

On War, Security, Democracy - Interview with X-th General Secretary of NATO Lord Robertson

London. The City. Office of Lord Robertson – 9.30

Numerous photographs cover the walls and desks.

The host knows many world leaders.

He is one of them himself having been head of the most powerful military organisation in history – NATO.

Our attention is drawn to one photograph showing Berlusconi, Putin, Bush and our host.

On the other wall big black and white photos – deserted landscapes, compositions.

The host notices our looks, nods – yes, mine. Shows interest in our camera – yes “Contax”, good optics.

Lord Robertson, an accomplished photographer, sometimes publishes in photography magazines and participates in exhibitions. Landscapes, seascapes, rocks and people. A Scot, former Labour Member of Parliament and Defence Minister of a nuclear power, he served as Nato General Secretary from 1999 to 2004.

Following his resignation, he became Chairman of the Royal Institute of Foreign Affairs (Chatham House) which is situated next door to the offices of Herald of Europe magazine.

Q: Ninety-one years ago the First World War started and it changed the course of world history. The break between the First and the Second World War was twenty years. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War.

You are a man of the post-war world. From your point of view and with your experience, what do you think we should remember as the most important lesson to be learnt from the Second World War? What conclusions should we draw from that lesson?

LR: Yes. At 11 a.m. on the 11th of November 1918 the bombardments stopped – Germany capitulated. On the 3rd of September 1939, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced that Great Britain was at war with Germany. The lessons of both the First and the Second World Wars were that competing interests in Europe are always going to be a constant source of instability, competition and confrontation. What I believe has protected my generation, born after the Second World War, from the kind of conflagration of previous generations is that the integration of Europe has meant that competition is more limited. People argue about the Common Fisheries Policy and about Agriculture not about national frontiers or borders. So, the lessons which were learned very quickly after the Second World

War – integration and co-operation – are as valid today as they were then. If we are to avoid what happened in 1918 and 1939 then we must continue that process of co-operation between European countries.

Q: During 1940–41 Britain, and above all London, withstood heavy bombardment, the signs of which can be seen even now. In June and July 1944 the Germans launched thousands of V-1 missile-shells. Churchill recalls in his *History of the Second World War* (for which he was awarded a Nobel Prize in literature): “This new form of attack was a heavier burden for Londoners than even the raids of 1940–41. 8,564 missile-shells were launched on London. Around 750,000 households were damaged, 23,000 of them beyond repair. The number of civilians killed was 6,184, with nearly 18,000 seriously wounded...” The Discovery Channel from time to time shows the film *Battle of Britain*. The commentator argues that if the missile attacks had gone on for another month, then Britain might have been looking for a separate peace. The Germans were thinking the same thing, but not the British. Later, 1,359 V-2 rockets were launched on London. In August and September 1944 German bombardments continued. By the end of the campaign around 2,000 pilots had died defending London. Both sides were aiming to crush the enemy economically and psychologically, to undermine morale. That was the strategy of the war.

At the beginning of WWII Britain was practically fighting alone against Nazi Germany. Later, Britain, the United States and Russia formed the Alliance. After the end of the war there was a long period of the Cold War. In Zurich, on the 19th of September 1946, Churchill delivered a speech urging countries “as a sovereign remedy... to recreate the European fabric, or as much of it as we can, and to provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in freedom and in safety... The first step must be a partnership between France and Germany. If Europe is to be saved from infinite misery and final doom, there must be this act of faith in the European family... Time may be short. If we are to form a United States of Europe, or whatever name it may take, we must begin now.”

Since that time, the mechanisms of world security, created at the end of the 1940s, have remained broadly unchanged and are no longer compatible with the current situation as it has evolved, particularly over the last fifteen years. What kind of changes do you think are needed to create new mechanisms of world security?

In other words what essential intelligence would be needed to secure an integrated and co-operative approach to world security? How can agreement be reached between different countries, for example, on selling weapons to Iran or Arab countries or lifting the embargo on sales to China? Should we plan a new structure for world security?

