



THE CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES

TRANSCRIPT OF THE 2001 RUTTENBERG LECTURE

“FOREIGN POLICY IN THE AGE OF TERRORISM”

DR HENRY KISSINGER

31st October 2001

When originally I was scheduled to deliver this lecture, it was supposed to be about America's attitudes or views regarding Britain's relationship to Europe; that would be too dangerous a topic for me. Since then, world events have created other issues. So I want to talk to you about the foreign policy issues raised by the period of terrorism.

I want to make two points: the events of September 11th were a great tragedy – that can turn into an extraordinary opportunity if the changed circumstances for America, for Europe, for Russia, China and other parts of the world are properly understood.

For America it was a wake-up call against the background of a period of indolence and self-satisfaction. The illusion was that history was over, that foreign policy had become a version of economics or sociology, that there were no major political issues left was at an end. The illusion that we have an unlimited range of choice, or that we can choose among our options those which most flatter our preconceptions, has also been severely shaken. Much of the debate, at least as far as America is concerned, that has characterised our discussions since the Vietnam War – between power and morality, between national interests and idealism – is being subsumed and, at the moment, overshadowed by a situation in which it is clear that these are not the ultimate alternatives of foreign policy. Our alliances, our relations with Russia, China and South Asia can be looked at in a different context.



FOREIGN POLICY IN THE AGE OF TERRORISM: DR HENRY KISSINGER

Any American concerned with foreign policy is bound to express his respect and appreciation for the conduct of British policy in this period. I belong to the generation that grew up in the context of a belief in the 'special relationship' between Britain and America. Some had begun, if not to dismiss it, to look at it from the perspective of a perhaps outdated sentimentality. But those of us who have observed not just the actions of the British Government, but the explanations which identified the British concerns so much with American concerns, have seen that there still is a very special attitude in the relationship between our two countries; and that this relationship should be preserved in the years ahead for the challenges that are clearly facing us. I know no other leaders that have so identified the experiences of New York and Washington with the attitudes of their own people as those of the British government.

Now when I speak of the conduct of the war against terrorism, I look at it as a common enterprise and not as an American projection of an American national view. And, indeed, in its deeper sense, it is a common enterprise not just for Britain and the United States but for all peoples concerned with world order. It is a war that has no front-lines. It is a war that had no issues on September 10th. Until then the American public would have been astonished to hear that there were fundamental differences between the United States and Islam, or that there was such a thing as a concept of a war of civilisations. For them, that was confined to academic treatises.

The American public still does not understand why, exactly, we were attacked nor what, precisely, it is that we are supposed to do. This is what has generated this extraordinary sense of defiant unity which I have never seen in America, not even after Pearl Harbour, to quite this emotional extent. That is why there has been no pressure on the American Government that it might be doing too much. If there is any psychological pressure, it will come from the opposite direction.

Now the shadowy nature of the challenge, the imprecision of the issues that have been rhetorically more aimed at our existence than at our policies in the early stages, nevertheless do not prevent some definition of what it is that needs to be done. It seems to me that the fundamental challenge of



FOREIGN POLICY IN THE AGE OF TERRORISM: DR HENRY KISSINGER

terrorism is that it exists in many cells all over the world, but it cannot survive without some base and without some direction. If one reads of the structure of the various plots that one knows about, they all go back to a variety of base areas that provide organisation, recruitment, fund-raising and a sort of coherence. It is for this reason that the elimination of these base areas, or at any rate the suppression of them by the host governments, has to be the strategic objective of the common policy. President Bush, in his speech to the Congress, said:

From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbour or support terrorism will be regarded, by the United States, as a hostile regime.

If you look at the record of President Bush, you will see that he tends to mean what he says. So the war in Afghanistan must be seen as an attack on the most flagrant harbourer of terrorists and against the most symbolic representative of terrorism in the person of bin Laden.

