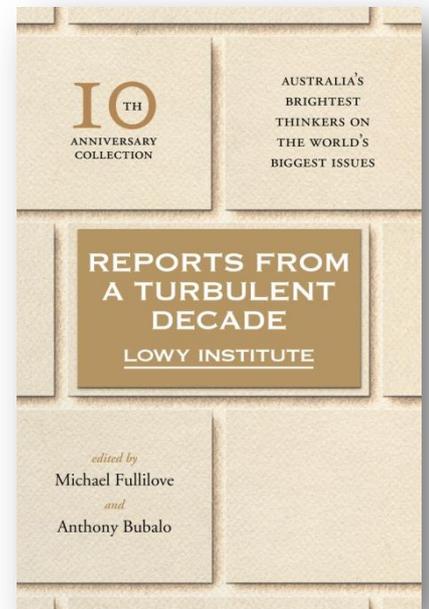


Reports from a Turbulent Decade

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Extract

Introduction

The biggest compliment that can be paid to the Lowy Institute is to say that, ten years after its establishment, Australia's international policy landscape is unimaginable without it.

The Institute was not the first think tank to be established in Australia, but they were certainly thin on the ground when we arrived and there were no prototypes to follow. However, a feasibility study written in 2002 provided a road map and a set of founding principles: that we would aim to influence international policy as well as informing the public; that we would be independent, non-partisan and evidence-driven; that we would be host to the widest range of opinions but the advocate of none. And we had a clear mission from our founder and Chairman, Frank Lowy: to deepen the debate in Australia about the world and to give Australia a greater voice abroad.

Our job was to address the political, strategic and economic dimensions of international relations in an integrated way. Above all, as our first executive director, Allan Gyngell, reminded us, our goal was to influence policy through applied research. Our work needed to be relevant and accessible to all of those engaged in the world, including government, business, the media, non-governmental organisations and, importantly, the broader community.

In terms of the specific subjects we chose to research, the Institute's staff members were given a relatively free hand and were challenged to make judgements about what was important. Proposed research did, however, have to be relevant to the concerns of policymakers, in Australia or abroad, and show that we had something meaningful and original to contribute. We have never done research for research's sake – we always had to answer the question 'So what?' In that regard, we were fortunate to have no shortage of issues from which to choose. The decade of the Lowy Institute's existence has been a dynamic period in global affairs, from the war on terror and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to the rise of China and India and the global financial crisis.

As we developed our agenda of research and events, our Chairman repeatedly interrogated us on one key point: how do we know we are succeeding? Most think tanks struggle with this question. We don't make widgets and there is no profit or loss to account for at the end of the financial year. Nevertheless, looking back over the last decade, there are several indicators of success that we can point to.

First, others have been willing to invest in us. When we were established, the Lowy family provided all of our funding; today, half of it comes from other sources, including government, corporate members, foundations and individuals. We see this as one important reflection of the relevance and quality of our work. It had always been the Chairman's goal that the Institute become a valued part of Australia's public policy infrastructure and not simply remain a generous philanthropic gift to the nation. The Federal Government's recent decision to support a new Institute initiative on engaging Asia is a major step towards achieving that goal.

Second, the best think tanks and universities in the world seek to work with us, from the Brookings Institution and the Council on Foreign Relations in the United States to Tsinghua and Peking universities in China. We have won significant grants from the world's leading foundations, including the MacArthur and Gates foundations and the Nuclear Threat Initiative. In the only annual ranking of think tanks worldwide, our peers have recognised us as the leading think tank in Australia and among the top fifty in the world.

Third, the Chairman's example has moved others in Australia to establish new research institutions. Since our founding, the think tank scene in Australia has expanded significantly. In other words, we have helped to make the market.

In the final analysis, however, it is the quality of our ideas that represents the most important measure of our success, and this is what we have tried to reflect in this volume. You will find in the following pages examples of how the Institute has shaped public debate, such as through our polling on attitudes to climate change. There are examples of our researchers showing particular prescience, such as Mark Thirlwell's work on the rise of the Indian economy at a time when Australians were still largely focused on the rise of China. Jenny Hayward-Jones's paper on the need for a rethink of Australia's policy towards Fiji has changed minds. Rory Medcalf's research has contributed to the strengthening of the Australia–India relationship.

We have addressed big global policy questions, such as Linda Jakobson's work on the new Chinese leadership and Warwick McKibbin's work on climate change policy. We have identified new issues for policymakers to consider, for example through Michael Fullilove's research on global diasporas, or 'world wide webs'. And we have provided close analysis of some of the world's most complex problems, as illustrated by the paper by Malcolm Cook, Raoul Heinrichs, Andrew Shearer and Rory Medcalf on Asia's changing power dynamics.

Nevertheless, this anthology represents only a small proportion of the Lowy Institute's work. In the last ten years the Institute has published over 370 research papers. Institute authors have written over 1000 op-eds and articles for Australian and international newspapers, magazines and websites, including *Foreign Affairs*, *the American Interest*, *the New York Times*, *the Financial Times* and *the Washington Post*.

It was, therefore, difficult to decide what to include. We applied a number of criteria, of which readability and accessibility for the nonspecialist reader were the most important. This has meant leaving out some of the denser and more technical papers published by the Institute.

We wanted to give a sense of the breadth of the Institute's back catalogue. We did this by choosing mostly excerpts from our longer papers; we hope this will lead readers to the full papers, all of which can be found on the Institute's website. We have included a large number of op-eds, many of which summarise a longer piece of research undertaken by the author. We have also included a number of posts from our highly successful blog, *The Interpreter*. In its five years of existence, *The Interpreter* has established itself as one of the world's liveliest forums for the discussion of foreign policy.

Nevertheless, there are many issues that the Institute has researched that have been left out. For reasons of space we also took a decision not to include longer articles written by Institute staff for international policy journals. This meant leaving out notable pieces such as those by Michael Fullilove on the role of US special envoys in *Foreign Affairs*, Alan Dupont and Mark Thirlwell on food security in *Survival*, and Anthony Bubalo and Malcolm Cook on 'Horizontal Asia' in the *American Interest*.

Not everything in this volume was written by our staff members. The Institute is the leading Australian venue for speeches on international issues, and we have incorporated major speeches and papers delivered at the Institute, including by the three Australian prime ministers who were in office during our first decade. A number of the Institute's nonresident and visiting fellows, past and present, are also represented, including columnist Paul Kelly, and Owen Harries, the editor emeritus of the leading American policy journal *the National Interest*.

Finally, we also felt it important to include a reference to the important polling work that the Lowy Institute has conducted in the last decade. The annual Lowy Institute Poll is one of our most important

publications and a vital record of Australian attitudes to the world. In what is the only contribution written specifically for this volume, Fergus Hanson and Alex Oliver have provided a summary of some of the most interesting results from the annual Lowy Institute Poll and the country polls we have conducted in China, Indonesia and Fiji.

For Australia, and for the world, the next decade is likely to be as challenging as the last. For Australia, in particular, our elevation to the world's most important economic and political forums, the G20 and the United Nations Security Council, will give the country a new prominence in global affairs and new opportunities to realise our prosperity and security.

But this will also test Australia as a country. Our political and business leaders and our government officials will need to engage at a higher level, and a faster pace, than they have ever done before. To justify our place at the big table, Australia will need big ideas. The Lowy Institute's job is to help provide those ideas and to shape the debates about Australia's international policy and its place in the world – and to make an international mark.