

CONFLICTING NORMS, VALUES AND INTERESTS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: A POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Keynote address by Professor the Hon Gareth Evans, Chancellor of The Australian National University, to Friedrich Schiller University Jena/ Protestant Academy of Thuringia Public Symposium on *Legal Norms, Moral Values and National Interests*, Berlin, 20 February 2018

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Living with Complexity

Whether the context is politics, diplomacy or scholarship, the urge to simplify – to come up with single catch-all explanatory theories, or single big-bang solutions – is all too common. But it is an urge to which I, for one, as a long-time foreign policy practitioner both inside and outside government, have always been allergic. Big overarching explanatory theories may be great for royalties and keynote speeches, but in my experience they are rarely of much practical utility. The big theories about the causes of deadly conflict, for example – whether cast in terms of ‘clash of civilizations’, ‘greed’, ‘grievance’, or anything else – just never seem to help us in untangling those situations which are really combustible from those which are not.

Again, the big overarching theories about international relations generally which preoccupy so many of my academic colleagues – Idealism, Realism, Constructivism and all the rest — I’m afraid I have never found very helpful either in understanding the world or working out how to change it for the better. And I have never found to be very persuasive big simple *solutions*, especially those involving the threat or use of deadly military force: all too often, as observers of the wars in Vietnam or Afghanistan or Iraq will hardly need reminding, these have proved either unproductive or ruinously counterproductive.

The organizers of this event have resisted that impulse to simplify, recognizing that the conduct of international relations very often involves the balancing of multiple factors – including in particular legal and other norms, moral values and national interests – which, while they may sometimes be mutually reinforcing, very often will be in stark conflict with each other. And for that approach they are much to be congratulated. They are also much to be congratulated for bringing together, in the three day workshop of which this public symposium is part, both international relations academics and foreign policy practitioners who do tend to live in parallel universes – in the hope, if not expectation, that we will learn something from each other.

While I have spent some time in both universes, most of my public life has been as a practitioner, in a variety of different roles: inside the tent as my country’s foreign minister; half inside and half outside, as chair or member of a number of government or UN-appointed advisory commissions; and, as leader of an international conflict prevention NGO, outside the tent, but trying desperately to squeeze my head through its flaps. I am by instinct a liberal idealist, passionately committed to human rights, and the embodiment of universal moral values in international norms, institutions and behaviour. But in all the political and practitioner I have played, I have been forced to accept multiple realities: that decent values sometimes point in different directions, and hard choices have to be made between them; and that sometimes decent values have to yield completely to other imperatives, as competing

national interest and other factors become relevant, and compromises constantly have to be made.

As an idealistic Australian foreign minister I pushed my diplomats' tolerance to the limits by requiring them, for example, to make endless representations in Beijing and other rather unreceptive capitals against executions and in support of Amnesty prisoners of conscience, and also in making various quixotic efforts to reform the UN personnel practices and restructure the Security Council. In my post-ministerial life, my major mission has been to try to end once and for all the horror of genocide and other mass atrocity crimes, by getting the international community to embrace and accept a very idealistic new international norm, the 'responsibility to protect', about which I will say a little more later. And I have worked endlessly, if not very productively on another idealist cause: to try to eliminate from the face of the earth nuclear weapons, the most indiscriminately inhumane ever invented, an issue to which I'll also return.

But on the other hand, I have engaged in plenty of hard-nosed realism, particularly during the eight years I was Australia's foreign minister. I did what it took, for example, to keep our alliance relationship with the United States intact, including on some nuclear policy issues, like port visits by nuclear-armed ships, about which I personally felt strongly and which was an alliance-breaker for my Labour Party colleagues across the water in New Zealand. I conducted boundary negotiations with Indonesia over the Timor Sea to unlock oil resources in the interests of both sides, accepting in the process the what – then at least – seemed the unchangeable reality of Indonesia's sovereignty over East Timor, notwithstanding the indefensibly brutal way that territory had been acquired. I was prepared to sit across the table with Khmer Rouge leaders with genocidal blood on their hands in order to craft a workable peace plan for Cambodia, enraging in the process those who thought that no end could possibly justify these means.

