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THE TRANSNATIONAL REVIEW

Down the Barrel of Hidden Conflicts





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Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of The Transnational Review to include our interns for Semester 2, 2015. Our new interns have joined the already large team to add some fresh perspectives and help carry out some brilliant youth projects.

The Australian Institute of International Affairs aims to create an interest in and understanding of international affairs. However, our focus is on topics of public interest and political relevance. There are simply too many issues for our fortnightly seminars to cover in order to give adequate attention to every topic under the sun. Which is why this edition looks at the hidden conflicts and disputes happening all around the world. We begin with Miles Kitts providing an overview of what a hidden conflict is and how states deal with them. Resident columnist Laure Fournier decided to change tact and conducted an interview with Florimond Muteba Tshitenge, a civil society worker in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which makes for compelling reading.

Our newest columnist Raphael Mengem takes a different look on the conflicts in the Middle East by examining the nuances of the relations between Arab states. British writer James Snell joins us again

to provide some caution on the hidden consequences of the Iran nuclear deal. Reporter-turned-columnist for The Transnational Review, Elliot Dolan-Evans then explores the long history of persecution that the Rohingya people have suffered before the refugee crisis exploded this year.

Our attention spans are short and news bulletins must be sharp and to the point. The danger in this is that complex issues, such as the Congolese War or the historic plight of the Rohingya are not able to receive the attention that they deserve. Anything that can't be explained in a one minute news story is usually left uncovered. And if something goes on for too long we just lose interest.

This edition seeks to address this imbalance by teasing out the details and nuances of the issues that the mainstream news forgets. Our writers have dug through the details in order to explain the hidden conflicts occurring around the world.

We also have reports about some of the exciting seminars that we've had at Harris Terrace in recent weeks. Ranging from climate change politics, Australia's public diplomacy and global megatrends, this issue packs it all in.

James Turner | Editor-in-Chief | Executive Council

Hidden Conflicts - an overview

Understanding armed conflict today and tomorrow

Miles Kitts

Hidden armed conflicts abound the world over. Armed conflicts which are more readily well-known to the public's awareness are more suited to study and appropriate policies adopted for dealing with. This is so because the public's mindset is more likely to have become accustomed to such conflicts. Having the world's latest 'hot topic' war bombard the public's attention via every form of media imaginable makes it easier for the public to know that there is a war going on, have some sense of what it is about, and what can be done about it. [The current fighting in Syria and Iraq fits this mould.](#)

There are also 'hidden' conflicts of which the public is not readily aware. There are those conflicts which are going on right now in the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) where people, such as Australians, are living far from these conflicts of which they have little to no awareness. When was the last time you saw a report in the Australian media concerning any of the fighting in Myanmar? I cannot recall. Such reporting rarely happens. Conflicts like these are a case of 'out of sight, out of mind' for the Australian public.

Though these conflicts are out of the public's focus, if the conflicts changes in some way, such as a dramatic development or an uptick in the intensity of the fighting, public attention may move towards the issue. In response the media could shift its focus to the previously 'hidden', yet previously existing conflict. Furthermore, people could of their own initiative come to investigate and study these conflicts. When the public has a greater awareness of these previously obscure conflicts they can then be dealt with through well-tailored policies.

However, there are those conflicts which will always be hidden from the public's awareness as they reside in the future. Barring the use of H.G. Wells' Time Machine, it seems that certain knowledge of the future is bound to remain out of complete grasp. As such, these conflicts cannot be fully prepared for by people. The best that can be under these conditions is to anticipate those conflicts which are deemed to be within the realm of reasonable possibility. This is why societies engage in defence planning.

Among those future conflicts which have a reasonable prospect of occurring are possible future wars in East Asia involving China fighting a range of countries at once, either individually or collectively. Added to this are possible wars between Saudi Arabia and Iran, another India-Pakistan conflict, another Chechen war, or another Yugoslav war. For these possible future conflicts with a reasonable chance of occurrence, policies can be adopted in anticipation of their outbreak. For example, the First World War was preceded by decades of preparations for war by the various European countries. The most important thing that such policies can do is to psychologically prepare people in order to avoid the deleterious effects of poor planning and surprise. Germany's initial offensives at the start of the First World War were shocking surprises to many, though the fact that war with Germany had finally occurred was not.

Advancing our train of thought even further, we can conclude that there will be future conflicts which cannot be anticipated. As such, these conflicts cannot be prepared for, neither in terms of suitable defence policies nor the more important cultivation of psychological fortitude. If you do not anticipate a conflict then you cannot acquire the tanks, planes, ships, and troops that you would need to fight. Nor would you have an open mind as to how you should fight such a conflict. It is these

conflicts which would therefore hold the greatest possibility for public surprise and shock. How shocking would a Canadian-American War be? How about an Australian Civil War? Conflicts like these are often thought of by many to be too outlandish. [They are stuff of jokes and comedies.](#) Yet they are fantasy right up until the prospects of that conflict occurring enters the public's consciousness as being a conflict with a reasonable chance of occurring in future.

