

Philip McDonagh, Brotéria, Lisbon, 4 May 2022

*Towards a Strategy for Transition in International Relations*

Introduction

I'm very grateful to Ambassador Ralph Victory and to Fr. Francisco and Brotéria for the opportunity to share some thoughts with you this evening. There's a well-known quotation by the Irish-American writer Scott Fitzgerald:

The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.

I only recently discovered that the quotation continues as follows:

One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.

Scott Fitzgerald's reflections on hope in the midst of opacity are a good place to begin as we look at Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the horrors that have followed, and the risk of a further downward spiral. Even in this dark situation we must look for signs of light. That is the spirit in which I offer these reflections on the future of Europe and of international relations. They are no more than my own personal opinions, and they are tentative. We will have time for questions and dialogue.

My plan is as follows.

First, I will set out briefly my personal perspective on the situation in Ukraine.

Second, I will look beyond the war in Ukraine to offer an account of the global context.

Third, I will argue that the pandemic reminds us of the vulnerability of our lives on this planet and the expectation among ordinary people that political activity should be directed towards the building of community.

Fourth, I will discuss one global issue in particular, the ethics of preparing for war.

Finally, I will return to the situation in Europe and offer some specific ideas based on my experience of the CSCE and the OSCE and of the Northern Ireland peace process.

#### 1. My guiding ideas

My guiding policy ideas in the present situation in Europe can be summed up as follows. On all sides we should stop looking for tactical advantage, stop escalating, and instead initiate negotiations without preconditions. In this respect, there is scope for a European initiative. As well as restoring the relationship between Ukraine and Russia, we need to form an image in our minds of a continent at peace from Lisbon to Vladivostok. The role played by Turkey in mediating between the sides can be an asset.

We should look on the sundering of relationships, not in the light of World War II, but in the perspective of the Helsinki Final Act and its promises. As an integral part of peacemaking we should initiate new and well-resourced negotiating processes along the lines of the original CSCE. These processes should build on the SDGs and connect to global issues.

Finally, there is no avoiding the coming together here and now of former enemies. This was key to the development of the European Union and on a smaller scale, of the Northern Ireland peace process.

## 2. Today's global situation

There are many different ways to frame today's global situation.

Pope Francis and the UN Secretary General describe a form of political entropy. In 2015, Pope Francis stated in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*: 'We can see signs that things are now reaching a breaking point ... the present world system is certainly unsustainable from a number of points of view ... Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain...' (*Laudato Si'*, 2015). The UN Secretary-General, in his document *Our Common Agenda* (September 2021), suggests that "humanity faces a stark and urgent choice: breakdown or breakthrough."

Climate change and the responsibility it imposes on all of us can serve as a single lens through which to view the world. The report released on 28 February by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is a yet another milestone.

Here in Europe, the war in Ukraine is in the foreground. Apart from the unbearable suffering it brings to millions of people, the war threatens to disrupt food supplies and almost every other aspect of global stability and cooperation. The more money spent on arms, the less money for anything else.

Graham Allison's bestselling book *Destined for War/Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap* (Allison, 2017) offers yet another perspective on 21<sup>st</sup> century history. The starting point for Allison's analysis is a famous sentence in Thucydides's account of the origins of the Peloponnesian War:

It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable  
(I 23)

For Allison, the US is Sparta and China Athens. Avoiding “Thucydides’s trap” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – that is, avoiding confrontation and war between the US and China – will require, as Allison puts it, “nothing less than bending the arc of history” (p. xx).

In the sphere of technology, we can point to many unanswered questions, including the fundamental question of who sets the rules on AI, synthetic biology, and in other key domains.

The rising population of the planet and migratory movements are further pressures. In 1900, the world population was about one and a half billion. By 2050, it will probably have grown to nine or ten billion.

Whether we start from Ukraine, climate change, the rise of China, political fragmentation, or other factors, we can agree, I think, that we have reached a dangerous point of inflection. In mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the League of Nations Covenant and then the UN Charter were designed to maintain peace and security among sovereign states. This challenging objective was easily understood. What is needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is more complex. Our task is to map and manage profound currents of change with planetary survival at stake. There’s a further fundamental difference between then and now. After each of the world wars, the alliance that won the war provided a core of decision-making authority within the new world body, at least for a time. Today, there is no clear pattern of this kind. The Security Council is divided. Its permanent membership no longer fully represents the forces in play. The number of sovereign states has risen to close to 200. Often the real power rests with private business interests.

