Transcript

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What Will the World Look Like in the Obama Era?

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

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Dr Robin Niblett

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Chatham House. Fantastic to see you all here. I'm not quite sure if we're going to have an extreme change of temperature from upstairs and downstairs, but you'll all have to put your jackets on in a minute, hopefully we can get the temperature balance right from upstairs to downstairs. The thing is, let me – we have a slightly extended, kind of, evening this evening, a) because I think we're going to have an important and very interesting Memorial Lecture. So this meeting will go on to 7:15. We may even drift a little bit to 7:20/7:25, depending how the questions are going, but we will definitely finish shortly after 7:20.

As a boring thing there, please ask you to make sure your mobile phones are switched off. Just to remind you that this talk tonight is on the record, so even when we get to Q&A, just as I know there are quite a few members of the political establishment here, I want to make sure they're aware of that and no-one gets caught out. Let me thank, also, Robert Woodthorpe Browne and the British – sorry, the Liberal International British Group, I know I don't usually get the British in there, delighted to be able to host this evening and this Lord Garden Memorial Lecture with you, Robert, with all of your colleagues, who've joined us here this evening.

Obviously, for Chatham House, it is very special to be able to hold this event, in honour of Tim Garden, Director of Chatham House. Somebody who's life was cut short and somebody who had, I think, a lot more to give and that makes, obviously, the ability to have this, kind of, Memorial Lecture all the more important and significant for us, as well as I know for all of you who've come here today. He was somebody who captured, it strikes me, those interesting three dimensions over life. Somebody who committed his time to the Services, to the Royal Air Force, but the Armed Services, the British Armed Services, somebody who gave a good portion of his life to politics and to try to reach beyond the Services and communicate his vision of international security to the broader British people and to the political process. But somebody, also, who gave time to thinking and to strategising and, therefore, somebody who published, as you all know, published Can Deterrence Last? Published The Technology Trap: Science and the Military, and somebody who was an active speaker, thinker, commentator, on the choices that Britain faced in the post-Cold War world, of this very complicated world that we face today for international security.

It is, therefore, all the more appropriate that we should be able to host Paddy Ashdown here this evening, somebody who, I should note, has been, and is, a President of Chatham House, one of our three Honorary Presidents, so, Paddy, all the more pleasure to have you here, for that reason. But somebody who also captures those three qualities, I think, that can also be said to be shared with Tim Garden, somebody who gave a good portion of his life, in his case, close to 20 years, and to British Armed Services, to the Royal Marines. Somebody who, as we all know here, had a very active life in politics, close to 20 years in the House of Commons, some 11 years as the Leader of the Liberal Democrats. But, also, somebody who's been a strategist and a thinker, both from his own personal experience as the High Representative of the International Community and as the EU Special Representative for Bosnia Herzegovina between 2002 and 2006. Somebody also who has written, both his Swords And Ploughshares: Building Peace in the 21st Century. His current book, which I think we've got copies of over there, of A Fortunate Life, all the more fortunate if some of you will take a few copies at the end of this. And with today being an especially busy day, somebody who's, I think, probably been heard by many of you on the airwaves this morning, as one of the Co-Chairs of the IPPR Commission on Shared Responsibilities and National Security Strategy for the United Kingdom, and I suspect some of those themes that are in that commission report, Paddy, will be appearing here in your remarks.

So, again, let me say welcome, thank you all so much for coming this evening. It's a delight to have Sue, to have Antonia and Alex with us here this evening and to have all of you, who knew Tim Garden so well, and it's wonderful to be able to host this second lecture, having had George Robertson, another President of Chatham House, with us last year, but in this new venue. Hope you enjoy Paddy's comments and thoughts and the Q&A that we'll have afterwards, and we look forward to keeping doing this every year. But over to you, Paddy.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

Thank you very much [applause]. Robin, thank you very much and thank you for inviting me here tonight to give this lecture. I was walking through Paddington, not long ago, and somebody came up to me and said, "Here," he said, "here, didn't you used to be Paddy Ashdown?" So, the fact that you've invited me here tonight seems to indicate that I still am, and that's really jolly reassuring, especially for me.

It's a real privilege to give this Memorial Lecture and I really want to congratulate the International British Group for setting up this Memorial Lecture. Tim was a man who was widely respected, across all political parties, but deeply loved amongst his colleagues, not just his colleagues, but his colleagues in the Parliamentary party, and it's wonderful to see so many of them here today. Respected because he was a man of absolute integrity, loved because he was a deeply committed colleague, who could always be relied on and a strong Liberal Democrat to the core of his bones and I think, also, in both cases, because he had such clear sight about events and what was coming. And in drafting this lecture and writing this lecture, I really, very much, had Tim in mind, and the kind of lecture that would – he might have appreciated or, at least, would have engaged in and would do him justice.

So, in this speech, there's going to be some history and some poetry and on a slightly more prosaic level, I will also unveil to you, tongue in cheek, of course, Ashdown's third law for effective action in the post-Obama world, not to be taken too seriously, just a bit of fun, as Jon Snow used to say on Election Night specials. Let as start with the poetry. It comes from that great Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore, and he wrote, of course, in the first decades of the last century, this poem is called Unity in Diversity, a pretty common theme nowadays, but absolutely not a common theme in the early decades of the 20th Century. Here's what he wrote. "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 in one common life, like mountain peaks in the morning sun." It's a wonderful line, that, like mounting peaks in the morning sun. We are about, I think, to enter an age in which Tagore's great statement will be one of the few signposts we have for a safe passage through turbulent times.

Three factors, I think, make the years ahead completely different from those of the last century, and some are of a nature, which we have never before encountered. The first of these factors is not unique, but it's not going to be any the more comfortable for that. We are on the edge, I believe, of one of those periods of history, which comes about every 100 years, when the pattern of world power changes, when the gimbals, upon which the established order is mounted, shift and a new order begins to emerge. And these are almost always difficult times for the weak, tough for those whose power is waning and usually, I fear, bloody for almost everyone.

Economic power is running away from the nations gathered on the shores of the Atlantic and towards those gathered on the rim of the Pacific. Trail your hand over the side of the boat and feel how powerfully that tide is running. This economic recession is not, I believe, going to be like any other we have recently experienced. We will not, this time, plummet down and then bounce back safely to where we were before it all started. This is about something much, much deeper. Underneath the tectonic plates of global

power are beginning to shift and when it is over we, in the Western nations, will, I believe, relatively speaking, be weaker than those in the Eastern nations and they will be stronger.

Now, 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 emerging power of the United States in the last decades of the 19th Century and the early decades of the 20th, and we all remember the convulsions which followed that collapse of empires and the emergence of a new order. Only then, when power shifts, the values mostly didn't. This time, what I believe we are about to experience is not just a change of order, but a change of values, too.

Now, it's important to be very clear about exactly what is happening and what is not. I am not saying that the rise of nations, like China and other Far Eastern powers, will be smooth or comfortable for them either. There are some who propose that China's ascent will follow the straight line graph that yesterday China was here, today they are here, draw a line between the two and extend it, that is where China will be at a given time in the future, I do not believe that. China's ascent to great power status will not be smooth; Beijing is trying to do something very difficult and, in a Chinese context, very dangerous, too. Their economy may be largely liberalised but, unlike India, their society is not, and my guess is that as they begin to lose the bonds of their old communist structures in favour of a freer society, as they must, there will be considerable turbulence in China, too. Look at the increase in protests and disturbance already occurring in China and you might well conclude that this has, indeed, already started.