I don't think my own experience in navigating the extraordinarily complex real world of international policymaking has been at all unique. The challenges and dilemmas I have had to work through are those that face foreign policy practitioners all the time. All of us have found ourselves constantly stretched and pulled between different imperatives, trying to find a balance, case by case, between doing justice or saving lives, advancing national economic and interests or being a human rights standard bearer, respecting national sovereignty or intervening to stop atrocities, keeping security allies happy or campaigning against nuclear weapons, doing that which is politically popular or that which is morally right. I suspect the analytical framework that most of us bring to the task owes more to the very pragmatic Chinese leader Deng Xiao Ping's cat than any grand theory: Deng, it will be remembered once famously said 'What matters is not whether the cat is black or white but whether it catches the mouse'.

But as much as that may be true, I don't think any of this means that international policymakers are condemned to complete *ad hocery* in our approach to these decisions. I think we can do better than simply throw up our hands and say we have to accept the messy reality of the world as it is, ducking and weaving and compromising, case by case, as we try to steer a course through it all. I think there *are* guiding principles that can help us untangle many, if not all, of these familiar dilemmas. Let me test that by now exploring with you in a little more detail four particular dilemmas of which I have had close personal experience: peace v. justice, humanitarian intervention v. state sovereignty, nuclear v. conventional deterrence, and national interests v. ethical values.

Peace v. Justice

Reconciling the competing demands of peace and justice often confronts practitioners with a cruel dilemma, which I certainly had to wrestle with a number of times when I was President of the International Crisis Group. The dilemma is not so acute when one side or another to a conflict has been clearly defeated, or is clearly on the way to being defeated and is trying to negotiate the terms of a surrender. But when there is an *ongoing* conflict, and a peace negotiation is attempting to reach agreement between parties capable of perpetuating that conflict, hard choices just do have to be made. Do you insist, as formal UN guidelines evidently require, and as do human rights lawyers like my friend Ken Roth and his colleagues at Human Rights Watch, on no impunity at all for the worst human rights violators – but then risk the conflict continuing with terrible further loss of life and immiseration? Or do give them – as the price of the conflict coming to an end – a soft landing of some kind?

A classic case on which I had to make a call was Nigeria's initial grant of asylum to Liberia's murderous Charles Taylor in 2003. As head of an organisation focused on the prevention and resolution of deadly conflict, I did not think this was at all unreasonable given the prospect then looming of thousands more deaths in the final battle for Monrovia; I also strongly believed that the asylum deal should continue to have been honoured so long as Taylor met the conditions of his asylum, in particular that he made no contact with any of his previous supporters. But this was not a view shared by my among human rights advocates in the region and around the world, who were delighted when Nigeria subsequently succumbed to international pressure and handed him over, through Liberia, to be tried and convicted in the Sierra Leone Special Court, even though there was no evidence at all that he had breached his asylum conditions.

My strong view at the time was that while initially giving Taylor some impunity was not an optimal message from a human rights perspective, even more damage would ultimately be done by sending the message that amnesty or asylum deals were not to be trusted. I know from personal involvement that this did indeed resonate strongly with some other serial human rights violators, notably Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe. Mugabe was obsessed with the Taylor case, as evidence of what might be his own fate if he accepted some kind of agreed graceful exit from office: for years those offers were on the table, and for years they were refused – and Zimbabweans suffered grievously as a result.