These unanticipated conflicts need to be hedged against by developing military forces which are flexible in their organisation. They also need to have weaponry and equipment which can be used in a range of different situations. Most importantly, they also need to have flexibility in thinking. This open-mindedness comes from engaging in extensive and continuous scenario-planning. This is a big reason why we have defence education bodies, command staffs, and intelligence

“The number of troops, submarines, ships, and airplanes are not simply issues for technocrats and politicians. These are issues which may well end up being crucial to the survival of one's society.”

services. Having places where experts can think about possible future conflicts, even the most outlandish ones, is an imperative if disaster is to be staved-off.

At the end of the day though, the public must be aware of issues surrounding possible future conflicts. In particular, they must know about the particulars of force planning issues. The number of troops, submarines, ships, and airplanes are not simply issues for technocrats and politicians. These are issues which may well end up be crucial to the survival of one's society.

The public must also think about the range of possible scenarios which might be faced in the future, no matter how fanciful they might seem at the time. In doing so there is the need to be open-minded lest disaster strike because no one had thought it was possible. The mass shock and surprise in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11 comes to mind. In order to think constructively about future conflicts people should remember the evocative lesson of H.G. Wells' novel [The War of the Worlds](#). In the novel humanity's near-death by the Martians was preceded by humanity's dismissive thinking about the possibility of a Martian invasion. Though a work of fiction, the novel's opening words succinctly points out the lesson of why people set themselves up for a shocking downfall: 'No one would have believed...'. When thinking about the 'hidden conflicts' of the future, let us make certain that we keep our minds open as to what might occur. Keeping our minds open is the only real certainty we can ever have when it comes to dealing with the future.

Miles Kitts is a PhD candidate at the University of Queensland, an intern at the Australian Institute of International Affairs Queensland, and a columnist for The Transnational Review. He specialises in international security, great power politics, and terrorism and insurgency. Views are his own.

The Congolese War

An interview with Florimond Muteba Tshitenge

Laure Fournier

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the civil war has been raging for nineteen years. In 2014, it was calculated that six million people had died because of the conflict. However, it has almost disappeared from international headlines.

Florimond Muteba Tshitenge runs two organisations in the DRC: the Centre d'Études et de Gestion du Développement en Afrique (CEDA), a bureau of studies, and the Observatoire de la Dépense Publique (ODEP), specialised in the citizen control of public expenditure.

What is the current situation in the DRC?

In the east, the situation remains difficult. The peace is not really restored. Residuals of armed groups persist and continue to attack the population, committing rapes and robberies, traumatising the population. More broadly, tensions are persisting between the existing government and the opposition from the last presidential election. People speak about dialogue, but a part of the opposition rejects what it considers as a manipulation aimed at extending for a few years the tenure of the authority currently in power.

What are your thoughts about the UN intervention and presence in the DRC?

It allowed the organisation of elections thanks to the permanent mediation of the International Support Committee to the Transition, coordinated by the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). It has been efficient when it supported the Congolese army against the M23 (pro-Joseph Kabila armed faction). But there have been problems when their troops became engaged in an intervention and pacification mission directed against the rebels. The UN soldiers also participated in rapes in the eastern part of the country.

Do you think that there is a disinterest in the conflict abroad when international effort is needed for peace?

Leaders are often imposed on African people through outside involvement. Those leaders, while arranging affairs of multinational corporations, do not bring anything to African people. Often, these leaders come to power with weapons in their hands, without any political plan, without any program to govern day-to-day and are far more preoccupied by their personal enrichment. If eastern Congo had been through a real development, wars would have been over for a long time. There it is a war of poverty, of misery and of under-development. The economic potential of eastern DRC could make it a global agricultural and industrial great power. Millions of jobs could be created and could result in a high immigration from neighbouring countries. We would not speak about war anymore. The mediocrity of the African political class alone is responsible for the current situation.

Some describe Joseph Kabila's development project as a sham to hide suffering, what is your opinion?

Congo's problems are like an ocean. Joseph Kabila does what he can with the means he has. However, the real issue is the global governance. The corruption is great and the siphoning-off of tax incomes is huge. The budget of the DRC hardly reaches €4 billion while it reaches 70 billion in Angola, 40 billion in Uganda, five billions in Gabon for one million inhabitants - while Congo has seven millions inhabitants. Four billion is the budget of a commune or of a supermarket. In Congo, a commune like Bipemba in the city of Mbuji-Mayi has an estimated population of 900 000 inhabitants and receives, for its functioning, €1000 per month from the central government, I do not need to describe to you the level of misery and

poverty over there.

What about the looting of natural resources by foreign owned multinational corporations? How is this related to government corruption?

The looting of natural resources is a deal that has not changed. There have been several reports, from the UN and from NGOs, but also from the Congolese Parliament, related to looting. Concerning the corruption, you could consult the last International Transparency Report in order to know the rank held by the DRC. The legislative void is wanted. The Court of Auditors is marginalised. The General Inspectorate of Finance is the responsibility of the President, the parliamentary control is weak, you cannot challenge a minister or manage a no-confidence vote against the government. It is difficult to condemn this way of handling the country and its natural resources.

