

"How Best Can We Meet the International Economic and Security Challenges of Our Time?"
– Lecture by Charles Clarke, Former Home Secretary

By Sai Ming Liew

How do we deal with change? Mr Charles Clarke, former Home Secretary, adeptly tackles the question. As a society, we find it very difficult to have a rational discussion about how to deal with change. The international nature of problems we encounter is not being addressed with sufficient urgency and clarity. With the lack of effective leadership, society does not feel that it can solve some of the most difficult problems it faces.

The extent of change in the world over the last 40 years has been extraordinary, to say the least. We have rapidly shifted towards political maturity. This is exemplified in the movement from dictatorships to democracies. The one exception to this general story of progress is the Middle East, which is the focus of security concerns across the world.

The end of World War II has seen a shift from a two-power world (US and Soviet Union), to a one-power world (US) in 1989, and most recently to a zero-power world in 2002. Now, a large range of coalitions is constantly shifting. As such, we question the international regime of the governance of global issues.

We first have to understand the challenges faced by the international community. The main issues of globalisation are economic, technological, social, environmental and security. As Mr Clarke highlighted, the increasing interconnectivity has raised questions regarding migration, and the 2008 global financial crisis has raised the question of effective international governance. More responsive international governance of these issues is required. We have seen massive technological transformations with the shift in production systems and the creation of new industries. The significance of education and the ability to understand inevitable evolution is pertinent here. The whole structure of society has evolved. Changes in conventional family structures, advancement of the position of women, and the growth of cities are some major social transformations that have been prominent. The threats of climate change and the difficulties that international institutions face dealing with them are the most evident environmental issues. Lastly, the security challenges we face cannot be confined to a particular region. The rising exasperation towards the world's leaders is telling of the lack of efficacious conflict-resolution. More desperately needs to be done.

Conventional politics has failed to solve these problems. As a result, many sense impotence – demonstrated by the rise of political parties in the UK, such as UKIP and the Tea Party. However, Mr Clarke emphasises that the 'go alone' strategy is just mere illusion. He asserts that the solution is to influence the wider world through engagement, rather than to insulate ourselves.

International governance by, for example, the United Nations, European Union and NATO, boasts a patchy record at best. There is currently a lack of support from governments for the UN's peacekeeping agenda, resulting in half-hearted solutions. Economically, the global

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financial crisis spells of the failings of the World Bank and IMF to understand the dynamic environment. With the recent emergence of Ebola and ISIS, it is only logical to wonder whether we are up to the challenge. While change can happen and does happen, the challenge is to make sure change is in the right direction.

To answer the question, "How Best Can We Meet the International Economic and Security Challenges of Our Time?" Mr Clarke's emphatic response is that we need to make our international systems work better and more effectively. But how? Improvements in commitment, energy, urgency and imagination are essential. More importantly, Governments need a firm resolve to back international organisations before a situation arises. International organisations must clarify their responsibilities. A collaborative approach with the likes of Russia, China and Iran will undoubtedly have a monumental effect. It is only when these have been achieved can we effectively overcome the economic and security challenges we face.