



At the conference 'Trump's World', co-hosted by the Asser Institute for International Law and the John Adams Institute, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer gave the closing remarks. "Engage, for heaven's sake, engage. If you do not, you will lose the day."

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer

We live in times of big egos in international relations: Trump, Vladimir Vladimirovich, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. And we see a lot of hubris in international relations. As you know, hubris comes from ancient Greece, where it was punishable by the gods. But we see a lot of it in the present international relations environment, and there hubris stands for excessive pride, egotism, extreme self-confidence.

What is the risk of egos and what is the risk of hubris in international affairs? The risk is that in times of crisis, reason may fall victim to egotism. That is a danger and a risk in international relations.

Exhibit number one: Turkey. From zero problems with its neighbours to problems with almost everyone and everybody. Ottomanesque foreign policy overstretch. Now, in a *mariage de raison*, Erdoğan with his sworn nemesis Vladimir Putin.

Exhibit number two: Donald Trump. Transactions rather than principles, the big ego democratically elected. Yes, stop moaning and complaining, democratically elected. Leading an independent, more unilateral, perhaps even retreating, America. Perhaps, we are not sure yet. I do not have an established opinion on that. I say independent, more unilateral, and perhaps even retreating, America. But if he, Donald

J. Trump, retreats from Pax Americana, which after all has sustained seventy years of relative peace and stability, we might enter a world of Hobbesian great power conflict.

What comes in diplomatic language and in international relations after the word ‘unacceptable’?

Is that a world we are looking for? My question is rhetorical; I am not sure yet and the signals are contradictory. Giving up the one-China policy, cosying up to Taiwan? Non-negotiable for Beijing. Beijing will go to war for Taiwan, if necessary. The South China Sea and Rex Tillerson’s remarks about the, I quote, “unacceptability”, unquote, of China’s behaviour vis-à-vis disputed islands.

What comes in diplomatic language and in international relations after the word “unacceptable”? Language matters. Military action? That is not retreating. Safe areas, which should have been established in Syria as Donald Trump said during the campaign? That is not a retreating America. So, independent: yes. Unilateral: yes. Retreating: remains to be seen.

Indispensable nation

All this leads me to one of the key questions facing us all: can the United States afford *not* to be an indispensable nation, in the words of Madeleine Albright? In other words, how strong will the constant factors in United States foreign policy be vis-à-vis the variables? If I listen to the Senate hearings of Rex Tillerson and Secretary of Defence James Mattis, who I remember very well from my NATO days, there are constant factors. There should at least in their opinion be constant factors in United States foreign policy.

In my view, the United States of America cannot afford to create a political vacuum in East Asia by abandoning TPP. Trade is of course trade, but trade is highly political. TPP is highly political. What was the ambition of Barack Obama with the TPP that was part of his pivot (not completely successful) to Asia? To gain and to keep political influence.

What do we see now? TPP has been abandoned and we see the Philippines and Malaysia setting sails to Beijing. We see Australia yesterday suggesting TPP include

China without the United States. And this happens in the week when Ireland, Canada and Ethiopia are joining the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank set up by the Chinese.

Can the United State afford to abandon the South China Sea politically?

That is the geopolitical reality, also for Donald J. Trump. I repeat my question: can the United States ever afford to abandon that region politically? The South China Sea is an area where roughly 70% of all the world's commercial shipping passes through sea lanes. Is that an exclusive responsibility we leave to China? Is it, speaking as a European, an exclusive responsibility we Europeans leave to the United States of America as we have always done? I hope from my intonation you know what my answer is. In one way or another, the United States, also under a Trump Presidency, will have to take political and military responsibility for this crucial part of the world. So I repeat: unilateral, more independent, but not retreating.

NATO's financial burden

As for the European Union and NATO, President Trump's remarks on the European NATO allies not sharing the financial burden are of course fully on the mark. You would not expect anything else from a former NATO Secretary General, but I feel strongly: fully on the mark. The European NATO allies have shamefully neglected our responsibility in this regard on our side of the Atlantic. We are still cashing in on the peace dividend, the fall of the Wall in 1989 - how long is that ago?

The European allies have shamefully neglected our responsibility to share the financial burden of NATO

I think we should now change course, and ensure that we contribute substantially to a better financial balance inside the NATO alliance. One example. Jochen Bittner, who works for the German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, said: 'Let the Europeans begin by paying for all the equipment President Obama pre-positioned in Europe shortly before he left the Oval Office'. We leased that equipment. We paid for it, because when you want to have your defence budget in order it would take much more time. But here

Trump is fully on the mark and he might be, I say again he *might* be, more serious in this regard than his predecessors have been.

As to his remark on NATO being obsolete, Secretary of Defence James Mattis might find a few hours on a Sunday afternoon to bring his President up to date. NATO is of course the essential tool to discourage and deter Vladimir Vladimirovich from further adventures in what he defines as his 'near abroad', in other words his sphere of influence. Here, Trump's narrow interpretation of US interests might lead to a reassessment of America's international engagements in transactional terms. A disturbing idea if you happen to live in Tallinn, Riga or Vilnius. The Hague is comfortable in that regard, and so is Washington. So is Brussels by the way.

