

Thank you for this invitation to Cape Town...

City of my childhood...Bantry Bay ... Newlands... Muizenberg... Clifton... Camps Bay...Table Mountain... My grandfather cutting open a water melon...several brisk incisions then opening it like a flower...the fried kingklip for lunch...the crisp yellow peaches...(it's so reassuring that certain delicacies cannot go global).

My mother, whose birthday it was yesterday - she would have been 88 - was happy here. Uprooting to Britain was hard. She never quite managed it.

Memories..

I felt as an infant the I-might-drop-you hostility in a black maid's arms. I wondered at the blacks swimming in a filthy harbor when whites-only sand stretched for miles at Muizenberg. I began to understand, and detest, racism through some sort of osmosis. I caught the illicit glances as an adolescent, flirtation as crime. I listened to the meat-chomping justifications, bigotry dressed up as scientific theory.

Years later in Lagos, watching Fela Kuti in a disco where I was the only white among a thousand blacks, I understood the word "minority." The thing I've been most grateful for in journalism is the ability to cross lines, look at situations from every angle, try to reach an understanding. The blacks in South Africa weren't even a minority. They were a majority corralled into serfdom.

This place country taught me a lot.

I once mused in a column on where I would go if I knew I had a few weeks to live? I wrote that..I would go to Cape Town, to my grandfather's house, Duxbury, looking out over the railway line near Kalk Bay station to the ocean and the Cape of Good Hope. During my childhood, there was the scent of salt and pine and, in certain winds, a pungent waft from the fish processing plant in Fish Hoek. I would dangle a little net in rock pools and find myself hypnotized by the silky

water and quivering life in it. The heat, not the dry high-veld heat of Johannesburg but something denser, pounded by the time we came back from the beach at lunchtime. It reverberated off the stone, angled into every recess. The lunch table was set and soon enough fried fish would be served, so fresh it seemed to burst from its batter. At night the lights of Simon's Town glittered, a lovely necklace strung along a promontory.

Home in other words...

But we are here to speak of geopolitics...

Well, ladies and gentlemen...These are troubling times. They remind me of the famous old Jewish cable:

Start worrying. Details to follow.

I will try not to depress you too much.

What Trump MEANS to South Africa and the World...

I am tempted to dwell more on what South Africa today means to the United States...that a nation, a liberal democracy, one with more fragile institutions than ours, of more recent creation, can survive a corrupt, vulgar, pretty relentless kleptocracy and come through intact with a new leader, Cyril Ramaphosa, who seems to promise a new beginning, one in which accountability, transparency and the law are once again meaningful words. The United States, today, is being ZUMAED, and we don't yet know who our Ramaphosa might be.

As for what Trump means to South Africa...well, I have no great confidence that he knows where it is.

In his one of his very few attempts to say something about Africa he alluded, twice, to a place called "Nambia"I wonder what happens in The Chronicles of Nambia, Trump's *spectacular* realm of elephants tusks and rhino horns and *terrific* deals.

Please, don't get me started on shitholes...

What Trump means to South Africa...and really across the world...is that if you are a nation that stands for certain values...freedom, democracy, the rule of law, a rules-based international order, a free press, an independent judiciary, openness...then the United States no longer has your back in the same way....It's gone AWOL....and if you are an autocrat...a Putin, a Duterte, an Erdogan, a Xi, an Orban, a Sisi, a Mohammed Bin Salman...you no longer have to worry about what the U.S. President might say about human rights flouted, political prisoners tortured, murdered opponents, a silenced press, a censored Internet, a corrupted state or cowed judges.

This is a combustible moment. Old assumptions can no longer hold. The world's strategic architecture is fragile. The worst is not inevitable but is more conceivable.

Of course we could also get peace on the Korean Peninsula and a Nobel Peace Prize for Donald Trump. I am a columnist. I have learned that making predictions is a treacherous business.

Anything could happen with this man. We can get into his psychology later if you wish. Suffice to say he has feral instincts, mostly for the darker sides of human nature, and that, to be fair, he intuited anger in America that his opponents, and particularly Hillary Clinton, failed to perceive.

He is also dangerous. Let me try to explain.

The Post-World Order is personal to me.

I was born in Europe – well, if you still call London part of Europe after the staggering act of irrational self-harm known as Brexit – and became an American. I am the descendant of South African Jews who, from faraway Johannesburg, joined the Allied war effort. I live in Brooklyn, accent notwithstanding, but carry Europe in my bones.

Europa was my generation's hope.

I lived in Berlin from 1998 to 2001. I saw the capital return after the

Rhineland sojourn in bland Bonn. I witnessed the miracle: Germany unified, within NATO, its borders no longer contested; the German problem that had caused sleepless nights for 1000's of US diplomats at the Bonn Embassy resolved.

I would cross the Polish border sometimes. I had to pinch myself, with the border near invisible, to recall that these were "Bloodlands," in Timothy Snyder's phrase, the last resting place of millions. Yet here, only decades later, there stretched before me the tranquility that NATO and the European Union and statesmanship had brought.

