

New World Disorder: How can the international community best respond?

Speech by Lord Hannay of Chiswick, Chair of the UN Association of the UK

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I suppose many of those in the audience I am addressing tonight have either no, or at least only the vaguest, personal memory of the Cold War which ended roughly eighteen years ago; and I suspect I might be the only person here, or at any rate one of the very few, with some personal recollections of the second World War which ended over 60 years ago. These two milestones and the series of events they record are nevertheless crucially important to an understanding of the era in which we now live—an era which has as yet no very well accepted title other than the back-handed one of the post-Cold War world, but which is getting close, I would argue, to acquiring the uncomplimentary soubriquet of ‘new world disorder’ which I have taken as the theme of my talk to you. Understanding the era though which we are living, and identifying and—what is more difficult—implementing, the best international policy responses to the challenges we face, requires an understanding of where we have come from and how we got into the situation in which we find ourselves. So I make no apology for beginning with what the Michelin guides describe as “*un peu d’histoire*”.

The Cold War was a period dominated by two basic trends: the confrontation between two super-powers capable of blowing the whole world apart if they miscalculated, and the process of decolonisation which almost trebled the number of independent sovereign states which make up what we call the international community. And those two trends were linked as the super-powers and their allies vied for influence among the newly independent developing countries and a whole string of proxy wars were fought out in the four corners of the earth—on the Korean Peninsular, in Vietnam, in many parts of Africa, in Central America—by countries enjoying the backing and material support of one or the other of those super-powers.

Despite those proxy wars, which no international organisation, least of all the newly founded United Nations, was permitted to prevent or mediate, the Cold War was a period of considerable stability. The chilling doctrine of mutually assured destruction ensured that the super-powers never stepped over the edge into open conflict. Most of the victims in the proxy wars were citizens of far away countries of which we knew little.

Should we feel nostalgic for that bygone period as we face up to the uncertainties of the post-Cold War world? I do not believe so. Not only is nostalgia a bad guide to policy-making, but

many aspects of the Cold War were genuinely objectionable and obnoxious. The world economy under-performed as a parallel battle was waged between command economies and market economies. Appalling abuses of human rights took place both in the communist countries and in those affected by the proxy wars. Much of the world was denied the benefits of democratic institutions and the rule of law. And a number of really dangerous regional disputes—over Palestine, over Kashmir and over Korea—festered, bursting occasionally into open hostilities but basically rendered insoluble as the two super-powers manoeuvred for advantage around them, backing one or the other of the regional protagonists.

At first the end of the Cold War seemed to bring nothing but benefits. An act of aggression, by Iraq against Kuwait, was rapidly reversed under the authority of the United Nations. A whole number of Cold War relics—proxy wars in Africa, Central America and Asia—were wound up successfully, often with UN-led peace operations providing the necessary framework for restoring peace and stability. Namibia, Cambodia, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Mozambique are examples of that trend. You do not hear much about them now. Successful peace operations are more often ignored by commentators and historians: they do not make a good copy. Over that same period freer trade and market economics set the world on a path of unprecedented growth, which continues to this day, and which began to draw tens of millions out of poverty. It was at this heady moment in the early 1990s that the father of the president of the United States coined the phrase “new world order”.

That post-Cold War honeymoon period did not last long. By the middle of the 1990s the wars of the Yugoslav succession and a series of peacekeeping debacles in Somalia, Haiti and Rwanda had tarnished the image of the UN. From being thought capable of handling everything, the UN swung to being thought capable of handling nothing. The unity among the five permanent members of the Security Council, so noticeable in the Kuwait and Cambodian cases, began to fray at the edges and to collapse, particularly when it came to authorising the use of force, as we saw most dramatically in Kosovo in 1999 and in Iraq in 2003.

Why was this golden moment allowed to slip away? Why was the opportunity to build up and strengthen a system of collective security enshrined in the UN Charter of 1945, but still-born because of the Cold War, squandered? The answers are complex and derive more from inadvertence and neglect than from malign intent. Here are a few of them:

- First, no real attempt was made to analyse the range of security threats, often new ones, which faced the post-Cold War world, let alone to find systematic responses to them. The phenomenon of state failure, often in states which won their independence in that heady rush of decolonisation, a phenomenon which had been masked during the Cold War period by the iron discipline of one or other of the super-powers, broke out like a rash right across the world. And with it came other evils: shelter for terrorism (in Afghanistan), genocide (in Rwanda and Bosnia), regional mayhem (in West and Central Africa and in the Horn). This phenomenon was poorly understood; little was done to prevent it; and dealing with the consequences often proved beyond the capacity of the international community.
- Second, the existence of a global security agenda, far wider than one confined to the threats from terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, was slow to be recognised. Poverty, pandemic diseases, environmental degradation—never previously figuring on anyone’s security agenda—began to emerge with manifold linkages to what could be more classical items on the world security agenda. Recognising the need to address the whole of this wider security agenda, and not just part of it, took time; funding effective responses to the items on it took even longer. Indeed we are still searching.
- Third, while the international community was quick to turn to the UN to deal with these problems and threats, it was slow to provide the resources and political backing to deal with them effectively, particularly when the going got rough. The main players were not slow to hand themselves massive peace dividends in the aftermath of the Cold War, but they were slow to recognise and meet the demands of increasingly complex multilateral peace operations. The one remaining super-power turned its back on multilateral solutions to these problems and pursued unilateralist policies—whether in Iraq, or dealing with the nuclear policies of North Korea and Iran, or over climate change—policies which have proved to be disastrously defective.
- Lastly, nothing effective was done to address the worst of the world’s pre-existing regional disputes—over Palestine, over Kashmir and in Korea—which continued to fester and feed some of the new security threats, terrorism and nuclear proliferation in particular.

