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**Opening Session**

***“Natural Assaults and European Security  
in an Ecozoic Era”***

*Remarks of  
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*I thank the organizers for affording me this time in this important O.S.C.E. forum.  
I've tried to frame these views with care, in meter and in rhyme, and hope that this won't violate decorum.  
Though I am an advisor at the Institute of Peace, the views that I express are just my own.  
I only hope that as the risks from habitats increase, the views expressed will not be mine alone.*

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The future of the planet has been coming into view, and various scenarios are forming.  
Trends are now in motion we no longer can undo from population growth and global warming.  
In just a generation, we will add two billion persons, and warm up by another two degrees.  
And as these trends continue, and the situation worsens, more and more of us will feel the squeeze.

Our habitat increasingly presents us with the clues that humans are at ever greater risk;  
And every week some expert body warns us on the News, or stark reports on Web or compact disc.  
The I.P.C.C. helps distill the evidence from science, its last Report especially emphatic;  
Despite its cautious tone and its empirical reliance, the human implications are dramatic.  
The gist is that new stresses will bring larger-scale eruptions, disasters will increase in scale and scope.  
Causing social strains and more political disruptions, and challenging all governments to cope.

And yet, the general public seems disturbingly detached, and governments contribute to the drift;  
Until these risks and peoples' sense of urgency are matched, priorities will not begin to shift.  
Societies will try to be resilient, stern and stoic, emphasizing basic self-reliance.  
And when resilience falters, people often are heroic, responding to disasters with defiance.  
The U.N. and the World Bank press Disaster Risk Reduction, and plan a conference next year in Japan;  
And U.N. OCHA tries to lead relief and reconstruction, as more disasters overwhelm their plan.

Yet, while we try to focus on resilience and relief, and batten down the hatches of Manhattan,  
The surging seas will likely bring more coastal zones to grief, where there may not be hatches left to batten.  
The scale of new assaults will breach both stoic and heroic, and overwhelm this normal kind of focus;  
We're entering an era that we might call "ecozoic", when many people have to shift their locus.

This era will transform how our security is felt, as people are compelled to face the facts.  
For, as we come to recognize the hand that we have dealt, our fate will hinge on how each state reacts.  
It's time that we acknowledge what the data represents, and where the dangers are most existential.  
It's time that we think harder of unthinkable events, in order to reduce their worst potential.

I do not make this argument to call for mitigation; I don't think things will change soon just by pleading.

The Population/Climate train already left the station; our chance to stop more train wrecks is receding.

### Cold War Precedent?

These days we are distracted by the Russian intervention, dressed up in a strange Eurasian rubric;  
A product of nostalgia for that Stalinist pretension: *Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik*.

Yet, nothing that this current dangerous crisis represents, short of major nuclear exchange,  
Can match the size and scale of coming natural events, whose impacts will uproot and rearrange.

I came of age, like many here, with Cold War expectations, we lived with many narratives of gloom;  
Superpower conflicts through mistakes or escalations were captured in scenarios of doom.  
No one then suggested that such guesswork was too tough: or too far-fetched, too dire or depressing;  
A one-in-twenty likelihood was likelihood enough to prompt elaborate planning and assessing.

More recently, Dick Cheney even further stretched that math; he said that to protect our nation's treasures,  
Odds of even one per cent should justify our wrath, and vindicate "extraordinary measures".  
Does anybody really think the chances are that low, of super-storms, pandemics, massive quakes?  
Should we not anticipate the ways that things could go, and gauge not just percentage risks but stakes?  
In fact, the point of working on scenarios like these, is not to scare us into indecision,  
But rather by converging our ideas and expertise, they help us to steer clear of a collision.

Nearly forty years ago, and as the Cold War raged, and nuclear deployments were intense,  
Up north in Helsinki a large conference was staged, with governments from both sides of the fence.  
Divisions seemed unbridgeable, alliances were fixed, and public expectations then were low;  
And yes, Helsinki's overall accomplishments were mixed, and many people said "I told you so!"

Critics thought the documents were diplomatic caskets that froze forever World War II aggression.  
The final statements organized as principles in baskets, which only seemed to overlook oppression.  
But over time the value of Helsinki's Final Act, crystallized within a declaration,  
Was how it represented a pan-European pact, a kind of manifesto in gestation.

Rather than a typical rhetorical endeavor, a meaningless political exchange,  
Basket Three became a kind of democratic lever, a rally point for movements bent on change.  
A source of solidarity and grass-roots innovation, for human rights and other points like those.  
A form of "higher power" that transcended every nation, and helped to bring the Cold War to a close.

### A New Helsinki?

So, as the O.S.C.E. now approaches middle age, forty years beyond that Final Act;  
Maybe it is time for it to turn another page, and contemplate another type of pact.  
As we confront the prospect of huge natural assaults, and challenges from heat, disease and weather,  
We can't afford our pattern of decisions by defaults; we need some tools to tie our fates together.

