

Speech: The World Order Today: Is it fit for purpose?

When I first met my husband, in 2002, I was doing my Masters in international relations at the London School of Economics. He came to my housewarming party, and his chat up line, his opening gambit, was about Francis Fukuyama and the end of history: had liberal democracy really won the battle of ideology? To be honest I didn't know, I thought it quite odd as a chat up line – but I liked him anyway.

And when I think back to that time, there was a real sense of optimism about the world order. It was after the UK's successful intervention in Sierra Leone, after NATO's intervention in Kosovo – and before the misadventure in Iraq. Humanitarian interventionism was riding high; the Responsibility to Protect principle was gaining traction.

Yes – 9/11 had been a shock, a reminder of the threat posed by non-state actors – but there seemed to be a broad consensus amongst state actors on the direction of travel. And that was:

- greater democratisation,
- increasing globalisation, and
- a sense of universal values and rights that would and could be protected – even across borders.

Today that optimism has gone. The world feels more insecure and less stable and we are all – rightly – concerned: about resurgent nationalism, about whether “America First” signals a US retreat from the liberal world order; China's ambitions in the South China Sea, Russia's invasion of Crimea, hostile states using cyber to interfere in other countries' democracies. Terrorism, nuclear war, water security. Our collective failure to stop the devastating conflict in Syria. The worst migration crisis since the second world war; five famine alerts.

All suggest that the world order is not equipped to deal with the problems of the modern age.

But to assess whether that is really the case, we need to know what we mean by the world order.

I take it to comprise of three things. First, the architecture of the international system. That is, international organisations with truly global representation: the UN, the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank; and also quasi-international organisations with sub-global representation: NATO, the EU, the Commonwealth, APEC; and so on.

Second, the laws, and rules that govern international affairs, sometimes, but not always, enforced by international courts like the ICJ, the ICC, the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

And third, but less easily defined, the shared values that underpin that international architecture and international law. They are, I suggest: – A shared commitment to reward cooperation and negotiation and to punish aggression and hostility; – A shared belief that human life should be protected and human dignity respected; – a recognition that our mutual prosperity depends on our mutual engagement and mutual trade; – AND a recognition that we live on a shared planet with finite, common resources that must be managed for the benefit of all.

So: architecture, law, values. It is a system which emerged from the aftermath of the Second World War and the horror of genocide. It is designed to prevent a third global war, and to reduce bloodshed from international conflicts. But it is also directed at raising living standards and enhancing life chances globally.

On those most basic indicators, it has been a resounding success.

There are proportionately fewer violent deaths today than there have ever been in history.

Levels of education are steadily increasing.

More and more countries are becoming democratic, and global extreme poverty tumbled from 44% in 1981, to less than 10% in 2015. Every day, 137,000 people come out of extreme poverty. No one tweets that, but it's an amazing statistic.

And that is the success of the world order: international architecture; international law; and shared values all contrive to prevent a Hobbesian state of nature, and instead encourage dialogue and co-operation for the better.

But that is – in large part – the success of the 20th century. What about the 21st?

In some respects, the challenges for the World Order in 2018 are the same as those in the 20th century:

- Hostile and belligerent states such as DPRK remain a threat to peace and stability.
- And the Rohingya crisis shows us how hard it is to respond, internationally, to sudden and systematic ethnic cleansing.

But there are also very real differences between the post-war world, and the world today.

First, there are new and emerging threats to the world order: from non-state actors like ISIS; from climate change; water scarcity; mass migration; cyber.

Secondly, the global balance of power is shifting. We are moving from a unipolar to a multipolar world: the singular dominance of the United States is diminishing; Russia is back as an assertive presence in what it considers its neighbourhood, including the Middle East; and China is gaining global

reach in terms of economic and political influence, and is aiming at vastly increased military capability.

And thirdly, ideas that we thought were shared and settled are once again up for grabs. For instance, resurgent nationalism and populism challenge the assumption that globalisation and free trade, and the multilateral institutions that support them are necessarily good: the Brexit vote and the vote for President Trump had multiple roots. But they were as much votes for the nation state as they were against anything else.

And there are certainly signs to suggest that the World Order is no longer functioning as it should. – In the UN, Russia's cynical use of the veto on Syria has undermined the most basic task of the UN system: the provision of humanitarian aid, and the investigation of the use of chemical weapons. – And on global trade, the Doha round beyond stalled; and the US has withdrawn from TPP and wants to renegotiate NAFTA.

