

PERSPECTIVES

NEW VOICES 2010

GLOBAL ENCOUNTERS

OUTCOMES REPORT

AUGUST 2010

The Lowy Institute for International Policy is an independent international policy think tank. Its mandate ranges across all the dimensions of international policy debate in Australia – economic, political and strategic – and it is not limited to a particular geographic region. Its two core tasks are to:

- produce distinctive research and fresh policy options for Australia’s international policy and to contribute to the wider international debate.
- promote discussion of Australia’s role in the world by providing an accessible and high-quality forum for discussion of Australian international relations through debates, seminars, lectures, dialogues and conferences.

Lowy Institute Perspectives are occasional papers and speeches on international events and policy.

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OUTCOMES REPORT

New Voices 2010

Global Encounters

held on

Friday 25 June 2010

at the

Lowy Institute for International Policy

On 25 June 2010, the Lowy Institute for International Policy hosted its seventh annual New Voices conference. The conference forms an important part of the Lowy Institute's outreach activities to generate dialogue on Australia's role in the world and international affairs. New Voices has been a platform for early and mid career professionals to offer fresh insights and perspectives on issues such as Australian sovereignty, global challenges and opportunities, the impact of technology on international relations, leadership in the international realm, new issues of responsibility arising from globalisation and the role of networks in international relations.

This year's conference, *Global Encounters*, took a slightly different approach to past conferences. It brought together Australia's top international relations and development studies students from universities around Australia for an interactive dialogue with professional leaders working in the field. This report is an overview of the day's discussion on four broad themes.

The Lowy Institute would like to thank AusAID for their sponsorship of the New Voices conference. Without their generous support it would not have been possible to host such a well subscribed conference. Thanks are also due to the panellists and moderators of the conference for their efforts in directing the day's discussion and driving such fruitful debate on the key aspects of the conference theme. Lowy intern, Ali McDonald, provided much appreciated assistance organising the event and was the principal drafter of this report.

Diplomacy from the Prime Minister's Office

The first session examined the role of a foreign policy advisor. There has been an evolution of government in recent years, resulting in more complex organisational structures which in turn have increased demands on policy advisors. Today, advisors are taking on more responsibility and serving in more senior positions in order to better facilitate cooperation and communication between ministers and a wide range of relevant agencies.

A typical day for a foreign policy advisor begins and ends with an overview and analysis of both the national and international media. There is an integrated relationship between the media and the government and understanding the day's press is critical in shaping the political contour of the coming day. However, policy advisors face increasing difficulties synthesising an overwhelming amount of information from both the press and diplomatic cable traffic. A good staffer must have the instinct and skill to identify where the key issues and potential dangers lie.

However, the role of a staffer goes well beyond monitoring and responding to the media cycle. Policy advisors must help guide ministers through the short-term process of responding to the immediate issues of the day while ultimately moving towards the minister's long-term objectives. This makes the connection of policy advisors with the media and press secretaries a vital one – but also requires advisors to keep their eye on the big picture and to be continually engaging the bureaucracy in long term planning.

State Building in Conflict Zones

The second session analysed state building from a security, development, and diplomatic perspective in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Solomon Islands.

In the conflict environment of Afghanistan, the task of implementing state building initiatives and creating the necessary institutions for development is hindered by a population fearful of a coalition withdrawal and a corrupt and ineffective central government. The complexity of the security-development nexus was highlighted by the experience of coalition forces in a small mountainous village, located in the Kapsia transit corridor. Here, building and securing a road through the region helped the coalition improve security by allowing forces to quickly react while opening up new markets to Afghans. However, the road also became a target for insurgent attacks.

The village examined in the case study had enormously complex local hierarchies and power structures that were extremely difficult for coalition forces to understand in their entirety. It was also home to its own localised insurgencies underlining the fact coalition forces in Afghanistan are fighting hundreds of wars, not just one. Understanding what policy and strategy options are available in the war in Afghanistan means understanding what occurs at the tactical level. The example of the village, as one war among hundreds, demonstrated the importance of state building at the local level.

The overall message from a diplomatic perspective in Iraq was a positive one. Unlike the situation in Afghanistan where progress is slow, in Iraq the security situation has improved markedly, opening up the possibility of parallel improvements in living conditions and a broader focus on diplomatic relations.

However, in Iraq, the efforts to rebuild the bureaucracy in the post-Saddam era have faced numerous challenges, including those associated with the de-Ba'athification process.

Discussion on the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) looked at both the long-term and short-term goals of state building. The case of the intervention in Solomon Islands differs from that of Afghanistan and Iraq in that it was done at the request of a legitimate government, yet the mission still faces many similar security and development challenges.

Achieving law and order and disarming the militias was the immediate task of the mission and was necessary to focus on broader state building initiatives. However, the mission's primary long-term objectives now focus on rebuilding the machinery of government, economic recovery, improving and strengthening the police force and the restoration of law and justice.

This final objective highlighted some of the challenges of state building. It showed the complexity of reconciling formal and traditional systems of justice with the Westminster system that dominates the Solomon Islands' legal sector and which is often at odds with traditional structures and restorative justice mechanisms.

Integrating state building with existing structures and hierarchies was a challenge faced by all missions. Understanding the complex human environment of any foreign country is difficult and often the level of knowledge that can be achieved by constantly rotating forces and officials is limited.