Here as elsewhere, I think there are some important principles that we should be able to agree about which would help guide these kinds of decisions in the future. The first is that justice is the default position, and that it is only in the most exceptional cases, where the evidence really is clear that very major peace benefits are involved, should serious consideration be given to discontinuing investigations under way or granting formal amnesties. Justice serves too many public policy goals, including – crucially – deterrence, to ever be lightly traded away. It is only when the shorter-term costs of prolonging an ongoing conflict clearly outweigh these benefits that non-prosecution of clearly prosecutable cases, in the International Criminal Court (ICC) or anywhere else, should be contemplated. The obvious downside risk of these situations is that the more the ICC's work is perceived as “negotiable,” the more its role as a deterrent of atrocity crimes is undermined: the cases really do have to be very exceptional.

The second principle is that if decisions to give primacy to peace over justice do have to be made in certain hard cases, those decisions are best made not by the court or its prosecutor but by those with appropriate *political* responsibility: in the case of the ICC, the Security Council has that power, if it chooses to use it, to suspend prosecutions for renewable periods

of twelve months.¹ The prosecutor's job is to prosecute, and do justice, and he or she should get on with it, with bulldog intensity. If the call has to be made, as I think it should be on occasion, that the interests of peace should override those of justice, then that should be not for the ICC but the Security Council to decide—however difficult that will no doubt prove to be in practice.

Humanitarian Intervention v. State Sovereignty

Another policy dilemma which has long divided policymakers is that between those on the one hand who support international intervention, including in extreme cases military intervention, to halt or avert genocide and other mass atrocity crimes being perpetrated within state boundaries, and those on the other hand who cannot accept any such intrusion on what they argue to be irreducible state sovereignty.

For centuries, going all the way back to the emergence of the modern system of sovereign states in the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, the view has prevailed that, to put it bluntly, sovereignty - the possession by a country of the recognised trappings of independent statehood - is a license to kill: what happens within state borders, however grotesque and morally indefensible, is nobody else's business. One would have thought Hitler's Holocaust would have put paid to that notion once and for all. Certainly major gains were made after World War II. Individual and group human rights were recognized in the UN Charter and, more grandly and explicitly, in the Universal Declaration. With the drafting of the Charter of the Nuremberg Tribunal in 1945 came the recognition in international law of the concept of 'crimes against humanity', which could be committed by a government against its own people, and not necessarily just during wartime. And with the Genocide Convention of 1948 came an apparently explicit override of the non-intervention principle for the most extreme of all crimes against humanity.

But running alongside all this was a very traditional view of state sovereignty, seen to be reinforced by the language of the 1945 UN Charter which says in Article 2(7) that 'Nothing should authorise intervention in matters essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State' (although this language of course leaves open the question as to what *is* essentially domestic). The UN founders were overwhelmingly preoccupied with the problem of states waging war against each other, and showed no particular interest in the question of what constraints might be imposed on how states dealt with their own subjects. The state of mind that even massive atrocity crimes like those of the Cambodian killing fields in the mid-1970s were not the rest of the world's business prevailed throughout the UN's first half-century of existence: Vietnam's invasion, which stopped the Khmer Rouge in its tracks, was universally attacked, not applauded. The traditional view of sovereignty, as enabling absolute control of everything internal and demanding immunity from external intervention, was much reinforced by the large increase in UN membership during decolonisation era – the states who joined were all newly proud of their identity, conscious in many cases of their fragility, and generally saw the non-intervention norm as one of their few defences against threats and pressures from more powerful international actors seeking to promote their own economic and political interests.

With the arrival of the 1990s, and the end of the Cold War, the prevailing complacent assumptions about non-intervention did at last come under challenge, as never before. The

¹ Under Article 16 of the Rome Statute.

quintessential peace and security problem became not interstate war, but civil war and internal violence perpetrated on a massive scale. With the break-up of various Cold War state structures, most obviously in Yugoslavia, and the removal of some superpower constraints, conscience-shocking situations repeatedly arose. But old habits of non-intervention died very hard. Even when situations cried out for some kind of response, and the international community did react through the UN, it was too often erratically, incompletely or counter-productively, as in the debacle of Somalia in 1993, the catastrophe of Rwanda in 1994, and the almost unbelievable default in Srebrenica just a year later, in 1995. Then came Kosovo in 1999, when the international community did in fact intervene as it probably should have, but did so without the authority of the Security Council in the face of a threatened veto by Russia, raising anxious questions about the integrity of the whole international security system.

