



Policy, Guns and Money Special Episode: Strategic Vision 2020

Peter Jennings, Executive Director ASPI, in conversation with journalist and conference host, Stan Grant

Peter Jennings:

Hi, I'm Peter Jennings, I'm the Executive Director of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and you're listening to 'Policy, Guns and Money', the ASPI Podcast. I'm talking to Stan Grant, welcome, Stan, how are you?

Stan Grant:

Hi Peter, how are you? I love that title 'Policy, Guns and Money', a little steal from Warren Zevon. I like it.

Peter Jennings:

We had a long debate about whether we would use it and other people won out, Stan. So, it's, but no, look, it kind of plays to what we think is our strength and our focus in the organisation. So, we are interested in strategic policy, how governments make long term decisions, and of course, none of this exists without money. So, it kind of sums up what we're all about. That's the context. Stan, we're going to be embarking very soon on our conference, Strategic Vision 2020, which you're going to be the host, we're really pleased that you've agreed to do that. Thank you so much for that.

Stan Grant:

It's a pleasure.

Peter Jennings:

And I think what's really exciting about this is that we've been able to line up a really interesting, eclectic collection of people, three former prime ministers, who are going to be talking to you about different aspects of the world as we look at it in 2020, and it's a troubled world Stan, I have to say, I don't think in my lifetime I've seen as difficult and more complicated a period that we're going through as we are right now.

Stan Grant:

Yeah, it's, it's a convergence of so many things Peter. I think, you know, Coronavirus has only accelerated what was already happening in the world. I think, you look at the past 20 years or so, particularly with the United States, and as the US goes, so goes the rest of the world. But, from the attacks in 9/11, the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, the global financial crisis, the political polarisation of the United States set against the rise of China, increasing authoritarianism in other parts of the world, the rise of the far right as a blow back against immigration and refugees in Europe. All of these things have widened cracks that were already existing. I think we're really at a hinge point in history now and these are the things that I'd love to explore in the webinar series. But, this moment where we seem to be hitting the limits of liberal democracy and its capacity to govern over difference and a rising authoritarianism that appears increasingly sure of itself, more belligerent and more assertive, and not just in China, but in other parts of the world.

Peter Jennings:

Well, we are going to be starting on Wednesday, the 22nd of July, you'll be talking to John Howard and Kim Beazley, probably two of the most significant figures of Australian politics in the last fifty years or so. Of course, Howard, Prime Minister for twelve years. I think increasingly people look back

to Howard's time as a point of stability and sensible, if conservative, policy direction. Kim Beazley, often said to be the best prime minister we never had, Stan. How are you going to approach talking to these two significant Australian political figures in terms of, you know, getting their reflections on some of those big issues that you've just raised?

Stan Grant:

The wonderful thing about both men is that they are men you can engage with, who are introspective, also very sure of their ideas, but willing to engage with other ideas. If you look at the periods that they were in office, Kim Beazley, of course, long-time Defence Minister, former Ambassador to the United States as well, with a deep family degree in politics. The period that he covers was such a tumultuous period, post-Cold War, the triumph of liberal democracy, but then very quickly, the pushback against that, the unravelling of that. If you look at John Howard, of course, dealing with Australia's place in the world, there on the ground, let's not forget, on the day of the 9/11 attacks and that absolutely pivotal moment. I really want to explore with both men, the arc in their careers, those moments that they lived through, draw on that lived experience to try to chart a course ahead. Where does Australia now sit in the world when we are increasingly unsure of our place? Are we dealing with a rising China? Our biggest trading partner, but of course a country that challenges our own values and our capacity to represent those values. The United States, that clearly is not in the same position globally that it was during the heights of both of these men's political careers, the loss of prestige for the United States. I really want to explore with John Howard too, that decision to go into Iraq and what that meant for the world and subsequently the consequences of that, how he considers that now in the light of those consequences. And with Kim Beazley, as well, what he saw change in the United States in the Obama years leading up to the Trump years. One of the things I'd really like to explore with Kim is the Obama presidency, which, of course, was hailed with great hope, and particularly hailed in Europe, let's not forget he won the Nobel Peace Prize before he'd really done anything. But, if you look at the end of his presidency, I've been sceptical and critical perhaps, of his foreign affairs record. When you look at where he left the world, China increasingly assertive in the South China Sea, militarising those disputed islands; North Korea now a nuclear armed state; and the rise of Russia during that period, a Russia that has now re-emerged as a significant player in global affairs, particularly in the United States; and the Sino-Russia relationship that we often overlook, that is critical in geopolitics right now. There is so much to explore with these men and then bring that back to Australia, of course, and where Australia sits.

