MICHAEL QUINLAN LECTURE

"COMPROMISE OR CONFRONTATION?"

DELIVERED BY THE RT HON SIR JOHN MAJOR KG CH

LONDON

TUESDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2018

When Mary Quinlan invited me to deliver this lecture I was flattered – and fearful; flattered by the opportunity, and fearful about whether I could do justice to such a remarkable man.

I first met Michael over 30 years ago and he left me with two over-riding impressions. First, he was an easy man to like; and second, he was even easier to admire. He had a distinguished career as a civil servant, and – to me – exemplified the *ideal* of public service.

It was my experience in Government that, *taken as a whole*, the best of the Civil Service was the equal of talent in *every* other sphere of activity and, in Michael's case, he was not only a public servant – in the true sense of that term – he was also a world-class authority on his subject.

Public service matters because, without it, Government is paralysed. Its efficiency is as relevant to public wellbeing as policy itself.

This is not universally understood, but it should be: those who use "bureaucrat" as a term of abuse simply don't understand the wider role of public servants.

I hope to speak of this more fully at a later date but, for now, let me observe merely that the State needs its fair share of our brightest and best talent, and it is important

we continue to attract them. Michael Quinlan is an exemplar of who and what we need.

And, at this moment, our country is in need of all the expertise it can get. We live in a world of flux. Power structures are changing. Allegiances are changing. Little *is* as it *was*: even *less* will remain as it *is*.

For many millions, the financial crash of a decade ago destroyed their faith in the political and financial world. I am not surprised. The innocent were hurt. Since then, the global market, the on-rush of science, of medicine, and all forms of technological advance, continues to move the world on at an ever–faster pace.

Government is a serious and complex business. It is far more important than the trivia of who is "up" and who is "down" in the political stakes – intriguing and newsworthy though that may be.

Government is about enhancing our status in the world. Our security. Our economic wellbeing. Our national reputation. Our future prospects.

It is about selecting priorities between Government programmes; between business and civil society; between rich and poor.

It involves choices between competition and compassion; between young and old; or between the component parts of our (currently not very) United Kingdom. Sometimes, the choices are straightforward but, all too often, they can be hideously complex.

What Government is *not* about is cheap grandstanding. It's not about deceiving the electorate with slogans, or soundbites, or untruths or half-truths. It's not about windy oratory that says nothing. It's not about simplistic solutions to intricate

problems. It's not about scapegoating one part of our population to earn the plaudits of another.

And – most emphatically – it's not about princelings fighting for the political crown of Premiership. Coded messages that shriek "I'm the One" are about as subtle as a punch on the nose.

Such self-interest is politics at its *least* attractive. It does not deliver sound government. It *destabilises* Government.

As a general rule, those whose focus is on self-advancement are rarely the most suitable to be entrusted with power.

Talk of power moves me on to the post-Brexit role of diplomacy and the Foreign Office. Here – in the Locarno Room – I feel a little inhibited.

I recall Harold Wilson speaking in the 1966 Election and asking, as he moved to his peroration:

" … and why do I talk about the Royal Navy?"

to be told by a heckler:

"Because you're in Chatham.".

But I plead "Not Guilty" to that charge. I talk of diplomacy because it is vital to our national interests and, once we leave the EU, we will need to become ever more forceful in *pressing* those interests.

The blunt truth is that – as a nation of 65 million – our voice is going to be less resonant than as a leading member of a Union of *500* million. We need, therefore, to compensate – as far as we can – by increasing our foreign policy capability.

That must mean more proactive diplomacy. If we retreat solely to our own interests; to Fortress Britain; to our own national boundaries; to the role of on-looker and not innovator – then greater isolation will surely lead to greater irrelevance.

But being proactive requires an expansion of our Foreign Service capacity. As an internationalist, I believe such a posture is desirable in all circumstances. Post-Brexit, it will be essential.

For decades, our foreign policy has been bolstered by our membership of the EU, and our closeness to the US. Now, we are on the verge of leaving the EU, while the US continues to move towards Asia-Pacific – and away from Europe and the UK.

Until now, *every* US President I have known has considered our relevance to America to be enhanced by our membership of the European Union. Yet very soon – on our current course – we will no longer be able to argue from *within* the EU for Anglo-American beliefs in free trade; open markets; and strong defence.

