

**Civic Lecture: Desmond Tutu Centre for War and Peace Studies,
Liverpool Hope University**

Does a Culture of Violence dominate US–UK Foreign Policy thinking?

The case I wish to argue today is that human civilisation faces an existential crisis. I will make the case that the threatened catastrophe is avoidable but that to achieve this, we need to challenge and change the culture of violence that dominates US/UK foreign policy thinking.

I believe that we face enormous threats of growing conflict, failed states, hunger and massive displacement of people. In the view of Lester Brown of the Earth Policy Institute in Washington, there is a real danger that our civilisation will collapse as a result of ecological crises, as other civilisations have done in the past. He says in his latest book 'World on the Edge', published this year " If we continue with business as usual, civilisational collapse is no longer a matter of whether but when. We now have an economy that is destroying its natural support systems, one that has put us on a decline and collapse path. We are dangerously close to the edge. Peter Goldsmith, former Rockefeller Foundation President, puts it well: ' the death of our civilisation is no longer a theory or an academic possibility; it is the road we are on' ".

Lester Brown is by no means a lone voice. In March 2009 Prof John Beddington, the UK Chief scientist said " By 2030 the demand for resources will create a crisis with dire consequences. Demand for food and water will jump 50% by 2030 and for fresh water by 30%, as the population tops 8.3 billion..... Climate change will exacerbate matters in unpredictable ways". He concluded that " It's a perfect storm " and said " There's not going to be a complete collapse, but things will start getting really worrying if we don't tackle these problems ".

Jonathon Porritt, former chair of the UK Sustainable Development Commission, writing in the Guardian said he agreed with Beddington, but for the crisis would hit much closer to 2020 and 2030.

Lester Brown in his series of books Plan B, Plan B1, Plan B2, B3 and so on, spells out the nature of the crisis with great clarity. And he is also clear that disaster is avoidable. The

scenario I am putting before you today is not one of gloom and doom. It is a Call to Action. We are on a very, very dangerous path but the disaster that is looming is avoidable, if we take the necessary action. I hope you will forgive me if I read Lester Brown's summary of the necessary action. I do this because I want all to be clear that my argument is that we are on a dangerous path, we are wasting massive resources on military action and we are causing bitter division in the world, when instead we should be working for unprecedented international cooperation in order to implement a series of programmes that would achieve the same aims as Lester Brown's plan B.

So here is Lester Brown's summary of what needs to be done taken from his recent book *On the Edge*.

To help us understand how we got so close to the edge, parts one and two of this book document in detail... The ongoing liquidation of the earth's natural assets, the growing number of hungry people, and the lengthening list of failing states.

Since it is the destruction of the economy's natural supports and disruption of the climate system that are driving the world towards the edge, these are the trends that must be reversed. To do so requires extraordinarily demanding measures, a fast shift away from business as usual to what we are the Earth Policy Institute call Plan B...

With the scale and urgency similar to the US mobilisation of the World War II, Plan B has four components: a massive cut in global carbon emissions of 80% by 2020; the stabilisation of world population at no more than 8 billion by 2040; the eradication of poverty; and the restoration of forests, soils, aquifers, and fisheries.

Carbon emissions can be cut by systematically raising world energy efficiency, by restructuring transport systems, and by shifting from burning fossil fuels to tapping the earth's wealth of wind, solar, and geothermal energy. The transition from fossil fuels to renewable sources of energy can be driven primarily by tax restructuring: steadily lowering income taxes and offsetting this reduction with a rise in tax on carbon.

Two of the components of Plan B—stabilising population and in eradicating poverty—go hand-in-hand, reinforcing each other. This involves ensuring at least a primary school education for all children – girls as well as boys. It also means providing at least rudimentary village level healthcare so that parents can be more confident that their children will survive to adulthood. And women everywhere need access to reproductive health care and family planning services.

The fourth component, restoring the Earth's natural systems and resources, involves, for example, a worldwide initiative to arrest the fall in water tables by raising water productivity. That implies shifting both to more efficient irrigation systems and two more water efficient crops. And for industries and cities, it implies doing worldwide what some are already doing – namely, continuously recycling water.

It is time to ban deforestation worldwide, as some countries already have done and plant billions of trees to sequester carbon. We need a worldwide effort to conserve soil, similar to the US response to the dust bowl of the 1930s.

The Earth Policy Instituted estimates that stabilising population, eradicating poverty, and restoring the economy's natural support systems would cost less than \$200 billion of additional expenditure a year – a mere one eighth of current military spending. In effect the Plan B budget encompassing the measures needed to prevent civilisational collapse is the new security budget.

