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Transcript

The Power of Diplomacy: US and EU Approaches

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US Secretary of State (1997-2001)

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Robin Niblett:

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Chatham House. I'm delighted that you could join us today for this conversation – it's billed as a lecture, but it's going to be a conversation. I don't think Douglas Dillon, after whom this lecture is named, would mind one bit if we were to have a conversation rather than a lecture, especially as the conversation is with Madeleine Albright, who I think as you all know was the first woman secretary of state of the United States between 1997 and 2001, having served also as ambassador to the UN prior to that. Somebody who, as you can do in America, combined an academic career with a policy career and continues to teach as a professor at Georgetown University.

We will get actually to the subject of what she teaches in a minute in our conversation. She has also managed to find plenty of time to write. Whatever we don't get to cover in our conversation today, you'll be able to pick up through the various writings that she's done. Very interestingly at the moment, released now in paperback, is her book *Prague Winter*, which covers that critical period 1937–48, much of which time Secretary Albright spent here in London.

She is currently chairman of the Albright Stonebridge Group. She is chairman of the National Democratic Institute. She serves on the Defense Policy Board and she chairs lots of other things as well, as one would expect with somebody of her experience. What we're going to do is talk maybe for 25 minutes, 20 minutes, something like that, and have a conversation around some themes that are under the title we have here of 'The Power of Diplomacy: US and EU Approaches'.

The Douglas Dillon Lecture, put in honour of that great generation of Americans who fought in World War II, who had a business career, who served in government as well – actually one of our other lectures is the John Whitehead Lecture, a very similar kind of profile. Douglas Dillon served as ambassador to France; he was secretary of the treasury, various undersecretary positions at State as well. I think he brings that combination of experiences. We really want to focus on something that he believed in very strongly – the transatlantic relationship – and try to look at it through the prism of the conversation that we will have now on the 'power of diplomacy'.

Let me start perhaps, if I may, Dr Albright, by giving you a bit of a stereotype and see how you react to it. The stereotype is that when we talk about diplomacy, Americans like getting things done and diplomacy is about action, and the Europeans tend to sort of talk and manage problems. As long as they

aren't blowing up, maybe they can keep going a little bit. And that this is potentially an area for frustration, and is maybe seen to be so in the Middle East or in other parts of the world. Is that a bit of a caricature, in your mind? Or do you think there is some truth to that kind of contrast?

Madeleine Albright:

First of all, I am delighted to be here. Thank you very much, and thank you all for coming.

I think it's a caricature. But I think partially, diplomacy is something that was invented for monarchs and various of their representatives to be able to talk to each other. A more recent description by one of my former colleagues was: diplomacy is useful when you want to talk to people you really don't like. So I think it's obviously a very important tool.

I teach a course at Georgetown, and I say that foreign policy is just trying to get some other country to do what you want or think what you want. So what are the tools? There are not a lot of things – the course is called the 'National Security Toolbox', and there are not a lot of tools in it. There is diplomacy, bilateral and multilateral. Then there are economic tools – either carrots like aid and trade, or sticks when you take them away; the threat of the use of force; the use of force; law enforcement and intelligence. That's it. Ultimately what one sees is that diplomacy continues to be the basic tool that is required to make the other ones work.

Americans do have a tendency, I think, to make lists and check them off and see that they are done. Yet I have found that things never really are quite done, that they need to continue to be managed in a variety of ways. Let's take for instance the Balkans. I think there was really a sense after the war in Kosovo that it was done, and yet what we're finding now is obviously the importance of continuing to look at how the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia works. The EU is very important in that diplomacy and having people be able to have a moderator in it or some diplomatic aspect.

So I think Americans – while we do like to check off lists, I think that we also understand the value of talking. The thing that's hard – and I always end up blaming the media, but not usually in the first question – is that part of it is that diplomatic activities are always covered and the question is: what did you just accomplish? What came out of this meeting? And if there's not a specific result then people say diplomacy failed. People are asking: what happened in Almaty over the P5+1 on Iran?

It's part of a process. Nothing failed. So that's part of why people say it's just talking and it doesn't get you anywhere.

