

'Global Justice in a Multipolar World'

Address by the Netherlands Minister of Defense, J. A. Hennis-Plasschaert, as part of the Distinguished Speakers Series of The Hague Institute for Global Justice on the 3rd of June, The Hague.

Check against delivery!

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests,

It is both an honour and a challenge to speak to you today.

It is an honour because the *The Hague Institute for Global Justice* has made a name for itself. In spite of its relatively short history, the Institute has built up a solid reputation for conducting research on issues related to global governance, the rule of law and conflict prevention. It has, moreover, been remarkably successful in bringing together people and experts from various cultural and geographic backgrounds.

It is a challenge because we are living in an era of momentous change with uncertain outcomes. To make sense of this change and to keep an even keel in these tumultuous times is not easy for anyone. Yet I consider precisely this a duty for those in public office. And as minister of Defence of this beautiful country, the Netherlands, I do not wish to shy away from this duty.

I therefore have gladly accepted the honour of contributing to the Institute's *Distinguished Speaker Series* and do intend to rise to the challenge.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When we look at today's world, we see shifts in the global balance of power. We see new actors that are gaining influence claiming their place under the sun. There is no question that the global political, economic and security landscape is in a state of flux. As a result, both the idea and the reality of global justice are under pressure.

A brief summary of recent events is enough to underline the seriousness of the situation:

- the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia in the spring of 2014, followed by military meddling in Eastern Ukraine and the issuance of nuclear threats to European nations;
- the brutal endemic warfare and civil strife in the Middle East and North Africa, causing the displacement of entire people and fuelling the terrorist threat both in the region and the inner cities of Europe;
- further afield, China's growing activities in support of its claim to virtually the entire South China Sea, which may still have a destabilising effect in the region.

In the greater scheme of things, what are we to make of the changes that are unfolding? And what kind of response to the new security context is needed in the interest of global justice?

Twelve years ago, Robert Cooper, in his bestselling book *The Breaking of Nations*, divided the world into three zones that are living in different stages of history. In his book, this senior British diplomat, who at the time advised the EU's foreign policy chief Javier Solana, divided up the world in a "pre-modern", a "modern" and a "postmodern" part.

The "pre-modern" world was, in his view, the realm of failed states. It is the world in which the state's monopoly on the use of force has been diluted by the influence of non-state actors such as drug syndicates, criminal organizations, and terrorist networks. In the pre-modern world, societies often linger in an anarchic state of war.

The "modern" world was the classical world of sovereign states that were capable of maintaining internal order, strove to protect their national interests and to maintain a favourable balance of power.

In the "postmodern" world, finally, states have agreed to relinquish a significant measure of their sovereignty for the greater good of the commonwealth. In Cooper's view, this world represented the highest and most sophisticated form of political governance. Not surprisingly, he found that it had flourished almost exclusively in Europe. "*For the postmodern state, sovereignty is a seat at the table,*" he stated.

In Cooper's view, the "postmodern" world was threatened most of all by the "pre-modern" world. While Cooper vested his hopes in the European model, he also believed that Europe had to learn how to cope with the harsher and often dreadful political realities beyond its own realm.

"In the jungle, one must use the laws of the jungle," he wrote.

Twelve years later, what can we make of this view of the world?

Firstly, Cooper was certainly right that "postmodern" Europe would be threatened by the "pre-modern" world to the south. With the unravelling of the Arab spring, it is impossible to deny the huge impact of circumstances in that part of the world. This unravelling has resulted in a resurgent terrorist threat, endemic violence throughout the region, and growing refugee flows on Europe's very doorstep.

Secondly, we may also conclude that the so-called "postmodern" world of Europe is not only threatened by the "pre-modern" world but also by the "modern" world of nation-states. We are clearly living in an era of geopolitical stress and diverging worldviews and agendas. Big countries such as Russia and China have continued to boost their military expenditures over the past decade, while those in the West -- in particular in Europe -- have cut spending drastically.

Russia is, of course, very different from China. But as the illegal annexation of the Crimea by Russia in 2014 as well as recent Chinese activities in the South China Sea have shown, they have both become more assertive in a military sense. Neither is refraining from using military power to further geopolitical interests.

More generally, most analysts point out that after the unipolar system that followed the bipolar system of the Cold War, global order is drifting towards some kind of multipolar arrangement.

And they make clear that such an arrangement tends to be a lot less stable. A multipolar power arrangement certainly complicates global governance and the pursuit of global justice.

Countries find it increasingly difficult to cooperate within a universally accepted framework.

After many years of predictable partnerships, international relations have therefore become an increasingly complex and volatile chess game. One of the key questions for the future is whether Europe will be able to hold its own in a world with many competing powers. I suggest that Europe will have to get its act together. And this also entails becoming more realistic – or more “modern” – in its global outlook.

