

Brussels Forum

March 20, 2016

Epilogue - A Conversation

Ms. Karen Donfried: And now I'm going to invite Nik Gowing and Robert Kaplan to come and weave all the threads of the past three days together. So Nik and Robert are coming in right now.

Mr. Nik Gowing: We're here Karen. Thank you. Robert's here. Well, this is the epilogue. It's going to be about a half an hour and then there's lunch and as I said just before coffee, an epilogue suggests a bit of a closing, but that's really not the spirit of what we're trying to do here. This really is a staging post in a vibrant, disruptive, chaotic, non-normal dynamic. The kind of things we've all been sampling for the last 24 hours--36 hours. Rich, granular discussions, but what are you all going to take away to your train, your plane, your office, your colleagues, your homes, your family? What's the message? And that's what we want to try and distill for you in the next 30 minutes so you can go home and say at Brussels Forum I got this clear message. Now all of you will have your own impressions, but as you've seen Robert and I have been sitting listening, trying to distill, trying to get a sense of what has been emerging and what the themes are. And first I think I have to ask Anne-Marie Slaughter--as Ann-Marie Slaughter mentioned in her breakfast, "Robert, what do you do?"

Mr. Robert Kaplan: Well, after hearing Anne-Marie say that I realize that I've been as guilty as anyone in asking people those questions and so from now on I'm going to ask people the latest book they read or the latest [audio gap 04:52:53 - 04:53:15] --89. And get that--get that around your heads where World War II did not end until 1989. [Audio gap 04:53:23 - 04:53:38] we're talking about a world of disorder. Romania really did not know [audio gap 04:53:42 - 04:53:50] you know, the hundreds I interviewed, a vision, a way of looking at Europe that's different than you get here. It's a Europe where the EU is more than a balance sheet. It's still about hope. It's about states rep-- [audio gap 04:54:04 - 04:54:32]

Mr. Nik Gowing: --history and how that is important to understand the enormity of what is happening. But I'm going to come back to the point we raised yesterday initially, is this the right title "A World Beyond Disorder?" Because surely what's being defined here is how the world is struggling to embrace the scale of the new non-normal, the new disorder, quite apart from what happens after that.

Mr. Robert Kaplan: I think it's about coping with disorder by first understanding it and by understanding it then you have the possibility to move beyond it, but first you have to understand where it comes from. As I said yesterday, we're in a post-imperial period, a post-imperial moment in the sense that it's harder and harder for the great powers to project power. What we have to look beyond now is the weakening of

Russia particularly and though it's in a far more subtle sense, of China, because I feel that the more weaker internally China and Russia become, the more aggressive externally they may become.

Mr. Nik Gowing: Do you think there's been a gripping of the enormity of the non-normal at the moment? We just heard from Farah Pandith, for example, ISIS is not the last stop. In other words, everyone is worried about ISIS or Daesh or whatever we want to call it, but it's the scale of what is happening, the dynamic of what is happening, and the uncertainty-- [audio gap 04:55:59 - 04:56:09]

Mr. Robert Kaplan: -- of religion distorted by digital technology. So [audio gap 04:56:18 - 04:56:41] but it may--but the scale of it may increase.

Mr. Nik Gowing: But I'm--what I'm getting at there, I think Robert, is the fact that ISIS was struggling with that, but it's what happens next. I'm using that just as emblematic.

Mr. Robert Kaplan: Yeah.

Mr. Nik Gowing: In other words, the enormity of so many iterations, of so many issues, which are coming fast down the train.

Mr. Robert Kaplan: And I think right here in Europe--to get back to Central-Eastern Europe, what you see as part of this is the latest Russian form of imperial subversion, which is its--I've heard over and over again, again, in Romania, elsewhere, that article five does not protect these countries from the threat against them because article five is about an overt, obvious act of aggression. But what's coming from Moscow is aggression by buying media, buy third--through third parties, buying off corrupt politicians, building energy pipelines to ensnare energy poor countries, to run all kinds of intelligence operations, a kind of imperialism that's ambiguous and because it's ambiguous it's deniable, and because it's deniable it's harder for the west to formulate a response.

Mr. Nik Gowing: We're all lucky to be in here for 48 hours to listen to this in this kind of incubator of ideas and challenges, but what about the scale of what is happening and the ability to understand the enormity, the human challenge of those in leadership for example? Now I say that because in the 1990's you were writing papers and pieces for the Atlantic, which you brought together in "The Coming Anarchy" and I took the trouble to check the kind of things you were writing about disease, about refugee migrations, and about nation states--the erosion of nation states, and international borders. That's what you were warning about 20 years ago. That's surely what we're confronting.

Mr. Robert Kaplan: Yes, it is. And because of the enormity and scale, I think that never before in history has leadership been so lonely because leaders have to listen to a drumroll of briefings from experts every day are really boring down into the technical details of things and yet the leader has to step back and

remain a generalist and deal with just not just the profundity of what's happening, but the speed of it. And, you know, leadership was always about having good judgement at a time of crisis. That's something that you can't be taught or that's very hard to be taught. You know, some people just have it. Robert Gates, you know, has it, James Baker had it when he was Secretary of State, others--but it's going to require an even greater amplitude of that, you know, to make this rapid fire decisions in time of crisis. As Henry Kissinger used to say, "you can't wait for 80 or 100 percent of the information to make a decision because by the time you have 20 or 40 percent, it may already be too late to make it." Enough for you to--we're making a decision with just partial evidence.

Mr. Nik Gowing: I'm getting a few one-liners from some of you about the kind of things that are on your mind. So in the next 15 minutes, do just use the app if you want. We won't get through all of it. But if there's a great idea you'd like to put to us, just send it to me.

But let me just keep going on that issue of leadership. We just heard from Farah again. We're not nimble enough in government. We heard from General Maire earlier. We're not facing static threats anymore. And he said we have to permanently adjust and do more. And we heard from Karim El Aynaoui yesterday from Morocco. We lack cutting-edge leadership that can rise to the disruptive challenges, must change bureaucratic thinking, respond to fast-changing and evolving situations. In other words, really strong suggestion from insiders that the mindsets simply cannot handle the [audio skip 05:01:05].

Mr. Robert Kaplan: Especially the U.S. Government because as a global power, just the scale of the U.S. Government is bigger than other governments [audio gap 05:01:18] of justice, the various departments in government. And what needs to evolve, pardon the expression, is more of a model along the old British Colonial [audio gap 05:01:30 - 05:01:41] worked in the same building, more or less. And all cross-fertilized all the time.

You know, we call it colonial but it was actually a horizontal way of making decisions.

Mr. Nik Gowing: News Moscow has this thought, one-liner, "How do you ensure, out of all of this, this kind of leadership challenge, that strategic thinking prevails?" And remember what the General said earlier.

Mr. Robert Kaplan: Yeah.

Mr. Nik Gowing: You know, who remembers the 100-year war? Not 100 days or 100 hours, but 100-year war. Because that's what history tells us.

Mr. Robert Kaplan: [audio gap 05:02:16 - 05:02:28] to be read. And, you know, history is very insightful because it gives, you know, it gives a context to the present. The current moment did not begin when we

started to focus on it. It has a past that goes back hundreds or even thousands of [audio gap 05:02:47 - 05:02:52] thinking nothing can do that. But it encourages it. It moves you a little bit closer to that.

Mr. Nik Gowing: [audio gap 05:03:01 - 05:03:28] now to think these unpalatable and unthinkable, however you want to describe them.

Mr. Robert Kaplan: Yes. I put it this way. Who, in 1900, could have predicted World War I? Who, at the end of World War I, could've predicted World War II? Who, in, you know, after the Cuban Missile Crisis [audio gap 05:03:49 - 05:04:26] but that often doesn't get you where you are, where you need to be.

Mr. Nik Gowing: So what's the [audio gap 05:04:33 - 05:04:43].

