

Tony Blair does not rule out a British military invasion of Iran

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BLAIR: 'BRITISH TROOPS IN IRAN? WE CAN NEVER SAY NEVER'

By Bob Roberts Deputy Political Editor

The Mirror, 7 February 2006

TONY Blair yesterday refused to rule out a British military invasion of Iran.

He told MPs the rogue Middle Eastern state was helping to spread the "virus" of Muslim fanaticism across the world.

It was a problem which needed "sorting", the Prime Minister said.

And asked if the British military option was on the table, he admitted: "You can never say never in any of these situations."

The warning is a significant increase in the language the PM has used against the Tehran-based regime which is also accused of developing nuclear weapons. American military experts have already said war-planes are on standby to attack.

Mr Blair said he would prefer to resolve disputes with Iran through "peaceful and diplomatic means".

But he attacked the regime which has threatened to wipe Israel off the map.

He said: "The concern about Iran is growing very, very substantially - and the more the President of Iran carries on using this type of language and saying what he says about the state of Israel, the more people get worried."

The PM warned the Tehran government would be making a "very serious mistake" if it defied international calls to stop making nuclear weapons, adding: "When they try to export terrorism, it's a problem. When they are trying to meddle in Iraq, it's a problem."

TONY BLAIR YESTERDAY

Blair went on: "There is a virus of extremism which comes out of the cocktail of religious fanaticism and political repression in the Middle East which is now being exported to the rest of the world.

"We will only secure our future if we are dealing with every single aspect of that problem.

Our future security depends on sorting out the stability of that region.”

The warning comes as an Iranian newspaper announced a contest for cartoons satirising the Holocaust in response to the caricatures of the prophet Mohammed which appeared in Denmark.

Iran said it was cutting trade ties with the Danes - but the EU warned that attempts to boycott Danish goods or stop trading with European countries would lead to further deterioration in relations.

During his session in front of senior MPs on the Commons Liaison Committee, Mr Blair also pledged a police crackdown on Islamic fanatics who brandished hate-filled placards in the UK last week.

DEFENCE Secretary John Reid last night said there could be “significantly fewer British forces” in Iraq within a year - but only if threats from insurgents are reduced and the country has effective local government systems.

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