

Transcript: Q&A

Renewing the Transatlantic Alliance

John C Whitehead Lecture

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Question 1

You said 'isolate Putinism but don't isolate the Russians'. It's a profound phrase and I'm sure that the journalists would like it for tomorrow morning's newspapers. But how is one to execute it? How does one calibrate it? For instance, would you support permanent stationing of troops in the new member states of the alliance as one of these moves? We're grappling with this for 20 years, trying to isolate individuals from a nation which we must embrace, as you said.

Condoleezza Rice

Putinism, I think, is broader than Vladimir Putin. One of the problems is sometimes when we look at authoritarians, we assume that they rule only by fear. Vladimir Putin actually has a constituency. It is older, it is rural. It is military retirees. It's largely uneducated people. They only watch television, most of which is about the great man. So I don't believe the 89 per cent, but I believe he's broadly popular within his country. But he's not broadly popular with that part of the Russian population that bought on to the notion that they might finally integrate into the West.

So it's finding ways to reach those people. For instance, continue to hire Russians in companies abroad. Continue to hire Russians in law firms and banks. Continue to bring Russian students to the United States and to Europe and to Great Britain for training and education. I talk to liberal Russian economists. They say if the price of oil stays this way, 'they will have to listen to us eventually'. Because after all, 80 per cent of Russian exports are in oil, gas and minerals. Sixty-five per cent of the budget is oil, gas and minerals. Somewhere along the way, the economic realities are going to catch up.

So much as we sometimes have to do in places where the opposition can't raise its head, you just try to keep the opposition alive. I think we all have an obligation to do that. Given my own preferences, I would have, for instance, in response to the Ukraine crisis, done more on the military side, like deploy into eastern Europe and Poland, and less on the sanctions side. Because some of the sanctions – sanctions are a pretty blunt tool. You sometimes capture people that you actually didn't want to capture, because the Russian integration into the economy is a good thing, not a bad thing. So while it's fine to have sanctions on Putin's inner circle and the like, even though if you really think they have any assets outside the country that is reachable, I've got something to sell you. But I think you have to try to keep those contacts to the different Russia, that if the economic circumstances finally emerge, they may finally have a say.

Robin Niblett

That's interesting. You would have balanced more strongly the military, the reassurance side, and maybe been a little more cautious on the sanctions. It's a different angle.

Condoleezza Rice

Yes, and more on the help Ukraine side. Help Ukraine, reassure the neighbours and use the sanctions very minimally, because you end up with unintended consequences for people you're trying to support.

Question 2

China and Saudi Arabia are in the news in Britain at the moment because of their troubling human rights practices and our ever-closer economic ties to them. I don't think it's any coincidence that at the same time the British government has dropped human rights from its foreign policy agenda. To me, this

exemplifies an attitude that regards human rights and trade, and human rights and national security, as necessarily in conflict with each other. So I wanted to ask, how do we convince our leaders on both sides of the Atlantic that not only can we have both, we must have both in promoting international stability.

Condoleezza Rice

We must have both, because ultimately authoritarian regimes are brittle. You need to get, particularly with allies like Saudi Arabia or Egypt, to get them to reform before their people are in the streets. That was always my argument to Mubarak – reform before your people are in the streets. A decent record on human rights is just the first step in making sure that governments are somehow able to deal with their people. A country that is so brutal on human rights is by its nature dangerous in the system.

I also always found, whether it was with the Saudis or with the Chinese, you can raise human rights issues and you can even do it publicly in a respectful way. You don't actually have to pull your punches on those issues. With China in particular, they knew that we were going to raise those issues. They always had their response prepared. But nobody was surprised when the American secretary of state brought a list of human rights concerns to the foreign minister, or said in the after press conference that it was our hope that China would move to greater respect for human rights and religious freedom, which were always the twin pillars.

We have to have a soul about this. We all sit around and we criticize democracy and we say how hard it is, and we sometimes say 'those people aren't quite ready for it'. What's amazing to me is the people who don't have it, the number of people who will risk jail and risk harm and who will even risk their lives, just to be treated decently. The least we can do is speak out for them.

Question 3

Recently, Canada elected a prime minister who wants to pull out of fighting ISIS. In the US, we have Bernie Sanders. We have Corbyn in the UK. A big underpinning of the transatlantic alliance is the willingness of the people in those countries to take on this very difficult role and responsibility. How do we maintain faith in, or a sense of duty, in countries where, as they look at the chaos, it seems like it's beginning to fail.

Condoleezza Rice

First let me say that I think we – I personally accept some responsibility for, in the United States, a sense of being tired. I told President Bush at one point – he was complaining about the polls, this was in August 2008. I said: you know what, they're tired of us. It's been war, it's been revolution, it's been vigilance, it's been terrorism. They're really tired of us.