LR: We already have some very good security institutions, which should be refreshed and organised. The United Nations still has a huge role to play in the world but it must be modernised. It needs to be reshaped and re-modelled for the new dimensions it has to face today. I think NATO has shown the way in security terms by its relationship with Russia, with the Ukraine and countries of the former Soviet Union. Now it is reaching out to the Mediterranean countries as well to show how common security can be formalised in an international organisation. NATO was established as a counterweight to the Soviet threat, but now it is a co-

operative organisation able to build multinational peace-keeping forces which it can send to places like Afghanistan or the Balkans and it has a lot of lessons for other parts of the world. You then have the European Union, which has gone from strength to strength. In the post-war world it was NATO to assure Europe's collective security, the European Union to build the economic strength of Europe after the war. The European Union is 25 members strong, it has a security and military dimension as well and it obviously plays a huge part in keeping the continent together. It is also a major influence in the world. Then you have the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which is less well known, less publicised, but actually an important organisation that helps to keep East and West closely aligned with one another. The OSCE has a hugely valuable role to play in peace-keeping, in elections and in democracy building too. So, we have plenty of organisations at the moment that we should revitalise, instead of pretending that we could start a new organisation which would prove very difficult to construct and which ultimately is not necessary.

Q: In the current situation there are some crucial disagreements within the unity of the European members of our alliance, e.g. the situation in Iraq. Does it reflect the relations of the members of NATO within NATO?

LR: No but I would like to mention that there are contradictions. There are differences of opinion and we have had differences of opinion in the past. You cannot get a group of countries that are democracies, with individual public opinion, individual governments, individual parliaments, without having differences of opinion. The question is, how are they resolved?

In the past, these issues were resolved by war, conflict, border disputes. Now they are argued about round a table: the issues are thrashed out and they are resolved. For example, every one of the issues confronting the NATO allies since NATO was formed in 1949 has been solved. Some of them were almost at breaking point, some of them could not be resolved because they were unsolvable, and yet because there was a common interest they have been solved. The main aim – defence of the democratic world – stayed, survived, but it acquired a new meaning. Many people criticise NATO, often deservedly, but it is the only effective international structure able to defend peace.

Without NATO the world would be a lot more dangerous and unpredictable. When I was in NATO we created the NATO Russian Council and we brought Russia into that same cohesive decision-making. It was a huge surprise to many Russians to discover how NATO comes to decisions. Previously, they thought it was simply a phone call from Washington and the other 18 countries simply did what they were told. When we formed the NATO Russian Council an issue would be under discussion and the Russians would find themselves on the same side of an argument with the Americans, with the British, with the French. But still there was no decision because there was not unanimity at the level of 20. So, these are not contradictions of policy, they are differences of policy, and if there is a common will to solve them they will be solved. And that is how we solve the problems of NATO.

Q: Do you think at some time in the future the Ukraine can participate in NATO and then possibly even Russia?

LR: Both the Ukraine and NATO are involved at the moment. The NATO Russian Council – that's the first picture of the meeting over there, myself and a few friends! NATO has a NATO/Ukraine commission. In fact, the reason you did not meet Mr Yushenko in Kiev last week is because he was in Brussels at NATO headquarters participating in a meeting of the NATO/Ukraine commission with all the heads of state of government. I don't know what the future holds. Who would have thought that NATO would have included Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, formerly parts of the Soviet Union? So the future will take care of itself. What we need to do is to build institutions that bring that co-operative approach, now.

Q: You are in a unique position, one of very few at the present time with such enormous experience in international relations, especially international military relations. The question is, from our point of view Russia sits between two chairs. Russia will not make a final decision about what it wants. To become a European country, Westernised, with a European democracy, or to create a new alliance with totalitarian countries like China. Within Russian society the choice has not yet been made. Do you think there are serious chances that Russia finally will be welcomed into the society of the current developed countries, or will Russia create a new alliance with countries like China?

LR: The president of Russia wants Russia to be a Western country. He said that to me very explicitly and I believe him. I believe that the people round about him want that as well. They want to be firmly anchored in Western Institutions: EU, NATO. They want to share in the prosperity of Western Europe where they believe they have a role to play. They want to be part of the security, the common security set-up. Even though they don't particularly want formal membership of the institutions, they see themselves very much as part of the successful integration, the successful growth strategy that has been represented by Western Europe. I don't think there is a choice here, a choice to become part of an alliance with China or Central Asia. The fact is the bulk of the Russian people live in the European part of Russia and it is to Europe that they look and the president, quite rightly, sees Russia very much as part of that huge economic success that Western Europe has represented after the Second World War. Generally, I see two most important, post-WWII, historic factors – establishment of the European Union and disintegration of the Soviet empire, – freeing countries and nations from totalitarianism, leading to the establishment of democratic regimes in the countries of the former Warsaw Pact. Many of those countries have already covered a long path of transitional development, become members of EU and NATO; others are still on that path. The result of these grand scale historic events is the end of the intense military and political opposition on the European continent. Young people today do not know what level of threat, what kind of potential was discharged, but only some 20 years ago peace in Europe was so fragile. In the centre of Europe, the most powerful military machines in history, complete with nuclear weapons, were standing in opposition to one another.

