

“ETHICS IN DECISION-MAKING”

INTERACTION COUNCIL VIENNA 26 MARCH 2014

This special meeting is to honour Chancellor Schmidt on the occasion of his 95th birthday and the founders of the InterAction Council, especially former Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda, whose vision and inspiration was directly responsible for the foundation of the Council. Through his life, Helmut Schmidt has seen many changes. As a young Lieutenant, he was posted to the Russian front in 1941. He saw the lights of Moscow, but thankfully his unit was not involved in Stalingrad. If it had been, Europe may well have lost one of its greatest statesmen.

Chancellor Schmidt has worked tirelessly for the unity of Europe, to make sure that old enmities are put aside. In particular, he worked closely with President Giscard d’Estaing, whom I am delighted to see, is also here to honour this occasion. What these two great people did provides a lesson and a model, not only for this Council, but for much of the world. France and Germany had been locked in intractable and longstanding enmity. They were perhaps the most important people in making sure that a different relationship was established, one of collaboration and cooperation. I was fortunate that their time in office overlapped with my own.

I would like to welcome Members of the Council. A special welcome to all religious leaders, who I hope will play a very active part in this meeting. Many have already contributed significantly, in preparing papers relevant to our discussion. Thank you for that. I also welcome our special guests.

The InterAction Council was founded in 1983, shortly after the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan. Its purpose was to look at longer term issues, the problems of a rapidly growing world population, the challenges created by practices that contribute to environmental degradation. How to establish a peaceful and prosperous world? How to abolish nuclear weapons? How to look at longer term issues which governments often put aside. These issues were of particular interest to Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda.

Chancellor Schmidt and Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda in particular, sought to define and achieve a greater understanding of the common ethic, at the core of major religions. The first Interfaith Dialogue was held in 1987, leading 10 years later to the Draft Declaration of Human Responsibilities, which perhaps, for the first time, defined the common ethic acceptable to major religions.

There are many factors which make these longer terms issues more important than ever before. One of them is the rapid growth in the world's population. At the time of the 1st World War, the world population was 1.7 billion. At the end of the 2nd World War it was 2.3 billion. Today, it has reached 7.2 billion and is continuing to increase at a rapid rate. This increases pressure for resources. It will make it more urgent to use the resources of this planet wisely, and to pay proper attention to environmental issues.

These are not the only factors that make the longer term issues more urgent. During the Cold War, the world was more stable, there was less danger of serious armed conflict then, than is now the case. The fact that there were two superpowers, led to a certain precarious balance. Each knew that they could not push the other too hard, and neither wanted a nuclear war, though they came frighteningly close on repeated occasions. That balance ended in 1991 with the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Since that time, despite the Non-Proliferation Treaty, more countries, currently nine, now possess nuclear weapons. The danger of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists is real. The possibility of a regional nuclear war cannot be dismissed as idle speculation. There are many who do not understand that such a regional conflict could have severe global consequences for climate, for the environment and for future security, with billions at risk of famine.

In 1990, the first Gulf War was undertaken. After the war, President George H W Bush made, what I regard, as a great speech to Congress on 6 March 1991. He said, *"To the aid of this small country (Kuwait) came nations from North America and Europe, from Asia and South America, from Africa and the Arab world, all united against aggression. Our uncommon coalition must now work in common purpose: to forge a future that should never again be held hostage to the darker side of human nature."* This was the voice we wanted to hear from the United States.

President Bush spoke of a new world. A new world order in which quoting Winston Churchill *"the principles of justice and fair play protect the weak against the strong...."*

It was then an optimistic period. The major rivalries between the darker forces of communism and the free world were over. There was no obvious enemy to freedom. Nations would have the capacity to work together, to advance humanity and decency throughout the world.

It was the second time, in my lifetime, that a period of optimism had engulfed the world. After World War II, when civilisation had so nearly destroyed itself, world leaders, victors and vanquished, knew that they had to do better. It was a period of emancipation, the ideals of the United Nations and the spirit of freedom and equality spread around the world. Nations would work for the betterment of humankind. Unfortunately, that optimism soon dissipated.

The Cold War endured for over 40 years. The older rules of power politics dominated relations between nations. There were dangerous rivalries. The opportunity to create a truly cooperative world amongst major states was lost.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the period of optimism soon passed, as the old rules governed by suspicion and fear dominated relations between states and new dangers arose, including the war on terrorism, which was always wrongly named because it was too easy for fundamentalists to interpret it as a war on Islam.

