



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – ANU Harvard Symposium Keynote

**Ambassador Bleich's Remarks at
The ANU Harvard Symposium: Creating a Productive Future
Australian National University**

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Before I get started, I'd like to tell you a story, so I hope you'll bear with me. When my sons were younger, I was an assistant scout master. For those of you haven't done this, it's a great education in surviving teenagers, specifically ones who have access to fire. Let me share a couple of the lessons I learned from this experience.

First, you really shouldn't go to bed until after the fire is extinguished. If you do go to bed before the fire is out, it tends to make the boys curious. They ask questions like, "I wonder what would happen if I threw this into the fire?"

And by "this" they mean a C-5 Estes rocket engine.

This experience will teach you a few things the hard way. Like where to pitch your tent. For the record, I recommend that you not do it too close to the fire. Or like me, you can learn how to sleep with a hole burned in your tent by a flaming fireball

Another good survival skill is having the right equipment. I learned this one day when the boys discovered that a C-5 rocket engine fits perfectly in the end of a soda bottle. It turns out that soda bottles are not designed to work as rockets – something that became evident as one whizzed within inches of my head. Soda bottles are for soda. Rocket engines are for rockets.

Right now you're probably thinking, "Okay, who is the real U.S. ambassador and what have they done with him?" "What does this have to do with a U.S. strategic vision for a productive future?" Well, I do have a point here. The future depends on: being attentive to small fires and not letting them become big ones. Anticipate the actions and ideas of others who affect your interests to guide their behavior. Use the right equipment. And always have a plan in case things go wrong.

As a public servant, I find that these four maxims describe pretty well what we try to do every day. I suspect some of you felt a certain degree of déjà vu as I went through the story. We try to put out fires. We try to reduce risks and temptations and keep dangerous weapons out of the hands of leaders with poor impulse control. We carry a diverse toolbox – diplomatic, economic, cultural, etc. – to meet the need, rather than assuming one tool will work with any problem. And we are humble enough to know we can't stop things from sometimes going wrong, so we try



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to be prepared for all contingencies. By and large we do okay, but it isn't easy and requires public servants to be creative and resist complacency.

I've been asked to talk to you about the emerging global challenges for public service that we see in the world today. I think these challenges fall into three broad categories. First, looming shortages in food, water, and energy threaten to cause instability and conflict if they are not resolved. Second, we are facing security problems our predecessors could never have imagined as we deal with threats on the frontiers of new technology – in space and in cyber. Finally, we are faced with figuring out how to make good policy and reach our publics in a time when information overload is plaguing democracies and the public is often more confused by proliferating data than enlightened by it.

Food, Water, Energy

The first challenge concerns our natural resources. Today there is no guarantee that we can produce and provide enough water, food, and energy to meet the demands of a rapidly growing industrialized world. If we make the wrong choices – or make no choices – we could face a future marked by famines and border disputes over resources. That would inevitably lead to riots, mass migration, environmental destruction, and regional instability.

The challenge arises in part from the dynamic growth here in the Asia-Pacific. The world's population has nearly tripled since 1950 – from 2.5 billion to nearly 7 billion today. Another 2 billion people will join us by 2050.

More important than the dramatic increase in numbers is how these people will live. As economies improve, per capita incomes will improve as well. People will want the same things we all want – nicer homes, cars, and electronics. They will demand more energy per person; they will consume more water per person; and they will consume more and better food. Between population growth and rising incomes, the U.N. estimates that the demand for food, energy, and water will rise exponentially faster than the population.

My point is not that our nations need to stop this growth. As leaders, we need to help the world prepare for this dramatic shift. The good news is that societies are adaptable. Two hundred years ago, Thomas Malthus predicted that humanity was doomed. However, people are clever creatures and we figured out new ways of increasing food production at the same time that we were using old ways of increasing the number of humans.

It's unlikely that we'll face some Malthusian catastrophe as long as we recognize and address the challenge. Today it is a small fire, but unattended it could become an inferno. But to feed, hydrate, and power everyone will require early and unprecedented investment. It will require new levels of cooperation and a sharing of ideas across borders beyond what our world has previously achieved. As public servants, this represents a huge challenge for the future.



