

Khusro Memorial Lecture
The Rt.Hon. Lord Howell of Guildford
Thursday November 29th 2018. Leeds Business School

Re-Positioning Britain in a Network World

I am honoured to be invited to give this memorial lecture in honour of Professor Ali Khusro, who was not only a distinguished economist and administrator but also an ambassador extraordinary for the great nation of India, the world's largest democracy by far, and also now emerging as the pivotal nation in the new global pattern.

I will not call it the new global *order*, because it is filled with much disorder, but there can be no doubt that as the Indo-Pacific region rises to equal the Atlantic region, and the new great game of Asia plays out, India becomes the epicentre of geo-political concerns and hopes – an India which our predecessors would barely recognize, which is building, so I am told *seven thousand new homes a day* . Would that we in Britain could do that!

My friends, today's leaders of nations need to be good cooks. That is to say that they have to work with many new ingredients of enormous complexity , and use new ingenuity, new creativity and entirely new skills if they want to serve their followers and peoples with something that is popular, digestible, healthy and also realistic.

The old British menu was straightforward. It was roast beef served up by John Bull. But today the chefs of international diplomacy would run rings around such simple icons, Far more subtle menus are required. Before I depart from this culinary metaphor , let me set out in summary my own choice of the new menu which our strategist and national leaders have to prepare .

First and top of the list is preservation of the rules-based international order. Without the international institutions, the respect for international law and the cooperation between nations which has held the world broadly together, and with exceptions, at peace since the end of the horrific Second World War we are lost - straight back to the barbarianism which came close to destroying everything in both 1914 and again in the nineteen thirties.

Second Nations and their governments have to learn to work and operate skilfully in an age of networks , demanding quite different skills from the old world of treaties and alliances.

Third , there has to be a clear sense of national narrative and direction, difficult to construct and purvey at any time in the past, but ten times more so, and more

necessary , in the age of information overload and almost total mass connectivity. But nations do have to have a feeling of purpose. Nations have to be led and not submerged or feel belittled. That is a very dangerous path.

Fourth ,our leaders and strategy-makers have to learn about soft power, alongside strong military forces of the more traditional kind, creating smart power and even what is now called sharp power, if our nation's interests are to be properly safeguarded and promoted in today's infinitely more complicated international milieu – a new situation not yet entirely grasped by those who operate the levers of Government.

I will now expand on all four of these, my menu choices , in what some have called a new epoch of human endeavour.

First the rules-based order, now under direct attack. After the Second World War, as after the First, the statesmen of the world came together and vowed to replace the rabid nationalism of the past with new institutions, new arrangements and new customs ,so that never again would countries tear out each other's hearts and youth with the terrible slaughter of modern weapons.

After the First World War, whose ending we have just celebrated, hopes were high but it all failed.

After the Second World War we have had seventy years of relative global peace, despite the Cold War period which nearly exploded but was just prevented from doing so, and despite ugly regional conflicts. But now the structures of international cooperation and understanding are being smashed.

Under populist pressures national leaders are tearing up treaties, flouting international law, rejecting international responsibilities. Me-first has become the inward-looking nationalist watchword.

Russia has seized Crimea and is bent on further violations in Ukraine; China rejects UN court rulings and contests international waters with sovereignty claims; the USA has a leader who puts 'America first', rubbishes the G7, quits global agreements, starts unravelling arms control treaties, triggers trade wars, unpicks trade agreements and shows a general contempt for multilateral bodies painstakingly built up over past decades. Everywhere nationalism in its louder and harsher forms , vastly empowered by the communications revolution, the cell phone and the web, is on the march. Mass migration has given it further strong impetus -in Europe, in South Asia ,in America .

Some depict Brexit as part of this tendency, but while it is true that one hears shrill anti-EU voices, including regrettably from Ministers, the UK remains committed to deep European co-operation. It is simply the old integrationist model we reject, with its inward-looking protectionism and excessive intrusions, into which the original European Community had mutated.

We remain good Europeans. But we need to be much more than that. The absolute bottom line is that , as one of the founders and beneficiaries of the

rules-based order we must make its defence our top priority and be at the forefront in halting the slide back to global anarchy which is now beginning.

This takes me straight to my second priority, the new world of network power and the imperative need for successful nations to understand how to enter and operate within these circles of power.

Networks have their own agenda. Books pour out explaining how in an age of almost total planetary connectivity new networks are being formed ,growing all the time and instantly empowering both their members and the members of each and every other network with which they have contact.

It may be said that networking has always existed both within societies and internationally. That is true, but the scale ,intensity and frequency of connections today are completely unprecedented and alter the whole nature of the process.

Networking is continuing across the world , day and night (it knows no rest) , on not just at governmental level but between groups, causes (good and bad) , interests, professions of every kind, and at every level of society and between every age group.

Official and visible examples are the Comprehensive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, the new Pacific Alliance, the new African grouping, Comresa, the invigorated ASEAN system, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the African Union, the 46-nation Government procurement alliance , and many more – entities hardly mentioned in the media yet wielding colossal power over nations and societies . Yet coming up behind them are networks outside the governmental orbit which may be growing faster and having more power than any single nation, large or small, or than any of the multilateral institutions of the past.