In the 1970s, there were signs that a broader approach to peacebuilding might take root. It proved possible to negotiate the Helsinki Final Act as the alternative to a formal treaty ending World War II in Europe. As participating States in the CSCE, we committed ourselves to “cooperating in the interest of mankind.” The three “baskets” of the CSCE set out a regional work program corresponding to the three main work streams at the UN: security, development, and human rights. Fifty years on, despite the excellent work done by the UN in specialized fields, and

despite the negotiation of the sustainable development goals in 2015, we are far removed from a shared political purpose at the global level. Not only this, there is a risk that in mobilizing or organizing public opinion for conflict, we will find it increasingly difficult to warn against military escalation or to follow a long-term agenda of global peacebuilding.

When I talk to friends about these facts, the conversation tends to move in either of two directions. At the Centre in Dublin City University where I am Director, we have a module for graduate students which looks at the role played by high-level values in international relations. Our cohort of students remain focused on the need for a broad transition at the global level with a strong ethical dimension. Central to their thinking is climate change, one of several “problems without passports,” to borrow a phrase from a former UN Secretary General. For our students, the sustainable development goals represent, in embryo, a medium-term plan for humanity. They believe in the vision of the Schuman Declaration: “the peace of the world cannot be maintained without creative efforts commensurate with the scale of the threat.”

When I raise the question of a possible “point of inflection’ with my own contemporaries, I sometimes encounter a less hopeful reading of our situation than among the students. Many people argue that the Russian invasion of Ukraine changes everything. They think of tectonic plates on the move and are prepared for an earthquake in which multilateralism as we know it may no longer function. I find that this school of thought has some of its roots in the expectations nurtured in English-speaking universities in the 1990s – Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history,” Joseph Nye’s definitions of “hard power” and “soft power,” the debate between “realists” and “idealists”, and Philip Bobbitt’s vision of the “market state” which achieves democratic legitimacy for the harnessing of new forms of military power. Among these writers, there is relatively little questioning of underlying political premises.

Against this background, it is not surprising that a picture now comes to mind of an epochal struggle with the US and the European Union on one side and Russia and perhaps China on the other, with the paradigm of World War II as a point of reference and pressure on every other

country to take sides. In practice, an “epochal struggle” means, first, that there will no peace agreement in Ukraine in the real sense of the word. Second, the goal of degrading the Russian economy and punishing Russian individuals may compromise the basic conditions for global diplomacy, at least for several years to come. An epochal struggle means, third, that finance, trade, technology, regulation, access to resources, communications, academic cooperation and all other aspects of global interdependence will be seen for the foreseeable future through the lens of national security and competition between nation States. Governments that used to insist on the independence of civil society are now calling for discipline in a battle fought on all fronts.

A teacher of mine used to say, “never turn a distinction into a dichotomy.” We can oppose calls for an end to dialogue in the light of high-level values including a recognition of our common humanity:

... we do pray for mercy;  
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
The deeds of mercy ...  
(Merchant of Venice, Act 4)

If we don’t want to rely on Shakespeare, fortunately we can also turn to certain stubborn facts to help soften the differences between those two visions of the future – a medium-term plan for humanity versus an epochal struggle.

Humanitarian corridors have been opened in the present war, though not to a sufficient extent. There have been “windows of silence” – temporary truces – in Eastern Ukraine since 2014. It is broadly agreed that nuclear installations should be protected. Prisoners have been exchanged. We should see greater efforts to protect civilians. Some categories of weapon have not been used. The supply of weapons to Ukraine that will flow from the recent Ramstein meeting will presumably respect the NPT. The US and the Russian Federation are still, it seems, working together on Iran. The hotline between Washington and Moscow could lead to broader confidence and security building measures. The basic point is that constructive relationships

rarely wholly vanish even in the midst of a crisis. We can always pursue confidence-building measures.

