

## **New World Disorder: Future Prospects for the UN – speech by Lord Hannay of Chiswick**

**Wednesday, 4 June 2008, 1.30pm to 2.30pm  
Chatham House**

*UNA-UK Chair and former British ambassador to the UN Lord Hannay discusses the themes in his new book 'New World Disorder: The UN after the Cold War – An Insider's View'*

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I should begin this talk with a word or two of reassurance. I am not simply going to subject this (or any other) audience to a synopsis of my new book on the post-Cold War UN. Those early years after the end of the Cold War, when the main international actors emerged, blinking into the sunlight of a new uncertain era, after forty-five years of the frozen certainties of the previous one, are now receding into history. We need to study them; to understand better what went right and what went wrong; to learn lessons from the mistakes made, and there were plenty of them. But they are not going to provide us with that much guidance for the years ahead. Like all periods when fundamental transitions take place, those early post-Cold War years will remain a bit of a muddle, a time when no clear patterns had yet emerged. The kaleidoscope of international relations had been shaken, but the consequences remained unclear to all the main players, who were all too ready to snatch the peace dividends from the ending of the long East-west confrontation and from the winding down of a whole string of proxy wars around the world, and not to give too much thought to the new threats and challenges that lay ahead nor to how some elements of order were to be established in a world which soon evinced manifold symptoms of disorder.

Now we find ourselves at another important turning point, not a fundamental transition like that which occurred in the late 1980s, but nevertheless a moment at which new choices will have to be made by new leaders. In the United States a wonderfully vigorous election campaign is being fought out before a global audience whose interest in the outcome is obvious but whose influence over it is nil. And this time the campaign is not just about the economy; it is also about America's role in the world now that unilateralism and the hubris of the first few years of the present President's administration have proved to be a disastrous policy dead end. China's rising power continues, and will continue; so far it remains, as its architects frequently proclaim, a peaceful rise. But already China's leaders face uncomfortable foreign policy choices now that they are no longer just a regional power but a coming global power too. We Europeans face foreign policy choices too. The new Lisbon treaty, if ratified by all, should make possible the execution of a more coherent set of external policies in a more systematic and effective manner. But will the trio of relatively new leaders in Berlin, London and Paris seize that opportunity or will they, like their predecessors squabble amongst themselves and leave the new institutions to under-perform? And then a newly re-assertive Russia, although not one driven by a competing ideology nor one vying for world domination like the Soviet Union did, under a Medvedev/Putin duo is forcing other players towards policy responses which they had all become unused to making. There are many other important players on the international chessboard than this—the emerging powers in what we used to call the Third World before we appreciated that in policy terms we only had one—India and Brazil and others. But I hope I have done enough to illustrate why 2008 will see the certain rise of a new scene, if not a new act, in the post Cold War era.

What then are the policy choices which will have to be made next year and in the years that follow? No power, not even the United States, can impose foreign policies like a

blue-print and dictate the responses of others. All have to find responses to a whole range of challenges which have been dealt to them already, like a hand of cards—climate change; trade policy in a world experiencing economic slowdown; energy and food security; nuclear proliferation; terrorism; state failure, principally in Africa but elsewhere too; poverty, disease and malnutrition on a scale which threaten stability; and of course the crucial relationships between the main powers (without whose concerted support none of these challenges is going to be successfully met) will help to shape these responses. In the end it comes down in almost every case to a choice between a multilateral approach through reformed international rules and institutions, and a variety of unilateral expedients each provoking a unique counter-reaction. In posing these alternatives I am not for one moment suggesting that under the first of them, the multilateral approach, any of the principal players is simply going to sign away an independent foreign policy or place the whole of its future in the hands of global institutions, the UN or others. That is the dream of global governance which belongs to the realm of theory, not practice. Not the United States, not China, not Russia, not Europe, not the emerging developing country powers are going to head off down that road. For all of them and for others the choice is to what extent they can work together and to what extent differences of national interest, which cannot just be wished away, are to be allowed to frustrate attempts at concerted responses to all these challenges.

