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QUARTERLY ACCESS

YOUR KEY TO INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



Australian Institute of International Affairs
Promoting understanding of international issues



Quarterly Access (QA) is the national quarterly publication of the youth networks of the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA).

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Launched by Access, the youth network of AIIA Victoria, Quarterly Access is an entirely volunteer based publication providing a forum for students and young professionals with an interest in international affairs to contribute to the exchange of ideas.

There are currently few avenues for non-established writers in Australia to voice their insights on global events. It is our hope that Quarterly Access can help act as a stepping stone for young writers, as well as expand Australian public debate and promote in-depth discussion of complex international issues.

The editorial team comprises a group of students and young professionals in Victoria; it receives advice and encouragement from Graham Barrett (AIIAV Vice President)

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Editor's note

As this third issue of the relaunched Quarterly Access goes to print, dramatic changes are occurring in Australia's political leadership, as Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is deposed by his deputy Julia Gillard. The transition is sudden and unexpected. The result is unprecedented; Australia now has its first female Prime Minister.

This turn of events is one example of the ever changing nature of contemporary politics, which is a reality not only in Australia. The articles in this issue have been chosen to help make sense of a world that changes rapidly and unpredictable.

Tim Lawson examines the Gaza flotilla raid, which may be prompting a new dynamic in the Middle East conflict, shown by deteriorated relations between Israel and Turkey, and renewed international pressure on Israel to ease the blockade. Dale Jasper presents a firsthand account of innovative new development projects in Nepal, and examines what lessons they may have for future attempts to tackle child poverty. Andrew Forrest looks at changing power relations in East Asia, and how a rising China deals with a strengthened US-Japan alliance.

Meanwhile key controversies are addressed as Eyal Halamish examines community opposition to wind power and Jane Hingston discusses international opposition to the death penalty. Interviews with Sally Neighbour and Hugh White bring the focus to Australia and Asia, answering questions on terrorism and the proposed Asia Pacific Community respectively. This issue's travel article, a stroll through Mexico City, is a must read for the intrepid traveller.

Enjoy this mix of interviews, book review, travel, journalistic and academic articles. And we encourage all students and young professionals to write their own articles and submit them for the next issue. There are currently few avenues in Australia for non-established writers to voice their insights on global events. Quarterly Access offers those at the start of their international careers the opportunity to publish and in turn discover what their peers are working on and researching.

Daniel Wilson
Editor-in-Chief

Features

GAZA FLOTILLA: RECAP AND ANALYSIS

Timothy Lawson

page 6

WIND TURBINES: MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Eyal Halamish

page 20

DEATH PENALTY: THE UNITED STATES AND INTERNATIONAL OPINION

Jane Hingston

page 23

Interviews

Q&A WITH SALLY NEIGHBOUR

Andrew Zammit

page 3

Q&A WITH HUGH WHITE

Olivia Cable

page 25

In depth

NEPAL'S ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO TACKLING CHILDHOOD POVERTY

Dale Jasper

page 12

CROSSING THE RIVER BY FEELING THE STONES: BEIJING'S BALANCING ACT

Andrew Forrest

page 27

Travel

MEXICO CITY: MYTH BUSTED

Evan Schuurman

page 32

Book review

RECONCILIATION: ISLAM, DEMOCRACY AND THE WEST

Benazir Bhutto (2008)

Reviewed by

Trini Espinosa Abascal

page 35

GAZA FLOTILLA: RECAP AND ANALYSIS

Timothy Lawson

On May 31st 2010, the Israeli navy conducted a pre-dawn raid on the 'Gaza Freedom Flotilla' - a group of six ships carrying over 10 000 tonnes of aid supplies and over 600 pro-Palestinian activists from 37 countries.

At 4:30 am, Israeli Shayetet 13 Special Forces descended upon the ships while they were in international waters; the operation was dubbed 'Operation Sea Breeze' by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). On board the main ship, the MV Mavi Marmara, activists engaged in combat with Israeli commandos who had abseiled onto the deck of the vessel.

During the fighting, nine activists were shot and killed by Israeli soldiers and, according to a recent *Ynet News* article, forty-two other passengers were wounded. Eight of the dead were Turkish nationals and the others were of American or Turkish descent. The IDF suffered no casualties, although seven commandos were wounded, with two of them receiving severe injuries.

The flotilla was aiming to break the naval component of the Gaza blockade, which can be described as an Israeli and Egyptian cooperative naval, land and air blockade surrounding the Gaza strip; it was initially implemented by Israel and Egypt in June 2007 as a reaction to Hamas winning the 2006 Palestinian legislative election.

In mapping out the events, it is useful to begin with the 2006 Palestinian election, as this was a key event in shaping the current political leadership in the country. Soon after being legitimately and democratically elected, Hamas refused to uphold agreements

made between the preceding Palestinian Government, led by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), and Israel. This, and other similar events, sparked a brief internal military conflict between Hamas and rival political party, Fatah.

The conflict culminated in Hamas controlling the Gaza Strip and Fatah controlling the West Bank. This led to the current Gaza blockade, which is employed jointly by Egypt and Israel, and seals off the entire Gaza Strip. According to a BBC News article, the amount of goods allowed entry into the Gaza Strip by Israel is one quarter of the amount prior to the blockade.

Israel insists the blockade is needed to limit Palestinian rocket attacks on its cities. According to the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, Egypt argues that lifting their section of the blockade would imply a recognition on its part of the Hamas government of Gaza, thus further widening the schism between Gaza and the West Bank.

In the days leading up to the raid, the Israeli government requested that the flotilla dock in Israel at Ashdod, so that the aid supplies could be checked by Israeli authorities. The flotilla declined this request, saying (as quoted in *Haaretz*): "This mission is not about delivering humanitarian supplies, it's about breaking Israel's siege on 1.5 million Palestinians." It was announced by some supporters of the flotilla that "a violent response from Israel will breathe new life into the Palestine solidarity movement, drawing attention to the blockade."

Arguments are still raging about who

the initial aggressor was when the Israeli Special Forces boarded the MV Mavi Marmara. An article in *The Australian* expresses some frustration that people try to proclaim the innocence of the activists on board the main ship. Pointing to evidence that surfaced following the raids, it states: "The activists involved know they lost the first debate. Footage proves they used metal poles, knives, Molotov cocktails and live ammunition against Israeli soldiers, blowing out of the water claims of non-violence... Second, the flotilla was never about delivering aid; its organisers refused to co-operate with Israel, Egypt or the UN to have the goods delivered. Rather, the flotilla was about embarrassing Israel and bringing to light Israel's Gaza blockade." The article also discussed the revelation that one of the organisations supporting the flotilla, a Turkish NGO, has been linked with Hamas and other Jihadist organisations.

These events seemed to quell some of the criticism directed at Israel by other international actors because, initially, international response to the botched raid was of widespread outrage and condemnation. Many protests took place around the world following the incident. The United Nations Security Council strongly condemned "those acts resulting in civilian deaths", demanded an unbiased investigation and called for the immediate release of citizens detained by Israel. Further, the UN Human Rights Council dispatched a team to investigate alleged violations of international law.

Israel claims the activists ambushed the commandos after they descended



“Activists later stated that while they did engage in combat with Israeli soldiers, they acted in self-defence because the vessels were boarded by a military force.”



on board from helicopters; the IDF and Turkish TV have both released separate footage that supports this claim. However, activists and journalists on board the ship have claimed that the Israeli commandos started shooting *before* they boarded. *Al Jazeera* journalist, Jamal Elshayyal, writes in his blog: “Just after 4am local time, the Israeli military attacked the ship, in international waters. It was an unprovoked attack. Tear gas was used, sound grenades were launched, and rubber coated steel bullets were fired from almost every direction.” He describes the scene when the shooting began, saying: “Commandos on board the choppers joined the firing, using live ammunition, before any of the soldiers had descended onto the ship.” Activists on board at the time later stated that while they did engage in combat with the Israeli soldiers, they acted in self-defence because the vessels were boarded by a military force.

A section of an article in *The Australian* comes to the conclusion that Israel is caught in a vicious cycle whereby “the

more it hawk-thinks, the more the outside world will always hate it, the more it tends to shoot opponents first and ask questions later, and the more it finds that the world is indeed full of enemies. Though Israeli leader, Mr Netanyahu, has reluctantly agreed to freeze settlement-building and is negotiating indirectly with Palestinians, he does not give the impression of being willing to give ground in the interests of peace.”

As for the implications of this incident? It is doubtful that any of the main players have emerged from the last fortnight with their reputations intact. Israel has been criticised for what is seen as a tendency to lose its nerve and resort to deploying overly aggressive tactics. The IDF’s decision to send in commandos to turn the boats around also raises legal issues in regards to how the flotilla was handled at an organisational level.

However, the activists should also not escape censure for their violent actions, which justifiably undermined claims that they were ‘peace activists’. It has

been claimed that some of the activists had close ties to terrorist groups and have lied about the nature of the confrontations on board the vessels. This greatly undermines their cause and draws into question whether they are acting in the best interests of the people in Gaza, or whether they are merely trying to engineer confrontations with Israel.

A considerable amount of time and effort has been wasted with the flotillas, and the only potential positive to emerge will be if it leads to some relief for the people of Gaza. Israel has recently announced that it will ease the blockade, but this has been greeted with scepticism. It unfortunately seems that Gaza itself is often lost in the din of hardliners on both sides who are using this incident to propagate their own jaundiced and militaristic views.

Timothy Lawson is a journalism student at Monash University and a columnist for News Hit, an online student publication.

Q&A WITH SALLY NEIGHBOUR

by Andrew Zammit

Through ABC Television's program *Four Corners*, Sally Neighbour has gained wide repute for her investigative journalism, and has also won three Walkley Awards. She now writes for *The Australian* newspaper.

Over the past ten years Sally Neighbour's work has focused on Islamic militancy. Her reporting on terrorism in Indonesia led to her first book, *In the Shadow of the Swords: On the Trail of Terrorism From Afghanistan to Australia*. This book remains one of the most comprehensive journalistic accounts of the emergence and development of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), which is best known in Australia as the group behind the Bali bombings. Her book tells the story of the people who became involved with the organisation, the agencies that raced to stop them, and the events – historical, modern, local and global – that contributed to this unanticipated terrorist campaign in Indonesia.

More recently, she has honed her investigation into Australia. While investigating terrorism in Southeast Asia, she was intrigued by stories of an Australian woman who was said to have played an intimate role in both Jemaah Islamiyah and Al Qaeda. This was Rabiah Hutchinson, the subject of Neighbour's second book, *The Mother of Mohammed: An Australian Woman's Extraordinary Journey into Jihad*. The years spent working on the book were motivated by a momentous question: "Here was a woman as Australian as me, who had become a footsoldier in the global jihad. Why?"