What impact has the conflict in the east had on the rest of the country? And in Kinshasa?

The conflict in the east takes away from the government tax revenues that could have come from this province and deprives it of additional means of action. There is very little economic integration between the provinces of Congo.

Have neighbouring countries had a role in the conflict?

The neighbouring states have looted the wealth of Congo on the pretext of helping. They were richly rewarded and have contributed to the aggravation of corruption. Their troops have raped our wives.

Do opposition groups in DRC actually represent the people?

They are family circles, with no ideology and no organisational capacity. A lot of them have been created by the existing political power and play its game. They are present in Kinshasa, but it does not mean that they are implanted within the population.

What has been the impact of Rwandan involvement in the DRC?

Rwanda did not only have a negative role in the DRC. The Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL) that had overthrown the dictatorship of Mobutu in May 1997 has been supported by Rwanda through weapons, soldiers and who knows what. The issue is to ask ourselves how this agreement between Rwanda and the ADFL has been handled and what caused the deception of Rwanda. On either side, rebellions have been supported. It was the task of the DRC to prevent looting of its own riches by neighbouring states. It is a question of defence of national sovereignty. It is for the Congolese to have strong leadership and a forceful army, a well-structured and well-organised administration to defend Congo and its people.

Did the Congolese lose hope regarding a possible termination of the conflict?

I would rather say that Congo does not have its back to the wall faced with the world of tomorrow. Better governance of the country will end the war. The people of Congo are the primary sovereigns. It is up to them to know how to use their votes during the next elections, in order to choose the path of an ameliorated government by electing honest men as well as men with integrity and real patriots to run the nation. The solutions to violence are political solutions.

Laure Fournier is an intern with the Australian Institute of International Affairs Queensland, and a columnist for The Transnational Review, specialising in the political climate in Europe. Views are her own.

Keeping your Enemies

How the enemy of your enemy is not necessarily your friend

Raphael Mengem

The 2008 Arab League summit would offer the final appearance for some of the League's most notable characters. The regional tensions that would bring about their undoing were largely ignored, save for an emotional speech by the Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi. Breaking, from the norms of benevolent diplomacy and Israeli condemnation, Muammar Gaddafi approached the podium to speak. As he did a familiar anxiety filled the summit, like a drunk uncle at a wedding.

Gaddafi began to report on every elephant in the room, and all the delegates squirmed as he told them what they all knew but weren't there to acknowledge. Within three years the Tunisian president Zine al-Abidine had fled Tunisia, the Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh was in exile, Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak was unseated and under house arrest, Gaddafi was killed in a sewer by his countrymen, Bashar al-Assad was suspended from the league as Syria began to fall apart, Lebanon was politically divided, the Yemeni civil war had remerged with a vengeance and Iraq was on the verge of collapse. In each case the League failed to unite against foreign intervention, in some cases they endorsed it. Pan-Arabism had fallen and a vicious form of sectarian pan-Islamism rose from its ashes.

At the summit Gaddafi observed that "an entire Arab leadership was hanged, as prisoners of war, as we sat on the sidelines laughing, [...] we all had reservations with Saddam's policies yes, but he was the leader of an Arab country, he was a member of the League. No investigation was held into the killing of Saddam Hussein," at this point the cameras at the summit pan to the delegates, and Bashar al-Assad can be observed chuckling gleefully.

"Why?" Gaddafi protests, "anyone of you might be next. Yes?" He then turns his gaze towards the illusion of their diplomacy. "You are friends with America today fine, but one day America may hang us." The mood at the summit began to change, the cameras no longer showed mocking laughs of state leaders, and Gaddafi pressed on.

"We are enemies of one another, I'm sad to say, we all hate one another, we deceive one another, we gloat on the misfortune of one another, and we conspire against one another. Our intelligence agencies conspire against one another, instead of defending us against the enemy. We are the enemies of one another. And an Arab's enemy is another Arab's friend."

His analysis painted a stark contrast from the early hopes of the League's regional aspirations. Established in 1945 the Arab League aimed to consolidate the geo-political power of Arab states. As a union the states sought to co-operate in the face of colonial and great power divides, through cultural, political economic and social programs. Most importantly the League was to be a forum for inter-state mediation in the region. Arab tensions were to be solved by Arab leaders and not by alternative arbitrary powers and ideologies. It was to be a beacon for Pan-Arab legitimacy, a fraternal opposition to East-West interference and a liberator of oppressed Arab minorities.

Far-right parties declare that they are not elites: they are ordinary people, living in the real world, and therefore capable to defend it, or so they claim. This defence is embodied by the charming leader, posing as the saving commander of these lost troops constituted by the people.

Unfortunately the organisation found trouble at its first hurdle. The rejection of Israeli sovereignty and the establishment

of an Arab state in its place to this day has never been realized, and over half of the founding states defected from this long held position. Most notably Egypt and Jordan who today have better relations with Israel than with many other Arab states, and even the Saudi Kingdom operates with greater co-operation with Israel than it does with some other Arab regimes. What had become apparent as attention withdrew externally from Israel and internally towards the League, was that the enemy of your enemy is not inherently your friend.

