

# THE TRANSNATIONAL REVIEW

## Year of the Caliphate

*12 Months of the Islamic State*

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## One Year of the Khilafah

I logged on to Twitter just over a year ago on 29 June, to find that my feed was awash in the commotion that the jihadi group Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (Isis) were demanding to now be referred to as Islamic State (IS), after declaring a new caliphate in the Middle East. The organisation, with a tumultuous history from its foundation in 1999 as Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, under the stewardship of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, became the most infamous splinter of al Qaeda during the occupation of Iraq.

Zarqawi's group became notorious for their megalomaniacal use of violence, not only against the "Crusader West", but against the Shiite Muslims of Iraq. This was a form of great tension between Osama Bin Laden and Zarqawi, with the former arguing that such a focus on Shia Iraqis at the expense of Western troops would turn regional Muslim opinion against al Qaeda.

Now, in 2015, IS represent a group that have swept through two countries, have various emirates in others (think Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance to the group in Nigeria), and have attracted a sizeable portion of the largest foreign fighter mobilisation since the Afghanistan jihad during the 1980s.

Over the past twelve months, the group have switched from an offensive posture to a defensive one.

Fighting a war on multiple fronts against Iranian-led Shiite militias, Syrian and Iraqi Kurds, the Syrian Government, and contending all the while with US-led airstrikes, the group's reliance on an aura of invincibility and continual momentum has been shaken, but not destroyed. The towns of Ramadi and Palmyra both fell to IS forces recently, sparking a chorus of outrage from more neoconservative-minded commentators, who argue that US President Barack Obama is too passive, too weak, to defeat IS.

Really, as Ramadi has shown, IS have only made gains in areas of Iraq dominated by Sunnis, long disenfranchised by the Shia-led government in Baghdad, who enjoy the patronage of Tehran. I had the honour of spluttering and stuttering alongside the University of Queensland's Patrick Jory at a panel discussion last month, who convincingly argued that the decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein, along with the de-Baathification of the Iraqi Army was the most pivotal point in the region's recent history, with the effects spilling over borders, with grave consequences.

While the group are unlikely to fall in the medium-term, the consequences of their campaign will remain far longer than their operational capacity.

# Finding Thucydides in Canberra

The first international relations historian has lessons for Australia

## Miles Kitts

In April 2015 noted strategist Colin Gray published a monograph through the Strategic Studies Institute at the United States Army War College. This monograph is entitled *Thucydides Was Right: Defining the Future Threat*. In this monograph Gray uses the ideas of fifth century BCE Athenian general and historian Thucydides as the basis for framing how the United States should consider future military threats to its security. These ideas are also applicable to the Australian context.

At the outset, Gray acknowledges the problem of the applicability of Thucydides' ideas from two and a half thousand years ago to thinking about the present, or the future. Gray says that this problem concerns the applicability of Thucydides' ideas due to the tension between continuity and change. Gray argues that some of Thucydides' ideas are still applicable as they have continuity with today's world and will continue to do so into the future.

Gray asserts that these ideas should shape how the United States thinks about preparing for future threats. Gray specifies these ideas as being the three constants of human nature, the political process, and the logic and method of strategy. For the sake of clarity, Gray defines the logic of strategy as being the policy goals which strategy seeks to achieve. Gray further defines the method of strategy as the search for harmony between the ends being fought for, the ways in which the fighting is prosecuted, and the means being used in the fighting. In addition to calling for the use of these three constants, Gray also calls for the need to make assumptions about what the future will be like.

In applying this thinking to the context of the United States, Gray argues that American decision-makers need to take on board a number of assumptions. The first is that the United States needs to prudently plan to meet challenges while under conditions of ignorance of the future. Second, the definition of threat is not always self-evident, but is often vague. Third, historical parallels are the norm, not the exception. This third point invokes the importance of applying Thucydides' constants of human nature, the political process, and the logic and method of strategy. Fourth, the United States is bound by the same social realities as everyone else in the world. Finally, the future is uncertain, meaning that unforeseen events will occur.