Equally relevant, if we want to avoid turning a distinction into a dichotomy, is the inconsistency at the heart of the so-called liberal order. The US, the UK and others have broken international law in a deeply damaging way in Iraq and elsewhere, as the Lord Chief Justice of England Tom Bingham points out in his book *The Rule of Law*. There are other inconsistencies as well. The US is not a member of the International Criminal Court. Under the so-called Washington consensus western countries have sought to exempt corporations from the jurisdiction of national courts. Crucial areas of economic activity remain more or less beyond the reach of democratic politics, including, arguably, the entire sphere of monetary policy. In many countries, it is remembered that until the Second World War, the European powers and the United States believed that other parts of the world, often referred to as the “uncivilized world,” could legitimately be ruled or reorganized by what we call “the West.” If we were sitting in China this evening, we might well be asking the awkward question whether some leading western countries are still tempted to impose a self-referential moral code on others, using new concepts.

It is essential to avoid a psychological disposition in which the contrast with others is the main source of meaning in politics. That would bring the equivalent of populism into the realm of foreign policy. The European Union has demonstrated a different approach in the past. What has happened between France and Germany and Germany and Poland can happen in other parts of Europe as well.

### 3. The planetary future: our *speculum gentium*

I turn now to the third part of my argument. Post-pandemic, there is an expectation among ordinary people that political activity should be directed towards the building of community. The UN Secretary-General’s document “Our Common Agenda” speaks of renewing the “social contract” between governments and their peoples and correcting how we measure economic

prosperity and progress. At this moment of openness to change, it is important to nurture an intercultural dialogue through which to create better conditions for concrete decisions in the future. This is the subject of our co-authored book *On the Significance of Religion for Global Diplomacy*. Forgive me if I offer only a few broad indications of what we mean.

The Islamic thinker Avicenna develops the powerfully enabling idea that the potential evolution of any political situation is always more far-reaching than what is immediately “possible”. To use a modern example, the “latent potential” to build airplanes was, in some sense, always there. But airplanes only became “possible” as a result of several intervening scientific and experimental breakthroughs. On this analogy, there are steps we can take now in the realm of orientation and methodology that will prepare the way for future change. We must find the courage to believe, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer believed during the darkest days of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that “something new can be born that is not discernible in the alternatives of the present.”

Our thesis is that to help unlock the potential of the future, we can develop “*axioms of the historical imagination*” to provide a common criterion of evaluation across cultures and from one situation to another. Acting in the light of common axioms creates community even among people and groups who never interact directly. This deepening of the historical imagination would mean a cultural change in global politics. I think of the emancipation of women as a precedent. In our book we discuss the Axial Age, when more accountable forms of government emerged in roughly the same period in Israel, Persia, Greece, India, and China.

Fernando Pessoa complains in *The Book of Disquiet* (391) that neither mathematics nor metaphysics can directly resolve practical problems. We propose the following axioms which belong neither to mathematics nor to metaphysics:

- we should examine the patterns of our behaviour in the light of all that we ought to know and can know



- we should ‘image’ or visualise peace as the rightful possession of the human community as a whole
- we should identify and explore the factors that accompany healing in a wounded social structure
- we should recognise that the starting position for political deliberation is inevitably non-ideal
- discernment in the midst of opacity in accordance with a common standard should become a core value in the conduct of international relations
- we should give expression to a changing diplomatic culture through new frameworks of engagement

In the light of these axioms, international organizations should use their convening power to bring about new, multilayered consultative processes, inclusive of the representatives of faith communities, as an extra dimension within the wider project of making multilateral diplomacy fit-for-purpose. New consultative processes will require a new style of negotiating mandate aimed at a distinctive diplomatic “product”. This “product” will be a combination of (i) the gradual definition of new criteria or points of agreement to govern the conduct of international relations; and (ii) confidence-building measures (CBMs) with *demonstration value* in the perspective of a future “age of sharing” at the global level. Our axioms point towards an “anthropological” development over the coming decades – a global humanism founded on a broad understanding of the scope of reason and a richer understanding of the meaning of freedom.

In the ancient Greek world, philosophers or religious thinkers would deliver speeches before kings or emperors or write to them, setting out a vision of kingship or the ideal king that amounted to constructive criticism. Seneca, addressing his *De Clementia* to the emperor Nero, is the first writer to describe such a work as a mirror. The literary genre in question became known as “mirrors for princes,” *principum specula*. Our axioms are an attempt at creating a mirror for today, not for a king but for the participants in a “multi-stakeholder dialogue” about our global

future. I call this mirror a *speculum gentium*, “a mirror for the peoples.” The word *gentes*, or “peoples”, echoes the opening phrase of the UN Charter, “we the peoples of the United Nations.” By offering our mirror to peoples instead of princes, we make it clear that our shared future is the responsibility of citizens and civic society as well as governments.

