

Joseph Rotblat Memorial Lecture

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“Ashdown’s third law; or how the world will never be the same again and what we should do about it”

In this speech, there will be history and poetry. And, on a slightly more prosaic level, I will also unveil for you, tongue in cheek of course, Ashdown’s Third law of international relations in the post Obama world.

Let us start, as we should in a literary festival, with the poetry.

Rabindranath Tagore, the great Indian poet, wrote in his poem “Unity in Diversity” these words:

“We are all the more one, because we are many

For we have made an ample space for love in the gap where we were sundered,

Our unlikeness reveals its breadth of beauty, with one common life,

Like mountain peaks in the morning sun”

We are I think, about to enter an age in which Tagore’s great statement will be one of the few signposts we have for a safe passage through dangerous times.

Three factors make the years ahead completely different from what we have lived through for the last century - and some are of a nature which we have never before encountered.

The first of these factors is not unique.

We are on the edge of one of those periods of history when the gimbals on which the established order is mounted, shift and a new world order begins to emerge. And these are, almost always the most frightening and turbulent of times.

The tide of economic power is running away from the nations gathered on the shores of the Atlantic and towards those gathered around the rim of the Pacific.

This recession will be different. This time, we will not plummet down and then bounce back comfortably to where we were before it all started. This is about something much deeper. The tectonic plates of power, in this case economic power, are shifting and when it is over we in the Western nations will, relatively speaking, be weaker and those in the Eastern nations will be relatively stronger.

The last time we saw a shift of power on this scale was when the leadership of the world passed across the Atlantic from the old powers of Europe to the new emerging power of the United States in the last century. And we all remember what followed that collapse of empires and the emergence of a new order. Only then, though power shifted, the values didn’t. This time, we will experience not just a change of order, but a change of values too.

It is important, here to be clear exactly what is happening and what is not.

I am not saying that the rise of nations like China and India will be smooth or comfortable for them either. In China in particular there is likely to be considerable turbulence as, having largely freed their economy and now have to try to free their society. And Beijing is frightened by that – and they have every reason to be so. Chinese history is littered with instances when this great nation, as disparate and ethnically diverse as Europe, stands at the edge of greatness

and then descends into dissolution and chaos.

But, though this may alter the time scale and manner of China's rise it will not alter their ultimate destination as one of the world's great powers.

Some, especially amongst my more left wing friends tell me, often with ill disguised glee, that we are now seeing the beginning of the end of American power in the world. I do not believe that either. The symptoms of decline in nations, as in humans are scleroticism, institutional arthritis and resistance to change. And the United States shows none of these - as the still remarkable election of Barack Obama very clearly shows.

Indeed it seems to me very probable that the United States will still be the world's most powerful nation for one or two decades yet, which, in practical terms is as far ahead as it is reasonable to make predictions.

But, though the position of the United States as the world's pre-eminent power, is not likely to change, the CONTEXT in which she holds that position is now certain to.

We are no longer looking, as we have for more than the last half century, at a world dominated by single super power. The globe is no longer going to be mono-polar in the way it has been for most of the life times of most of the people in this room.

The growth of new power centres means the emergence of a much more multi polar world – a world which will look much more like Europe in the nineteenth century. And this will have a number of rather important consequences.

One will be a rise in regional groupings – of which history may say the EU was the first, albeit highly imperfect example.

Second and linked will be an increase in protectionism and probably a reversal of the movement towards free trade of the last half century – with all implications that carries for a destructive period of beggar my neighbour economic policies.

The third implication of this emerging pattern of world power, is for Europe.

In a much more multi sided world, the eyes of the US are likely to be at least as much, west across the Pacific, as east across the Atlantic. The Atlantic relationship will remain a key relationship on the European side and on the American one too. But it will no longer be the lynch pin for all other policies, as it has been over the last half century. The US security guarantee, under which we have all sheltered since World War two and which has enabled many of our European neighbours to take a free ride on Uncle Sam for their national security, no longer exists. Such United States soldiers as are left in Europe, are here, not for our defence, but to support their operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

My guess is that Europe will be less important to every future US president, including Barack Hussein Obama, than we have been to every past one, including George W Bush.

Indeed I suspect that, having loved to hate him, we Europeans may well find ourselves missing George Bush before too long.

George Bush may well turn out to be the last US President to have had an emotional tie to Europe. In future we are likely to be judged by Washington, not on the basis of history, but according to a rather cool, even brutal appraisal of what we can deliver when it comes to pursuing our joint interests – and here the answer is not much, if Afghanistan is anything to go by.