Gaddafi's brutal death was hailed by the Arab League as an important end in regional tyranny. The Iraqi Prime Minister Nabil al-Arabi noted the "similarity of the fate of tyrants in Iraq and Libya and elsewhere is proof of the potential of the people to defeat dictators, however long they have been in power." This understanding spread throughout the Arab spring, but a new one emerges in the subsequent Arab summer, buried behind Pan-Arab

"What had become apparent as attention withdrew externally from Israel and internally towards the League, was that the enemy of your enemy is not inherently your friend."

regional diplomacy lies hostility and political contestation. Until these grievances are addressed Arab states will struggle to act as a cohesive regional bloc.

In his pessimistic examination of the Arab League Gaddafi managed to articulate the hidden political vulnerability exposed to Arab states by the endorsement of the US's extrajudicial removal of the Saddam regime. Despite strategic and economic differences, Arab states had an interest in maintaining traditional conceptions of sovereignty in the international system. As a regional collective they had the opportunity to reinforce such norms and deal with tensions internally. In outsourcing their grievances to the international system they initiated the erosion of oppressive state control that perpetuated and stabilised many of their regimes.

Raphael Mengem is an intern with the Australian Institute of International Affairs Queensland, and a columnist for the Transnational Review. He is also a student of Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Queensland. Views are his own.

A Very Bad Deal

The hidden consequences of the Iran Nuclear Deal

James Snell

Do you know the old stories told about Vienna in the summertime? Imperial capital to a polyglot dual monarchy, the city served as a meeting place of societies, languages and nation-states. A cultural epicentre, Vienna saw streams of the most elegant, artistic, intellectual people populate its grand palaces and ballrooms. It was a place of meetings, of cultural exchange; a place of nobility, both in birth and intent. According to this telling, the civilisation it apparently embodied could never bow to the harshness and cruelty of human nature; it had simply progressed too far and achieved too much to stop.

It was not true, of course. While Vienna may have dominated culturally, the political workings of the empire surrounding it were arcane and antiquated. Internecine struggles permeated its bureaucracy and crippled its politics. The empire resembled its penultimate Emperor: at all times working very hard, but nevertheless sliding at an ever increasing rate towards decrepitude. The reality, in other words, interfered to derail these over-optimistic tales.

The story itself does not have a happy ending. The empire entered a war it could not win; it promptly suffered a series of stinging military defeats; it collapsed under the weight of its own internal failures coupled with external pressures; it sued for peace; and finally, after a drawn-out and costly peacemaking period, the dual monarchy saw itself dismembered. Only rump states remained. For a time the waltzes continued in that imperial capital on the Danube, but soon the food began to become scarce. Austria, hollowed out and without the means of subsistence, resigned itself to national desolation; boredom and greyness was punctuated by chaos – political murders, political instability, and eventual union with the National Socialist state next door.

Such optimism as that displayed in pre-war Vienna made an appearance in its modern successor this summer. The P5+1 group of nations, having worked, like the Emperor Franz Joseph, most awfully hard every day, followed the Emperor in gradually sliding into a worse and worse predicament – in this case a nuclear accord which got progressively more imbalanced in Iran's favour as the days went on. Limitations were trumpeted, 'snap-back' sanctions promised, but all many wanted to do was celebrate. Such was the general mood of jubilation that legitimate criticism of the settlement was initially dismissed – by both supporters of the deal and commentators – as being generally out of keeping with the atmosphere. A new order was being forged and legacies minted. Why spoil it all with talk of Iranian obfuscation, the possibility of capital derived from sanctions relief going to regional proxies and the establishment (or extension) of a regional hegemony? It rather punctured the fun of it all.

But such criticisms, sad though they may be to hear, must be said; objections to this agreement must be stated and, if necessary, acted upon. [Cracks began to appear](#) regardless of the effort to contain them mere hours after the agreement was concluded; they have not been contained, and can credibly threaten to bring the whole edifice of this deal crumbling to earth.

It must be noted that some of those who are now being exempted from sanctions are not the nicest. Qassem Suleimani is one of the masterminds of Iran's ever-expanding imperium. It is on his watch that the Shia militias who rampage through much of Iraq commit war crimes of their own in the fight against ISIS. It is under his orders that the Assad regime persists, and he must take responsibility for many of its atrocities. He will receive sanctions

relief from this deal. Now the 'living martyr' can buy European sports cars. What a deal it has been for him.

Iran's proxies could find themselves in receipt of a vast cash injection from henceforward. Let us remember that Iran spent more on the preservation of the Assad tyranny than its own military budget last year, and that this figure does not include the transfers of oil – essentially gifts to prolong its ally's war machine – which must increase the total figure considerably. And this was the case under those terrible sanctions everybody is so keen to end. Imagine how much greater such 'assistance' to those ultimately undesirable organisations will be from now. Yet we are meant to imagine that this will not be the case, that the Iranians need the money, among other things, to develop their peaceful nuclear energy capacity; we are also expected to believe that the Iranians will be mortally terrified of doing something to re-impose these supposedly crippling sanctions via the feted 'snap-back' mechanism. Neither of those propositions seems entirely likely, I

“The P5+1 group of nations, having worked, like the Emperor Franz Joseph, most awfully hard every day, followed the Emperor in gradually sliding into a worse and worse predicament.”

would humbly suggest.