Throughout the 1990s the United Nations was, on all of this, a consensus free zone. The only debate was about ‘humanitarian intervention’: the so-called ‘right to intervene’ militarily. Hardly anyone talked about prevention or less extreme forms of engagement and intervention. The options were ‘Send in the Marines’ or do nothing. The global North often rallied, at least rhetorically, to the military intervention cry, but the global South was understandably deeply reluctant – after all its unhappy historical experience – to accept the idea that big powers had the right to throw their weight around in this way. And so we had all the division or inaction, or both, in the face of catastrophe that we can all remember.

That was what led Kofi Annan to throw down his millennial challenge in 2000: ‘If humanitarian intervention is indeed an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica – to gross and systematic violations of human rights that offend every precept of our common humanity?’ This in turn led to Canada responding to that challenge by initiating the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, which I had the pleasure and privilege of co-chairing, which came up in our 2001 report of that name with the breakthrough concept of ‘The Responsibility to Protect’ (‘R2P’), which made it politically possible for the global North and South to find common ground.

Eventually, after a long, complicated and often cantankerous diplomatic process, the UN General Assembly sitting at head of state and government level at the 2005 World Summit unanimously endorsed the principle of R2P, with its three distinctive pillars: the responsibility of a state to its own people not to either commit such mass atrocity crimes or allow them to occur (‘Pillar One’); the responsibility of other states to assist those lacking the capacity to so protect (‘Pillar Two’); and the responsibility of the international community to respond with ‘timely and decisive action’ – including ultimately with coercive military force if that is authorised by the Security Council – if a state is ‘manifestly failing’ to meet its protection responsibilities (‘Pillar Three’).

Those of us involved in the creation of the R2P concept were trying neither to create new international legal rules nor undermine old ones. Our intended contribution was not to international relations theory but political practice. We knew that in the real world it was going to be hard to get perfect results, but we wanted to change the way that the world’s policymakers, and those who influence them, thought and above all acted in response to emerging, imminent, and actually occurring mass atrocity crimes behind sovereign state walls. The bottom line was to change the habits of centuries by generating a reflex international response, not only in words but also in deeds, that genocide, other crimes against humanity, and major war crimes were everybody’s business, not nobody’s.

How well have we succeeded? Looking at the catastrophic series of events in Syria, where R2P has gained no traction at all, largely because of negative reaction by the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) to the initially successful but then divisive and ultimately failed military intervention in Libya in 2011, it would be easy to say that nothing has changed for the better. The continuing ugly situation in the Congo, the disastrous war in Yemen, and the terrible ethnic cleansing of Rohingya people in Myanmar have all further reinforced the cynics who say that this whole norm-building enterprise has been a waste of time or worse. But using as my benchmarks the four big things that R2P was designed to be – a normative force, a catalyst for institutional change, and a framework for both prevention and effective reaction – my own assessment is more positive, albeit not remotely complacent.

Normatively, R2P has achieved a global take-up unimaginable for the earlier concept of ‘humanitarian intervention’ which R2P has now rightly, and almost completely, displaced (a certain lingering academic nostalgia for that language notwithstanding). True, many states are still clearly more comfortable with the first two pillars of R2P (the responsibility of all states to protect their own peoples and that of others to assist them) than they are with the third (the world’s responsibility to react effectively, by measures extending from persuasion to coercion, when that protection fails). That is certainly true of Russia and China, particularly after getting their fingers burned in Libya in 2011, when they approved a military intervention but the NATO powers pursued a regime-change rather than minimalist civilian protection agenda. Some voices are still to be heard in some parts of the UN community – not to mention some parts of the academic community – taking an absolutist view on non-intervention, but they do not include the powers that matter most. In my judgement there is no longer any serious dissent evident in relation to any of the elements of the 2005 Resolution. The best evidence lies in the General Assembly’s annual interactive debates since 2009, which have shown ever stronger and more clearly articulated support for what is now widely accepted as a new political (if not legal) norm, and in the more than 40 resolutions referencing R2P that have now been passed by the Security Council (35 of them *after* the divisions over Libya in 2011).

