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The Crisis of Modernity

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First, I would like to thank Arcadia University, Marie Louise Jackson and Marylin Cranin to give me this opportunity and speak to you tonight.

The title of my presentation is the crisis of modernity. What does it mean?

Uncertainty is the essence of politics, both domestic and international. This uncertainty results from the dynamic multi-factor nature of politics where the outcomes are neither predetermined nor impossible.

That is why Europe and the rest of the world had so many wars and often these wars ended in a very different way than expected by those who initiated them.

The starting point of the age of modernity corresponds to the realization that international security is based not only on the size of the army and the power of weapons, but on the international public law which may serve, as an instrument to reduce the dangers and uncertainties of lawlessness. This realization marked the beginning of the Age of Reason in international politics. The first attempt at creating such a law goes back to 1648 and is known as the TREATY OF WESTPHALIA. This marked the beginning of THE AGE IN WHICH SECULAR INTERNATIONAL LAW WAS DEVELOPED AS AN INSTRUMENT of PEACE AND STABLE INTERSTATE RELATIONS.

The common belief of modernity was the idea of the underlying ethical purpose of politics and their legal framework – social contract, liberty and equality of all men, constitutional rights, scientific progress and social justice. These were the new meanings to which European secular modernity was aspiring and which found their expression in the Bill of Rights, American Constitution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, going back to the period between 1689 and 1789. In international relations, this period was characterized by the rising awareness of the necessity of stable institutional security arrangements. In 1795 Immanuel Kant outlined the conditions of European security in his text PERPETUAL PEACE AMONG STATES. Kant's view was that the state of peace among men was not the natural state; the natural state was that of war. This did not necessarily signify open hostilities, but a perpetual threat of war. A state of peace, therefore, just like the state of culture, required an effort and had to be *established as a necessary component of cultural interaction*. As Kant stated himself: "Unless this security is pledged to each by his neighbor, each may treat his neighbor as an enemy."

Twenty years after Kant had written these words, European powers established the first modern international system: the so-called Concert system introduced by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. This was the first attempt to resolve international disputes peacefully through multi-lateral diplomatic negotiations and consultations, rather than by force. Between 1815 and now we knew four such attempts – the concert system, the League of Nations, the UN and the EU.

It took 130 years and two world wars for the idea of multi-lateral global security system to come to its fruition, but in the end it did. The United Nations Organization coming to existence in May of 1945 was in many ways the triumph of multi-lateral diplomacy and desire for a lasting peace. Its existence was outlined by the Yalta agreement. Some years later, in 1951 another system-defining treaty was signed – The Coal and Steel Union between France and

Germany, that served as the first step toward creating the EU. Both institutions were the product of trauma of the Second World War and of the American will to be the guarantor of peace, if not worldwide than at least in Europe. It was the time when everybody in Europe, In the United States and in the Soviet Union, wanted to avoid World War Three – the memories of the last war were still too vivid and the marks of war – too unmistakable.

In parenthesis I would like to remark that united Europe remains perhaps a unique example of successful implementation of the modern ideal of supremacy of international, that is pan-European, law, but also an example of regionalization, already predicted by the father of geopolitics Friedrich Ratzel in the XIX century.

The period between 1945 and 1991 was the longest period of peace that Europe had known. Despite many uncertainties, this period was marked by symmetrical relations. Indeed what is more symmetrical than the MAD - Mutually Asserated Destruction doctrine, with its very elaborate strategy of nuclear dissuasion based on the principle of symmetrical annihilation. Some even argued that the USSR enjoyed the status of a superpower only because of the special arrangement with the US called the Cold War.¹

Despite their antagonism, both sides did everything to avoid any real confrontation. We can only recall the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, which resulted in the Soviet withdrawal of their missiles from Cuba and US withdrawal of their missiles from Turkey.²

¹ Immanuel Wellersten, *in After Liberalism*, The New Press, 1995

² In 1961, the U.S. deployed 15 Jupiter IRBMs (intermediate-range ballistic missiles) at İzmir, Turkey, aimed at the western USSR's cities, including Moscow. Given its 1,500-mile (2,410 km) range, Moscow was only 16 minutes away. Yet, Kennedy gave them low strategic value, given that a SSBN submarine provided the same magnitude of threat, and from a distance. Khrushchev publicly expressed anger and personal offense from the Turkish missile emplacement. The

Symmetry, even the symmetry of threats, balances off the uncertainty of the possible outcomes when the threats are actualized. For a while, this symmetry of uncertainty was a source of stability, at least in Europe³, but in the end, tested in a real war, this symmetry of Cold War disintegrated. This happened in the 1980s, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the victorious Islamic revolution in Iran. It was the period during which political modernity had clearly reached its limits.

It also signified the beginning of the new age marked by the rising obscurantism, anti-modernism, an age of asymmetrical conflicts, and a growing dysfunction of the security arrangements. The war in Afghanistan was the hidden stage of the growing crisis of institutions, principles and concepts developed by the Modern Age. The visible dissolution of the system began in 1990 with the First Gulf War, and later, with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

This was a period when Francis Fukuyama hastily declared the End of History and the victory of the liberal market system as the only viable model for the global community. Unfortunately, he was proven wrong.

It is paradoxical but the collapse of communism meant more polarization rather than less. Symmetrical polarity of East-West often conflictual relations was now supplemented by the asymmetrical polarity North-South. It is precisely the asymmetry of this latter conflict that contributed to its savagery.