Even the briefest of glances through a number of the main challenges facing the international community illustrates why only a multilateral approach, drawing on the support of all the main economic and political actors on the world stage, will enable those challenges to be met. Take climate change. There is an emerging scientific consensus on what needs to be done; there is an emerging economic consensus on the costs of action and on the far greater costs of inaction; there is a timetable for negotiation agreed in Bali at the end of last year and leading up to the Copenhagen conference in 2009; and there is a road map for the issues that need to be covered in any new international arrangements—limits on carbon emissions, technology development and transfer, and so on. But there is no agreement yet, nor even the sign of one, on the crucial issue of how carbon emissions are to be capped and whether the caps are likely to be legally binding, on how the impact of that is to be shared out between countries and within groups of countries like the EU, and between developed and developing countries; nor on how any agreements are to be implemented and enforced—almost certainly requiring a new, global agency of some kind. So we are at the end of the beginning, not the beginning of the end on this issue. And without a concerted global effort we will not get to the end. If there are major countries holding out and staying outside any system, as there were after Kyoto, then not only will the action taken be insufficient but the governments which are ready to act will either lose the political support needed to do so or will be tempted down the dangerous path of trade protectionism to compensate for the costs they are bearing.

And then take trade policy itself. The Doha Development Round of global trade negotiations lies becalmed, unlikely to move ahead this year. I do not myself share the view of those who say it is doomed. It is as well to remember that its predecessor, the Uruguay Round, was pronounced dead any number of times; and yet it was then successfully completed and formed the base of the long period of strong growth in world trade and in the main economies, from which we are only just emerging. But the economic slowdown which is now underway will certainly not make it easier to complete the Doha Round; and the siren voices of protectionism are being raised ever louder in the US election campaign. It would be as well if those who are flirting with these ideas remembered that it was trade policy protectionism which turned a financial crisis in 1929

into a world economic slump, with disastrous foreign policy consequences. What will be needed from next year onward will be a renewed effort to complete the round. After all, the problems of food security and rapidly rising food prices should surely have made one of the major obstacles to be resolved easier to handle. The world needs freer trade in agricultural goods and less subsidisation of them if the market response to higher prices is to help remedy the shortages coming from greater demand in the rising economies and from bio-fuels. Yet again a global consensus is needed. And it would be good to see Russia, the last important economy not there, joining WTO sooner rather than later.

Turning now to an entirely different field, that of nuclear proliferation and the twinned subject of moves toward nuclear disarmament by the five, legally recognised nuclear powers. The challenge there is clear and immediate. The non-proliferation regime as a whole is under serious threat from the nuclear programmes of North Korea and Iran, both signatories of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, both pursuing activities which the UN Security Council has unanimously deemed to be threats to international peace and security. There should be no illusions. There will be no soft landing if those two countries successfully break out of the commitments they entered into, and I am not here just speculating about the risk of military responses. Others in their regions will follow; and the world will become a more insecure and dangerous place for all of us. But the problem is both wider than these two countries and wider too than just their nuclear programmes. Any solution to the latter will need to address directly the security concerns that led them to develop these programmes in the first place; and that will require face-to-face talks between the US and each of the countries concerned, which are under way in the case of North Korea but not yet in the case of Iran. But the wider problem of the regression since the turn of the millennium in multilateral measures of disarmament and arms control will need to be addressed too if the nuclear non-proliferation regime is to be strengthened and not left to decay; and that leads directly to the doorstep of those five official nuclear powers which committed themselves in 1995 and again in 2000 to moving towards nuclear disarmament but have since done nothing about it. The items on that agenda are clear; bringing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty into force, which will require US ratification; negotiating a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty; establishing an IAEA-guaranteed scheme for the supply of enrichment and reprocessing services for civil nuclear programmes; fully adapting the strategic regimes of the nuclear powers to a less hair-trigger approach; and resuming the short and intermediate nuclear weapons negotiations. Nothing will be done without a US and Russian lead. A major non-partisan campaign is on the way in the United States, led by a group of statesmen, none of whom has ever been accused of being soft on security issues, to ensure that the next US President gives that lead; and every one of the major candidates has now responded positively. The outcome of this initiative is likely to determine whether or not the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference ends in a fiasco like its 2005 predecessor or leaves the world with strengthened defences against nuclear proliferation.

State failure, and the consequent accompanying horrors of ethnic cleansing, regional mayhem, international terrorism and genocide, remains as prevalent as when the phenomenon first surfaced as a major international challenge in the early 1990s. We have got no better at preventing it; and we have got not much better at remedying it and at post-conflict peace-building. The 2005 commitment to a collective "responsibility to protect" remains words on paper, with the situation in Darfur a continuing rebuke to those who signed up to it but have found no effective response so far to the massive abuses of international human law in that province of Sudan. Both the UN and the African Union are stretched to their limits in handling this and other African crises. Either the members of the UN will find effective ways to strengthen these two organisations'

capacities for peace operations and their ability to work in tandem, or we will be confronted with widening areas of instability and disorder; as we are already seeing in Somalia. There are no alternatives. The experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan have exhausted both the resources of and the appetite for coalitions of the willing, even if their international legitimacy were not more and more challenged. So, if we are not to see more Burmas and Zimbabwes—and these two continuing as an affront to a rules-based international community—we are going to have to give effect to our fine words, not just repeat them.