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So how do we change this? When I was younger, one of my mentors asked me: “How do you eat an elephant?” The answer: “One bite at a time.” Solving these problems will take lots of small actions by lots of people. The challenge of leadership will be getting those of us in comfortable nations to take action when the looming crisis has not affected us yet.

Let me start with food. The challenge is this: there are limited ways to increase agricultural production. We can devote more land to agriculture. We can increase yields. We can improve the efficiency of farming and food delivery by adopting new technologies or practices. Over the past 50 years, we’ve relied largely on the first two factors – more land and more fertilizers and pesticides. But there’s only so much land, and there’s only so much food the land will yield. This trend of using more to produce more will become untenable.

So we are going to need to make two significant changes. First, we’ll need to help change technologies and farming practices around the world. There is tremendous waste in every aspect of food production. We need to modernize every part of the food chain around the world, to get more crops to market with less spoilage and more accountability.

Second, we’ll need to promote more efficient food sources. As a devoted carnivore and lover of processed foods – particularly Big Macs – I don’t expect this change to be easy but great challenges never are.

Water is, in some ways, an even more important challenge. Already, more than a billion people lack adequate water. At current consumption rates, that number will triple in less than 15 years. By 2050, we will need nine more Murray Rivers at full annual flow just to meet the global water shortage. This is not only a problem on the world’s driest continent, it is – or soon will be – a problem on every continent. And it is not news. We’ve seen it coming for years.

Almost everyone – no matter where we live – wastes water. The biggest challenge with water, as with food, is changing how we think about it. In the U.S., water costs about \$1.50 for every 1,000 gallons. We think of it like we think of air – unlimited and virtually free. If we are going to make sure that we have enough water, we’re going to have to get out of our comfortable habits and confront the real challenges of water scarcity – including changing how we produce, deliver, consume, and price water.

All over the world, divisive politics and bad policies have prevented the efficient and equitable use of our most valuable natural resource. Former Secretary Clinton called water security a “global imperative.” In short, water is one of our greatest diplomatic and developmental challenges.

Finally, there is the issue of establishing a secure energy future. Today, 23 percent of the world’s population – more than 1.6 billion people – still lives without electricity. Overwhelmingly, they live in the least developed countries, and they will need electricity to achieve sustainable economic development. In rapidly industrializing nations, demand for



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energy continues to increase. No one knows this better than Australians, who are experiencing unprecedented demand for brown coal, coking coal, and for iron ore and other commodities.

The subject of how to best produce energy is always contentious. Everyone has their preferred fuel source and they don't want to hear about other sources. And so the debate too often stagnates.

But at some level we all know the following facts are true:

First, there is a finite amount of oil and coal in the ground. Ultimately they will be exhausted. But all of our transportation systems – cars, trucks, airplanes, ships – run principally if not entirely on oil products. Likewise the majority of power plants run on coal. This is unsustainable and we need to invest in known alternatives.

Second, being dependent on oil makes nations like ours vulnerable. To the extent that a nation can use energy sources that they already have – sources like wind, solar, hydro, and biofuels – rather than oil, the less vulnerable we are to the politics or pressures of oil-producing nations.

Third, our current energy supplies are hurting our health and environment compared to alternatives. Climate change is real, and our massive carbon emissions are a big part of the problem. But the risk comes from much more than excess carbon emissions, it also comes from other byproducts like sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, lead, soot, and other particulates. Anyone who has spent time in Beijing or Mexico City knows what I'm saying and has felt this in their own lungs. People expect to live longer and better in each generation and that also requires changing our energy mix.

So leadership requires us to confront the facts; we need to use less oil and coal and much more of these other energy sources. On this topic, where it is so easy to simply criticize rather than act, public servants have to get it right. The one thing we cannot do is nothing.

We must understand that the old systems for producing food, water, and energy that have served us so well are not sufficient for the future. The solutions are out there. So going back to my camping trip, we need to recognize the danger before it is too late, and refocus on finding the right equipment.

Cyber Security

From very old problems, let me turn now to some very new ones: space and cyber. This set of challenges mostly has to do with anticipating the actions and interests of people sharing your environment and having a plan in case things go wrong.

In the last two decades, new communication technologies have changed the world completely. The internet is unlike anything that we've ever seen before. It's not just a means of



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communication; it is a new world with classrooms and shops and theatres and criminals and bullies and police and regulators. And it is in constant interaction with our physical world. It has the power, like all technological innovations, to do great good. But it brings with it a host of new security challenges as well.

Every part of our society depends upon the security of cyberspace. Our financial systems, our media, our communications, our weapons, our water supplies, our electrical grids, our command and control, everything – absolutely everything – depends upon cyberspace being secure. We all know the good that the internet does. After all, who doesn't love a good cat video? How else would you know about the insane political views of your third cousin twice removed if it weren't for Facebook? While it is not *exactly* a necessity of life, it is difficult to get things done these days without the internet. Our reliance on the internet makes us vulnerable in unprecedented ways. And it presents the public sector with security challenges in an uncharted dimension.

Because information technology is so central to the work of every public sector organization today, cyber security must be a priority for all of us. Malicious cyber actors will seek out the weakest link in the information technology chain. They will use a vulnerable organization as an entry point to attack its trusted partners. No agency can afford to be complacent.

To illustrate the risks, we don't need to look very far. In the face of increasing attacks on U.S. businesses, the U.S. National Security Advisor Tom Donilon spoke out about cyber-intrusions on an "unprecedented scale" in a speech last week. In Australia, the media recently reported attacks on the systems of the Reserve Bank, which controls the monetary policy of the world's 12th largest economy.

Of course this is not only a problem for governments. Security and data breaches cost U.S. companies billions of dollars every year. The same is true here in Australia. In 2012, the Australian government estimated that over 5 million Australians fell victim to cybercrime, costing the Australian economy over \$1.6 billion.

The cyber attacks that are reported represent only a small fraction of the total number of incidents. Companies fear the consequences of going public with the damage they've suffered. Or – in too many cases – they aren't even detecting the exploitation of their systems.

Our leaders are used to fighting to protect us on the land, in the air, and on the seas. Cyberspace requires an equally vigorous defense. This will be a huge challenge for all of us as public servants. It will require the kind of trust and cooperation that we are sometimes reluctant to pursue between agencies.

It will require us to share sensitive information with the private sector to help prevent attacks and intrusions. We will need to educate users about how to operate safely online. We will need to work with international partners to promote a safe and secure cyberspace environment governed by international law. Importantly, we will need to defend the principles of free speech and



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association, privacy, and the free flow of information even while we're moving toward greater global cyber security.

Our nations' governments need to be structured to deal with the challenges of cyber, and we are moving to meet this threat. The Australian Cyber Security Centre that will be established here in Canberra is a critical step in that direction. In the U.S., we are bringing together our law enforcement, homeland security, defense, and foreign policy officials, under the leadership of the White House, to implement our whole-of-government cyber security strategy. We are working closely with the private sector. We are working with tech companies as they develop solutions to make our systems more secure and resilient. Both our public and private sectors continue to make the transition toward cloud-based IT platforms, to give us the strongest line of defense.

We know that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to cyber security. Different sectors have different vulnerabilities. Each company is best positioned to understand how to use innovations in cyber security to protect its networks. But government still has an important role to play in facilitating the sharing of information and guiding the private sector toward the adoption of best practices. Only when we share information across government, and with the private sector, on threats and best practices, can we address the challenge of cyber security.

I won't speak at length about space and satellites, but these are now the central nervous system of our communications. It faces big threats as well – attacks, space debris, and spying.

Technology and trust will be the key to our success. One of the reasons I became a diplomat, after having had a very good career as a lawyer, was because I believe in diplomacy. I believe that it is better to anticipate problems, to negotiate before conflict arises, and to resolve our disputes peacefully. And the Internet has created an extraordinary way for diplomats to do this. I can assess almost immediately when something dangerous may be developing, I can quickly share that information with Washington, and I can work around the globe with counterparts to defuse problems. As problems move at network speed, we need to build systems that move at that same rate.