Thucydides' ideas about future planning, as defined and built upon by Gray, should be applied by Australian strategists to the Australian context. In particular, there are four assumptions which should guide them in formulating Australia's future defence planning. The first point is that Australia today and in future does not face one overarching threat, but faces a range of possible and actual threats. These possible and actual threats range from large states within the international system to non-state actors with global reach. Specifically, a war in East Asia involving China is a possible threat. A crisis involving North Korea which results in war is another possible threat. A deterioration of relations with Indonesia is a possible source of future war. An attack on Australian territory by jihadists, originating from either inside or outside of the country, is a threat which has happened before and could happen again. The ongoing need to maintain maritime border security is an actual threat which will endure into the future. Another recurring threat to security is state collapse within countries that are close to Australia.

The second assumption is that, unless one overarching threat emerges which demands all of the energies of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), the ADF will need to be prepared to flexibly respond to the range of possible threats outlined above. This means that the ADF needs to be able to have long-range precision strike capabilities for use against specific targets. It must also be able to defend against missile attacks. It must contribute to maritime border security. The ADF needs to be able to support state-capacity-building efforts in foreign countries. It must also have the means to sustain large numbers of personnel so that ground forces can provide continuous security to contested populations. Finally, the ADF must be able to project and sustain interservice amphibious forces made up of components of air, sea, and land forces.

The third assumption is that Australia has always sought to find its security in cooperation with others. This has come most prominently in seeking security first with Britain, and then the United States. This mainstay of Australian behaviour, finding security with likeminded partners, is likely to continue given the

*“Australia seeks to promote a rules-based international society, liberal democracy, and an open international economy.”*

alignment of Australia's interests with those of its current and potential future security partners. In general, Australia seeks to promote a rules-based international society, liberal democracy, and an open international economy. Australia's current main security partner, the United States, seeks these general goals. Japan is a potential future major security partner for Australia as they also seek these same general goals. Australia's [recent](#) moves to enhance ties with Japan show this congruence of interests. With such partners on offer, it is likely that Australia will continue to seek its security with those partners.

The final assumption is that Australia does not have, nor is it likely to have, the ability to carry out all of the tasks that will be asked of the ADF. This is another long-standing feature of Australia's presence on the international stage. Australia has limited funds and personnel available for the ADF. Furthermore, Australia's defence industry is not large or diversified enough to meet all possible demands. Under such conditions, Australia will not have in its possession all of the assets required to meet all contingencies. As such, Australia will most likely continue its historical trait of seeking to make up for this shortfall in military capability by supplementing the ADF with the assistance of security partners. This behaviour acknowledges the shortfall of Australia's defence capabilities to meet its defence requirements, and its defence capabilities, thereby making the ideas of Thucydides and Gray that much more important for adequate future defence planning.

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# High Society: The Miliband Delusion

The former Labour leader is gone, but his legacy lives on

**James Snell**

After a humiliating defeat for his party at the polls in the British General Election, Ed Miliband may be gone, but his legacy continues to shape events in Westminster – and not for the better. The losing Labour leader has left his party an immense and almost intolerable burden. It falls to those left standing – unlike former Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls, who lost his seat amid the debacle – to pick up the pieces and begin once again to rebuild the Labour Party.

Foreign policy, it seems, occurs very low down indeed in their list of priorities – which includes such momentous tasks as reversing the electoral rout in Scotland, reconstructing the decimated Labour leadership, and attempting once again to engender an image of the party's economic competence, which for nearly ten years has eluded those in most desperate need of it.

The new Conservative majority government, too, has little to gain by beginning the new Parliament with anything resembling a thoughtful and thorough examination of foreign affairs. As I wrote in my previous column, the Tory leadership even before the election was of the opinion that foreign policy could offer the party little in terms of votes; and no one when surveying the post-election scene can see any reason to think or act otherwise. Labour, after all, lost the confidence of the public on the essential issues: it was afflicted with an obvious and unapologetic lack of economic acumen, the perception of being 'soft' on those who take the welfare system for a ride, and a seeming inability to arrest the inexorable, catastrophic rise of the SNP. It was not David Cameron's action or lack of it in Europe and the wider world which made the difference; thoroughly domestic concerns predominated in the minds of those who voted for the Conservatives in unpredictably large numbers, taking every pollster by surprise.