#### 4. The ethics of preparing for war

An important example of a cultural or anthropological development would be to return to the spirit of the UN Charter and call into question the ethics of preparing for war. I am speaking here of war in general, not only the particular questions raised by the possession of nuclear weapons.

Early in Thucydides’ history, the Spartan King Archidamus, who wants to avoid war, argues that “wisdom consists in large part a sense of shame.” This sense of shame or hesitation (*aidōs*) is contrasted with the rising anger (*orgē*) that leads the Spartans to reject Archidamus’s advice and begin the Peloponnesian War. In Thucydides’ account of the civil war at Corcyra, a “far-seeing hesitation” (*epimellēsis promēthēs*) is a centrally important value closely related to divine law, religious reverence, the sacred, and the shared laws that offer hope to all. The Thucydidean virtue of hesitation anticipates the *Heuristik der Furcht* (“heuristics of fear”) developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Hans Jonas. For Jonas, an appropriate hesitation in exploiting technology accompanies a heightened sense of planetary awareness.

The consistent implication of Thucydides’ history is that the restoration of *inhibition* should be a key objective in the life of citizen-states and in inter-state relations. Today, dealing with emerging issues in such fields as AI, cyber, synthetic biology and the development of weapons, we may lose our way if we rely only on abstract, discursive reasoning. There are circumstances in which the sheer “enormity” of what is proposed, the abandonment of a human scale, should make us hesitate. In *Fratelli Tutti* Pope Francis states: ‘It is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a “just war”’ (258). The Pope then asks us not to “remain mired in theoretical discussion” but to “touch the wounded flesh of

the victims” and to “grasp the abyss of evil at the heart of war” (261). The virtue of hesitation can be applied very usefully in a situation like this.

We can combine a sense of inhibition with discursive reasoning by applying traditional “just war” criteria such as moral detachment, right intention, legitimacy, proportionality, the protection of non-combatants, and likelihood of success to military policy in the round as well as to individual military actions. A future jurisprudence on preparations for war – let us call it *ius ad bellum parandum* – could address, for example:

1. the scale of defence expenditure in comparison with other expenditures
2. the specific tasks for which we are developing civilian and military capabilities
3. the use of military spending to promote economic interests, including private economic interests
4. the relationship between economic sanctions and the threat of force (which is forbidden under international law)
5. the role of espionage, including espionage for commercial purposes
6. the place of weapons development and surveillance technology within the wider question of how technological change impacts on human experience
7. the arms trade
8. developing credible mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of disputes and for negotiating disarmament as provided for in UN Charter
9. broadening our conception of national service.

In the days of the Spanish empire, theologians attempted to mitigate the effects of war by establishing criteria that are invoked today as an antecedent to the concept of humanitarian intervention. I cannot put out of mind, however, that the same theologians failed to outlaw the transatlantic slave trade. In the background is Aristotle’s definition directly linking the concept of a “just war” to the doctrine of the “natural slave” (*Politics* 1256 b 24):

The art of war will by nature be an art of acquisition that is properly employed both against wild animals and against humans designed by nature for subjection who refuse to submit to it; this warfare is by nature just.

## 5. Europe 2022

I come now to the last part of my talk concerning the situation in Europe and my experience of the CSCE and the OSCE and of the Northern Ireland peace process.

In December, which now seems a long time ago, the 57 participating States of the OSCE decided that Finland will exercise the OSCE chairmanship in 2025. Throughout the region, we were ready to restate our commitment to “the letter, the model, and the spirit of Helsinki,” as described by Finland’s President Niinistö before the chairmanship vote. President Niinistö also stated: “We are looking at ways to combine the Helsinki Spirit approach with the Our Common Agenda process at the United Nations.” The ambition of the OSCE at that moment was to open a door to preparations for a transformative all-European Summit on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2025. Such a Summit was to become a regional building block, even the cornerstone, in the revival of global diplomacy. As the pandemic eased, the horizon of Helsinki plus 50 would liberate energies and ideas. A broad-based dialogue on the “grand challenges” of our time would assist all states in the OSCE region to build responsive societies.