Yet again in the foreign policy of the Obama administration, what substance there was has been lost amid the glint and glimmer of highly polished surface. This deal is 'historic'; the alternatives are not worth contemplation. Those who say otherwise are warmongering ideologues, all of whom are desperate to hold on to the comforting notion of Iran as an existential enemy, a contention which cannot remain in the modern, civilised, progressive world.

Such a suggestion does not survive a collision with reality. The first tremor has already come, and the lacquer is already becoming somewhat chipped; as time wears on and the situation described above begins to play out, it seems likely that this presentation – and the reputation of the President who ordered it – will incur some serious damage.

The United States has declared itself 'shocked' at ex post facto Iranian criticism of the settlement. Not only has Tehran had the temerity to suggest that it will continue to work to defy any restrictions placed upon its capacity to develop the nuclear weapons this deal was meant to prevent, it has done so at a time which had hitherto been reserved for celebration. But let us not forget that despite the prevalence of Western-educated negotiators and the slight suggestion that President Rouhani represented a new way of doing things in the Islamic Republic, the crowds are still chanting 'Death to America' after Friday prayers.

Perhaps the champagne corks were popped a little prematurely in Vienna and Washington.

James Snell is a British journalist who has written for publications in his native country and worldwide, including The American Spectator, the New Humanist and Free Inquiry magazine. He is a Huffington Post UK blogger. Views are his own.

The Plight of the Rohingya

The failure of regional cooperation

Elliot Dolan-Evans

The vast majority of the approximately one million Rohingya reside in the Rakhine region of Myanmar (formerly Burma), an area bordering Bangladesh. This Muslim minority traces its roots back to Arabic merchants of the late 7th Century, who traded with, [and then settled in, Burma](#). For centuries, the Rohingya had peacefully inhabited the Rakhine area with Buddhists (majority religion in Myanmar), and under British rule there were [plans to create an autonomous zone](#) for the Rohingya people. However, following the withdrawal of British rule, the country was overtaken by military rule in 1962. Since then the Rohingya have had their [identity and rights gradually, and forcefully, removed](#).

The military junta have instituted discrimination against the Rohingya for decades, [denying them citizenship](#) and basic services. The 1982 Citizenship Law officially stripped Rohingya's of their nationality and made them stateless, on the unsubstantiated and repugnant [claim that they are illegal immigrants](#) from Bangladesh. Due to this, the Rohingya lack access to secondary and tertiary education in state-run schools, cannot be issued identification cards to access government benefits and [face restrictions on freedoms](#) of religion, association and movement. Rohingya couples have to [seek permission from the authorities](#) to marry, usually requiring large bribes, are exclusively limited to having only two children, and are not allowed to travel between towns without permission or [paying hefty bribes](#). Violently compounding this widespread discrimination, the Rohingya have had to face several state-sanctioned ethnic cleansing campaigns. 'Operation Dragon King' in 1978 drove [200,000 people to Bangladesh](#), and a similar operation in 1991 forced 250,000 people to flee Myanmar.

The situation over the last three years has been similarly characterised by violence persecution. Tension between the Buddhist majority and Muslim minorities has been boiling over, and [came to a head in 2002](#) when Muslim youths raped a young Buddhist woman. Riots, murder, looting, sexual assaults, and indiscriminate violence followed. Hundreds of armed Buddhist nationals descended on Rohingya villages, and razed them to the ground, with [reports of over 4,500 destroyed structures and a considerable number of deaths](#). Security forces have often been [complicit in crimes against the Rohingya](#); standing by and watching the violence, or conducting targeted killings, rape, and mass arrest of the Rohingyas exclusively. The violence has [displaced 140,000 Rohingya](#), who have been forced into low-lying [camps in paddy fields that face heavy flooding](#). These camps are unforgiving places, with thousands sharing four latrines and [no nurses or doctors visiting the camps](#). The work of international aid organisations has also been disrupted by the Myanmar government and violent nationalists. In 2012, the Myanmar Border Affairs Ministry [shut down medical assistance and food programs](#), and refused to issue travel permits to humanitarian agencies. Following a raft of violence against the Rohingya last year, Medecins Sans Frontieres was suspended from the country after providing medical care to victims, as the [government vehemently denied the violence had happened](#).

Compounding their current situation, most Rohingya face [severe food insecurity](#) with an 'emergency' level of [acute malnutrition](#). As a direct consequence, the number of Rohingya fleeing Myanmar has risen drastically after 2013, with [over 100,000 escaping](#) for their lives by boat. Rohingya asylum seekers

“With little to no action to address the plight of the Rohingya, the Asia-Pacific region is bound to witness the same crisis again.”

look to make it to Malaysia, Thailand, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Australia, or other local Asian-Pacific countries, despite the well-known risks. Thousands have [drowned on this perilous voyage](#), many have been abandoned on the high seas by people smugglers, whilst an [unknown number have been abused and killed](#) in smugglers' camps. Despite this calamitous and alarming humanitarian crisis, the response of the region has been extremely concerning, illegal, and at times absolutely repugnant.