Beijing is certainly and properly frightened by it, and they've every reason to be. Chinese history is littered with instances when this great nation, as disparate and ethnically diverse as Europe as a whole, stands at the very edge of greatness and then descends into dissolution and chaos. But, but, and here is the point, though this may alter the timescale and the manner of China's rise, it will not, I think, change the basic fact that great power status is probably her most likely destination, ultimately. Nor do I agree with some of my more leftwing friends, who tell me often, with ill disguised glee, that we are seeing the end of American power in the world, that the United States has passed the zenith of its glory. I do not believe that either. You know, you know a power which still has a claim to greatness by its ability to change, by its flexibility, by its like footedness, 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. And for those who wish to do so, then note another example, look at the lightning fast changes brought about by General Petraeus in the American Army, which in the matter of years, two years or so, has changed the US Army from a great lumbering dinosaur, incapable of effective action against insurgents in Iraq, into, in my view, the world's most effective counterinsurgency Army, leaving, I regret to say, the British Army now trailing some way behind. You know, no European Army, indeed, none in the world could have made a change with such speed.

No, I don't think that we have seen the end of the American century yet. The US looks likely, to me, to be the world's most powerful nation for one or two decades to come, which is, frankly, as far as it is wise to make predictions. But though the United States position as the world's pre-eminent power is not, in my view, likely to change, the context in which she holds that position is now, it seems to me, certain to. We are no longer looking, as we have for more than half a century, at a world dominated by a single superpower. The globe is no longer going to be monopolar in the way it has been for most of the lifetimes of most of the people in this room. The growth of these new power centres now emerging means the emergence of a much more multipolar world, one, which I think, will look much more like Europe in the 19th Century.

You may remember the Great British Foreign Secretary, George Canning, used to refer to the five-sided balance of power in 19th Century Europe as the European Areopagiticus, borrowing a word from Milton, the so-called concert of Europe, in which he saw Britain's role as always playing to the balance, in order to prevent any single European power dominating and thus, keeping Britain out of continental entanglements.

Well, my guess is that the world, for the next few decades, is going to look much more like that and this will have a number of rather important consequences. One is likely to be the rise in regional groupings, of which history may well say that the European Union was the first, albeit highly imperfect, example. Second, and linked to that, will be an increase in protectionism and probably a reversal of the movement towards free trade of the last half century or so, with all the implications that carries for a destructive period of beggar my neighbour economic policies.

The third implication for this new pattern of world power is for us, by us I mean us in Europe. In such a multisided world, the eyes of the US are likely to be just as much West across the Pacific as they are going to be East across the Atlantic. The Atlantic relationship will, for sure, remain a key relationship on the European side and on the American one, too, but it will not have, I think, anything like the unique importance as the singular linchpin for all other policies, as it has had over the last half century.

I'm not sure, I'm not at all sure, that Europe has fully realised it yet, but the world has changed. Even in the last ten years, the US security guarantee, under which we have all sheltered since World War II and which has given many of our European neighbours the opportunity to take a free ride on Uncle Sam for their national security, no longer exists. There are still United States soldiers left in Europe, to be sure, but very few of them, and almost all are here, not for our security, but to support their operations in Iraq and in Afghanistan.

My guess is that Europe is going to be less important to every future US President, including Barack Hussein Obama, than it has been to every past one, including George W Bush. Indeed, having loved to hate him, we Europeans may well, I'm sorry, find ourselves rather missing George Bush before too long, it's scarcely credible, but I think it's so. Firstly, because we were able to shelter behind complaints about his unilateralism, as an excuse for not getting our own European act together. It may not be long before America's new President calls our bluff by posing a challenge for concerted European action with the US, which we have neither the institutions nor the will for effective co-ordination to respond to. And secondly, because 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 emotion and family and history, but on a rather cooler, even brutal, appraisal of what we can deliver, when it comes to pursuing our joint interests and here the answer is, frankly, not much, if Afghanistan is anything to go by.

The United states, you see, ladies and gentlemen, is going to have interests in the world, which do not always coincide with those of Europe and Europe is going to have interest in the world, which do not always coincide with Washington's. For Europeans, this will mean having a rather more subtle and sophisticated foreign policy in the future than simply hanging onto the apron strings of our neighbourhood superpower, as we have in the past. And for both of us, that is the US and Europe, it means developing a much more mature relationship in which we can sometimes disagree, without shouting betrayal on every occasion. It also means that if NATO is to prosper, perhaps even after Afghanistan survived, then it will do so better to the extent that it fulfils the dream of Kissinger and Kennedy, of a twin pillar NATO, where the European defence structures are co-ordinated enough to offer something closer to a partnership of equals, than our present unequal dialogue between a giant and a Parliament of pygmies.

There is a final consequence, from this new situation, in which we Europeans now find ourselves. If we cannot, in future, count on the US as our protector of last resort and our friend for all circumstances, then it is also true that things are more threatening for us elsewhere as well. We now have an increasingly assertive Russia, prepared to use the lever of energy, skilful and dividing and ruling, asserting the old Brezhnev Doctrine of spheres of interest and being prepared to back it with military force, when the opportunity arises, and beyond that we have a rising China and an increasing economic power in the Pacific Rim.

Now, if we Europeans do not realise that the right reaction of Europe to the new and much more difficult circumstances in which we find ourselves, is to deepen the integration of our institutions of defence, foreign affairs and economic policies, then, frankly, we are fools and the next few decades are going to be much, much more painful than they need to be. As Nick Clegg has rightly said, the choice for us in Europe is to be stronger and safer together, or weaker and poorer apart. Now, I know that doesn't respond to the mood of the nation, but that's the hard reality of the new circumstances, I think, in which we find ourselves.

And last and arguably, most important consequence of this new shake to world power is this. We are, I believe, reaching the beginning of the end of, perhaps, six centuries of the domination of Western power, Western institutions and Western values over international affairs. We are soon going to discover, no, we are already discovering, that if we want to get things done, such as redesigning the world economic order or intervening for peace, we cannot, any longer, do them within the cosy Atlantic club, that's not enough. We are going to have to find new allies in places we would never previously have thought of and they will probably prove less congenial and more demanding than we find it comfortable to cope with.

I suspect that Iraq and Afghanistan will be the last interventions that we attempt, depending on Western power alone. In future, if we cannot find wider partners for these affairs, we will probably not be able to do them. The global financial crisis has made it very plain. If we want a more ordered world at a time of great instability, and we certainly should, then we are going to have to provide a space at the top tables for nations who do not share our culture, our history, our world view or even, in some cases, our values, themselves. And that's going to be uncomfortable and it's going to be painful and it's going to mean making some very difficult compromises and it's going to need a new way of thinking. We're going to have to accept deals we would, hitherto, have found completely unpalatable. I suspect it will not be long before we look back at the deal we spurned, for instance, at the Doha Trade talks, when they failed, with a nostalgia that comes from the realisation that this was an opportunity lost and the chagrin that accompanies the understanding that we're not going to get anything as good again.

The second factor I want to talk about tonight, which is likely to make these times to try men's souls, is that we are seeing, in a sense, a double shift of power. Power is not just moving laterally from West to East, it is shifting vertically, too. It is migrating out of the structures of the nation state, which we created to hold power to accountability and make it subject to regulation under Rule of Law and into the global space, where the instruments of regulation are few and the framework of law is weak. Look at the institutions, for a moment, which are having difficulties at this time. National Governments, political structures, the old establishments, I note that nearly all depend on the nation state and find their range of action confined within the borders of the state to which they belong. Now, look at those institutions, which are growing in power and reach: the internet, the satellite broadcasters, the transnational corporations, the international moneychangers and speculators, international crime, international terrorism, and note that all operate oblivious of national borders and largely, beyond the reach of national regulation and the Rule of Law.

