

**LAUNCH OF LOWY INSTITUTE'S 10th ANNIVERSARY ANTHOLOGY  
*REPORTS FROM A TURBULENT DECADE***

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**Full transcript**

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One of the – few – advantages of grey hair and all that comes with it is that you've seen it all, and have developed a certain capacity to distinguish between individuals and organisations who are never going to have any class, those who aspire to it, and those who have achieved it.

Frank Lowy can be very proud that the Institute he created is squarely, on any view, in the third category. Frank has made many investments in the course of his journey from thinking man's delicatessen in the western suburbs to head of the world's largest retail property group, but this "grand investment in ideas", as John Howard describes it in his inaugural Lowy Lecture in 2005, may well be the grandest of all, with the most lasting impact.

Part of the evidence – but only part of it – is in this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary anthology we are launching today which, in Michael Fullilove's and Anthony Bubalo's very capable hands, is about as good as an anthology can be in conveying the flavour of the Lowy Institute's contribution to the national, and in some cases international, debate.

The opinion pieces and speech extracts and paper extracts – over 300 pages of them – are grouped systematically around the themes that Lowy has from the beginning made its own: the overriding one of Australia's place in the World, then the sub-themes, going to what kind of world it is that we are now living in – with Asia changing, our near neighbourhood changing, and our great and powerful ally America having to at least think hard about changing; with the global economy evolving in ways that require ever more deft and coordinated international policy responses; and with the traditionally state-based nature of the international system also evolving, giving an ever greater role, for good or ill, to non-state actors.

We have here tastes of the work of Lowy's staff and contributors on many of the themes and topics they have made their own – for example Alan Gyngell on the overall shape of the contemporary world, Rory Medcalf on the Indo-Pacific, Hugh White on the US-China face-off, Linda Jakobson on China, Michael Fullilove on internal US dynamics, Alex Oliver on the stresses confronting our consular service, and many others on many other subjects.

But really this anthology is just a tasting menu, and as the editors point out in their Introduction, the Lowy Institute has been about much more than is fully captured here. There are the books that have been published, most recently Solahudin's *Roots of Terrorism in Indonesia*, launched just last week; there have been the full-length, thoroughly researched, papers and reports which have made serious and substantial contributions to policy and organisational thinking, including the work on Australia's stressed-out diplomatic infrastructure; there has been the steady flow of shorter but still substantial analytical pieces on particular themes like the G20.

There has been the very sophisticated polling work conducted on Australian attitudes to the world, and some of our neighbours' attitudes toward us; there have been the many events held here at which the subsequent debate and discussion has often been at least as probing and stimulating as the formal presentations; and there has been the daily *Lowy Interpreter*, which as well as its regular diet of often quite substantial posts, captures in its links a lot of material published elsewhere which harried readers like me might otherwise miss. When you put all this together it amounts to a formidable success story: the Lowy Institute has become a simply indispensable player in the Australian policy landscape.

I think it is worth exploring for a moment the crucial ingredients of that success. I wrote a piece recently in which I described – from my own long experience both on the receiving end of think-tank and NGO advocacy, and as an international NGO head – what I thought the four major factors were, whether the organisation in question was primarily a thinker (like the Brookings Institution and other classic think-tanks), a talker (like Human Rights Watch and the other mainly advocacy-focused organisations), a doer (engaged in on-the-ground mediation or capacity building), or some combination of all three like my own International Crisis Group.

The first is to *add value*, meeting a need not currently being met well or at all. There were other internationally and regionally-focused research institutes and think tanks around at the time Lowy was created, but none had the combination of range, depth and visibility that Lowy has from the beginning made its own; none were providing the regular stage for national debate that Lowy has done; and few were being listened to by policymakers with as much attention as Lowy has commanded almost from the outset. What is interesting is that Lowy's rise has encouraged others – like the Australian Institute for International Affairs – to lift their game, and that can only be healthy for us all.

The second factor is *clarity of mission*. The most successful international NGOs are those that find a very clear niche and stick to it. Lowy seems to have chosen from the outset the classic Brookings-type think-tank template and to have adhered closely to it, for the most part resisting other worldly temptations. Just one note of caution is, however, I think called for, which may just reflect my advanced age: while op-eds, blog-posts, and immersion in tweets and all the other ever-evolving opportunities for social-media communication are all important and necessary elements in building and sustaining any organisation's profile and influence, they must remain subordinate to its primary mission, which in Lowy's case is substance – research substance, analytical substance, and policy substance first, second and third. This is what Lowy's credibility and reputation has been built on, and what must continue to be its core business if they are to be sustained.

The third criterion is real *independence*. Any think-tank or NGO in the business of giving advice it wants policymakers to take seriously must be absolutely scrupulous about being, and being seen to be, immune from influence by particular vested interests – including those who sustain it financially. The Lowy Institute has, I think, passed this test with flying colours, which is a tribute to its founder, its board and its successive directors. It has also been very self-consciously non-partisan in its approach, which has sometimes disappointed the true believers on either side, but I think is an approach tremendously important to cultivate in foreign policy above all: the issues are just too big and important for the future of this nation, and the opportunities for international misunderstanding are just too great, for any of us to allow ourselves to be comfortable with mindless partisan posturing and drum-beating.

The final criterion for success is absolute *professionalism*. If you want to meet government policymakers on their home ground you have to provide product of a quality that the best of them are used to and demand. And management – of finance, personnel and attention to governance – has to be sustained at world best-practice level. Like every organisation of any consequence, the Lowy Institute has been through its stressful periods, but overall has again, I think, passed this test with flying colours, which is a particular tribute not only to its board, but above all to its founding director Allan Gyngell, who set the tone, and to his successors Michael Wesley and Michael Fullilove.

So this is an organisation with a splendid story to tell about its first decade of existence. On the strength both of this anthology, and everything else we know about the Lowy Institute, it's going to continue to have a great story to tell for many more decades to come. Congratulations again to the editors, and to the contributors, and to everyone else who has made possible the great achievements of Lowy's first ten years.

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