



**World Traders
Election Dinner Speech
April 29th 2019,
Goldsmiths' Hall**

Wardens, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good evening again, everyone.

I now have a number of thank yous to say.

The first is to our distinguished speaker. Thank you, Lawry, for those sobering thoughts about the new nuclear dangers we now face. No weapon is ever uninvented, and it is worth being reminded that these ones are still part of our geopolitical landscape—with a troublingly long half-life, both militarily and politically.

By my calculation, Lawry, Judith and I have known each other for exactly 40 years. When I first moved back to the UK and then London all that time ago, I had already lived in a number of places: Germany, Czechoslovakia as it then was, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and even the wilds of Yorkshire, Scotland and Wales, but London was still pretty daunting, then as now, for newcomers. So, as a Mancunian by birth, it was always a great comfort to hear Lawry's northern tones across a crowded conference room—my first pal in London's northern mafia.

Even then, Lawry was clearly destined to become, as Mary has described him: the Dean of Strategic Studies in the UK. Though in fact, his reputation for scholarship went global a long time ago.

When Lawry told me he wanted to explore nuclear issues this evening, it seemed particularly apt. His writings have covered a wide range of subjects, but he and I first met professionally in the dark days of the Cold War and we bonded over some of its quirks.

For Lawry not only had his serious side, he also had his seriously funny side. With Lawry sitting next to you, there was never a dull seminar—whether it was the cartoon doodles of the speaker in the margins of his notepad, whatever grim version of future Armageddon we were all discussing at the time, or the notes he passed when he was beyond bored, as his ear immediately picked out the holes in any argument. In addition to his many other honours and accolades, Lawry has the great distinction of being the only friend I have who has ever written a Ladybird Book, and it is more than fitting that its subject is that childhood favourite: “nuclear deterrence”.

Dark times often bring forth black humour, and back then we all knew the words to Tom Lehrer's catchy anthem "We'll all go together when we go!"

"Duck and cover" was the politically-correct, but pretty pointless, defence of the day against an incoming nuclear strike that just happened to find you inconveniently at school or at the office.

We all pondered Herman Kahn's "44-rung escalation ladder", hoping we would never have to climb very far up it as the two superpowers rattled their nuclear-tipped rockets at each other, each plotting to achieve more bang for their buck, or more rubble for their rouble.

Impenetrable jargon is not necessarily the hallmark of a serious subject, but aficionados of nuclear deterrence and arms control back then had a speaking code all of their own: talking in acronyms such as SIOP, ICBM and MIRV. Treaties designed to rein in superpower competition had designations such as NPT, SALT, ABM, INF (back in the news, but for all the wrong reasons), PTBT and CTBT.

I can see I am losing most of you all already!

It was like learning a foreign language. Though one that was rather less useful for ordering a beer on holiday.

But our speaker emerged from the Cold War with plenty more to say: his books on war and conflict, his tomes on strategy, nuclear and otherwise, his grasp of the great shifts of global history, and his guidance and wisdom in analysing and explaining some of the most searing events in this country's recent history are landmarks in the Strategic Studies field. They could also fill a library just on their own.

So, thank you, Lawry, for taking time out from all your other commitments to share your thoughts with us this evening.

And now my final thanks this evening: to our Clerk, Gaye Duffy.

Until you stand in those blue robes I was wearing when you all arrived this evening, you really have no idea how much detailed effort goes into planning events such as this one—and the many others, some smaller, some larger, some simpler, some even grander that we all enjoy over the course of any World Traders' year. Each person who takes on the role of Master learns very quickly to appreciate everything Gaye does for them, and everything she saves them from.

Each Master's interests and priorities are inevitably different (Peter's will be different from mine), but Gaye adjusts to us all, with great skill and great humour (whatever its particular hue on any given day, and that does vary!). So, thank you, Gaye, from me and from all of us.

Thank you.