

Craig Murray Speaking at the Plenary on the 4th February

THE United Kingdom is not an entity that deserves to exist because it has lost any moral authority it had.

With these words Craig Murray, the former UK ambassador who exposed torture and murder in Uzbekistan, made his case for the break-up the United Kingdom at the Convention's February plenary.

Tony Blair's failure to consider the human cost of war has brought us to where we are today, he said, and the only way to right the situation is to split up the UK.

Murray also challenged the authority of UK Attorney General Lord Goldsmith in Scotland saying that his Legal Writ sanctioning the Iraq war 'carried not a milligram of weight in Scotland'.

Said Murray: "One of the things that makes Scotland a nation is that it has its own legal system. This is not only quite separate from the English legal system but has a distinctly different origin, in Roman as opposed to Anglo-Saxon Law.

"Lord Goldsmith was never Attorney General in Scotland. Scotland has a Lord Advocate.

"It speaks volumes about the reality of the so-called Union, that the English Attorney General advises the Cabinet on whether to go to war, and in so doing he travels to Washington to consult the opinion of US legal authorities, but he does not travel to Edinburgh to consult the opinion of Scottish legal authorities.

"As a matter of urgency, the Scottish parliament should now request the Lord Advocate to produce a review of Lord Goldsmith's opinion on the Iraq War in the light of the Scottish understanding of international law.

"She should also produce views on the constitutional questions which may arise when the Scottish Lord Advocate takes a different view on the legality of war to the English Attorney General.

"The Parliament should make plain that the notion that Scotland does not have a view on the legality of a war in which Scottish troops will be involved, but is bound to follow the English Attorney General, is not an acceptable position."

Murray revealed that actor David Tennant is to play him in a new BBC Radio 4 play by David Hare.

The story of how Murray as 'our man in Tashkent' exposed the brutal tyranny and torture of a regime that had little regard for human rights does little for the reputation of the Foreign Office under the leadership of Jack Straw.

It is based on an adaptation of Murray's book, *Murder in Samarkand*, written after his sacking in 2004.

He was dismissed after a government led witch-hunt against him which saw him brought back to London and confronted with 18 trumped up charges, all of which he says were totally untrue.

Frustration over his inability to defend himself – in part due to the Official Secrets Act - led to a nervous breakdown.

Up until then, he said, he had believed that Britain was a force for good in the world.

"I no longer believe that," he said, adding that today Britain is hugely disliked

throughout most of the developing world.

When Murray was appointed as UK ambassador to Uzbekistan in June 2002 he had a brilliant career in front of him.

But it was not long before he began to question both his role and that of his country in so-called 'democratising' states.

In his book he writes: 'Something happened on September 11 2001 that caused the West to lose its moral bearings in a way that led government machines and those who worked in them, to move a significant way down the path of contempt for individuals.

"The Nazis went much further down that path, but it is undeniably the same one."

He went to Uzbekistan with the instruction that every time he spoke in public he was to refer to President Islam Karimov as 'a force for stability and moderation in central Asia'.

But the truth was, he said, that Karimov was one of the world's worst dictators presiding over a country with no freedoms at all, where the opposition parties were banned, where there was no free media, where 10,000 political opponents were in prison, and where torture was widespread.

Murray's unusual style of leadership – early on he went out of his way to attend dissident trials - made ordinary Uzbeks turn to him.

He was handed photographic evidence of torture and killing which he sent off to the pathology labs at the University of Glasgow only to receive a chilling report that the young victim had been boiled to death.

With mounting evidence of other boilings as well as reports of innocent people being raped and murdered by agents of the state, Murray's alarm grew.

He said: "I was reporting all this back to London and they started getting angry with me. They told me: 'We are concerned that you are perhaps over focused on human rights to the detriment of other British interests'."

Murray said: "I was horrified."

By this time it was 2003 when the "war on terror" was at its height and information obtained by the regime's torturing of Muslim terror suspects was proving useful to the west in the battle against al Qaeda.

After speaking out about the torture allegations Murray was called back to London and told he was in 'big trouble'.

To his horror the Foreign Office's chief legal adviser Michael Wood ruled that it was not illegal under the UN Convention of Torture to receive or possess information under torture.

He said: "So there we had it, torture by proxy for intelligence purposes was legal."

Murray reckons he 'stumbled' across the extraordinary rendition programme after discovering that foreign nationals were being flown into Uzbekistan and interrogated.

He said: "A UN report yesterday named Uzbekistan as one of the extraordinary rendition centres."

Murray says he likes to think he would have resigned from the Foreign Office but 'the Foreign Office decided not to give me the chance'.

He walked into a meeting where he was presented with a 'charge sheet' listing 18 charges against him.

He said: "One charge accused me of driving a Landrover down some stairs but I didn't even have a driving licence."

Clearly viewed as an embarrassment, Murray was ordered to resign and told that if he did so right away then 'Copenhagen is coming up shortly'. Instead Murray told them to go ahead and try to prove the allegations against him.

On 16 of the 18 charges no evidence was ever presented. The other two charges went to a formal disciplinary hearing. He was cleared of all charges, but sacked for an alleged breach of the Official Secrets Act.

Murray said: "What they did to me is only a fraction of what was suffered by so many Uzbek people killed by torture."

Early in his talk Murray referred to his 20-year career with the Foreign Office taking part in many bi-lateral and multi-lateral negotiations and working closely with (and sometimes against) diplomats from other small European countries – Denmark, Ireland, Sweden etc.

He said: "The Irish carried much more weight in multi-lateral negotiations than a country that size could expect.

"I was always deeply puzzled and I still am deeply puzzled that there should be a perception that the Scots can't do that."

In her vote of thanks Convention chair Elaine C Smith described Mr Murray's speech as 'one of the best arguments for the break-up of the United Kingdom I have ever heard'.

She said: "For Scots who have traditionally voted Labour, for this to happen under Labour's watch is worse."

And she accused Labour of resorting to trying discredit their political opponents once they knew they had lost the argument.

"It's a very depressing picture of the state of Britain today", she said.

After leaving the Foreign Office Murray stood unsuccessfully for parliament in Blackburn against his nemesis, the foreign secretary, Jack Straw. He now campaigns on human rights and African development issues.

He has just completed three years as rector of Dundee University.

His book *Murder in Samarkand* is published by Mainstream Publishing, price £7.99.

The BBC Radio 4 adaptation will be broadcast on February 20th at 2.30pm.