Quarterly Access interviewed Sally Neighbour to gain her insights on terrorism in Australia and Southeast Asia.

QA: In *The Mother of Mohammed* you write that the incentive behind your years of reporting on Islamist militancy was not terrorism itself, but the personal stories of the people who became involved in the movement. What made their stories intriguing?

What made their stories intriguing in the first instance were the Australians. They came from the same communities as me, similar families to me; a lot of them were very "Aussie": people like Jack Thomas or Rabiah Hutchinson. Yet they had embraced this ideology and this philosophy and purpose which is so foreign, really, to the Australian way of life – to the point that some of them were prepared not only to die for it, but to kill other people for it. I wanted to try and get a handle on why that was.

QA: Who is Rabiah Hutchinson and what does her story tell us about jihadism in Australia?

Rabiah Hutchinson is a former Mudgee girl. A former surfer chick from the northern beaches of Sydney; a dope smoking hippie who converted to Islam and then went on this amazing journey, joining the jihadist movement, becoming involved with JI in Indonesia in the 1980s, with the Mujahideen in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the 1990s, a member of Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2000–2001.

I think it tells us a lot about the jihadist movement both internationally and in Australia: the reason that we have seen this extraordinary movement. And that's the thing about it – I quoted a phrase from Marc Sageman who calls it "a global terrorist movement"... and that really struck me. We've seen terrorist organisations and terrorist groups and terrorist individuals but I don't think we've ever really seen a terrorist *movement* before. I think Rabiah Hutchinson helps us to understand why there is not only a few terrorists that kill people here and there, but why this is such an important and momentous global movement, to the point that there are objectives that even ordinary Australians have related to.

QA: What surprises have you encountered in your years of reporting on terrorism?

The most surprising thing to me is how likeable some of these people are. I think sometimes we tend to see terrorists as kind of cardboard cut outs, and we assume that they are psychopaths. In fact, all the research tells us that there is no psychological profile of a terrorist. Terrorists aren't psychopaths. They don't have psychiatric or psychological problems. So, I think what was most surprising to me was to find out that they are in fact likeable. They are sincere, they are principled, they're

intelligent and they're articulate. They have so many human qualities. I think that's really what we have to remember about this whole terrorist movement; that there are sensible, intelligent people involved in it because they think it's the right thing to do.

QA: Turning to Southeast Asia, is the greatest terrorism threat in the region still Jemaah Islamiyah, or has the situation changed in the past decade?

The situation has changed considerably in the past decade.

I think it's far too early to write off JI. I think on the face of it we know that JI has been dismantled and dismembered and I think we can be confident that JI is probably no longer, at this point, capable of an attack on the scale of Bali 1.

They could probably do Bali 2 again without too much difficulty. But, I think we can't write off JI because we know that JI is just the latest manifestation of a violent Islamist movement that has existed in Indonesia for 50, 60 years. In the past, Indonesian governments have believed that the Darul Islam movement (which preceded JI) had been crushed, and it never was. I think that we can be quite sure that it will re-emerge in a different form.

The danger now is not so much JI itself. For some time people have talked about JI being a network of networks, and the most striking phenomenon has been the emergence of all these splinter groups and factions.

We tend to speak as though the factions only emerged since Bali, but a lot of them existed before and we just assumed they were all JI. We now know that there is an entire network of groups and little organisations and militias that have exactly the same aims as JI - some of which existed before JI and many more of which have sprung up since the Bali bombings and the dismemberment of JI itself.

QA: Our media coverage of terrorism in Southeast Asia usually focuses on Indonesia, because of the direct threat posed to Australians demonstrated by the Bali bombings and the embassy attack. But, what terrorist threats are other countries in the region, such as Malaysia and the Philippines, faced with?

Well, we hear very little of the Philippines. Clearly there is an ongoing issue in Southern Philippines which hasn't been resolved. I think like JI in Indonesia, it's in a lull at the moment. To be honest I haven't followed the Philippines very closely recently, so I don't think I



can speak with any authority on it. It may well be that the jihadists in southern Philippines are regrouping and rebuilding as it seems that JI is now doing. So we can't write that off.

You know, the situation in Southern Thailand is still very volatile and unpredictable... that conflict has intensified and has not gone away and now we're at a crucial period where it could very well run out of control because of all the focus being on the events in Bangkok.

So that's another one we have to keep a very close eye on, and you know they talk about the fact that whereas to this point no strong links with either JI or Al Qaeda or other outside groups have emerged, it's still possible that this could occur in the future. So I think all those movements in Southeast Asia are quite unpredictable. Singapore and Malaysia they seem to have a pretty firm lid on it.

QA: Given your experience of reporting across the region, have you found that terrorism is reported very differently in Southeast Asian countries than it is in Australia?

I think in Indonesia, terrorism has always been reported with much less gusto than in Australia. For us, people being blown up in bombings, if they're Australian, is big news, and always has been. And the fact that they could target Bali was horrifying for Australians.

I think political violence is much more just a fact of life in Indonesia, where it's not for Australians.

QA: What are your views on Australia's approach to countering terrorism?

Look, I think it has to be said: I'm not always a barracker for ASIO and the AFP, and in fact I've been very critical of them on numerous occasions. But, I think it has to be said that our counter-terrorism agencies have done a good job, in that they've been right on top of cells that have emerged.

I think up until 2002 they were not on top of it. They didn't even know about Jack Roche until somebody told them about him, long after the event. So from that point they scrambled to catch up and I think, since

then, and I guess it is easy to say this, because a) we know that there has not been a bombing in Australia, and b) we know they have uncovered terrorist cells. So, they have certainly been vigilant and part of the result of that is that there has not been an attack here.

I think the much more difficult part of that equation is the counter-radicalisation side of it. I think, in a sense, counter-terrorism is easier, because you can impose tough laws, you can infringe on civil liberties, and you can have preventive detention and so on. Counter-radicalisation, attacking the ideology at its source, is much more difficult and I think our police forces and counter-terrorism agencies generally have been much slower to get a grip on that.

To be fair to them, so have similar agencies around the world, because it's much more difficult. But, I still think our agencies here are struggling to tackle counter-radicalisation. It's the buzzword; they know that's what they have to do, to stop people being radicalised in the first place, but they haven't figured out how to do it.

Cases in Australia

2000: British immigrant Jack Roche conspired with key Jemaah Islamiyah and Al Qaeda figures to bomb the Israeli embassy in Canberra, the Israeli consulate in Sydney, and murder a prominent Jewish businessman in Melbourne. Controversy was caused because Roche had second thoughts and contacted ASIO in an effort to tell them about the plot, and offered to work for them. In what it later admitted was a blunder, ASIO failed to follow up, and only became aware of him in 2002. Roche pleaded guilty in 2004 and received a light sentence because of his co-operation with authorities.

2003: Melbourne resident Joseph Thomas ("Jihad Jack") was arrested in Pakistan and later extradited to Australia. In 2006 he was found guilty of receiving funds from Al Qaeda and falsifying his passport. This conviction was overturned on appeal, because it was based on an inadmissible confession he gave in Pakistan, without a lawyer and after violent treatment by Pakistani security officers. However, when Sally Neighbour interviewed him for Four Corners, he spoke openly about these activities and was re-tried. The interview was the prosecution's key evidence, raising questions about the legal and ethical difficulties involved in investigative journalism. He was convicted of passport falsification in 2008.

2003: Sydney resident Faheem Khalid Lodhi, who had trained with the group Lashkar-e-Toiba, was arrested for conspiring to carry out a terrorist attack with Frenchman Willie Brigitte (later convicted in France) and others. He was convicted in 2006.

2005: Twenty-two people in both Melbourne and Sydney were arrested in Operation Pendennis, a co-ordinated effort by ASIO, Federal Police and the State Police Services. Police claimed these suspects constituted two cells preparing an imminent terrorist attack. Eighteen of them were convicted between 2006 and 2010, with several pleading guilty.

2009: Five men, most from Melbourne, were charged over an alleged plot to attack Holsworthy barracks in Sydney. They are currently facing trial.

QA: Do you think it's too early for us to start expecting police and others to have 'counter-radicalisation' programs? There are so many different views on what causes radicalisation and so many different definitions. It's one thing to say they should be doing 'counter-radicalisation', but if we really don't understand it that well, couldn't it end up being harmful?

Yes. Muslims generally are very suspicious of the police, and incredibly suspicious of ASIO. If anyone from a police force or ASIO tries to 'counter-radicalise' anybody it's going to have the opposite effect. So it can't be overtly done by the police or by ASIO; I think it's highly debatable how successful either 'counter-radicalisation' or 'de-radicalisation' can be.

And I don't think it's at all clear that the police are the best people to do it.

I think what the police do need to do, and which they're starting to do, particularly in Victoria and also in New South Wales, is community engagement. And I think that's really important for the police to do. I've seen some really good work being done both in Melbourne and in Sydney, and I think they have to keep doing that.

But, in terms of counter-radicalisation it's probably true that the police can't do it. And there are people who are going to be completely immune from counter-radicalisation.

The agencies can't even agree on the definitions. Some of them consider radicalism to come before extremism, and others consider extremism to come before radicalism. This just illustrates how difficult it is.

QA: Lastly, some of our readers are heading for careers in journalism. Is there any advice you would offer?

I think it has always been hard to get into journalism. It was hard in my day and it's still hard now... I think you have to be much better educated. When I started out in journalism you didn't need a degree, no one had a degree, and now I think generally you need two degrees to get into journalism.

I think the ABC is a fantastic start for anybody. I didn't start in the ABC, I actually started in commercial radio, but when I moved to the ABC after about ten years as a journalist that's when my real journalistic career began.

So thankfully the ABC still takes trainees, I think, but you've got to get those degrees first.

Andrew Zammit has completed a Master of Counter-Terrorism Studies at Monash University. He is a research assistant at the Global Terrorism Research Centre, and holds an editorial position at QA.

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NEPAL'S ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO TACKLING CHILDHOOD POVERTY

Dale Jasper

Children in Nepal face stark realities in their daily lives. Since the end of the Maoist insurgency and the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Accord at the end of 2006, the rebuilding process has been arduous. With the attention on the re-structuring of the government, child protection and development services have been neglected. According to UNICEF's most recent Humanitarian Action Report, the conflict has destroyed many of the networks that supported disadvantaged children, and poverty amongst youth remains rife. Around 43 percent of children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition and over five percent do not even make it to that age.¹

However, Nepal provides us with successful examples of grassroots community development projects focused on the needs of children. Unlike their counterparts, which are initiated by large international organisations, these 'bottom-up' type projects are developed by the local community. Even though the results of these projects have not been quantified, they appear to have an immediate positive impact.

