# Institute for Human Security and Social Change, La Trobe University, Foreign Policy White Paper Submission, 27 February 2017

## Summary Points

- Australia's foreign policy needs to be located within a context of growing uncertainty, inter-dependence and complexity. The significant global progress in wellbeing we have seen over the last fifty years is in real risk of being undermined.

- The national interest has to be defined in ways that: recognise the common humanity that is embodied in the notion of human rights; convey the underlying philosophy of the Sustainable Development Goals; and which communicate our values of openness, fairness and equality.

- Australia's continued push for human rights and a rules-based international order based on international law and agreements remains critical for our national interest and broader processes of international development.

- Australia can maximise its influence by undertaking an honest and thorough review of how key domestic policies enhance or detract from Australia's ability to act in the national interest in international arenas.

- Australia is in a unique position to act as an 'honest broker' between emerging and existing powers. It is in both Australia's national interest and in the interests of the region as whole, that it builds not just economic linkages, but also the political and social relationships necessary to play this role.

- An independent body should be established which can scrutinise Australia's policy making, and provide advice on the degree to which longer term threats to national and regional prosperity are being adequately addressed.

- The concept of '*human security'* would provide the government with a framework and language to bring together what have hitherto been disparate and separate foreign affairs and development assistance functions.

- DFAT should review the degree to which its current business practices are consistent with emerging research on effective development practice.

- Australia should make much better use of the knowledge and connections of diaspora communities from around the world that reside here, in promoting peace building and development in their home countries, and for policy purposes.

- It is important to build more sustained networks and linkages of learning and mutual exchange between those groups working on common problems in Australia and in other countries in our region. This will assist in demonstrating, and communicating, a different mode of international collaboration: one built on respect, mutual exchange and common humanity, rather than one overly characterised by charity, pity and short-term aid.

## Introduction

Stephen Pinker in his influential 2011 book 'The Better Angels of our Nature: a history of our violence and humanity', suggests that there are five key factors which explain why physical violence has declined over the last 10,000 years. These are:

- **The Leviathan and Justitia**: or in development-speak 'Effective Governance and the Rule of Law';
- **Gentle commerce:** which in Pinker's words 'sweetens the outcomes of mutual pacifism with the mutual gains of exchange';
- **Feminisation of society:** because 'the most fundamental empirical generalisation about violence is that it is mainly committed by men';
- **The Expanding Circle of Empathy:** which is driven by 'the cosmopolitan mixing of peoples and the endorsement of humanistic values'; and finally
- **The Escalator of Reason:** which powered by literacy and education allows the development of a reasoned argument for why one should consider one's own interests and another person's as equivalent, as well as the application of reason to human affairs, including in the establishment of the formal and informal institutions that are engineered to reduce the temptation of violence including for example those that protect human rights; encourage cooperation and dialogue; and promote inclusion i.e. those things that appeal to the better 'angels of our nature', and recognise the inner demons that human's also possess.

Now while some people critique Pinker's methods and approach it is hard to disagree with him, and many others - see for example Kenny (2011), Deaton (2013) Radelet (2015)[1] - that on many dimensions human wellbeing, in general, has improved dramatically in the last 50 years.

This is clearly not to deny that there a number of places where this is not the case, and where people are now considerably worse off than they were previously. Indeed the Institute for Economics and Peace most recent Global Peace Index[2] finds that there has been an overall decline in global peace in the last ten years as conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Somalia continue and internationalise. All of which serve as excellent illustrations of the fact that progress is not inevitable, and indeed can be reversed.

It is therefore sobering to think that <u>**all of the drivers of progress identified by Pinker are currently under greater threat than they have been for perhaps 70 years**</u>, as authoritarianism, protectionism, sexism, nationalism and attacks on science and reason all

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[1] Charles Kenney (2011) '*Getting Better: Why Global Development Is Succeeding--And How We Can Improve the World Even More*', New York: Basic Books; Angus Deaton (2013) '*The Great Escape: health, wealth and the origins of inequality*', Princeton University Press; Steven Radelet (2015) **'*The Great Surge: The Ascent of the Developing World*'**, New York: Simon & Schuster

[2] See http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/GPI-2016-Report_2.pdf

seem to be on the increase. This is compounded by a closing space for civil society to hold governments and powerful interest to account (Civicus, 2017[3]).

Some observers such as Pankaj Mishra[4], note that this is perhaps a pattern we have seen before in previous waves of prosperity and globalisation as those who have not benefitted as much as others have responded to missing out. Many have suggested (from the IMF to Pope Francis) that the role of **inequality** in driving present trends needs to be better recognised. Indeed Branko Milanovic's famous 'elephant chart'[5], which depicted how the incomes of the poor and the western middle classes have stagnated compared to others perhaps presents this most conclusively.

**The growing threat of climate change** and the fact, as the Stockholm Resilience Centre notes we have already surpassed four of the nine planetary ecological boundaries[6]**,** adds a new set of existential threats to the mix.

It is within this context of **growing uncertainty, inter-dependence and complexity** that Australia's foreign policy needs to be located. A context in which the significant progress in well-being we have seen over the last fifty years is in real risk of being undermined.

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[3] See http://www.civicus.org/images/EENA_Report_English.pdf
[4] Pankay Mishra (2016) 'The Age of Anger: a history of the present', New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux
[5] See 'Get Ready to See This Globalization 'Elephant Chart' Over and Over Again'
[6] Will Steffen et al (2015) 'Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet' Science, 20 January 2015.

## 1. Australia's foreign policy needs to be grounded in a clear-eyed assessment of our national interest.

- *How should we define Australia's national interests in a changing world? How should our values underpin Australia's foreign policy? What should we do differently? How can we do better?*

We would agree with Julie Bishop that Australia's national interest is 'best served through regional stability and prosperity'[7]. We would also submit that achieving regional stability and prosperity means addressing a number of **common challenges** that the region collectively faces notably: climate change; population movement; gender inequality; disproportionately large youth populations, which exacerbate the likelihood of social and economic ruptures[8]; unequal access to health, education and economic opportunities; and an uneven effectiveness of governance – by which we mean the arrangements and processes by which societies (government, civil society, the private sector) make decisions and allocate resources. These are challenges facing all countries in the region - including Australia - albeit in different ways, are interconnected, and which have important trans-national dimensions. In other words individual nation states cannot address them on their own.

As such we believe the national interest has to be defined in ways that recognise the **common humanity** that is embodied in the notion of human rights i.e. as Conor Gearty puts it the sentiment, '*to see people truly as people and therefore – each of them – as entitled to right treatment on account of their humanity*'[9]. Furthermore, it has to be defined in ways that convey the underlying philosophy of the **Sustainable Development Goals** i.e. that they apply everywhere and that they represent a "conceptual pivot" (Levine 2013) away from a "rich helping the poor" narrative to one in which citizens, organisations and states see themselves as part of an inter-dependent eco-system. Eco-systems which work with a narrative of shared identity, challenges and responsibility and which incentivise international collaboration to build the international social, economic and political relationships and institutions fit for addressing the complex challenges we face (Fullilove 2015)[10].

This will require developing a much richer conversation amongst Australians about how we have benefitted as a nation from the maintenance of international collaboration, exchange and stability in the past, and why it will be even more essential in the future.

**In other words the national interest has to be defined in ways that communicate our values of openness, fairness and equality and which encourage what Pinker calls the 'better angels of our nature', rather than our inner demons.**

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[7] Julie Bishop address to the Australasian Aid Conference 15 February 2017.
[8] Henrik Urdal (2004) 'The Devil in the Demographics: The Effect of Youth Bulges on Domestic Armed Conflict, 1950-2000', The World Bank, Washington DC
[9] Conor Gearty (2009) 'Human Rights after Darwin: is a general theory of human rights possible?' LSE lecture 7 May 2009
[10] Michael Fullilove 'The Birthplace of the Fortunate' 4th Boyer Lecture, Radio National, 18 October 2015

## 2. Australia has diverse interests that span the globe.

- *Which countries will matter most to Australia over the next 10 years? Why and in what ways? How should we deepen and diversify key relationships?*
- *Which global trends, such as technological developments, environmental degradation and the role of non-state actors, are likely to affect Australia's security and prosperity? How should Australia respond*

As noted above rising nationalism, protectionism, xenophobia and attacks of science and reason are likely to have major impacts on not just Australia's security and prosperity but the region's as a whole. The drivers of these phenomena need to be addressed, as do other compounding factors such as climate change.

These are 'wicked', multi-level and interconnected problems[11] which are not going to be solved individually, or in a reductionist manner i.e. by breaking them down into bite-sized chunks which are delegated to different ministries or departments. By definition these problems are driven by diverse interests, social norms and identity, as well as brute politics and economics. As such, Australia's response has to recognise: the joined up nature of the challenges faced; that building multi-level coalitions for reform will be critical; and that integrated approaches not just across a 'whole of government' level, but also with civil society and the private sector will be critical.

While we agree that it does make sense for Australia to focus the majority of its efforts in building strong relationships primarily in the East Asia Pacific region, if an approach that is consistent with working diffusing innovation in complex adaptive systems[12] is taken then this can create ripples and effects in the broader system of relationships. We would therefore argue that a focus on our immediate region does not mean insulating Australia from broader international relationships.