Institutionally, more than 50 states and intergovernmental organizations have now established R2P ‘focal points’ – designated high-level officials whose job is to analyze atrocity risk and mobilize appropriate responses. Civilian response capability is receiving much more organized attention, as is the need for militaries to rethink their force configuration, doctrine, rules of engagement, and training to deal better with mass atrocity response operations.

Preventively, R2P-driven strategies have had a number of notable successes, notably in stopping the recurrence of strife in Kenya after 2008; in the West African cases of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and Cote d’Ivoire over the last decade; and Kyrgyzstan after 2010. Volatile situations such as Burundi get the kind of continuing Security Council attention unknown to Rwanda in the 1990s. Strong civilian protection mandates are now the norm in peacekeeping operations. And the whole preventive toolbox, long and short term, structural and operational, is much better understood, albeit with action still often lagging behind rhetoric.

Reactively, however, where it matters most that R2P make a difference, the record has been at best mixed. On the positive side are the success stories in Kenya in 2008, Côte d’Ivoire in 2011, and at least initially in Libya in 2011, and the partial success that can be claimed for UN operations in Congo, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic. But against this must be weighed serious failures in Sri Lanka and Sudan, and above all in Syria, and most recently now Myanmar. Reestablishing Security Council consensus in these hardest of cases is

not impossible, but it will take time. Brazil's 'responsibility while protecting' (RWP) proposal – in which policymakers in both China and Russia have expressed interest – remains the most constructive of all the suggested ways forward, requiring as it would all Council members to debate more comprehensively the criteria that need to be met before any use of force is authorized and to accept close monitoring and review of any coercive military mandate throughout its lifetime. Getting any such agreement will take time, and will certainly have to wait for the heat engendered by the Libya and Syria cases to die down, not to mention a change of administration in the United States. But it is not impossible.

Achieving fundamental change in the way states and their leaders think and behave is as hard as international relations gets. But by any historical standard, the speed and extent of the evolution of R2P, in the few years since the idea was conceived, has been remarkable. And my own strong instinct is that no policymakers anywhere in the world really want to see a return to the bad old days of Cambodia, Rwanda, and the Balkans – those days when US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger could say to Thai Foreign Minister, after Khmer Rouge march into Phnom Penh in 1975: 'You should also tell the Cambodians [the Khmer Rouge] that we will be friends with them. They are murderous thugs, but we won't let that stand in our way.'

Nuclear v Conventional Deterrence

Turning to the third dilemma I foreshadowed – whether states should rely on nuclear or conventional deterrence for their security – in many ways the most troubling issue is that so many policymakers don't see this as a dilemma at all. Under President Obama the world had seemed to be gradually edging its way toward greatly diminished reliance on nuclear weapons -- the most indiscriminately inhumane ever invented, and the only ones posing an existential risk to the entire planet. But over the last few years that momentum has almost completely stalled, as old Cold War assumptions about the deterrent utility of nuclear weapons, and their central importance in security policy, have reasserted themselves.

