

Global Strategy Forum: 9 December 2008

A Conservative National Security Policy.

Introduction

The invitation to this event quotes Michael Clarke.

Michael said

‘It seems to me that this is a very, very interesting time to be studying British security policy.

It is a miserable time to be making it, an absolutely miserable time to be a policy-maker,

...but it is a great time to be an analyst since this is the transition between two international systems.

And whereas the old system was one that played to Britain's strengths...the international system of the 21st century does not....

...and I think we will have to look much harder for those areas of strength than hitherto in order to exploit them'.

There are three important assertions there: Transitional period between international systems; the new system plays less to UK strengths than the old one as a result of which, third thought, we shall have to work harder and more imaginatively to find our comparative advantage. I accept the first contention, I will test the second and consider the third. Am I miserable as a prospective policy maker? Intellectually challenged perhaps.

First the diagnosis.

What is the nature of the transition between world orders?

I shall be brief on this. The outlines are well understood- the transition from a bipolar world, relatively static, relatively simple and linear in construction in which the identity and ambitions of large parts of the globe were repressed or suppressed by the bloc structure to one in which a thousand flowers and a lot of previously suppressed weeds are blooming in a chaotic landscape lacking alignment and stability. The first system was negative and often brutal and denied whole societies their rightful identity. Now there is a good deal of self expression and in twenty years the world has become vastly more prosperous thanks to western led globalisation. Despite this, complexity, fragility, unpredictability and vulnerability are now the watchwords. We are anxious, bordering on the fearful. So what has gone wrong?

Apart from fear of the unfamiliar, which is human,

I would suggest three things:

the continuing inability of many states to provide inhabitants with a fulfilling and worthwhile existence. Absent the repressive framework of the Cold War, it has become safe for ideological alternatives like islamist fundamentalism and terrorism to challenge the legitimacy of inadequate, corrupt and repressive states;

the initial incomplete western response which has fed the narrative of grievances and failed so far to bring down the networks which sustain terrorism;

the credit crunch which has followed from a combination of over leveraged Western capitalism and excessively high commodity prices.

What is the nature of the last of these three factors, which it would be fair to say is more self inflicted than the other two and saps at our self confidence? Does it merely make dealing with the other challenges more difficult because of the inevitable preoccupation with domestic problems and the loss of resources and room for manoeuvre? Or is it a game changer in its own right?

Up to now we have broadly speaking considered globalisation to be a win -win for all sides. Except perhaps for the French who have not thought mondialisation to be a positive phenomenon. But the doubts are beginning to be more widely shared in the Western world. I am not the only person to have remarked on the transfer of economic power that seems to be underway from the consumer oriented Western democracies to the commodity producing countries- especially the energy producers – and the new manufacturers and service

providers like China and India. The questions are: is the transfer permanent? If it is, is it in any case a zero sum game: do we automatically lose if others gain? Is the economic bust turning a situation in which it had already been demonstrated that American power had limits into one that reveals that it has suffered absolute losses? Does it matter?

Some would say yes to all these questions. I am clear that what happens to Western leadership certainly matters. Up to now the institutions by which the world has been governed, the rule of law under which we have lived as expressed through such things as the UN charter and the major alliances and alignments which shape power relationships in the world have been Western in origin and spirit, incorporating our values and goals for society. They were laid down in the early years after the Second World War and they are a precious inheritance which we need to safeguard by

reinvigorating rather than sidelining. And economic power is needed to power this system of ours. There has been a transfer of power, but in my view the losses of the current situation will only become a permanent disadvantage if we allow them to. Nothing is so preordained that it is bound to be so. Western capitalism is robust – more robust over the long term because of its flexibility than the autocratic variety on display in China or Russia, both of which societies have deep structural problems.

But in the near term the bust undoubtedly makes things more difficult at time when politically the Western world is already to some extent on the back foot. The brand has taken a hammering. But with the exception of a few capitals like Pyongyang and Tehran there is no widespread wish to unseat American dominance or leadership. It matters too much. Terrorism is a common enemy, not

exclusive to the West. People worry as much about American withdrawal from the world- her absence- as they do about the Administration being overbearing. In a global downturn there is no clear win for one group at the expense of another since we are all too interlocked (this is not to say there will not be certain individual losers and I worry about the UK under this heading- a point to which I shall return later).

