

## **52nd Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs**

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### **Presidential Address**

**Sir Michael Atiyah**

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As you know I am stepping down as President of Pugwash after five years in office. It is natural that I should look back and see how the world has changed in these five years. Have things got worse or better, in what ways, and how should this affect the Pugwash agenda? I would like to share my thoughts with you and point the way ahead for the new officers and Council.

I should emphasize that I speak in a purely personal capacity, and that none of the officers or Council of Pugwash know in advance what I am going to say. The fact that, tomorrow, I will no longer be President encourages a certain brash courage! I adopted a similar line when I gave my final Presidential Address to the Royal Society in 1995, when I attacked (not physically) the British Nuclear Deterrent. The result of the speech was that I was thought suitable to become President of Pugwash. I hasten to add that, on this occasion, I intend fully to retire and I am not angling for further presidencies!

Although the Cold War is over and the threat from nuclear weapons is subsiding the world is as far from peace and stability as it was five years ago. The problems keep changing. For a time we had regional conflicts emerging from the collapse of Communism and now we have the events of September 11th and the response to it.

At the Pugwash conference in Agra, just six months ago, I felt I had to address this last issue - that of terrorism. I did so by analyzing four case histories : Ireland, South Africa, Kashmir and Palestine, to see what general lessons might be learnt from such comparisons. The last six months have seen a slight diminution of the threat of an Indo-Pakistani war, but an unfortunate escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where the Old Testament injunction to exact an "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is being relentlessly pursued. I do not think that, in either case, my speech or any of the actions of Pugwash had any influence whatsoever. But perhaps I should add that we took advantage of our personal contacts with Government Ministers in both India and Pakistan to write letters

urging caution and restraint.

Today, and since we are meeting in the United States, I would like to look at the whole issue of terrorism in a broader context and from a global perspective.

As expressed so eloquently in the UNESCO Constitution of 1945, "Since wars begin in the minds of men, so it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed".

I want to look into the minds of men - of different men - to search for the roots of our problems. Since I want to look at the issue from different geographical and political vantage points I must digress to give you a potted history of my own life, so that you can see where my experiences lie.

Most of my life has been spent in Britain which (despite what you read in the English tabloid press) is part of Europe. Having shrugged off its imperial past, with its vast colonies, and having endured two major wars, Europe is now struggling to find its feet in the 21st century. A unique experiment is going on, inching hesitantly towards economic and political integration, while maintaining its traditional variety of cultures. It will shortly bring together over 500 million people in an economy that will rival that of the United States.

Being a European I believe this is a good thing and that the new Europe can be a bulwark for peace in the world. But diversity will remain and there will be a wide range of opinions in those 500 million minds.

Although my working life has been mainly spent in Britain I have lived and worked in the United States over long periods. Many of my professional collaborators and closest friends are American and I have come over for short visits on literally innumerable occasions. In recent times, when I have applied for a US visa, I have had to fill in the very small form that is provided and one question that is asked is "Have you ever been in the United States before, and if so give the dates". There is a small box for the answer, just large enough for me to insert the words "more than 50 times since 1955". That is almost certainly an underestimate by now.

Finally, let me revert to my childhood. My father was Lebanese, I was brought up in Khartoum, had my secondary education in Cairo and Alexandria, and spent vacations with my grandmother in Lebanon and my Aunt and Uncle in Haifa. Although English was literally my mother tongue I spoke fluent Arabic and of course I loved Lebanese food. I left the Middle East when I was 16, but I have returned on various occasions and I still have close relatives in Beirut.

Having a mixed background may not make one totally impartial but at least it does

provide a basis for a better understanding of different viewpoints. So let me use my experience to describe the view from these three different parts of the world. Before I start let me emphasize one general point. In every region, large or small, there are men (and women) with very different views, depending on their background, experience and individuality. So, in strict sense, there is no such thing as "the American point of view". There is the view of the President, of the Democrats in Congress, of the media, of the opinion polls and of the American participants in this conference. In such a complex and varied society these may diverge widely. Nevertheless, since no-one is uninfluenced by his milieu, there tends to be a centre of gravity - a mean point, about which things fluctuate. It is like people looking out of the windows of a large house - there are many views to be seen depending on which window you look out of. But the fact that the house is in the middle of a wood or on top of a hill affects everyone.

