

And finally global warming; if the climate warms for the next fifty years at the rate of the last ten, we'll lose whole island nations in the Pacific that will be flooded by the rising water table as the South Pole and the North Pole get smaller. We will lose the Everglades in America that I worked so hard to save, we will lose fifty feet of Manhattan island - prime real estate - gone. But more to the point there will be millions of food refugees created, more terror, more destabilisation.

But you could argue that long before we have to worry about global warming, we will be consumed by the rise of global epidemics accelerated by the breakdown of public health systems across the globe. This year, one in four of all the people on earth who die, will die of AIDS, TB, malaria and infections related to diarrhoea. Most of them, little kids that never get any clean water. If you just take AIDS alone we have forty million AIDS cases,

that is 8,200 people a day dying. Thirteen million orphans. We're projected to have a hundred million AIDS cases by 2005. If that happens, it will be the biggest epidemic since the plague killed a quarter of Europe in the fourteenth century.

And it will destabilise countries and a whole lot of young people around the world will say "well, I'm HIV positive, I've got a year or two to live, why shouldn't I go out and shoot up a bunch of other people?" It'll look like one of those Mel Gibson road warrior movies in a lot of countries if we have a hundred million AIDS cases. And lest you think it's an African problem, the fastest growing rates of AIDS are in the former Soviet Union, on Europe's backdoor. The second fastest growing rates of AIDS in the Caribbean on America's front door. My wife represents a million people in New York state from the Dominican Republic alone. The third fastest growing rates of AIDS and the largest number of cases outside South Africa are in India, the world's biggest democracy. And China just admitted they have twice as many cases as they thought: they had a 67% increase last year, and only 4% of their adults know how AIDS is contracted and spread.

And finally, one of the big burdens of the modern world is high tech terrorism - and a lot of people knew it before September 11th. The marriage of modern weapons to ancient hatreds: Rwanda, Sierra Leone, the Balkans, East Timor, the Middle East or - until, God bless them, the people of my ancestors, the Irish, did the right thing - Northern Ireland. Don't you think it's interesting that in the most modern of ages, the biggest problem is the oldest problem of human society - the fear of the other. And how quickly fear leads to distrust, to hatred, to dehumanisation, to death.

So we now live in a world without walls that we have worked hard to make. We have benefits, we have burdens, we have to spread the benefits and shrink the burdens. Very briefly, let me mention some specifics. First we have to reduce global poverty and increase the economic empowerment of poor people. We know how to do this and it doesn't cost that much money. Last year we had this phenomenal global effort to reduce the debt of the poorest countries in the world, with everybody from the Pope to Bono to Jesse Helms for it. Usually when everybody's for something, there's something wrong with it; in this case there wasn't. You can only get this debt relief if you put the money into education, healthcare or development. The results have been stunning. Just give you one example: Uganda took their debt relief savings and in one year doubled primary school enrolment and cut class size. We ought to do more of that.

America funded, when I was President, two million micro-enterprise loans in poor villages around the world, I've been to African villages where the local village treasurer would show me his pencilled notes to prove that he had taken all the money that he thought I had personally sent to him and loaned it out in an efficient way to create a market economy in his village. We should do more of that.

The great Peruvian economist, Hernando de Soto, has told us something we should have recognise a long time ago, which is that poor people in the world already have five trillion dollars in assets in their homes and businesses but they're worthless to them except to live in or use, because they can't be collateral for loans. Why? Because they're outside the legal systems in their country. Many of them live in shacks with no addresses, no title, no access to a court that would validate the title. Many of them run businesses that would literally take more than a year to legalise. I've seen the map on Cairo, I tell you, if you went to Cairo tomorrow and opened a bakery and handled it in the normal fashion, it would take you over five hundred days to complete all the government paperwork to legalise your bakery.

So de Soto is going through the works trying to rationalise the business laws and rules and make it cheaper for people to have legal businesses than to pay the taxman to look

the other way. And then trying to organise the property system so people can legalise their homes so poor people can get credit, because they have collateral. The key in a market economy, both personal advance and national economic growth. We gave him a little money when I was President, we ought to do more of that.