None of this would have happened without the transatlantic alliance, without the Berlin airlift and the Marshall Plan, without America as a European power.

Constancy and resolve in pursuit of strategy wear down opponents. Enemies soon learn the difference between strength and strutting. I fear that my president has not learned that distinction yet. President Trump knows *nothing* of history and cares less.

I do not say this lightly. I am a naturalized American and a patriot. I want to respect my president. I have tried. I have searched for redeeming features. I've come up pretty much blank.

So what to do? The first thing is to realize there is a threat from within.

I think Fritz Stern offers us a clue. "I was born into a world on the cusp of avoidable disaster," he wrote in *Five Germanys I Have Known*. "The fragility of freedom is the simplest and deepest lesson of my life and work."

The citizens of South Africa know that as few nations do.

Today the fragility of freedom is all around us. We awaken to it on Twitter. We experience it daily as a mild nausea. We go to bed with misgivings. We see it in rekindled bigotry, racism and intolerance. We see it in Donald Trump's America. We see it in the nationalist lurch in

Benjamin Netanyahu's Israel. We see it in rekindled anti-Semitism and rampant Islamophobia.

Stern's phrase – *the cusp of avoidable disaster* – resonates to the point it may even give us goose bumps.

The Atlantic Alliance still stands as the essential bulwark against a world controlled once more by barbarians and buffoons who want to destroy connections, set tribes against each other. Isaiah Berlin reminded us of a truth about liberal democracy of which the American Founding Fathers were mindful: "The best that one can do is try to promote some kind of equilibrium, necessarily unstable, between the different aspirations of different groups of human beings."

"Some kind of equilibrium" does not quicken the pulse. It is not what human beings yearn to die for. It is however essential for the health of any liberal democracy.

But you will say, 16 months have gone by and the world has not gone off a cliff. Markets are up, WAY up. If Trump is more noise than action, does he matter? If he's all hat and no cattle, who cares?

It's a tempting argument.

I don't buy it.

America's word has undergirded global security since 1945. That word today is a *devaluing currency*. Trump's wild decisions on Iran and climate illustrate that. Therefore, absent the United States as a reliable ally, the world is exponentially more dangerous.

Something even more serious is happening.

I am not starry-eyed. America has often fallen short. Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo are but the latest examples. Yet the torch flickers to life again. America is the land of constant reinvention, of endless churn (which is why when it turns it back on migrants, it denies itself).

But America's claim to leadership is voided, *permanently*, if stripped of a moral component. So we have a problem these days. Words cascade from President's Trump and they mean nothing, because when a man of moral emptiness and habitual mendacity tries to exhort a nation – or the world – to greatness the only thing communicated is pitiful, almost comical, hypocrisy.

When an American president can't quite find unequivocal words of condemnation for neo-Nazis, *the ground shifts in the free world*.

My president practices a valueless foreign policy. He has scoffed at NATO and the European Union. He's opened trade wars with allies. He's torn up solemn agreements reached with those allies, as with Iran. There appears to be no grasp in this White House that "Pay up!" does not make America great and prosperous.

President Trump has scarcely met a strongman who does not elicit his sympathy, a multilateral organization that does not prompt his disdain, or an elected official – the German chancellor, the mayor of London -- whom he fails to insult.

We have seen the evisceration under Trump of the State Department: a proposed 30 percent budget cut, countless critical posts unfilled, including ambassador to this country. Military budgets, by contrast have soared. It's very simple in the end. When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

Again and again we hear "America First!," that slogan of ugly Fascist pedigree. But what can America First do for terrorism, or climate change, or the crisis presented by 65 million migrants on the move, or poverty across this great continent?

In response to America's current erratic behavior, Chancellor Merkel has spoken of the need for Europe to take its destiny into its own hand. I think, to some degree, that true of all countries. There's a need to think again.

After Brexit, after Trump, the European Union must seize the moment. South Africa, as a leader on this continent, needs to affirm the values that have seen this great country come through the horror of Apartheid, achieve an unlikely degree of reconciliation and now survive the Zuma Presidency.

Ramphosa...for the iftar meal...breaking the Ramadan fast...not so many countries like this

This president must speak up for South African values. All free nations of decency and good will must at this juncture in history when illiberal gales are gusting, from Budapest to Moscow, from Washington to Beijing.

Nobody should have any illusions about the disruptive force of the nationalist, nativist, rightist, xenophobic revival on both sides of the Atlantic.

Trump's appeal to tens of millions of Americans endures. It demands to be understood, at a time when tens of millions of other Americans hold him unfit for office – a charlatan, a fraud and a serial liar. I've been a foreign correspondent for much of my life. I can tell you that visiting Trump country from New York is a foreign correspondent's experience

I want my country back: this is the universal cry of the global wave of rightist reaction. It's Trump's "America First." It's Brexit. It's Marine Le Pen's nationalists against the globalists. It explains the vogue word of the moment: sovereignty.