This article will focus on three such projects and shall demonstrate that given their tailored nature, these should be further supported by larger development organisations. This would allow countries such as Nepal to develop their own unique solutions. These projects directly target child labour, drug addiction, malnutrition, economic exploitation and limited access to education. This article is based on academic research and interviews conducted during a study tour in January and February of this year.

Nepal's political situation

The tiny Himalayan nation of Nepal has had a tumultuous history to say the least. However, the last decade has seen

a dramatic escalation in politically motivated violence and divisions amongst politicians and royalty. During 2001, in what former *New York Times* correspondent Barbara Crossette called an "orgy of butchery," almost the entire royal family was gunned down during a family dinner. Incredulously, the Crown Prince massacred his family and fatally shot himself in a substance-induced rage.² Remaining first in line for the throne then stood the somewhat unpopular brother of the King, Prince Gyanendra. This version of events is still hotly contested on the streets of Nepal. Many Nepalese, some of whom I was lucky enough to meet, believe the misguided ambitions of an unpopular Prince were to blame for the murder of their King. Following the massacre, the newly crowned King Gyanendra began enacting measures that culminated in a royal coup in 2002 and the complete assumption of absolute powers in 2005. In just four short years Gyanendra had wrestled power from the popularly elected government and used his powers under article 127 of the Nepalese 1990 constitution to, "relieve the Nepalese of their sovereignty."³

Throughout the same period the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) began an armed campaign in Western Nepal, which eventually spread throughout the country. This Maoist insurgency provided the monarchy with the excuses it required to curtail civil liberties in 2005. The King argued that Nepal required "peace and security before it could have democracy", while factions within the Maoist insurgency imagined Nepal as a 'base' for the creation of a Marxist state in South East Asia.⁴ Nonetheless, the opportunity to participate in the planned Constituent Assembly proved too attractive for

1 UNICEF 2009, *Humanitarian Action Report 2009*, New York. p.35.

2 Crossette, Barbara 2005, "Nepal: The Politics of Failure" *World Policy Journal*, Vol.22, No.4. p.70.

3 Ramakrishnan, A.K. 2005, "History of Despair; Politics of Nepal" *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol.6, No.3. p.458.

4 Bohara, Alok K, Mitchell, Neil J & Nepal, Mani 2006, "Opportunity, Democracy and the Exchange of Political Violence: A Subnational Analysis of Conflict in Nepal" *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.50, No.1. p.109.



the rebels to resist. As a result, the Maoist combatants laid down their weapons in 2006 and remain to this day in various United Nations supervised cantonments throughout rural Nepal. Notwithstanding this, more than 13,000 people lost their lives before this political trade-off ended the bloodshed.⁵

The Comprehensive Peace Accord signed in 2006 between the government and the Maoists guerrillas concluded years of violence and has served to set the scene for today's political landscape in Nepal. In their paper titled, "Nepal – A Revolution Through the Ballot Box," Bishnu Sharma, Bronwyn Stevens and Patrick Weller explain that after the peace accord and a subsequent 19 days of popular protests in Kathmandu, King Gyanendra was forced to hand power back to the parliament. The first act of the parliament was to unceremoniously strip the King of his authority. This new 'alliance of convenience' formed an interim government (including the Maoists) tasked with re-writing the Nepalese Constitution.⁶

In spite of this apparent success, the political situation in Nepal is still volatile and peace remains precarious. There are continued power struggles between 24 parties that sit in parliament, resulting in further conflict within political alliances. Rhoderick Chalmers, the deputy director for the South Asian Division of the International Crisis Group, believes that stability and prosperity in Nepal are

not guaranteed. Chalmers alludes to a disenfranchised populace when he writes:

In Nepal, the black-and-white struggle against the monarchy has given way to a political landscape of shades of gray. The people have sent a clear message that they will not put up with a return to royal dictatorship. But they know all too well that an uneasy coalition of tainted democratic politicians and semi-reformed Maoist revolutionaries hardly guarantees a happy ending to the turbulent history of Nepal's political convulsions.⁷

Discontent amongst the masses is not at all unwarranted. The number of political murders, kidnappings, human rights abuses and incidents of oppression of the media has reportedly spiked since the King was removed from power.⁸ Moreover general strikes, or *bandh*, instigated by various political parties, persistently interrupt the daily lives of everyday citizens and stunt economic growth. Some Nepalese fail to see the difference between life under the former monarchy and the current political turmoil. The following are the words of a Nepalese villager, taken from an online edition of the *Nepali Times*.

There may be an indefinite bandh in Doti, all schools may be closed in Kailali, health posts in

5 Nayak, Nihar 2008, "Maoists in Nepal and India: Tactical Alliances and Ideological Differences" *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.32, No.3. pp.466-467.

6 Sharma, Bishnu, Stevens, Bronwyn & Weller, Patrick 2008 "Nepal – A Revolution Through the Ballot Box" *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.68, No.4. pp.516-518.

7 Chalmers, Rhoderick 2007, "Toward a New Nepal?" *Current History*, Vol.106, No.699. p.161.

8 Shah, Saubhagya 2008, *Civil Society in Uncivil Places: Soft State and Regime Change in Nepal*, East-West Center, Washington. pp.44-48.



Bajura may be without medicine, there may be a food shortage in Humla. But who cares? The people of Western Nepal stopped expecting anything from Kathmandu long ago.⁹

This disillusioned attitude is increasingly apparent throughout Nepal, so much so that prominent citizens have begun to form co-operatives to provide basic services to the community, services which the government is either unable or unwilling to provide. The following will explore three such projects, both urban and rural, focused around the education and protection of children.

Thulaket Children's Resource Centre: addressing cultural scepticism

In Nepal the education system struggles to be effective because of many factors, such as the minimal amount of government spending in schools. The government currently allocates just US\$30 annually per student.¹⁰ Poor resourcing aside, education standards in Nepal also face cultural challenges. Some Nepalese feel that education may inspire dissent amongst those of lower social status. Dissatisfaction with their function in life could potentially lead to upheaval.¹¹

This skepticism towards education makes knowledge less accessible to children of certain classes. Nepalese society is unconvinced of the benefits of education. Some children cannot attend school regularly as they are expected to undertake a large portion of household duties. Aside from domestic work, children in rural areas are sometimes required to complete agricultural work. Children as young as six years old spend an

average of between 1.9 and 3.7 hours of their day completing backbreaking agricultural work that children in Western countries could never imagine.¹² All these factors combined have led Nepal to an adult literacy rate of 68.3% in urban areas and only 45% in rural areas, thus reinforcing a cycle of poverty, especially in rural families.¹³

There are many projects that are designed to raise educational standards of children in Nepal, not least of which is the World Bank funded Community School Support Project. On a smaller scale, however, are a number of locally organised projects that focus their attention on using education to alleviate poverty. The Thulaket Children's Resource Centre is one such example.

Thulaket is a tiny rural village located in the Fewa lake valley near Pokhara, Nepal's second largest city. Families in the village have no running water to their homes, contend with frequent electricity shortages and have little in the way of modern conveniences. The Thulaket Children's Resource Centre has no broad international network of donors, nor does it rely on a large bureaucracy to operate. Rather, the Centre is funded entirely by the local community and the goodwill of strangers who may pass through the village. It is the initiative of one man, Tulasi Bhandari, a local educator.

Tulasi Bhandari, more affectionately known as Dhurba, imagined the Resource Centre many years ago. When I asked him why he had dedicated so much of his own time and financial resources toward the Centre, Dhurba responded, "Because knowledge is like a great light." Dhurba went on to explain how his own university education had empowered him to spread knowledge throughout his community. He admits that much of his time is exhausted trying to convince local farmers and those less fortunate than himself of the benefits of educating their children. While education may yield greater long-term economic returns than manual labour, families feel compelled to make a rational decision about their welfare.¹⁴ Often, sacrificing the potential long-term gain of childhood education to put a child to work in the fields, so a family can feed itself in the short-term, is the only logical option for people in many developing nations. The strengths of the Thulaket project rest in the crux of this tough choice.

9 Pfaf-Czarnecka, Joanna 2005, "No end to Nepal's Maoist rebellion" *European Journal of Anthropology*, Vol.46. p.166.

10 Shields, Robin & Rappleye, Jeremy 2008, "Uneven terrain: educational policy and equity in Nepal," *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, Vol.28, No.3. p.266.

11 Ibid., p.266.

12 Reingold, Amy Jo 1993, "Non Formal Education and Early Childhood Development Activities in Rural Nepal," *Report: Save the Children*, Westport, Connecticut, p.3 – Copy available upon request

13 Shields, Robin & Rappleye, Jeremy, op cit. p.267.

14 Ersado, Lire 2005 "Child Labour and Schooling Decisions in Rural Areas: Comparative Evidence from Nepal, Peru and Zimbabwe" *World Development*, Vol.33, No.3. pp.455-456.

Recognising the opportunity cost imposed upon poor families sending their children to regular school, Dhurba has structured the classes of the Resource Centre accordingly. Classes operate between 7am and 9am, then between 5pm and 6pm. By holding classes in the morning and the evening, children who are required by their family to work, perhaps in the fields or completing domestic chores throughout the day, still have access to educational opportunities. According to local teachers, not only does the Resource Centre provide non-formal education but also acts as a catalyst for school enrolment. After attending the Resource Centre families are more likely to understand the benefits of education. The teachers also claim that Thulaket has a higher rate of school attendance than many nearby villages. The demand for education in Thulaket is now so great, thanks in part to the work of Dhurba and the Children's Resource Centre, that a private primary school has since opened in the village, in addition to the mainly government funded primary and secondary schools.

Pokhara Contact Centre for Working Children: rethinking child labour

The Thulaket project is not the only success. Overall, access to education in Nepal has increased dramatically since the early 1970s, because of efforts over the last forty years to hand control of schools to local communities. This process of decentralising the control of education has resulted in an increase in the number of primary schools from 10,600 to over 26,000 in the years between 1971 and 2003.¹⁵ Since then, the World Bank has funded the Community School Support Project (CSSP). Thanks to this decentralisation process and funding from the World Bank and other non-governmental organisations for the CSSP, the percentage of GDP allocated to schools has constantly risen.¹⁶ Even though increased funding has arguably provided greater access to, and better quality, education, it does have some drawbacks.

Firstly, placing control of education into the hands of small communities has led some to assume that successive governments since 1970 have sought to create a market based economy for education, which could render it inaccessible to the poor. According to the report, "Empowering the Local Through Education? Exploring Community-Managed Schooling in Nepal," these fears of market liberalisation have stirred political unrest and sometimes violence, especially amongst the

Maoists.¹⁷ Secondly, large-scale projects such as the Community School Support Program fail to cushion the economic impact suffered by poor working families who desperately need to maximise their income and therefore may not be able to send their children to conventional schools. Fortunately programs such as those initiated by Tulasi Bhandari in Thulaket help act as a safety net for these families.