I am aware, of course, that discussions in the OSCE are largely stalled at present. The Special Monitoring Mission in Eastern Ukraine has ended. It is difficult to see how the OSCE can, as it were, lift itself off the ground and take important decisions over the coming months. On the other hand, I recall Pope Francis’s reflections in his address to the Council of Europe a few years ago:

If [conflict] paralyses us, we lose perspective, our horizons shrink, and we grasp only a part of reality. When we fail to move forward in a situation of conflict, we lose our sense of the profound unity of reality, we halt history, and we become enmeshed in useless disputes.

I believe there is still scope for a transformative initiative at the regional level, and that the inspiration for this can come from within the European Union. Earlier this year, President Macron called for a “European proposal” aimed at a new “security and stability order.” A possible way forward is for Member States of the European Union, working with other friends of multilateralism, to use the forthcoming 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2025, “Helsinki plus 50,” to initiate a process that would look something like the beginnings of the CSCE in 1972. In the military sphere, the “first basket” in CSCE terms, the European Union does not have to replicate NATO’s capabilities in any near-term future. Across other dimensions of the former CSCE, the European Union and its member States have the ability and the resources to lead. A new Treaty later in the decade, based on a comprehensive approach to security, and transcending the present OSCE, can give the European Union a universally recognised position within the wider Europe. The key to this would be to resolve two questions that have been unresolved over decades: first, the legal personality of any wider European structures; and second, the place within those structures of the European Union itself – as opposed to 27 supposedly sovereign and equal participating States.

At this liminal moment, we in the European Union can make an important contribution to peace by reflecting in a spirit of critical self-awareness on three issues that have disempowered European diplomacy over the last two decades. These are: first, the tension between different paradigms of security; second, a loss of focus on the Helsinki principles; and third, Afghanistan, understood as a case-study in how we have collectively taken a wrong turn since the end of the Cold War.

The Helsinki process – since 1994, the OSCE– has sought to build confidence and trust across a range of common concerns while promoting transparency and disengagement in the military sphere. Security according to this paradigm is “indivisible”. A paradigm of security based on deterrence is not the same thing as an OSCE-style “security community.” Since the 1990s, concerns have consistently been raised about the marginalisation of the OSCE by NATO. In particular, the Russian perspective was taken seriously by the independent panel of eminent persons whose recommendations in 2005 for the reform of the OSCE can still become an impartial point of reference on all sides. In the Helsinki Final Act we committed ourselves to taking “measurable steps” towards general and complete disarmament under effective international control. Finding a new balance between differing paradigms of security will necessitate generous confidence-building measures on all sides.

At the recent OSCE Ministerial meeting, it was asserted by key speakers that the ten principles of the Helsinki Final Act “are not open to interpretation or negotiation.” In fact, the Helsinki Final Act states: “All the principles ... are of primary significance ... each of them being interpreted taking into account the others.” The Helsinki principles have, in effect, been over-ridden in the present war in Ukraine. If, however, the Russian Federation were prepared to examine future options in the perspective of CSCE principles, the European Union should acknowledge that this is not the first time the principles have been called into question. Even setting aside the war in Yugoslavia in 1999, overall EU policy towards the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union involved an interpretation, in the light of other principles, of Principle IV concerning the territorial integrity of states. The recognition of the new state of Kosovo involved a further interpretation. The day-to-day role played by military alliances and (de facto) by the European Union within the OSCE entails an interpretation (welcome, but nevertheless an interpretation) of Principle I concerning “sovereign equality.” When a previous EU High Representative came in person to address the crowd in the Maidan in Kyiv, she was interpreting Principle VI concerning non-intervention in internal affairs. At face value, Principle IX obliges OSCE participating States to “develop their cooperation” across a number of named sectors. Despite this, there has been an

influential view within the European Union that we should cooperate in the OSCE only in areas in which the OSCE has “comparative advantage” – again, an interpretation of the principles.