Mr. Robert Kaplan: --and read philosophy because someone like Isaiah Berlin or on another tack, Thomas Hobbes, are still incredibly relevant for what's going on in Africa, with ISIS, etcetera. Why is that? Because Hobbes said before you--order comes before freedom, because without order, there is no freedom for anybody. And that's why, in a way, the Americans have less to offer other people, because their systems of order were inherited from 18th century England, whereas a lot of places around the world have to reinvent legitimate systems of political order from scratch.

And Isaiah Berlin always believed in, you know, in the triumph or the need to preserve liberalism and not to fall into the trap of believing in totalizing ideologies. You know, he was always a voice of restraint and I think we need that more and more.

Mr. Nik Gowing: We had, yesterday, the budget commissioner up here, Madam Georgieva, and she was warning, at one point, about, "We have a tendency to close our eyes to things that are bad and pray that things will pass over our heads." And she then referred to, "It's like driving a car. Always looking in the rear mirror, thinking that's the way ahead."

Mr. Robert Kaplan: Well, it's ironic. I'll get back to this again. But the way to look forward is to know what happened backwards. Because what is the present, it's the sum total of everything that's happened up to this point in history. And if you understand everything that's happened or much of what has happened up to this point, you're more likely to see what's in front of you.

Mr. Nik Gowing: Nancy Lindborg has just dropped this line, this thought. Security and human rights are too often seen as a zero-sum game. Short-term urgency and public pressure result in security-focused solutions and investments, despite all evidence showing that the reduction of citizens' rights can further enflame extremism. How to tip the scale towards more even-handed responses?

Mr. Robert Kaplan: Well, I think people in the intelligence community deal with this all the time. Because democratic publics are notoriously fickle, you know, they want total revenge after a mass-casualty attack

and yet four months later, if there's not been a second attack, they say, "Why did you take such harsh and extreme measures?" So it's, you know, it's particularly the difficulty of people in the intelligence community and in the wider political community to thread that narrow gap between protecting people and protecting, you know, the liberal order at the same time.

Mr. Nik Gowing: I'm haunted by what Margaret MacMillan reminded us right at the beginning. And she wrote a brilliant book published last year on the start of World War I. Two years ago, actually--but talking about that five weeks which suddenly led to war. And I still think that both of us have been talking about this. It's chilling to listen to former Foreign Minister Ivanov sitting there yesterday warning about changes, not just radical but irreversible. About this possibility, inevitability almost, in his mind and his words, about this leading to a crisis like Cuba or the missile crisis of the '80s in Europe. Dangers of miscalculation, misunderstanding, lack of contact, no confidence-building measures, leading really to the potential of a true-- [audio gap 05:08:28 - 05:08:45]

Mr. Robert Kaplan: --China Sea. Because neither side wants it, both [audio gap 05:08:53 - 05:09:21] China sea involving, you know, some of the world's leading economies. Or in the Korean-- [audio gap 05:09:26 - 05:09:37]

Mr. Nik Gowing: --that he was indicating could lead to something like this, that really, there is no confidence of even contact between NATO and Moscow. I mean, that's going back to the dark ages.

Mr. Robert Kaplan: Well, I don't know if there's no contact. I think the Obama Administration's in constant contact with the Russians at this moment. The question is, what is the quality of that content? Are they, you know, are they just lecturing each other or is there a real back-channel exchange of, you know, views that--and ways of de-conflicting things?

Mr. Nik Gowing: Just before I ask Robert for his last thought, does anyone got one theme that they'd like to put on the agenda, which we maybe haven't, in any way, raised? There are three hands going up. Remember that Robert nor I have any responsibility for any policy, just give us [audio gap 05:10:29 - 05:10:39].

Male Audience Member: --now is the lack of trust in--

Mr. Robert Kaplan: [audio restart 05:11:44] --populist anxiety. I recently spent a month driving across the United States just listening to people in small and medium-sized towns. And what I noticed, visually [audio skip 05:11:54] who were drifting upwards into the upper-middle, wine-sipping, global--near poverty, you know, existence where there's no protection [audio skip 05:12:05] in the United States [audio skip 05:12:06] completely, the populism in the U.S., you know, to it in Britain under Jeremy

Corbin, in Hungary under Viktor Orbán and [audio skip 05:12:18] with the niceties, the classiness, you know, the politeness of normal politics.