The US and Russia are no longer negotiating arms reductions, both are modernizing their nuclear arsenals, and nothing has been done to take large numbers of actively deployed weapons off hair-trigger alert; North Korea has become effectively a new nuclear-armed state, and nuclear weapons numbers in the other Asian nuclear-armed states are growing, not diminishing; President Putin, since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, has brandished the possible use of Russia's nuclear weapons in language not heard since the darkest days of the Cold War; President Trump has comprehensively walked away, here as everywhere else, from the Obama agenda, and has not only talked about dramatically increasing US retaliatory capability, but pre-emptively using nuclear weapons of different shapes and sizes for specific military tasks, including against some non-nuclear threat contingencies; and US allies and partners both in Europe and the Asia-Pacific seem so comprehensively spooked by recent developments that none seem prepared any longer to even begin to question the notion that nuclear deterrence adds something to their security that strong conventional deterrence does not.

Policymakers in the nuclear armed states and those who think they are sheltering under their umbrellas have utterly failed to heed the analysis of those quintessential hard-headed Cold War realists, Kissinger, Shultz, Nunn and Perry, in their famous *Wall St Journal* articles over the last decade, that whatever role nuclear weapons may have played in the past, in the world of the 21st century they are far more dangerous than beneficial, and it is time to get dead serious about their elimination. They seem also to have forgotten, if they were ever aware of

it, the points so forcefully and succinctly made by the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons in 1996 and repeated by every blue ribbon panel since: ‘So long as any state retains nuclear weapons, others will want them. So long as any nuclear weapons remain anywhere, they are bound one day to be used – if not by design, then by human error, system error, miscalculation or misjudgement. And any such use will be catastrophic for life on this planet as we know it.’

As with the other policy dilemmas I have discussed, I think there is a way through the bind which so many policymakers seem to feel themselves in – understanding the risks associated with nuclear weapons but unwilling to abandon them in favour of sole reliance on conventional weapons. What is needed to reduce the risk of catastrophe to which we are now inexorably headed is two fundamental attitudinal changes by the relevant policymakers.

The first is to not accept at face value, but stringently re-evaluate, all the familiar arguments made about the deterrent value-added of nuclear weapons. The crucial counter-argument is, in essence, that because of the obvious risks associated with their deliberate use anywhere at any time, and the – until now – almost universally accepted taboo on such use, nuclear weapons are simply not the deterrent or strategic stabiliser they may seem, whether the context is deterring war between the major powers, deterring large-scale conventional attack, deterring chemical or biological weapons attacks or deterring nuclear terrorism. The notion that nuclear weapons are needed to guard against the kind of threat now posed by North Korea does not withstand close scrutiny: US conventional capability, not least when combined with that of Japan and South Korea, is perfectly capable for the indefinitely foreseeable future of turning every population centre in the North into a carpark. And Kim Jong-un knows perfectly well that to be homicidal is to be suicidal.

Moreover, the continued possession of nuclear weapons by the present nuclear armed states encourages proliferation – with all the additional risks this poses of their accidental, even if not deliberate use – more than they restrain it. This is because – as the Canberra Commission described the reality – so long as any country has nuclear weapons, others will always want them. It is illusory to think that one group of countries can continue to get away with claiming that *their* security – or, even less credibly, their claims to, or psychological need for, great power status – demands their continued possession of nuclear weapons, but others must be forever denied them. All the world hates a hypocrite.

The second attitudinal change necessary goes to the normative issue of the nuclear taboo, which has to be seriously reasserted. Until now, what has inhibited the deliberate use of nuclear weapons by anyone since 1945 has been not just the practical concerns that military commanders have always had about their actual utility in securing military objectives, but something even more powerful: the profound normative taboo, not legal but moral, which has unquestionably existed internationally against any use of nuclear weapons, at least in circumstances where the very survival of a state is not at stake. Since the early 1950s – when it began to sink in that their destructive capacity really was infinitely greater than anything previously seen – such deliberate use has been seen as inconceivable by the leaders of any country thinking of itself, as civilized, and wanting to be thought so by others. Presidents Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy rejected military advice to use nuclear weapons in the Korean War, the Taiwan Straits crisis, and the Cuban missile crisis, and even that quintessential realist, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, said that if the U.S. had used nuclear weapons in Korea, Vietnam or against China over Taiwan, ‘we’d be finished as far as present-day world opinion was concerned’.² There is no clearer example anywhere in the

² Quoted in Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.173

history of international relations of just how immensely important a constraint on sovereign-state action a non-legally binding international moral norm can be.