Now, for a time, for a time, being unregulated and free of the constraints of the law suits the powerful, but sooner or later, lawless spaces also become attractive, not just to the builders, but to the destroyers, too. That's why Al Qaeda is there using the internet, satellite broadcasting, our systems of mass global travel. Even the very systems of global finance that they are dedicated to destroying, in order the better to destroy us. It's calculated, you know, that some 60% of the $4 million taken to fund 9/11 actually passed through the financial institutions housed in the Twin Towers that 9/11 destroyed.

International terrorism loves the global space, precisely because it is a lawless space, as lawless as were the deserts of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan. Now, ladies and gentlemen, there is an immutable rule of history, where power goes governance must follow and if it doesn't then chaos, conflict and turbulence are the consequences. Now, what makes this even more urgent, even more dangerous, is that it isn't just power that has been globalised, problems have, too. The uncomfortable truth, which our Politicians in Westminster refuse to acknowledge and our old institutions can find no way to cope with, is that there is now almost no problem, which affects our citizens' wellbeing or our natures' future, which can be resolved within the nation state or by its institutions alone. Not our ability to protect ourselves, not our capacity to fight crime, not the cleanliness of our environment, not our capacity to tackle global warming, not our health, not our jobs, not our mortgages, 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, however, as the global financial crisis has showed, and the issue of global warming showed, even before that, we have neither the institutions, nor the political leadership, to do this. If, as I believe, 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 successfully, whilst ensuring a degree of democratic accountability, will, in large measure, define the extents to which we will be able to manage the period of turbulence ahead, either successfully or much less so. By the way, I suspect that this task of bringing governance to the global space will be achieved more through treaty-based institutions, like Kyoto, G20, the WTO, than through a further spawning of UN-based institutions, but that is a subject for a different time.

We, meanwhile, have a third factor to cope with, which is now shaping this age in a way which is different in scale from anything we have seen before, our increasing global interdependence. Well, of course, nations have always been connected. What happens in one nation has always been of interest and importance to its neighbours and its allies, that's why the – one of the oldest functions of Government is diplomacy. But today's interdependence is of a completely different order. Nations today are not just linked by trade, commerce and diplomacy, they are intimately interlocked in almost every aspect of our daily lives. What happens in one can have a profound, direct and immediate consequence for what happens in another.

The outbreak of swine flu in Mexico affects us and our health in Britain hours later. The collapse of Lehman Brothers in the US sets in train a domino effect across the entire global economy in days. 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, even in one of your most iconic cities.

You see, in a way that has never been true before, today everything is connected to everything. Imagine, for a moment, have a little piece of imagination, just for the moment, that I am not Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon, but Lord Roberts of Kandahar. He was, of course, the last British General to invade Afghanistan and the only General, since Alexander the Great, to make a success of it, not least

because, like Alexander, he didn't try to stay very long. He went in and out in very quick and rather bloody order. His, too, was a war of vengeance. It was a punitive expedition to avenge the terrible defeat of the British Army at the massacre of the snows in 1842. Incidentally, my great, great grandmother left Pashara in the autumn of 1842 to go and join her husband in Kabul, and only avoided that massacre because she didn't get there and had to come back before the rebellion started.

But this is now 30 years later. By the way, we took 30 years to mount our punitive expedition in those days and a great deal of that time was spent arranging the relationships of the tribes in Southern Afghanistan and places like Helmand and Kandahar before Bobs Robert was sent in. But the year is now 1879, the war is the second Afghan war and here he is, Bobs Robert telling us how he did it. What's he saying? He's telling us about the number of troops he had, about the performance of his Indian soldiers, the Sepoys, about the importance of his screw guns, the great mountain guns, which were the British equivalent for knocking down Afghan villages of the US B-52s today. Please note what he's not talking about. He's not talking about poppy fields, not because they were not there, the poppy has always been grown in Afghanistan for century-after-century. But in his days, the poppy simply didn't matter. Today's Afghanistan poppy fields are directly connected to crime in our cities, in our neighbourhoods; everything is connected to everything. He'd have not talked about a mad mullah in a cave, preaching a doctrine of Jihad, there were lots of those, too. One of them was called the Wali of Swat, which I think is a wonderful name. Well, he was slightly later, but still, there were plenty of them in 1879.

But in 1879, they didn't matter. Today, what Osama bin Laden says in that cave in the Tora Bora Mountains is directly connected to what happens in that terraced house in Bolton; everything is connected to everything. He wouldn't have worried about what we now call collateral damage or dead civilians, they didn't matter for the world didn't know about them, until six weeks or even months later. Now the picture of that wedding party, inadvertently blown up 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 critical battle, which has to be won, in operations such as these. Everything is connected to everything and that interconnectedness applies, not just to the external relations between the nations, it applies to the internal organisations of nations, too.

Here's another little piece of imagining for you. Imagine that we're now talking about the defence of Britain 40 years ago when I was a British soldier, what would we have talked about? Well, we'd have talked about the size of our Army, the size of our Navy, the size of our Air Force, and we'd have talked a bit about the strength of our allies and that would have been it. Get all those right and the defence of Britain is secure. The enemy was outside the walls and the job of keeping them there fell exclusively to the Minister of Defence. But now, because everything is connected to everything, the enemy is not outside, it's inside and now we have to talk about everything. Defending the country is not just a job for the Ministry of Defence, it's a job for the Ministry of Health, because, as we've recently seen, part of defending ourselves is defending ourselves against pandemic disease.

The Minister of Agriculture is also involved because food security is part of our security, too. The Minister of Industry, I'm speaking generically here, is involved because the lack of resilience of our internal systems is a key point of vulnerability for our enemies and, as we know, the Home Office is involved because the enemy are not just foreigners from another country, they can also be our own citizens, whose loyalty lies with those whose belief are inimical to everything we stand for. Everything is connected to everything.

Defending Britain is no longer a job for the Ministry of Defence, it is now a job for every department of Government, and our ability to defend ourselves depends on our ability to bring together all their

activities in a networked and interlocking way. But the problem is that our Governments are just not structured to do things in a networked and interlocking way. They are rather made up of vertical stovepipes, steeped in stovepipe culture and are run, in the main, by people with deeply stovepipe minds. And there's a reason for that, to be fair, our current Government structures, and the same applies to all other Western democracies, took on their form in the 19th Century and they followed the structures that were in fashion at the time. The structures of the industrial revolution, the era of mass production, strong command chains, vertical hierarchies, specialisation of [inaudible – 33:55], you can see it all in Charlie Chaplin's film, Modern Times, and this was right. It was appropriate for the time. It suited the age, but, ladies and gentlemen, it does not suit our age, for this is the age of post-industrial structures, of flat hierarchies, of networks, so networking dedicated to bringing disparate inputs together, at a single focal point, which, in the case of commercial institutions in the marketplace, is satisfaction of the customer.

Now the Armed Forces have understood this. Led by the US, they have now restructured themselves to fight, what they call, the network battle, using all arms to achieve, what they call, an effect-based strategy. Some Governments, too, are dimly realising that this is something they ought to be doing and they've invented new language, like the comprehensive approach, in the hope that language, alone, will solve the problem. But, mostly, insofar as the compressive approach exists at all, it does, in theory, at Whitehall, but is pretty well absent in practice on the ground, where it matters. Meanwhile, Government structures and cultures remained resolutely stuck in the past. Ministers are judged on how well they defend the territorial integrity of their department, preserve its budgets, defend its payroll, senior Civil Servants, ditto.

