

My proposal to make a strong speech on Uzbek Human Rights at Freedom House was strongly opposed by Sir Michael Jay and Simon Butt. Charles Hill of Eastern Department had the job of negotiating the text with me and, after this pretty sharp correspondence, I largely got the speech I wanted.

Craig Murray
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Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Eastern Department
King Charles St
London
SW1A 2AH

Tel: 020 7270 2460

Fax: 020 7270 2164

E-mail: charles.hill@fco.gov.uk

16 October 2002

Craig Murray
HMA Tashkent

2 pages by Airtech

Matthew

Daniel o/r

pa Huma RBs

ESP 240/001/02

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Dear Craig

SPEECH TO FREEDOM HOUSE

1. Many thanks for sending a copy of your draft speech. It is hard-hitting, and one that (I think) Martin Luther King would have been proud of. But there are elements of it, as currently drafted, that I doubt should be delivered by an HMA Tashkent. Language which is too outspoken risks antagonising the Uzbek authorities and undermining your mission (in both senses of the word). This applies, for example, to much of paragraph 3, and to points elsewhere (see below).
2. Nowhere in the speech is there any acknowledgement of the Soviet legacy Uzbekistan needs to overcome, or the genuine extremist / terrorist challenges it has had to grapple with in the past: IMU incursions, bombs in Tashkent, Hizb-ut-Tahrir propaganda. We do not accept Uzbek arguments that these problems justify human rights abuses, but we do seek to address them in recognising that.
3. I have also doubts about elements that can broadly be described as involving a judgement or criticism, when the wording for this judgement or criticism is not taken from something that the FCO has said before. An example of this is paragraph 8 beginning "I talk of brutality" As far as I am aware, this language takes you (and therefore the FCO) beyond what we have previously said publicly. As such it should not be used. The best examples of what the FCO is on record as having said are in publications such as the Human Rights Reports. You should already have received a copy of the 2002 Report (HRPD have told me copies were dispatched to Posts two weeks ago), but in case you have not I am (separately) faxing to you copies of three pages on Uzbekistan. As you will see, on torture the Report says "Uzbekistan has a poor record of ensuring respect for



human rights We are concerned about reports of torture....etc etc". We would be content for you to jazz up the language of the Report somewhat, but expressions like "deep shame", "outrage" etc go too far.

4. My doubts also apply to the sentences in the speech beginning "we believe", as the "we" implies the FCO. So for example the sentence "we believe that there are significantly more political and religious prisoners" is one that I have not seen hard evidence to validate. The impression that I have is that things are bad, but not as bad as we say. One of the ways 'around' the "we believe" sentence would be to say "we believe" and then reinforce these type of judgements by reference to other reputable sources or other Human Rights groups, US State Department Reports etc. It would be roughly the same as what has been said, but linking the judgements to reputable sources of information - incidentally making them harder to refute.
5. For the reasons outlined in the above paragraphs, I also have doubts about the emotional language used elsewhere in the speech and the soapbox tone of the peroration. It would be better to list these concerns with reference to Uzbekistan's international obligations and then contrast the situation in the country, while combining this with a statement of willingness to engage in dialogue with the authorities, and readiness to offer practical assistance.
6. In general, I would hope that these alterations would have the effect of altering the tone, while pressing the concerns of substance, and making the analysis somewhat more sophisticated. As telno 272 outlines, we have reservations about making too vocal a stance in public. I leave it for you to decide whether you wish us to comment on a revised version, but we would be grateful to see a copy in any event.

Yours ever

Charles Hill
Charles Hill
Easter Department
0207 270 2420

P.S. I agree that the opening remark is great.

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British Embassy
Tashkent

17 October 2002

67 Gulyamova Street
Tashkent
700000
Uzbekistan

Charles Hill
Eastern Department

Tel: 998 71 1207853
Fax: 998 71 1206549
Post E-mail: brit@emb.uz
Website: www.britain.uz

Dr Charles,

Thank you for your letter of 16 October and your comments on the proposed speech to Freedom House, which I will rework to take account of your views, subject to the following.