You break it, you own it

Putin, I must admit, plays a weak hand intelligently, given his successful hacking exercises and wrong-footing the United States and all of us in Syria. The dark side of this Syrian intervention for Putin is that he has now to face the Colin Powell maxim, the so-called Pottery Barn rule, which reads: you break it, you own it.

We need more direct communication channels with Russia in both NATO and the European Union, despite our differences, despite the need for the moment to keep the sanctions intact. Backroom diplomacy is fine with me and that would be the preferred option. But with all the differences we might have with Russia I think we are not using the communication channels we might have in our dealings with Moscow. Now, what should be done? What can be done from the European side? What should our political priorities be? I will give you just a few, even though I am fully aware that events usually reign supreme over a carefully planned agenda.

If we do not defend the European Union now, we might not have another opportunity.

One: stop moaning over the Trump Presidency. He is in the Oval Office, whether we like it or not. He is the Commander in Chief. So in the words of Ambassador Schuwer: engage, engage for heaven's sake, engage. If you do not, you will lose the day.

Two: Let this Trump Presidency be the rallying cry to take ourselves and the European Union seriously. Economically, politically and, last but not least, militarily. And let's have a discussion about legitimacy. Because if the virus of the referendum spreads further through Europe, nothing will be possible anymore. I am a strong fan of a representative democracy. Every four years in this country I have the opportunity to vote, and if I do not like the guys and girls I voted for four years ago I will outvote them. But let's take ourselves and the European Union seriously.

I consider this an important message to the European political parties in the center. I call on them to stop leaving the floor in the European Union to the extremes of the political spectre to Frauke Petry, to Marine LePen, to Geert Wilders, to Beppe Grillo. Speak up! Speak Up! If we do not defend the European Union now, we might not have another opportunity. So let this be a rallying cry, this Trump Presidency, because we will have a lot to discuss with the other side of the Atlantic Ocean as well. We need Angela Merkel in the Bundeskanzleramt, also after the elections in Germany in the fall of this year, and we need le President de la République Française in the Elysée Palace with the gravitas of restarting, or perhaps I should say restoring, the German/French motor, which in my opinion is a prerequisite for successful European integration and a sound future for the European Union.

We also need the softest possible Brexit we can achieve. That will not only depend on the British, but also on us. We are talking and discussing frequently how difficult it is for the British to arrange their exit from the European Union. I can tell you from experience that coming to a position with the 27 on the European continent might even be a bigger ambition than coming to an agreement with the British. But what I said about representative democracy and about referenda is very relevant here as well. I cannot imagine an agreement by the heads of states and governments with Great Britain stranded for years in 28 plus regional parliaments.

Under no condition will any EU or NATO member tolerate the creation of secret detention facilities on its territory

Three: Based on President Trump's worrying remarks about torture, let us underline that both the European Union and NATO are communities of values. Let us state that

under no condition will any EU or NATO member tolerate the creation of secret detention facilities on its territory. We should make that statement and, if I am not mistaken, we have Secretary of Defence James Mattis on our side. He said that torture is not only out of the question, but also has no result. Trump came back to the torture issue. I think if we are a community of values we should say this now and make this clear.

Four: given the potential narrow interpretation of United States' interests let us not be the witnesses to the funeral of the responsibility to protect. I realize that after the war of choice in Iraq and the war of necessity in Afghanistan (these were Barack Obama's terms, as you might remember) and the half-hearted intervention in Libya, I realise that the political climate is not conducive to this type of debate. But we cannot completely close our eyes in this domain. Responsibility to protect took a big hit after Libya, because it was a half-hearted intervention and we forgot about the responsibility to rebuild and the responsibility to prevent - and then the whole system does not work. We do not like intervention anymore, and I am not making a plea this afternoon to intervene in Syria or in Yemen, but what I am saying is this: if we are a member of a community of values, we should not bury the responsibility to protect, difficult as it is.

Five: let's not do away with our rules based in multilateral institutions, despite their malfunctioning. Are we serious when we claim that we can fight terrorism, or fight a pandemic, or fight the misuse of cyberspace, or fight climate change, or fight mass migration, which is the biggest challenge for the European continent in the years to come? Do we really believe we can fight these challenges without a system where the right of the strongest does not always prevail, and where the less influential can have their voices?

Just as I defend the European Union, I defend our multilateral institutions. For many nations on this globe they now have a western flavour: they were set up by the nations who won the Second World War. But I cannot explain in New Delhi that India is not a permanent member of the Security Council.

The Chinese understand this. They will have their own international institutions where they make the rules. Do we want to have our rules set by a nation where last week the President of the Supreme Court said: “We do not have any independent justice system. I am, of course, also answerable to the party”? Do we want that nation setting the international rules?

Finally, it is my strong belief, and I say this also based on my own experience, that like in your and my personal life, personal relations do matter a lot in international relations and international politics. It is therefore of importance that we take the men and women shaping Trumpian politics seriously. I say again, engage with them. We might need them now, better said we need them now, but we certainly need them in time of crisis.

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