Robin Niblett:

This was part of the criticism that was made in the UK and the US and other places of President Obama's first term. It was perhaps that impression that not as many things as some people had hoped would get done, got done. Yet I think one of the things that was most defining of that first term was the re-engagement of the United States in the Asia-Pacific. Do you see that engagement in the Asia-Pacific – whether it's as a response to China or just a rebalancing back to where things should have been in any case – is that an example then of diplomacy as engagement, as managing relationships rather than achieving things?

Madeleine Albright:

First of all, I think managing does actually achieve things in the end, so I wouldn't have such a strong dichotomy. I think frankly the Obama administration had to get over the Bush administration. Part of the issue here was how to re-engage the United States in partnerships with other countries and to do what makes an incredible amount of sense: to see that China is the power that one has to deal with and try to sort out what the different approaches are. Plus generally, the United States is not monogamous. We are an Atlantic and a Pacific power.

I think it's very important to try to see how diplomacy in both areas can help really – you think of diplomacy in many different ways, but some of it is just discussion, putting issues on the table. For me, the most important part of diplomacy is not just delivering a message but actually listening to what the people on the other side of the table are saying, and getting that exchange of views and setting the table and learning about what the needs are.

I think that's something that the Obama administration has really done, is recalibrate where we need to pay attention. The truth is we have to pay attention everywhere. Then Secretary Clinton I think was absolutely amazing in terms of her capability of going to places and not just engaging with the government officials but also doing something that's essential in the 21st century – listening to civil society, getting the views of people and connecting in that particular way. We now talk about public diplomacy, some of which is obviously done through the media in a variety of ways, and trying to hear

what the other society is saying. So diplomacy has gotten larger and I think that's true in Asia as well as in Europe and Africa and Latin America.

Robin Niblett:

One of the big things that – we had a speech here from Anne-Marie Slaughter, who just presented the QDDR (Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review) – I think it's diplomacy and development. Again, this has been a re-articulation I suppose of where diplomacy fits in. How do you see that diplomacy and development connection? Is this something new? Is this just a continuation of the past?

Madeleine Albright:

What is interesting about that, it was modelled on the fact that the Defense Department has the Quadrennial Defense Review. It's interesting to see how things evolve. When I was secretary, one of the things I wanted to do was to try to get more coordination among the various parts of our government and try to understand what it is that we were doing in development and diplomacy and democracy, and how they fit together. I actually wish that this had been the QDDDR, adding the fourth D – defence, development, democracy, diplomacy – together.

But I do think it's a very important part to see the kind of combination and collection of the tools, because you really do need them. Part of the problem was also trying to get the other branch of the US government – Congress – to understand that the development budget had to be funded and that development was something that was part of the national security toolbox, and seeing how they fit together.

Robin Niblett:

You brought democracy up there. I think this is probably one of the more challenging dimensions at the moment of international relations, both for Europe and for the United States. We seem to see governments that are authoritarian – China – but that are looking for ways to be representative. We have governments in the Middle East that are transitioning from authoritarian to democratic but are struggling to be democratic and deliver. When you raise democracy like that, it almost looks like the next stage where we should be trying to get the world to go. Is that viable? How do you see democracy

manifesting itself? I know it's a big question but it must be absolutely fundamental.

Madeleine Albright:

You'll be so sorry you asked me that. I am chairman of the board of the National Democratic Institute. It's an organization that actually started as a result of a speech that President Reagan gave here at Westminster in 1983. He was talking about the fact that democracies were not good at explaining themselves *vis-à-vis* communism. So he went back to the United States and he started the National Endowment for Democracy. It had four institutes under it: Democrats and Republicans, business and labour. I was the original vice-chair of the National Democratic Institute.

The truth is we didn't have a clue what to do, because American political parties are so different from European ones. So we began to discuss, believe it or not, what democracy was about. Everybody said, well, elections. Well, elections are necessary but not sufficient. So we then began to say that obviously one of the elements that was necessary was the existence of a legitimate opposition party, because what that does is provide choice for the electorate but also accountability to those who are in government. Then obviously the creation of institutions like the rule of law, a free media.

So elections are only part of it. I think one of the things that we have kind of lost track of, and it's true to some extent in the United States: we're so focused on elections that we've forgotten about governance, which is: why is it that people are elected – what is it they're supposed to do?

I happen to believe that we're all the same. I never went for the fact that Asians didn't believe in democracy. I think basically people everywhere want to be able to make decisions about their own lives. Wherever you live, you want to be able to decide where you live, where you send your children to school, are you able to have a job. That kind of migrates upward to making decisions about who runs your country.