Networking with other departments is regarded as a threat, not an opportunity, and I doubt if anyone in Government, outside the Ministry of Defence, has ever heard of an effect-based strategy. The screaming of gears that we hear in Whitehall and Washington and elsewhere is the sound of vertical hierarchies and stovepipe minds, knowing that they ought to be networking, but finding it impossible to do so. We probably need a wholesale restructuring of Government, along more modern lines, but I somehow doubt this is going to happen. So, we may have to be satisfied with, at least, changing cultures, if we can't change structures.

This is the moment you've all been waiting for. 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 institution's ability not to do, but to network, which matters most. The key part of modern structures is not their internal order, it's their external docking points. It is not the effectiveness of hierarchies which matters, 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. And 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 coalitions. In our determination to see Afghanistan solely through the prism of the place in which we happen to be fighting. Their British think Afghanistan is Helmand, the Canadians think it's Kandahar, the Dutch think it's Urozgan, the Germans think it's Badakhshan ,and the United States think it's B-52s. In our refusal, in other words, to co-ordinate ourselves in order to produce a single countrywide strategy interlocked together, which enables us to speak with a single voice and act with a single purpose.

The real scandal, ladies and gentlemen, of Afghanistan is not that our soldiers don't have the right boots or enough helicopters, it's that they are paying with their lives because our Politicians cannot or will not get their act together, that's the real scandal of Afghanistan. And what applies in nation – between nations in Afghanistan applies within them, too. Though there have, at last, been, of late, some welcome

improvements in our ability to bring civilian peacemakers and reconstructions from DFID into action, straight after the military have taken their objective. I'm afraid that this still lags well behind the, kind of, practice that is necessary. When British forces took, retook, Musa Qala in Afghanistan, it took weeks for DFID to arrive and start the reconstruction, which should have begun the moment the fighting stopped. We are not, ourselves, properly interlocked together.

So, it does not matter if you're 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 an invasion in – of Iraq, even though America was, beyond ourselves and the largely cosmetic support of a few others, alone in the enterprise. In the new interconnected, multipolar world, which we are entering, nations will raise the chances of success in their enterprise to the extent that they can make them multilateral and raise the chances of failure if they are unable to do this.

Finally, there is one other completely new, arguably, revolutionary aspect of our interconnected world, which is worth mentioning. You see, from time immemorial, the means by which men, and they usually were men, of course, organised their defence against their enemies was through the concept and principle of collected defence, through building, together with others in tribes, in nation states, and when these proved insufficient, in alliances like NATO, in order to create more powerful collective defence structures than their enemies. And the more powerful those collective defence structures 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 share a destiny with our enemy, in many cases. The notion of collective security is, in many ways and in many cases, having to give way to an understanding of the importance of common security. It is this revelation of a shared destiny and an understanding of the importance of common, rather than collective, security, which underpin 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 comes, not from a nuclear armed powers, but from the threat of nuclear proliferation. It was the understanding, at last, after 37 years, that the Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland were partners in a shared destiny, rather than enemies in a zero sum conflict that laid the foundations of the Northern Irish peace process. And it is Israel and some of its Arab neighbour's failure to understand that they share a destiny with each other, which is, arguably, the greatest single barrier to a secure Israel within a peaceful Middle East.

Now, please note what I'm saying. I'm not saying 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 in the kind of world we're coming into, when we think about how to secure ourselves, we would also have to think about not just how to destroy our enemies, but also, how we may be able to live with them as well. Well, is that new? Not really. 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 that fatal year of 1879 when Lord Roberts was invading Afghanistan, in his great second Midlothian speech, in which 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, bind 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, ladies and gentlemen, here is the difference between their age and ours. For Donne and for Gladstone these were recommendations of morality. For us, I think they are increasingly going to be part of the equation for our survival. Thank you very much [applause].

Dr Robin Niblett

Paddy, thank you very much, that really was – that was a Memorial Lecture. I mean, that was a lecture, I think, is going to give us a lot of cause for thought. Lucky we have copies of the speech and it will be on our website. I think we may even have some hardcopies, yes, after this, and I think there are definitely some phrases and thoughts that I'm going to want to go back and ponder over, as I think many here will, as well. I was thinking, how does one do a segue at this moment? I think at least I'm going to point out what I took as the five key messages and give folks a chance to gather their thoughts before we move into the conversation. These were the five thoughts that I took from you. Forgive me if they weren't the ones you meant to make.

Number one, patterns of world power are changing, in particular from West to East, and you went through a whole range of the implications, but one that really struck me is, is this the beginning of the end of Western institutions? Amongst the many other points you raised. Number two, power is shifting vertically. This isn't just states, this is the rise of all those non-state actors, etc. Third, a global interdependence, your phrase, "Everything is connected to everything," and I think we – you know, you illustrated that very powerfully. We did get, fourth point, Ashdown's third law, the most important thing is not what you can do or, at least, what not what you can do alone, but what you do with others, and, again, I thought you gave some very trenchant examples of that. And then, finally, not that we can do without collective defence or security, but we need to think, in terms of common defence, how we live with our enemies, not just on the basis of morality, but on the basis of survivability, I suppose, and our common future.

So, that was a way to give all moment of thought, so that we can now engage in some Q&A, and when Charmaine wanders up here and gives me a watch, 'cause my battery ran out about a minute ago and I forgot to bring mine with me and, as all my members remind me, there are no clocks in this damn room, oh, there we go, thank you, Paddy, I want to know how much time we've got left. We have half an hour, thank you, and I've got two watches now. Thank you. Paddy, I'll take yours, but we have half an hour, so at least half an hour for questions. I've got two hands up. Please let Paddy know who you are, and I'll grab as many as I can. We'll take 'em one at a time to start with and then, if we have to group, we'll group later on. William, you had your hand up first.

William Wallace

William Wallace, Paddy…

Dr Robin Niblett

Microphone coming.

William Wallace

...I'm not very happy with the modern multipolar world in the 19th Century fashion, they managed it by limited wars and the system eventually broke down. Now, if one takes the interconnected world thing, the question is, how do we co-opt the other powers into a common security system? And if one just simply says Brazil, China and India, how do we manage to co-opt them into sharing the problems of managing insecurity in a world of which, actually, British and American defence policy is still being based upon the idea that white men manage those problems and we can't do it any longer?

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

Did you say the third, Brazil, China and India?

William Wallace

Yeah.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

Do you want me to take them one at a time?

Dr Robin Niblett

I think they're big questions, it's worth taking them one at a time.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

They are big questions. Look, I didn't say our destiny would be the 19th Century destiny. I said that this looked, to me, like the shape of the world and the 19th Century handled the multipolar structure of power in its own way and ended up, indeed, in conflict, and that's one of the solutions that – one of the endpoints that it might be for us, if we don't manage things better. I don't think – I don't speak out of historical inevitability, in terms of outcomes. I'm merely saying that if you look at the nature of the world in the next two or three decades, it looks, to me, much more like a multipolar, multisided structure of world power, a bit like Europe of the 19th Century. You don't have to conclude from that, that we end up with the wars of the 19th Century, though, I'm bound to say, I can't think of a period, I can't think, and maybe we can break out of the cycle of history, but I can't think of a period where power shift, on the scale that I think is now taking place, was accompanied by, other than turbulence, chaos and, in large measure, war. Maybe we'll be wise enough to avoid it in the future.