Moreover, the powerhouses of the world and the wealth generators are technological and intellectual and the lead in these areas remains Western. I am convinced that out of the current financial crisis we shall see the emergence of differently structured economies with new industries and new technologies much less dependent than today on hydrocarbons. Necessity being the mother of invention, good leadership can turn transition into

an opportunity. And I do not see that leadership coming from other than the West.

Finally on values. For all that they have been tainted which gives the enemies of free and open societies a gratuitous propaganda weapon against us, the remedy is to reassert them in what we do. We cannot and should not try to make our foreign policy value free. On the contrary, we should unabashedly promote the institutions of free and open societies as one of the best ways of creating a just and stable context for fulfilling lives for ordinary people. The policy group proposed a programme in this regard for the promotion of Open societies. This is not the same as crude promotion of the use of the ballot box in the name of democracy which can lead to extreme nationalism or tyranny adorned with the fig leaf of Popular election. Sustainable democracy is the product of the existence of free institutions and we

need to be focussed and patient about the task of laying them down and not demand instant results.

Therapy

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have already ventured on to the territory of what we should do in response to the challenges we have before us. To sum up on Michael's proposition about transition to a new order. Yes. But it does not need to be something that happens to us: we can make it happen. While I do not for a moment underestimate the difficulties, we do not face rubble and ruin as in 1945 when our forbears rose to the immense challenge of reconstruction. Provided we put our minds to it and sink our differences in a common endeavour, the Western democracies are perfectly capable of engineering recovery.

The opportunity for reasserting Western leadership is however neither unconditional nor time unlimited. The indispensable elements are:

- US leadership;
- No delay getting on with it: time is not on our side;
- Western countries actively working together;
- An inclusive approach which reaches out to new powers and players; the fact of distribution of power has to be recognised;
- Specifically, bringing new powers into membership of established institutions and/ or increasing their rights in them and in informal groupings. It is, for instance, ridiculous that China is not in the G8. Which means we Europeans in particular are going to have to give some ground;
- Yes if we behave by the rule book we would like others to accept too; in other words honour our values

This amounts to a strong sense of direction and a change of style. Talking to those who are close to the Obama Administration, I get the impression that this is understood – less that the objectives of policy will change substantially but the manner of their attainment will. More consultation and a shift of emphasis from deploying hard to more reliance on soft power. It has been well said that if we want a more consultative US Administration, we Europeans will have to be willing to respond, it taking two to tango. We need to be willing to help develop a broad Western strategy in which we assume some of the load, notably in Europe and the Middle East.

So early activism seems to me important. Especially in the Middle East. There is no risk free policy available and the new Administration cannot afford to hoard credit: it must be willing to expend

it. Indeed doing nothing is itself a risky policy. Iran has been the main gainer of the last decade, the trend lines are wrong and time is running out to deal with Iran's nuclear ambitions before she acquires sufficient enriched fuel for a nuclear capability which further destabilises the Middle East and sets off a dangerous escalation of nuclear proliferation. The Administration needs to take advantage of the goodwill that will greet its arrival will to build on the Arab peace initiative in relation to MEPP and increase the stakes- both the benefits of cooperation and the penalties of defiance- for Iran.

There is a lot more that could be said about individual policy areas which we can discuss in Q&A if you wish. The wider danger of nuclear proliferation is among them. I want now to discuss the implications for the UK.

The UK.

The government keeps on telling us that the UK is particularly well placed in the current economic predicament as compared with other Western competitors. Does anyone in this room believe this? I most certainly do not. Successive events to my mind progressively belie this analysis; the immense increase in governmental and national indebtedness and the dramatic decline in the international value of sterling in relation to other currencies revealing a different picture. I just hope we will not in the end be worse off. But the near time state of the nation's finances will make the task of an incoming government harder. I do not however think it should alter the general direction of policy.

First, the UK's geopolitical positioning under a Conservative government.

- The story I shall tell will have more continuity about it than change though there will be some real variations from the present government. In general, we support bipartisanship in foreign policy since we believe in being a reliable ally. Part of reliability is continuity from one government to the next. We shall seek clarity of purpose on the basis of national consensus.
- In framing the national security policy of a country like the UK, the policy maker has to accept that we not have the power to be an autonomous player: we cannot presume to alter events by the exertion of our own power alone. Even the United States has discovered that its power to act without help and goodwill of others has its limitations. So much more the UK. So it is idle to divorce UK policy from that of others. As I said, US policy forms part of necessary context.

- The Iraq war showed that the British public want UK policy made in London not Washington; that acting in the British interest is an important characteristic of a close relationship with the United States
- A Conservative government will continue to maintain a close relationship with Washington, which will be strong but not slavish to quote William Hague.