Q: If you remember, Churchill stated in his book about the Second World War that war also happens as a consequence of many wrong decisions, mistakes, not

enough levels of responsibility for politicians and so on. Are the current mechanisms of decision-making and the direction of organisations appropriate to our present circumstances? Are they adequate and efficient? What do you think? Does the mechanism of decision-making need to be improved or is it equal to dealing with current military threats?

LR: No, it's not adequate for the current situation. We have far too much in the way of military hardware and manpower still configured for the conflicts of the past. In the West we are far too dependent on constant forces and on equipment that was designed for confrontation with the Soviet Union. The military in Russia is a huge waste of money because it is still configured for a battle that is gone completely. We now have common enemies in terrorism, instability and failed states. They are renegades of Russia and of the West and yet we are completely insufficient to deal with them. They are enemies that are agile, asymmetric, unexpected. Enemies, which require flexibility of thinking and of action because their agents move very quickly and we simply are not configured properly for that.

Q: The most important questions. Integration processes are accompanied by something completely opposite – surges of nationalism, separatism, and terrorism. This is happening not only on the territories of disintegrating multinational countries, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, but also in Western Europe. In some European countries the ultra-right parties are very strong, nationalism is becoming a demanded product on the political market. It is important to understand the conditions the new mechanisms of coexistence have to satisfy. What measures are adequate to combat terror or what new technologies must countries produce in place of an enormous capacity of nuclear weapons and missiles? Do you think the new political strategies and alternative technologies are being implemented and produced in order to deal with new threats, or are we still not ready to answer that new challenge?

LR: The world is changing rapidly, too rapidly, and many people, indeed whole countries, do not manage to adapt to it. This is an objective and unavoidable process. There always will be outsiders; it is important that they do not take hold.

Q: Up to 200 years ago, in order to change the government one had to fight in battle. Now it's enough to set off explosions on trains and buses. Some people think the democratic system is too fragile. Is that true?

LR: You have to be constantly vigilant. Democracy is not something automatic; it has to be worked at. I think there are plenty of institutions around to deal with security issues. But certainly the capabilities need to be examined. One of the things I was most concerned about was manpower, troops who were used in difficult situations whether it is in the Beslan school or in the Balkans. You have to have usable forces on the ground in sufficient quantity in order to be able to deal with the kind of situations that you are faced with. We have hardly any of them. Russia has most of theirs deployed in the southern part of the country. The Europeans have theirs distributed in the Balkans and Afghanistan and a lot of them in Iraq. But there are too few of them. It should be the priority of every country to make

those expensive soldiers into usable soldiers for the threats that we are going to face now and in the future.

Q: What sort of new technologies do countries have to produce, perhaps in co-operation, specifically to fight threats like terrorism?

LR: We need to be much more sophisticated in terms of chemical, biological and radiological weapons because that's what the instrument of choice of the terrorists is likely to be. We need to focus on what is called C4 ISR. Command; control; computers; surveillance; reconnaissance; because that gives you an advantage over those who use primitive methods. We need to focus a lot more attention on logistics, on medicine, on engineering in the armed forces both in the East and in the West. We need to have sophisticated precision weapons because it is not acceptable that you take out a whole block of buildings in order to get one group of terrorists who are involved. Therefore precision weapons are the only things that are acceptable to international opinion and international law and we need to have many more of our troops equipped with that kind of precision. Take a look at Russian forces. The whole potential of the Soviet Union was directed towards production of weapons that are not necessary any more. For example, what can be done with huge tank armies in contemporary conditions? What use are thousands of missiles, millions of shells and mines? Smaller numbers of tanks are needed but equipped in more sophisticated ways. There is not enough transport, communications systems, other infrastructure. But reconstruction of defence is not only a problem of Russia.