On the question of co-opt, yeah, I don't think this is as difficult as we think it is, if only we'd think a little bit more imaginatively. First of all, let me start with – well, let's just choose two or three examples, the presumption is that we would not be able to co-opt the Chinese into UN operations. Excuse me, anybody know, in the room, how many Chinese troops serving under the Blue Beret, the Blue Helmet and the Blue Flag and UN Command in the world at present? Let me tell you, 3,700. How many Americans? 11. By the way, how many British? Three. China's already made a contribution. Yes, they may well be using their position, much as we did in the past, for, sort of, post-colonialist and sometimes even [inaudible – 04:53] ends. But they have made that contribution, they are making that commitment, and, by the way, India has been a nation, which has got a reputation of involving themselves in UN operations much more

than we have. I don't think there's any lack of – I don't think there's any enmity towards participating in international action.

The second thing is, let me give you an example. You know, my gue – if we want to have – our Foreign Secretary keeps on talking about a rule-based world order, which is another way of saying that we have to bring governance to the global space, who else in the world has got an interest in creating a rule-based world order? Answer, China. Of course they do, they're a mercantilist nation. They want an ordered world to trade in, much – for much the same reasons as we did when we were the world's most powerful mercantilist nation. Now, they want a world order, but it won't be the same as ours. It won't be based on Western values. The question for us and where the difficult compromises come in, is do we want that, kind of, rule-based world order, even though it may be imperfect and not conform to our values? Or are we prepared to stick to our values and abandon the opportunity of having a more ordered world? I'm not giving you an answer to that, I'm simply saying that's the question that poses itself.

And let me give you the third example here. My guess is, for what it's worth, and it's a really radical thought, but my guess is that the best way to resolve the tremendous difficulties we've now got ourselves in, in Afghanistan, I think we're losing there. I think the dynamic is shifting at an accelerated pace against us there. I do not know how we're going to turn this round. Maybe Obama and the surge will do it, but I have my doubts, but I can come onto that later, and I certainly don't how we did it in Pakistan. But I can tell you how we might do it. If we were prepared to engage some of these other neighbours, if we were to draw up a regional context, a regional treaty, recognising the borders of Afghanistan, and much as we did with Dayton in Bosnia and bring in the neighbours, yes, bring in Iran. I think China has an absolute interest in playing a part in that, not least because they don't want to see Jihadism triumph, they've got their own problems with it. So, I mean, I really do believe that there's a chance, if we were to bring in this extra dimension, if we were to get away from the idea that we have to solve this problem on the basis of Western power and bring in others, I think they might well be willing to do this. Iran's a special case because of recent circumstances, but certainly, I think China would be prepared to do that. Of course they'll want their own price. I mean, one of the things they may want to say is, "Yeah, we'll help you out, we'll play a part in this." But, of course, we're going to forget about the bet, aren't we? And that's going to be tough for us.

One final point here, I – my guess, in Pakistan, by the way, at present, is that even if we were to do the right thing in Pakistan, and I don't think we are, it would still be the wrong thing because we're doing it, because we, the West, are doing it. Because we cannot now convince the Pakistani people that anything we do to help their Government regain control of their own territory is being done for any other reason but a modern version of imperialism. If we really want to resolve the issue of Pakistan, maybe we have to think about can we Islamicise it? Are there other Islamic nations who would not wish to see Jihadism triumph, who could come in and help Pakistan regain control of its own territory? I don't know if there are, but absent that, kind of, thinking, I'm not sure we can resolve this. So, William, I don't think the issue here is a reluctance, nor is the issue one in which we can't find areas of common interest. The issue, it seems to me, is because we are stuck in the mindset of Western hegemony that has gone on for 600 years. We think, in this world of ours, we still have the power to propose and dispose, I don't think we do.

Dr Robin Niblett

Thank you. First here, Lady Dahrendorf, and I've got a number of other hands up.

Lady Ellen Dahrendorf

Thanks, Ellen Dahrendorf. Paddy, I would like to ask you a question about values in two quick parts. First of all, I think if I were an African sitting and listening to this lecture, do you mean Belgian values in the Congo? British values in Kenya, as we've been reading about? I think not. And, secondly, do you think there are, in fact, universal values, not institutions, values, like in viability of the person or the Rule of Law, that as Chinese get richer, they might aspire to?

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

Well, they're not small questions, then, are they? No, of course I don't mean the values of the Belgians and the Belgian Congo or, indeed, of the British and what you're talking about in Kenya. I'm talking about the values we're proud of, the values that we talk about, about the – and the importance of human rights. It may well be, as you argue quite cogently, Ellen, that you know, as nations like China get richer and so on, they will come to aspire to these values, that's an interesting question I'll return to in a moment. But at least, at present, let's take the value that we place on human rights. I don't think we would find that those are shared with others, with whom we may have to work, in order to be able to create some of the circumstances for peace that we're talking about, and I guess, it's going to be some time before we do.

The second point is, are these human values? I mean, I take refuge, I'm a liberal, I have to believe they are. I have to believe these are universal values. I certainly don't believe they're Western values. I think they're the values, which are shared universally by all the great religions and all the great civilisations, to a greater or lesser extent. And, frankly, I detest it when I hear, less, I must say nowadays, thank God, our leaders standing up and saying, "We're fighting for our Western values." Are they so stupid or, indeed, are they so historically ignorant, as to believe these are uniquely Western values? If so, I invite them to go, for instance, to Siena Cathedral. Take a look at the Parvimento. This was the very first building block of the Renaissance, and what do you see celebrated on the floor of – in the Parvimento on Siena Cathedral? Answer, Virgil, Plato, Socrates, what on earth are they doing on the floor of a religious cathedral, a Catholic cathedral? And the answer is, we had just discovered the Hellenic text, which we regard as the fountainhead of the Renaissance and European values and where had we discovered them? In the universities of Baghdad, where they had been preserved, love, cherished and internalised in Islam, while we were still slaughtering each other in the black – in the dark ages.

These aren't our values. They wouldn't be even known to us, had it not been that Islam kept them alive at the time when we destroyed them. These are universal values. Now, are they perfectly so? Will all people get converted to them, as they become richer and more civilised? I can't be sure, but I think, as an operating principle to proceed in the world, it seems to me that's the safest one.

Dr Robin Niblett

Thank you, and I'll take a question here and then I've got two there and I've got a number over there. I will have about ten questions. You, sir, first, and I'll start grouping them in a minute. Yeah, right there, young person there. Put your hand up, you're right next to the person, there. Reach out for the microphone, it helps. Go ahead.

Member

[Inaudible – 12:11].

Dr Robin Niblett

It's on.

Member

Member and Intern here. Lord Ashdown, sir, your third rule seems fairly logical and makes total sense and yet the Conservatives, who are probably going to take power in a year's time, don't seem to see that. Do you think they'll do as much damage as some people believe?

Dr Robin Niblett

Don't phrase it anymore than that, that'll do.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

Are you, by any chance, a Liberal Democrat Member? If not, give the man membership card free, and this is a free hit at the Tories. I mean, look, I am – and I have to say that I think Mr Cameron is an intelligent, clever, and they aren't always the same thing, subtle, very twinkle-toed, he's twinkle-toed, his capacity to twinkle-toe across the stage reminds me enormously of Blair, I mean, his ability to shift from one position to another, with elegance and grace, is amazing. So, I do not. I mean, I genuinely do not understand. I am bewildered by the blindness of the Conservatives, when it comes to Europe. I just don't understand it. I really do not understand it. My friends, senior friends, in the Conservative Party, who I trust and believe in and who are, themselves, I think, passionate European, tell me that the Tory Party is now more viscerally anti-European than any British political party has ever been, not excluding militant Labour. And, you know, if that's so, then this is a collision waiting to happen, it's either a schism waiting to happen in the Tory Party, when it gets into power, and the old over of of Europe come back and halt it again, or it's a collision between what they think should happen and what the facts are in the real world, in which they have to exercise power. And so, my guess is that what happens, my hope is that what happens, is that they do they u-turn and we'll watch it and see whether they do it with elegance, will be a testament to Cameron's capacity to twinkle-toe out of this one. But because I just think that common sense will force them to do a change, if they should be the Government of the country, because they'll know they can't achieve any of the things they need to achieve by their attitude to Europe. So, it bewilders me, is the short answer to that.