I do not believe that the elimination of bin Laden will end the problem; nor do I believe that success in Afghanistan will, by itself, end the issue. What America is attempting to do, together with those members of the Coalition who in fact are doing something, is to demonstrate that safe havens cannot be tolerated if terrorism is to be ended. If America takes the lead it is, of course, in part because of the effect of the offence in attacking New York and Washington; but it is also, importantly, because for the entire post-war period the security of free peoples anywhere has depended upon America's willingness to defend them, whether that was always recognised or not. If America fails in its reaction to an attack on its own territory, the whole structure of the security of the post-war world will disintegrate – even for those people who are critical, or sometimes for domestic reasons pretend to be critical. That is the fundamental issue.

In Afghanistan we clearly cannot have as an objective the occupation of Afghanistan. Our goal needs to be to destroy the network of bin Laden and, by removing the Taleban from the government of Afghanistan, to make clear the penalties for tolerating and even encouraging this sort of activity. It also puts all of us under a certain amount of pressure, because the longer this part of the conflict continues, the longer the Taleban can remain standing,



FOREIGN POLICY IN THE AGE OF TERRORISM: DR HENRY KISSINGER

the more the war itself becomes the emphasis and the larger issue tends to be obscured. We also have to face the fact that at some point in this process, a surviving Taleban can become a symbol for the defiance of the Coalition and the American joint effort with its allies. When that point will be reached is not for me to say here, but it would be wrong to believe that there is an unlimited period of time and that one can afford too many experiments.

I do not believe that when those two objectives are reached – that is, the destruction of the Taleban and the destruction of the network – that American and allied military forces have the primary rôle to play in the so-called ‘nation-building’ of Afghanistan. The pacification of all of Afghanistan has eluded many previous countries that have attempted it and it is something that should be turned over to the United Nations – perhaps by the creation of some ‘Contact Group’ of neighbouring countries, together with those countries that participated in the conflict, and with generous economic assistance from the Western countries. But if the war as such for us should end with the destruction of the Taleban and the destruction of the bin Laden network, then at that point the war against terrorism will confront the next challenge.

That challenge is: how does one deal with State-supported terrorism in the aftermath of Afghanistan? If we slacken in this effort, if we think that what I have defined as ‘victory in Afghanistan’ is the only purpose and is an adequate reaction to what happened on September 11th, we will find that terrorism will come back; it will engulf first the moderate States in the region, but blackmail many other countries – as we see now in the nature of the Coalition in many parts of the world. We will then face the question of what the Coalition is supposed to do; whether the Coalition is a convoy that sails at the rate of the slowest ship, or whether there is another way of interpreting it. The President and the Secretary of State have spoken of a Coalition in which every member does what it is most comfortable with doing. This is what might be called an ‘à la carte’ Coalition policy. It can be interpreted in two ways: that nations can do as little as they want, but also that those who wish to do more can join together in those actions and will continue to demand not much more than the condemnation of terrorism which characterises the contributions of so many members of the current Coalition.



FOREIGN POLICY IN THE AGE OF TERRORISM: DR HENRY KISSINGER

In any event, at that point, there has to be some definition of what constitutes a terrorist organisation and of what represents State support of that organisation. What matters is what those members of the Coalition who are prepared to act will do in response. At some point this question will arise and will oblige countries which are now technically part of the Coalition to choose between whether they wish to remain in the Coalition or to engage in actions that support terrorism. This is one of the challenges for the next stage and I have every hope that we and our European allies and other countries – such as Russia, China and India – can stay together on the definition of aspects of these issues. In that case, I believe we shall also have support from some Middle Eastern countries.

It is often said that this is not simply a question of terrorism but that there are other issues which have caused terrorism and which must be eliminated in order to achieve what we have set out to do. To some extent this is true, but one should keep in mind at least three aspects. The first is that almost all of these issues have a longer time-frame for their solution than the immediate issue with which we are confronted. The second is to make sure the solution cannot be represented as a victory for the terrorists' measures – that is, that people cannot say they were the result of the attack on the United States. The third is to develop some idea of what it is that one is attempting to do.