Financial hardship is not unique to rural areas but affects the residents of Nepal's urban areas as well. Child labour has been identified as an issue in large cities including Pokhara, and although slightly different in nature than farm work in Thulaket, child labour in cities can still affect the likelihood of school attendance. Extended exposure to extreme working conditions has also been shown to hamper children's development both socially and cognitively. Underage workers in cities suffer from low pay, poor treatment, poverty and few prospects. These children are deprived of "optimal development."¹⁸ It is commonly argued that poverty induces parents to make their children work, therefore sacrificing access to education and perpetuating the poverty cycle.¹⁹ However, there is an ever-growing school of thought to the contrary.

For example, Anokhi Parikh and Elisabeth Sadoulet explain that child labour need not be a trade off with education and that it is not always necessitated by poverty, but sometimes is the result of opportunity and can lead to economic prosperity.²⁰ A growing number of development programs encourage entrepreneurship and foster a child's ability to earn in an effort to tackle child labour and exploitation.

The Pokhara Contact Centre for Working Children is a community-initiated project that targets such issues. There are five similar contact centres located in various parts of the Pokhara urban sprawl. Each centre forms an integral part of the Pokhara Valley Child Labour Elimination Program, which has been implemented and funded by the Pokhara Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The Child Labour Elimination Program (CLEP) has two slogans, "Stop Child Labour," and, "Child Labour Elimination is our Collective Responsibility." It aims to halt child exploitation by providing non-formal

15 Carney, Stephen, Bista, Min & Agergaard, Jytte 2007 "Empowering the Local Through Education? Exploring Community-Managed Schooling in Nepal" *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol.33, No.5. p.266.

16 Ibid., pp.266.

17 Ibid., pp.266-267.

18 Esa Alaraudanjoki, Murari P. Regimi, Timo Ahonen, Jari-Erik Nurmi & Isto Ruoppila 2001, "Cognitive Skills Amongst Nepalese Child Labourers" *International Journal of Psychology*, Vol.36, No.4. pp.242-243.

19 Ersado, Lire, op cit. p.456.

20 Parikh, Anokhi and Sadoulet, Elisabeth "The Effects of Parents' Occupation on Child Labour and School Attendance in Brazil," UC Berkeley: Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, *Working Paper No. 1000*, retrieved from: <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/49g4z7mx>

education, apprenticeships, vocational training, family reunification services and a communal savings and credit scheme for working children. It also acknowledges the importance of children's wages for the economic viability of their families and the Pokhara economy at large. In countries that have no state-provided welfare, a child's income may be feeding an entire family. Taking this into account, CLEP's sole purpose is not to actively remove these children from their jobs but rather to provide them with support and essential services, empowering them to escape poverty.

Umela Bhattarai, a tutor and counsellor at one of the contact centres reports that a vast majority of her students have moved on into better, non-exploitative jobs, some into formal schooling and a few more have gained the skills enabling them to begin their own businesses. By taking a pragmatic approach to the issue of child labour, rather than taking a legalistic approach, CLEP has been able to attack child exploitation in their community without harming working families' ability to survive.

The most prominent activity of the Child Labour Elimination Program is the non-formal education provided to children. Classes at the contact centre run at various times throughout the day to enable attendance outside of the children's working hours. These classes include English, Nepalese and mathematics as well as important life skills such as health care and sanitation. CLEP hopes to build children's self-esteem and empower them to resist continual exploitation while satisfying the basic right to education. The support offered to working children by CLEP reaches far beyond educational services and includes proactive promotion of the Children's Development Khazana (CDK). CDK is a savings and credit union type scheme that operates on "cooperative principles."²¹ CDK is partly an international program but is greatly influenced by small communities. CDK is broken down into 77 sub branches, each managed by children for children under the advice of adult facilitators. According to the CDK website,

*The primary objective of the CDK is to impart life skill education, it supports children to be responsible, inculcate the habit of prioritizing needs, to budget and save. It helps in providing security to a child or adolescent's future. Street and working children are able to use the capital for their empowerment.*²²

The premise of the Children's Development Khazana is that removing a child's ability to earn can be detrimental to themselves and their local community. Accordingly, the CDK encourages entrepreneurship amongst working children, often providing them with micro-finance to begin their own enterprise.

Pokhara Street Children Protection and Rehabilitation Centre: escaping abuse

There are of course many other children in Nepal that live in dire conditions. Many are unable to even live with their families. These children often try to survive on the streets, and are particularly vulnerable to physical violence and sexual abuse. In 2008 *The Nepali Times* reported that 95% of homeless children in Nepal were subjected to some form of abuse.²³ Street children experience violence, have their physical and mental health compromised, and are compelled to undertake dangerous activities. Needless to say, they are also deprived of quality education.²⁴

However, another community initiated development project focuses on the need to protect these children. The Pokhara Street Children Protection and Rehabilitation Centre utilises a vast network of local citizens and the Pokhara police to provide care for disadvantaged children. Local committee members and police officers identify candidates for protection, and after an initial period of rehabilitation and health care, this network assesses their potential to be returned to their family. At the time of my visit, the centre housed and fed over twenty-five children ranging from just two years old up to fourteen. The Rehabilitation Centre specialises in assisting street children who have suffered from either solvent or alcohol addiction. I was saddened to learn from Min Prasad Bhattarai, the general secretary of the Pokhara Child Protection Committee that almost all the children currently residing in the centre had suffered through some form of addiction. The centre relies entirely on the work and financial assistance of volunteers, both local and from abroad. The ultimate goal of their work is to reunite the children with their family. While this is not possible in all cases, the centre has an excellent success rate.

21 Children's Development Khazana Website: <http://www.butterflieschildrights.org/developmentBank.asp> [accessed on 03/03/2010]

22 Ibid.

23 Sciantarelli, Emma 2008 "Abusing Young Hearts and Minds: Kathmandu's Street Children have Learnt to Trust No-one," *The Nepali Times*, 12th September.

24 R. Baker, C. Panter-Brick & A. Todd 1997, "Homeless Street Boys in Nepal: Their Demography and Lifestyle." *The Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, March. p.129.

Lessons for development

Of the three community-initiated development projects examined in this paper, only the Child Labour Elimination Program (CLEP) receives any funding from international aid organisations. In addition, none of these projects were instigated by international aid organisations, providing evidence that development programs initiated by locals can be effective. Beyond being effective, these projects can adapt to the specific needs of the target community, thus enhancing their efficiency. Given the demand for development funding worldwide, perhaps it is in the interests of larger aid agencies to further invest in training and assisting local residents who can translate those skills and funding into successful development projects.

Meanwhile, the Constituent Assembly is still debating the proposed constitution that is due to be implemented this year, and both small and large-scale development projects continue to play an integral part in the lives of many millions of Nepalese, especially children. Despite the

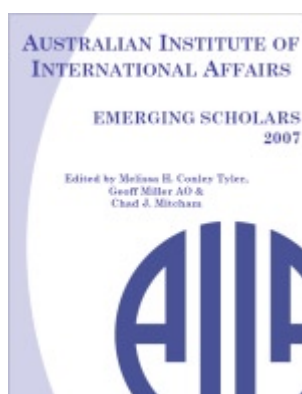
perpetual strikes coordinated by various political factions and the economic uncertainty created by the current political climate, community initiated development projects confirm the resilience of the Nepalese people. Programs such as the Thulaket Children's Resource Centre, the Child Labour Elimination Program and the Pokhara Street Children Protection and Rehabilitation Centre provide not only an excellent foundation for promoting the rights of children but also the potential for larger aid organisations to operate fiscally leaner and more effective development programs. These three projects have assisted to improve the lives of many, particularly children. In a country such as Nepal, with over eleven million people under the age of eighteen, this willingness has never been more important.²⁵

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²⁵ Ibid.

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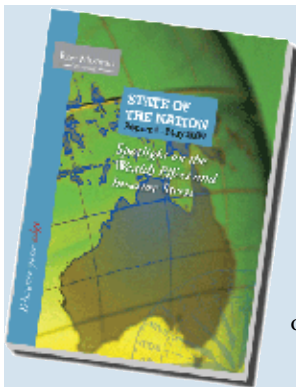
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WIND TURBINES: MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Eyal Halamish

Green city dwellers are lobbying their politicians to increase renewable energy targets in today's carbon-constrained world. Yet wind power, the most economically viable renewable energy source, is facing ongoing community opposition and has limited political support. A new approach is needed to manage expectations.

One of the best examples of community opposition to wind farms was recently exposed on Australia's nightly news programs. Both *A Current Affair* and *The 7:30 Report* broadcast the story of how local residents in Waubra, Victoria were fighting a development on the basis of the potential health impacts of wind turbines.

The wind farm operators had already purchased the home of one of the complainants, yet community concern, particularly regarding health impacts has only exacerbated. Now, the local council has 'hand-balled' the local outcry to the state government claiming they were not responsible for the planning and permit conditions for the site. Anti-wind farm activists across the region have coined the term 'Waubra disease' and claim 'wind-turbine syndrome' is reason enough for turbines not to operate in regional Victoria.

Waubra is not alone. In the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States, local and regional action groups are building awareness, mobilising and suing companies with existing or future wind farm plans. The strong emotions swept up in anti-wind farm activism are quickly picked up by local, regional and national press, tarnishing

the industry reputation and limiting the political will to approve wind farms. Meanwhile, companies end up spending more on court cases, public relations and additional government regulatory hurdles.

Germany, which has been the paragon for clean energy growth, had its industry hindered by the 'not-in-my-backyard' (NIMBY) movement in the 2000s. Local community opposition peaked in 2004 when the popular magazine *Spiegel* published a cover story entitled "The Windmill Craze". The article criticised the wind industry's impacts on communities and coincided with government discussions around increasing renewable energy subsidies. The Hamburg Institute of International Economics discussion paper on *The German Wind Energy Lobby* explains, "in 2002 and 2003, changes in the tax law made wind power funds less attractive for investors and therefore the inflow of money was considerably reduced". Here, the major threat to wind power is the increasing NIMBY movement, which has contributed to the German government's decision not to increase subsidies for renewable, resulting in fewer wind farms being developed.

The wind industry remains baffled by community concerns, considering the benefits involved with their operations. In Australia, wind turbines placed on farm properties provide local farmers with an additional \$6,000 - \$10,000 per annum per turbine. Some perceive this as a unique way to mix rural economies and provide financial support to farmers during hard times, without disrupting their practices. However, while some

farmers reap major financial benefits, not all are given the opportunity.