Mr. Nik Gowing: What about that tension that are highlighted by the trade representative yesterday and the discussion with Google and everything else? The amazing potential for technology. We heard it from James with all the stuff from the McKinsey Global Institute. Yet, the real backlash for the workers who feel their jobs are threatened and in this [audio skip 05:12:40] comes down to the leadership problem [audio gap 05:12:43 - 05:12:51].

Mr. Robert Kaplan: --identities, like in the futile era, you're going to have a Europe of city states and region states that's going to partially be able to pick up the slack from the European Union. And that's going to be energized to a significant degree by technology. But technology is value-neutral, as I said yesterday. It can be used by terrorist organizations, others, to create not just a monochrome, radical Islam but like in the 1990s and earlier, a monochrome-radical Hinduism, you know, that energized the Hindu Nationalist movement for instance. All that would not have been possible without the current age of technology.

What is terrorism? It's this form of--it's a particular form of violence [audio gap 05:13:41 - 05:13:59].

Female Audience Member: --and the youth bubble in the Muslim world. And he predicted this in 1993, yet we're still stumbling through all of this. But we have a new aspect of ambiguity because we have China, you know, kind of doing salami slicing in the South China Sea and the U.S. doesn't know how to respond.

Mr. Nick Gowing: And so the theme is?

Female Audience Member: And the theme is these three issues of ambiguity, disorder and how this is all going to work out between Russia, China and at the time, this destruction of the Muslim world and all of these issues that are kind of creating three different pillars. Thank you.

Mr. Robert Kaplan: I can--

Mr. Nik Gowing: Okay. So the world's always been like that but is it much worse now?

Mr. Robert Kaplan: Well, actually, when you read, not the article, but the full book that came after of Samuel Huntington, the clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order, his main theme was that the [audio gap 05:14:49 - 05:15:01] the stage in it. And one of [audio gap 05:15:03 - 05:15:10] over the world that would reflect people, you know, local values the same way that Fox News or you know, MSNBC reflected American parochial values and that all came true.

There is--it's not so much a clash of civilizations. I call it the clash of artificially reconstructed civilizations, because what's happened is as globalization has created a mass cosmopolitanism specific, you know, identities have to be recreated in more radical, you know, austere and artificial forms as, you know, a kind of compensation. And that's where you get ISIS and a lot of other things.

Mr. Nik Gowing: Sam Huntington was right. Look at the MGI map yesterday which James had showing the center of gravity moving back towards the East.

Mr. Robert Kaplan: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Nik Gowing: Please.

Female Audience Member: Yeah, the theme I want to put back on the table I've heard are foreign as interesting is the issue of inequality and its intergenerational aspects. We've heard this morning youth variously described as victims or villains and really it's a question, what can we do to bring back agency because I'm really feeling a sense of fatalism in the face a growing youth population that are not going to have jobs. And we see already inequality testing the very limits of our democratic societies.

Mr. Nik Gowing: Don't go away from here depressed.

Mr. Robert Kaplan: Actually when it comes to Europe I'm cautiously optimistic because I think the EU will survive and the partial replacement will be what I said earlier about city state and all of that.

Mr. Nik Gowing: But she's talking youth, the next generation.

Mr. Robert Kaplan: Youth, yeah and with youth I think what's going to happen, one of the challenges is the information economy leads to, you know, not everyone can adapt to it. It rewards certain people, you know much better than others and jobs have to be found because if you're not going to have jobs you're going to radical movements.

Mr. Nik Gowing: But what do you say to the person who's got a first class honors degree who can't get a job?

Mr. Robert Kaplan: That leads to radicalism as well. I don't have a solution for that. I mean that, you know that is happening. It will happen. It has happened.