So, after this long preamble, let me try to describe the world as currently seen by the American people - we are in the United States for this conference, so this is the natural starting point. I might add that, earlier this year, I spent six weeks in the US and had a chance to imbibe the political atmosphere at first hand.

We have to begin with the events of September 11th and the devastation in New York and (to a lesser extent) in Washington. Those of you who are not American may have to be reminded what a traumatic experience it was to see the heart of New York devastated. You have to put it into your own context : if you are from London, imagine Big Ben or St. Paul's destroyed (something even Hitler failed to do), while Parisians may like to contemplate the collapse of the Eiffel tower and Notre Dame. Rome offers even more choice. The physical destruction together with the death of thousands has been compared with Pearl Harbour, and so it is very understandable that it produced a similar reaction - this is a war and we must unite to defeat the enemy. But the parallels with Pearl Harbour stop there - the Japanese were a visibly powerful force about to embark on military expansion across Asia and the Pacific. The new enemy was much harder to identify, a loose shadowy organization blending into the landscape. Afghanistan, a poor backward country devastated by decades of war with Russia and internal struggles, provided the only reasonably clear target. In due course it was dealt with, the unloved Taliban regime was obliterated and the first phase of the war was over.

But what happens next? The war on terrorism has been defined in such a vague way, and the public has been led to expect such a long war, that there are not many options. One is to increase vigilance on the home front and vast resources are being devoted to this objective. Foreigners may question this use of America's wealth, but if you are an American citizen it all seems perfectly reasonable, even if it is going to cost you more money and waste your time at airports. But this is a merely passive activity. There is a natural inclination in a war to do more - to search out the enemy before he launches an attack. This is now what is expected. Find the

crooks and go after them. You line up the usual suspects, starting with Saddam Hussein, but with secondary characters such as North Korea and Iran not far behind.

At this stage there is, from the American point of view, a side-issue that needs to be addressed. An attack on Iraq might produce a back-lash in the Arab world and destabilize an area which, with its vast oil reserves, is of vital interest to the US. The Arab opposition might be mitigated if the Palestinian issue could be resolved in some way, but here again terrorists become involved, no progress is being made and there is an impasse. Moreover, to the Israelis and to the Americans the Palestinian suicide bombers are lumped together with those who flew their planes into the Twin Towers - Islamic extremists, driven by a blind hatred of America and its friends. Similar measures in response are necessary: Arafat and his henchmen play the role, in lower key, of Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda.

I think this is the best I can do to explain American attitudes to terrorism though I am conscious that some latent scepticism may have slipped through the net.

Let me now turn to the Middle East and try to describe the world through the eyes of the Arabs. We must begin by looking at the history of the 20th century.

This was the period when the Arabs (together with peoples in Africa and Asia) were emerging from a colonial background, first under the Ottoman Empire and then under the British and French. Except for Algeria this process was relatively peaceful, with the Arabs adapting to, or even welcoming, the modern western world.

However there was one major exception - the creation of Israel. At the same time as the West was withdrawing from power in the region it fostered an intrusive new entity. The British Government, with its Balfour Declaration, decided to support a National Home for the Jewish people, with the proviso (almost as an after-thought) that this should not prejudice the rights of the indigenous inhabitants (i.e., the Palestinians). It was a recipe for disaster. With the weight of British, and subsequently American, backing it developed into a very one-sided conflict, so that now the Palestinians are either in exile or live under a brutal Israeli occupation in a small fraction of their original territory.

It should come as no surprise that this situation has produced, in desperation, a violent reaction and led to the growth of extremist groups.

Although it is the Palestinians who are directly affected by the creation and expansion of Israel all the Arabs (as well as the wider Muslim world) feel deeply involved, in part because of the religious importance of Jerusalem. For the Arabs the conflict with Israel, so far from being the minor side-show it is for the

Americans, is the focal point of their world. Hostility to America has arisen, to a great extent, from this single source, and it is ultimately a large factor behind the terrorist attack on New York.