So is the world order broken?

We need to be careful not to add 2 and 2 to get 5. Just as Fukuyama was wrong to believe in a global narrative which irresistibly led to liberal democracy, it is also wrong to tell a story of decline or collapse of the world order today.

In addition to the peace and prosperity gains of the 20th century, there have been real, tangible successes of international co-operation of late.

In the security field, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran has made the world a safer place; and co-operation on aviation security since 9/11 has denied terrorists the grand spectacle they crave.

On climate change, the Paris Agreement has shown that the world's nations can come together to tackle its most pressing challenge. Importantly, the US withdrawal did not spell the collapse of the agreement; if anything it emboldened others to meet their commitments and show leadership.

So the world order is clearly not broken. But if it is to survive in an era of resurgent nationalism, and a shift in global power, it needs three things: reform of its architecture; an update to its law and rules; and a reinvigoration of the values that underpin it.

First, reform the architecture. The international architecture is anachronistic – it reflects mid 20th century power structures, rather than the reality of the world today. So:

(1) the UN needs reform. The Security Council should be expanded – the UK supports permanent seats for Germany, Brazil, India and Japan, as well as permanent representation for Africa. And the existing P5 must agree to exercise veto restraint if the integrity of the UN system is to survive..

(2) NATO needs to reform. NATO members need to respond to President Trump's challenge by meeting the 2% spending target of the Defence Investment Pledge. Decades of unprecedented peace in Europe is testament to NATO's success; but

it has also given rise to a complacency that the current security situation does not warrant.

(3) The international system of globalised free trade must also reform, from the WTO down. Trade is a global good – and not just in economic terms; it also enhances bilateral relations and ensures a level of cooperation and interdependence that reduces the risk of conflict. But we must not ignore the rise in populist parties across the Western world, and elections which have broken the traditional centrist consensus. Many feel uncomfortable with the pace of change, they feel left behind. There is a perception that free trade, open borders, and multilateralism work for the elite but no-one else. So: free trade agreements of the future must champion progressive principles; ensure adequate worker and environmental protections; and reflect the continuing relevance and needs of the nation state.

Other organisations also need to adapt and evolve. We need to reinvigorate the Commonwealth. And although the UK is leaving, I would argue that the EU, too, needs to reform. It needs to think carefully, reflecting on the Brexit vote, about how much more pooling of sovereignty its members and citizens will accept.

Moving now to international law, we must ensure that it keeps pace with change in international affairs. Two areas in particular are in need of clearer international law: a. Cyber. The UK wants to see the full application of existing international law – including the UN Charter – to cyberspace; b. The environment. The impacts of climate change, marine pollution and other environmental hazards all require urgent and collective action: and international law has a key role to play.

And, finally, our shared values.

The principles of that we hold dear -democratisation, multilateralism, and human rights – are under threat in the global system: in the west and elsewhere.

So we need to increase our efforts to make the case for the norms and values which underpin the international order. We should never assume consent.

First, in the face of growing protectionism, we need to make the case for International Trade, emphasising that our mutual prosperity depends on it – while taking seriously the needs and concerns of those who feel left behind.

Secondly, we need to reemphasize our belief in human dignity and the importance of protecting our shared resources. The global goods as we see them – human rights, tackling climate change, protecting the taonga of our wildlife and natural resources, gender rights, tackling poverty, tackling modern slavery – are not just good things to do in an altruistic, fluffy kind of way: they make sense in terms of the economics, and national self-interest of a country. If you don't educate and empower women then – as Obama once said- you are leaving half your team on the bench. If we don't tackle climate change now, it will cost us far more in life and treasure to respond to it later down the track.

And finally, we need to reinvigorate a belief in multilateralism. International terrorism, climate change, nuclear proliferation, cyber attacks all require global multilateral solutions. But those solutions will only be achieved if we can base them on shared values: and if we can demonstrate the benefits of such co-operation to our citizens.

To conclude: the international order has delivered peace and prosperity beyond the imaginings of my grandparents. But if it is to endure, it must adapt and evolve. And it is for countries like the UK and New Zealand – close friends with shared values, and a shared stake in the international system – to work together to make the case: for reform of the architecture, an updating of the law, and a reinvigoration of the values underpinning the world order.

Thank you.