It is cause for real alarm that President Trump, and at least some of those supposedly serious adults advising him, no longer seem to have any sense of the force of that normative taboo. And there is some recent published research³ suggesting, also very troublingly, that the nuclear taboo is not felt nearly as strongly as previously thought by the U.S. public. All this means, in my judgement, that it has become desperately necessary to defend and reinforce this perhaps most important of all existing international norms.

The good news in this respect is that a substantial majority of UN members – supported by an international NGO led by ICAN which won last year’s Nobel Peace Prize – have now negotiated a Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty designed above all to do just that, through provisions that would not only comprehensively ban the use or threat of nuclear weapons, but their possession in any form. The less good news is that none of the world’s nuclear armed states, nor any of their partners and allies – including my own country – have shown any willingness to date to join this ban treaty, or even to participate in further negotiations (of the kind which I would support) aimed at making its objectives more practically achievable, for example a ‘No First Use’ convention. On even the most optimistic view we have an immense distance to go in eliminating the existential risk to every person on this planet that nuclear weapons pose,⁴ but the most immediate and pressing need is to hold the line on this most important of all normative taboos.

National Interests v Ethical Values

Let me address, finally, the issue which probably arises more than any other in any discussion of the dilemmas confronted by foreign policy makers: the apparently irreducible tension which so often seems to exist between hard-headed national interests on the one hand and widely recognised ethical values on the other.

The trouble begins, in my judgment, with the way in which ‘national interests’ are almost universally conceptualised, in just two boxes: on the one hand geopolitical, strategic, physical-security-related interests, and on the other hand trade, investment, and other economic-related interests. If one limits the concept to that familiar duo, how does one square that, if you are your country’s foreign minister, with being a liberal internationalist? Should a country like Australia – or Germany – care about human rights atrocities, health epidemics, environmental catastrophes, weapons proliferation or any other problems afflicting others far away, only in situations where these developments directly or immediately impact on our own security or prosperity? What should we do about pursuing global public goods like reducing carbon emissions when the cost to us might outweigh any direct return? Should we care about Islamist terrorism in the Middle East only because extreme jihadist movements of this kind may recruit deluded young men who may return to threaten our homeland security? Should we care about refugees from Syria and Afghanistan only because they might become queue-jumping asylum seekers threatening our territorial integrity or domestic harmony?

Of course governments in Australia and elsewhere do occasionally make commitments that cannot easily be characterised as advancing the traditional security-prosperity duo. And they

³ Daryl G Press, Scott D Sagan, Benjamin A Valentino, “Atomic Aversion: Experimental Evidence on Taboos, Traditions and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons”, *American Political Science Review*, February 2013

⁴ For a detailed account of a realistic, step-by-step path first to minimization then ultimately to elimination of nuclear weapons, see the report of Australia-Japan sponsored *International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers* (Canberra, 2009).

sometimes explain them in terms of meeting international legal obligations, or – more often – as *value* issues: doing the right thing simply because it *is* the right thing. But the trouble is that even when governments, of whatever political colour, do act decently – providing, say, disaster relief to earthquake victims in Nepal – most of the time these actions are seen, by themselves and others, as discretionary add-ons, not as engaging in the hard-headed, hard-core business of foreign policy. This has wider implications for effective foreign policymaking. If governments do not think of these responses as core foreign policy business, fitting squarely, when properly understood, within a national interests rather than just values-based framework, they get increasingly drawn into the kind of *ad hocery* which has characterised so much of my own country's international relations, as well as domestic policy, over the years – picking up and dropping aid commitments, and treaty negotiation commitments, and principled positions on policy issues like climate change, as the domestic mood is perceived to change.