So the question is: do people have the tools to do that, and what is the right answer? So we at the National Democratic Institute do not believe that American democracy is the answer to everything. Therefore we have partnered with other countries that have a somewhat different democratic experience, and take groups of people to different places. So for instance, one of the first things we did was the 'No' campaign in Chile. Now there are a lot of people that were part of that who went with us to Central and Eastern

Europe. Now some of the people from Central and Eastern Europe have gone to North Africa. So there is all that.

The other part about democracy that is important to understand is that it's not an event, it's a process. Believe it or not, we're still working on it in the US. So I think that is part of it.

Then, to put it back to the development issue, all of us who have been academics – either as students or as professors – have debated what comes first, political development or economic development. They clearly go together. My simplest answer to that is: democracy has to deliver, because people want to vote *and* eat. So the bottom line is: how does the democratically elected government basically create and distribute wealth?

For instance, when I was secretary, I went to Venezuela a number of times. It was run by a bunch of tired old men. It was a country that had oil and had money. I can understand how Hugo Chavez got elected. What happened was he was an indigenous person – it was a majority indigenous country. He initially created a poor people's fund out of the oil wealth. Then it all went to his head and he forgot about the delivery part of it.

Democracy does have to deliver. So development and democracy go together, and diplomacy does in fact help to oil the way.

Robin Niblett:

So forcing the process I suppose, if I had to interpret you, would not work. Where do you see, if I can shift but try to link – what do you see as the legacy of Iraq and the attempt to try to inject a rapid transition there? And what does that mean for the choices that are now flowing from that across the Middle East?

Madeleine Albright:

Let me say that... I think that it has complicated matters. I have to say this very frankly: with Iraq, we militarized democracy – not 'we', the other people. Basically what happened is, it's associated with the fact that American troops come in, and I think in many ways it made it more complicated.

What is interesting is that the National Democratic Institute is actually in Iraq. The thing that we do, for instance, is we do not propagate – we're not ideological. We go in and we kind of provide the tools, the nuts and bolts of democracy – helping people have discussions, organize alliances, etc. One of

the issues that has happened is we go in places and we say it's really important to build coalitions and compromise, and they look at us and say, 'yeah, like you guys right now?' So at the moment we are not the best example. But the bottom line is I do think it complicated things a lot.

I did write this book, which was called *A Memo to the President Elect*, at a time when I had no idea who the president was going to be. I did ultimately give it to President Obama and I inscribed it, 'With the audacity to hope that this book will be useful to you.' I laid out five big, umbrella issues. One of them was the restoration of the good name of democracy. I think it's very important because ultimately – and this is from the perspective of the United States – we are better off if other countries are democratic. I think it's more complicated and the right people don't always get elected – it happens in our country. The bottom line though is it is something that ultimately stabilizes countries. And to add to that, if women are politically and economically empowered, the societies are more stable.

So I do think that it is important, and Iraq hurt, there is no question. But we are now watching the evolution of some democratic means in Iraq. There are going to be elections there. I think it is a process.

Robin Niblett:

I know you chair this Aspen foreign ministers' group, for former foreign ministers. I think you did one of your meetings recently in Marrakech, in North Africa. When you look at political Islam, where do you see that fitting in the arc of a shift to more representative government, or the process in the Middle East?

Madeleine Albright:

I wrote another book about the role of god and religion in foreign policy. What happened was that I was the first secretary of state that put Muslim holidays on the official calendar. We began to have iftar dinners and began to understand more what Islam was about. In fact, a lot of the basis of that book was some of the research that we all did in terms of understanding Islam.

One of the things in doing research for the book later – if one reads the Old Testament, there are some pretty bloody parts in it and a lot of fighting. There is some of that in the New Testament and there's some of that in the Qur'an. However, in all three of the books there is also very similar language in terms of peace, charity, love, justice, etc. So I don't think of Islam as a warring

religion – it is not. In fact, in many ways it has a more democratic basis. The imams are themselves more independent than churches that are run by popes and archbishops. So one can't automatically say...

What I do think we are in the middle of is a massive schism in Islam. I think most people didn't know the difference between a Sunni and a Shia and now many people in the non-Muslim world do. They are going through and trying to decide what direction they should go in.