This is not the occasion to discuss the issue of the future of Palestine, but it is important to keep in mind what it is for which one should ask. Almost everybody knows that in any negotiation what will be asked of Israel (and what often, or at least on occasion, what Israel has conceded) is some territorial change, some modification of settlement policy – and therefore some sacrifice. What is not so clear is what is being asked of the other side. The overwhelming concern, of not only Israelis but of many who have looked at the subject, is that for too many on the Arab side any negotiations are considered an intermediate process to the total destruction of the Israeli State. Some definition of what constitutes Israeli legitimacy, and some definition of the content of security, must be supplied by the Arab side and not simply an unconditional demand for a negotiation whose content on one side is clear and on the other side is nebulous.



FOREIGN POLICY IN THE AGE OF TERRORISM: DR HENRY KISSINGER

The second issue has to do with the remedy of economic development as the solution for all problems. There is no doubt that many governments in the region are backward and have not fulfilled the aspirations of their populations. It is also true that if one looks at the economic development of these countries and compares that with the situation in the 1950s and with the situation today in, say, Korea and in many countries in the Middle East, there is no doubt that a country like Korea that has undertaken major reforms has made much more rapid progress – and this is not primarily due to the actions of foreigners.

The second challenge that we face in this respect is to know what it is we want. It is now very fashionable in our media to attack Saudi Arabia and Egypt and other countries for their attitude towards terrorism and related activities. It is true that in many countries in the Middle East there is a kind of tacit agreement between these ‘cells’ and the government in which the government tolerates these cells so long as they do not direct their actions against the countries in which they are located. It is also the case that an attempt to bring about in a very brief period of time the evolution that took centuries in the West is more likely to produce chaos than democracy. What the intermediate steps should be, and how one can have reforms such as those which brought Islamic Turkey to a democratic system, are matters on which Western thinking has been largely confined to domestic debates between those who are allegedly concerned primarily with expediency, and those who claim for themselves the mantle of abstract idealism and who forget that sometimes crusades can produce more suffering than incremental steps.

These are tall orders with which to deal in a relatively brief time. I began by saying that we started with a tragedy and we are winding up with what I believe to be an opportunity. This opportunity has this component. Before September 11th it was fashionable in some circles in America to speak of the end of history; it was certainly fashionable on the Continent to think that there was no longer the sort of danger that justified an Atlantic relationship. Indeed, it was commonplace to seek European identity in distinction from the United States and NATO rank the risk of becoming an institution that was used for ‘liturgical’ purposes and occasional meetings, but with less operational content. I think that on both sides of the Atlantic and,



FOREIGN POLICY IN THE AGE OF TERRORISM: DR HENRY KISSINGER

importantly so far as America is concerned, because of the attitude of this government here in Britain, there is now a much greater understanding of the continued importance of restoring the vitality of the Atlantic relationship.

Many of the issues that on September 10th absorbed us, like missile defence or the Kyoto protocol, will now be able to be dealt with in a quite different context. Missile defence will find a solution, so far as the overall global relationship is concerned, in the negotiations between President Bush and President Putin. The issue of the global significance of environmental and medical issues will have to be addressed when we deal, as we must, with the question of biological warfare as it has emerged in recent weeks.

Whatever the causes of the particular incident in America, whatever its origins, the question of States developing these weapons cannot be left to the occurrence of an incident like the one on September 11th. This is an issue with which the Atlantic nations first, and then on a much broader basis other nations, must come to grips jointly. I am not talking simply of the traditional Atlantic relationship because we face, in relation to Russia, a situation that none of us has had to consider in the period since World War II. The attempt by Russia to enter the international system on the basis of borders that have not existed in Russia since Peter the Great is a new event for Europe, for America and for Russia. How to bring Russia into this system is a challenge with which all of us have to deal. Up to now there has been a temptation to believe that perhaps Europe should act as a mediator in this process between an excessively slow America and a Russia that needed psychological help. That is no longer the case. Indeed, any attempt by Europe or America to deal with this on a regional basis or on a national basis is likely to create temptations that it is in our interest to discourage in Russia. At the moment the opportunity for America to do this as a bilateral negotiation is quite considerable.