Local and state governments are trying to resolve the equity issue by requiring developer investment in local community funds to offset negative impacts. Such attempts at resolution are often considered by the rural 'have-nots' to be tokenistic gestures, particularly if investments are not linked to the main concerns of complainants.

Whether it is because of aesthetics, the danger to birds, or low-frequency noise, to name a few complaints, the real issue is perception. It is about the difference between public and expert perceptions of risk. Over the last 40 years, extensive research has been conducted by psychologists and social scientists, using a range of psychometric and cultural analysis techniques, to explain exactly which risk factors the public are and are not willing to be exposed to. This research found that the public perceives and evaluates risks according to a very different set of criteria than those of experts. For the public, harm is not abstract or a mathematical likelihood of damage.

The 'wind-turbine syndrome' debate is one example of how relying on an expert-based assessment of risk has left the public confused. Two years ago, Dr. Nina Pierpont, a controversial medical doctor, introduced her theory of 'wind-turbine syndrome' into the public eye. She claims large-scale wind farms, which emit low-frequency noise, can cause migraines, sleep deprivation and other serious symptoms to any person living within two kilometres of a turbine.



“The wind industry remains baffled by community concerns”

Considering the economic viability of the wind industry is dependent on turbine proximity to electricity lines, which are typically close to communities, Dr. Pierpont’s research has raised a range of industry questions.

With scientific uncertainty about the impact of wind turbines on human health, rural activists were quick to flog newspaper headlines and TV press releases with new facts about Pierpont’s research. Meanwhile, the wind industry denied the claims with their own experts and reports. RenewableUK, a leading British energy association, championed Dr. Geoff Leventhall’s 2003 *Published Research on Low Frequency Noise and its Effects* to counteract Pierpont’s claims. Furthermore, the American and Canadian Wind Energy Associations co-funded a study with academics from leading institutions across the globe. The public remains confused about which side is “more right” or who has all the facts (activist academics or industry

experts). Therefore political support for wind farms remains uncertain.

Less than three months after the United States and Canadian Wind Energy Associations produced their report, those in the wind industry remain puzzled as to why people were still airing their concerns about ‘wind-turbine syndrome’ and why the press was still covering it.

New Jersey-based risk communication consultant Dr. Peter Sandman says, “It’s outrage, stupid.” For him, risk is a factor of both technical hazard and outrage.

Risk = Hazard + Outrage

Dr. Sandman explains that in this equation, hazard and outrage do not carry equal weight. When hazard is high and outrage is low, people under-react. When hazard is low and outrage is high, people overreact. With regards to wind farm developments, in the majority of cases, outrage outweighs the hazard.

Issues that upset communities, ‘wind-turbine syndrome’ and dead birds, are actually hazards which are scientifically proven to be small. Yet these are the primary issues around which wind farm opponents rally community members.

While outrage seems highly erratic, it is actually more predictable than technical risk. According to Katherine Teh-White, former journalist with *The Age* and communications expert, understanding outrage factors such as control, fairness, and natural justice are the keys to predicting and addressing community expectations. Teh-White says, “The risks that you control are much less a source of outrage than risks that are out of your control.” When communicating the environmental risk, wind farm developers need to recognize that people’s outrage is as important as the hazard itself. In fact, when people are outraged, they tend to think the hazard is more serious than it is. Trying to convince them otherwise

is unlikely to solve the problem until their emotionally-driven outrage is reduced. The greater the level of control a community feels, the more likely they are to support a windfarm. Outrage analysis of countryside dwellers faced with turbines shows they are not *just* concerned about aesthetics, bird kills, and paychecks. Their feelings are about having little to no control over life-changing decisions taking place in their backyards, and the inequitable distribution of wealth, and the unnatural, *industrial* killing of birds. It is actually the perception of the risk rather than the risk itself.

The first step in the process of fast-tracking renewable energy construction is getting project managers and renewable energy supporters to understand 'outrage'. If more project managers in the wind industry could understand what drives perceptions in civic meeting halls, public auditoriums and school gymnasiums, they could plan wind farms in a more inclusive, community-driven way. Moreover, if city-slickers recognise the role of outrage in limiting wind farm developments, they might lobby for clean technology which establishes local ownership and responsibility over issues which matter to their countryside compatriots.

The Danish wind turbine cooperative model is one unique, community-driven approach; although energy policy expert Professor Benjamin Sovacool warns

"not everything is easily copied outside of Denmark." To encourage investment in wind, families in Denmark do not pay taxes on revenue received from cooperative wind farm investments. As such, families purchase shares, which are invested in community wind turbines. According to renewable energy analyst Paul Gipe, in Denmark nearly 2,100 cooperatives existed in 1996 and opinion polls showed that direct involvement and community empowerment led to approximately 86% of Danes supporting wind energy. The cooperative model has spread to Germany, the Netherlands and most recently, Australia.

The town of Daylesford, Victoria celebrated the signing of a contract for Australia's first community-owned wind farm on April 29, 2010. After five years of planning, the two-turbine Hepburn Community Wind Park will start producing power by mid-2010. Hepburn Wind chairman Simon Holmes told *The Age* how community investments and support from state government and Bendigo and Adelaide Bank made the \$12.9 million wind farm a reality. When in full operation, the wind park's two turbines in Daylesford will be capable of powering the entire town's homes (1,187 houses in total).

In an era of high social expectations from government and the community, Daylesford's use of the Danish model stands out. It demonstrates how outrage can be minimised through community

ownership and shared responsibility. The process has led the community to understand that as part of the problem they have to be part of the solution. It is community ownership of the issue, not just the solution.

Managing outrage in the wind industry, even at the community wind farm, has a long way to go. As you drive into Daylesford, there is a sign to the side of the road which reads "Save Leonard's Hill, Wind Factory NOT Welcome Here." While the wind farm cooperative represents a global and Australian landmark, some underlying issues are still there.

The sign is a gentle reminder to the renewable energy movement that all stakeholders, companies, communities, governments, and activists, need to think collaboratively and work together in order to overcome our energy woes. Wind projects, including Hepburn, need to share control and decision making with activists who they are not used to sharing with. This is a challenge needing to be resolved as we build a renewable energy-powered future.

Eyal Halamish is a consultant at strategic advisory firm Futureye and is a co-founder of the social media platform OurSay Australia.



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DEATH PENALTY: THE UNITED STATES AND INTERNATIONAL OPINION

Jane Hingston

Eighteen months ago as an International Relations student, I had the opportunity to travel to Louisiana in the United States to work in a capital assistance/defence law office. Here, I was able to contribute to the extremely important legal and humanitarian work to assist those who are ultimately defenceless in their situations, to restore a little hope and dignity. This was within an environment that considers the death penalty a necessary vehicle in delivering justice.

This experience brought to my attention the influence the international community could have in promoting the abolition of capital punishment.

In the United States the death penalty is lawful and is considered (within the United States legal system) not to violate international law or international human rights. Still, the death penalty remains a controversial issue not only internationally but within the United States itself. A recent example of this is the state of New Jersey, which in 2007 made the decision to remove the death penalty from its justice system. The state Governor commented that "New Jersey is truly evolving" and this decision made New Jersey the first state in approximately 40 years to outlaw the death penalty. International opposition to the death penalty is very much active, arguing that the death penalty is a violation of human rights and should be globally abandoned. It is argued that the death penalty defies human rights principles essentially through the violation of the right to protection from deprivation of life and the potential violation of the right not to be subjected to cruel and inhumane treatment or punishment.

A common counter-argument to the international movement is that international interference on death penalty issues threatens the principle of national sovereignty. National sovereignty is what gives the United States the power to determine the future of the death penalty in their criminal justice system. Nevertheless, in an increasingly globalised and integrated world and with the very nature of the death penalty threatening fundamental international human rights standards, the death penalty remains an issue worthy of international activism and concern.

The death penalty is seen as an irreversible, vindictive and inhumane punishment that can be inflicted on persons by a criminal justice system that is potentially flawed by error and bias. The system cannot guarantee that innocent persons will not be sentenced to death and there are many factors to demonstrate this, such as: human error, deliberate withholding or tampering of evidence, prejudice and inadequate defence through disparity in the ability of persons to afford appropriate counsel. Issues regarding previously inadequate defence representation featured highly in many of the cases the capital assistance/defence law office in Louisiana was involved in.

Whilst in Louisiana and attending capital trials, I was better able to understand why the death penalty has been retained in Louisiana and throughout the United States. During these trials, and particularly during jury selection, it was clear that the long history of capital punishment has greatly embedded a strong acceptance and support for the death penalty in

the public. Here, the belief that the death penalty can deliver justice is set in deep cultural, social, religious and even political understandings and justifications, which are informed and encouraged by the criminal justice system. This system differs from Australia, in that the respective communities and parishes elect judges and prosecutors, resulting in prosecutors who, needing to appear tough on crime, eagerly and aggressively push for the death penalty. This creates a situation whereby strong public opinion in favour of the death penalty can dominate a courtroom and an entire justice system.

In the trials I attended, the question of the death penalty consumed the courtroom and quickly became the focus, disconcertingly even before discussions of the presumption of innocence or the evidence required to determine guilt. From the prosecutor's perspective, the death penalty was the only way justice could be served in these cases and it was evident that they tried very hard to select jurors whom they were confident could deliver a death sentence. In some cases this involved blatant injustice through racism, bias, prejudice and the lack of due process, amongst other systemic issues.

From an international perspective there are many treaties and conventions that directly and indirectly demand the abolition of the death penalty, and these treaties and conventions have been widely endorsed in many countries around the world. This shows that there is grave concern about this form of punishment and demonstrates that the elimination of the death penalty is an essential step towards the protection of human dignity and the continual development



“Issues regarding previously inadequate defence representation featured highly in many of the cases”

of human rights. However, since the international treaties and conventions themselves do not restrict the United States in administering the death penalty, it is encouraging to see that international opinion is being debated at the highest level in the United States Supreme Court. Such international presentations, primarily made by way of the submission of amicus briefs, can be a timely and influential instrument to facilitate change in the mentality towards the death penalty. This can contribute, at a high level, to assisting in its future restriction and eventual abolition. International opinion regarding the death penalty and human rights is significant in aiding, not deciding, constitutional interpretation. Material of this nature urges the Court

to consider international standards to determine and expand the application of domestic constitutional rights. This material can come from many sources, both internal and external to the United States, such as non-government organisations, international organisations and other countries.

Although the consideration of international opinion has not always been well regarded, especially amongst some of the Supreme Court Justices, it appears that the inclusion of international material is evolving and hopefully becoming more influential. A number of arguments, regarding certain aspects of death penalty administration (not necessarily the death penalty itself), heard in the Supreme Court whilst I was

in the United States had international material presented. Although, it did not bring about a positive decision in further restricting the death penalty, it did force the Supreme Court Justices to debate the material. It brings an international perspective to capital punishment in the United States and shows that evolving standards around the world are continually moving away from the death penalty.