So I do not see a contradiction between Islam and democracy. In fact, NDI has run a number of conferences about how Islam and democracy can in fact not only be compatible but really does work. But there are other things going on within the Muslim religion – and then we have a tendency to kind of categorize people. Frankly, there are extremists in all three of the Abrahamic religions. So I think we have to be very careful in the way that we describe that.

Robin Niblett:

Let me ask you one more question and then I'm going to open it up to the floor and to our guests and members to ask some questions. China: you talked earlier about the rebalancing of US foreign policy. Just to stick to the democracy theme for a second, because I think this is part of the context as you think about America's position in the world – and we have to think about it from a European context as well – there's been a lot of use of the word 'democracy'. Wen Jiabao, before he stood down, would throw this word out, that China is heading in a democratic direction, that it will be a democracy. They seem to mean something else, I'm not sure. I know you've travelled quite a bit to China, you've met Chinese leaders. What do you think they're grappling with in their stage at the moment and how stable is it? Are they trying to stop somewhere short of where you think the ideal outcome is, and is that possible?

Madeleine Albright:

The truth is I don't think they've actually sorted it out. They have a huge country to run – not simple. They have some ethnic differences within the country. They also do have an urban–rural divide; they have a rich–poor divide in a communist country. They do have pressure at the bottom of their pyramid. It's interesting, one reads about now in terms of demonstrations

because of the sewage system or pigs in the rivers and their environmental issues. So they're trying to figure out what to do with it.

I think they have a very serious problem obviously, which is: in order to have an industrialized society, they have to have information. They have to allow people to make decisions about – business decisions – and it's very hard to isolate that from other aspects. To a great extent, they now have what I would call a consumer society, which is in some cases becoming a middle class, which then does become – at least in my definition of things – a more political class.

The Communist Party there is trying to figure out what its legitimacy is. To some extent they align themselves with Confucianism. But I think they don't know the answer to this question. They know in order to keep modernizing they have to loosen up the system. Partially they are supported by those who are benefitting from the system: they have managed to bring the equivalent of the American population out of poverty. They have an awful lot more but they have managed something. I think we're watching the evolution of the system and they are trying to sort it out. If one reads, for instance, about their five-year plan of trying to work it out, they are wrestling with it.

I think they thought they were going to have a much smoother transition than they had – the Bo Xilai events and all of that becoming public. What I find interesting – who knows whether it will stick this way – but Xi Jinping does recognize that he has to do something about the elitist image of the leadership. He's tried a lot of populist things, in terms of taking away the motorcades and things like that, but it will be interesting to see. He clearly recognizes that he's got some kind of an issue in keeping his society functional. He does look at what Gorbachev did to the Soviet Union and that kind of scares them. But I think they are trying to get their head around this question.

Robin Niblett:

If I remember rightly – you'll know this history better than me – the Soviet Union was partly brought down by environmental NGOs, one of the first manifestations of that kind of opposition. So if they see that happening, they must worry about the USSR model.

Madeleine Albright:

I think one of the hardest parts for everybody in this day and age, and it has something to do with democracies everywhere, is with all the information that is out there, the channels of communication between the people and their leaders has gotten more complicated. The National Democratic Institute believes in political parties, but what has happened with social media is all of a sudden there is this kind of plethora of information and demands coming out. The average person believes that if they put it out on social media, somebody is listening to them. The bottom line is: somebody may be, but not necessarily the leaders. So they get frustrated and then there are riots, and then there is no channel of communication.

Everybody is dealing with this. It's true in the United States. I call it the California-ization of democracy – a referendum on something, people don't know what the referendum is about. In Egypt, for instance, [the issue] is how you get from Tahrir Square to governance.

When I leave here Sunday, I'm going out to California to have a meeting – NDI is having a meeting with Silicon Valley to look at how technology is affecting democracy. I don't know what the answer is but it will be interesting to see. How do you absorb the information that is being created and what does it do to governance generally?

Robin Niblett:

We've got an enormously rich menu and I've not been particularly transatlantic about it. I think this is the context that we're grappling with in Europe, in the United States. I think the transatlantic relationship has been described since the end of the Cold War as one that needs to look at the common international challenges that we have and can we approach them together. So I think we've just had a fantastic *tour d'horizon* of many of the global challenges and we can dig into them.