The answer is not as simple as replicating Western state structures. An introduced system of institutions can often fuel the problems it seeks to address. For many Afghans, the concept of a province or Afghanistan as a nation is a foreign one. In Iraq, the de-Ba'athification of the government stripped the country of skills and knowledge vital to rebuilding the state. While in Solomon Islands, the formal legal system fails to satisfy the traditional restorative justice measures demanded by many Solomon Islanders. In conflict and post-conflict state building missions, the interveners must understand how the fundamental functions of society operate.

Climate Change

The third session of the day was a frank discussion on the role of both government and non government actors in the lead up to and during the Copenhagen climate change negotiations. The behind the scenes look at Copenhagen illustrated why the negotiations failed to achieve the anticipated outcomes while emphasising Copenhagen was not the end of the process. By exploring the perspective of government, non-government and private enterprise, it was suggested that achieving global action on climate change required the mutually reinforcing efforts of both a top-down and bottom-up approach.

Copenhagen's modest outcomes were explained by way of an examination of the build up to the summit. The expectations for Copenhagen were unprecedented and created challenges during the process of negotiating a global outcome. Given the 'global commons' nature of climate change, developing a legally binding treaty is essential to achieving a workable and viable international solution. From the outset however, the interests of the 193 countries involved in the Copenhagen negotiations were too diverse to make a global, legally binding treaty achievable.

While it is the world's governments that will ultimately negotiate a deal on climate change, it was suggested the role of NGOs is to generate public debate in the media and create the political will necessary for governments to adopt strong policies that will address the problem. NGOs generally seek influence by taking an insider or outsider approach to either directly influence government policy or by shaping public opinion.

While it is commonly argued that in international law a treaty is only as successful as the ability to enforce it the creation of an international body for the purpose of enforcing action is not a silver bullet. Compliance with international law is more for reputational reasons than

fear of retribution. An international treaty is needed to provide countries with the confidence that other nations will also take affirmative action on climate change.

Development and Multilaterals

The final session discussed the role of multilaterals in development and the shifting nature of global economic structures.

The idea of multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as influential organisations pushing fundamentalist ideologies is inconsistent with the role they play in practice today. Multilaterals can offer an enormous breadth of expertise at a technical level that draws together their experiences from across the world. However, in very few cases do they ever exert the type of power and control often stereotypically associated with their interventions. Even when their influence is considerable – for example in the wake of the Asian Financial Crisis – it is often only fleeting.

It was argued, there has so far been a strong focus by multilaterals on economic growth as the key to development with the retreat of the state at the core of this issue. Yet, it was suggested that in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis, there is a growing sense of a need for a new approach to economic development that addresses growing problems of inequality and justice. Movements for affirmative action are seeking to take advantage of this to develop strategies that emphasise redistribution and focus on inclusive growth led by the people.

An initiative seeking to achieve social justice is the Robin Hood Tax which aims to create market stability and help curb speculative trading. While the tax is an old idea with a fresh title, recent economic turmoil has presented a new opportunity to promote it. Successful policy ideas and campaigns such as the Robin Hood Tax require the right timing. While it was argued that NGOs needed to seize on these opportunities it was noted a certain degree of pragmatism was required and NGOs must be prepared to compromise.

The discussion on the Robin Hood Tax revealed the complexity of the interaction of states and NGOs. The details of the tax including what constitutes speculative trading, how to collect the tax, and how the money will be spent and by whom, are questions that are yet to be answered and present the possibility that the tax revenue, if it is introduced, could be used for purposes not originally intended by NGOs. Discussion of the tax pointed to the continuing central role of the state – in this case via its capacity to regulate and tax.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Aisbet, Jack	University of Newcastle
Ashiq, Iqbal	University of New South Wales
Azar, Gavin	Macquarie University
Baylis, Adam	University of Sydney
Brown, James	Lowy Institute for International Policy
Coates, Eliane	University of Sydney
Cummins, Deborah	University of New South Wales
de Silva, Sanjiva	Department of Climate Change
Della Valle, Colinda	Macquarie University
Dent, Kelly	Oxfam
Dunn, Damien	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Fortuna, Sarah	University of Melbourne
Fuller, Amy	University of Wollongong
Garand, Noellie	University of New South Wales
Gifford, Katherine	Australian National University
Gordon, Rochelle	University of Queensland
Green, Fergus	Allens Arthur Robinson
Hansen , Kristine Alsly	University of New South Wales
Hanson, Fergus	Lowy Institute for International Policy
Heaven, Cara	University of New South Wales
Horscroft, Virginia	World Bank
Ingle, Patrick	Australian National University
Kaidbay, Rhonda	Macquarie University
King, Matthew	Macquarie University
Law, Archie	Action Aid
Lee, Will	University of Western Australia
Lum-Yip, Kevin	Monash University
McDonald, Ali	Lowy Institute for International Policy
McGoldrick, Will	Climate Institute
McMillan, Joanne	Australian National University
Metuamate, Areti	Australian National University
Moles, Benjamin	University of Sydney
O'Connor, Simon	University of New South Wales
O'Neil, Claire	Australian Defence Force

Pastor, Heidi	University of Sydney
Pearse, Rebecca	University of New South Wales
Pomfrett, Jamie	University of Newcastle
Prance, Felicity	University of Adelaide
Robertson, Scott	University of Wollongong
Rothe, Andrew	Macquarie University
Sara, Benjamin	University of Adelaide
Shule, Lucy	University of Newcastle
Taylor, Kye	Australian National University
Tinning, Chris	AusAID
Van de Ruit, Amy	Macquarie University
Vistarini, Tim	AusAID
Webb, Adele	Jubilee Foundation
Zahava, Orli	University of New South Wales

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