Next to those matters, international matters hold little appeal, especially to a political class of sorts whose thoughts and concerns are increasingly directed by what can be discerned from the daily opinion polls; and those at the top made little effort to reverse this trend. This is where we return to the unfortunate Mr Miliband. An intellectual by taste and an oddity by nature, Miliband was at his most successful when on home territory and in front of a friendly crowd. His ideal audience needed no convincing about the merits of taxing the rich to supplement the National Health Service. But the country as a whole needed more than that, so Miliband began to supplement his socialist ideology with dashes of political opportunism, and it is this category into which foreign policy was flung.

Like a weathervane, the Labour Party under Miliband swung in whichever direction met with the most popular approval, and like that instrument, the Labour leader and his team were content to slavishly follow the weather; not to engage in the more politically complex process of making it.

This opportunism can be seen in Labour's contradictory voting record, which was seemingly more determined by opinion polls than morality or the national interest. Miliband followed David Cameron in calling for a no-fly zone over Libya in 2011, raising only minor opposition to the operation which followed. He and his party voted against intervention in Syria in 2013, later using this dark episode to score political points during a television debate in the election campaign, and he supported David Cameron in voting for airstrikes against the Islamic State in Iraq, but not in

Syria – the source of its revenue and geopolitical strength (this after several British hostages had been brutally beheaded by the group and there was a clear public majority in favour of such action). Finally, and brazenly, Miliband used the occasion of a speech at Chatham House during the election campaign proper to criticise David Cameron's handling of the Libyan intervention, a course of action he and his party endorsed at the time.

Apparently Labour strategists thought that, if they remained rigidly on the 'right side' of public opinion in this particular field of policy, it would make up for taking more unpopular stances on the home front. And apparently they also thought that no one would notice. Both of those assumptions have been entirely disproven; yet, in the aftermath of an election criticised from all sides as unexciting, in which politicians largely played safe for fear of making some tactical blunder or other, this

*“Foreign policy remains an area of governmental activity only where votes can be lost, many believe.”*

modus operandi – which has become something of an archetypal Labour position – is unlikely to change.

Foreign policy remains an area of governmental activity only where votes can be lost, many believe, and consequently politicians to a man will likely avoid it in favour of less contentious topics of discussion. That this is a tragedy in need of remedy does not seem to have occurred to anyone – and even if it has, no one is brave enough to say, or do, anything about it. Britain's politicians are willing to sacrifice our place in the world – and all the attendant responsibilities and obligations which a first rank nation must expect – for a quiet life. It is very a great shame, and it exacerbates the extent to which Britain appears to be retreating from responsibility, both in its European and global manifestations.

In the case of Labour this record is inconsistent and hypocritical and deeply shallow. (And the Conservatives themselves are not immune from it; David Cameron meekly gave up the prospect of protecting the Syrian people from war crimes perpetuated by chemical or conventional means after what was only a fairly narrow parliamentary defeat on the matter.) Even though the primary author of this policy – Miliband – has effectively departed the scene, the Labour Party is likely to continue on this saddening trajectory.

Ed Miliband resigned the day after his party's trouncing at the hands of the electorate, but his legacy, for good or for ill, lives on. With the remaining Labour leadership candidates too preoccupied with their internecine struggles to care about foreign policy, and the Tory government secure in its domestic supremacy, there sadly seems little chance of anyone in British political life taking the initiative in international affairs.

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# A National Shame

Australia's approach to asylum seekers is inhumane and detrimental

**Jayne Francis**

Australia has often prided itself on being a responsible global actor and sponsor in the realm of human rights. The condemnation that Australia receives from organisations such as the United Nations and Amnesty International in regards to its treatment of asylum seekers in detention, and its border protection policies in general, runs contrary to this.

Since the new conservative government has come into power one of the most hard-pressed statements has been 'stop the boats!'. Whilst this campaign has been spun to the Australian community as a way to stop deaths at sea and protect Australian jobs, what has often been neglected and overlooked is the actual approach that Australia has taken in order to deter those seeking asylum.