Our value – as an *ally* of America – will decline. Our friends, the Americans, are hard-headed about power. It is romantic folly to think otherwise. Be in no doubt – if the UK can no longer serve America's interests in Europe, she will look elsewhere for someone who *can*.

Of course, our relationship won't collapse: ties of blood, trade and security will remain. But the UK will be even more clearly America's subordinate and dependent junior partner.

No "ifs", no "buts": we *will* be less relevant. No-one should be bedazzled by folksy talk of our "special relationship": it is becoming less "special" year by year.

At this moment our country needs to focus on policy, not personality; on substance, not show; on the national interest, not ideology. Because decisions that must soon be taken will shape the futures of our children and grandchildren for many years to come.

You will assume that I am referring to Brexit – and I am. But my concern runs far wider than that.

However, first Brexit …

For centuries, our State schemed and plotted to prevent all Europe uniting against us. Our Monarchs even married off their children and bribed our foreign adversaries in order to maintain alliances.

Now, *we* have chosen to turn our back *on* all Europe. A long line of former Statesmen will be turning in their graves.

Europe gone ….. America going.

We are told our future aim is to be "Global Britain": that is certainly the *right* policy, but it is hardly new. It has been the reality for 300 years.

What *is* new is that much of the world will now perceive Britain to be a middle-sized, middle-ranking nation that is no longer super-charged by its alliances. Suddenly, the world will be a little chillier.

If the art of negotiation is to obtain what you seek, then the intention must be to give a little to (hopefully) gain a lot more.

Such a negotiation is difficult. It benefits from a trusting relationship. From goodwill. It is most likely to succeed if respect is evident on *both* sides.

I cannot know how the Government has conducted negotiations in private with the European Union: very possibly they have met the tenets I have set out.

But, even *if* they have (and not all the signs are good), belligerent noises-off – on a daily basis – have built up ill-will, and made the Prime Minister's task even more difficult.

We know the post-Brexit world will be very different from now.

It cannot be otherwise, because *no* form of Brexit will remotely match up to the promises made by the Leave Campaign in the referendum: they were vote-gathering fantasies, not serious politics.

I have *no* constituency vote clouding my view of Brexit. I have *no* ambition driving my support for it. I have *no* Party Whips demanding loyalty before conscience.

I have made *no* false promises about Brexit that I must pretend can still be honoured, even though – in my heart – I know they cannot.

I am free to say *absolutely* and *precisely* what I believe about Brexit.

And it is this:

I understand the motives of those who voted to leave the European Union: it can – as I well know – be very frustrating.

Nonetheless, after weighing its frustrations and opportunities, there is no doubt in my *own* mind that our decision is a *colossal* misjudgement that will diminish both the UK *and* the EU.

It *will* damage our national and personal wealth, and *may* seriously hamper our future security. It may even, over time, break up our United Kingdom. It will most definitely limit the prospects of our young.

And – once this becomes clear – I believe those who promised what will never be delivered will have much to answer for. They persuaded a deceived population to vote to be weaker and poorer.

That will *never* be forgotten – nor forgiven.

Our domestic focus is on the impact leaving Europe will have on the *UK*. That is quite natural but, to the world at large, the bigger question is how the EU itself will be affected. The answer is – badly.

Most obviously, the EU will lose their second largest economy; one of only two nations with a nuclear capacity and significant military capability; and the nation with the longest, deepest, and most effective foreign policy reach.

But it goes further than that. Without the UK, the dynamics of Europe may change. Once the UK leaves, the balance of the EU changes. The free market majority may be at risk: protectionists will be encouraged and, perhaps, empowered.

The UK will no longer be a buffer between the Franco-German steamroller and smaller nations. Germany will be more isolated, and friction may grow.

The UK may have been an irritant to the Commission and some of our European partners, but it has also been the anchor to windward against precipitate, or unwise, or unaffordable policies.

There is irony here: over 70 years ago, Britain stood alone to fight *for* Europe – now we freely choose to stand alone and, in so doing, *undermine* Europe.

"So what?" committed Brexiteers say, "We won't be Members: it's Europe's problem". But that ignores reality. How can it *not* be our problem, too?

Whether we are "in" or "out" the EU is in *our* neighbourhood; is our *predominant* economic partner; and *our* wellbeing is inexorably linked to their *own* wellbeing.