We in the rich countries ought to open our markets to poor countries. Last year, in my last year as President, we opened our markets more to Africa, to Vietnam, to Jordan, to the Caribbean. In less than a year we increased our purchases from some African countries by a thousand percent. It didn't hurt the American economy, but it sure helped theirs. The same argument goes for education. In a poor country - and AIDS, keep in mind, is largely a poverty disease - in a poor country one year of education is worth about 10% increase in income. There are a hundred million kids who never go to school. Part of our problem in Afghanistan and in the Muslim world is all these kids who couldn't go to public schools so they went to madrassas where they were indoctrinated instead of educated, not because their parents were radical: their parents couldn't afford to send them to school. Now, we could send all these kids to school. Two examples: Brazil is the only poor country in the world that has 97% of its kids at school. You know how - they pay mothers, not fathers, mothers, in the poorest 30% of the families, if they send their kids to school, every month, up to forty five dollars a month. It increases the family income up to 30%, 97% going to school. Last year I got three hundred billion dollars to provide a nutritious meal to children in school but only if they would come to school to get it. You know how many people you can feed all year long in poor countries for three hundred million dollars? Over six million. And, you ought to see where we've done this, enrolments are exploding, people are coming in. We ought to send those kids to school.

The same argument applies to healthcare. Kofi Annan just won the Nobel Peace Prize - richly deserved - for promoting peace. He knows if we have a hundred million AIDS cases, we'll have more war, and he asked us for ten billion dollars to fight AIDS, TB, malaria and other infectious diseases. America's share would be a little over two billion dollars, Britain's share would be a little under a half a billion dollars. We ought to give it to him.

Look, we can turn this AIDS thing around. It, to me, is the most frustrating of all problems. We're gonna have medicine because of the South African drug case being settled. Uganda cut the AIDS death rate in half in five years with no medicine. Brazil cut it in half in three years with prevention and medicine. I have been in health clinics all over the world, I've seen kids in remote African villages doing plays to talk about AIDS but AIDS has been around twenty years. Last year I talked to world leaders who were friends of mine who told me they really couldn't talk about AIDS because after all, there's all this cultural resistance. How many people have to die before your cultural resistance melts? So we've got to pay for it.

Now you can say that the same argument applies to global warming except it's the only area we'll actually make money out of. There is a trillion dollar market today in alternate energy sources and presently available energy conservation technologies that will create jobs in Europe, in America, in the developing world and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We're being hurt by denial there.

Now, the other stuff will cost money. It will cost money but I can tell you this, it's a lot cheaper than going to war. We will spend far more to pick up the pieces of destroyed lands and shattered lives if we do not do these things. We will spend much more. We're spending - America - about a billion dollars a month in Afghanistan, that's as cheap as a war gets. We will never fight a conflict for less than a billion a month. For twelve billion dollars a year, we can pay America's share of all those initiatives I just mentioned and have money left over. So I urge you to think about that.

The next point I want to make very briefly is that we can do all these things and there are some countries in which it will make no difference. There are changes that poor countries have to make within that make progress possible. For example, it's no accident that most of these terrorists come from countries that aren't democracies. If you never get to take responsibility for yourself, and you're never required to take responsibility for yourself, then countries are like people, you're kept in sort of a state of permanent immaturity where it's quite easy to convince you that your distress is caused by someone else's success.

It's no accident that Jordan is the most stable country in the Middle East. Ten years ago, King Hussein basically made a social compact with all elements of society including fundamentalist Muslims and he said "here are the powers I will give up, here are the powers that Parliament will get, anybody can run, anybody can serve, but here's what you cannot do to destroy the fundamental character of our society" and it has worked. So here's a country that's majority Palestinian, quite poor, quite young, and in a dicey position geographically, still chugging along partly because the people have some way of taking responsibility for themselves.

Same thing is true in Iran: the government's very anti-Western, but the people aren't, in part because they have real elections and real votes, and the only time that real democracy is thwarted is when their own people do it, so they don't blame us. So we should be advancing democracy and human rights and once a country makes a decision to be more open and free, we should help them be more successful. Elections are only part of the job.

And finally we have to be in this debate in the Muslim world. I think we have demonstrated that America's not the enemy of Islam. I was the first President ever to recognize the feast of Eid al-Fitr every single year at the end of Ramadan, to bring in large numbers of Muslims to consult in the White House. One of the best things President Bush has done in this whole mess is to go almost immediately to a mosque and meet with Muslim leaders after September 11th and then to break the fast of Ramadan in the White House with a meal, to illustrate that we have six million Muslims in America who are pursuing their faith and doing well.

But most Muslims in the rest of the world don't know it. There are some other things they don't know. They don't know five hundred Muslims died on September 11th, a direct violation of the Koran and Sharia law, to deliberately kill other Muslims. They do not know that the last time the United Kingdom and America used military authority was to protect the lives of poor Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo. They do not know when eighteen American soldiers died in 1993 in Somalia - in that raid, Mr Bin Laden loves to brag about, he brags about how he helped train the Somalis to kill the Americans, but he never tells you what the Americans were doing there. They were part of a United Nations peacekeeping force, asked by the United Nations to go arrest Mohammed Adid because he, Adid, had murdered twenty two of our fellow peacekeepers, all Pakistani Muslims. They do not know that before I left office, I recommended and Israel accepted, but the PLO rejected, the most dramatic peace proposal for a comprehensive fair peace in the Middle East to give the Palestinians a state on the West Bank in Gaza and protect Muslim and Palestinian religious and political equities on the Temple Mount, the Haram al-Sharif. They don't know any of that.