The United States is increasingly going to have interests in the world which do not always coincide with those of Europe. And we are going to have interests in the world which do not always coincide with theirs. What this means

that we Europeans are going to need in the future, to have a rather more subtle and sophisticated foreign policy than hanging onto the apron strings of our neighbourhood friend, the world's only super power.

But that's not the end of the story. We, Europe, are losing the US as our protector of last resort and friend for all circumstances at a most difficult time – for things are more threatening for us elsewhere, too. We now have an increasingly assertive Russia, prepared to use the lever of energy, skilful at dividing and ruling, asserting the old Brezhnev doctrine of spheres of interest and backing it with force if they need to. And we have a rising China. And increasing economic power in the East. If we do not realise that the right reaction of Europe to these new circumstances, is to deepen the integration of our institutions, especially when it comes to defence, foreign affairs and economic policy, then we are fools and the next few decades are going to be much more painful. I know this does not run with the mood of the times only a week or so from European elections. But the hard choice for us Europeans is nevertheless this; to be safer together; or to be poorer apart.

The last and arguably most important consequence of this new shape to world power is equally dramatic; we are reaching the beginning of the end of the perhaps five century long period of the hegemony of Western power, Western institutions and Western values over world affairs. We are soon going to discover – no, we are **already** discovering - that, if we want to get things done, such as re-designing the world economic order, or intervening for peace, we cannot any longer just do them within the cosy Atlantic club; we are going to have to find new allies in places we would never previously have thought of. And they will be less congenial and have demands of their own. The recent global financial crisis has made it very plain. If we want a more ordered world at a time of great instability, we are going to have to provide a space at the top tables for nations that do not share our culture, our history, our world view or even our values.

The second factor which is likely to make these the times to try men's souls, is that we are seeing a double shift of power – a shift which is not lateral, but vertical, too.

Power is migrating out of the structures of the nation state, which we created to govern power and to hold it to regulation and the rule of law, and onto the global stage, where the instruments of regulation are few and the framework of law is weak.

Look at the institutions which are having difficulties at the moment – national governments, political structures, the old establishments. And note that nearly all depend on the nation state and find their range of action confined within borders of the states to which they belong. Now look at those institutions which are growing in power and reach. The internet; the satellite broadcasters; the trans-national corporations; the international money changers and speculators; international crime; international terrorism. And note that all operate oblivious of national borders and beyond the reach of national regulation and law.

Now, for a time, being free of the constraints of law, suits the powerful. But sooner or later, lawless spaces also become attractive, not just to the builders, but to the destroyers as well. That's why Al Qaeda is there too, using the internet, satellite broadcasting, our systems of global mass travel and of global finance. It is calculated that some 60% of the 4 million dollars taken to fund 9/11 actually passed through the financial networks housed in the Twin Towers.

Al Qaeda is in the global space precisely because it is a lawless space - as lawless as were the deserts of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan.

Now there is a rule of history. Where power goes, governance must follow. And if it doesn't chaos, conflict and turbulence are the consequences – the great 19th century British political reformers who framed the reform acts that brought us our modern democracies, knew that. And when their counterparts in Europe ignored it, they suffered the 1848 revolutions which set Europe alight from end to end.

But it is not just power that has been globalised; so have our problems. The uncomfortable truth which our Westminster politicians refuse to acknowledge and our old structures cannot cope with, is that there is now almost no problem which affects our citizens wellbeing or our nation's future, which can be solved within the nation state or by its institutions alone; not our ability to be protected from crime; not our the cleanliness of our environment; not our capacity to tackle global warming; not our health; not our jobs; not our mortgages, not even our food. All of these and

more now depend, not on the actions of our governments, but on their ability to work with others within a set of institutions which are global in scope and international in character.

The problem is, we have neither the institutions nor the political leadership to do this.

If one of the key phenomena of our time is the globalisation of power, then one of the key challenges of our time is to bring governance to the global space. And the extent to which we are able to do this will determine the extent to which we will be able to manage the period of turbulent years ahead.

Our inter dependence is the third factor which is now shaping this age in a way which is different from anything we have seen before.

Nations, of course have always been connected. What happens in one nation has always been of importance to its neighbours and allies. That's why one of the oldest activities of government is diplomacy.

But today's interdependence is something completely different. Nations today are not just linked by trade, commerce and diplomacy, they are intimately interlocked in almost every aspect. What happens in one can have a profound and direct consequence for what happens in another. An outbreak of swine flu in Mexico, ends up affecting our health in Britain just a matter of hours later. The collapse of Lehman Brothers in the US sets in train a domino effect which infects the entire global economy. The revelation of 9/11, is the revelation of our time. That, even if you are the most powerful nation on earth, the consequence of ignoring what is happening in a far away country of which you know little and care less, can be death and horror one bright September day in one of your most iconic of cities.