In the hot heat of debate it should not be forgotten that we ignore the EU, disdain it, or stand aside from it, at our *own* risk.

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We live at a time when America is showing withdrawal symptoms, and China is growing in economic, political and military power. Whenever the US leaves a vacuum around the world, it will be filled by China, or Russia, or regional players.

Already, Russia is a far more significant presence in the Middle East than would have seemed conceivable a decade ago.
The fundamental point is simple: if America withdraws from international obligations, then Europe can best protect her own interests if she is united.

It is easy to demonstrate why this is so. When China joined the WTO, it was hoped she would conform to accepted trade practices. Thus far, she has not.

Instead, the evidence suggests that she still appropriates other countries' intellectual property; forces technology transfer; closes out competitors' investment to favour her domestic – often state-run – industries; and still subsidises to succeed.

None of this meets WTO rules.

China also smothers complaints about her trade practices by judicious economic investment: this shows that, rules notwithstanding, economic power and a deep national wallet can by-pass accepted international behaviour.

All this undermines the rules-based world trading system.

No-one seeks a dispute with China. But rules made – must be obeyed.

China may be powerful enough to ignore, isolate and punish individual critics.
But she cannot ignore or punish the *whole* of Europe.

And unfair trade practices can no longer be excused with the argument that China is an emerging economy and we should therefore turn a blind eye to her activities. We should not.
She is now an economic superpower dramatically increasing her defence capability. Expenditure on land, sea, air and submarine capacity is soaring.

China now has the world's largest Navy, with more warships and submarines than America – and she continues to build them at pace.

It is time to remember that – in the late 16th Century – China was the pre-eminent global power. China has *not* forgotten this: and nor should we.

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It is impossible to talk of Michael Quinlan without considering defence and, in particular, nuclear weapons. We may wish they had never been invented – but they *were*.

Today, nuclear capability is in the hands of certain undesirable States, and is sought by yet more – including *non*-State actors.

The UK has Trident. It is our nuclear insurance: a weapon to deter. It is hard to see the circumstances in which we would *initiate* a nuclear strike but, if attacked, our enemy can and *should* expect us to retaliate.

To this end, every Trident submarine carries instructions on what to do with its payload were the UK to be destroyed in a nuclear attack. Because of that, such an attack is unlikely.

But no Government can ignore the demands of non-nuclear defence and security expenditure. I don't only mean combat aircraft, or destroyers, or frigates, or

submarines, or tanks, or manpower: I mean the growing threats of new technology and cyber warfare.

The misuse of new technology is almost impossible to control. The fear of rogue States or terrorist groups gaining a nuclear capacity obsesses many – and rightly so.

But so should *bio*-technology.

Consider this quote from the American National Academy of Sciences:

> "A few individuals with specialised skills ... could *inexpensively* and easily produce a panoply of lethal biological weapons ..."

That is truly terrifying – especially if one accepts that technical expertise is as likely to lie with the fanatic as it is with a sane and balanced citizen.

It is not the only novel threat. Many States – and, most probably, terror groups as well – are developing offensive cyber capabilities that could be targeted *anywhere* at *anytime*.

Conceivably, we might not even know we were under attack – or from where the threat had come.

But we know where it might go. Malicious cyber activity could hit anything from missile defences; to civil nuclear power plants; to water supplies; to innovative research; to corporate interests; or to Government secrets.

One successful cyber attack at a civil nuclear plant could release radiation, disrupt energy supply, and create havoc.

But attacks on the fabric of a nation can go far beyond the physical infrastructure.

Take information, which is now being weaponised.

America has been examining whether her Presidential election was perverted. Some believe there may have been external influence in our own recent referendum and General Election.

Whether or not such fears are justified, *external* interference in *internal* matters must be on everyone's list of rising dangers. And *democracies* are vulnerable targets since they have open societies, a free press, and an active social media widely available to the mass of the populace.

Attack comes through weaponised information, and *mis*-information, pumped into public news broadcasts and social media. In this way, the reputation of individuals and organisations can be trashed; opponents can be undermined; and public opinion can be manipulated.

The purpose is to sow confusion and create distrust. To weaken opponents – whether individuals, or Governments, or countries – and put them on the defensive.

This can reinforce and strengthen extreme views or populist insurgencies. It is very difficult to defend against, and inflicts damage well before its victims realise what is happening.

