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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | The Australian Institute of International Affairs New South Wales welcomes you to issue 78 of: | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | **From the Councillors** | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | Each week, some of our Councillors and interns share a selection of articles, analytical pieces, videos and podcasts about what is happening in the world of international affairs. This week, they consider the the question of women's rights in Afghanistan, a review of the development of e-payments systems and Robert Oppenheimer's role in the Manhattan Project.  Disclaimer: The views expressed below by councillors and interns are their own. The Australian Institute of International Affairs New South Wales does not take policy positions. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | | [**T**](https://www.mup.com.au/books/the-mother-of-mohammed-paperback-softback#:~:text=In%20The%20Mother%20of%20Mohammed,member%20of%20the%20jihadist%20elite.)[**he Mother of Mohammed**](https://www.mup.com.au/books/the-mother-of-mohammed-paperback-softback#:~:text=In%20The%20Mother%20of%20Mohammed,member%20of%20the%20jihadist%20elite.)  The Mother of Mohammed: An Australian woman’s extraordinary journey into Jihad was published in 2009, more than ten years ago. It tells the story of Rabiah Johnston, born in Mudgee NSW into a strict Presbyterian household, and how she travelled to Bali, Jakarta, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Egypt after converting to Islam, eventually marrying a senior Al Qaeda leader, before being repatriated to Australia. The personal story provides insights into the belief system of [**Wahabi fundamentalist Islam**](https://www.mup.com.au/books/the-mother-of-mohammed-paperback-softback#:~:text=In%20The%20Mother%20of%20Mohammed,member%20of%20the%20jihadist%20elite.) and the joys and tribulations of life as a woman in an Islamist state.  Since the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan, the question of women’s rights in that country has come to the fore again. This makes this book even more relevant and worth reading. A friend picked it up from a neighbourhood street library and passed it on to me. I have found it very enlightening. It is also very easy reading, though sprinkled with Arabic technical terms and quotes from the Koran and the Hadith.  Sally Neighbour, the author of this biography, knows Indonesia well and has won the Walkley Award for excellence in journalism several times.  Image credit: [**Jan Chipchase**](https://southasianvoices.org/afghan-talibans-policy-and-the-erosion-of-womens-rights/) | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | This book was selected by Jocelyn Chey AM. Jocelyn is an Adjunct Professor at the Australia-China Relations Institute, University of Technology Sydney, Visiting Professor at the University of Sydney and an Adjunct Professor at the Australia-China Institute for Arts and Culture at Western Sydney University. She was previously a senior officer in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Jocelyn is a Fellow of Australian Institute of International Affairs. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | | [**The Future of Payments in Africa**](https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/financial-services/our-insights/the-future-of-payments-in-africa)  This article - a collaborative effort by McKinsey & Company Global Banking Practise - provides a useful review of the development of e-payments systems: a development being experienced across the globe as communications and banking/fintech systems are invested in and upgraded; and pan-African payments infrastructure such as the [**PAPSS**](https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/financial-services/our-insights/the-future-of-payments-in-africa) are agreed.  While the review centres on the implementation of these systems across Africa the paper also reviews the impact on economic development in terms of payments systems, and cross-border trade and highlights the regulatory changes required.  The article illustrates not only how young city dwellers but also non-urban people are driving its implementation and benefiting from it, and sees this development as an opportunity for economic development across Africa.  Image credit: [**Institute for Money, Technology and Financial Inclusion**](https://www.devex.com/news/how-to-comply-with-usaid-s-new-procurement-rules-requiring-e-payments-85069) | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | This article was selected by Ian Thomson, an AIIA NSW Councillor since 2022. His international businessexperience includes working with Westpac Banking Corporation, Leighton Contractors and the Sydney Airport Corporation. His international involvement has included operations in Shanghai, Beijing, Macau and Hong Kong, where he resided from 2007 to 2022. During the last decade he has been a university lecturer in accounting and finance. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | | [**J**](https://variety.com/2023/shopping/news/oppenheimer-book-american-prometheus-christopher-nolan-1235675257/)[**udging Oppenheimer**](https://variety.com/2023/shopping/news/oppenheimer-book-american-prometheus-christopher-nolan-1235675257/)  Robert Oppenheimer is the central character in the movie, [**Oppenheimer**](https://variety.com/2023/shopping/news/oppenheimer-book-american-prometheus-christopher-nolan-1235675257/), just released. He was the scientific director of the Manhattan Project that produced the world’s first atomic bombs. The conventional wisdom has it that Oppenheimer was driven by the belief that Nazi Germany was working on the bomb and might use any monopoly of the weapon to win the war then raging. But the Manhattan Project continued after Germany’s defeat – and after it became evident that Germany was further behind than expected in building an atomic bomb. So, what was Oppenheimer’s role in continuing the Manhattan Project? Was it simple hubris, or did he, along with many others at the time, believe that demonstration of the unprecedented explosive power of the weapon might put an end to war generally? And has he been vindicated in this by the non-use of nuclear weapons and the long major power peace since 1945?  Was Oppenheimer hero or villain? Before we rush to judgement, we must take account not just of the uniquely horrible character of nuclear weapons but of wider developments in world politics as well. The right place to start is, of course, K. Bird and M. Sherman, [**American Prometheus**](https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/3643056) (the book on which the movie is based). But useful also are: R. Rhodes, The Making of the Atomic Bomb; J. Gaddis, The Long Peace; and, P. Ham, Hiroshima Nagasaki.   Image credit: [**Los Alamos National Laboratory**](https://picryl.com/media/los-alamos-colloquium-93d6bd) | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | This piece was selected by Bob Howard. Bob researches aspects of the history of international relations in the twentieth century, with special reference to developments in international security. He is an honorary associate and former lecturer in the Department of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney and has written extensively on international relations, international security and Australian politics. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | **From the Interns** | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | In addition to our Councillors' recommendations, we invited our interns to share with you what they have found insightful or interesting in the world of international affairs over this week. This week Matthew Vasic discusses last month's aborted Wagner mutiny and the myth of Russian regime security, while Dominik Hruby discusses the need for Western nations to support the global south and issues surrounding concurrent global heating events.   Disclaimer: The views expressed below by councillors and interns are their own. The Australian Institute of International Affairs New South Wales does not take policy positions. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | [**Russian Roulette**](https://www.theamericanconservative.com/whither-the-siloviki/)  Revolutions are unthinkable until they become inevitable. Last month, the world held its breath as Wagner paramilitaries briefly occupied a garrison in Rostov-on-Don, south of Moscow, which some observers thought pushed Russia to the brink of civil war. Although it was over in 24 hours, the mutiny undermined the myth that Putin is invulnerable: despite his domestic popularity, Chad Nagle, writing for The American Conservative, argues that Putin[**cannot escape the shadow of Russian history**](https://www.theamericanconservative.com/whither-the-siloviki/).   Political turmoil has characterised incarnations of the Russian state since its foundation in 882 CE, most recently in the dissolution of the Russian Empire (1917) and Soviet Union (1991).  Due to this instability, the Russian security services have held disproportionate power over society. Notable examples include the Secret Chancery (Catherine II), Okhrana (Nicholas II), KGB (USSR) and FSB (Russian Federation). It was no coincidence that Russian President Boris Yelstin, whose administration was defined by political and economic chaos, chose Putin, FSB director in 1998-99, to succeed him on the eve of the new millennium. Yelstin could not have made a better choice. Throughout his 23 years in power, Putin has been adept at purging his political rivals. Competitors have either been exiled (Mikhail Khodorkovsky), imprisoned (Alexei Navalny) or murdered (Boris Nemtsov).  But, despite his consolidation of power, Putin, like his Soviet predecessors, will have to continue to look behind his back for adversaries, including from the sivoliki: the security officials who dominate his inner circle. Nagle, nevertheless [**does not predict**](https://www.theamericanconservative.com/whither-the-siloviki/) a break-up of Russia, but a successor to Putin not so different from Putin himself.  Image credit: [**Flickr**](https://www.flickr.com/photos/olpol/) | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | This article was written by Matthew Vasic. Matthew is a fifth-year undergraduate student studying Law and International Relations at Western Sydney University. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | | [**Western Criticism of China must take account of the perils faced by the Global South**](https://www.economist.com/china/2023/07/06/chinas-message-to-the-global-south)  Sir Richard Moore, the head of MI6, recently provided a scathing critique of China’s ‘no limits’ partnership with Russia in a manner that would have been unacceptably confrontational just a few years ago. That such comment from a senior security official is no longer completely jarring reflects the increasing hawkishness with which western countries see China. However, while western officials are right to criticise China’s support of Russia’s war in Ukraine as anti-western propaganda undermining the rules-based world order, they would do well to occasionally empathise with some of the messaging directed against them. China’s recent attempts to frame the Ukraine war as being at the expense of low and middle income countries that are typically non-aligned and non-western orientated is subtle and highly effective. Fighting has resulted world-wide in massive raw material cost increases, greater food insecurity and significant economic damage, all of which have disproportionately affected the [**global south**](https://www.economist.com/china/2023/07/06/chinas-message-to-the-global-south). The west is right to support Ukraine - a failure to do so would undermine the security architecture of Europe - yet its dialogue needs to acknowledge the pain being felt by the prolonging of the war. An emphasis on aid programs supporting countries in the global south is a critical step needed to prevent more widespread resentment of the western world.   Image credit: [**RAND Corporation**](https://www.rand.org/blog/2022/06/science-and-security-setting-the-direction-for-the.html) | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | This article was selected by Dominik Hruby. Dominik is a student at the University of Sydney in International and Global Studies. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | **What else we're reading** | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | * An [**article**](https://johnmenadue.com/the-us-in-australia-and-in-china/) in Pearls and Irritations by Geoff Miller AO, former senior diplomat, expresses concern at Defence Minister Richard Marles’ uncritically, pro-US anti-China views and calls for the more independent attitudes of Foreign Minister Penny Wong to prevail. * The commissioning of USS CANBERRA in Sydney on the weekend, described in an [**article**](https://asiapacificdefencereporter.com/uss-canberra-lcs-30-commissioned-in-sydney/) in the Asian-Pacific Defence Reporter, marks an extraordinary milestone in the Australia-US relationship as the only US Navy ship named after a foreign city. * In The Interpreter, Greg Earl [**suggests**](https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/economic-diplomacy-japan-s-message-gas-bottle) that Japan's public criticism of Australia's reforms in energy policy sit uneasily with the stated close security relationship between Japan and Australia. * Ahead of the Australia-United States Ministerial Meeting this weekend, experts at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies [**preview**](https://www.csis.org/analysis/previewing-ausmin-2023) its likely outcomes, focused on China, climate change and security deliverables for the Pacific. * In an opinion piece for the Washington Post, Josh Rogin [**criticises**](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/07/21/qin-gang-china-minister-secrecy/) Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang's disappearance as an example of the secrecy of Xi Jinping's leadership. * Michelle Gavins, [**writing**](https://www.cfr.org/blog/lessons-new-era-african-statecraft)for the Council of Foreign Relations, suggests African populations are eager for partners and reform in the international system, and argues that the United States should embrace this changing approach to statehood. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | **Letters to the Editor** | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | Dear Editors  The Institute's Columns from Glover Cottage #77 offered a varied, informative and enjoyable read but the Kotkin rant, the last entry, was rather sad, replete with unsubstantiated assertions, redolent of wishful thinking and let the side down.  Why the resort to the same tired old US/UK institutional "think-tanks" such as Brookings?  On the issues of Russia and the Ukraine, Kennan, Burns, Brzezinski, Stephen Cohen, Mearsheimer, Jeffrey Sachs and, in real time, some military historians ( just a Google away), Biden....not to mention translated speeches by Putin and Lavrov... each and all with their own varied views have helped clear my head.  Kotkin, not so much.  Yours faithfully Terence Hayden | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | **Get involved!**  We're committed to keeping conversations about international affairs going, so get involved in our Letters to the Editor section!  Each week, we publish letters from our subscribers about what they think of the issues we’re discussing.  You can take part in the conversation by emailing us with your comments on each edition's articles. There are just a few simple guidelines: letters should be no more than 100 words in length, and should only be about the previous edition's articles. Please include your name and affiliation, and a mobile number (which won't be published). If you are a university student, please include your university and current degree.  Send all letters to the editors at [**aiianswletters@gmail.com**](mailto:aiianswletters@gmail.com) by Wednesday at 5pm Sydney time for the chance to be published in the following fortnight's newsletter. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | | |