New Voices Conference 2007
International Leadership
Outcomes Report

On 25 May 2007, the Lowy Institute for International Policy hosted its fourth annual *New Voices* conference. The *New Voices* initiative is part of the Institute's outreach efforts and serves three main goals: to introduce the Institute and some of the bigger questions it grapples with to a new audience; to provide engaged early-career people from a variety of backgrounds with a platform to express their insights and ideas on important issues of international policy; and to facilitate professional cross-pollination.

New Voices themes emanate directly from the mandate of the Lowy Institute, which is to analyse in a practical, policy-relevant manner Australia's place in the world and the global challenges and opportunities facing different groups in Australia. *New Voices 2005*'s theme of binding the world together focused on global challenges and opportunities. *New Voices 2006* focused on how technological development affects international relations. *New Voices 2007* looked at the nature and practice of leadership in the international realm, with sessions on individual leadership, dealing with global disparities, social leadership and systems of governance.

The diverse session topics reflect the diversity of the participants, who hailed from the private sector, government, public policy organisations, the media, the armed services, and social movements. Many participants had professional interests in one or more of the sessions. Discussion was consistently accessible but also detailed, specific and sophisticated, so that participants derived benefits at various levels of professional exposure. During the course of the conference several common themes emerged. This report is structured around those themes and the four session topics. Its contents are derived exclusively from participants' contributions, but are not attributed to any individual or organisation.

The Lowy Institute would like to thank the sponsors of *New Voices 2007*: AusAID and Booz Allen Hamilton. Without their generous support it would not have been possible to host such a well-subscribed conference. Thanks are due also to those who made presentations to the conference or who chaired one of the session panels.

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Conference Outcomes

International leadership in a multi-speed world is often best demonstrated by recognising the importance of motivation. Disparities in economic development between countries complicate the process of addressing international problems, particularly where common solutions are necessary. Laws that enshrine international standards or obligations have limited utility in countries that do not have the resources or inclination to observe them, so relying on international law to regulate transnational humanitarian problems such as people trafficking, or global commons problems such as anthropogenic climate change, is problematic at best. In practice, it can be more effective to instill aspirations than demand commitments. The concept of progressive realisation recognises that participation is the first step towards compliance. Rather than strict enforcement, developed states can create mechanisms to assist compliance within broad areas of commitment to lay the foundations for more specific frameworks of action.

The Coordinated Ministerial Mekong Initiative Against Trafficking in Southeast Asia shows how a focus on process rather than outcomes can yield results. The Initiative recognises that member states have strong incentives not to act: to admit the reality of human trafficking is embarrassing, and trafficking can be lucrative for elements of the state. Four factors contribute to its success. It is composed of a small group of six countries with shared issues and circumstances. As such there is a subtle but powerful dynamic of competition between members, which becomes a driver to action. Third, the initiative focuses on process as much as outputs, so that member states each feel that they have control. The fourth success factor is the contribution made by individuals in driving the process forward in its informal stages. The Initiative began with an informal dialogue between members which became a memorandum of understanding within eighteen months. Laws enacted in Burma connected with its membership of COMMIT were some of the very few legislative changes made there in recent years.

Advances in computing power have enabled virtual worlds to grow to the point where they are treated as serious domains of action by states. *Second Life*, for example,

now has a US$500 million economy generating similar 'cross-border' regulatory problems that characterise the interface between rich and poor worlds. The United States Congress is looking at how to tax virtual transactions, and law enforcement authorities are addressing cyber-crime including sexual stalking, gambling and money-laundering and virtual slave-labour. South Korea, which has high exposure to virtual worlds because of its high bandwidth internet provision, has legal statutes to regulate virtual worlds. The private sector has recognised an emerging market and increasingly is staking claims within it. Telstra and the ABC both have 'islands' – dedicated virtual spaces – in *Second Life* and Harvard, INCEAD and MIT all teach via their virtual presence there. Parallels in governance between the virtual and physical world are increasing, but there are still fundamental differences, such as the fact that host companies are 'judge, jury and executioner' in virtual worlds. The early stages of community development – the frontier stages – often require strong leadership to make up for the lack of established governance systems, and virtual worlds are no exception.

In the physical world, globalisation has generated an enormous increase in the rate and reach of international crime. To meet this challenge, the Australian Federal Police now find themselves operating permanently in the international environment. Previously, international deployments were limited to occasional small-scale contributions to peace-keeping, but in recent years have been scaled up greatly in number and the commitment of resources. The focus has expanded from narrow peace keeping duties to include building the capacity of local forces in fragile states like East Timor and Solomon Islands. International deployments are now a core part of the AFP's operations, commanding a third of its resources and stimulating an overall rise in budget from $345 million in 2001 to $1.3 billion in 2007. A dedicated unit – the International Deployment Group – has been set up outside Canberra to service the growth in operations overseas. The implications have been great for the internal structure of the AFP. Whereas previously it was organised along regional lines, the extra concentration of resources in Canberra has led to strengthened management along functional lines, which has increased cooperation across the country.