The Rohingya have no constituency in the Western world and come from what is regarded as a 'strategic backwater', and have [received minimal empathy](#) to their protracted plight from the international community. Indeed, for decades [Thailand, Bangladesh, and Malaysia](#) have pushed Rohingya boats back into the open sea, in [direct breach](#) of the customary, non-refoulement principle of international law. Even if the Rohingya manage to make it to these countries, they are [often ineligible for UN aid and protection](#), are [detained and abused](#), and are [inadvertently pushed into the human trafficking trade](#), where they are maltreated and often end up in mass graves.

Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh and Indonesia are [not signatories to the UN Refugee Convention](#), and are reluctant to adhere to its principles. At the height of the Rohingya boat crisis in 2015, where hundreds of people were stranded in dingy vessels in the open seas, Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott [responded to suggestions](#) his country should provide asylum for the Rohingya with "nope, nope, nope". The Asia-Pacific's response to this immediate crisis was absolutely appalling, and even after convening a special meeting on this issue, the only solution was that Indonesia and Malaysia [took the Rohingya ashore](#), with the guarantee they'll be resettled in third countries.

With little to no action to address the plight of the Rohingya, the Asia-Pacific region is bound to witness this same crisis again. However, it is within the power of this collective of countries to enact a positive change for the stateless Rohingya, and build a positive model of regional cooperation to solve one of the world's most alarming humanitarian travesties.

The situation must firstly be addressed in Myanmar, where the travesties against the Rohingya are simply out of control. It has been alleged that the atrocities against the Rohingya [amount to crimes against humanity](#), and there is a real risk of genocide, if it is not already ongoing. Significant political pressure must be put on Myanmar to end their contemptuous policies against the Rohingya. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) must [reverse their policy of non-interference](#) and engage in a dialogue with Myanmar, as the crisis is affecting other countries in the region. Being passive is no longer an option on this issue.

Elliot Dolan-Evans is an intern at the Australian Institute of International Affairs Queensland, and a columnist for The Transnational Review. He is a MBBS and LLB candidate at Griffith University and QUT respectively. Views are his own.

Event Report: Climate Change and Australia's Rocky Road to Paris

A recap of Graham Readfearn's presentation at Harris Terrace

By Miles Kitts

Climate change is certainly a major issue of our age. In his presentation at the Queensland branch of the Australian Institute of International Affairs, Graham Readfearn pointed out that climate change has been a rocky issue, particularly since a decade ago during the closing years of the Howard Government. Readfearn contended that despite the widespread politicisation, global warming is still happening.

In his presentation, Readfearn asserted that destructive climate change is putting Australia's natural heritage at risk. In particular, he cited changes to Australia's coastline as sea-levels rise. He claims that there has been an increase in the frequency of hot days. Readfearn also argued that there has been a bleaching of coral reefs, including of the Great Barrier Reef.

The current international agreement concerning greenhouse gas emissions is the Kyoto Protocol. However, it expires in 2020. In order to establish a post-Kyoto international agreement, countries from around the world are sending delegations to meet in Paris to try to reach an agreement on regulating greenhouse gas emissions. If an agreement is reached, it would be the first international agreement on greenhouse gas emissions including the large-polluting countries of China and India. Should an agreement be reached, Paris would be the most advanced emissions deal thus far because it would include all of the world's major emitters, as well as target the use of fossil fuels.

Readfearn noted that Australia signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and also the Copenhagen Accord. However, Readfearn asserted that the Australian government's target for emissions cuts is unclear. This is in contrast to the proposals surrounding a possible Paris agreement, which could require signatory countries to cut their emissions anywhere from 15 per cent to 25 per cent by 2030. According to Readfearn, the Abbott Government's vagueness as to what it wants to accomplish means that it is uncertain what results government policies could garner.

The Abbott Government's evasiveness on this issue, according to Readfearn, stems from the reality that Australia is a major raw material supplier. This conflicts with prospects for decreasing greenhouse gas emissions. For this reason, Readfearn asserted, the Abbott Government's approach is hostile to the promotion of renewable energies. This is in spite of long-time polluting countries like China, India

and the United States beginning to invest more in renewable energies. Partly for this reason, international observers have become negatively critical of the Abbott's Government's approach and the targets it has established.

Readfearn concluded his presentation by contending that Australia has a moral obligation to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. Readfearn also stressed that there is a trend among other countries to work toward cutting these emissions and that Australia should conform to this trend.

Following Readfearn's presentation there was a revealing question and answer session. During this session Readfearn stated that he thinks that at the heart of the debate over climate change is the issue of how much power government should have over the economy in particular, and society and people in general. Readfearn went on to say that in this debate that both the Coalition and Labor parties end up adopting policies which cater to the fossil fuel industries. Readfearn said that policies should be adopted which favour renewable energy industries over those of the various fossil fuel industries.

