



Transcript

The Lord Garden Memorial Lecture: The 2010 General Election and its Implications

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Shirley Williams:

Air Marshal Lord Garden, whom we all knew as Tim, was an outstanding defence strategist, thinker and public servant. In all three roles he flew high. Such was his ability as a pilot that he was able to range from bombers to helicopters, and from practicing to instructing, in his illustrious RAF career. He was also a thinker, a man who contributed ideas well beyond the requirements of his responsibilities as a senior military officer. He took a postgraduate degree in international relations at Magdalene College, Cambridge, in the early 1980s. It was his wider understanding of the world in which military power operates that made him such an effective director of defence studies for the RAF, a visiting professor at Kings College London, and an outstanding commander of the Royal College of Defence Studies. I lectured there on several occasions to an impressively international audience of senior officers and civilians, potential members of a mutually respectful and close network that stretched to many countries. Tim, outgoing, informal, never constrained by rank or pomposity, moved easily among them making friends.

Tim understood better than most of us that defence strategy had to take account of a dramatically changing world, in which traditional Cold War assumptions about relative influence and power no longer held good. His analyses and conclusions were grounded in thorough study of the facts, and in respect for truth, however uncomfortable. His moral courage was as unflinching as was his courtesy.

Tim recognised the limitations of national power in this new world. That was one of the reasons for his early interest in European security. He supported closer cooperation in procurement and on peacekeeping operations with other EU countries, although those still remain far from fully realised. His work was recognised by the award to him by President Chirac of the Legion d'honneur. It was Tim's commitment to European integration that made the Liberal Democrats the obvious party for him; both he and his wife Sue were committed and active members, she standing as a Parliamentary candidate for Finchley in the 2005 General Election, he becoming the Party's defence spokesman in the House of Lords after his elevation to the peerage in 2004, just in time to make a searing critique of the UK's involvement in what he called "the rush to war" in Iraq.

Would Tim have been an enthusiastic supporter of the coalition? Incapable of self-deception, or indeed of deception of any kind, he would undoubtedly

have recognised the scale of the economic challenge both to the United Kingdom and to the European Union. He would have understood that the scale of the challenge is such that partisan obsessions and even passionate preoccupations have to be put on one side to ensure our economic survival. Being Tim, he would have realised too that the current growth projections and investment prospects for the UK, for the Euro zone and for the United States, around 2%, as compared to the emerging powers, particularly China at over 12% and Latin America at 10%, spell out the further relative decline of the West – not quite “Der Untergang des Abendlandes” forecast by Oswald Spengler in his notorious book, but an imitation of it.

The institutional structure of the post-war world does not even begin to reflect this transformation in relative power – and it is always worth remembering that with power goes responsibility. The failure to alter our institutional structures has left the Great Powers of 1945 with a much resented leadership role, but also with disproportionate responsibility for maintaining order and the rule of law. I can sum this up quickly. The permanent members of the United Nations Security Council are exactly the same as they were in 1946. A combined effort in September 2004 by the strongest candidates for permanent places on the Security Council, India, Brazil, Japan and Germany, got nowhere.

In the great financial institutions created at Bretton Woods in 1944, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, voting power is based on financial contributions. Taking the IMF as an illustration, this means that the UK has a larger vote than China, and Italy a larger vote than India. In addition, the presidency of the World Bank is traditionally held by an American, that of the IMF by a European. To his credit, the World Bank’s President Robert Zoellick has recently negotiated an increase in its capital in exchange for some shift of voting powers from the Europeans to the emerging markets of China, India and Brazil

But even the more recent decision-making-bodies, the G8 and the G20, are anachronisms. The G8 consists of four European countries, together with Canada, Russia, the United States and Japan. In an effort to make the G8 more representative, a new body called the Outreach Group, consisting of China, India, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa was bolted on in 1995. The G8, it was announced, was to become the new permanent council for international economic co-operation. But it has already been superseded by the G20, the nearest thing to a globally representative group. Formed in 1999, it includes all the world’s richest and largest countries. But it lacks the formal legitimacy of its older forerunners.

The disjunction between power and responsibility is well illustrated in the final conclusions of the recent review conference on the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty. The proposals for nuclear disarmament put forward by the P5, the recognised nuclear powers, despite some welcome evidence of progress such as the new START treaty between Russia and the United States, were deemed by some non-nuclear weapons countries to be too cautious and too slow in moving towards the abolition of nuclear weapons. Rather than the detailed, dogged work of strengthening the IAEA and pressing ahead with a collection of disarmament measures from fissile material cut-off to getting rid of tactical nuclear weapons, some member-states proposed a big fix, a global convention to be held in 2012 charged with drawing up a convention to outlaw all nuclear weapons by 2025.

The other major focus was to convene a regional conference in 2012 on the establishment in the Middle East of a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone. For some member-states, this would entail the outing of Israel, still stubbornly silent on its nuclear role. That silence will be made more difficult by the willingness of the United States government and of the new Foreign Secretary William Hague in the UK to reveal details of the exact number of warheads each state possesses. For other member states, the proposed NFZ should deal peacefully with Iran's nuclear aspirations in the region. The conference might even find answers to the insufferable wretchedness of Gaza, a situation being brilliantly exploited by Hamas and its Iranian godfather.