I am not sure to what extent our foreign policy establishment has yet understood this. For those trained in the processes of governance and bureaucracy it is undeniably difficult to see or admit that power may now lie outside the corridors of government as much as, or to an even greater extent, than within them.

Most power of all has now been accumulated by the giant global corporations which control and administer the algorithms behind the networking of the world and who regiment our thinking , as well as allowing darker forces to coagulate and cooperate with an ease never before available in ways which threaten stability and law-based governance and order everywhere.

It is no wonder that Governments are waking up to this threat, although it may be too late. Facebook, with a membership larger than China or India, Amazon growing in every country, Google - these are the new supranational giants that national Governments and parliaments are scrambling to bring under control. And note that in doing so the West faces an added danger - namely that

communications giants of equal size operate from the East, such as Baidu, Tencent and Alibaba. If American and European Governments do succeed in breaking up the Western world high-tech monopolies (actually, almost entirely American) you can be sure that the Chinese will be in there in trice.

But there is one global network of an entirely virtuous kind which is actually larger, and potentially more persuasive and influential, than even these behemoths. I refer to the 2.4 billion strong network of Commonwealth nations - a third of the human race - once the successor nations of the old British empire but now transformed into something new and quite different.

And this brings me straight to my third priority, the imperative need for a nation – ours here in Britain in particular – to have a sense of national purpose and direction. Our leaders must pray for the wisdom and insight to articulate a new national story in a totally changed world.

I can think of no better focus for the British people, as we step out of full participation in the European Union (though not by any means in Europe), than to dedicate ourselves to upholding and developing the Commonwealth network – nearly all democracies, or with democratic aspirations, nearly all believing in the rule of law and respect for human rights, and forming what has been called an oasis of stability stretching across a troubled world.

Of course we in Britain must take up this role in a suitably humble way. No use talking about the British Empire, or Empire 2.0. The British role and position have changed radically and must change still further. We are now the *demandeurs*, asking to be readmitted to the family and the club, after decades of relative disinterest and neglect in. Some of us thought all along, long before Brexit, that with the rise of Asia and the huge eastwards shift of world power, the day would come when we might need our true friends in the Commonwealth again, however important our immediate regional neighbours might continue to be.

Well now that day has come, with the need becoming urgent to join up with ‘old partners and new allies’ (to use the Prime Minister’s phrase).

This is often put entirely in trade terms – the scramble to get into the great new consumer markets of the Indian sub-continent, of Asia and of Africa, which we have neglected for so long.

But here are two other aspects which underpin the case for putting stronger Commonwealth engagement at the centre of our national story.

One is security. As British reliance on the ‘bedrock’ of the USA ‘special relationship’ wobbles we need strong new friends in defence and security round the world to stay safe. That means building up links of both the new

technological kind and the conventional kind with Commonwealth partners. Closer ties should now develop in cyber space, on intelligence, in control of the hideous weapons of chemical, biological and nuclear warfare, as well as in practical military, naval and airborne collaboration.

A second factor is that the Commonwealth network, spreading its latticework of links across every continent, is a huge transmission mechanism for soft power – the very resource of which the UK is especially well-endowed.

And this brings us to my fourth priority. Already the common features of the English language, English common law, British accounting standards, British professional and technical standards and underlying likemindedness act as a binding force of amazing strength. They provide a solid foundation not just for Britain's advantage but also for discharging responsibilities and duty of care towards struggling small island nations and poorer areas which rightly falls upon us. This alone gives us a role which we can fulfil with pride.

As so often in the zig-zag course of history it turns out that the very structure which seemed at one time so dated, the old British Commonwealth headed by the monarchy, turns out to be the ideally suitable framework for the digital age. Its roots lie in its increasingly empowered peoples; it demands no treaties or heavy centrally hierarchies, it has a focal point not in transient politicians but in the person of the British monarch – a role filled with exemplary skill by Queen Elizabeth II.

It has become indeed, in H.M. The Queen's deeply prescient words 'In many ways the face of the future', literally so, with 60 percent of its citizens under thirty! Others now describe it as , 'The Mother of all Networks' - and it has become that as well.

Nothing like this has ever existed in history. Empires have come and gone. Superpowers have come and gone. Networks have arrived . For nations to survive and prosper in this network world requires new agility and new kinds of statesmanship. Old notions of sovereignty have to be shaken off even while pride and patriotism need be more extolled and valued.

It is hard to know whether to greet with laughter or pity the voices harking back to old ideas of independence and 'taking back' sovereign control in conditions which cannot any longer possibly exist. Interdependence now trumps control, like it or not. Post-Brexit laws may be shaped in Parliament but scarcely any of them can be free from higher forces from the outside world.

Whether it is control of borders, the future of farming, the organization of fisheries, the structure of social provision and health administration, the conduct of business or the pattern of finance, the 'control' in an open society such as ours, embedded in world connections and trade, lies as much in international forces, and in the dictates of global networks, as in our own choices.

To believe otherwise, or to promise otherwise, is to deny the facts of an ever more interdependent age.

So as we lift our eyes beyond the Brexit furore, which will in due course be resolved, a quite different world unfolds into which our United Kingdom can, with wise leadership and with inspiration, advance with confidence.

Our old friends are our new friends and partners. We greet new allies with new respect and understanding.

I believe this is an epoch opening out which Professor Khusro , whom we commemorate, would have understood and welcomed.