Behind all this lies a potent emotion: fear. This was Trump's great intuition

Demographic fear (the end within the next couple of decades of America's white majority); economic fear (the dislocations of globalization); cultural fear (of the urban elite who want to chase guns and God and out the country); primal fear (the white flip-out over

having a black president); fear of the stranger (the immigrant hordes); fear of national decline (Chinese power rising and those endless post 9/11 wars without victory); fear of the future (automation and the end of work); fear of terrorism (the Muslim jihadi amongst us); fear of speaking your mind (the liberal tyranny of the politically correct).

Take all this, inject the potent galvanizing force of Fox News and Breitbart (with their dime-a-dozen scapegoats), wrap it in a heavy dose of angry nationalism and elite-bashing, and a winning guerrilla offensive was there to be mounted – especially against a candidate as identified with “the establishment” as Clinton.

You just had to see it. Liberals in their arrogance didn’t – until it was too late. They still fail to see that millions of smart, decent Americans support Trump. His supporters, to state the obvious, are not all alt-Right zealots.

Trump’s election, like Brexit, was disruption at any cost.

Just recently the President tweeted: “With all of the Fake News coming out of NBC and the networks, at what point is it appropriate to challenge their license? Bad for country!”

This is Putin-Erdogan territory.

We don’t know yet how far the president is prepared to go in silencing critics who do not meet his test of patriotism, while inviting his supporters to give free rein to their inner bigot.

Benjamin Franklin, 1787: A Republic, if you can keep it.

I had an alarming experience last month. Let me tell you about it.

President Trump had lied about two [phone calls](#), one from the president of Mexico and one from the head of the Boy Scouts. The calls, supposedly to congratulate him, did not exist. They never happened. They were pure inventions. Asked if Trump had [lied](#), the White House press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, said, “I wouldn’t say it was a lie.”

I actually remember shrugging. It was the shrug that was terrifying.

This is how autocrats — or would-be autocrats — cement their power. They wear you down. They take you down the rabbit hole. They want you to read that $2+2=5$ – and shrug.

Please, ladies and gentlemen, don't shrug.

The worst of our fracture concerns truth. I am standing at a podium. We can discuss whether it's the appropriate height or shape, whether it's well enough lit, whether the mike could be better placed – so long as we do agree it's a podium.

In the America of Kellyanne Conway's "alternative facts," I fear that we no longer do. A large number of Americans believe Trump is the most honest president we've ever had. Why? Because he speaks his mind, he's unscripted and he does what he said he'd do. *He tells it like it is* – that's honesty; and to heck with whether what he says is a lie.

America is split down the middle

But it is fighting back.

The judiciary is fighting back.

At the NYT, we've added more than 800,000 digital subscriptions. Times and Post mano a mano...

You know, my father and uncle were hoisted as young men in their 20's out of faraway South Africa to join the Allied war effort, Jewish kids summoned back to the continent my family had left in time. My uncle, Bert Cohen of the 6th South African Armored Division, 19th Field Ambulance, gave me his war diary chronicling the Italian campaign. On July 21, 1944, he arrived Monte Cassino, abandoned by German forces a few weeks earlier after repeated Allied assaults.

He had this to say:

“Poor Cassino, horror, wreck and desolation unbelievable, roads smashed and pitted, mines, booby traps and graves everywhere. Huge shell holes, craters filled with stagnant slime, smashed buildings, hardly outlines remaining, a silent sight of ghosts and shadows.

“Pictures should be taken of this monument to mankind’s worst moments and circulated through every schoolroom in the world.”

This was the Memento Mori offered by my uncle, then aged 25 and recently arrived in a bloody continent called Europe. He never saw the Lithuania his mother had left, land by then of dead Jews. Those pictures of Monte Cassino were not circulated; and the miracle and fragility of European peace is too often forgotten today.

We succumb at our peril to amnesia. I was shaped by the second half of the 20th century. If I did not end up doing what my uncle and father did, it is thanks to the interlocking ocean-jumping institutions of the postwar order.

I try never to forget that.

President Trump, who seems to get a testosterone fix from saber-rattling, should take a look at those images of Cassino in 1944

For myself I can only be a creature of hope. Some of my most formative moments were spent in South Africa, the country in which my parents were born. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, catastrophe was inevitable. The Johannesburg swimming pools of my relatives would be red with blood. Out of the distant, fetid, desperate townships the black majority would rise up to claim what was theirs and avenge the cruel injustice of Apartheid. My family, along with 4 million other whites, would be chased out.

Well, it didn’t happen, thanks to the leadership, the statesmanship, of Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk.

Statesmanship, such a quaint, old-fashioned word today. But even in the

age of Twitter, its importance has not faded.

I have faith in my Republic. It is worth keeping, worth fighting for.

And I have faith in the strength of free and democratic nations across the world. Few continents and few countries know the price of freedom as Africa and South Africa do. To me, for all its desperate problems, this continent is a place of hope, and this country above all. It did not succumb to the worst. It opted for life and coexistence, not death and tribalism. It placed the lives of children above the wounds of history. For all its manifold problems, rainbow South Africa to me will always be a miracle.

As Albert Camus observed, and Nelson Mandela knew:

“The only way to fight the plague is with decency.”