And then, the last of the global challenges I will refer to, the Millennium Development Goals, set with such a flourish in 2000, saved from virtual collapse and irrelevance by the Gleneagles and UN Summits in 2005, but now yet again requiring urgent treatment and mid-course corrections. We are now over half way to the target date of 2015; but we are nowhere near half way to achieving the MDGs. Moreover such statistical progress as has been registered masks a massive regional imbalance, with some parts of Asia forging ahead but with what Professor Paul Collier has called the “bottom billion”, most of them in Africa, lagging far behind. So this September’s high level meeting in New York, called for by Gordon Brown and summoned by the UN Secretary-General, will have much work to do, old commitments to be more effectively honoured, new resources to be found, more effective action to be taken by the developing countries themselves through their Poverty Eradication Programmes. Because these problems—of weak public health programmes, of inadequate education, of poverty, communicable diseases and malnutrition—undermine the world’s security and stability every bit as surely as they undermine its prosperity. None of them will be easier to handle during a slowdown in the world economy; every one of them will in fact become more urgent.

Where then does the UN stand in all this? Right at the centre of it, I would argue. Every one of the five great challenges I have identified—with the sole exception of trade policy which falls to another organisation, the WTO, but one with an almost identical membership to that of the UN—is on its plate already. None of them is currently being adequately addressed. The indispensability of the UN is not easy to gainsay; but its effectiveness is. By looking first at the policy challenges I have aimed to argue that substantive multilateral responses to these need to be the highest priority in the period ahead. Without an emerging consensus on finding such policy responses, no amount of institutional change will be of any use, nor will institutional change bring about such a consensus. Of course institutional changes are important and necessary. Enlargement of the Security Council, with agreement on a new category of longer term, renewable members as a stepping stone towards an eventual increase in the number of permanent members, could be one such step; enlarging the G8 to include the main developing country economies would be another; breaking out of a rigid system of regional pre-emption on the posts of UN Secretary-General, Director-General of the IMF, and President of the World Bank is a third. But these institutional changes must not become a distraction from the policy challenges. And it is sobering to recall how inadequately the last institutional changes introduced at the UN in 2005-6—the Peacebuilding Commission, the Human Rights Council, the responsibility to protect—are so far functioning. So we should not let the institutional cart get ahead of the policy horse. Should we be looking for alternatives to the UN in facing up to those challenges? Some, particularly on the other side of the Atlantic, would argue so. There is much talk about a grouping of the world’s democracies taking over the UN’s role or working as a caucus within it. But that surely does not stand up to much critical scrutiny. Not only would such a grouping have no international legitimacy or legal force, however powerful and compelling its shared values. But do we really want to set up a caucus which, for the foreseeable future, will

exclude both China and Russia, two permanent members of the UN Security Council? And why should it be supposed that some of the main developing country democracies—countries like India and Brazil and Mexico and Indonesia and South Africa—will be willing to see the UN displaced or divided by such a grouping? I am convinced they would not. So it would be wise, I suspect, not to go off into that blind alley at all. To try it and fail could be worse than not trying at all.

So we come back, I would argue, to the UN, and to that old conundrum of how to make it work better, more effectively and more equitably. Certainly that would require a closer working relationship between the five permanent members of the Security Council than we have seen in recent years, although over Iran and North Korea there has been some modest mending of fences and coming together. Of course such cooperation necessitates compromises and trade-offs and it takes time. But what are the alternatives? And then the developing countries need to be brought, more surely and as of right now, into policy formulation at the UN. Without that, the necessary reforms of the Secretariat will again fall victim to mistrust and a lack of confidence between developed and developing countries.

Can one confidently predict that all this will happen, that the policy challenges will successfully, or at least sufficiently, met, that the UN will remain at the centre of the efforts needed to deal with them? That would be a heroic assumption. What can be predicted with a good deal more certainty is that if these challenges are flunked, if multilateral solutions are not found, if the UN were to become marginal and largely irrelevant, then the sort of new world disorder which we have been through in the last two decades will be as nothing compared to that which we will then experience.