You see, today everything is **connected to everything**.

Imagine for a moment, that I am Lord Roberts of Kandahar. He, by the way, was the last British General to invade Afghanistan and the only General since Alexandra the Great to have made a success of it, perhaps because, like Alexandra he didn't try to stay. His, too was a war of vengeance – it was a punitive expedition to avenge the terrible defeat of the British Army at the “massacre in the snows“ of 1842. The year now is 1879, the war is the Second Afghan War. And here he is telling you how he did it. He is telling you about the number of troops he had. About the performance of his Indian soldiers. About the importance of his “screw guns”, the mountain guns which were the British equivalent for knocking down Afghan villages, of the US B52s today. Please note what he is NOT talking about; he is NOT talking about poppy fields. Not because they were none. The poppy has been grown in Afghanistan for centuries. But in his day, the poppy simply didn't matter. Today Afghanistan's poppy fields are directly connected to crime in our inner cities. Everything is connected to everything.

He would NOT have talked about a mad mullah in cave preaching jihad. There were plenty of them too. But in 1879, they didn't matter either. Today, what Osama bin Laden says, is directly connected to what happens in that terraced house in Bolton. Everything is connected to everything.

He is NOT talking about collateral damage, or dead civilians. For him, they didn't matter either, for the world didn't know about them until weeks or even months later. Now the picture of that wedding party inadvertently blown apart by US high explosive, is on television and computer screens around the world, a matter of minutes later. And those images really matter in the battle for public opinion which is now the battle that must be won in operations such as these.

Everything is connected to everything.

And this interconnectedness applies not just to the external relations between nations. It applies to the internal organisation of nations, too.

Imagine now that we are talking about the defence of Britain, forty years ago, when I was a British soldier. What would we have talked about?

We would have talked about the size of our army our navy and our air force. And that would have been it. The enemy was outside the walls and the job of keeping them there fell exclusively to the Minister of Defence.

Now, because everything is connected to everything, the enemy is not outside; it is inside.

Now we have to talk about everything.

It is not just the Ministry of Defence which is involved. The Minister of Health is involved, because, as we now know, part of defending ourselves, is defending ourselves against pandemic disease. The Minister of Agriculture is involved, because food security is part of our security. The Home Office is involved, because the enemy are not just foreigners from another country, they can also be our own citizens whose loyalties lie with those whose beliefs are inimical to everything we stand for. The Minister for Industry is involved because the fragility of our systems is a real point of vulnerability for our enemies.

Defending Britain is no longer a job just for the Ministry of Defence. It is now a job for every Department of Government. And our ability to defend ourselves effectively depends on our ability to bring all their activities together in an interlocking way.

But the problem is that our Governments are not structured to do things in an interlocking way. They are made up of vertical stove pipes, depend on a stove piped culture and are run, in the main, by people with stove piped minds.

And there is a reason for that.

Our current Government structures took on their present form – as they did in every advanced Western democracy - in the nineteenth century. And they followed the structures which were in fashion at the time – the structures of the Industrial Revolution and the era of mass production. Strong command chains; vertical hierarchies; specialisation of tasks – you can see it all in Charlie Chaplin’s film “Modern Times”. And this was right; it was appropriate for the times. It suited the age.

But it does not suit our age. For this is the age of post industrial structures. Of flat hierarchies; of networks and networking, dedicated to bring disparate inputs together at a single focal point, which, in the market place at least, is the satisfaction of the customer. Successful commercial structures – like Toyota -- have understood this and restructured accordingly. And those who have failed to change, have failed.

Some Governments, too are beginning dimly to realise they must do something similar and have invented new language, like “the comprehensive approach” in the hope that this will solve the problem. But these new terms remain expressions of hope, more honoured in rhetoric than existing in reality. In so far as the “comprehensive approach” exists at all, it does so in theory in Whitehall, but is pretty well absent in practise on the ground where it matters – look at Afghanistan to see what I mean.

But even if some in governments may dimly realise that they should be networking, their structures and cultures remain resolutely stuck in the industrial age. Ministers are judged on how well they defend the territorial integrity of their Department, its budget and its pay roll. Senior Civil Servants ditto. Networking with other Departments is regarded as a threat, not an opportunity. The screaming of gears we hear in Whitehall is the sound of vertical hierarchies, tribal cultures and stove piped minds, knowing that they ought to be networking, but finding it impossible to do so.