Jane Hingston undertook an internship at the Louisiana Capital Assistance Centre through Reprieve Australia. She holds an editorial position at Quarterly Access



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BEST OF MONTHLY ACCESS

QA regularly features a highlight from Monthly Access. For this issue, we have selected a Q&A with Hugh White, who is Professor of Strategic Studies and Head of the Strategic & Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University. He is also a visiting fellow at the Lowy Institute for International Policy.

Access is the youth network of the AIIA Victoria. Its members produce a newsletter ten months of the year, Monthly Access (MA), edited by Olivia Cable. MA features submissions by members, which include short articles, interviews, website reviews, and a listing of public lectures and events around Melbourne related to international affairs. The newsletter is sent electronically to members.

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Q&A WITH HUGH WHITE by Olivia Cable



In 2008, Rudd proposed a new institution, the Asia Pacific Community (APC), which some see as a response to major global economic and geo-strategic changes. Appointing Richard Woolcott as Special Envoy, he visited 22 countries, consulting leaders of the highest level; ministers, senior officials, academics and those involved in think tanks in the region. As Rudd said, he wanted “to begin a conversation” and strengthen cooperation in the Asia Pacific region. What has been the general consensus to date?

HW: That this is not an attractive idea. Just look at what was proposed; the speeches, the conference in Sydney, what the government convened.

Rudd’s speech articulated two reasons why he thinks the region needs a new institution. Firstly, to better manage the problems the region faces today; climate change, pandemics and people smuggling. Secondly, the region is undergoing fundamental shifts in economics, and therefore strategic weight. We need to manage this process strategically.

Rudd proposed two different arguments. One was about the present order and another was about building a new order. These are very different kinds of arguments – like the difference between writing law and constitutions; one is writing, the other is building.

In my mind, it failed – as I think it has – because the two different interpretations of what it is about are incompatible. You can’t trust the same instrument for two different things.

The real purpose of the APC is the second one. To rebuild order, membership will be exclusive not inclusive. With only big powers involved, the less credible it will become.

There were structural problems from the outset of the APC. The handling of it diplomatically was completely wrong.

China and India are challenging the hegemonic position of the US, shifting the balance of power. How can Rudd help Obama understand China’s growing power and help to minimise strategic competition between the two superpowers?

HW: Key question. It’s critical because it appears that the Americans find it hard to take seriously the scale of China’s challenge. The most important, useful thing Australia can do is make clear to the US what Australia thinks – that we see China’s growing power as transformational and we see that US primacy cannot be sustained if China keeps growing.

There is no particular reason that the US will respond just because Australia says that. Australia sends mixed messages and when you hear mixed messages, you hear what you want to hear. The US picks out what it wants to hear.

The 2009 White Paper said two different things. One, that China’s growing power is transforming the region, and two, that the US would remain a global power for as long as we can see.

If Rudd wants to be able to persuade Obama he must

be brave enough to tell him what he thinks, and he must tell Australians first, which so far he's been reluctant to do.

If Rudd's APC works, what will happen to existing institutions such as ASEAN, APEC and the EAS?

HW: They would be somewhat less significant. His principal aim is to prevent it, the APC, from dying. As long as it is out there and discussed, he'll be able to pretend to himself that it's going somewhere.

They have their place and some strategic issues can be addressed through current institutions. However, with a shift in the fundamental power of relativities, that's not something you do multilaterally.

Are multilateral institutions the right tool to use in Asia when addressing economic and strategic issues? What sort of tool should Rudd have used in order to maximise our opportunities and minimise our threats in the region?

HW: A very good question. There was a debate between bilateralists and multilateralists. I always thought the debate was stupid, but they're both important. It's like you need the right size spanner for the right sized nut.

Without the strategic challenges, I don't believe

multilateralism forums will make a difference. New order is created by the way individuals see their interests.

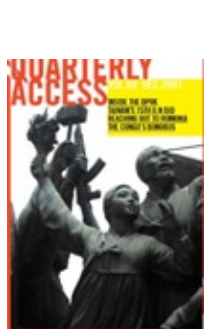
Australia should have the conversation with the US to respond to China's growing power, by sharing rather than competing. In order to do that safely, the US needs to remain active in Asia. We need to set some standards around what is acceptable by China, which needs to be conservatively set, giving China room to work - to be prepared to work in the international order, getting the boundaries clear.

It has been the most challenging piece of diplomacy in Australia's history. It's not going to be done by sitting in a hotel with 20 countries. It needs to be one-on-one.

It first involves talking to Australians. Rudd cannot engage in creating a new strategic order until Australians know what is at stake, what's good, what's not and what we need to pursue. Until he has credentials at home, he cannot go overseas.

Olivia Cable is studying a Bachelor of Asia Pacific Studies at the Australian National University in Canberra. She is the editor of *Monthly Access*.

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CROSSING THE RIVER BY FEELING THE STONES: BEIJING'S BALANCING ACT

Andrew Forrest

The nature of the US-Japan security alliance has changed extensively over the last decade, causing difficulties for China both domestically and in its relations with Japan and the United States. Since the turn of the new century, official Chinese thinking on what constitutes a suitable role for Japan on the regional and global security stage has become increasingly linked to Chinese popular nationalism, perceptions of the evolving structure of power in Asia, the sources of Japan's renewed assertiveness, and US strategic policy towards China. This article outlines how Japan's evolving security role has created new avenues for Washington and Tokyo to undermine the legitimacy of China's top leaders, by drawing attention to Japan's identification with the United States and its perceived hostility towards China.

That China's leaders' legitimacy is undermined is premised on certain assumptions about China's strategic policy towards contemporary Japan. First, the US-Japan security alliance is now *the* key variable in China's calculations of all regional security futures. Second, there are few more pressing challenges facing China's leaders than addressing the implications of increasing Japanese contributions to regional and global security matters under the auspices of this alliance. Although Beijing has long understood the US-Japan security alliance to be the cornerstone of America's strategic efforts in Asia, many Chinese are becoming increasingly concerned that the alliance's transformation has created new pathways for Japan to figure prominently in how America pursues its future security goals.

Some Recent Historical Reflections

Article 9 of Japan's post-World War Two 'Peace Constitution' declared that, "the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation", and is widely seen to negate its need for force projection capabilities. However, the re-emergence of a more assertive or 'normal' Japan under the auspices of the US alliance has forced many observers within and outside

China to re-evaluate Japan's level of commitment to this pacifistic clause. The Japanese Self Defence Forces' logistical contributions to the US-led 'War on Terror' and its participation in the US-led missile defence programme are the most commonly cited examples of Japan's renewed assertiveness and Washington's support of it. It is accordingly important to recognise the effects of Japan's changing strategic priorities on China's views of the US-Japan security alliance. This particularly helps us understand Chinese perceptions about whether genuine trilateral security cooperation is achievable or desirable in the face of alleged anti-China forces underlying the regional order.

Stressing Non-Interference

During much of the 1990s, the United States was portrayed by Beijing as the biggest threat to China's political and strategic interests. This reflected growing concern within China's foreign policymaking circles about the kind of role that China should aspire to in a region, and international system, sustained by American power. Sensing problems and needing solutions, Chinese diplomatic and military officials embarked on a tour of Asia in 1997 calling for the abrogation of alliances worldwide as an unnecessary legacy of the Cold War.

The argument presented was that since these alliances had been forged against a specific enemy during the Cold War, the Soviet Union, they were no longer necessary now that that country had ceased to exist.¹ This tour is notable for three reasons. First, it was widely interpreted by foreign experts as a veiled denunciation of America's Cold War mentality, which, according to many Chinese at that time, was being employed to strengthen America's relationship with Japan.² It also sent a signal to observers

1 Shambaugh, D. 2005, *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics*, California: University of California Press. p. 26.

2 Finkelstein, D. 1999, *China's New Security Concept*, Alexandria Virginia: CNA Corporation. p. 188.

that China's leaders still viewed alliances in zero-sum terms, rather than as a way of maintaining regional stability. Third, it coincided with the much anticipated release of China's 'New Security Concept' earlier that year. The tour would accordingly have reinforced the common view at the time that China's expanding power would be accompanied by a strengthened commitment to promoting non-interference as the golden rule of international affairs.³ Jiang Zemin, then President of China, emphasised the commitment to non-interference in a key foreign policy speech delivered in Geneva in March 1999:

*The world is undergoing profound changes which require the discard[sic] of the Cold War mentality and the development of a new security concept and a new international political, economic, and security order responsive to the needs of our times ... the core of the new security concept should be mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and cooperation. The United Nations Charter, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and other universally recognised principles governing international relations should serve as the political basis for safeguarding peace while mutually beneficial cooperation and common prosperity are its economic guarantee. To conduct dialogue, consultation and negotiation on an equal footing is the right way to resolve disputes and safeguard peace.*⁴

Toning it Down

Perhaps recognising that China was not yet in a position to challenge America's dominant power status in Asia, Beijing decided in the late 1990s to avoid doing or saying anything that could be misconstrued as showing dissatisfaction with the existing regional order. This decision provided the basic rationale for what now seems to be the consensus among China's political elite that a low-key, accommodating approach is the best way for China to enhance its regional and global clout. The intention to cultivate a non-confrontational international image did not emerge out of a conceptual or historical vacuum, but after considering factors such as regional order and domestic stability. Another consideration would have been the desire to create new incentives to dissuade other countries from entering into political and security arrangements designed to hold China down.

At the turn of the new century, China's leaders were worried that the patterns of post-Cold War regional security were becoming increasingly difficult to read. There was concern that this contributed to a climate of unpredictability that could force some of China's neighbours to come up with new reasons to justify their seemingly hostile strategic positions. Such concerns would have been accentuated by the challenge posed to the government's domestic legitimacy by the popular Chinese perception that US-Japan security ties were strengthening, even though Japan and the United States no longer had a specific enemy against which to defend. The Chinese government feared a backlash if it could not convince its public that strengthened US-Japan security ties did not undermine China's ability to achieve its foreign policy goals. This predicament led to the increasingly paradoxical internal-external policy imperatives that China's leaders face today. It also helps explain why Beijing has attached so much importance since the mid-1990s to predicting the impact of strengthening US-Japan security arrangements upon popular Chinese nationalism.

Mobilising the Populace, Immobilising the Populace

By the start of 1999, anti-American sentiment was deeply embedded in popular Chinese nationalism, seemingly beyond the intents and purposes for which it had previously been fostered. This is worth emphasising as it helped create a situation where the domestic legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was, to many within and outside China, increasingly linked to its willingness to oppose any new forms of international collusion against China. This included addressing any move by Japan toward 'normalcy' under the auspices of an allegedly anti-China US alliance system. The mounting internal and external pressure on Beijing to denounce any changes in America's strategic position in Asia was consolidated by the supposedly accidental bombing, by the US, of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in May 1999.