The situation in the world faces now is even more urgent than the economic crisis of 2008 and 2009. Instead of a US housing bubble, it is food bubbles based on over pumping and over ploughing that cloud our future. Such food uncertainties are amplified by climate volatility and by more extreme weather events. Our challenge is not just to implement Plan B, but to do it quickly so we can move off the environmental decline before the clock runs out.

One thing is certain—we are facing greater change than any generation in history. What is not clear is the source of this change. Will we stay with

business as usual and enter a period of economic decline and spreading chaos? Or will we quickly reorder priorities, acting at wartime speed to move the world onto an economic path that can sustain civilisation.'

Obviously this is a summary of what needs to be done, and no doubt you have many questions. We can come to some of them later and I hope you will read the book, but now I want to take us back to September 11, 2001 and its consequences, and to ask why world leaders pursuing policies which ignore the major threat to our civilisation, waste resources and exacerbate conflict.

But first I will take a quick sweep through history, to bring us up to where we are now. Let us begin by reminding ourselves that until 6000 years ago, humans lived as hunter gatherers and there were not many of us. In the days of the Roman Empire there were 200 million people in the world. Settled agriculture began about 7000 years ago. Writing developed for the first time in about 4000 BC i.e. just 6000 years ago. And the industrial revolution, that lifted most of us from constant toil on the land and short life expectancies, got going only 200 years ago.

In 1800 at the beginning of the industrial revolution, there were 1 billion people in the world. There were 3 billion in 1960 and there are 6.7 billion of us now. We will reach 8-9 billion by 2040-50 and 1 billion of the new people will be born in the poorest countries. Karl Marx, who understood the enormous productive capacity of capitalism, as well as its proneness to crisis, thought that industrialisation would produce so much wealth that the workers of the world would take over the reins of power, and there would be sufficient to provide "from each according to his ability to each according to his needs". There would be plenty, and all would be provided for.

But in those days of early industrialisation, few realised that the ecological capacity of the Earth was limited. However by 2002, things were looking different. A study by a team of scientists led by Mathis Wackernagel aggregated the use of the Earth's natural assets into a single indicator – the ecological footprint. They concluded that our demands first surpassed the Earth's regenerative capacity in 1980. Now it would take 1.5 Earth's to sustain our current consumption. And we are living at a time of enormous economic growth in China and India, the countries of 2.5 billion people, who all wish to live as well as we do. And the 1 billion in Africa and the other poor countries want a similar life too.

We have to conclude that our way of life is completely unsustainable and if we go on as we are, we will face growing conflict over food, water, oil. There will be terrible hunger and suffering. And climate change disruption will displace tens of millions of people.

We have an enormous crisis facing us and a wonderful opportunity. The only way we can prevent disaster and maintain human civilisation is to develop the world more evenly and to live more sustainably. To make the changes necessary would be an enormous task. But it is a task that has been the dream of religious leaders and moral philosophers since time began. One of the current problems of the OECD countries is that for growing numbers of people, life is losing any meaning. What a worthwhile challenge it would be for all of us, to work together to create an equitable and sustainable world in order to avoid a future of crises and suffering.

But now, I need to take us back to the events of September 11, 2001 and the response of the world's leading powers. Clearly the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon on that day were monstrous crimes. In international law, and Christian and Muslim teaching on just war, attacks on civilians are forbidden. 3000 people from 90 countries died and many more suffered terrible injuries. The world united to denounce the deed. The UN Security Council and General Assembly unanimously denounced the attack and called for international cooperation to bring the perpetrators to justice. For a moment there was a pause and an instinct to keep the world united. It was agreed at Doha in November 2001 that there should be a trade round that would make international trade rules fair for developing countries. And then it was agreed, with almost universal support, that we should invade Afghanistan and close down the Al Qaeda training camps. This was done with very little fighting. Special forces worked with the Northern Alliance, the Taliban melted away and Kabul was taken. The Afghan people welcome this and hoped for a better future. But immediately, mistakes began to be made. Warlords were allowed to keep their fighters, paid for with drug money and were incorporated into the new government. And then, despite a promise not to turn away from Afghanistan a second time, the decision was made to invade Iraq and attention was diverted from Afghanistan.

More generally, in the Middle East, Western policy propped up dictators and refused to require Israel to abide by international law. Thus the settlements and the Wall gobbled up more and more Palestinian land, despite the International Court of Justice saying that this

was completely illegal; and the West did nothing. The people of Gaza and the West Bank were subject to siege like conditions in ways that Archbishop Tutu said was much worse than the experience of apartheid in South Africa. And then came the attacks on Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in 2008; and the West did nothing. Palestinians suffered, the Arab world felt angry and humiliated, and international law, laid down at the end of the Second World War to prevent any country trying to take other people's land by force, ever again, was trampled in the dust.