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The increased international presence of the AFP has also stimulated greater personal contact and understanding between organisational leaders in Australia and regional countries. Cooperation between police forces internationally has generated closer ties at national level, particularly with Indonesia, and has helped Australia's recent closer involvement with the various organisations of the Association of South East Asian Nations. International engagement has generated greater domestic social communication as well, particularly with regard to the Muslim community in Australia.

To promote good management, the AFP tries to focus on individual employees rather than the organisation, to understand their motivations, to instill a sense of their importance in how the organisation is viewed publicly, and to maintain dynamism and interest at senior levels. It begs the question: can individuals be more important than the institutions they inhabit? Individual leadership is often about inspiring other leaders rather than accruing followers, and about placing issues on the public agenda rather than dealing with them institutionally once they are popular. In the case of HIV, a successful strategy could be to concentrate on how demographic differences constitute barriers to the flow of information on HIV and therefore contribute to cross-infections. This approach is predicated on treating HIV as a community-wide problem rather than one that pertains just to populations overseas or to enclaves within Australia. It takes personal leadership to place the issue publicly before it can be addressed institutionally.

Something similar can be said about leadership in facing the threats posed by climate change. While the science of climate change has been clear for some time, it is also complex and disaggregated. These characteristics prevented widespread public acceptance of the gravity of climate change until, over the last couple of years, there has been a rush of concern among the population, the business community and finally the government. The relatively sudden change in the public importance of climate issues demonstrates the sometimes elastic nature of leadership in public policy. It is as though a notional elastic band encircles the different actors in the debate, preventing any from falling too far behind or from pushing too far ahead without dragging the rest of the group with them.

Two problems deplete the power with which mitigation advocates can stretch forward the elastic band of public opinion on climate change. A generous time lag exists between action taken now and its effect, with implications for intergenerational equity as people living now make economic sacrifices for those who are not yet born, in the hope that the world we leave behind us is not turned to mayhem by our profligacy. And if intergenerational burden-sharing is important, so is balance in the international distribution of mitigation activity. Climate change is a global problem requiring a global solution – but it is not enough to say that because others display inanition on climate change we are excused from acting ourselves. Indeed, the global commons will only be protected from tragedy through displays of leadership by nations with the means to pursue it.

How, then, is action stimulated at the national level? Governments cannot be relied upon always to lead the way on issues of importance, and in the information-rich contemporary world there is more and more scope for policy activism by social groups. Institutional conservatism tends to repress creativity and leads to a moribund and sclerotic social fabric. Sub-political interconnections have been deteriorating with an increased focus on the individual – the 'bowling alone' phenomenon. Social movements can be useful in addressing this because of their inherently self-selecting nature. They cannot be manufactured, because unless an issue genuinely resonates with people it will not be actively supported. But social leaders can facilitate the organisation and progress of a social movement with commensurate impacts on government policy.

Climate change is an issue to which governments have been forced to attend rather than leading the way, but on other issues government leadership has been damaging rather than constructive. Australia's Muslim community has suffered from the security decisions made by government in recent years, which have tended to alienate the underemployed and militate against social cohesion. The risk factors for Islamic radicalisation include empathy with injustices occurring elsewhere as well as a personal sense of exclusion. Australia's diplomatic support of Saudi Arabia, the seat of radical Wahabist Islam, prevents it from tackling head on the actions of the all-important 'middle-men' of radicalisation, those that turn a youthful disaffection into

dangerous extremism. But in partnership with government, targeted programs like the Building Identity and Resisting Radicalisation can mitigate some of these effects.

Relationships between countries are primarily governed at state level. International institutions are useful for creating habits of dialogue, and responsible states should seek to operate within them whenever possible. But legitimacy of action does not require strict adherence to institutional rules – when the pursuit of policy ends require it or when institutions are unable to resolve problems, states should be prepared to act outside them. The quality of governance in international institutions is measured by the evident degree of accountability and responsibility, the efficiency of processes and the effectiveness of outcomes. The world's most powerful non-state rule-making body, the United Nations Security Council, is increasingly unrepresentative and its decision-making process is opaque, but reform is unlikely because of incumbent interests. Treaty-based regimes replace states as international arbiters only to the extent that states agree to cede their sovereignty.

Non-government organisations are less accountable to states than international institutions. Their constituencies are not always clearly defined, but they can influence policy and real outcomes in dramatic ways. It is therefore vital that NGOs are open about who they answer to, and transparent in their decision-making processes. Political goals should be limited to governments and politicians, and avoided by aid or humanitarian organisations. Ultimately, NGOs must be prepared to sacrifice everything to stay true to their charter. To that end, pragmatism is often necessary, for example when social and economic stability is more important for human welfare than the sum of human rights.

System failure in global governance is increasingly apparent in the wake of genocides committed in Rwanda, Kosovo, and Sudan. Inaction on climate change is another example. The Kyoto Agreement has done little to abate emissions despite its good intentions, because it is laced with perverse incentives. As developing countries are not required by the Kyoto Protocol to act on climate change, high-emissions industries are migrating from the developed world, while deforestation has increased to make way for palm oil plantations which feed the clean fuels market.

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