When trust between states has been broken, we should try and understand why. We should be able to look at matters objectively and in good faith. For example, NATO had achieved its purpose. The freedom of Western Europe had been secured. The battle had been won without firing a shot. Freedom was secured, including many countries formerly dominated by the Soviet Empire. It was time for generosity. It was a time for farsightedness, but narrow self-interest prevailed.

NATO was pushed to the boundaries of Russia, despite President Gorbachev believing he had an agreement that NATO would not march eastward. Russia would certainly regard that as an unfriendly

act. Its empire had disintegrated. There were other ways of securing and guaranteeing the freedom of countries of Eastern Europe, but NATO did not see it that way. This was perhaps the most important and fatal mistake. In the view of many, it was and is a significant contributor to current problems in the Ukraine and Crimea.

Policy should have been conducted so that Russia would believe that others wanted her as a truly cooperative partner, in a new world. A world in which Russian views would also be given due space and taken into account. This one act of advancing NATO, destroyed that possibility. The development of new weapons systems in Eastern Europe only reinforced Russian concerns.

Why was it that the principles enunciated by President Bush in 1991, were so easily and hastily pushed aside? How is it, the great hopes that many experienced after that Gulf War came to naught? As a result, we have, in the years since, found ourselves in a more dangerous and precarious world.

The idea of American exceptionalism was present from the founding of the United States, but it is only in recent times, since America has indeed become the most powerful nation, that belief in American exceptionalism has come to be a major influence and factor in world affairs.

Morton Abramowitz, United States Ambassador for Turkey and Thailand, and one of the founders of the International Crisis Group, wrote in *The National Interest*, as recently as 2012, "How American Exceptionalism Dooms US Foreign Policy". In part, Abramowitz wrote "*This faith in our unique virtue causes us to believe that we have not only the capacity but also the inherent latitude for action that no other country possesses.....our cause is invariably just, particularly when we use force. We can if necessary also override our own laws.....*" and so he goes on. It is worth reading that honest and open commentary on American affairs.

Even President Obama asserts a belief in American exceptionalism. In part he says "*... when..... we can stop children from being gassed to death, and thereby make our own children safer over the long run, I believe we should act.*" "*That's what makes America different. That's what makes us exceptional.*" Indeed, is America the only country that would want to stop children being gassed?

America has more power than the rest of us, but to claim some unique virtue, does not contribute to the cause of peace. President Vladimir Putin was correct when he said in a New York Times op-ed *“it is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional.....”* It is dangerous because it endows a nation with a sense of righteousness. A sense of conviction in its own view and, at the same time, blinds that nation from the capacity to understand the point of view of other people. None of this is conducive to working for peace.

Inability to see what the other person or another country may be able to accept often makes agreement and peace very difficult to obtain.

In any diplomatic initiative, it is important to understand the arguments on both sides of the equation, to be able to come to a quiet judgement about what is reasonable and what is not. If one wants accommodation, not to push beyond that point of reason. In a successful negotiation, one that will endure, people on both sides of an equation need to be able to walk away feeling they have achieved something worthwhile.

While this is certainly a problem between countries, it is also a problem between religions and within religions. In quite recent times, the Catholic-Protestant divide in Ireland led to acts of terrorism by both sides. It took decades of negotiations and pain to create the opportunity of a peaceful future for Ireland. Both sides had preached bigotry and hatred of the other. When such words are uttered, it is difficult to take them back. Religious hatreds are perhaps the hardest of all, to overcome.

I truly believe there is a common ethic running through all the world's major religions. The basic values, the ethical standards, needed for a peaceful society, are shared. This became clear in the long discussions that led to the preparation of a “Draft Declaration of Human Responsibilities”. To write down the words, the principles of a common ethic, is one thing, to get people to act upon it and to live by it, is quite another. That is an outcome that has so far eluded this Council and most of the world.

There are now many in the West who will point to Islamic fundamentalism and to the voices of the jihadist clerics and say how

can there be compromise. What they forget is that this is Islam at the extreme, condemned by the great majority of Muslims around the world.

If we, in the West, have the honesty to admit it, there are Christian fundamentalists in the evangelical churches. There are those who point to Islam as the fount of all danger, of all threats to a peaceful world. The point should be clear, there are fundamentalists in most religions, in Islam, in Christianity, in Judaism. How do we create a world in which their rhetoric, their exhortations can no longer attract new recruits. That is one of the great challenges for all of us. It is a challenge for those of us in the West, to make sure that our actions do not needlessly provide arguments that fundamentalists can use.