The third area in which European diplomacy is disempowered is in relation to the unhappy history of Afghanistan since the signature of the Helsinki Final Act. In 1979, the Soviet invasion was decided in Moscow without (it is said) full consideration of the consequences. One immediate outcome was to undermine the economic dimension of the CSCE. In 1989, at the first ever meeting between a Soviet Foreign Minister and Foreign Ministers of the European Community as a group, Moscow’s core objective was to start a political dialogue on Afghanistan. We turned the Russians down. At the time, the British and US intelligence services were busy arming the *mujahideen*. Today, after so much suffering on all sides, with millions of Afghans on the brink of famine, what lessons have been learned?

If we in the European Union want to resume diplomacy with Moscow, a first step could be to examine the historical record with humility – concerning the points mentioned above, the understandings that were in place in 1990, the scale of military budgets since the end of the Cold War, our reluctance in the period leading up to 2013 to engage with the Eurasian Economic Union, the events of 2014, and the obstacles on different sides to the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

## 6. Northern Ireland

I turn finally to our experience of the Northern Ireland peace process. In Ireland, our historical experience enables us to empathise with the situation in which Ukraine finds itself in relation to its larger neighbour.

In the century since the Anglo–Irish Treaty, Ireland has been careful not to pose a military threat to Britain. Our then Foreign Minister drew attention to this commitment in the UN Security Council during the Cuban missile crisis.

Irish governments have fought to preserve the common travel area across the two islands along with many other special arrangements. As long as both Ireland and Britain were Member States of the European Union, we used the wider European rapprochement to relativize the differences among ourselves on our two islands. In areas such as intermarriage, sport, literature, and the media we have protected what is good in Anglo-Irish relations without this being cast as a betrayal.

Regarding the partition of the island, we have sought to “light a candle instead of cursing the darkness.” In particular, we have encouraged innovative forms of political and cultural pluralism in Northern Ireland. The question of re-unifying territory has been left open.

My suggestion, then, is to borrow some ideas from our Irish experience to support Ukraine in its relations with Russia while at the same time moving towards a situation in which the European Union’s relations with Ukraine and Russia are less of a zero-sum game as seen from Moscow.

Perhaps the most important lesson of all from the Northern Ireland situation is that it is never the wrong time to start working for peace, even with those who are involved in illegitimate violence. According to Friedrich Hölderlin in his novel *Hyperion*, “reconciliation begins in the midst of strife.” When I accompanied our Nobel Prize winner John Hume to visit the Tamil Tigers in the jungle in Sri Lanka, I heard from John himself his deep conviction that hearts change and positions evolve in the course of a genuine dialogue.

### Conclusion

When Thucydides sets out to describe the great conflict of his time, he begins by describing four hundred years of development. He then explores a period of fifty years between the end of the Persian Wars and the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. Only then does he turn to the immediate circumstances of the outbreak of war. To understand historical events in their full



significance, we need to look into the past and to “image” the future. The broader the geographical canvas and the longer the historical time-scale, the harder it becomes to see any one situation as pivotal or to assess “proportionality” in the use of force.

Situational awareness equally requires a grasp of political complexity. Under Pericles, Athens made peace with the Persian Empire, cooperated with feudal monarchies such as Macedon, and reached an accommodation with Sparta, despite Sparta’s famously inflexible political model. Pericles was famous for thinking beyond the inherited assumptions of his own society; his friends were persecuted for this in the courts. Pericles’s emphasis on the *quality of relationships* as the basis of politics is a potential bridge to Chinese and Indian political philosophy. Thucydides memorializes this moment in history. He blames the successors of Pericles for many things, but above all for their violence and their inability to dialogue with others. Following the defeat and decline of Athens, the democratic ideal went silent in Europe for the next two thousand years.

For Thucydides, the greatness of people’s suffering (*pathēmata*) is the main reason for researching and recording history. His account of the first great sea-battle of the conflict is full of military and diplomatic detail. Both sides in the battle claim victory. What remains in our minds, however, is not political analysis, but a picture: “the dead bodies carried out by the current and by a wind which rose in the night and scattered them in all directions.”

Even as the world he grew up in breaks down around him, Thucydides does not despair. Like his contemporary Socrates, he looks at what is happening and seeks to discover what he can do about it. To tell the truth about history is compared by Thucydides to doctors keeping medical records during a pandemic: it is a mode of resistance and an expression of hope. We should bring the same spirit to peacebuilding in our own time.