Peter Jennings:

So, Stan, in addition to Howard and Beazley, you're going to be talking to Samantha Power, who was of course, American representative to the United Nations under the Obama administration, you're going to be talking to Sir John Scarlett, the former head of British Secret Intelligence, who is a Russia specialist and spent a significant part of his career in Moscow. It really is a great line-up of people. I sort of wanted to get your perspective, as a professional journalist who's been in this business for a long period of time, how do you prepare for these things? You know, you'll be sitting down with some pretty significant global figures. What's your methodology for engaging with people like that and trying to draw the best out from them?

Stan Grant:

Peter, if I had to prepare now, it'd be too late. So, my approach to this is to always be prepared. I need to be prepared to sit down at any moment and engage intelligently, thoughtfully and in an informed way with anyone at any time. I really, I think, sharpened those skills when I worked for CNN as a global correspondent for more than a decade, traveling the world, getting to experience this firsthand, but at any moment you can be put into a conversation with significant political figures. You can't prepare, you need to always be prepared. You know, I've always had a motto that I run on fear, I can never know enough. I can never know enough. So, I read constantly, I read widely, I'm immersed in this, there's not a day goes by that I don't work. Every single day. And I write. And I think writing is significant, too, because if you're not writing, you're not developing your thoughts, you're not challenging your ideas. I don't believe anything until it's been written, until I've written my own ideas down. So, you know, I approach this that I already have a reservoir of knowledge that I try to be as

knowledgeable about various parts of the world as I can. I also look for where I can connect that knowledge. So, if you're talking about Indonesia, for instance, how does Indonesia connect with the rest of the world? How does Indonesia connect with the rise of China, with Russia, which is increasingly looking at taking and increasing its Pacific and Asian footprint? You know, if you're talking to someone like Carl Bildt, you're talking about Europe. You're talking about the changes in Europe. What does the rise of an illiberal democracy under Orban in Hungary mean for Europe? What does Brexit mean? What do the wars of Syria and Libya mean for Europe and the influx of refugees? I really want to explore too, that critical moment when Europe did not back the United States in the Iraq venture. And I think we are still unravelling the consequences of that and Europe now being at this point where it's unsure of the US, maybe living in a post-American world, unsure of NATO. So, I'm constantly reading and ranging across different issues. And then when I come to the specifics, it's easy to go to a particular individual and look specifically at what they've had to say, to be able to bounce ideas back off them. But if you are not prepared, if you are not ready at a moment's notice, it is too late. And I'm always running on fear.

Peter Jennings:

That's excellent, Stan. It reminds me of advice I used to give when I was a senior public servant about how do you prepare for appearing in front of parliamentary committees, because Defence was a fantastic organisation at giving people thick briefing books and I used to say, look, if you need to refer to the briefing book, it's too late. You haven't actually got yourself across your responsibilities in the portfolio. You have to be ready to go at a moment's notice. Look, I think it's going to be a great conversation, Stan. I did just want to, in finishing, touch on Four Corners last night, which was a program that I watched and found actually very moving. Listening to your reflections on the Black Lives Matter movement, your own experience as an Indigenous man, there was some really great moments, seeing you with your parents I thought was very lovely, but also some pretty sad moments frankly, as we reflect on how we've messed this story up so terribly over the years. None of this is anything that you can sort of just put away as you walk into the door for a day's professional work. How does being an Australian Indigenous man impact on your daily life? How will you bring this to the interviews that we're going to be, that you're going to be, conducting for us here at ASPI?

