Whitlam Institute
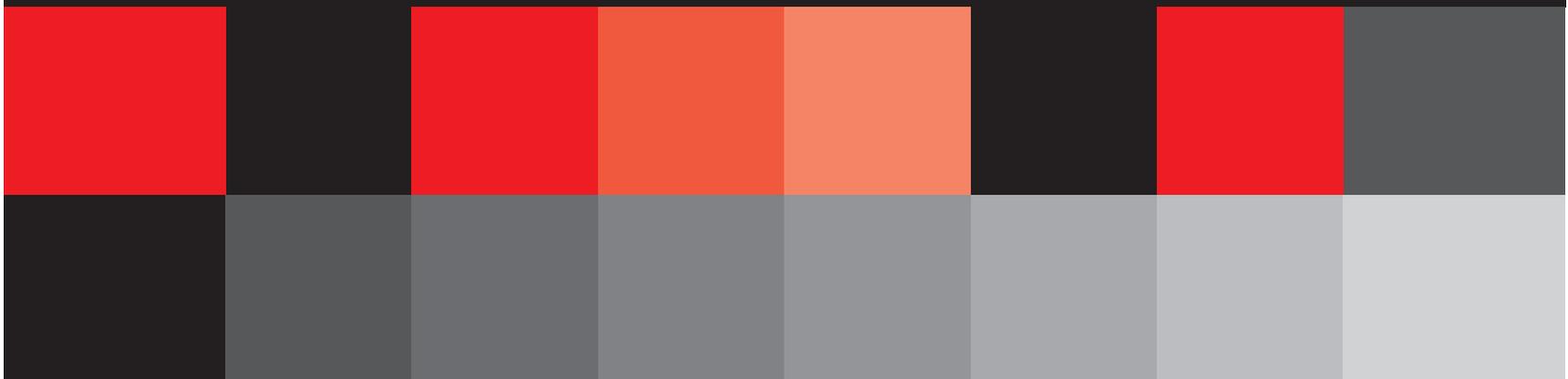### WITHIN WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

PERSPECTIVES

The Role of International NGOs:
The International Crisis Group as a Case Study

Professor the Hon Gareth Evans AC QC FASSA FAIIA

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Professor Evans has been Chancellor of the Australian National University since January 2010. He was a Cabinet Minister in the Hawke and Keating Labor Governments from 1983-96, in the posts of Attorney General, Minister for Resources and Energy, Minister for Transport and Communications and - from 1988-96 - Foreign Minister. During his 21 years in Australian politics he was Leader of the Government in the Senate (1993-96) and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the House of Representatives (1996-98). From 2000 to 2009 he was President and CEO of the Brussels-based International Crisis Group, the independent global conflict prevention and resolution organisation.

He has written or edited 12 books - including *Nuclear Weapons: The State of Play 2015* (co-author), *Inside the Hawke-Keating Government: A Cabinet Diary* (2014), and *The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and for All* (2008); has published many newspaper articles and over 100 journal articles and chapters on foreign relations, human rights and legal and constitutional reform; has honorary doctorates from Melbourne, Sydney, Carleton and Queen's Universities; and has lectured at many universities around the world, including Oxford, Cambridge, Princeton, Yale, Stanford and the Central European University.

He has co-chaired two major International Commissions, on Intervention and State Sovereignty (2000-01), and Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (2008-10), and has been a member of a number of others. He currently Co-Chairs the International Advisory Board of the New-York based Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, and is Patron and Emeritus Convenor of the Asia Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament.

Gareth Evans was made a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) in 2012 for his "eminent service to international relations, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, as an adviser to governments on global policy matters, to conflict prevention and resolution, and to arms control and disarmament", and in the same year was elected an honorary Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences of Australia (FASSA). *Foreign Policy* magazine cited him as one of the Top 100 Global Thinkers for 2011 "for making 'the responsibility to protect' more than academic". In 2010 he was awarded the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute Four Freedoms Award for Freedom from Fear, for his pioneering work on the Responsibility to Protect concept and his contributions to conflict prevention and resolution, arms control and disarmament.

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Foreword

The Honourable Gareth Evans AC QC served in the Australian Parliament for twenty-one years as Senator (1978-1996) then as the Member for Holt until his resignation in 1999. During the Hawke-Keating years he held a number of ministerial portfolios but most notably as Labor's longest-serving Minister for Foreign Affairs (1988-1996). He served as President of the International Crisis Group throughout the first decade of this century. He is a noted policy 'thinker'; academic; author.

Evans is uniquely equipped to reflect upon the role of international non-government organisations in the evolution of the more complex set of relationships and institutional arrangements that distinguish trans-national governance in this modern era. His diverse experiences emerge throughout this paper[1]. However, it is the particular experience as President of the International Crisis Group that most clearly informs this wide-ranging consideration of a new global environment in which "Individual states and state-centric structures no longer enjoy a monopoly over the collective efforts to improve international society and world order".

These are difficult matters that directly affect the security, freedom and livelihoods of literally millions of people. They are developing against a backdrop of devastating failures in the past and the emergence of new risks. Yet, as Evans elaborates in very practical terms, there are sound grounds for continued hope.

We could all do with a little of that.