On the question of fact, I am frankly astonished that you claim to have seen no evidence to back my assertion that there are now more political and religious prisoners than there were a year ago. Have you not, for example, seen 3/00/23745-02? You could not have finer evidence. I suggest you look at it instantly. And why do you think I am here? I have spoken to a great many people here, including reputable human rights groups, and representatives of a spectrum of Uzbek and expatriate society. I asked about the August arrests all over the Ferghana Valley. I have met the families of detainees. I know that there are more in political/religious detention now than a year ago.

I can see that you might find this fact politically inconvenient. If you wish me to omit it, then say so. But don't pretend it isn't true.

I will say some more sympathetic things about the problems facing Uzbekistan, but you must appreciate that the government ARE the Soviet legacy. I am not convinced, and nor is anyone else here I have spoken to, that the Tashkent bombs were anything to do with the IMU or Islamic terrorism. There are two prevalent theories – either it was the government attempting to blame the opposition, or internal government faction fighting. To mention the Tashkent bombs as one of the Government's legitimate security concerns would be considered risible by the audience.

Incidentally I would not be at all surprised to see more bombings of this nature in Tashkent shortly, to justify continued repression and try to take off some of the pressure for reform. Do I misremember or were not the Russians known or suspected to use the same tactic of falsely blaming the Chechens for bombs some time back?

On the question of style, of course I agree that the objective of being an Ambassador is to maximise my influence. But you don't gain influence by being a pushover. You don't gain influence by never saying anything interesting, by sticking in the crowd. You gain

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influence by being more informed. Intelligent, articulate and outspoken. You gain influence by being formidable, by being a factor that must be taken into account. You are making what I may call the Chamberlain error. The Uzbek government are not gentlemen. They respect strength. I think they consider us easy to ignore – and I think they have to date been right. You are, incidentally, quite wrong in thinking that an analytical approach makes a more powerful speech.

Consider the evidence. How effective has the softly softly method of influence been? Before my arrival the last two attempts I can see where we tried to influence the government of Uzbekistan were over Hemans' nomination as OSCE rep and over the reinstatement of the BBC Uzbek retransmission service. In both we failed abysmally, with the Uzbeks treating us with a fair deal of contempt. How exactly do our influence methods perform when put to the test? So very well that there is no case for trying another approach?

I find your censures sadly cautious and above all completely unimaginative. Personally I have always regarded the classic public school and Oxbridge influenced FCO house style as ponderous, self-important and ineffective. My style is more direct and, in my view, more effective. I am sorry but I am never going to turn into Polonius. I usually go down very well with business communities, with NGO's (I don't apologise for that) and yes with the host government. Alexander Kwasniewski arrives here next week and I will be most surprised if he doesn't remember me – and President Kuffour of Ghana remains a close friend, a friendship started by a very non-FCO style speech I made on corruption, though in fact not as direct as one subsequently made in the same venue by Clare Short. It takes some getting used to, but I generally end up valued for my honesty.

Uzbekistan is different – the nature of the regime is such that senior individuals have almost never met anyone who dared to disagree with them. They certainly find me a bit of a shock. But I would contend that we have achieved very little in eleven years through the more nuanced approach. It does no harm to actually say what we think.

A speech based on publications is not a good idea. Normally of course we base our lines on what Ministers have said in public, but we have a real problem here because they haven't really said anything – which is something you might usefully seek to remedy. I am sorry you consider the style soap-box. I suspect that lurking behind what you say is a desire that I be so dull that no-one in Uzbekistan notices we have said something on human rights.

Actually I think that outrage is absolutely the correct emotion at learning that someone has been tortured to death with boiling water. If your reaction at seeing photos of this is not to be outraged, but to wonder precisely which UN Convention contains provision against torture by boiling water, then I am sorry. I see the head of ODIHR has called it in public "Horrid". I presume you think he is being a bit strong.

I will try to get a revised version to you shortly. I particularly would like your comment on the distinctions I make between the simply religious and those that espouse violence,

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and on the calls for action (legalisation of political parties etc.) Could you reply with actual drafting amendments.

hm
Chris
Chris Murray

- cc Matthew Donnelly, HRPD
- Stuart Horsman, RAD
- Mary Keefe, DFID
- Ian Bond, UKDEL Vienna

PS I don't know if you have noticed but I have a slight speech defect. I can't really call anything "howwid".

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