Stan Grant:

That's a really good question. I always say to people that, you know, I am, there are many layers to my identity. I am Indigenous, I'm also an Australian person, I engage with the world, I'm a cosmopolitan person. I've been a citizen of the world. I think I've traversed that fault line, and I think this is a fundamental fault line in the world now, between belonging and roots and cosmopolitanism. Yes, it's important to belong. Yes, it's important to have an identity. But identity should not be the thing that frames all of you or so clearly defines you. And I think the challenge of the world is that pushback against modernity and liberalism that looks at a more capacious sense of identity and a cosmopolitanism, both in a political sense with a political multilateralism and pooled sovereignty, versus a blow back against that that has seen people increasingly define themselves in exclusive ways, usually around some grievance of history. You know, Xi Jinping talks about the 100 years of humiliation, Viktor Orban uses history to galvanise people, Vladimir Putin plays that line, Donald Trump plays that line. So, I've really grappled with my own sense of my place in the world and how do I engage with the world beyond my own? How do I see myself in the face of others? And, you know, that has really filled out my international interests in my journalism. I see the eyes with the eyes of being an Indigenous Australian looking for a place in a broader world and I think I'd like to bring those sorts of ideas to this discussion, because I think fundamentally that is what we're looking at in the world. The question of, all the conflicts post-Cold War are the conflicts of identity: the Balkans, North Korea, South Korea, Pakistan, India, the rise of China, North Korea, Syria, the Arab Spring, ISIS, al-Qaeda, the Taliban, these wars of identity, and I'd love to be able to explore that with people, too. And fundamentally, Peter, you know, my political philosophy has always broadly been that I believe fundamentally that for its faults and its chequered history that liberal democracy still remains the most effective way of giving us the freedoms that we cherish as individuals and the greatest capacity for building a political architecture that can govern over diversity. And what people were challenged with now, both Indigenous Australia, Black Lives Matter, all of those things, and

people who are looking to engage with that and saying how do we allow the space for liberal democracy and challenge some of those ideas to look again at its history, to look again at some of its foundation for ideas, but do so in a way that is inclusive and strengthening to those fundamental principles. Like the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which says indigenous people can find their aspirations and their political belonging in a constitution that was never written to include us in the first place. That is a fundamental strength of liberal democracy. So, that's always been my starting point: identity, cosmopolitanism, globalism, liberal democracy and the challenge is that that's under threat now, challenged by this rising authoritarianism. So, I think that fills out my worldview and I'll bring that to this discussion, and I want to traverse those fault lines of identity that I think are front and centre in our world today.

Peter Jennings:

Stan, I can't think of anyone that's better placed than you to have this discussion with some really fascinating Australian and global figures. It's, you know, frankly, it's just going to be, it's just going to be a brilliant experience, I think. And, you know, with you, with your background and your knowledge of the world, being able to, you know, share time with these people I think is actually going to be a real privilege to be listening in. And I'll be very pleased to be part of the after party because, every week I'll be talking to ASPI colleagues to reflect on some of the discussions that you've had and to put our own thoughts and questions as the conference goes on. Stan, it's great working with you, as always, we're really looking forward to this. Thanks for agreeing to do it and let's press on. Can I ask everyone, please register if you want to be a part of this conversation, you will be able to put questions, which Stan will be able to relay to our speakers towards the end of each conversation, and it's all free folks, brought to you with the sponsorship of Thales Australia, which we're very proud to be working with. Stan, once again. Thank you. Looking forward to this discussion over the next few weeks.

Stan Grant:

So excited, so excited. I'm really, this is, as I said, for a geek like me, it's Christmas come early.

Peter Jennings:

Indeed, I agree. Just imagine, we'd have to be working if we weren't doing this Stan. Thanks, mate. We'll talk to you soon. Bye now.

Stan Grant:

Talk to you soon, bye.