In the Middle East, some, perhaps many, have the view that western interference, from the overthrow of Prime Minister Mosaddegh in 1953, to the invasion of Iraq, by the United States, Britain and Australia in the 2nd Gulf War, has caused many of the problems throughout the region. It certainly is difficult to see where western policies have been successful, and have contributed positively to peace and shared progress, in the region. The first Gulf War was a notable exception, but that was not merely western policy. The United States had put together a coalition of over 30 nations, in marked contrast to the later invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The chaos throughout the region today would seem to be an endemic problem which is perhaps the greatest barrier to peaceful progress. The severe divisions, rivalries and hatreds between Islamic sects obviously have an extraordinary impact on a number of countries. The consequences of Al Qaeda itself, have been a major contributor to a worldwide concern and fear of Islam. As I have shown, however, the divisions within Islam are not unique to Muslims. They have been present and have exacted a terrible cost in Christian nations.

In recent times, the Middle East has been a major focus, but the Western Pacific is becoming a new area of tension and of assumed rivalries. Again, instead of adopting the principles President Bush enunciated in his speech of March 1991, Cold War principles of power, containment and military rivalry seem to be coming more and more to the fore.

There are, throughout the region, some remarkable examples of peaceful and effective progress. The development of ASEAN, now embracing 10 nations and encompassing within its membership countries which had been former enemies, has been quite remarkable. It has been achieved on the initiative of Thailand and Indonesia especially, without any Western involvement. These Asian countries have done it their way and they have been effective. There are still some problems, there are still rivalries over the South China Sea, but amongst ASEAN, the problems are contained and controlled. They all recognise that the greater purpose is served by peace and cooperation. We should note that not all members are democracies, but this has not prevented necessary cooperation. Indeed, ASEAN has developed to such an extent that the association has taken tentative steps to mediate differences between members. The transformation of ASEAN provides an example to all of us. There is no real sign that western states have learnt that lesson.

One of the problems we have to face, are the rapid changes taking place in many parts of the world. For example, some find it difficult to come to terms with the growing power and strength, and the economic weight of China. China is not well understood in the West. Events in China are often reported adversely, with little understanding of its history, culture or cause. China does things differently from Europe, or from America, but so far they have been effective in maintaining balance and in continuing economic growth and development. This is critical to their plans for the advancement of living standards, in China itself.

This is a transformation that we must understand. In the lifetime of many of today's leaders, China has been withdrawn and preoccupied with her own internal affairs, not interacting much with the wider world, beyond that which was regarded as immediately necessary.

China has now emerged from this withdrawn period in her history and is now the major trading partner of every country in the Western Pacific and her economy is still growing at over 7% a year. It is only to be expected, that as an ancient and proud nation, China's views must be respected and given a place in the conduct of affairs throughout the Asian Pacific region. This should not be regarded as aggressive, a new assertion of power, but rather as a resumption of China's traditional and historic interest. It has, however, led to some concerns, which sometimes have been much exaggerated. China has

not been an imperial power, as European states, America and Japan have been. How this new balance in the Western Pacific is handled, how it evolves, will depend, not only on China's own attitude, but in the way, especially America and Japan, conduct their affairs with China. In recent times, there has been no good progress between these nations. There is distrust between China and Japan, and a growing concern in America, and an uncertainty of what they should or should not do. America uncertain, mistakenly, seeks to strengthen military options.

I make these points because much of Europe and America's attention has focused on the Middle East, on the difficulties of achieving peace and progress throughout this region, and on difficulties in the post-Soviet Era, but the problems the world faces are wider than that. The Western Pacific should receive more attention.

So far I have spoken of tension and difficulty, but what to do, what can this Council say. Can we draw attention to the need to unlock a greater sense of purpose and ethical government? Most of the people in this room are long past the stage of wielding or holding political power. Those currently in office, are not prone to listen to their predecessors. I believe, however, that we are standing at a crossroad. We either take decisions based on ethical government that will advance the prospect for peace and progress, or we can have a long slide to a 3rd World War with the prospect that nuclear weapons would be used. Whether that starts over some dispute in the Middle East, or over a rock in the East China Sea, may be immaterial to the outcome.