Now that's maybe our fault, but we've got to get into this debate and we have to fight. And let me say it's a debate, you know as well as I do, not just in the Middle East. But there are people in this country and in my country who are sympathetic with the terrorists. We had an Afghan mosque in New York City, where on September 12th, the Imam was a stand-up guy and he got up there and said "this terrorism is terrible, it is wrong, it is

immoral, it is a violation of Islam." But a minority of his congregation walked out and started worshipping in the parking lot.

So this is a fight we have to make everywhere which brings me to my last point, and the most important thing of all - although it may sound naïve to you. What this is all about is that simple question: which will be more important in the twenty first century - our differences or our common humanity? This encounter we have had with the Taliban and Mr Bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda and all the debate that has filled the airwaves since, has given us a picture of this debate and of the very different ideas we have about the nature of truth, the value of life, the content of community. Like fanatics everywhere throughout history, these people think they've got the truth, and if you share their truth, your life has value. And if you don't, you're a legitimate target, even if you're just a six year old girl who went to work with her mother at the World Trade Centre on September 11th. That's what they think. And they really believe it, like fanatics everywhere. They think to be in their community, you have to look like them, think like them and act like them and they know people will stray every now and then, so they pick a few people to beat the living daylights out of those who stray.

Now most of us believe that no-one has the absolute truth. Indeed, in our societies, the most religious among us sometimes feel that most strongly because we believe as children of God, we are by definition, limited in this life, in this body, with our minds. That life is a journey toward truth, that we have something to learn from each other, and that everybody ought to have a chance to make the journey. So for us, a community is just made up of anybody accepts the rules of the game, everybody counts, everybody has a role to play, everybody deserves a chance and we all do better when we work together. Now, that's what this is about.

This is not complicated. The people that want to kill us over our differences do so because they think their life doesn't matter except insofar as they are different from and better than others. Those of us who are trying to change ourselves and change them, we think our common humanity is more important and if we could just live up to its potential, the world would be a better place. And which side wins will shape the twenty first century. What do you think is more important? The answer is easy to give, but very, very hard to live. Think about this as you go home tonight.

Think about how important your differences are to you. Think about how we all organise our lives in little boxes - man, woman, British, American, Muslim, Christian, Jew, Tory, Labour, New Labour, Old Labour, up, down - you know, everything in the world. I like red ties, I got a blue shirt on, you laugh about it, think about everything you define yourself by. Our little boxes are important to us. And indeed it is necessary, how could you navigate life if you didn't know the difference between a child and an adult, an African and an Indian, a scientist and a lawyer? We have to organise that, but somewhere along the way, we finally come to understand that our life is more than all these boxes we're in. And that if we can't reach beyond that, we'll never have a fuller life. And the fanatics of the world, they love their boxes and they hate yours. You're laughing, that's what this is all about. And it's easy to give the right answer but it's hard to live.

When I was my daughter's age, just about to embark on my great adventure in England, just before that Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, two of the heroes of my youth, were murdered by their fellow Americans for trying to reconcile the American people to each other. Gandhi, the greatest spirit of the age, murdered, not by an angry Muslim but by a fellow Hindu because he wanted India for the Muslims and the Jains and the Sikhs. And the Jews and the Christians. Sadat - murdered not by an Israeli commando, but by a very angry Egyptian - a member of the organisation now headed by Bin Laden's number two guy - an angry Egyptian. Because how could he be a good Egyptian or a good

Muslim because he wanted secular government in Egypt and peace with Israel, though he got the desert back. And one of the people I have loved most in my increasingly long life, Yitzhak Rabin, was murdered not by a Palestinian terrorist, but by a very angry young Israeli Jew who thought he was not a good Jew or a good Israeli because he wanted lasting peace for Israel through the recognition of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians for a homeland. And that guy who murdered him got exactly what he wanted - he derailed and delayed the peace process and let it be swarmed and mauled by all those people who were under the foolish illusions that their differences matter more than the fact that they are all the children of Abraham.

So that's what I want you to think about. It's great that your kids will live to be ninety years old but I don't want it to be behind barbed wire. It's great that we're gonna have all these benefits of the modern world, but I don't want you to feel like you're emotional prisoners. And I don't want you to look at people who look different from you and see a potential enemy instead of a fellow traveller. We can make the world of our dreams for our children, but since it's a world without walls, it will have to be a home for all our children.

Thank you very much.