Moreover, Europe has proven to be less "postmodern" – and more fragmented – than Cooper surmised. Since 2003, the European integration process has come under unprecedented stress.

The rise of populism in most European countries, *topped by the financial and banking crisis which still threatens the Eurozone*, has not been without consequence. The referendum which will be held in the UK on EU membership is a point in case. There is an apparent need for Europe to touch base before it can move ahead.

Thirdly, the distinction between "postmodern", "pre-modern" and "modern" has become less clear-cut in a world that has become increasingly interconnected.

DAESH (ISIL) might seem medieval in its brutality, but it uses highly modern media techniques and communication methods. And it has proven remarkably capable of even attracting the sympathies of young Muslims who grew up in democratic, "postmodern" European societies.

Furthermore, we are all caught up in the same digital information revolution. This revolution may well turn out to be the most important development in mankind since the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, changing the way we live our lives, connect, organise our societies, do business, wage war.

And as Google's Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen have written, *"the Internet is one of the few things humans have built that they do not truly understand."*

What we do know is that this new digital world is already looking quite different – and more complex – than the old world. The increased connectivity means that the different worlds interact more than ever before. They meet -- and collide -- with each other both in the physical and virtual domain, making the distinction between our external and internal security even less relevant.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me now turn to the second question I posed at the outset:

what kind of response to the new security context is needed in the interest of global justice?

One thing I am convinced of...

If, in this increasingly complex and less agreeable world, we do not take the initiative, others will decide the course of events.

As Federica Mogherini, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, stated, *"the world system is more connected but also more contested; more integrated but also more fragmented; it is much more complex."* In this environment, she argued, *"we need a sense of direction."*

From my perspective as The Netherlands' Defence minister, it is clear that we need to reaffirm the importance of both the transatlantic partnership and European cooperation. Without this partnership as well as a higher level of cooperation among the European nations, we cannot hope to stave off the dangers from the east and the south.

And yes, the transatlantic partnership continues to be the indispensable nexus for a more peaceful and more just -- *dare one still say "more enlightened"?* -- world order. For many years NATO has served as a backbone to European security. The Alliance is 65 years old, but cannot retire.

In response to events, government leaders rightly decided at the most recent NATO Summit in Wales to strengthen the common defence effort.

I emphasise, as minister of Defence, that after many years in which defence budgets have declined, it will take years to rebuild the military strength needed to cope with the new security environment.

This requires that we re-invest in our security as part of a step-by-step approach within a clear long-term perspective.

In doing so, we must also deepen European defence cooperation, an area in which the Netherlands continually has been in the forefront. And re-connect with likeminded leaders across the globe, such as in Africa and in the Middle East, reform the United Nations, and support international organisations seeking to promote global justice.

Should we also heed Robert Cooper's advice to abide by "the laws of the jungle"? Here I take a different position.

Our response to the new reality cannot *only* be about protecting our security or economic interests. We need to stand up for our most cherished values and principles. In order to bolster our security and our way of life, the best thing we can do is to stay true to ourselves and to firm up in the face of hardship.

The fight against DAESH (ISIL) in the Middle East is necessary in order to protect our own societies and citizens against the jihadist security threat. But it is also driven by deep revulsion against the indiscriminate violence and gruesome beheadings we have been forced to witness.

Russian behaviour is in direct contravention of European security interests.

But the concern about our current relationship with Russia, is also explained by a deeply felt disturbance about the blatant disregard for the international rule of law.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests,

As minister of Defence, I have a responsibility to take account of the sobering facts of the international situation. The threat to our society has become increasingly urgent and wide-ranging.

And we cannot afford to turn our backs on the fires burning around the world, on the threat to NATO's territory, on the danger of digital espionage and sabotage, on the inhumanity of terrorism, on the sectarian violence and collapsing states resulting in uncontrollable refugee flows, illegal immigration and international crime.

Inaction, ladies and gentlemen, is not an option.

Not only because events in other parts of the world have a direct impact on our own security and prosperity. But also because our ideals count for something! The freedom of choice, the freedom of speech, the freedom to be your true self. The freedom of not having to watch your back just because you believe in something different than those in power or those who seek power. The freedom of not having to live in fear. These freedoms -- or interests -- are under attack. And they are worth protecting, worth fighting for.

Without the preparedness to stand firm, the prospect of global justice -- *to which the The Hague Institute is devoted* – will remain illusory.

I believe the coming years will be far from easy.

And if we are not prepared for danger, we risk losing the peace and the growing prosperity that have brought so much good to the world.

I thank you for your attention!

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