Mr. Nik Gowing: All right. Okay. What about the one big idea this last moment, Robert before we all depart, about the problem between departments and skills and the challenges now of how to bring together governments departments who are not talking to each other. We heard from the intelligence from the Belgian foreign minister that intelligence departments are very good at gathering intelligence but not even sharing it with governments or within their own government.

Mr. Robert Kaplan: The enormity and the scale and the depth of the change, you know, which translates into disorder will need, means that national governments will be in a competition with each other to adapt. You know it's almost like we know about the fight for human ingenuity among individuals. It will human ingenuity about--between national governments in terms of which can bureaucratically reform and reduce vertical stove piping. Remember the current U.S. system came about at the turn of the 20th century. Particularly with the Teddy Roosevelt administration when most of the government departments that we're familiar with now were first created in their current form. And the gilded age was a time of tremendous stress and change with tremendous inequalities. So you know, the American system, the bureaucratic system coped with that. It also coped at the end World War II with the creation of NATO and the United Nations and other organizations. We're at that point where there has to be, you know, another generation of institutional and bureaucratic change that I believe will go horizontal rather than vertical.

Mr. Nik Gowing: All right that's the message to take forward. We hope we've crystalized for you whatever thoughts, observations, analysis that you had from wherever you've been in the last 48 hours. Thank you to you for staying to listen to this. Thank you Karen for inviting all of us to partake in this incredible brainstorming with the most wonderful attendees as well. Thank you.

Mr. Robert Kaplan: Thank you.

Ms. Karen Donfried: Well, I want to thank Nik and Robert for being our intellectual guides through the weekend and distilling the many ideas that were generated over the weekend. And Robert you actually brought into the conversation my favorite philosopher Isaiah Berlin. And as you were talking about Berlin and quoting various things from him, I was thinking about the wonderful essay he wrote about the fox and the hedgehog. And I thought that [audio gap 05:20:41 - 05:20:48]. Give you a sampling through the plenary sessions, the night owls. That's sort of fox like. You scamper a lot of territory and learn a little bit about a lot subjects. But then through other formats like the dinners, try to give a deeper dive and burrow in the way the hedgehog does on certain subjects. And I appreciated you reminding me of that essay.

But you also Robert [audio gap 05:21:13 - 05:21:26]. At the note she ended, which is yes maybe we stumbled into a war in 1914 and maybe we could stumble into war in 2016. But she ended by saying avoid complacency. So her point is that we do have agency. And let's think about the positive changes we've all experienced in our lifetimes. The Europe that we currently stand in was divided in our lifetimes, in my lifetime. And how did that change? Because people took action. People like all of you. After World War II it was people who said, "We don't want that again and we're going to create a European community," which is today European Union. If we care about that liberal international order that has



been created since the end of World War II, it's on us. So I don't think there should be a fatalism about where we end.

But it is taking action and avoiding complacency. So that would be my note to end on. But to create Brussels forum it does take a village and I think you've all seen that village at work over this weekend. We have an incredible set of partners who make this possible. And I want to just again share with you who those partners are and give them thanks.

We have our founding partners, Daimler and the federal authorities of Belgium. We have our strategic partner Deloitte. We have our foreign partners Google, BP, the OCP Policy Center, UPS. We have our associate partners, the Assan Institute [audio gap 05:23:08 - 05:23:11] Latvian Ministry of Defense, NATO and the Wilfried Martens Center. And as all of you enjoyed last night we had lots of wonderful dinner sponsors who got us out across Brussels.

And I also want to give a special note of thanks to our congressional delegation, Senator Shaheen, Senator Sessions, Congressman Turner. It was really great to have their voices in this election year in the United States. And as you know I get to stand up here, but I'm representing an incredible group of colleagues at the German Marshall Fund and an equally and incredible group of volunteers who have helped us throughout this weekend. And there are far too many people to mention. But I do want to mention two and that is the incredible Nicola Lightner and our man on the ground Ian Lesser here in Brussels. And on that note of gratitude to so many and all of you in the room who took the time this weekend to be with us, Brussels Forum 2016 is officially over. Thank you so much.