Dr Robin Niblett

Thank you, I'm going to group, there's two questions waiting here. I'm going to take these two first and then I'm coming to the front and then to there and you, later on.

Stephanie Talbot

Stephanie Talbot, University of Leeds. You talk about us all living in an interconnected world, are you not concerned that we just end up squabbling amongst ourselves and achieving nothing, while we try to gain this interconnected world?

Dr Robin Niblett

If you pass microphone to the gentleman on your right, please, we'll take two questions here. Yes, please.

Malcolm Bruce

Malcolm Bruce. Paddy, I don't disagree with your, somewhat, pessimistic analysis of Afghanistan, but I wonder whether you would consider, first of all, that, for example, DFID would argue that 80% of the budget is not being spent in Helmand and the problem is, the Americans are not prepared to give direct support to the Afghan Government and, indeed, most of American aid to Afghanistan is actually spent in the United States and not of great benefit to the people of Afghanistan. As a result, we don't have a credible Government, which is being supported, but independently by the international community. Do you not agree that unless the Americans change their attitude, we can't network with them and, therefore, we can't work together?

Dr Robin Niblett

Can I just ask, did anyone else have an Afghanistan question that they were going to ask of those people who've raised their hands? No, okay, let's – it was an Afghanistan question, sir? Yeah, please, just might as well group that, yeah.

Terence Parker

Financial unreality leads to a financial crash and social unreality leads to a social crash. In Afghanistan – perhaps I better introduce myself. Terence Parker, Member, 25 years in the Army during the Cold War. In Afghanistan, we have a situation where soldiers are dying to prevent terrorists occupying certain areas. Back in England we have borders, which appear to be one way valves to terrorists. If somebody gets into England, through one of the ports of entry and we wish to deport him, it is a very great difficult job to achieve. Now, is this not a bit of unreality?

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

I'm just looking around the audience here to see whether I can risk what I'm going to say here. I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I said – Stephanie asked me was I concerned? Yeah, Stephanie, I'm concerned, I really – I mean, I'm aware that what I've said to you is pretty bleak. You know, I think the – we've done a lot wrong and if we don't start getting things right, then – and if, instead, we squabble amongst ourselves, then we are – and this is where – okay. Okay, I'll try it. I'm not sure I'll get away with this, guys. I think I'm going to be – I once had a Marine, who, in any given tactical situation, would come up to me with a rather worried look on his face and said, "But sir, but sir, what happens if a tank comes along?" And I said to him, "Marine Snodgrass, if a tank comes along, we're fucked." I think that is exactly where we are.

If we end up squabbling, instead of taking the opportunities, I won't say the word again, but we are. Malcolm is, of course, right, and it's one of the big arguments that I had with the US administration, when Condi Rice asked me to do this job and go into Afghanistan. And I met a very, very good man from USAID, who was going to come with me, and he told me that he could change the American Government's attitude. Absolutely right, that what the American Government does is, I think, put – Malcolm, you've got the figures, obviously, to hand, but some 80% of their aid does not go through the Afghan Government. It actually goes to American contractors, who build the road or build the school, and I think the figures, when I was looking at this, the figures are – the Americans using American contractors in USAID to build a school room in Afghanistan costs something like $1 million, and the Afghans could do it for something like 80,000, to the very highest standards and, of course, a huge amount of money gets wasted. And the reason is, because the American taxpayer is resistant to the idea that any money could be siphoned off for corruption and, therefore, they try to – and, therefore, they waste a huge amount of this.

So, it is a big problem for the United States. I think they are beginning to change it. The last time that I spoke to Holbrooke, he was saying he was determined to make sure that we would alter this, not to the kind – to be fair, DFID does put its money through the Afghan Government, and what we were going to do was to insist that a very much larger proportion went through Afghan institutions. So, as you rightly said, Malcolm, bolstering the credibility and capacity to govern of the Afghan Government, rather than of foreigners. So it's a big issue, and no question about that, DFID is better at that.

On the other hand, I have to say, Malcolm, that, you know, the Americans are now far, far better at, for instance, backing up their soldiers, with the reconstruction teams that move in, literally, an hour afterwards. The soldiers take a territory like Musa Qala, the American aid teams are in there reconstructing immediately, and there's a reason for this. In the British Government, the duty of care amongst our Government means you can't send DFID into a hostile zone, until it's regarded as being secure enough, which is possibly weeks later. Now, what that actually means is that the sacrifice made by the soldiers to win the ground is lost as the place is backfilled by the Taliban, rather than backfilled by governance and connection and jobs and economic activity.

The way the Americans have got around that is that they have called for volunteers from USAID, who are prepared to take the extra risks and have formed a, sort of, core of commando reconstructors, or something, that are able to go in straight after the soldiers. And I keep on begging the British Government to do this. To be fair, the Foreign Office has taken steps forward to improve co-ordination and DFID is now close – more closely interlocked with the military. But the Americans are better at counterinsurgency because they've cracked this problem and we haven't. It's nothing to do with the quality of their soldiers, they're better at it.

Now, having said all that, Malcolm, those are problems, but they are second order problems, in my view. The first order problem in Afghanistan is that there is no co-ordination. I mean, I pity Karzai. We love to criticise him, but we've all got different plans for Afghanistan. Every successive Ambassador goes in to see him, of the 17 international coalitions, all of them with a different set of priorities and, of course, one of two things happens. Either Karzai is given the perfect opportunity to drive wedges between us and do what he wants to do, which is, by and large, exactly what happens, he's now going to stand for election, most people didn't want him to. It's precisely because we couldn't be united about it and, secondly, the effort that we put in is massively wasted.

When I went to Bosnia, I mean, I know Bosnia and Afghanistan are different, I spent a huge amount of effort. I mean, when I went there people said to me, you know, "It's like herding cats," Bosnia, let me tell you, the cats behind me in the international community were far more difficult to herd than the cats in front of me. And I spent more of my time in Bosnia co-ordinating the international community, getting them to speak with a single voice, getting them to buy the plan, getting us to act in a co-ordinated fashion, because I knew that if we were fighting each other, as we were when I arrived, there was nothing we could get done, but if we were united, there was nothing we couldn't get done, and that applies in Afghanistan, too. So, I agree with the problems, but they're second order problems, the first order problem is, we have to get our act together in Afghanistan. If we don't, we will lose.

Dr Robin Niblett

And if you want to touch on the question about the problem being inside the UK, I mean, it's not quite enough.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

Yes, I mean, look, the Rule of Law operates here, and I think you had to subscribed to the Rule of law. We buy up to certain conditions, the European Convention of Human rights, and I think we have to buy it. We have to adhere to those. It maybe make life much more difficult for us. But one of the things I discovered as a soldier, speaking for myself in Belfast, was that an observance of the Rule of Law and observance of the standards of human rights that are required for us, as a civilised nation, may have been more difficult for the soldier on the ground, but it was the only way to win the war, and if we hadn't done anything else, we would have lost it, instead of winning that war. So it is tough, and I understand the point you make, sir, and, of course, it's very easily amenable to a dramatic Daily Mail headline. But the reality of it is, that if people make their way into our country as, for instance, asylum seekers, the way we deal with them has to be consistent with our law and the undertakings we've taken, in relation to human rights, and we are the stronger because of that in the end, not the weaker.