Today, we see that the international system is in crisis and this crisis is not conditional, but systemic and results from continuous disbalance of power

Cuban missile deployment — the first time Soviet missiles were outside the USSR — was his response to U.S. nuclear missiles in Turkey.

³ Between 1955 and today, Europe experienced unprecedented economic prosperity and was able to translate it into creation of a new European super-state — the EU.

between the United States, and its allies on one hand and the rest of the world on the other. The real problem is, until now we were unable to properly measure and adequately analyze these disturbances. Some call it the Clash of Civilizations, others – the rise of "Islamofascism", or the negative side-effect of the benevolent empire-building. Whatever it may be, it signifies a profound crisis of modernity in international relations.

The first clear signal of this crisis was the NATO-led attack against former Yugoslavia. This was the first war conducted by NATO and it was done bypassing the UN. It put on the forefront the NATO alliance as a trans-national security organization. NATO, eclipsing UN, was the clearest signal of the revision of Yalta agreement - something openly affirmed by G. Bush in June 2001 in his speech at the Warsaw University.

The second signal, which had much larger implication, came on September 11, 2001. The war on terrorism, which some like Norman Podhoretz, called the World War Four, is a new type of war. This is the first global war in modern times, in which the enemy has no nationality, no territory, no real infrastructure, and no standing army in any traditional sense. And yet it is a real and omni-present enemy. This war cannot be won on the battleground since the only definable battleground in this war is the hearts and minds of those who may be considering to join the war against us. We had seen this in Pakistan and Afghanistan, Iraq, in Northern Africa, in London and Madrid.

Terrorism and the war against it is one, perhaps a major source of instability.

There are other sources. Just to name a few:

- nuclear proliferation
- Changing demographics
- Illegal immigration
- Growing pressure on resources.

- Climate change, increasing pollution and environmental degradation.

If we look at the past fifteen years, we see that the trend toward fewer conflicts reported by peace researchers since the early 1990s, now seems to have been broken.⁴

Perhaps most unfortunate is our own disregard for the norms and principles of international law. One example of it is the unilateral declaration of the independence of Kosovo and its recognition by the leading European powers and the United States in February of this year. It is another blow to the system of international law and post-war legal arrangements. Recognition of Kosovo sets a dangerous precedent not only in terms of encouraging separatists movements world-wide, but most importantly in violating the spirit and the letter of important international treaties. It violates two international treaties - the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act, as well as the UN Resolution 1244, and legal recommendation of the Arbitration Commission of the Peace Conference on the former Yugoslavia also known as the Badinter Commission.

As a result of all this, we have an unmistakable mark of the growing international insecurity – the rise of military blocs. The enlargement of the NATO Alliance, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization - a military alliance between Russia, China and four Central Asian states which some call the new Warsaw Pact, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, another Russian military alliance, attempts by the United States create a new military alliance in the Middle East using the Gulf Cooperation Council which points to the increasingly volatile situation over Iran's nuclear program.⁵ We also hear about the emergence of the

⁴ This is shown in the latest annual report "States in Armed Conflict," from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program at the Uppsala University Department of Peace and Conflict Research. The Middle East is the region where peace initiatives are most conspicuous in their absence.

⁵ Saudi Arabia and the five other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states of Kuwait, Qatar, Oman,

Pacific NATO, involving US, Japan and Australia. All this points in the direction of growing regionalization and potential rivalry between different regions.

Some critics will say that these blocs are defensive, or even dysfunctional. Yet, I would like to remind you what Otto Von Bismarck once said about politics: “In politics what counts is not the intentions, but the potential”.

Today global military expenditure and arms trade form the largest spending in the world at over one point two trillion dollars a year and has been rising in recent years. It is a 37 per cent increase over the 10-year period since 1997. We also have increasing concentration of military expenditure, i.e. that a small number of countries spend the largest sums: the 15 countries with the highest spending account for 83 percent of the total military expenses worldwide.

On the other hand the United Nations and all its agencies and funds spend about \$20 billion each year, or about little over \$3 for each of the world's inhabitants. This is a very small sum compared to most government budgets and it is just a tiny fraction of the world's military spending. Yet for nearly two decades, the UN has faced financial difficulties and it has been forced to cut back on important programs in all areas. Many member states have not paid their full dues and have cut their donations to the UN's voluntary funds. As of November 2007, members' arrears to the Regular Budget topped \$735 million.⁶

Yet, the entire budget of an organization that was once conceived as an instrument of peace and stability is approximately 2 percent of the global military expenditure.

Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates yesterday, along with a 10-year, \$43 billion military aid package for Israel and Egypt.

⁶ Of which the United States alone owed \$688 million (94% of the regular budget arrears).

If you think that the generation that lived through the Second World War is slowly passing away, and less and less people remember the meaning of real war, it seems like we are no longer afraid of it, if only because we don't know what it is. Empowered by our ever-performing technology, we are no longer seem to be bound by our historic experience that found its expression in international public law since 1945. The danger is - if we are to forget what we lived through, we will be tempted of living through this experience again, and this is something we all need to avoid. In this context, one cannot over-emphasized the importance of true humanist education to think critically and act civically. Peace, just like culture, requires an effort, an act of will. Today, a deeper understanding of the global issues is needed, because it helps us to see how we got to where we are today. Only then can we begin to contemplate and effectively plan where we are heading and what that implies for the community of nations of today and tomorrow.