The approach I refer to specifically is the "push and pull" tactics that Australia has used as a way to appear as unwelcoming as possible to asylum seekers. These tactics have led to Australia being used as an example of what not to do when it comes to dealing with boat arrivals. Under current government policies, asylum seekers arriving on boats are finding themselves being pushed away and literally hauled back to places that Australia chooses to ignore. Or, in the case of those on Nauru and Manus Island, being placed indefinitely in highly restrictive detention, in conditions that are visibly inhumane and contradictory to Australia's rhetoric regarding people's fundamental rights. These two practices raise concerns for a number of reasons and foster questions in regards to the Australian government's real aims in contrast to what it is broadcasting to the general public.

For instance Tony Abbot has repeatedly stated that the key aim is to stop deaths at sea and halt the arrival of boats. Although he has been successful in doing that, he has failed to mention in each of his speeches that, while boats have indeed been "stopped", the individuals seeking asylum do not disappear and their lives are still put in significant danger. As was the case when Australia handed Tamil asylum seekers to Sri Lankan militants; the very government who has been found guilty of committing genocide against Tamils. Under new domestic laws the government is now permitted to covertly detain boats at sea or tow them back to any place outside of Australian waters. This includes countries that will not accept them or have little capability to deal with them successfully. By doing so Australia merely pushes this apparent burden on to other states or sees innocent civilians being forced to return to persecution.

Under the 1951 Refugee Convention, Australia is legally required to ensure that these people are not returned to harm or harmed in any processes. Australia must also allow anyone who is seeking asylum to have their refugee status assessed fairly. Australia is blatantly ceasing to recognise these laws as it continues to tow asylum seekers back to Indonesia on unsafe boats and refuses to address their claims. In this case Australia is unquestionably communicating to the rest of the world that it does not want to commit to this evident global challenge and care for those seeking asylum, regardless of the fact that it has far more capability than states that currently accept double our total intake.

If this is not conflictual enough, the treatment of those arriving who cannot be totally neglected is an entirely separate case that reinstates Australia's insensitive attitude towards those who need our assistance. The government is persistently assuring the Australian public that it conforms to the international human rights obligations that it has historically vowed to follow.

Yet Australia, a founding member of the United Nations,

is now being criticised for multiple breaches of international law on numerous occasions due to its existing asylum seeker policies. Critics argue that Australia has one of the harshest attitudes in the world towards those seeking asylum, and condemn its offshore detention facilities. In these facilities people in detention are stripped of their dignity as they are refused access to basic education, water, medical services, and the right of access to legal representation. Furthermore they are kept in these facilities indefinitely, which in plainer terms, signifies that they are held against their will.

Whilst detaining them for a certain period is of course necessary for health checks and various security concerns, it has been repeatedly argued by authorities such as Human Rights Lawyer Julian Burnside, that undetermined detention results in further violations of these people's civil liberties. This is because they are kept in isolated conditions and treated as faceless

*"Australia, a founding member of the United Nations, is now being criticised for multiple breaches of international law on numerous occasions due to its existing asylum seeker policies."*

characters, being degraded in the process, which leads to short and long term psychological damage as illustrated by the numerous suicides and riots that have taken place within Australian facilities. These conditions are just one example of how Australia handles this situation and already it is clear that when in detention, there is an overwhelming disregard for liberties that these individuals are universally entitled to.

Additionally asylum seekers are constantly demonised by the media and illustrated as queue jumpers who will steal Australian jobs. But these are all contradictory assumptions to the actual facts. Firstly asylum seekers are not illegal immigrants; their title merely implies that they have not had the opportunity to be granted refugee status. This is often because the centres that provide the required documents are surrounded by adversaries who wish to stop anyone leaving the corrupt and harmful regimes. Secondly despite what a majority of Australians presume, over 90% of cases regarding those seeking asylum are found to be legitimate refugees. Thirdly, although Australia has increased its humanitarian intake, it remains 62<sup>nd</sup> for refugee intakes in relation to population size per 1000 inhabitants, and 87<sup>th</sup> in relation to our national wealth GDP per capita.

These figures expose the minuscule efforts of Australia in relation to others and yet Australia still seems to have an obsession with making sure asylum seekers are not our problem to deal with. Australia is not being asked to allow each and every asylum seeker to be accepted into its borders but is urged by the international community to at least deal with the problem in a humane way. Australia would do well to remember Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 'everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.'