Shortly after the bombing, the streets of Beijing were filled with the largest mass protest since the 1989 pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square. The demonstrators protested outside the US Embassy in Beijing and the consulates in Guangzhou and Chengdu.⁵ The demonstrators chanted anti-American slogans and burned the consul general's residence in Chengdu. The Chinese media did not publish President Clinton's "regrets and profound condolences" to the Chinese people for the "tragic mistake", instead proclaiming the

3 Sutter, R. 2003, 'Bush Administration Policy Toward Beijing and Taipei', *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 12, no. 36. p. 290.

4 Gill, B. 2007, *Rising Star: China's New Security Diplomacy*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press. p. 248.

5 Shirk, S. 2009, 'China's Domestic Insecurity and Its International Consequences', in E. Paus, P.B. Prime and J. Western et. al eds *Global Giant: Is China Changing the Rules of the Game?*, New York: Palgrave, p. 203.



The Current Situation: Controlling Perceptions of a 'China threat'

China's leaders are acutely aware that perceptions of a 'China threat' can force neighbouring governments to adopt belligerent policies towards China – just as these perceptions can force some segments of Chinese society to fear those countries that portray China as a threat. They are also aware that if this trend continues, the task of maintaining and enhancing Chinese security in a peaceful international environment will become increasingly difficult. This awareness seems to reflect a realisation in Beijing over the last decade that popular sensitivity to the 'China threat' theory must have as much to do with self-perceived

bombing as a "barbaric" and "criminal act".⁶ Even after Washington provided financial compensation packages to the victims of the bombings, Zhu Bangzao, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, publicly demanded that the United States "conduct a comprehensive and thorough investigation into the bombing, severely punish the perpetrators and give satisfactory account of the incident to the Chinese People."

Following this incident, expert articles from around the world began to surface, arguing that China's leaders could no longer afford to take a soft line with the United States, because public opinion would turn against them.⁷ These articles lent some credence to the argument that China must act now to prevent the United States and its allies from colluding against China's strategic long-term interests. That this was a serious problem for Beijing was confirmed by a Zhejiang University study of Chinese attitudes toward the United States undertaken shortly after the embassy bombing. Sixty percent of respondents agreed with the statement that the main goal of American foreign policy was to preserve America's hegemonic status.⁸ This negative trend in Chinese popular attitudes toward the United States beginning in the mid-1990s peaked at the turn of the century, making it extremely difficult for the Jiang leadership to maintain good relations with Japan and the United States.

virtues of a historically China-centric regional order as it has to do with calculations of regional security futures.⁹ Interestingly, Chinese Communist Party elites have long sought to orchestrate Chinese history and memory in order to maintain domestic stability, and have proven adept at doing so. However, more recently, this awareness of the domestic political need to maintain a link between China's strategic past and future has given rise to an emerging dilemma.

On the one hand, today's CCP elites must appease those segments of Chinese society that now expect them to become more assertive with their neighbours, and even expect them to try to force the United States out of Asia. On the other hand, for reasons of international legitimacy China must be seen by other countries in the region to be working hard to promote comprehensive strategic engagement. However, a more assertive Japan that to many Chinese has failed to adequately atone for its wartime past is, under prevailing conditions, likely to expand the grounds for internal criticism of China's decision-making regarding Japan. This makes it increasingly difficult for Beijing to do both at the same time. With this dilemma in mind, we need to ask: how do China's increasingly paradoxical internal and external imperatives make it easier for decision-makers in Japan and the United States to predict, or even pre-determine, how Beijing will react to future joint US-Japanese attributions to China of threat?

6 Gries, P.H. 2006, 'Identity and Conflict in Sino-American Relations', in I.A. Johnston and R.S. Ross et. al eds *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, California: Stanford University Press, p. 327.

7 Gertz, B. 1999, 'Spies Tell China Embassy Attack Was No Accident' *Washington Times*, 24 May, p. A8; Li, R. 1999, 'Partners or Rivals? Chinese Perceptions of Japan's Security Strategy in the Asia-Pacific Region', *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 1-25.

8 Gries, *op. cit.*, p. 344.

9 Kim, S. and Dittmer, L. 1993, 'Whither China's Quest for National Identity', in *China's Quest for National Identity*, New York: Cornell University Press, p. 281.

Constructivist theories regarding learning and change in international relations tell us that as long as China's top leaders are influenced by nationalism and anti-Americanism they will be inclined to exaggerate the threat posed by strengthened US-Japan security arrangements. Constructivism also suggests most Chinese people are unlikely to change their minds about what they see as anti-China bias in US strategic policy, unless major change in China's political structure and the regional order enables them to do so.¹⁰

Global counter-terrorism cooperation did shift some attention away from the long-standing areas of dispute between China and the United States during the Bush administration; China was a tacit supporter of the US-led plan to oust the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2002. Nevertheless, it is clear that the antagonistic tone of Sino-American relations and, by association, Sino-Japanese relations had already been established by the perception that Washington's aim was to prevent any powers, other than the United States, from dominating Asia. From this viewpoint, China's concerns about motives behind a stronger US-Japan alliance were not solely attributable to anxieties about the Bush administration's efforts to ensure that friends and allies of the United States were committed to meeting their responsibilities in the 'War on Terror'. Indeed, the current Chinese president strongly suggests that other more, conventional, geopolitical considerations also shaped China's strategic thinking about the implications of the US-Japan security alliance's changing dynamics. In 2002, Hu Jintao remarked that:

[the United States has] strengthened its military deployments in the Asia Pacific region, strengthened the US-Japan military alliance, strengthened strategic cooperation with India, improved relations with Vietnam, inveigled Pakistan, established a pro-American government in Afghanistan, increased arms sales to Taiwan, and so on. They have extended outposts and placed pressure points on us from the east, south and west. This makes a great change in our geopolitical environment.¹¹

The most important aspect of the 'China threat' theory is China's reactions and responses to it. While Chinese rebuttals of the 'China threat' in the early-1990s were blunt and empirical (focusing on the fact that China's military spending lagged far behind the United States, Japan, South Korea and India), over the last fifteen

years China's handling of the 'China threat' theory has become much more sophisticated. From the mid-1990s onward, many Chinese writers have charged outsiders with deliberately distorting China's international image for their own benefit, which has allowed China's leaders to challenge the roots of the 'China threat' theory. For example, Chinese scholar Sha Qiguang asserted in late 1997 that the goal of 'China threat' advocates is "to mould public opinion, so as to exert pressure on China and interfere in its internal affairs ... to stir up tensions between China and its neighbours, thereby limiting China's development."¹² Seemingly echoing these remarks, from 1999-2002 former Premier Zhu Rongji, said repeatedly that the "China opportunity" idea should be promoted.¹³ This shift away from crude empirical rebuttals of the 'China threat' idea to more carefully crafted, image-conscious rebuttals - intended for both domestic and external audiences - pointed to a profound change in China's self-conception: while not seeing itself as a threat to others, it recognised that many other states saw China this way.

China's leaders could no longer afford to be dismissive of the 'China threat' theory, importantly because of two key points. First, China's reputation in other countries exerts enormous influence on their perceptions of China's strategic goals and intentions, and on the implications of China's rise broadly defined. Second, concerns expressed by other countries about China's strategic goals and intentions exert enormous influence on Chinese nationalism and whether it will become more or less aggressive as China's national power grows. As sociologist Charles Cooley sums up: "Our ideal self is constructed chiefly out of ideas about us attributed to other people."¹⁴

The Importance of Reputation for Security Dilemma Dynamics

The importance of reputation for security dilemma dynamics between China and any nation that propagates the 'China threat' theory significantly limits the options its leaders have to neutralise 'China threat' arguments - should they wish to do so. Two main factors can help explain why this is the case. First, the link established between reputation and security dilemma dynamics in Western International Relations theory over the last two decades has implications for China. It suggests

¹⁰ Sutter, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

¹¹ Quoted in Nathan, A. and Gilley, B. 2002, *China's New Rulers: The Secret Files*, New York: The New York Review Books. p. 208.

¹² Quoted in Rabinovitch, S. 2008, 'The Rise of an Image-Conscious China' *China Security*, Issue 11. p. 4.

¹³ Quoted in Moore, T.G. 2004, China's International Relations: The Economic Dimension', in S.S. Kim et. al eds *International Relations of Northeast Asia*, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, p. 117.

¹⁴ Cooley, C. 1922, *Human Nature and the Social Order*, New York: Scribner. p. 397.

that it is difficult for China's leaders to accuse 'China threat' devotees of perpetuating a Cold War mentality of containment, without stoking the kind of popular Chinese nationalism that may pressure them to react strongly to any criticism of China. Second, because of this it is now very difficult for China's leaders to promote a benign image of China abroad without inadvertently lending credence to domestic accusations that they are losing control of China's security policy decision-making.

The perpetuation of ideas of foreign threats to China is at once essential in terms of facilitating popular mobilisation in the interests of domestic agendas, and self-effacing in terms of making China seem more threatening abroad. This plays right into the hands of those in US and Japanese strategic circles who wish to highlight China's uncooperative international behaviour and unstable domestic situation in ways that may elicit a willingness from China to resort to using force to achieve its goals. This potentially makes it difficult for China's leaders to convince others that China's military modernisation programme is motivated only by a benign desire to protect China's sea lanes for trade.

Conclusion

The goal of this article has been to show how China's leaders are caught between competing internal and external policy imperatives. Stronger US-Japan security arrangements will continue to force Beijing to defend itself from foreign accusations of posing a threat and domestic accusations of weakness in the face of external provocation.¹⁵ It will be particularly difficult in the short term for China to avoid situations that may trigger a sudden increase in public anti-Japanese sentiment. How the Chinese leadership deals with this in the coming years will greatly influence how far Washington and Tokyo are willing to go to separate the reality of a stronger US-Japan security alliance from the anti-China ends to which many Chinese fear it is being directed. This recognition is essential to understanding why popular Chinese nationalism is an increasingly important shaper of its official thinking on Japan.

Andrew Forrest is a PhD Candidate at the School of International and Political Studies at Deakin University

¹⁵ Lampton, D. 2005, 'China's Rise in Asia Need Not Be at America's Expense', in D. Shambaugh et. al eds *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics*, California: University of California Press, p. 75.

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MEXICO CITY: MYTH BUSTED

Travel article by Evan Schuurman

Mexico City has had to bear almost every negative label: dirty, dangerous, boring, corrupt, drug-infested, and disease-ridden. It has been advised against, avoided and officially left-out. A casualty of US immigration laws and trade policies, Mexico City gets a bad deal in so many ways. But if you give it time, like a pesky dog, it will grow on you. It will nuzzle its little head right up under your arm and lick your face. Like a credulous owner, your job is to let it happen, and let yourself love it.