Secondly the character of our policy:

- it will be open to the world and engaged with it and seek to uphold a free trading system. We will work against the rising danger of protectionism and do not see it as a constructive way out of the present economic crisis.
- We shall be pragmatic. The party is allergic to the thesis that the way to make the EU a more

effective player in the world is continuously to hand power to the centre, but we do want an effective EU in the world and will work with partners to make it so: we should give serious priority and effort to the security of our own continent.

- We are committed to the millennium goals on poverty. An important precondition of the sustained eradication of poverty lies in improved governance round the world.

Thirdly: the use of force and the role of our armed forces.

- Our armed forces are vital to our security and we shall look after them. They are important in relation not only as now, to our capacity for expeditionary warfare, but also to the security of the homeland which does not feature in the structured way in which it should in the

Defence White papers currently governing defence policy. We shall correct this with a small home command. We will fund the Covenant, look after the welfare of servicemen and women and conduct a Review into both defence strategy and procurement. The current level of overstretch cannot continue indefinitely.

- We shall not be frightened to use force where this is necessary and we will continue to support coalition policy in Iraq and Afghanistan to the best of our ability. But we do not think that the relationship which has developed under New Labour- especially under Mr Blair, where by foreign policy trailed as a neglected afterthought following the use of force is a wise way to run policy not one that is sustainable in terms of available resources. We need to reverse this relationship to the more traditional one of defence and the

use of force being applied in the service of foreign policy to support its objectives- which will normally mean that it will not be an instrument of policy of first resort. That said. Last resort should not mean too late when the whole situation has gone rotten and upstream action could have saved much trouble. When and how to use force is one of the most taxing issues policy makers are ever likely to face. I know. The emerging Obama Administration seems to have something of the same perception which I welcome.

Fourthly: the definition of security and the machinery of government.

- The Conservative party publication “An Unquiet World” laid out various propositions on this subject and the government have subsequently to some extent followed where

we led. In a world of transnational movement of all kinds in which borders have become more a simple check point than a real barrier or protection, we pointed out the irrelevance of the traditional distinction between at home and abroad. We drew several conclusions:

- Security Policy has a much broader definition than in the past. It is not just a mixture of foreign, defence and development policy. The government's CONTEST strategy- the 4 P's- which we accept as a good framework has to be given a broad interpretation to include in addition home affairs, energy policy; aspects of local government and must draw on departments and agencies previously not always central to security policy.
- Domestic resilience is a crucial aspect of security to which there has to be an all

hazards approach combating both the motivated attack and the natural hazard.

- The process of risk assessment in government has to be more sophisticated. We do not agree with the government that the greatest threat this country faces is a pandemic. A pandemic could be very serious but not as serious in its effects as the actions of terrorists that caused us to alter the fundamental values and liberties of our society;
- There has to be both consistency and compatibility of policy and standards of behaviour at home and abroad. In particular, practising professed values abroad as well as at home is vital and not necessarily easy;
- We will strengthen border security with a proper force bringing together several currently disparate agencies with different

and not necessarily consistent mandates. Our aim is to have a secure a perimeter as we can in order to have as free and as unhindered and untrammelled freedom of circulation, speech association and person as possible within the country;

- We shall pay particular attention to the national identity and cohesion aspects of national security. Real security lies in citizens' loyalty to each other and not in submission to the power of the state for fear of each other.
- These features of security policy- its large substantive scope and breadth of application demand adaptation of the machinery of government to reduce the artificial compartmentalisation of policy making and accountability which arises from the traditional framework of departmental policy making and budgets

and the accountability of Ministers on a departmental basis before separate Parliamentary committees. The government have gone some way to recognise the implications of all this with the creation of a Cabinet committee with a complicated name to bring the different strands of policy together and the proposal to have a joint committee of both Houses on national security.

- A Conservative Administration will complete the design with an NSC chaired by the Prime Minister responsible for preparing a long term national security strategy once a Parliament, agreed by the Cabinet and sent to Parliament for debate. We will redesign some features of the cabinet committee structure at the centre under the NSC and we will strengthen the accountability to Parliament of the police

and intelligence agencies in ways which do not compromise their operational efficiency. There will be a single security budget which goes wider than the present budget with this name (ie just the agencies). More in Q and A if you wish.

Lastly I want to say something about the domestic aspects of national security in two broad areas.

