

Managing World Disorder: Westminster School Model UN

Keynote speech by Lord Hannay of Chiswick

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When I sat down a couple of years ago to write a book about the UN in the post-Cold War period – roughly 1990 to 2005 – and decided to entitle it “New World Disorder”, I was certainly not even faintly aware of just how much disorder the world would be facing by the time my book was published – in 2008. Many of the threats and challenges we all faced, and the difficulties the international community had had in finding effective responses to them, were of course all too clearly apparent by that time – from terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed and failing states, as well as from the less direct, but every bit as real, threats of poverty, malnutrition, disease and from climate change. But at that time the world economy remained on the steady and in some countries like China spectacular, growth track it had been on for more than a decade. Now, in addition to all the previous threats we knew about, we face a global financial crisis of unprecedented dimensions and a sharp economic recession of whose duration we remain in ignorance. If this experience teaches us nothing else it should remind us that it is the unpredicted, and often unpredictable, nature of events which invariably poses the greatest difficulties for the international community. Predicting future events and trends remains, at best, an uncertain science; managing these events when they arise, avoiding their worst consequences, and steering away from the mistakes which enabled them to wreak such havoc is often the best we are likely to achieve.

The most natural human response to such misfortunes is to search for a scapegoat, and on this occasion a fair number of critics are targeting globalisation or free market economics as the villain of the piece. That is unwise both because it is not the case that globalisation has itself caused nothing but problems – it has in fact brought huge benefits to countries right across the divide between developed and developing economies – but also because any attempt to turn our back on globalisation, to reverse the trends of recent decades, is likely to be unsuccessful and in fact to worsen the predicament we all face. You only have to think of climate change, or of international trade, which has regularly outperformed economic growth, to realise that protectionism and autarchy offer no sort of solution to the array of global problems before us, each of which is crying out for global responses. You only need to cast your eye back to one of the last times the world faced a financial and economic crisis of this dimension – in the ‘20’s and ‘30’s of the last century – to see the disastrous consequences of responding to such a crisis with trade protectionism, competitive currency devaluations and a turning away from international cooperation. Then a financial and economic crisis became a political one and the ensuing world war was the worst in terms of destruction and loss of human life the world has ever experienced. So, even if that horrendous prospect is not immediately before us now, a lot is riding on our collective response to recent events.

But even if we avoid that fundamentally wrong choice of trying to reverse recent trends and to cut ourselves off from the rest of the world, plenty of false leads lie ahead in the handling of this period of financial and economic crisis. The most insidious of them is likely to be the argument that we must first fix these financial and economic symptoms and then, only once the world is back on the path of sustainable economic growth, will we be able to afford to turn our minds and our resources back to dealing with the whole array of other challenges. To do that would be to ignore a number of uncomfortable truths. First is the fact that this crisis will hit developing countries every bit as hard, if not harder, than developed ones. This will be a major setback to the task we jointly set ourselves nearly a decade ago of achieving the Millennium Development Goals – for education, public health, clean water, nutrition and many others – by 2015. And, if we developed countries cut back our support for these goals, we will compound the problem in a way which will be contrary to our own interests, since global instability will thereby be fostered, and which will also be morally indefensible. Second there are challenges like climate change which will not stand still if we take time out from them, they will get steadily worse. The vast majority of both the scientific and the economic evidence before us now points to the fact that every year we put off action to slow down and eventually reverse climate change, the problem gets worse and its solution becomes more painful and more costly. And thirdly let us not delude ourselves that other threats like those from terrorism or nuclear proliferation or from failed states will somehow go into remission while the world economy is sorted out. They will not. Rather they are likely to delay and to complicate the task of restoring confidence which is at the heart of any realistic financial and economic agenda.

So what should the international community in general and the UN in particular be concentrating on in this most difficult of years which lies ahead? Well, clearly, remedying some of the weaknesses of the international financial system which have contributed to the onset of the present crisis has to be part of any overall approach, even if it should not be, as I have argued, a necessary pre-condition for other actions outside the financial field. There will need to be some increase in regulation, and a real increase in the effectiveness of the implementation of that regulation, if confidence and credit-worthiness, without which financial institutions cannot function properly, is to be restored. A delicate balance will need to be struck between too much, too intrusive regulation which will stifle recovery and new investment and simply tinkering with the existing arrangements which will leave us vulnerable to another crisis. Also world financial governance in the form of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank will need to be updated both in its functioning and in its institutional structures, with the leading developing countries such as China, Brazil, India, South Africa and Mexico given a great role and a greater say in their work. A good start was made at the G20 Summit in Washington last November. But that meeting was more a photo-opportunity than an occasion for serious reform. When these leaders meet again, in London this April, there will need to be a lot more substance actually decided if the meeting is not to add to the general feeling of insecurity and is actually to remedy it.