If Americans want real security nothing would enhance it more than a solution of the Israeli-Palestinian problem which was acceptable to the Arab World. The outlines of such a solution were in fact recently put forward by Saudi Arabia and are within the bounds of political reality, provided the leaders of the western world have the wisdom and determination to achieve them.

Having put into opposite poles the American and Arab views let me now look at Europe. As one might expect the view here is somewhere in the middle. Europe and North Africa share the Mediterranean coast-line and a common history. They lived together for centuries. While Israel was primarily a European creation, and there are close contacts in particular with Israel at the cultural and scientific level, there is also a good understanding of the Arab position: Lawrence of Arabia was after all an Englishman. Spain, with its long Moorish heritage, has deep links with Arab civilization which will survive the current skirmishes over a few rocks in the sea. It is no coincidence that Madrid was the venue for the last serious attempt at a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian issue. Italy, with its appendix of Sicily, extends close to the North African coast and Cyprus, which is negotiating with the European Union, is not far from the shore of Lebanon.

The Arab world, or at least the Mediterranean part of it, is closer to Europe in most respects than Latin America is to the United States. Europe has a really vital interest in the whole region and it should have a key role to play in searching for peace. So far it has only taken tentative steps, playing second fiddle to America. As a European I hope it can do more.

Europeans understand the American need for security after the events of September 11th but they think the US Government is in danger of over-reacting and perhaps embarking on a dangerous path, which will lead to less security for us all. In particular they do not see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the same light as the Americans

Having put forward these three different world-views on the subject of terrorism, which illustrate how divergent they are, let me return to US policy in a more general way. The aftermath of September 11th has seen a seismic shift in US attitudes across a broad band, not just on the issue of terrorism. In almost every single area, military, diplomatic, economic, environmental, the US has decided to go its own way. International treaties and conventions are seen as unacceptable restraints on US freedom of action. Conscious of its sole superpower status, it no longer sees the need to take account of the views of others, even of its close allies. American interests and security come first. A very cogent analysis and explanation

of this new American policy has been given by our Pugwash colleague Steve Miller, and I found his conclusions stark and daunting. A vast gulf has opened up between the United States and the rest of the world, with Europe and in particular Britain caught unhappily in between.

So far all our political leaders put a brave face on it, papering over the cracks, emphasizing the unifying role of NATO and saying that the common ground is much greater than the differences. I hope they are right, but the arguments are not convincing. There is a danger that the US and Europe are on a collision course, not of course in a military sense, but on all important economic and political issues.

When ships or aircraft are on a collision course, mishaps can be avoided by using radar and careful steering. I am not sure what the political equivalent of Radar is -- perhaps it is bodies like Pugwash which can bounce ideas backwards and forwards. As for steering, political leaders come and go and new captains may take the helm, so I am not predicting catastrophe. But, as I leave Pugwash, this divergence of world-views is to my mind the most disturbing event of our time. The Atlantic Ocean has become much bigger.

Talking of new captains taking the helm brings me naturally to the internal affairs of Pugwash and the fact that Professor Swaminathan from India is to be my successor. He will be the first Pugwash President from outside Europe and he will preside at a time when Asia is playing an increasingly important role on the world stage. With the largest populations of the world, India and China are now emerging as major economic powers and it is highly appropriate that the Pugwash President should come from this area.

Professor Swaminathan's interests have been primarily in fostering the Green Revolution and feeding the vast populations of Asia. He will undoubtedly bring a new perspective to Pugwash and I wish him well in the difficult times ahead.

Finally, let me say a few words to the younger members of this audience and in particular to the Student Young Pugwash members who are present. I have felt it my duty to describe some of the serious problems of the world as I see them. In doing so I may have painted too gloomy a picture. Our problems are not insoluble, we can hope for a better world and it will be for succeeding generations to bring this about. The young have energy and enthusiasm, two vital qualities that will be needed for the future.