There were two features which were striking about Readfearn's presentation and the question and answer session which followed it. The first was how 'science' was being continually asserted as being objective and that its research methods and conclusions were obvious for all to see. However, as Readfearn and the various members of the audience spoke, it became clear that this supposedly 'objective science' was being used to justify a diverse range of opinions.

This leads to the second feature of the event. This being that political ideology plays a much bigger role in the climate change debate than many of its participants wish to concede. Readfearn himself admitted as such, but yet claimed to base his arguments on objective science.

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Event Report: The Pursuit of Soft Power

Dr Caitlin Byrne on Australia's position as a middle power

By Emily Lighezzolo

In the recent seminar, 'The Pursuit of Soft Power' at the AIIA Queensland branch, Dr Caitlin Byrne contended that Australia is more interested in promoting popularity than legitimacy to the international community.

International propaganda has always highlighted Australia's popularised assets—the Sydney Opera House, our cuddly koalas, our sandy beaches.

On the world stage, our nation is applauded for its furry marsupials that welcome immigrants with open arms. Singapore can certainly testify to this as they were recently gifted four koalas to celebrate fifty years of Australian-Singaporean relations.

Australia is ranked sixth in the 2015 Soft Power Survey published in *Monocle* magazine¹, which grades countries that "best attract favour from other countries through diplomacy, culture, design, cuisine, sport and beyond". In contrast to the hard power diplomacy we're familiar with from the past—i.e. military strength, arms race—soft power does not use intimidation.

As Joseph S. Nye (2004) in his influential book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*² said, "Seduction is always more effective than coercion, and many values like democracy, human rights and individual opportunities are deeply seductive."

Analogously speaking, hard power players could be perceived as the bullies of the playground in high school, and cheerleaders were the soft power players.

The imperativeness of soft power even extends back to ancient Chinese origins in proverbial wisdom: "the softest can win the hardest. Invisible force can pass through the intangible" (Tao Te Ching). So what does this actually mean?

Governments have identified there is a need to tell the story of their nation to international audiences, not through one-dimensional propaganda, but through subtle and sensitive methods² (Polin, 2005). In the regional corner of the globe, Australia specifically relies on its soft power to gain support for national policies.

However, the 'popularised' soft power of Australia—with snags on the barbecue and thongs ready for the beach—only reveals one superficial face of Australia.

Another Australian face has begun to emerge for the world to see: an immigrant country that rejects immigrants; a xenophobic but multi-cultural society; a secular state that upholds Christian marriage ideals.

Ultimately, the policies of the current government are causing Australia's soft power to diminish. It clutches desperately to antithetical and myopic ideals. Furry marsupials will no longer 'make the cut' on the international stage.

Australia has had an altruistic story to share in the past. We have all seen the images of our nation coming to the rescue when natural disasters occurred in the Pacific or when East Timor needed a guiding hand. However, ironically 2015 saw additional budget cuts to Australia's development assistance and international scholarship programs.

Australia was built upon the backs of immigrants as our colonial past suggests. However, the nation has instated draconian policies to turn away the "boat people". This has left our country open to international backlash as un-caring and inhumane.

"There is increasing concern not only within the UN but within the wider diplomatic community as to the morality, legality and adverse regional and global impacts of Australia's refugee and asylum-seeker policy," said Phil Lynch (2014), director of the Geneva-based International Service For Human Rights.

"Australia's disdain for the rules of international human rights law, particularly the Refugee Convention, not only inflicts irreparable short-term harm on desperate people fleeing desperate circumstances, but is likely to undermine the rules-based international order on which Australia's security, stability, trade and investment so heavily relies."

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"There are many people around the world that think of Australia as a leader in the community of nations, it almost always has been, and some have been frankly scratching their heads of late, wondering what has been going on," said Al Gore, former U.S. vice-president, about the issue.

These foreign policy examples show the hypocritical face hiding behind the public face Australia promotes to the world. And because of it, Australia's soft power is in jeopardy of being tarnished.

Not only is Australia disregarding its legitimate soft power branding, but also its imperative organ for communicating it to the rest of the world. As a result, ABC has faced \$254 million budget cuts over the past five years.

Marc Scott, Managing Director of ABC said that this would significantly impact on Australia's soft power: "It is the most cost-effective means of influencing foreign publics and reaching large numbers of people on a daily basis, he said, "far more than any other public diplomacy mechanism."

Not only does Australia need to rectify the message it is sending to the international community, but also the means in which it is communicating it. Otherwise, we might be proclaimed the unpopular kid in the corner of the global playground. Relying on cuddly koalas is no longer enough for this country.

Emily Lighezzolo is an intern at the Queensland Branch of the Australian Institute of International Affairs and a reporter for The Transnational Review. Views are her own.

Event Report: Global Megatrends

Preparing for a future we can't shape with Dr Stefan Hajkowicz

By Emily Lighezzolo

Humans have always held a fascination with what our future beholds, envisaging dystopias, flying-hover-boards or The Matrix. Many people often disregard future predictions as mere “science fiction.” However, Dr Stefan Hajkowicz has devoted his career to the field of strategic foresight at CSIRO.