And then we really must not neglect international trade, hard though it is to make progress towards freer and fairer trade in times as difficult as these. The threat of protectionism is a real one, and already there are some, fortunately relatively

minor, manifestations of it around the world. The Doha Development Round of world trade negotiations remains stalled; and question marks hang over the intentions of the new US administration, over those of some major developing countries such as India and of the European Union. It would be folly to turn our backs now on Doha when so much of the structure and necessary substance for a deal are there on the table. Doha's predecessor, the Uruguay Round, was pronounced dead any number of times in the early 1990's, when economic conditions were similarly unpropitious, and yet it eventually came through to agreement and ushered in an unparalleled period of economic growth which has only recently ended. So resuming the negotiations on Doha, with a real, political determination to conclude them, ought to be high on everyone's international agenda.

Coming closer now to the UN's own activities, the centrepiece in 2009 clearly has to be the climate change negotiations, due to culminate at the Copenhagen conference at the end of the year. There have been some positive developments recently, particularly the shift in the attitudes of the two main developed country hold-outs from the Kyoto Protocol, the US and Australia, and a growing acceptance among the developing countries that they too need to contribute to the solution if this problem, not just stand aside and let the developed world take the whole strain. But plenty of problems lie ahead, quite apart from the distractions of the financial crisis. The European Union will need to continue to give a lead, as it has done for several years now, if the negotiations are not to become becalmed; its own internal decisions last December should enable it to do that, although the difficulty of the process leading up to these decisions, and the messiness of some of the compromises reached, are a harbinger of things to come when negotiations take place within a wider, global framework. The US and China, now the two biggest carbon emitters, will need to strike a balance between their mutual obligations; and a wider balance between the commitments of developed and developing countries will need to be reached. Far more effective instruments will be needed to encourage the transfer of energy-saving and energy efficiency technology to the developing countries. After all if huge developing countries such as China and India were only to need the same amount of energy to produce a unit of production as the developed world needs, rather than several times that amount, as they do now, we would be well on the way to reversing climate change as well as to developing new "green" industries and techniques ourselves. And then success at Copenhagen will call for new institutional structures at the UN to oversee and implement the commitments entered into there, given that the current UN structures for handling environmental issues are so clearly inadequate to any such increased tasks.

For the UN to play a more effective and equitable role in the world, you always come back in the end to these issues of peace and security which form the bedrock of the UN Charter, agreed in 1945 in the aftermath of the Second World War. Despite some successes and a massive expansion of the UN's responsibilities in these fields since the end of the Cold War in the late 1980's, not even the UN's most uncritical supporters would argue that performance has measured up to the challenges it has faced in recent years. Old disputes – over Palestine, over Kashmir and in the Korean Peninsula – have continued to fester and the international community's efforts to resolve them has remained inadequate while they have

fuelled new or newly acute threats such as terrorism and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The problem of state failure and the threats which emerge from state failure such as terrorism (again), genocide and other terrible abuses of human rights have again evoked thoroughly inadequate responses from the international community. The demand for the UN to do more, and to do what it does more effectively, is not in doubt. Why otherwise are there 100,000 peacekeepers authorised for deployment by the UN Security Council world wide? But the 17 or so active peacekeeping operations are often found to be short of resources and political backing when they going gets rough – look at the Congo or Darfur, if you want examples. So what are the most urgent things to be done if these weaknesses in the efforts to achieve international peace and security are to be remedied?