We ought to reform the shape of Government. But I doubt we will.

So we may have to be satisfied, if we cannot change structures, with at least changing cultures.

So, time now to unveil Ashdown’s third law for the modern age. And here it is. In the modern age, **the most**

important part of what you can do, is what you can do with others.

It is an institution's ability, not to DO themselves, but to network with others that matters most.

The most important part of a modern organisation is not its internal shape, but its external docking points.

It is not the effectiveness of the hierarchies which matters most, but the efficiency of the interconnectors.

And if you want to see the price of failing to understand that, you need look no further than Afghanistan. Here the chief reason for the fact that we are losing, lies, not in the ineffectiveness of the Afghan Government who we love to blame, but in our own complete failure to have any co-ordinated international plan; in our inability to work together between the nations of the coalition; in our determination to see Afghanistan solely through the prism of the place in which we each happen to be fighting - the British in Helmand, the Canadians in Kandahar, the Dutch in Uruzgan, the Germans in the Panjshir valley, the US in their B52s; and in our unwillingness to produce a single countrywide strategy which enables us to speak with a single voice and act with a single purpose. The real scandal is Afghanistan, is not that our soldiers don't have the right boots, or enough helicopters. It is that they are paying with their lives because our politicians cannot or will not get their act together.

It does not matter if you are an army unit, or an NGO, or an aid deliverer like DfID, or a Ministry like the Foreign Office the most important part of what you can do, is not what you can do alone, it is what you can do with others.

And as it is within governments, so it is between them. The age when even the most powerful can expect success if they choose to act unilaterally, is over. The last great experiment in unilateralism was George W Bush's determination to abandon the multilateral instincts of his father and insist on the invasion of Iraq, even though America was – beyond the largely cosmetic support of a few – alone in the enterprise.

In the new multipolar world which we entering, nations will raise the chances of success in their enterprises to the extent that they are able to make them multilateral and raise their chances of failure, if they cannot do this.

There is one other original aspect of our new interconnected world which is important.

From time immemorial, the means by which men (and they usually were men) organised their defence against their enemies was through collective defence – through banding together in tribes, in nation states and in Alliances like NATO, in order to be more powerful than our enemies. And the more powerful we were, the more secure we were.

But one of the revelations of our time is that now, with the advent of weapons of mass destruction and because everything is connected to everything, we increasingly share a destiny with our enemy. The notion of collective security is, in many cases having to give way to an understanding of the importance of common security.

It was this revelation of a shared destiny and an understanding of the importance of common, rather than collective security, which underpinned the nuclear arms reduction talks which took place in Geneva in the 1970s when I was a diplomat there. It is this notion that Barack Obama is seeking to reach out to, in his accurate understanding that the greatest threat to us all today, does not come from other nuclear powers, but from the threat of nuclear proliferation. As the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty meeting this month in New York, noted, genuine and concrete steps on disarmament are needed now to strengthen non-proliferation and build confidence that we can move together to build peace and security in a world without nuclear weapons.

It was also this revelation, that the opposing sides in Northern Ireland shared the same destiny which, enabled the Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland at last to understand that they were partners in a shared a future, rather than enemies in a zero sum conflict.

And it is Israel's failure to understand that it, too shares a destiny with its Arab neighbours which is, arguably the

greatest barrier to a secure Israel, within a peaceful in the Middle East.

I am NOT saying here that we will not need collective defence. Our capacity to defend ourselves in concert with our allies will always be important.

But increasingly in the future, when we think about how to secure ourselves, we will have to think also about, not just how we destroy our enemies, but how we may be able to live with them too.

This concept is not new of course. For it has always been the proposition of poets and saints and visionaries that we should learn to live together.

The great poem of John Donne's "No man is an island" says it all; "every man's death affecteth me, for I am involved in mankind. Send not to ask for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee".

Gladstone said it too, in 1879, when Lord Roberts was invading Afghanistan, in his great second Midlothian campaign. He said:

"Do not forget that the sanctity of life in the hill villages of Afghanistan amongst the winter snows, is no less inviolate in the eye of Almighty God as can be your own. Do not forget that he who made you brothers in the same flesh and blood, bound you by the laws of mutual love. And that love is not limited to the shores of this island, but it crosses the whole surface of the earth, encompassing the greatest along with the meanest in its unmeasured scope"

But here is the difference between their age and ours.

For Donne and for Gladstone, these were recommendations of morality. For us they are part of the equation for our survival.