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# The Sacking of Palmyra

What the Islamic State's capture of the ancient city means for the world

**Laure Fournier**

On May 21, the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra was seized and placed under the control of the Islamic State (IS). This city, an exceptional historical site, with all its architectural richness, and antiquities, is a true cultural jewel. Palmyra, of course, is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The city that was home to the third century Queen, Zenobia, whom led a famous revolt against the Roman Empire, derives its outstanding wealth and the interest of archaeologists and historians not only for its ruins and its beauty, but also from the fact that several aspects of Palmyra are still to be discovered.

The northern area of the city contains a town dating back to the Roman Empire, built at the end of the fourth century and renovated by the Emperor Justinian during the sixth century. While those ruins might represent the most edifying elements of the architecture of the city, Palmyra dates back several millennia and the vestiges already discovered mirror just three centuries of the history of this ancient place.

[The historian Maurice Sartre](#) insists on the hidden treasures of the Syrian city. Promisingly, since excavations began, much wealth has been discovered. After IS seized the city, they locked down the museum, a symbolic act which brings to light values that the group advocates. The Syrian forces of Bashar al-Assad did not successfully defend the city against a siege of the terror group.

This event is another example of the grave danger to mankind that the Islamic State represents. Since the establishment of the caliphate in June last year, covering parts of Iraq and Syria, IS has had a considerable and horrific impact in terms of loss of human lives. Furthermore, if the destruction of this worldwide cultural, historical and architectural heritage site by IS takes place, it would show how anything disconnected from their interpretation of Islamic history is not acceptable to the terror group. This utter and macabre disdain for cultural and archaeological wonders is a reflection of how IS are blinded by hate and ideology. Palmyra is not the first illustration of this. In February, for example, they burnt more than 100,000 manuscripts from the Mosul central library. Some of the documents were registered on a UNESCO rarities list.

In 1933, Hitler undertook a book burning of thousands of writings of Jewish literature, among others, which represented several centuries of literature. That was an act of ignominy towards a great part of the German culture. This Nazi campaign was initiated in order to fight a supposed "un-German" spirit. The horrible and inhuman acts of Nazi Germany were of an unprecedented barbarism and cruelty and nothing of that scale has been done before or since in the history of mankind.

However, it is fundamental to acknowledge the inhumanity of the ISIL and the resulting danger. Indeed, the acts of the ISIL bring to light the barbarism of the terrorist community. ISIL has as an ambition to establish a violent and unfair system. This system seeks to destroy lives of people who disagree with their convictions and, generally speaking, the Western world and its culture.

The destructive acts of ISIL, such as those perpetuated in Mosul and in Palmyra, have been realised because the targeted cultural elements do not belong to their interpretation of Islamic history. Today, this cultural masterpiece of Palmyra is between the hands of a cruel and brutal group, whose objectives and values go against the most renowned and fundamental of human

rights. Various human rights instruments prohibit from harm the protection of the cultural diversity, a concept which appears to be abstract and far from the concerns of IS.

Moreover, according to international humanitarian law, every party has the duty to respect the cultural inheritance of the contested territory, notably by avoiding targeting such sites or using them for military purposes. According to a report concluded by the United Nations, the leaders of the IS bear criminal liability for their acts, in particular regarding the International Criminal Court, and for crimes against humanity and war crimes.

As UNESCO have stated, the destruction of the ancient city would be an "enormous loss to humanity".

The terrorists have already taken lives since the conquest of Palmyra. Most of the museum's antiquities have been transferred to the capital city of Damascus. Some statues have however already been destroyed and the IS flag has been planted

*"The northern area of the city contains a town dating back to the Roman Empire, built at the end of the fourth century and renovated by the Emperor Justinian during the sixth century."*

on a castle, overlooking the area where the ruins are located. The concept of statues have already been criticised by the terrorist members who consider them as idols that were being honoured in place of God and who destroyed them during the attacks in Mosul.