One priority must surely be to address those old disputes more purposefully and more systematically than ever before and here the arrival of President Obama in the White House offers the hope of strengthened peace processes to address these disputes but of course not the certainty of resolving them. The hostilities in and around Gaza, the increased tension throughout the Middle East, the continuing lack of an inclusive process which encompasses all strands of opinion on the Palestinian side, and the possibility of the election of an even harder-line Israeli government all demonstrate just how difficult it is going to be to make progress in a comprehensive Middle East Peace Process. But the alternatives of neglect or ineffective diplomatic posturing are far worse. The six-nation talks aimed at reversing North Korea's nuclear weapons programme and at normalising relations on the Korean peninsula are temporarily stalled but still offer the best framework for making progress. They need to be given new impetus. Relations between India and Pakistan are fragile and tensions have increased following the terrorist attack on Mumbai. The bilateral process, but one strongly supported and encouraged by the international community, offers the best hope in this case. To this trio of long-running disputes should be added the problems raised by Iran's nuclear programme where a direct dialogue between the US and Iran to supplement the existing multilateral negotiating process can realistically be expected in the near future and is to be wholeheartedly welcomed. That process could well need more sticks in the form of strengthened sanctions and more carrots in the form of addressing Iran's legitimate security concerns before it can hope to succeed but that is an infinitely preferable option to any use of force.

A second priority needs to be to strengthen UN peacekeeping operations. This will mean giving peacekeepers in places like the Congo a rapid reaction capability to deal with break-outs from an agreed settlement; it means making an effective reality of what are called hybrid operations such as that in Darfur where the UN and the African Union are working together in tandem; it means clamping down more severely and overcoming jurisdictional problems in dealing with human rights abuses by peacekeepers. And it surely also means making a reality of the recently agreed standard of the international community's "responsibility to protect" those whom their own governments are either unwilling or unable to protect. This major conceptual breakthrough, which was agreed by all UN members at the September 2005 Summit meeting, has so far signified little more than words on paper. In Zimbabwe, in Somalia, in Burma attempts to implement it have been frustrated. The belief that it represents little more than a fig leaf to cover external

military intervention has sown much suspicion among developing countries. What needs to be done is to develop a complex strategy aimed at preventing state failure in the first place and at deploying non-military resources to help countries which may be sliding towards failure. In all this the UN's Peace Building Commission, also established following the 2005 Summit, needs to be given wider responsibilities and more resources.

And then a third priority must be to reverse the dismantling of multilateral arms control and disarmament agreements which has characterised the last few years. Forty years ago it was widely believed that the world was faced with a massive proliferation of nuclear weapons. The response of the international community was the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which has subsequently ensured that the number of states with nuclear weapons has only risen from five to eight (or perhaps nine, depending on how you classify North Korea). Now we stand on the verge of another major threat of widespread nuclear proliferation, with North Korea's and Iran's nuclear programmes potential precursors of a much wider break-out. To avoid that will require strengthened safeguards applied by the International Atomic Energy Agency. But it will also require action by the five recognised nuclear weapons states to resume the progress towards nuclear disarmament to which they committed themselves in 1995 and 2000. Without that the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Review Conference risks being as big a fiasco as its predecessor in 2005; and the negative consequences for international peace and security would be serious in the extreme. On this issue too much depends on the incoming Obama administration; it was the Bush administration's rejection of multilateral arms control and disarmament which has, among other things, brought us to our present predicament. But, even if the US does give a lead, it will require support from the other nuclear weapons states, Russia in particular (since we need to remember that the US and Russia control 95% of the world's nuclear warheads) and it will also require the willingness of the non-nuclear weapons states to accept more elaborate and intrusive inspections and disciplines over their civil nuclear programmes.

Well, all that amounts to a pretty formidable agenda for the UN in particular and for the international community in general. We are currently at something of a turning point. We have a choice between finding multilateral solutions to the global challenges which face us and thereby strengthening the trend towards a rules-based international community which so sharply distinguished the second half of the twentieth century from the lamentable first half; or, alternatively, we could see the unravelling of such rules as already exist and a failure to manage these global challenges. Over time the first (and in my view desirable) alternative will require too a radical re-shaping of global institutions, starting, perhaps even this year, with an expansion of the G8 economic summits to include as of right the main developing countries; and then too leading on to some enlargement of the Security Council aimed at achieving greater representativity and legitimacy for that essential institution. None of this will be easy. None of it will be achieved by simply sitting back and hoping that President Obama will pull all our chestnuts out of the fire for us. And all this is happening during a period of financial and economic turmoil. I hope myself that your generation will encourage our political leaders to echo and make a reality of the slogan of the Obama campaign "Yes, we can".