Upon entering 'the Zocolo', the thumping heart of Mexico City and the second largest plaza in the world, to my right I see the *Jardin del Palacio Nacional*, the National Palace, adorned with a 20 foot Mexican flag. To my left, I look out upon the lively shopping district, encased in baroque and neoclassical architecture, illustrating the nation's long history of European influence, and besieged by cafes and culture. And directly in front of me, I am confronted by the *Cathedral Metropolitana*: a breathtaking concoction of architectural styles, reflective of the countless leaders who had their say during its two-and-a-half

century building phase (the square itself has been under construction for almost seven).

But the most stunning building is not laced with golden ornaments or beset with grandeur; instead it lies in ruin, partially beneath the plaza's surface. It is the *Templo Mayor*: an ancient Aztec temple excavated just 31 years ago. It is believed to be the exact point from where, in 1325, the Mexican national symbol – an eagle sitting on a cactus with a snake in its mouth – was actually derived. Legend has it that upon seeing the spectacle of the eagle and snake, the Aztecs, who were in search of an omen to tell them where to construct their capital, immediately began building what would become modern-day Mexico City. In fact, prior to the Spanish conquest, the region was nothing more than a series of lakes littered with small islands. Following Spain's occupation, the lakes were drained, the Aztec capital all but destroyed and the *Distrito Federal* of Mexico built. Since then, the city has suffered from major sewerage problems, widespread flooding and sinking buildings.

Some imagine Mexico City to not only be over-crowded, over-polluted and unsafe, but also the leading culprit behind the global swine flu epidemic. It is a city whose reputation precedes it – a myriad of myths. Now, with the health catastrophe over and the global financial crisis receding, it is the perfect time to dispel these misconceptions.

Myth number 1: Mexico City is a big, dirty, annoying stopover.

From the plaza, I walk east on enchanting cobblestone streets through the *Centro Historico*; the city's oldest shopping district. The fashion scene in Mexico City is vibrant and diverse, now rivaling the great fashion capitals of the world. Chic, funky young designers are filling the city's growing number of boutique stores with a range of urban, vintage, night-glam and alternative styles. Prices are equally diverse, ranging from just a few pesos per piece, to top-end outlets that only accept cards.

For me, however, the most engaging shopping is for food. And in Mexico the best way to sample the local cuisine



is on the streets. I feel like tacos, though my list of choices is seemingly endless: there are stands selling *enchiladas*, *flautas*, *tamales*, *gorditas*, *quesadillas*, *tortas*, corn, and of course, tacos. While varying slightly in their makeup, most dishes are made from a corn base, with meat and cheese fillings.

“*Quiero dos tacos, por favor?*” I ask in broken Spanish. “*Con pastor* (pork)?”

I sit on a plastic chair eating my barbecued bliss. Unlike foreign versions, traditional tacos are extremely simple and small. They come with two soft tortillas lightly fried and a pile of barbecued meat mixed with onions. For flavour, you add salsa. And if street food isn't your thing, Mexico City's abundant plazas are lined with restaurants draped in fairy lights that serve first-class food

from all over the world.

From the *Centro Historico*, I travel west on the metro and spend the afternoon wandering around the world-class *Museo Nacional de Antropologia* (the National Museum of Anthropology). I then stroll through *Bosque de Chapultepec*: a massive oasis of lakes, trees and squirrels in the middle of the megalopolis. Not for a moment am I bored.

Myth number 2: Mexico City is dangerous

The year 2000 not only represented a transition between millennia, but also between the old, dirty and dank Mexico City to its newer, cleaner, safer model. In the year 2000, Andrés Manuel López Obrador was elected mayor of Mexico City, while Vicente Fox was elected

the country's President, ending 70 years of dictatorship. López Obrador immediately set upon significantly overhauling the city. Starting with the Zocolo, wide-spread renovations took place: street lighting was improved, security was strengthened, the public transport network was enlarged, and a number of new construction projects took place. Though Mexico City, like any major city, has dangerous areas, with a little commonsense it can now be easily navigated and enjoyed.

Despite an almost incident-free fortnight in the nation's capital, a true test of safety comes with a night-time public transport visit to a major event: the *Lucha Libre* (Mexican wrestling).

From my apartment in Coyoacan, in the city's south, I travel eight stops north on





the metro, leaving home just after dusk. During this time, four different people board the train with extremely loud music blasting from their backpack in the hope that someone will buy their CDs. No one does. Two blind people push through the packed carriage asking for money. No one gives it. And one grubby, little boy passes through, giving every passenger a small piece of paper, telling of his plight. Again, he asks for money. This time, people give.

From Balderas metro station it's a brisk 10 minute walk to *Arena de Mexico*. The streets are well-lit and foot-traffic is heavy. I buy another taco from a street vendor. Perhaps I'm imagining it, but I feel a sense of anticipation in the air. Tonight promises to be an epic experience - like every night that there is *Lucha Libre*.

After paying 84 pesos (AU\$7) for the second-best seats available, I wade through hordes of people selling beer, popcorn and wrestling masks. I eventually make it to my seat, six rows back from

the action. The crowd is building, though still well short of the stadium's massive 17,000-seat capacity. The music softens and the announcer begins to rev-up the fans. The light fades and a spotlight appears, highlighting bikini-clad models welcoming the wrestlers - each fighter wears a unique mask and has their own signature entrance. The first 'fight' is between two teams of three fuming females. I am amazed by the fanaticism of the supporters. Old women and young children sit side by side, waving their clenched fists and swearing as their heroes pummel the opposition. For a staged fight, the atmosphere is brutal.

After the women's fight ends, three sets of men's matches follow, and with the final bout between two popular heavyweights. With a miraculous comeback, the underdog eventually wins. He finishes the evening's entertainment with the *Desnucadora*, a flying power bomb. Whilst some of the acting was second-class, as a spectacle, it leaves me thoroughly entertained.

On the journey home the train is much less crowded than before. Only one elderly man asks for money. I still feel safe despite the hour.

Myth number 3: Swine flu

In March last year, the world gasped in horror as the H1N1 virus (swine flu), initially contracted from pigs, spread rapidly throughout the world. Mexico was home to the first human carrier and has suffered ever since. The nation was in lockdown during certain periods of 2009 and inbound visitor numbers have dropped off.

But the crisis is now over. The warnings and travel restrictions have subsided. It is time to return, and once again embrace the city.

Evan Schuurman is studying a Master of Sustainable Practice at RMIT University.

RECONCILIATION: ISLAM, DEMOCRACY AND THE WEST

Benazir Bhutto (2008)

Reviewed by Trini Espinosa Abascal

After eight years of exile in Dubai, Benazir Bhutto, Pakistani Prime Minister between 1993 and 1996 and first female prime minister of a Muslim nation, came back to her homeland to liberate it from tyranny: *"This is the beginning of a long journey for Pakistan back to democracy, and I hope my going back is a catalyst for change. We must believe that miracles can happen."*

Returning as leader of the Pakistan People's Party, she was killed on December 27, 2007 – two weeks before elections took place. This book was finalised shortly before her death, and published posthumously.

Until 2008 Pakistan was a military dictatorship under General Pervez Musharraf, who took power in a 2000 coup. Pakistan's history is full of tragedy and fights between military dictatorships (allied with religious parties and extremists) and the democratic opposition, guided recently by the Bhutto family. *"I was a symbol of democracy, and that responsibility weighed heavily on my shoulders."*

Some people, most notably Samuel Huntington in *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*, have argued that democracy and Islam cannot coexist. However, in this book, Bhutto points out through quotes from the Quran, that democracy and Islam are not just compatible but mandatory for world peace.

In Bhutto's exploration of the failure of democracy, freedom and human dignity in the Muslim world, she postulates that the actions of the West – in pursuit of various short-term economic and political strategic goals – have blocked democratic development, in addition to internal rifts that have caused turmoil in Islamic societies for 1300 years.

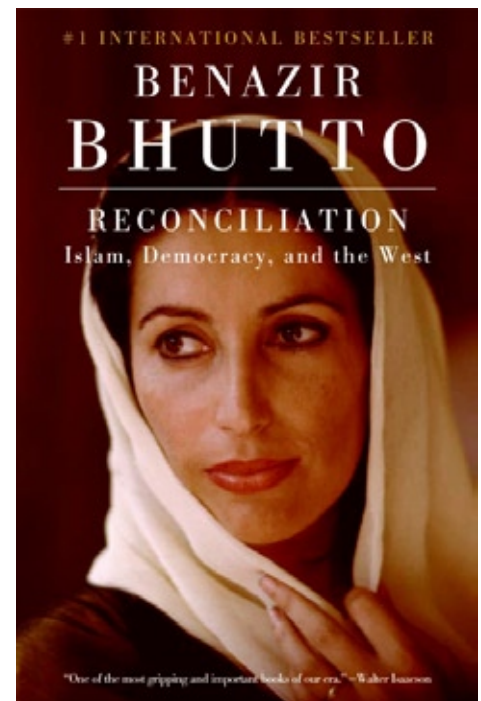
Through examples of Muslim and Latin American countries, the author shows that the intervention of the West has been significant for the failure or success of democracy in these countries. Countries she cites where democracy has failed or struggled due to the prioritisation of Western short-term strategic interest include Iran, Pakistan, Egypt, Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Guatemala and Argentina. However, Benazir explains that the increasing differences between the major sects in Islam – Sunni and Shia – are fundamental to understanding the situation in Muslim communities, and the rise of extremism and terrorism.

This construction of jihad is not only antithetical to the values of the civilised world but contradictory also to the precepts of Islam. Bhutto explains that jihad has two meanings; one is the internal struggle to be a better person, and the other is personal behaviour or conduct during war or conflict. However, extremist groups misread the Quran by believing that it excuses violence against innocents.

Benazir Bhutto's proposal to reconcile the complicated relationship between the West and Islam is through introspection and reconciliation, citing these as integral concepts to the creation and strengthening of democracies. This will lead to better education, equality, communication and peace. *"It is time for new ideas, it is time for creativity. It is time for bold commitment. And it is time for honesty, both among people and between people: It is time for reconciliation."*

The emphatic way in which the author explains the roots of the current discord between the Muslim World and the "other" world breaks paradigms and gives the reader a good understanding of the reality and possible solutions. It is a touching book, based on facts and the personal experiences of a prominent figure, which would be appreciated by those interested in terrorism, peace and human rights.

Trini Espinosa Abascal has recently completed a Marketing degree while in Melbourne and has returned to Mexico to take up a career in finance. She also holds a Master of Quality and Productivity.





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