One of the greatest difficulties in the fight against terrorism is the fact that the international community is facing people who commit themselves to impose their own ideas at the cost of their own lives. Moreover, war is not a deterrent for them since it is what they are seeking. Furthermore, the terror groups, and ISIL is a good illustration of this, are comfortable with the use of the Internet and employ it as a propaganda tool which brings them hundreds of new inductees. The members of the terror group have for instance posted propaganda pictures and videos on social media showing their power takeover in Palmyra and setting in scene their installation.

Even though voices from the international community have been heard, there is a feeling of powerlessness concerning the case of Palmyra. The headmaster of the UNESCO, Irina Bokova has asked the UN to seize this issue, stating that any destruction in Palmyra would be a war crime.

The advance of the army of ISIL throughout Syrian territory shows the fact that a sizeable portion of Syria lies between the hands of the terror group who now control half of the state territory. IS deliberately benefited from the civil conflict to establish itself. The additional storming of Palmyra is another huge drama for the Syrian population. It is also a drama for the entire world. Today, it is our values concerning the preservation of a magnificent cultural heritage that needs to be fought for.

[As Maamoun Abdulkarim declared](#), Syria's antiquities chief, "this is the entire world's battle".

*Laure Fournier is an intern with the Australian Institute of International Affairs, Queensland.*

# What is the Islamic State?

*Dr. Andrew Phillips presented his take on the so-called caliphate, ahead of their one year anniversary.*

By Elliot Dolan-Evans

Since its blitzkrieg in Iraq last northern summer, the Islamic State (IS) has confirmed its place as one of the most conspicuously violent challenges to international order. Associate Professor Andrew Phillips (PhD, Cornell) is a Discovery Early Career Research Award Fellow in the School of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Queensland, and he joined the Australian Institute of International Affairs QLD Branch (AIIA) at a packed venue on the Terraces of George Street, to discuss what exactly the Islamic State is.

Dr Phillips began discussions by highlighting the dangerously deficient understanding of IS amongst politicians and in the general public. The historical development of IS can be traced back to the origins of Salafi-Jihadism, which is an ideology based on a belief in violent jihad and returning to 'true' Islam - a very literal translation of the Quran - starting in the 1920s. 'Jihad' in itself refers to the idea of striving, and in the context of the Muslim faith it refers to the struggle to be better Muslims; however, some fundamentalist, Salafi-Jihad groups have utilised this term to symbolise their violent movement. Through the Salafi-Jihadism ideology, IS has adopted its political goals of ridding Western influences from the Middle East, 'purify' the Muslim world, and unite Muslim people under a caliphate.

Moving from the historical development of the ideological basis of modern-day IS, Dr Phillips elegantly led the packed congregation through the contemporary growth of the terrorist group. IS has its roots in the Iraqi arm of al-Qaeda, established by Abu-Musab al-Zarqawi in 1999, which led brutal attacks on Shi'ite Muslims and Western forces during the Coalition occupation of Iraq from 2002-2006. Al-Zarqawi's allegiance with the main al-Qaeda group was an un-easy one, due to personality and also ideological belief - Al-Zarqawi was able to justify the killing of Muslims to further his political goals, and he had a more internal focus on re-modelling the Middle East, whilst al-Qaeda saw the Western World as suppressing Muslims and focused on the external destruction of this enemy. The major differences between what would become IS and al-Qaeda, is that the former believed it necessary to create a local caliphate first, whilst al-Qaeda believed in destroying the Western enemy at home and abroad, and the caliphate would naturally develop later.

The Al-Zarqawi group (al-Qaeda in Iraq) were in catastrophe in 2008-2009, two years after al-Zarqawi's death and with a revolt from Sunni Arab chiefs in partnership with United State forces against the group

*“IS has its roots in the Iraqi arm of al-Qaeda, established by Abu-Musab al-Zarqawi in 1999.”*

(the 'Anbar Awakening'). However, once the US left, IS reinvented itself throughout 2011, in the face of a failed 'Arab Spring', an oppressive new Iraqi government that subjected Sunni Muslims to discrimination, and the Syrian Civil war. These conditions created a perfect basis for IS to fill the power-void left from the evacuation of US forces, and they begin to attack Shi'ite Muslims in order to make Iraq ungovernable - subjecting the population to sectarian and ethnic cleansing to cause havoc.