Q: One more question related to that. For example, what could happen if, let's say tomorrow, some terrorist group can get a covert weapon, say a covert nuclear weapon or a covert biological weapon? Do we have enough security against that, because people are frightened about it?

LR: Well, we need to expand our capabilities. At NATO we created a new chemical, biological and radiological facility: a mobile phone that would be able to deal with some of those threats if they came along and that was the first time in NATO's history that we've been involved in that kind of thing.

Q: Because the world has to produce new technologies against these threats, especially developed countries, do we have to spend a much larger part of our national budgets developing our defence technologies?

LR: Well, we spend a lot of money in all of the countries on defence but we don't spend it on the right things. So, it's important that we examine and restructure this sphere. I think we will all eventually have to spend more on defence if we are going to produce the security people are demanding. But first of all massive restructuring is needed, so that the money that is already being spent is being spent on the right things. Russia and Western Europe are facing the same problems. People are tied to the past: to old barracks, to large conscript forces, to large tank formations. These are completely irrelevant in the kinds of conflicts we will face in the future. A lot is already being done. NATO is one of the bulkiest structures in the world; it is difficult to turn around, but it is turning. Precision weapons

are being worked on. New communication and dispatch systems, training of special troops is becoming a priority. For example several years ago in Afghanistan there was only one autopilot intelligence plane capable of searching out small groups of terrorists. In Iraq there were tens of them.

One of the important military technology questions, in my opinion, is structure of forces. The correspondence between types of forces should be entirely different than in conventional warfare. In order to combat terrorism specially trained troops are needed and new command methods are needed. So far we do not have the ability to relocate forces quickly enough. We also do not have enough of these forces. Training and preparation of such forces is much more expensive and complicated. We also have to create proper mechanisms for decommissioning of such forces after they leave the army. So far this has been worked out by the film industry better than by the army.

Q: Some people think in the current situation, with the new challenges of terror and so on, that society doesn't have enough information to prepare its members for these situations or that information only comes after the event has occurred. What do you think? For organisations such as Chatham House and similar institutes in other countries, what should their role be in these situations? In other words, should they seek to address a wider public or simply maintain their position as experts in certain fields? And how is it possible to increase the influence of expertise in decision-making?

LR: There is no lack of information. Look at my desk for example. That is much reduced because we are moving office but there is a huge, vast amount of information out there. The important question is, whether people read it. The question is whether we have the right debates about the right issues. And that's why I think it's right to say there should be a higher level of discussion. We should be debating the real issues between countries on an international scale. We have to reach out to the wider public to inform them about what the dangers are and what needs to be done to confront them. I think there are organisations and there are lots of them: think-tanks that have been created by the big existing institutions – the CSISI in Washington, Chatham House, IISS – all of these organisations have a very important role. I try my best as President of Chatham House to raise money, to be involved and to keep aware of what's happening. Confronting the terrorist threat, the instability threat, the failed states, the trafficking, the tide of illegality and corruption which are all real threats to the future requires a multi-faceted approach. The military is only one aspect of that but I focused on it as my expertise was involved with that. It requires a solid effort by bankers, by financiers, by diplomats. All of these people need to be focused on what has to be done and if we assume this is only a problem for the military, or only a problem for the bankers in terms of money laundering, then we will never succeed. You need to have the co-operation of law enforcement organisations. You need to have a better level of intelligence and more intelligence sharing. You need to have a blockage on channels of communication whether they are physical or telecommunications. You need to do something about their supply of money and the ability we have to transfer money around the world. All these things are part of the global strategy to stop these tactics. You then need to have an over-arching policy as well to deal with some of the biggest political problems we are confronted with. It is important to ensure the

democratic process in Iraq is strengthened and stabilised so that these people who blew up a hundred people yesterday in the streets, who did it against civilian Shiite Muslims, because they want to start a civil war, are defeated. Not because they want to bring Saddam Hussein back, not because they hate the Americans, but because they want civil war in Iraq. They have to be confronted. We must deal with problems in Israel and there is a conference in London today. We have seen President Bush taking a major role. There is a new democratically elected President of the Palestinian people and a courageous Israeli Prime Minister willing to take on his own hardliners. All of that is an overall strategy and people should get the message that we can only deal with these things by a multi-faceted approach.

Michael BORSHCHEVSKY

Victor YAROSHENKO

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London

The interview was recorded some month ago prior to London bombings.