**Furthermore, we submit that Australia's continued push for human rights and a rules-based international order based on International Law and agreements remains critical for our national interest and the broader processes of international development[13], particularly given these institutions are under increasingly under threat.**

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[11] See http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/archive/publications-archive/tackling-wicked-problems
[12] See Rogers et al (2005) Complex Adaptive Systems and the Diffusion of Innovation
[13] As noted in the joint media statement by Malcolm Turnbull and Joko Widodo of 26 February 2017 ; '*We share a commitment to democracy, freedom, the rule of law and a rules-based international order that provides stability for both our peoples, and the region, to prosper*'.

## 3. Australia is an influential player in regional and international organisations.

- *Which regional and global organisations matter most to us? How should we support and shape them? How can we maximise our influence?*

Australia must remain a key actor within the UN and our engagement should be a foundational element of our foreign policy. Pursuing human rights in general and gender equality in particular – including within the UN – continues to be a vital contribution which Australia can and should make. We support  IWDA's call to consider the guidance and gender analysis from the International Centre for Research on Women provided to the incoming UN Secretary General to support a more gender equitable United Nations.

We believe Australia can maximise its influence in two ways.

Firstly, as Michael Fullilove suggests, 'foreign policy begins at home'[14].  With the SDGs now applying everywhere this is even more the case. How issues of immigration, refugee and indigenous rights, trade treaties and climate change for example are treated domestically effect in important ways the soft power and influence Australia takes into its international relations and its voice in fora such as ASEAN and the UN. **We recommend that the White Paper calls for an honest and thorough review of how key domestic policies enhance or detract from Australia's ability to act in the national interest in international arenas.**

Secondly, Australia's history and geographical location within the Asia-Pacific places it in unique position to act as an **'honest broker'** between emerging and existing powers. At a time when tensions are rising in the region, it is in both Australia's national interest and in the interests of the region as whole, that it builds not just economic linkages, but also the political and social relationships necessary to play this role[15]. This will require deft political leadership as well as building more effective citizen to citizen links, and track II diplomacy[16] initiatives.

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[14] Michael Fullilove (2015) 'Foreign Policy begins at Home' 3rd Boyer Lecture, Radio National 11 October 2015
[15] See https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/australia-china-ties-search-political-trust
[16] See Ball et al (2010) Assessing Track 2 Diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific Region - CSCAP

## 4. Australia needs to be ambitious in grasping economic opportunities.

- *What steps should be taken to maximise our trade and investment and expand commercial opportunities for Australian business? How can we ensure Australia is positioned to take advantage of opportunities in the global economy? What are the key risks to Australia's future prosperity and how should we respond?*

As the Minister for Foreign Affairs has recently noted, Australia's wellbeing is intimately tied up in the wellbeing and prosperity of our neighbours. Whether this is in terms of incomes being sufficient to provide markets for Australian products and services, or in terms of the potential of international joint ventures. 'Grasping economic opportunities' in ways that undermine collective regional wellbeing will ultimately be self-defeating.

Long term sustainable national and regional prosperity is particularly threatened by:

- **Inequality** in general and **gender inequality** in particular, which excludes large numbers of people from contributing to economic development. As such a number of economists and the IMF have noted that inequality can be a brake on growth and lead to instability[17];
- An underestimation of the contribution of the **'care economy'** and **the development of human capital** (including investments in health and education) in providing the long term platform for sustainable economies which have the capabilities to take advantage of new opportunities[18];
- **Climate change and associated population movements.** A recent study published in Nature suggests that climate change could reduce global incomes by 23% by 2100[19]. Some have estimated that there could be between 665,000 and 1,750,000 climate migrants in the Pacific region by mid-century[20]. This is likely to have important implications for both stability and prosperity in our region.

These are long term drivers and threats not easily addressed given the short term nature of electoral cycles. Furthermore, 'externalities' associated with all of the above are often not taken into account in orthodox economic modelling. As such it is our view that independent scrutiny and research on these matters is vital, along the lines of the Women's Budget Group or the Independent Commission on Aid Impact in the UK.

**We therefore recommend the establishment of an independent body that can scrutinise Australia's policy making, and provide advice on the degree to which longer term threats to national and regional prosperity are being adequately addressed.**

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[17] See http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook44p/EconEffects
[18] See UN Women (2016) Progress of the World's Women 2016-16: Transforming Economies Realizing Rights
[19] Burke et al (2015) Global Non-Linear Effect of Temperature on Economic Production, Nature Vol 527, 2015
[20] Campbell (2009) Campbell, J (2010) 'Climate -induced community relocation in the Pacific: The meaning and importance of land.' In: J McAdam (ed) Climate Change and Displacement: Multidisciplinary perspectives, pp57–79. Oxford: Hart Publishing

## 5. Australia confronts a range of strategic, security and transnational challenges.

- *How can Australia best deal with instability beyond our borders? How can our foreign policy, including our overseas development assistance program, support a more prosperous, peaceful and stable region?*
- *How should our international engagement work to protect Australia against transnational security threats, such as terrorism?*

As noted above the issues and challenges faced by Australia, and the region of the world in which we are located, are complex and multi-dimensional. They require an integrated, holistic response which recognises this. This requires conceptual frameworks which assist in providing language which allow for joined up thinking and action, as well as new ways of working which encourage this.