Dr Phillips moved on to look at IS today, after it broke with al-Qaeda in 2014, the group now has a totalitarian project in creating the caliphate and has sought to govern the regions in Syria and Iraq that it has conquered. IS, as a group of well over 30,000, are putting a huge amount of effort into governing the provinces it has taken control of, in order to give legitimacy to its goals. Ideologically, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that local populaces have not bought the IS message or their goals, but they are kept in line by the harsh brutality that the group harnesses.

In concluding his memorable address, Dr Phillip again reemphasised the problems with not understanding IS sufficiently. He was at pains to highlight the ignorance around the politicisation of IS as a domestic threat and a death cult, citing the insightful analyst of Prime Minister Abbott, and how that will feed in to not only poorly developed responses to IS, but also the curtailing of civil liberties at home with the 'IS excuse'. Dr Phillip called for a greater understanding of the goals and movements of the IS group, and in constructing solutions internationally to address this issue. Rather than IS being a threat to Western democracy as we know it, the real threat IS currently poses is to the millions of civilians who have been affected by their brutality, and that must be the priority for the international community.

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# The Sunni-Shia Divide and the Future of the Middle East

*A recap of the panel discussion co-hosted between the AIIA Queensland the UQ United Nations Student Association.*

By Elliot Dolan-Evans

The Australian Institute of International Affairs Queensland Branch (AIIA), and the University of Queensland United Nations Student Association (UQUNSA) joined together to host an enlightening discussion on the divide between the Sunni and Shia branches of the Muslim faith, and how this divide has shaped the history, and will affect the future, of the Middle East. The event was held within the pristine grounds of the University of Queensland, where a full lecture theatre of over 300 greeted the esteemed panellists to address one of the most complicated conflicts in this modern age. Each of the panel members had a particular interest in this area, and started with an opening presentation outlining the Sunni-Shia divide from their unique perspective.

Dr Halim Rane, the first panellist, is an Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at Griffith University, and has expertise on how the media frames the Muslim world. Dr Rane discussed the theological and political origins of the Sunni (85-90% of Muslims) and Shia (10-15%) faith, and their progressive formation following the death of the prophet Mohamed. However, contrasting the strong contemporary focus on the conflicts between the two, Dr Rane was quick to point out that most Muslims across the world just see themselves as Muslims, rather than defining themselves more narrowly.

Our own Joseph Power then spoke next from the perspective of Iran in this divide, which is a special topic of expertise for him in the Middle Eastern world. Joseph serves on the Executive Council of the Australian Institute of International Affairs (QLD) and is the inaugural Middle East and North Africa Fellow for Young Australians in International Affairs. In his address, Joseph articulated the political importance of religious interactions in the Middle East, and how it influences conflict. In particular, Iran (predominantly Shia-based) has assisted state-run foreign fighter programs in Syria to combat the 'Sunni threat' in that country. Joseph explained that Iran works closely with Syria, especially due to both countries disdain towards Sunni Muslims, in securing arms and funding to Hezbollah in assisting the Palestinian groups attacking the 'common enemy' Israel.

Dr Patrick Jory, a Senior Lecturer in Southeast Asian History and an Adjunct Professor at the Centre for International Studies, Ohio University, was the third panellist. Dr Jory's expertise in history was an exceptional boost to the panel, and he articulated very clearly the modern historical background of many of the current inter-Muslim conflicts. Taking on from Joseph's

*“Dr Jory described the historical clashes between the Ottoman Empire and Persia, and how it has morphed into a contemporary struggle between Shia Iran and the Arab monarchies.”*

focus on Iran as one of the major powers of the region, Dr Jory described the historical clashes between the Ottoman Empire and Persia, and how it has morphed into a contemporary struggle between Shia Iran and the Arab monarchies. These historical battles are now being played out in this modern age, as the Arab world fund Sunni rebellions in Shia-controlled countries such as Iran, which often results in reprisal violence.