Dr Robin Niblett

I'll take two questions at the front, please, so the lady here and Shirley Williams.

Elizabeth

Thank you. Lord Ashdown, thank you so much…

Dr Robin Niblett

Elizabeth.

Elizabeth

…for a really marvellous talk. Do you mind if I take you back to something that happened this morning, when they were talking about your report on the defence of Britain? They concentrated, almost exclusively, on Trident.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

On Trident, yes, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth

And I thought I would like to ask you do you think it's conceivable that any country in the world will start a nuclear war? That's the first one. And the second part is, to what extent did you take into account the need, is there a need, for Britain to remain at the nuclear table?

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

Not – sorry, yes, okay.

Dr Robin Niblett

I'll take the question here, please, and Shirley Williams.

Shirley Williams

And Shirley Williams. There's two questions, Paddy, the first – incidentally, thank you for a very impressive lecture. The first question concerns what you said about common security. If we look at, for example, the possibility of establishing with Russia a missile defence system, instead of the proposal for the Polish-Czech one, which would be, as I understand it, almost to your definition, an example of common security. But then you correctly said that the real enemy was nuclear proliferation and we know, and this fits in with what you said about the differences within the structures of governance and the nature of problems, that we don't know whether we can get the CTBT through the United States Congress. In fact, is quite possible we can't, in which case, the efforts to try to stop nuclear proliferation will come to a juddly halt at that point.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

Absolutely.

Shirley Williams

So, first question, how does one make the bridge between, particularly, oddly enough, very democratic governance like that in the United States and the necessities, the problems confronting those countries? Second question, very quickly, the one thing you didn't mention, in a remarkable speech was, that there is a very strong common culture among the global elite and that is largely, not entirely, but largely a Western culture. And coming out of Harvard, as I did for many years, one has to say that Indian and Chinese and Sudanese and Latin American and European elites find their way, and an astonishing way, to the same 15 or 20 universities in the world, and most of those happen to be in the Western world. Can you say something about the nature of the global commonality of, often, very westernised elites, who actually run countries across the world?

Dr Robin Niblett

Yes, and we're into our last five to ten minutes here and about four more questions to go, if I can.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

Shirley, I'm going to do Shirley first here and, Elizabeth, I'll come onto Trident in a second. I can't answer either of those questions, and you can answer them better than me, I think, you really can. When I was first elected, and if you represent a rural constituency, you have to meet with the farmers and before election time, and the farmers have wonderful fun. I wasn't elected. It was a week out from my election, there is a point to this story, I promise you, and so, a week out from the election and I'm meeting with my farmers and there are not many – but there are not many liberals there, I can tell you and, secondly, they're having wonderful fun asking us all difficult questions we can't answer. A little man at the back going, "What do you think about the price of barley, Paddy?" So I said, "I don't know anything about the price of barley," he said, "I'm voting for him," so I went up to him. God, I thought, no. He said, you know, "I asked you – you asked me a question and I couldn't answer you." "That's right," he said, "I asked the other two about the price of barley and they went on for half an hour and us doesn't grow barley within 200 mile of here," he said. So, I always promised that I would – if I didn't know the answer to the question I'd say so, it seems to be helpful.

Honestly, Shirley, I really – I mean, I should ask you to come up here and tell us about it, 'cause I just can't make – I don't know about – the US bridge is extremely important, and I didn't realise that there's a chance that Congress will turn down the CTBT. If that's true, it is very, very, very bad news. You're quite right, that brings proliferation, probably, to a clattering halt. And the global lead is just not something I've thought about very much, so I think my proposition is, you should give the next year's Memorial Lecture.

Dr Robin Niblett

There we go [applause].

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

I promise I'll be in the audience. Look, Elizabeth, I can tell you that at no time did we consider, in the IPP Report, the question of Britain remaining at the nuclear table. It was – I mean, maybe we should have talked about it, but we just never did. We were talking about what do we need to secure defence, the defence of Britain? And, by the way, the point that Shirley made is the one that we addressed, I think, chiefly, which is that it is our judgement that the world is now more in danger from the proliferation of nuclear weapons than we are from the actions of nuclear armed states. And so did we – you know, did we – do – your question was, did I think that any state will start a nuclear war? No, I don't have to, that was not the proposition. That was not the premise upon which we were based. We took the view, therefore, that it is absolutely essential that Obama's new push towards a non-nuclear world, who was it? Was it Bacon or was it – I can't remember who once said that "Your ideals are never realised, it's your pursuit of them that changes the course of history." Maybe we will never realise a nuclear free world, but it's our pursuit of them now that can change the course of history, and that's good enough reason. And we should be, as Britain, participating in that boldly and fully. And we say explicitly, in cour – in the – our report that part of that is being prepared to put our entire nuclear weapons holding into that, if it will make serious progress towards a nuclear free world.

However, we do reach a conclusion, with which I suspect you won't agree, which is that in the absence of that success, we still believe that Britain should have an independent nuclear deterrent, because these were going to be very turbulent times. Now, this was the Commission, there was a wide range of views on it, as between, you know, myself and George, and lovely George is a dear friend and he's a wonderful – gave a great speech last year, but he and I don't have the same views on nuclear matters, as you may well imagine. So, we agreed that this was an issue and an issue of Trident, which, a) we don't have to – by the way, a complete vindication of the Liberal Democrat position that we do not have to take this decision until 2014, and that we shouldn't, because we will be able to assess what we need in 2014 far better than we can now.

And, secondly, that the decision as to whether to replace the Vanguard hulls with a new range, was a decision that should then be reviewed in the context of a broader overall defence and security review. That was the position of the Commission. My position's very simple. I can see we would not have chosen Trident, in the present strategic circumstances. I never supported it at the time. I don't believe – I think it's even less viable today and I, personally, can see no circumstances in which, given the present situation in the world, given the nuclear proliferation talks that are going on and the signals that would send it, and given the opportunity costs that that would require for the rest of Britain's defence forces and lack of resources and finance, I can see no circumstances in which you would choose, at that moment, to replace Trident with Trident. I just can't see it.

Dr Robin Niblett

Right, what I'm going to do is, I've nodded to people on questions and we're, kind of, coming up to 7:15, so I think even with taking the questions, we'll probably then finish around the time I said, a little after 7:20. I'm going to take the four questions that I had waiting, if that's alright? And we'll keep note of them.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

And I'll be very quick.

Dr Robin Niblett

The first gentleman in the corner there.

Andrew Booth

Andrew Booth. Thank you very much for an excellent speech. Building on Shirley Williams' question, I guess, to an extent, is with the growth of the internet, telecoms and finance, there's a universal language developing around English and I'm wondering whether you have any views on that, as a means of future power and influence, whether it's going to be of benefit or a bane?

Dr Robin Niblett

And the gentleman, were you – you were waiting? Please, here, yeah, actually, and then I'm coming down to this side in a minute.

Tom McNally

Tom McNally, Paddy. Can I offer you some optimism? I recently attended a lecture where the Lecturer's peroration was that it may be the great paradox of the 21st Century that American capitalism is rescued by the Chinese People's Liberation Army Pension Fund. But I think what he was saying is that there is a massive identity of interest between the United States and China.

Dr Robin Niblett

Absolutely.

Delegate

And that identity of interest might be a counterweight to your pessimism.