First resilience.

- First, we need to protect society as a whole and not just the apparatus of the state. In their recent study of national security policy, the French government moved to an approach that I think we should emulate. They talked about human security which has several facets. In the days of Cold War civil defence, we protected the organs and institutions of the state: point defence. Today we need to protect the ability

of the essential sectors of the economy and society to function in all circumstances including major emergencies. It should be a business continuity approach at a national level. This means protecting critical national infrastructure systems and networks against threats and hazards which in turn requires planning, preparation and, in the case of the UK, given private ownership of many utilities, it will require public – private sector cooperation.

- It means efficient recovery after disaster. The government has pushed forward a programme here which we will build on strengthening inter alia regional interoperability of the blue light services. We also want the greater active involvement of local communities in their own survival and recovery in emergencies. All the signs are that local people want to play a

useful role in helping their neighbours and we should facilitate this with organisation and training. The German Technisches Hilfswerk system has much to teach us in this regard and would fit well with David Cameron's ideas for a voluntary national citizen service programme aimed primarily at young people and with Conservative ideas for a new special constabulary.

- The government has said that it will adopt a risk based approach and we agree with them. There is no such thing, except by creating a prison, as complete security. But the approach has to be a lot more thorough going than at present. The National Risk Register is useful though, as I said, we do not entirely agree with its assessment of risk. It also has to be the starting point not just for consequence management, as is the case at present, but

should be the basis of prioritising the cost of preventative measures.

- Resilience needs to be embedded, not bolted on. An example. We are told that the incidence of serious flooding will increase with climate change. Its effects are aggravated by current house building in which flood plains are being tarmacaded over so that surface water cannot drain away. The Pitt Review of the floods of 18 months ago was quite clear that the remedy lay not just in clearing up after the event, (in which installations vital to UK national security had some narrow escapes from being shut down,) but in increased and systematic preventative protection. We need, for instance, building regulations which obviate the risk in the first place. This is not rocket science but does involve a more systematic approach and the

institution of national standards for local authorities to follow. We shall strengthen the apparatus of government to deal with resilience.

National Cohesion

- My penultimate point: national cohesion. I mentioned the need to pursue a values agenda abroad. We need to do so at home too. Thus country has been through immense change in the last half century, both social and political. EU membership, devolution, social mobility, migration and multi ethnicity- all factors which make for individual choice and freedom, but which can dilute society's collective sense of its bearings and on the individual's sense of place within it. We need to reassert our national identity – not flag waving, but education about British history and

institutions, and the requirements of residence and citizenship which should include mastery of the English language. This approach should be the context for dealing with the particular problem of Islamist extremism and terrorism.

- We will continue to support with the necessary resources the current counterterrorism effort led by the police with the support of the agencies in which international cooperation remains vital. But we will also take so called engagement seriously. We shall target not just violent extremism but extremism per se even if not violent since it is the seedbed on which violence sprouts. Here we will be much more rigorously systematic in our approach to ensuring government at all levels does not have links with individuals or organisations which condone violence and extremism.

- Finally in all of this we shall try very hard to ensure that in providing collective security, the state does not take more power than is strictly necessary to do the job. Our liberties are not some cheap good to be snapped up by government in return for security. As in the case of government proposal for 42 days precharge detention, we case for further power will have to be demonstrated. More generally, in an age when government agencies unavoidably hold more and more information about the citizen, we shall insist on greater safeguards than exist at present against careless and improper use But this is a whole topic in its own right.

Conclusion

Will the new international system be less accommodating to the UK than the old one? In

the late 1940s and early fifties, faced by a continental Europe in ruins, with the Soviet Union half way into Germany and acquiring the bomb; with powerful communist parties in Western Europe; a hot war in Korea and the UK economy on its back, I don't think the British Prime Ministers of the day thought that world their oyster. It was grey and menacing. But Ernie Bevin, the then Foreign Secretary turned it to advantage with the creation of NATO which became the cornerstone of UK foreign policy. I am sure that lies behind Michal Clarke's comment about the Cold War international order suiting the UK.

It is relevant to what we do today. The 60th anniversary meeting of NATO next April and the Review that will follow will be an important test of whether the Allies want to continue their historic alliance. It will be a test and an

opportunity which the UK should certainly seize as providing a framework for the sort of transatlantic partnership we now need to fashion and help lead new world order. My guess is that our leaders of 1945 would have been delighted to have been able to attempt that task from the platform of prosperity and freedom that we now have.