Finally, Dr Alex Bellamy, the Director of the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and a Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies, specifically spoke on practical drivers and then solutions to the widespread conflict engulfing the Middle East. Dr Bellamy focused on the humanitarian aspect of the conflict, which are the millions of refugees that have been created from on-going violence in the region. The on-going Shia-Sunni conflict in many states, along with the rise of ISIS, and the brutal civil war in Yemen can be put down to a number of factors, Dr Bellamy argued, including the high rates of unemployment in young people, declining power of States due to non-State actors, intensifying competition on resources such as water, and the fact that the Western powers have often done more harm than good here. Outlining a road-map of long-term improvement in the region, Dr Bellamy identified a number of positive actions that the international community can take, such as supporting humanitarian assistance, the embargo of arms trade to the region, the freezing of assets of war criminals, lay groundwork for international discussions and a long-term political situation, and the development of economic strategies.

At the conclusion of the event, there was an opportunity for attendees to quiz these experts on various issues surrounding the Shia-Sunni divide, which was taken enthusiastically by many. It capped off a wonderful evening of informed and balanced discussion, and the partnership between the AIIA and the UQUNSA in creating this event was extremely successful.

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# Reading McConnell in Tehran

## How should we deal with the new face of Iran?

By Emily Lighezzolo

Political powers like to clothe foreign policy in euphemisms—creating a façade over their ideological and self-interested agendas. As such, we witnessed American troops invading Iraq under the banner of “freedom fighting.” “Martyrdom” is used to praise suicide-bombers who die for the Islamic State cause overseas. And Iran calls their foreign policy against the perceived oppression of the current Western-dominated world system “exporting the revolution.”

However, seemingly harmless titles hide regional hegemonic agendas and recalcitrant nuclear initiatives—as in Iran’s case. After the country’s domestic dictatorship was overthrown in the popular revolution of 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran looked to overthrow the international dictatorship as well. The revolutionaries viewed it as “unjust” and self-serving to only a minority. They wore their anti-Westphalian agenda on their sleeves.

At the time, the Cold War blanketed international relations in a bipolar frost of tension—and Iran chose the diplomatic middle-ground of “neither East, nor West.” This became Iran’s prevailing guideline after the revolution. It wanted to unify the Muslim nations of the world against the “tyranny” of the prevalent world system. Iran became active in the Non-Aligned movement of the Cold War, refusing to politically sway to the interests of the West or East: The U.S. or Russia.

Since the fall of communism, which gave way to the era of American unilateralism, Iran’s foreign policy has remained the same. The country’s core goal lingers: to maximise hegemonic power in the region and “deal with the West” (another euphemism that aligns itself with the congenial “brushing of hands”). Iran no longer wants to be the social-pariah on the world stage and it’s making its presence known.

Iran is an Islamic theocracy that politically brews state and religion together more thoroughly than any other country. Clerical dominance has reached into the elected branches of government. Since the formation of the Republic, until very recently, every elected president had been a cleric—except two that were brutally assassinated. Ultimately, theology cannot help but saturate its policies—including in the

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foreign realm.

It was not until 2005 and the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that a non-cleric represented the people of Iran (2005-2013). However, Ahmadinejad might be remembered most infamously for his comments for Israel to be “eliminated from the pages of history” and for calling the Holocaust “a myth.” Furthermore, he vigorously supported his nuclear programme against international criticism and inevitable sanctions. Indeed, once again, Iran was scorned on the world stage and found its desire to be counted as ‘world-player’ spurned.

Contrastingly, the election of President Rouhani in 2013 softened significantly the tone of Iranian international relations. He opened the policy of “open dialogue” with its global allies about their nuclear initiatives. This softening of tone was explicitly seen in the recent Lausanne negotiations. It saw Iran agree to curb its nuclear-armament potential (through uranium capacity), in exchange for relief from sanctions.

However, not all are convinced that Iran was now a passive and amenable player in the world-order. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell was apparently not “duped” by this “Iranian dialogue strategy,” as in his words: Iran is “the world’s leading state sponsor of terror.” Israelites, Saudi-Arabians and Republicans jumped at the chance to repudiate the deal, also.

However, amidst scepticism and dubiousness, it is evident that Iran has tried on a new costume to parade around in, on the world stage—I would say in a prudent and congenial fashion. The world now just has to watch and wait to see if Iran is once again dressing in euphemisms.



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