Europe should again prepare for existential pressures, and find the terms for future solidarity.  
It ought to set its sights upon these ecozoic stressors, assessing risks and remedies with clarity.  
By framing local challenges as European choices, citizens may see the larger trend;  
Making hard decisions with the weight of wider voices sometimes makes them simpler to defend.

Basket One of course would be commitments to **resilience**, priorities related to endurance.  
Unlike rocket science this does not require brilliance, the elements are known with some assurance.  
Infrastructure hardening and popular awareness of plans for shelters and evacuations.  
And public health facilities that operate with fairness, when crises overwhelm our preparations.

Basket Two would emphasize commitments to **relief**, reaffirming ethics of assistance.  
Principles providing that when people come to grief, they still deserve a dignified existence.  
That implies increasing our capacity for aid, but also stronger standards for its use.  
Relief should not perpetuate bad choices people made; emergency should not be an excuse.

Basket Three will prove to be an even greater lift, the one that frames the needs for **relocation**.

This subject could provoke a very deep, divisive rift, involving fears of government dictation.  
So what we must ensure is that through data and debate, decisions will be based on frank discussions;  
Failure to find fairness when large numbers relocate, could foster very deadly repercussions.

I realize this proposal may seem far-fetched and naive, that governments and publics are not ready.  
Perhaps ten years will have to pass before we all believe, that change could be more radical than steady.

But certainly within ten years, before it is too late, and if, by then, this entity survives,  
We'd have a manifesto that affirms our common fate, for when that wider urgency arrives.

### **Containing Mother Nature?**

Perhaps we also need to find some guiding metaphor, some slogan that will motivate decisions.

A molder of morale as these assaults strike more and more, to transcend our political divisions.  
Americans would say we fought the Cold War by containment, building on the ideas of George Kennan.  
That was what, we say, our anti-Soviet campaign meant, to bottle up the threat from Marx and Lenin.

Should that be our mantra now: "Containing Planet Earth", by treating "Mother Nature" as the foe?

Should we see our habitat as hostile from our birth, and blame the planet for each fatal blow?

No, I don't think treating Mother Nature as the villain gets us to the changes that we need,  
There are no simple fixes, no quick shot of penicillin, and metaphors like that will not succeed.

Nature is indifferent to humanity's survival, we dare not treat our planet as the devil.

Assaults do not negotiate the terms of their arrival; the oceans won't dial down their rising level.

And Mother Earth will not address the danger of division among a human family in stress.

This ecozoic era calls for leadership and vision, and very human measures of success.

For I predict that sooner than some analysts suppose, these fateful facts will dawn upon the masses.

The era of avoidance will come sharply to a close before another passive decade passes.

And then, I fear, the danger is that we won't be prepared, to hold the bonds of decency together.

Peaceful people can revise their values when they're scared—and decency can change, just like the weather.

Indeed, what history shows is that we humans can be manic; we're subject to wide swings from peace to war.

Avoidance and complacency can also turn to panic, as humans have done many times before.

People won't be patient, once they fear for their survival, for ineffective words or vague designs.

This August marks a century since World War I's arrival, and that should send a shiver down our spines.

And so, rather than build a case for Mother Earth's arraignment, we should focus brainpower and passion,

In fashioning the frameworks for humanity's "**sustainment**": security through wisdom and compassion.

The prior generation somehow managed to foreclose the nuclear exchange that nearly stung us;

To undergo the massive changes nature will impose, the forces to contain are those among us.

## Crying Wolf?

Am I just Chicken Little, who proclaimed “The Sky is Falling,” and organized a march to tell the King?  
(An acorn struck her head and Chicken Little started bawling, before she checked the science of the thing.)  
Or maybe I sound like the Boy Who Cried “Wolf” immaturely, before the Wolf was really at the door,  
And thereby lost his audience, by warning prematurely, and lost the sheep that he was liable for.

Well, Chicken Little’s theory was unfounded and unvetted, her principal hypothesis was dumb;  
And crying Wolf too soon, while both short-sighted and regretted, simply came before its time had come.

No, I prefer the metaphor of Boston’s Paul Revere, a hero of American tradition.

Paul Revere was famous as a horse-back volunteer, to warn about a British expedition.

Paul’s battlefield scenarios were limited to two: one by land, the other one by sea.

The British troops were coming, that prediction was quite true; the question was just which route it would be.

We can’t be sure from place to place just which assaults will strike; both land and sea can mount severe attacks;

We can’t be sure what local people’s actions will be like, or how the wider human race reacts.

But as with Boston’s Minutemen, the danger signs are clear, the answer to the question can’t be neither.

The risks we see from land and sea will not just disappear, real lives depend on readiness for either.