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SPEECH BY THE FOREIGN SECRETARY, ROBIN COOK, TO THE ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, CHATHAM HOUSE, LONDON, FRIDAY 28 JANUARY 2000

We have just celebrated the advent of a new millennium. Some people contend that we celebrated one year early. But in foreign policy, we celebrated the new era ten years too late. Movements in geo-political forces do not arrange themselves around convenient points in the calendar. In international relations, the new century began in 1989 when the Berlin Wall came down. The Cold War had divided much of the world and most of its GDP into two hostile camps. Its sudden end has coincided with a revolution in communications technology which has united many of the same countries in one global economy.

It was fashionable in the past decade to debate whether this century would be America's century, or Japan's century, or maybe even Europe's century. In reality, it is going to be the Internationalist century.

Economic growth is dominated by global trade which is expanding at triple the rate of output. The integration of financial markets is such that ~~both~~ investors and workers can find themselves ruined overnight because of upsets in banking systems on the far side of the globe. No national economy is now an island.

The growth curve in communications is ultra-exponential. In the US, the world wide web has attracted 50 million users in four years: to do the same took television 13 years and radio 38. Access to information on the internet expands by a million pages every day. The extraordinary capacity of the new technology to communicate instantly, and cheaply, around the globe has produced the 'death of distance' as the defining barrier between states and continents. It also makes it harder for authoritarian regimes to co-exist with modern economies. Even the most vigilant border guard is unable to challenge the mighty click of a mouse.

It is a curiosity of semantics that the word 'internationalism' produces a favourable reaction, except on the wilder shores of reactionary isolationism. But the word "globalisation" generally provokes a wary, if not hostile, reaction. If you asked me whether I am in favour of globalisation, I would answer that my attitude to globalisation is much the same as my attitude to the dawn. On balance, I think it is a good thing that the sun rises every day. But I also know there is nothing I can do to stop it even if I wanted to. Similarly, the only rational response to globalisation is to pursue strategies that maximise benefits and minimise damage.

What then is the foreign policy that helps deliver the benefits of globalisation and deflect its damage to Britain?

The purpose of our foreign policy is to pursue our national interests. In broad terms, those national interests are the four objectives I set out in the Mission Statement for the Foreign Office in this Parliament:

- promoting prosperity through trade and the British economy;
- ensuring the security of the United Kingdom;
- enhancing the quality of life of people through global diplomacy on environment, the drugs trade and cross-border crime; and

- building respect for our values by supporting human rights and freedom.

How the Foreign Office promotes those national interests requires us to understand the modern world, and produce a strategy that relates to the world as it will be in this new century, not as it was in the last.

I propose four guiding principles that can help us shape a foreign policy for the Internationalist century:

- globalisation requires more bridges and fewer barriers;
- the global interest is becoming the national interest;
- the global community needs universal values; and
- the stronger Britain's standing in our own continent, the greater the leverage we will have in the other six.

For diplomacy the starting point must be that globalisation requires bridges and removes barriers. A policy of containment is a difficult strategy in the age of the fibre-optic cable, the jumbo jet and satellite TV. There will always be the exception, such as the murderous regime in Iraq where the only safe strategy is to keep it in the isolation ward until it accepts the norms of international behaviour. Or the military dictatorship in Burma which has persistently failed to respond to dialogue. It takes two to critically engage.

But as a general rule it is increasingly hard to bar the multiple doors that globalisation forces open. We have therefore adopted a conscious policy of Critical Engagement - the pursuit of political dialogue wherever it can produce benefits.

This strategy of Critical Engagement has produced practical gains for British interests. For instance, with Argentina, we hosted a visit of reconciliation by former President Menem. We followed it up with an agreement that puts communications between Argentina and the Falklands on a secure basis. We are robustly committed to the long-standing policy that the Falkland Islands will be British so long as their residents wish it. But, the more we build confidence between ourselves and Argentina, the greater the security we can offer the islanders.