The great tragedy of all of this is that the end of the Cold War and, the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1989/90, really did offer the opportunity for a New World order. Arms spending was cut massively; the Kyoto protocol was agreed in 1997; The Millennium Development Goals were adopted in 2000 at a UN meeting called to mark the new millennium. The meeting was attended by more world leaders than any previous UN gathering, and it was agreed that the systematic reduction of poverty was to be the focus of a united international effort to mark the new millennium.

Thus historical opportunity and the needs of humanity had come together. The new focus could be world cooperation over climate change and poverty. Admittedly there were terrible stumbles in the Balkans, Somalia and Rwanda; but then a stand was made to prevent the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo, and a UN effort, backed by the UK, brought an end to a vicious civil war in Sierra Leone. It began to look as though there really was a prospect of international cooperation for justice and development.

But then came the declaration of the "War on Terror", a massive increase in defence spending and a bitter intensification of international division. It was President Eisenhower, in his retirement speech, who warned of the power of the military industrial complex, and it is difficult not to see it at work here. There is no doubt that the ideas of Al Qaeda are vicious and ugly. But it is also true, that they and Osama bin Laden are a blowback from US policy which used Saudi Arabia to encourage an Islamist rebellion against the Soviet backed government in Afghanistan, as part of its Cold War strategy. And it is very difficult to understand, how we could possibly need more military equipment than existed at the height of the Cold War to catch Osama bin Laden in his cave on the Afghan/Pakistan border.

My conclusion is that Western policy is irrational and dangerous. It is led by the US but supported by the EU, with the UK and the former Soviet states as the great cheer leaders. Foreign policy thinking in the US is dominated by, the military industrial complex, as President Eisenhower named it, or by what we can reasonably call, a culture that looks for violent solutions to foreign policy questions. Perhaps this is explained, not just by the vested interests of the military industrial complex, but also by the mind set developed out of the history of the ugly 20th century which was the bloodiest century humanity has ever experienced. It saw the First World War with 8 million military casualties followed by a flu epidemic that took 16 million lives. Then we had the depression of the 1930s, the Spanish civil war and the rise of fascism and Nazism. This was followed by the Second World War which took 60 -70 million lives, half of them military and half civilian. This was the most destructive war in human history and it should never be forgotten that almost half the loss of life was suffered by the Soviet Union. And within this period there was the monstrous events of the Holocaust and Stalin's purges. Then came the end of the war to end all wars, the United Nations was established to create a new world order, which included the end of colonial empires. But then, perhaps with the help of the military industrial complex, we moved straight into the Cold War, and world War was avoided by the preparation for nuclear annihilation. War was avoided in Europe but 10 million people died in proxy wars in Korea, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique Ethiopia and elsewhere but at least the world was not destroyed.

The conclusion I would like to stress, and the reason I make his case to you today, is that it is not enough for those who seek to prevent and resolve conflict to work with humanitarian or conflict resolution initiatives coming from the Department for International Development or other development organisations. The budget of the Ministry of Defence is nearly £37 billion in 2010/11. The budget of DFID, much of which is spent ineffectively in Iraq and Afghanistan, is £7.8 billion in 2010/11. And the extra costs of war in Iraq and Afghanistan tops £20 billion. The task is to challenge the central thrust of UK foreign policy, and make the policy thinking that underpins DFID, the foreign policy of the UK. When undertaking this task, we should always remember that current UK foreign policy is not supported by UK public opinion.

If I am right in this analysis, it is the duty of all rational and ethical people to unite in making this challenge. But more is at stake than improving the performance of the country in which we live and work. If the UK shifted its stance, the US would lose its constant echo and

would be a much greater chance of the US finding itself so isolated that it starts to think again. For example, over the war in Iraq, US public opinion which was misled in a different way than was UK public opinion, believed that the attack on the Twin Towers came out of Iraq. Not surprisingly therefore a majority said yes to war, but the proviso was that it must be in coalition and not alone. The UK was that coalition and it is possible that if UK policy on Iraq had been wiser, US policy may well have been different. A change of UK foreign policy could well help to bring change in the US as it found itself so isolated, it may start to think again. I do not believe that the widened EU can be persuaded to adopt a more intelligent foreign policy perspective but if the UK would change, it would be possible to build coalitions of the willing to work for a just peace in the Middle East and to begin to address the Lester Brown agenda and thus avert catastrophe.

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