New Media and the 24 Hour News Cycle

This brings me to the final challenge I want to discuss with you this morning. The ability to spread information quickly though the Internet comes with costs as well as benefits. Because news spreads to all corners of the world instantaneously, the time for thoughtful deliberation has decreased considerably; policymakers have to move at the speed of the news. We have become more reactive and less proactive, which can lead to mistakes. Likewise, the public has been so deluged with raw opinion and unfiltered news stories that it is often either easily misled or unwilling to trust any information. This will be a major challenge for public service in the years to come.



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The instantaneous information flow comes in vast quantities. It is easy to become overwhelmed. In the 20th century, it was often difficult to get the information we needed when we needed it. In the 21st century, the big trick is not to get lost in the flood of information that comes to us every day.

The way news gets distributed now often means there is nobody vetting the accuracy of the stories that spread quickly across the internet. Sometimes it can be hard – even impossible – to tell the trash from the treasure. Anyone, anywhere, can say anything without running it past a sober – or at least serious – editor, who has an interest in maintaining some level of responsible behavior and who has a reputation for accuracy to maintain. In today's media, it is easier to generate lies than it is to refute them. The best example of this I can think of is the rumor that President Obama is not a natural born citizen of the United States. Clearly wrong. Clearly disproven. Still hanging around – although generally only among the political fringe and attention seekers these days. Snopes.com, which has as its mission the debunking of internet myths, and other sites can only do so much. People have to reach out and inquire about the accuracy of the information they receive. In some cases, people have to want to disconfirm information that fits their biases.

Another challenge for tomorrow's leader is that relations with media will change. Today, any citizen with a mobile phone camera or a Twitter account can be a so-called journalist. Everything a diplomat says will be on the record. Chatham House rules no longer exist. It is very difficult to counter incorrect initial readouts of fluid events since public opinion takes shape at the speed of light.

Finally, the ease with which we access and distribute information increases the risk of leaks exponentially. Leaks have always been damaging. But nowhere near as damaging as they are today. Massive amounts of data can now be stolen instantly. Once, a person might be able to smuggle one document out in their underwear; today, with a thumb-drive, you can potentially steal hundreds of thousands of pages. And the stolen material can now be handed to people who can immediately post it all – unfiltered – on a website. Access is available to everyone, including hostile forces and dangerous individuals. It places open societies at a substantial disadvantage to closed societies where leaks are much less likely.

Getting truthful information may be harder as contacts inside and outside the government will say less or perhaps even refuse to take meetings altogether. This lack of communication breeds uncertainty, or worse, distrust, and reduces the information upon which decisions are based. Important official communications will likely migrate from written messages to phone calls. Without a written record, responsibility and accountability for policy decisions – and the ability to trace the history of a decision – will become less transparent and available. This will degrade decision making.



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Nonetheless, the genie is out of the bottle. We can't waste time complaining about this, we need to master the technology – like we did radio and TV – to limit negative effects and to make it work harder for us.

Leadership in this real-time world requires harnessing new communications technologies. When I worked on the Obama presidential campaign in 2008, I saw innovation and leadership on this front in action. President Obama and his team embraced new media platforms in the 2008 election. Using what they had learned, they took it to the next level in 2012. I think there are some lessons here for all of us, especially as our budgets shrink and we need to find new and innovative ways of reaching our client base.

When President Obama saw all of the new media tools available to us – Facebook, Twitter, SMS, Flickr, YouTube – he thought about them from the vantage point of a community organizer rather than as a traditional political campaigner. Community organizers believe in face-to-face conversation, because they know that most people need some personal contact to become passionate about an issue.

While others saw the computer as a fancy mailbox or television set, President Obama saw it as a community, a way to give people a personal stake in the race and to break down social barriers. Technology helps people access communities. President Obama's success in harnessing new information technology to build a community was a crucial step in his path to the presidency and becoming a true world leader in this real-time world.