There are some people who argue that the way to deal with it is to respond to occasional Russian hints that they might join NATO; I believe this to be a great mistake. NATO is not an organisation for bringing Russia into the international system; the attempt to do so will only lead to confusion in NATO, to bureaucratisation of the process, and to weakening even the



FOREIGN POLICY IN THE AGE OF TERRORISM: DR HENRY KISSINGER

prospect of the ultimate reconciliation between Russia and the West. What Russia should be able to participate in is in the political and fundamental choices about the future of the issues raised by terrorism and the construction of the international system for which the opportunity exists.

To the many people who think that I read the debates of the Congress of Vienna by candlelight, let me say that there is indeed an analogy. At the end of the Napoleonic Wars there was a quadripartite alliance directed against the resurgence of French expansionism, but there was also a Concert of Powers in which France participated as an equal and full member. The quadripartite alliance was never invoked and the Concert of Europe operated very well – at least until Britain withdrew from it and therefore the necessary balance was no longer fully at hand. It seems to me that some kind of new relationship should be established, first within the Atlantic region and on the political side opened to Russia, in which in time NATO would play the rôle of the quadripartite alliance of the previous period. This is a great opportunity for the West and a great opportunity for Russia.

I have mentioned that the debates, at least in America, on many of the issues like missile defence and those generated by the Kyoto protocol, are coming to an end. So are those about China. The theories of some of those who attempt to slight China, to put China into the position vacated by the Soviet Union and to organise the international system as a kind of coalition against China, are also substantially superseded by the considerable co-operation that is now taking place on the issue of terrorism, and that will take place on the issue of trade and that can be expanded into other areas.

I mention these opportunities without doubting that there can be many challenges, and leaving out such phenomena such as the rôles of India and of South Asia, because my fundamental point is not to pretend that there exists a detailed answer to all these issues. It is rather this: we have been challenged by terrorism and this has given us an opportunity to rediscover fundamentals; it is therefore an occasion to think, not simply of how to overcome the immediate challenge, but of how to deal with the deeper issue of what a world order for the twenty-first century should look like.



FOREIGN POLICY IN THE AGE OF TERRORISM: DR HENRY KISSINGER

When I was a young professor, in an indescribably long ago past, I once called on President Truman who had just left office. I asked him what he had done of which he was most proud and he said: 'I am most proud of the fact that we totally defeated our enemies and that then we brought them back to the community of nations as equals.' In a way, we now have the same opportunity as the leaders who created the post-war world between 1945 and 1950; but we have got to get the sequence straight; we have got to defeat the enemies, and then we shall be able to create a community of nations.

BERNARD HERMAN

You have referred repeatedly and strongly to the very special relationship between this country and yours; is this merely a manifestation of a deeper reality: that Britain is not truly a European power; it is more a mid-Atlantic power and it would be better perhaps if we considered our long-term relationship with the European Union and move towards membership of the North American Trade Organisation?

DR KISSINGER

Whatever the explanation is, it is certainly historically a fact that Britain has considered dangers to its security to arise from the Continent and its security to lie in its relationship across the Atlantic; that is historically unchallengeable. I do not believe that Britain today would consider threats to its security arise from the Continent, but I also do not think that British leaders would find it natural to believe that the European vocation consists of distinctiveness from the United States; and so Britain has played a very useful rôle in terms of the overall necessities in acting as this kind of bridge and I tend to think that the conduct of the current British Government with respect to terrorism in New York and Washington has had a very good impact in accelerating the reaction of Europeans – but in fairness one has to point out that the European reaction has also been very positive.

ROSEMARY RIGHTER, *The Times*

You are an acknowledged expert on how to deal with conflicts that involve deterrence. But there is in this conflict no real possibility of deterrence and we have in the Middle East a number of ruling élite who actually believe that accommodation is their only salvation. How are we to deal with that?