That was the background against which, in September 2003, Kofi Annan, then Secretary-General of the UN, launched the most ambitious attempt yet made to reform the UN and make it more fit for the purposes of the 21st century. That reform campaign did have some successes—the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission designed to bring sustained support to failed states; the replacement of the ineffective Commission on Human Rights with a new upgraded Human Rights Council with more scope for action; a pledged increase in the resources to help developing countries achieve by 2015 the targets set in the Millennium Development Goals; and most innovative and ambitious of all, agreement on the international community’s ‘responsibility to protect’ those citizens whom their own governments were either unwilling or unable to protect.

But the reform proposals which fell by the wayside—enlargement of the Security Council to make it more representative, strengthening of the non-proliferation regimes, agreement on the guidelines for the Security Council authorising the use of force, establishing an agreed definition of terrorism which would enable it to be outlawed as completely as piracy and slavery have been—these failures were every bit as numerous as the successes. They have left the problems they failed to address unresolved. And the jury is still out on whether those reforms which were agreed will be effectively implemented. The examples of Darfur, of Somalia, of Zimbabwe and of Burma are there as reminders of just how much more difficult it is actually to protect people than it is to say you will do so.

It is easy enough, when confronted with all the symptoms of world disorder around us and with the inadequacy of the policy responses so far adopted to deal with them, simply to throw up one’s hands, shrug one’s shoulders and conclude that nothing much can be done. Confronted with the complexities, fundamental errors and setbacks being faced in Iraq and Afghanistan, such siren voices are to be heard louder than before. Easy but, I would argue, wrong; and against our own interests too. If we have learned anything in the last 20 years it is surely the extent to which the problems we face are global ones, and the interdependence of each of us on the others if these problems are to be successfully confronted. Neither unilateralism nor isolationism are viable options for this country; but nor are they for the world’s remaining super-power, the US, or indeed for that rapidly rising power, China.

Our prosperity depends on freer and fairer world trade and the removal of barriers to investment. We need world-wide solutions to the challenge of climate change, and new, more far-reaching controls on carbon emissions when the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012. We need collective responses to the threats from terrorism, from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and

from state failure. We need to revive the move toward nuclear disarmament which fizzled out about the turn of the century. And we must surely not think that we can live securely in a world which tolerates the sort of levels of poverty, disease and malnutrition which still exist. The fate of what has been eloquently called the world's "bottom billion" cannot become a matter of indifference to us. But none of this can be achieved without much closer and more effective international cooperation and without strengthened multilateral disciplines.

So I can see no viable and no honourable alternative but to return to the (admittedly ungrateful) task of making our existing international organisations work better and more equitably, plugging gaps in them where these exist and adapting them continually to meet new challenges as these come along. And lest we feel a bit overwhelmed by the prospect of such a daunting task, it is as well always to remember a few salient facts about our post-Cold War world, even while also being aware of how far it has fallen short of the order and stability we might have hoped for.

It *is* a much more prosperous place than it was; hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of poverty. It *is* a more democratic place than it was; many countries, in Europe particularly but not exclusively, now have democratic institutions and the rule of law which did not have them before. It *is* a world in which the culture of impunity for gross breaches of international humanitarian law is in retreat, challenged by the recently established International Criminal Court. These steps forward were not achieved by chance but by the concerted efforts of the international community.

Here now is what I would call a minimum agenda for the years ahead:

- Successful completion of the Doha Development Round of world trade negotiations. I know this looks improbable right now with the negotiations deadlocked and protectionist pressures on the increase. But the Doha Round's predecessor, the Uruguay Round, was pronounced dead any number of times and yet it was successfully completed and provides the foundation of our current prosperity.
- Negotiation of new measures to arrest climate change and limit carbon emissions which will bring within their scope both the main developed country hold-outs from Kyoto, the US and Australia (the latter, in a welcome development, is already on the way to being achieved), and the principal developing country economies, China India and Brazil.

- Strengthening of the international instruments for conflict prevention, peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding, with more effective coordination of UN operations and those mounted regionally, for example by the African Union;
- A sustained and inclusive drive to promote peace in the Middle East designed to survive the cross-currents of forthcoming US elections and any acts of violence which the enemies of a negotiated solution may throw at it.
- A renaissance in the attempts to achieve negotiated measures of multilateral disarmament, which would include the coming into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty following US ratification, the negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty, the establishment of internationally guaranteed supplies enriched uranium and reprocessing services which would remove the temptation and the proliferation risk from new sources of supply under national control, the banning of cluster munitions, the negotiation of an Arms Trade Treaty and serious steps by the recognised nuclear states towards nuclear disarmament. The election next year of new presidents in the US and Russia presents an opportunity to bring about this renaissance; but it will not last for ever.
- A revived effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, with previous commitments being honoured; and start of considerations of how best to carry the process beyond the target date of 2015.

Well, that is certainly enough to be getting on with. Even partial success in fulfilling that agenda would represent a major achievement. I have never been convinced myself that we should really be aiming for something as potentially Orwellian as a new world order. But we do already have a world in which, as I have sought to show, some elements of order are discernible through the swirling clouds of disorder. We need, I believe, to build them up, and to extend and strengthen them in a pragmatic and realistic way. Britain and its European partners should be giving a lead in these matters; and we should be seeking to persuade the United States that their security too depends as much on the effectiveness of these elements of order as on the strength of their own right hand. Never has it been clearer that, if we do not hang together, we shall all be hanged separately.

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