In “Global Megatrends”, Dr Hajkowicz procured his crystal ball and envisioned how several patterns of global change will affect the world and Australia over the next twenty years. “Megatrends are gradual yet powerful trajectories of change that have the potential to throw companies, individuals and societies into ‘freefall’,” Dr Hajkowicz said.

In our fast-paced world nothing happens in isolation—even shocking events such as September 11 and the financial crash were heralded by larger global forces occurring at the time. While megatrends cannot be directly influenced by us, we can use them to anticipate the future and perhaps alter or prepare for their impact.

Our future will be shaped by the following seven global megatrends, according to Dr Hajkowicz.

1. More for Less: The first megatrend refers to the increased global demand for limited resources. We are witnessing an unremitting population growth, rise in the middle-class, and economic development; today’s shoppers have more buying power than ever before. This translates to a skyrocketing need for dwindling resources, including food, energy, water, minerals and more.

Food production needs to grow by 70 percent in order to feed the global population by 2035, according to Dr Hajkowicz. The Worldwide Fund for Nature estimates that by 2050, humankind will need 100 per cent more of the planet’s total biocapacity (i.e. forestry, fisheries, croplands) than there currently is. Accordingly, humans may as well find another Earth-like planet to exploit in the next thirty-five years.

At the moment hedonism and over-consumption in Western parts of our world prevents many developing countries from getting their share of resources. Also, 35 per cent of food produced is not consumed and goes to waste. If we rectify the inequitable distribution issues that our world currently faces, perhaps this trend will not be as dire as scientists forecast.

2. Going, going... gone?: The second megatrend represents the species loss on Earth; humankind faces a spate of extinction that has not been witnessed since the death of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. Scientists predict that approximately 30 to 50 per cent of species on earth will be extinct by 2050.

Today we are living through the sixth great extinction (known as the Holocene extinction event) and humankind is wholly culpable for it. This implicates the fragile web of ecosystems that sustains this Earth and humans.

There were no soothing words from Dr Hajkowicz about this trend, as humankind’s existence is putting the Earth’s biodiversity in jeopardy. The domination of one species may just obliterate all other species.

3. The Silk Highway: The third megatrend highlights the implications of the shifting global economy from the west to east, and the new world order that will emerge as a result. Geopolitical power will be held by Asia, which by 2020 will boast three of the world’s largest economies: India, Japan and China. History has been a victim whenever a great new power has arisen and often military conflict has followed.

However, this economical shift in Australia’s own backyard could be advantageous. Australian politicians have referred to the 21st century as the “Asian Century”. Today, Australia is the sixth largest stakeholder in The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and a member of the Asian Development Bank. Our country has ascertained a political hand in the Asian world order, potential establishing a flow-on opportunity of investment and tourism from Asia.

4. Forever Young: The fourth megatrend refers to Australia’s aging population as by 2050, 25 per cent of Australians will be over the age of 65. This is due to the extension of life expectancy from medical innovation and our sustained low fertility rate. Such trends will have negative implications on healthcare resources and prices. We can also wave goodbye to any proposition of an early retirement.

Consequently, Australia will see a bilateral decline in labour force and in the population of traditional working-age people. Even now, not enough hours of labour are being done by Australians under 65 to compensate for the unprecedented increase in people who are retired.

5. Virtually Here: Increased connectivity has transferred tangible tasks and experiences to the virtual world. Ultimately, this means I can sit on my bed wearing pyjamas, while buying jeans from the U.S., and telecommuting with my university lecturer.

Currently, six per cent of the Australian workforce telecommutes, which means they earn their income by working online from home or a similar off-site location. Technology will negate the need for workplaces as workers will no longer be required to visit a physical location or office. Perhaps the future will witness the bulk of our corporate workforce in pyjamas.

Technology has also reimagined our retail sector, as consumers increasingly prefer online rather than physical purchases. Data from an Australian Bureau of Statistics reports retail trade contributes AU\$59 billion annually to the Australian economy and employs 1.2 million Australians.

6. Great Expectations: The sixth trend is an implication of the rise of the middle-class, as people become in a position to look beyond basic physiological necessities. Expenditure on art, culture, and experience has increased in the average Australian household.

This trend also reveals a shift from Facebook relationships to face-to-face relationships, as the virtual world no longer sustains our cravings for social interaction. After all, we are social beings who have always desired to live in a community.

However, Dr Hajkowicz stresses that this megatrend is purely from the perspective of the wealthy. Our world still holds 1 billion starving people whom just dream about enough food and water to sustain them.

7. The Innovation Imperative: Dr Hajkowicz revealed a new megatrend facing Australia that requires scientists and researchers to be more innovative. Technological advancement is accelerating and will create new markets, while extinguishing existing ones. New areas of science and discovery are opening doors in regenerative and personalised medicine, energy storage, artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, and informatics.

The fuel to drive economies in the future will no longer be minerals, land, and agriculture but ideas. To continue Australia’s economic growth, we are faced with the imperative to innovate.



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