Dr Robin Niblett

And please, there's two questions waiting here at the front, the last two questions. I'm sorry for those who want as well, but I've got to stop there. Madam, yes.

Kim

Kim [inaudible – 32:28], and my question is really about…

Dr Robin Niblett

Take the microphone near your mouth, please. No, it's on, but just keep it close to your mouth, please.

Kim

Now? Yes, okay.

Dr Robin Niblett

That's it.

Kim

How do you see the place of the Balkans in this new era? What are the implications for the region, especially if there is a slowdown in the EU enlargement process, which is seen as the answer for the Balkans?

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

Yeah.

Dr Robin Niblett

And the gentleman in front of you right there. Thank you, last question.

Hasan Ali

Hasan Ali, and Chatham House Member. I was one of very few members who voted against the Obama, and this [inaudible – 33:02] in 29th of October, just on the eve of the American election, while you and Sir Malcolm Rifkind lecturing here. And because I was just worried about that we are moving from a crazy world in Bush's era to the mockery and political correctness world in Obama era. Do you agree that we were right, then?

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

And can I…?

Dr Robin Niblett

The political correctness era.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

Yes, but what's the connection with Obama? Sorry, I missed that.

Dr Robin Niblett

Why would it be a political correctness era if we move to the Obama era?

Hasan Ali

Yeah, because in six months, now it seems that the only difference between Bush and Obama is where the media focuses, rather than the reality on the ground, in terms of American foreign policy.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

Understood, thank you.

Dr Robin Niblett

Yeah, and this critique's been made, as you know, quite a bit, especially in the Middle East, and, you know, where's the real beef on the policy question?

Lord Ashdown of Norton-Sub-Hamdon

Yeah, English, is it a benefit? Oh, it's a massive benefit. Anybody, and I suspect that encompasses almost everybody in this hall, who's ever worked in the international scene, which we, of course, use English as the medium, just knows what a huge advantage you have if this is your mother tongue, as well, and I think it's a massive advantage for it. Now, you know, can we use this in some, sort of, imperialist fashion to improve Britain's powerbase in the world? I rather doubt that. But is it an advantage to us to be the speakers, as our mother tongue, of what is emerging as the lingua franca, lingua Britannica of the world? Yeah, it is massively so, and you see that culturally, you see it with the BBC, the World Service, you know, it's huge advantage for us. Probably, an uncovenanted and probably an undeserved one but, nevertheless, let's take advantage of it while we can.

Tom, and one of the themes was that everything is connected to everything, but America being connected to the People's Liberation Army Pension Fund is a glorious example, which I shall certainly pick up in future, and yes, it is. Yes, it is. I can't remember who it was who wrote a book, Frankl, was it, who wrote a book about – in the 60s, about the fact that we're now all so interconnected that war's impossible, I'm not sure that's true, by the way. Largely because I think, you know, the ideologies, the weapon systems, the command structures, are still in the hands of the states, rather than the hands of the individuals who may be connected. But I agree with you, that this interconnection has its upside as well as its downside, in fact, probably, there may be more upsides than downsides.

Let me be optimistic, and this is where I disagree with our colleague over here, if I may answer his question at the same time. I mean, I just think it's nonsense to say that there's nothing between President Obama and President Bush. I understand if you sit in the Middle East and you want things to happen, because you feel a desperate injustice that's been done to you, tomorrow, then you're going to be impatient and that's the kind of things you'll say, and I understand that. I've been to some of these Palestinian ghettos outside Israel and I'd feel the same way, if I was there. So, I understand why there is impatience and maybe even criticism. But I think even the most objective observer could not conceivably say that there's no difference between Obama and Bush.

My – you know, I remember saying before the last – before the American election, that I believe half the world, and the decent half of it, was dying for America to give us reasons to love them again and, you know, Obama gives me those reasons to have confidence, again, in the true America that I believed was the case almost every day. Yes, he is an extraordinary, but I think, very powerful mix, of man of principle and pragmatism. Yes, some of his compromises will annoy and I don't agree with all of them myself, but I

think a Politician who can be at once a man of principle and know when to make the compromises and to bring about power, I think, is a rather exceptional being and it seems to me that he has that. Obama is, to me, you know, a real source of optimism, maybe too much. Maybe we've invested too much hope in him and it's impossible for anybody to live up to that.

My second optimism is Iran. I mean, you know, and my own view is – and, by the way, I think the two are connected, I don't think Iran would have happened, had it not been for Obama's speech, and I think that shows you that in the world in which we live, there is still a power to ideas, which can be, in certain circumstances, just as great as a power of military forces. By the way, you know, it may not happen today, it may not happen tomorrow, it may not happen next week, not even next year, but I'm very clear that the Iranian counterrevolution has now begun, and it will, in the end, achieve success. I mean, that will change everything. It will tip, completely, the balance between the forces of moderation and Islam and the forces of extremism in Islam. It will completely alter the picture in the Middle East, completely alter the picture in Afghanistan. I mean, it is, potentially, a huge event and an event that gives you considerable optimism. So there is a lot to be optimistic about, Tom, but sensible optimism becomes – comes, it seems to me, best from a rational and real appraisal of the position we're in, and I think what I tried to give today was a realistic appraisal of the position we, the Western powers, are in, in the new world that's now emerging.

On the Balkans, look, I despair, frankly, of the institutions of Europe. Europe is a great transcendental idea. The biggest political idea to come out of Europe, or in the world, in the second half of the 20th Century. I believe in Europe, but, my God, the ineffectiveness of its institutions sometimes drives me to distraction. I was at the frontend of the European foreign policy lever in Bosnia. My friends used to tell me Bosnia was dysfunctional. It's not half as dysfunctional as Brussels, I can tell you that now, not half as dysfunctional as Brussels, so I despair.

The truth is that the Balkans are not, you know, an extension of Europe. They're inside the borders of Europe now. This is not, you know, a new expansion of our borders. This is unfinished business in the work that we've done and if we want to leave the Balkans as a black hole of dysfunctionality and corruption inside our borders, then let's go on the way we are. But a proper, and I have to say, muscular, but then I would, a proper energetic and focused policy towards the Balkans, on the part of Brussels and the Brussels institutions, both NATO and the European Union, could easily finish the job it set its hand to ten years ago. It's not difficult, instead of which, I'm afraid Brussels seems to want to undermine its high representatives in Bosnia. Fortunately, not the present one, it's had the guts to press ahead anyway, and I think it's disastrous. I just hope that Europe understands that unless it completes the work it laid its hand to, then the consequences for Europe, I think, are not good. The consequences for Europe's future are not good and the consequences for our relationships, with our primary ally in – on the other side of the Atlantic, are not good. And the consequences for our dialogue with the Islamic world in allowing, for instance, in Bosnia and maybe even Kosovo, a small, isolated Muslim rump steak to exist between the Scylla and Charybdis of massive enemies are not good either. This seems to be stupidity and folly of a very high order, is that clear enough?

Dr Robin Niblett

Well, let me just say, first of all, a couple of words of thanks. First of all, thank you all very much for coming, Chatham House members, Robert, all of the Liberal International British Group, to Antonio, Alex, wonderful to have you here and to mark this second Tim Garden Memorial Lecture. And Paddy, thank you very much for being the person who's helped us market, these have been highly thought-provoking, interesting, stimulating, sort of, remarks. You've taken us from a, kind of, G20 and the

implications, kind of, world, right down to what I've noted down here, just in case anyone asks later on, was the tactical use of the 'F' word for strategic intent, and as long as it's for strategic intent, I'm sure it'll go down fine with members and guests at Chatham House. But thank you very much, indeed, please, a hand for Paddy Ashdown [applause].