The traditional Great Powers may find themselves isolated and irrelevant if they cannot build new bridges with the emerging countries. It does not help that some of these emerging countries have remained outside the NPT and are now making their own bilateral deals with nuclear powers inside the NPT. The Indo-US deal of 2008, bypassing the NPT and leaning on the Nuclear Suppliers Group to bend their own rules, was a troubling innovation, brought about by President Bush's desire to build a strong alliance with India against terrorism. Now Pakistan is seeking approval for a deal with China to supply her with two new nuclear reactors. This would be in contravention of the NSG rules, since Pakistan is not a signatory of the NPT, nor does it accept IAEA inspection or international safeguards on reactors. It also has a much more fraught internal security position than India. The NPT's rules are being eroded, and can only be reconstructed by bringing the so called nuclear armed states within the system.

Nor does it help for the P5 to dismiss efforts by non-nuclear weapons states to bring potential proliferators in from the cold. Turkey is a key player in this

respect, a secular state but also a moderate Muslim country. The joint Turkish-Brazilian attempt to revive the Vienna group's proposal to enrich under IAEA safeguards, a substantial part of Iran's stock of LEU outside Iranian territory, returning HEU in fuel rod form to supply Iran's isotope producing research reactor. The deal was far from perfect – for instance Iran insisted on its right to enrich part of its LEU stock up to 20%, a much higher level than is required to feed civilian power reactors. The timing of the Turkish-Brazilian deal also weakened its original purpose. But it would have been much more constructive to raise questions with Turkey and Brazil about these aspects, and to ask for renegotiation, than to dismiss the deal out of hand. Both of these important non nuclear powers were angered by the reaction to their proposal.

The success of international efforts to prevent proliferation and to move towards a massive reduction of nuclear weapons hangs in the balance. The review conference said the right things but took few concrete steps towards non-proliferation and disarmament.

The agreement between the partners in the UK's new coalition government states that Britain's nuclear deterrent will be maintained, that its renewal will be scrutinised to ensure value for money, and that Liberal Democrats will continue to make the case for alternatives.

So let me take the opportunity so helpfully offered. .

Nuclear weapons are very expensive weapons seeking a role and purpose in the post Cold War world. It is difficult to find one. Against terrorists, they would be far less effective than conventional weapons or the soft power of men and women with the skills to reach people's hearts and minds. Against psychotic states like North Korea, a nuclear attack would almost certainly lead to retaliation capable of destroying much of the population and the economic infrastructure too of our ally South Korea. Against other current nuclear powers, their usefulness is again questionable, since these are now our partners or allies.

We do not have to decide between a vastly expensive like for like renewal (which would send all the wrong signals to would-be nuclear powers) and abolition at this point in time. We can reduce our nuclear position stage by

stage, at each stage encouraging others to join us in a global move towards nuclear disarmament.

For the United Kingdom, that first stage could be a reduction in the number of Trident carrying submarines from four to three. Before he left office, the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown was considering such a step. It could be achieved by not replacing the first of the submarines to be taken out of service.

The second stage, based on the recent research appearing in RUSI's Journal (the Royal United Services Institute) would be to keep the Trident submarines in port, with at least one on alert status able to sail in a developing crisis situation. The present very expensive "continuous at sea" strategy made sense at the height of the Cold War when Warsaw Pact nuclear weapons were at high alert levels, but it seems excessive now. With at least one submarine on alert status, the United Kingdom would keep a smaller but still effective deterrent, and would save an estimated seven billions pounds a year.

This proposed stage by stage reduction would enable the United Kingdom government to take into account technological and political developments over the next few years. The commitment of the Obama administration to nuclear weapons minimisation and eventual abolition remains staunchly strong; a number of influential non-nuclear powers are trying to extend nuclear-free zones beyond Latin America and Africa to Central Asia and the Middle East. If these initiatives are successful, there may well come a time when our own reduced deterrent should be put on the global negotiating table. It would be a mistake of the first order to get locked into a more expensive modernised nuclear deterrent with a lifetime of several decades.

The UK's contribution to the nuclear weapons debate has been impressive and appreciated internationally. We should not retreat from it. By maintaining the high quality of our technical work on verification and our remarkable joint research with Norway, we will sustain that contribution. We should add to it an offer to train some of the new generation of inspectors that the IAEA will require, and we should propose a study of cyber threats to the command and control systems on which nuclear peace depends.

Let me give the last word to Tim Garden himself. This is what he said about Trident on his own website not long before his untimely death:

"Any radically new nuclear system, whether ballistic or cruise missile based, would involve significant development costs for the platform, missile and warhead. Such costs would put further pressure on a defence budget which is

already finding it difficult to retain coherence. Nor is it clear that such systems could contribute to our security needs beyond deterring indeterminate future nuclear threats. The constraints of the NPT would cause further complications.

“The most sensible answer is likely to be that we should keep the Trident system going with life extension programmes, when needed. We can have a useful public debate about the future of UK nuclear weapons, but we would be foolish to rush into decisions that are likely to prove costly and irrelevant.”

(Quote from Tim’s website on Trident)