But the fact is, you have to say to people: great powers that want to shape the environment can't get tired. It's not as if, when we step back and don't want to shape the environment, the environment will just be benign. Others will shape it, and they will shape it in a way that is antithetical to both our interests and our values, and that's not a good place to be. So we're going to have to find it.

By the way, the isolationist argument hasn't actually done very well in the United States in this recent campaign. A lot of people thought that, for instance, Senator Paul would go out with a strong isolationist message. He found himself weaving back to, well, there are some things that we will have to take on. Because after all of these years of benefitting from a system that had to be defended, I don't quite think

that Americans – and I hope Europeans and the British – are not ready to yield and say, well, that's fine. We created that system, we profited from it, we did very well in terms of trade, we did well in terms of economic benefit. We'll just leave it to somebody else now, because we're seeing who you end up leaving it too, and people don't much like that either.

Question 4

We're three-quarters of an hour into this fascinating discussion but we haven't yet touched on the point that this country, within the next year or so, is going to have a referendum on the future of its relationship in Europe. I recognize what a sensitive issue that is for public comment but nevertheless it's a very important issue. I wonder if you would care to say something about how that choice could affect the transatlantic relationship.

Condoleezza Rice

The British people will have to decide. It's a democracy and I know it's going to be a very stimulating debate. Democracy is absolutely necessary but sometimes it's rather cacophonous, and I think that's going to be the case.

As an American, I hope that Europe will continue to have a transatlantic link, which is Britain. It is a very different Europe if it is a continental Europe. I was a part of the American administration under George HW Bush that helped to unify Germany. I am a Germanophile, I actually have great respect for Angela Merkel and what she's doing. But a Europe without Britain will be a very different Europe in terms of international politics, not because Germany is not a great ally of the United States – it is. But because the perspective of a Britain which has always had a global view of how human history ought to unfold, and has through the special relationship with the United States pursued that view, that would be missing from Europe. A Britain that has always looked both towards the continent and across the pond, that would be missing from Europe.

So from my point of view, my narrow, parochial, American point of view, there are a lot of Americans who will make fun of the European experiment. You say to them: look, it's not perfect. The European Union, you will negotiate different terms, I'm certain of that. But let's not forget that the European Union was really born out of the horrors of World War II, a hope to make Germany a democratic part of Europe. Helmut Kohl was always one, when you would say 'a unified Germany', he would say, 'within a unified Europe'. It's a Europe that succeeded in creating prosperity on the continent while the Soviet Union was still astride part of Europe. I think the little-acknowledged role that Europe and NATO played as lodestars for the east and central Europeans as they were escaping the Soviet tyranny – it allowed Hungary and Romania not to give way to violence over Transylvania. It allowed Bulgaria and Turkey to work out differences. It allowed civil-military reform. This was a tremendous success, the second phase of European integration.

As I said, it has to be tended to now, because I think some fissures remain. But Europe has been tremendously successful. But I think the European-American link, the transatlantic link, has been tremendously successful largely because Britain has been the bridge.

Question 5

My question is about Iran and the sanctions deal. What's your take on the deal, are you supportive of it? What do you think are the realistic prospects for US-Iranian relations going forward? How is that going to affect the relations with other Gulf allies like the Saudis?

Question 6

This goes back to Dani Rodrik's theory about the paradox of globalization and sovereign states. The concept of exporting the pure metrics of democracy into supranational systems, then hollows out the sovereign states themselves. You see that play through in terms of the democratic deficits. How does that work for the US in its attempts to reach out?

Condoleezza Rice

Let me take the point about the sovereign state first. I think the sovereign state is going to be around for a while but it has to be – and this is the genius really of what the people of 1945 and 1946 saw – it has to have permeable boundaries in a number of ways. In terms of trade, it needs to have permeable boundaries. Frankly, in terms of the flow of people – I know that this is a very difficult issue right now but the United States has benefitted greatly from an immigration policy that was largely open, that didn't define 'we, the people' as an exclusive concept.

So I think the Westphalian state, not so much in the Middle East, where it's breaking apart, but the export of democracy, I've always believed, is best when done within the nation-state character. That doesn't mean that you can't have transnational concerns about human rights. The civil society implications of a National Endowment for Democracy, or what the European Union does through democracy promotion – I still think we do it within building sovereign states, because sovereign states that can deliver for their people, protect their borders, and have the respect for their people to insist that their people have a say in who's going to govern them – that's the best stability you can possibly buy. So I don't see it as breaking down these borders, but rather actually strengthening them from within.