Russia is the present master of this tactic, although other nations have a similar capacity. It is a threat to beware. It is effective, and may – probably *will* – grow.

Other big questions arise. What happens to security and defence co−operation when we leave the EU? And what is the future of NATO?

Time and again, our Government has affirmed its commitment to European defence. This is an area of the Brexit negotiations where both sides should drop their red lines and their posturing and agree a mutually beneficial arrangement.

It would be a mistake for the EU to treat the UK as simply another “third country”.

A mutually beneficial deal should reinforce information sharing; involve the UK in planning and key decisions; tie in a British commitment to joint operations; and encourage co-operation in research, development and military hardware.

Such an outcome is in the interests of British *and* European security and – if it is not agreed – will be a failure of negotiation.

The whole agenda of risks is extraordinarily difficult to navigate, even with unlimited resources.

But we don't have unlimited resources – nor *will* we. So choices must be made that will be painful and controversial.

This becomes doubly important because, since he took Office, President Trump has repeatedly made disobliging references about NATO.

He has derided it as "obsolete", and its funding as "unfair" (to America), for whom it is a "great financial loss".

Whether this is playing to the gallery (since America *does* have a legitimate grievance over funding, and the President is right that Europe should up its game); or a prelude to withdrawing American troops from Europe; or a ploy to encourage a greater contribution from EU countries – is mere conjecture.

What *is* clear is that – since NATO was formed – the world has changed, and so have the risks it must guard against. In view of present concern over the future of NATO, there is a case for a new Treaty to include an updated commitment to collective security and action.

The present Article 5 – the famous agreement that an attack on *one* NATO member is an attack on *all* – has served us well for almost 70 years.

Is it still solid? Can we rely on it? Does President Trump's public hectoring of NATO encourage ill-wishers to believe Article 5 may be vulnerable if a weak financial contributor to NATO were attacked?

Old commitments are a comfort. Renewed commitments reassure.

It is not clear – certainly not to me – whether this worrying American tone is simply a ploy to encourage higher defence expenditure across Europe, or indicative of a future policy drift.

Should we sit out President Trump, or prepare now for a less engaged America?

I don't know the answer but, upon defence, we have surely learned the lesson of history – if in doubt, prepare.

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Let me turn finally to politics.

As I look at the political scene now, I feel both hope and concern.

My hope is two-fold: first, in the proven capacity of our country to rise to challenges; and, second, in the depth of talent that has entered politics in the last two Elections, and is now working its way up the greasy pole. This talent exists *across* the floor of the Commons.

But the immediate scene is less attractive. *None* of the mainstream political Parties is in a healthy condition. Both the Conservatives *and* Labour face pressure from fringe opinion within their own membership.

Voices from the extreme wings of both Parties – in and out of Parliament – are often the most committed, most noisy – and most likely to stir dissent. I admire their passion, but not their policies.

My fear is that the extremes of Right and Left will widen divisions and refuse to compromise, whereas more moderate opinion will often seek common ground.

The risk of intransigence – "*My* way or *no* way" – is that the mainstream Parties will be dragged *further* Right and *further* Left.

We should *not* be complacent over this: extreme views are already driving policy in many countries.

A famous line of Yeats comes to mind:

"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold".

I am deeply concerned that the "Centre" vote – the *moderate* vote that is shared among all the main Parties – will not be able to hold its traditional influence over policy.

It is *crucial* that it does. At heart, we are a tolerant, compassionate, and kindly nation. I feel privileged to have been born into it.

Our nation should not tolerate the unreasoning antipathy of the extremes – to the EU, to foreigners or to minority groups. Such antipathy is repellent, and diminishes us as a nation. Softer, more reasonable voices should not be drowned out by the raucous din of the loudest.

I freely confess to a taste for compromise. I have always preferred good old British pragmatism to rigorous ideology. Politics is real life. It isn't warfare. It isn't a popularity contest. It's about *people.* It's about four nations who deserve more than an ideological tug-of-war.

And the advocates of the extreme Right or Left must understand those with different opinions may well be opponents – but they are still our countrymen and women. To treat them as "enemies" or "saboteurs" or "traitors" is to poison both the political system and our way of life.

Respect and civility would do much to help lift politics out of the dog days in which it is now living.

More compromise – *less* confrontation.

In our world of change, that is one change I would dearly wish to see.

And so, I believe, would Michael Quinlan.

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