If social networks are going to resemble real life interactions, then they have to mimic a very different experience than election networks. What we expect political leaders to do in real life is work – which includes spending most of their time governing and only devoting some appropriate defined periods to being out among the public for some direct exchange with their constituents. We need to change expectations that simply because a forum is always open, public figures should be available there. (Example from Lincoln movie). One of the struggles we have with always being accessible is the expectation that we will always be available, which can lead to disappointment and anger.

There is no denying that technology poses challenges for diplomacy and policy making. At the same time it is a tremendous tool to educate, connect, and share information for the common good with a wide array of people in a way that was impossible before. The challenge for us will be to ensure that technology is not an end in and of itself. We cannot simply have a Facebook page or post a blog and think we are now masters of the internet. We need to make sense of both the challenges and the opportunities the technology presents. We need to use technology to strengthen our communities and use it as a force for good. It won't be easy – especially for older folks like me. But, in the future, leadership and success will depend upon it.



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The larger question is how does all of this energy get harnessed and put to use in a new socially networked government? We're still working on it, and I don't think this question is close to being resolved yet.

Large institutional bureaucracies need to speak decisively. This is hard to make vibrant or interesting in the off-line world, and so it is hard to make it any more satisfying in the on-line world – especially if you are trying to communicate a complex policy position in 140 characters. If you employ new media in a way that is not genuine, is overly controlled or contrived, your community will lose interest and tune you out. We are still working out the borders and boundaries, the strengths and limitations of these new media and how we can use them to connect with audiences and counterparts.

My view is that, taking a lesson from the Obama campaign, we really cannot afford to be afraid to experiment. Our challenge is to stand out and stay relevant in an increasingly crowded and noisy marketplace of ideas. But we have greater risks if we don't have a more calibrated environment. An SMS campaign that might spread an important message through the community of university students in Kenya may fall flat in Indonesia. A Facebook post that may inspire passionate discussion in Uruguay may not get a single comment on a page in Germany. The whole question of an effective new media strategy becomes significantly more complex on an international scale when cultural differences matter.

If we have learned anything, it is that we have to listen to what our counterparts are trying to tell us and we have to respond and adapt in real time. That can be a tremendous challenge in a slow moving and instinctively cautious bureaucracy. The medium may be interactive but it ceases to be so the second one side stops actively listening. We must, just as the President did during the campaign, give our people the freedom to experiment and push the boundaries of how these technologies are employed.

My Public Affairs team at the U.S. Embassy here in Canberra and our consulates across Australia experiments with new social media strategies every day. We work on how best to spread our message and develop an online community to supplement the interactions we have with people in real life.

Ultimately, new media will not replace all other forms of communication – it will simply replace those where it is superior. But the balance between different methods will change, and we'll need to look for ways to combine them. I still find face-to-face communication to be one of the best ways to engage with people.

However, that same technology has risks. If that electronic information that we're sharing gets stolen, it can undermine peace. It can give hostile governments and criminals critical insights. It can pre-empt or even derail discussions. And it can discourage the kind of honest exchanges that we depend on.



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Conclusions

So, to sum up. We are challenged by water and food shortages with the potential to dislocate thousands or millions of people. We are challenged to ensure that we always can access the fuel supplies that power our nations, and to use fuels that do not do long-term damage to our economies, or threaten our health and existence. We are challenged by the fact that terrorists and the tools of terrorism can circle the planet as quickly as a plane flight, and computer viruses can circle the planet in a blink of an eye. We are challenged by the fact that it is difficult to distinguish sometimes between news and “news.” We are challenged to respond to the 24 hour news cycle in a thoughtful and responsible way. While there will doubtless be others that crop up, it is clear that how we respond to at least these challenges will largely define the 21st Century.

The solution begins with leadership – with you.

In 1923, John Curtin described an English community organizer named Tom Mann as a person who had the ability to cast “bright lights on the otherwise darkened highway.”

That is the challenge of leadership. Let us hope and pray that we have the courage, the conviction, and the commitment to feed and power our people, to make cyberspace safe and peaceful, to halt the forces of terror, and to safeguard our information. To pay attention to the small fires, use the right equipment, anticipate abuses, and be prepared for any contingency.

Thank you.