These problems are much more urgent than in previous times, because now humankind has two quite separate means of destroying life on this planet. The inadequacy of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the failure of nuclear-armed states to disarm as the treaty obligates them to do, the widening capacity to produce fissile materials usable for nuclear weapons, the continuation of two thousand weapons being on high alert, make the possibility of some nuclear conflict more likely than before. Even a limited nuclear war could lead to a wasteland. Secondly, failure to act on environmental issues, of human pollution of the atmosphere, could also destroy the planet. Those of us who lead comfortable lives might find it difficult to appreciate or understand the urgency, but the urgency grows as each year passes without effective and adequate action.

There are some things that should be pursued now.

- 1 The Non-Proliferation Treaty has been applied inequitably. Actions are permitted by those who are regarded as friends. Similar actions are denied to others. The Non-Proliferation Treaty requires urgent renewal. There is a considerable body of opinion, amongst former military and former Secretaries of Defence, led by George Schultz, former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State, Bill Perry, former Secretary of Defense, and Sam Nunn, former Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, that nuclear weapons are not necessary for the safety of any country, while endangering all. Therefore, they ought to be abolished. Their views are replicated in many countries, including nuclear armed states.

The situation is urgent because more than 40 countries have the capacity to build a nuclear bomb. There are a few countries which could have nuclear weapons on deliverable missiles within months. This makes the danger of nuclear conflict, or of terrorists gaining possession of a nuclear weapon, greater than ever before.

A binding international agreement to prohibit and eradicate nuclear weapons is needed, and all states have some capacity and bear responsibility to begin negotiations on such an agreement as a matter of urgent priority.

- 2 We also have the capacity to do grave and serious damage to the planet through global warming and through replication of the Western lifestyle of high consumerism.

This is a new phenomenon in the history of the human race.

How do we find the way forward? How do we unlock the will and the conviction to take necessary action? These issues will not be tackled unless there is a change of attitude, where less emphasis is placed on self-interest and more emphasis is given to ethical, long-term decision making by governments.

- 3 There are notable examples which can provide a pattern and an example to follow. The work of President Giscard d'Estaing

and Chancellor Schmidt in the earlier post war years, working to achieve cooperation between two former great enemies, is one example. Oscar Arias, a member of this Council for many years, is a Nobel Peace Laureate, for the work he has done in Central America. He has worked tirelessly for peaceful purposes.

Unfortunately, it is often the large, the powerful and, indeed, commercial interests, who make progress difficult. Too often the element of risk that must be undertaken in the search for peace and progress is enough to deter action and to encourage leaders to act in traditional and antipathetic ways.

- 4 There are lessons from South Africa. There were many who believed initially that the black majority, once it gained power, would want vengeance, retribution. Nelson Mandela understood, with total clarity, that South Africa had to become a rainbow nation, where all people were regarded as important. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission provides a pattern that could be relevant to difficulties within religions or between countries.
- 5 The United Nations must be taken seriously by all countries. We know the principles and ideals of that organisation. Too often the United Nations comes in for criticism, which should be directed at its members. The United Nations especially, is the sum of its constituent parts. It is the governments that will make the United Nations work, or by pursuing self-interests, secure its failure.

While there are problems of reform, even within present structures, much more progress could be made. One single change, involving a variation of attitude, would make all the difference in the world. If the great and the powerful decided to abide by the rules of the United Nations, and not to break those rules when it suited them to do so, such a change would make progress possible.

- 6 Within the rules of the United Nations, we should pay more attention to progress made by ASEAN, which I earlier mentioned.

This meeting will not be able to resolve problems, that is not our purpose, but can we point to a process, can your collective wisdom suggest how governments may be motivated to act, in ways that will make the world a safer place? We can certainly underline the increasing urgency of the issues facing the world. We can emphasise the importance of effective action. We can emphasise the dangers that beset us all.

I was delighted to see the suggestion by Dr Habash in his paper, that we should, once again, seek to define a covenant of human ethics to be signed by political and religious leaders. The acceptance of a common set of ethics, within and between religions and nation states, may well be a prerequisite for a more just and peaceful world.

I hope in the next two days deliberations, your valuable contributions will help point the way forward, so that there will be a motivation to put self-interests aside and have it replaced by ethical government. If we could achieve that, we will achieve much of what Takeo Fukuda and Helmut Schmidt wanted to achieve in the early days of this Council.

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