FOREIGN POLICY IN THE AGE OF TERRORISM: DR HENRY KISSINGER

DR KISSINGER

I think it is true that some of the criticisms that have been made, and justifiably made, of some of the régimes in the Middle East who have accommodated, are caused by their fear or their conviction that they have no other choice. From this one could draw the conclusion that, to the extent that one can create a situation in which they come to believe that there is another choice – in other words that the terrorist threats and the fundamentalist threats are not the inevitable way of the future – the possibility of co-operation from the Middle East and Asia will increase rather than diminish, no matter what they say on a day-to-day basis in reaction to day-to-day events.

RICHARD BEESTON *The Times*

I understood from what you said that we are locked in an existential battle that has to be won, particularly the first phase in Afghanistan, but if I understood properly, you also sounded like you were rather impatient with the conduct of the war so far; that you would like to see matters taken on more robustly; is it a foregone conclusion in your own mind that this is a winnable battle in Afghanistan that we are engaged in; that we have the ability to fight and win it?

DR KISSINGER

In the abstract I am convinced that the leaders of Britain and the United States would also be delighted if the conflict were over. In that sense we are all impatient. I do not want to second-guess the strategic choices that have been made. I do want to reiterate that there cannot be an ambiguous outcome; that the Taleban Government has to be eliminated; that the bin Laden network has to be unambiguously destroyed; and that there is a time limit in which this has to take place. Because if the Taleban are still standing, at some point in time they will become a symbol of the ability to resist the strongest nation and its allies in response to an outrageous and unprovoked attack on the United States. If that impression spreads, it will have a very dangerous impact on everybody. Now do I believe a strategy exists to achieve those objectives? Well, there had better exist such a strategy! I also do believe that it exists.



FOREIGN POLICY IN THE AGE OF TERRORISM: DR HENRY KISSINGER

H.E. DR ALEXANDER CHRISTIANI *Austrian Embassy*

Do you see a fundamental difference, in your opinion, between the United States and Britain as far as the possibility of taking Iraq is concerned?

DR KISSINGER

I believe that at the end of the day I would be disappointed and astonished if Britain dissociated from the United States on measures that need, in the best judgement of America – in which Britain would surely be intimately consulted – to be taken. Indeed, I would think that dissociation from America is a matter that other European countries would think twice about; but I would be especially disappointed if Britain were to do it. I do not believe it will happen. I want to make it clear that I am not predicting that the contingency that you describe will occur; but if that should be the judgement, I think it will be understood why it has been taken.

JERRYLEWIS, *Jewish Chronicle*

Could you tell us if you think that terrorism which is carried out by bin Laden and his associates is the same type of terrorism that is carried out by the Palestinian groups? Was it wise of Britain to go to Syria and Iran and try and ask them to join the Coalition? What would you have done?

DR KISSINGER

Let me, since this is the last question, make it clear that I speak here for myself. I do not speak for the Administration. I strongly support our Administration and its top people are personal friends of mine, but they are very eloquent in speaking for themselves and you must assess what I say in this framework. The question was, in effect, is there a distinction between kinds of terrorism and the approaches to terrorism? When I said earlier that State-supported terrorism should be discouraged, I did not mean to imply that this should be done exclusively, primarily or initially by military means. I consider it a tenable approach to attempt to induce countries to stop their heretofore support of terrorism, as long as it understood that in a reasonably early period it must be stopped. Secondly, I believe that it is not feasible to make a distinction between regional terrorism and international terrorism and to develop a theory that only those terrorists who can reach the United States



FOREIGN POLICY IN THE AGE OF TERRORISM: DR HENRY KISSINGER

should be dealt with and that terrorists who engage in local actions should have a free pass.

It also seems to me that it is quite possible to define a distinction between terrorism and wars of national liberation. If terrorism is defined as indiscriminate attacks on civilians designed to break up the social fabric then I think one can make a very good approximation of what is a terrorist act and what is a military act. Once that is done, the conditions in several parts of the world will change and the possibilities of negotiations will be improved. What the proper steps are on the way, whether one should give these countries an opportunity to understand what they have been doing for quite a while and to desist from it, is a tactical decision that any country should make for itself – as long as it is understood that there is no indefinite time limit within which understanding can be extended.