At a conceptual level we believe that the notion of **human security** provides a useful intellectual and policy framework which brings together the ideas of 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want'[21]. We argue that Australian external relations needs to treat the 'soft' issues of security (often called development, peace building[22] or humanitarian response) as seriously as it treats the 'hard' realities of military defence, but also the many complex situations in-between, whether it be civil war, political upheaval, terrorism or piracy. Australia needs to do this first and foremost in our region, but also in relation to the unresolved regional and global security issues as we confront an increasingly uncertain and turbulent world. **We believe that it is important for the White Paper to provide the Australian government in general, and DFAT in particular, with a framework and language that brings together what have hitherto been disparate and separate functions.**

In terms of ways of working over the last few years there is a growing body of research and practice that has demonstrated the importance of **'Doing Development Differently'**[23]. This body of evidence suggests that: 'one-size-fits-all' solutions do not work; locally driven adaptive processes are central to the development process; and addressing the power asymmetries which block inclusive development is critical[24].

It is equally clear that the 'business models' and administrative process that are prevalent in most development agencies – and arguably other government departments - do not provide the right incentives for staff to perform in ways that are consistent with this evidence. The Independent Commission on Aid Impact in the UK noted, for example, that "*some of DFID's tools and processes have had the unintended effect of focussing attention on quantity of results over quality – that is, on short-term, measurable achievements, rather than long-term, sustainable impact*". And that DFID should "*ensure that the incentives of staff and*

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[21]  Dennis Altman et al (2012) Why Human Security Matters; and also
[22] As exemplified by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security
[23] See http://doingdevelopmentdifferently.com/; http://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/; http://www.dlprog.org/;
[24] See the World Development Report 2017: Governance and Law, the World Bank

*implementers encourage an investigative, problem-solving approach to programme implementation and a willingness to adjust programmes as necessary in response to lessons learned or changing conditions"*[25].

**We would recommend that the White Paper calls upon DFAT to review the degree to which current business practices are consistent with emerging research on effective development practice.**

## 6. Australia uses a range of assets and capabilities to pursue our international interests.

- *What assets will we need to advance our foreign policy interests in future years? How can we best use our people and our assets to advance Australia's economic, security and other interests and respond to external events?*
- *How can Government work more effectively with non-government sectors, including business, universities and NGOs, to advance Australia's interests?*

Firstly, we believe that Australia could make much better use of the **diaspora communities** from around the world that reside here. As Diaspora Action Australia has noted this can involve these groups promoting peace building and development in their home countries[26], and as the Minister for International Development and the Pacific Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells has recently stated the government can benefit from diaspora's local knowledge[27] for policy purposes.

Secondly, we believe that the **review of business practices** we recommend above would lead to more efficient and effective ways of working with non-government sectors that could be built on a greater sense of partnership, rather than the narrowly defined contractual models that tend to dominate, as well as promoting good development practice[28].

At the same time, we believe that all government funded programs – whether they be through NGOs, businesses, universities or contractors – must be subject to the same degrees of transparency and accountability. Research must be made available in the public domain, and the lessons learn by businesses and contractors must be made transparent and not be subject to commercial in confidence considerations. DFAT also needs to carefully consider the benefits of competitive tendering in some spaces, particularly when it is recognised that multi-actor coalitions and alliances are going to be needed to address 'wicked' problems. In these cases competitive tendering can discourage collaboration and dis-incentivise the knowledge sharing required.

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[25] ICAI (2015) DFID's approach to delivering aid impact.
[26] See http://diasporaaction.org.au/understanding-diaspora-led-development-peacebuilding/
[27] See http://diasporaaction.org.au/diaspora-conference-breaks-new-ground/
[28] For more specific recommendations see Valters et al (2016) Putting learning at the centre: Adaptive development programming in practice, ODI

Finally, we believe that if the national interest is going to be defined in the way we suggest above then it will be important that to build more **sustained networks and linkages of learning and mutual exchange** between those groups working on common problems in Australia and in other countries in our region.  This might include for example people working on violence based on gender and sexuality, indigenous governance, climate change mitigation, renewable energy, or women's economic empowerment etc. These groups could include researchers, NGOs, the private sector, and local government employees. This will require very different modalities and processes than those currently in place.  Although perhaps an expanded and extended 'New Colombo plan' might be an appropriate mechanism for this. In particular the slow rate at which Australians are learning Asian languages is a major concern.

**The important part of this process is to demonstrate and communicate a different mode of international collaboration: one built more on respect, co-ownership, mutual exchange and common humanity, rather than one overly characterised by charity, pity and short-term aid.**