When it comes to the Iran deal, I did not take a public position on this deal because I know how hard it is to be in there as opposed to out here. I can remember so many times, picking up the *Washington Post* and the editorial says: the Bush administration should unite the world around tough sanctions on Iran. I would think, why didn't I think of that? That's so brilliant. Well, because it's hard. I know how hard it was to get this deal. I was one of the founders of the P5+1, along with Jack Straw, as a matter of fact. We did it at Jack Straw's house in November 2006. So I'm a big supporter of having a two-track approach with the Iranians.

This particular deal, I think, has some good elements but the price that was paid was pretty high. I don't know how we will know where Iran will break out when we don't have a very good accounting for where they have been. It's entirely possible that they are already at threshold status and we will never know it. I fear that we're going to get into a lot of back and forth and disagreement about violations of the Iranians, because the Iranians are not going to be stupid enough to cheat at declared sites. It's never going to be black and white. One of the reasons we had the Iraq problem was we had uncertainty about what Saddam Hussein was actually doing. We had too many fights with the Russians and others about that. I fear we're getting back into that.

More importantly, \$100 billion for the Iranians to destabilize the Middle East? And by the way, a lapse of the conventional weapons ban that I fear is going to create an arms race in the Middle East, with the Iranians buying weaponry that won't threaten the Israelis and the Saudis, it will threaten American denial capabilities. So it's not a deal that I care much for, but it's there. I would never say to pull out of it, but I would hope that we, with our European allies, could put in place something that says to the Iranians: your behaviour is simply unacceptable. You are tearing apart the Middle East and that won't stand. We will, if necessary, impose sanctions again based on your behaviour.

Robin Niblett

I heard an Israeli say the other day: Iran is the one country that maybe does have institutions of governance in the Middle East, unlike most other countries across the Arab world. Might it actually be – you talked about \$100 billion to destabilize as opposed to \$100 billion to build on those institutions.

Condoleezza Rice

They have institutions, all right. The only problem is they're all dominated by one man. The ability of – now Khamenei reportedly is ill. Maybe he will go away, maybe those institutions will come into being. But I don't see anything right now that suggests that those institutions that we would recognize as institutions of governance are trumping those institutions that are destabilizing the Middle East, like the Quds Force and the Revolutionary Guard and Qasem Soleimani, who seems to be on quite a tear.

Question 7

You spoke about 9/11 and also the campaign. Donald Trump suggested that President Bush was to blame in part for 9/11. I wonder what your response to that was.

Question 8

Looking at freedom and human rights and sanctions, looking at America, one gets the feeling that the human rights and freedom of the Palestinians don't get enough sanctions from America to bring about progress in their direction.

Condoleezza Rice

I spent more time on the Palestinian-Israeli issue than I think almost any American secretary of state. I was in the region 25 times to try to bring peace between them. Ehud Olmert put a proposal on the table and I said to President Abbas: take it, because every time you turn down a proposal – in 1948, in 1967, in 2000 – your state gets smaller. We worked desperately to try and create Palestinian security forces who could secure Palestinians from the horrors of people like Hamas. We worked desperately to try and create economic opportunity through a great prime minister, Salam Fayyad. I personally went to the Congress and asked if we could finally free budget authority for the Palestinian Authority with American foreign aid, and we got that through.

The United States has worked tirelessly to try to bring a two-state solution. From time to time, I think we're close. But the fact of the matter is, as long as Hamas controls Gaza and as long as there are rockets from Gaza into Israel, you're going to have an Israeli response to that. You would have it from any democratic government. So the answer still remains the one that we've always talked about, which is the Palestinians need to govern themselves. But Fatah needs to reform. It needs a generational shift. It needs

to empower decent governance for its own people, and then it needs to sit down with the Israelis and finally resolve some of the problems that we all know the answers to. We know that it's going to be a certain percentage of the territory with swaps for the rest of it. We know it's going to be a small number of refugees who are going to be given the right to go back with compensation for the others. We know that it's going to be Palestinian security forces that are police forces, not an army. We know that something is going to have to be said about Jerusalem and governing the holy sites.

We know the answer. This is one of those frustrating international issues where we actually know the answer and we can't quite get to it. So I think the United States, and that's every administration, including the current administration, has done everything possible to try to bring a solution to that crisis. Just because we aren't willing to go and sanction our ally, Israel, when the Palestinians have been unable to take a deal too, I think the Americans are not guilty on that one.

And I think President Bush is not guilty on 9/11. I would ask – all Mr Trump has to do is read the 9/11 report. It's incredibly exhaustive about what caused the problem. It's incredibly exhaustive about the challenges of intelligence when we had a very firm barrier between intelligence coming from the outside and intelligence that we could gather inside. The FBI in charge of one, the CIA in the other. It's incredibly clear about the need for reform of intelligence agencies, reform of how the Congress does this. And yes, maybe there was a lack of imagination to imagine that a group of terrorists were going to hijack airplanes and not drive them to the ground and demand a ransom, but use them as missiles against our cities. I plead guilty to a lack of imagining exactly that.

But I want to say one other thing. The idea that somehow the president of the United States was warned that Al-Qaeda was going to attack the United States and did nothing about it – really? Do you think any president of the United States, if he'd had even an inkling that there was going to be that attack that day, wouldn't have moved heaven and earth to try to stop it?

The fact is, there was chatter in July and August about terrorist activity. It was just that: chatter. Most of the chatter, we thought, and the CIA thought, was about a possible attack in Jordan or Saudi Arabia or abroad. The United States had no systems in place for homeland defence. We hadn't been attacked on our territory since the War of 1812.

So the president of the United States would have done anything to stop it. He didn't know enough, didn't have good enough intelligence to stop it. But I think the real issue here is not revisiting the past. But I would ask any presidential candidate, how are you going to prevent it from happening again? What are you going to do about those passport holders from ISIS who are going to come home? What are you going to do about the tensions of home-grown terrorism? What are you going to do about – do you believe that big data has to be used by the intelligence agencies to track terrorists or not?

I will tell you one final story about this. Sometime around September 8th or 9th, one of the hijackers – would-be hijackers – made a telephone call from San Diego to Afghanistan. We didn't track in the way that we do now. Al-Midhar – It's not that we might have found him but I'll tell you, if anybody had known that al-Midhar was in the country, because he was on everybody's watch list, it would have triggered.

So before people start revisiting the past, who want to be president, they ought to address how they're going to do it in the future. Because the one thing I will probably say is, after the horrors of 9/11, it didn't happen again on President Bush's watch.

Robin Niblett

We've gone over time. There's one issue I feel has not been addressed. As this is the John Whitehead lecture on transatlantic relations, but also on UK-US relations, can I just finish with one last question? There was the comment about UK foreign policy affected by its position in Europe. But there's a broader sense reported in the US, commented on here, that the UK and the US are actually on different strategic trajectories. That the most emblematic example of this is how we're handling the rise of China. We had President Xi's visit here last week. It's interesting how cyber security was at the top of the list for the visit to the US but really didn't feature, publicly at least, on the visit here. The UK is committing – I think it believes, this government – strategically to China's rise and the UK benefitting from it. The US has entirely different obligations in terms of security commitments in East Asia and deployments, as you well know.

Could China become a wedge in this UK-US relationship, and potentially the US-European relationship? Because we're not that different in the UK from the rest of Europe. You wrote even back in 2000 – I did look back at your *Foreign Affairs* article ahead of this, and it really could be written for now, with where Russia and China will be next. How do you see this affecting the UK-US relationship?

Condoleezza Rice

I don't think China needs to become a wedge between us. If we actually think, what is it we're trying to do with China? I think our strategic interests are actually quite similar here. China is going to be more influential in international politics because it is a rising power. We can overstate that because it's got a lot of work to do at home. This shift from heavy export-driven, low cost of labour, heavy government investment in the economy, to one that is more free market, that has to start to get rid of SOEs, that has to start to free up. You're not going to be able to have both the free market and control it from Beijing. So they've got a lot on their plate, not to mention the terrible demographic situation.

So we can overestimate their quick rise, but let's say they are rising – they are. Our desire should be that they rise in a way that is supportive of and fits more easily at least into the system that we helped to build, both on the international economic side and slowly but surely the liberalization of Chinese politics. We don't need a revolution in China but they need to liberalize their politics if they're going to take advantage of their people in this more market-based economy. So we should be coaxing them to them.

Let me take one example of where I think we could have been on the same page and the United States made the mistake. When the Chinese came and said they wanted to do an Asian Infrastructure Development Bank, we should have said: oh wow, that's a great idea. Asia needs infrastructure. We should have been the first to join, rather than getting into a fight with our closest allies so that then our closest ally, Britain, goes ahead and joins and we look like the odd man out.

There are ways that we can help coax the Chinese. The Chinese want their companies to be global companies. I live not very far from the international headquarters for Huawei. Huawei is going to have trouble as long as the Chinese are doing things in cyber security that make people nervous about Chinese telecommunications equipment. So you say to them: this doesn't work. On the other hand, Alibaba, Tencent, these are going to be great companies. Why shouldn't we be encouraging that part of China's rise?

When we pivot to Asia on a more security foot, we play on their territory rather than ours. So I think we should have more cooperation and coordination on how to manage China's rise. It really doesn't have to

be a source of tension between us. Hopefully we can be successful in helping China to rise in a way that doesn't create more problems than it solves.

Robin Niblett

Thank you very much for taking that question. My apologies to everyone for keeping you waiting. A big thank you to Condi Rice. This really did justice to what John Whitehead would have liked to have heard. Also great for us to hear that mix of experience and future-looking. Thank you very much to Dr Condoleezza Rice.