IDU 40th Anniversary conference

opening reception – speech

My fellow democrats – and what a wonderful and distinguished group we have tonight

 I think I speak for all of us when I say that occasionally democracy can seem unfair

and there are times when your opponents seem to get the better of you in ways you simply didn’t expect

and you feel flabbergasted, and outraged

and you feel as you sometimes do in cricket

when the ball has plainly clipped your pads and not your bat before passing into the wicket keeper’s hands

and yet the umpire’s finger goes up – and what do you do?

what does a good well brought up Australian do?

Tony, Scott, John

Does he whinge? Does he protest?

No – he smiles and tucks his bat under his arm and walks back to the pavilion in the confident knowledge that there is always another innings

and that is why we are all blessed to be here at the Savile club tonight

with a free media, free speech, free and independent judiciary

and free elections where eventually the people can if they choose right the wrongs of biased and wilfully ignorant committees

and our proceedings at this IDU conference are crucial because those freedoms are increasingly contested around the world

where 70 per cent of the population still lives under a dictatorship

and the number of liberal capitalist democracies is estimated at 42 – the lowest for 25 years

and as we meet to talk about democracy, the Ukrainians are fighting heroically to defend it

laying down their lives for that noble and beautiful ambition

that government of the people by the people for the people shall not perish from the earth

and we must be scouringly honest and say that as of tonight things can go either way in and around Bakhmut and Zaporizhya

 we can many of us be proud of what our countries have done to help

and I am proud that the UK led the way with the NLaw shoulder-launched missiles

but at this critical moment in the counter-attack we can see what is happening

Too many pieces of armour – Bradleys and other western tanks – are being taken out by the Russian attack helicopters

How often did we say that the Ukrainians needed help with air cover? How many times did we mention the need for long range deep fires?

  My friends I simply cannot understand the logic of delay

Give them the AtAcms, give them the F16s

and if they say that these brilliant and brave Ukrainians do not have time to learn how to use these pieces of modern equipment, tell them that they are talking patronising nonsense

and think how much those Ukrainians could have learned if we had the sense to begin the training a year ago

 How will we feel, in a year’s time, if we this counter-offensive were to be stalled for lack of adequate equipment?

 I don’t think it will happen – I think the Ukrainians will win

I know they will win, because they are fighting with lion-like courage for their families and for the country

and the Russians do not know why they are there

I know in my heart that Putin will fail and Ukraine will win

 but why are we leaving it to chance?

 These heroic Ukrainian soldiers are fighting for the freedoms of all of us –

 they are fighting for peace and stability in east Asia, where

their resistance has greatly escalated the risk that must surely attach to any Chinese invasion of Taiwan

 and they are fighting for Georgia, Moldova, the Balts, the eastern Europeans, everywhere that might be vulnerable to a revanchist Putin

so my friends let us redouble our support for the Ukrainians

give them what they need sooner rather than later

  don’t worry about Putin; he can sort himself out

and let’s back democracy against autocracy everywhere we find it

and be proud of liberal capitalist democracies

who make the music that people actually want to listen to?

 who makes the films that people want to watch?

where are the universities that people actually want to go?

 and who made the vaccines – along with so many other breakthroughs – that actually worked?

 it was the democracies

So here in Britain the mother of parliaments

 I say don’t put the IUD into democracy

 Let new democracies declare UDI from those who would hold them back and may their representatives join the IDU as fast as possible

Thanks very much and have a great conference