To address these questions I developed, in my first weeks as foreign minister back in the late 1980s, a way of describing national interests that involved not just the familiar traditional duo of security and economic interests, but a distinct third category as well, what I called every country's national interest in *being, and being seen to be, a good international citizen*. Being a good international citizen means being willing to engage in cooperative international action to advance global public goods, or – putting it another way – to help resolve what Kofi Annan used to describe as 'problems without passports': those which are by their nature beyond the capacity of any one state, however great and powerful, to individually solve. The list is familiar: such issues as achieving a clean and safe global environment; a world free of health pandemics, out of control cross-border population flows, international trafficking of drugs and people, and extreme poverty; a globe without cross border terrorism, and on its way to abolishing all weapons of mass destruction.

In advancing this concept I was groping for a way of articulating the sentiment that 'purposes beyond ourselves'⁵ really are at the heart of every country's core national interests, and are not just some kind of boy-scout-good-deeds afterthought to the real business of state. That is because if good international behaviour is simply some kind of charitable impulse, that is an impulse that will often have difficulty surviving the rigours of domestic political debate. Politics is not just a bloody and dangerous trade. It is an extremely cynical one, often with very limited tolerance for embracing what cannot be described in very concrete national interest terms.

My belief is that treating 'good international citizenship' as a third category of national interest does help bridge the gap between realists and idealists, by embodying the idea that idealism can in fact be realistic. How? Because in my experience there are two very hard-headed returns – in terms of reputation and reciprocity respectively – for a state being seen to be a good international citizen. Enhancement of a state's international reputation is bound to work, over time, to its economic and security advantage. The Scandinavians, in particular, have long understood this – think of squeaky-clean Sweden becoming one of the world's biggest armaments sellers! As to reciprocity, foreign policymakers are no more immune to ordinary human instincts than anyone else. If I take your problems seriously, you are that much more likely to help me solve mine: my help for you today in solving your terrorism problem or environmental problem or piracy problem might reasonably lead you to be willing tomorrow to help solve my refugees problem, or at least vote for me for a major international position like a seat on the Security Council. Recognising good international citizenship as a category of national interest in its own right is a way of harnessing values and principles to very practical, and indeed self-interested, ends.

In Australia, my explicit recognition of good international citizenship as a core national

⁵ In the words of the world-recognized Australian international relations scholar Hedley Bull.

interest in its own right became a basic part of our foreign policy during the Labor governments of which I was a member, but has had something of a roller-coaster ride since. Internationally, good international citizenship as a core national interest has won a degree of recognition in the academic literature.⁶ But it cannot be claimed to have yet gained much traction with governments, despite my own multiple efforts over the years to persuade many of them around the world that they would have a much easier time selling multilateral commitments to sceptical domestic audiences if they worked harder at explaining the reputational and reciprocity benefits involved.

Being an incorrigible optimist, I continue to try to make the case for reconceptualising national interests, and continue to live in hope that one day this idea will find its time has come. Just as I continue to be an optimist about the ultimate effective elimination of all mass atrocity crimes and – although I suspect this will take even longer – the ultimate achievement of a nuclear weapons free world.

The crucial point is that in international relations, as in life itself, outlooks can be self-reinforcing, and self-fulfilling. Pessimists see conflict, horror and sheer human idiocy of one kind or another as more or less inevitable, and adopt a highly wary and competitive approach to the conduct of international relations. But for optimists of all stripes and colours, what matters rather is believing in and nurturing the instinct of cooperation in the hope, and expectation, that decent human values will ultimately prevail. And that's where I come out. If we want to change the world for the better, we must start by believing that change is possible.

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⁶ See, e.g., Nicholas J Wheeler and Tim Dunne. 'Good International Citizenship: A Third Way for British Foreign Policy', *International Affairs* 74 (4), 1998.