Professor Carolyn Sappideen   Eric Sidoti
School of Law   Director, Whitlam Institute

[1] This paper was first delivered at a conference on The Architecture of Transnational Governance: The Role of Non-State Actors, co-hosted by the Western Sydney University Law School and the Whitlam Institute on 23 October 2015.

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The Role of International NGOs:
The International Crisis Group as a Case Study

The global issues with which policymakers the world over are now grappling cover a formidably broad canvas of economic, environmental, social, developmental and security issues. The difficulty that traditional governments and intergovernmental institutions find in dealing with these problems is compounded by the very visible rise in salience and policy impact in recent decades, both for good and evil, of non-state actors.

Those actors extend across the spectrum from extremist terrorist organizations, to multinational corporations, through to influential non-governmental organizations like Human Rights Watch, my own International Crisis Group (about which I'll talk in detail today) and Médecins Sans Frontières. Individual states and state-centric structures no longer enjoy a monopoly over the collective efforts to improve international society and world order. They share the crowded governance stage with many other influential players.

It is not at all obvious that our present institutions of regional and global governance are sufficiently fit for purpose when it comes to getting effective cooperative international action of the kind necessary to achieve so many global public goods, or to resolve so many kinds of problems that are beyond the capacity of any country to address alone. To find effective solutions to most current global problems there are, in the very useful analysis of my ANU colleague Ramesh Thakur, [1] five big gaps that need to be closed, which we have done so far only very erratically and incompletely.

There is the *knowledge* gap (ensuring that all the relevant players know that the problem exists), the *normative* gap (ensuring that there is a will to resolve the problem, and some sense of the standards of behaviour applicable), the *policy* gap (generating understanding and agreement about the right levers to pull in response to a particular problem), the *institutional* gap (having the machinery to deliver effective results), and the *compliance* gap (ensuring that the decisions of international executive or judicial bodies are actually carried out).

1   See Thomas Weiss and Ramesh Thakur, *Global Governance and the UN*, Indiana University Press, 2010

In the course of your discussions today I am sure you will be identifying many ways in which different kinds of non-state actors can and should play a part in filling one or more of these manifest gaps in the architecture of global governance. Rather than try to survey the whole field, I thought it might be useful to offer you a case study of how one particular non-state actor with which I was rather intimately familiar for a decade of my life, the International Crisis Group, has gone about the task of helping to fill some of these gaps – knowledge gaps, to some extent normative gaps, and above all policy gaps – in the area of the prevention and resolution of crisis and conflict.

With a great many civil society organizations now overtly attempting to influence policymaking, increased attention is being focused on how activity and visibility translates into actual policy *influence*. What works and what doesn't? What makes for an *effective* international non-governmental organization? And how can any NGO make a difference – as I think it's fair to say Crisis Group has – when it comes specifically to an area as sensitive and difficult, and traditionally the domain of sovereign states and intergovernmental organizations, as the prevention and resolution of crisis and conflict?

Where Crisis Group Fits among Non-State Actors

There are an estimated 40,000 NGOs operating across state borders, and many millions more within them, and the overwhelming majority of them focus primarily on health, education, welfare, economics, development, industry, energy, the environment, human rights, justice and other social policy and governance issues – not in the peace and security area that is occupied internationally by Crisis Group and a few hundred other organizations.

Within that peace and security band of the spectrum, Crisis Group does seem to be generally regarded around the world as the pre-eminent international organisation of its kind working on the prevention, management and resolution of deadly conflict and man-made crisis – although the sceptics among you might well say that's for the good reason that it's the *only* one of its precise kind, not fitting exactly into any of the familiar descriptive boxes by which we usually catalogue organizations in this space!

NGOs that work wholly or significantly in the peace and security area do usually fit squarely within one or other of three such boxes, sometimes rather unkindly labelled as 'thinkers', 'talkers' and 'doers' respectively. They tend to be either pure think-tanks, research institutions or policy

forums (like Chatham House, CFR, IISS, Brookings or our own Lowy Institute); or overwhelmingly campaign-focused advocacy organizations (like Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, Enough, Kony2012 or Global Zero); or field-based, on-the-ground operational organisations, engaged on the one hand in activities like mediation, capacity building and confidence building (like Search for Common Ground, or the Community of Sant'Egidio, Independent Diplomat or Martti Ahtisaari's Crisis Management Initiative), or on the other hand humanitarian relief operations (like Oxfam, World Vision, MSF and a myriad of others).

Crisis Group is best thought of as a rather distinctive combination of all three categories. It is by no means wholly a think tank (although it consistently ranks very highly in the University of Pennsylvania's annual McGann rankings of the world's top think tanks), because its work is both narrower (in the sense of being geographically rather than thematic-issue focused) and wider (because regularly involving intense advocacy of positions taken, not just analysis), and also different methodologically (because of its strong field-base) than most think tanks. It is not a campaign organization in the familiar grass-roots, or now social-media sense, but it is certainly a high-level advocacy one, seeking constantly to communicate directly with government policymakers and those who influence them, and with a strong media profile.

Crisis Group is not really an operational organization either. It is certainly not a humanitarian relief body (though it started life with some aspirations in that area, as I'll mention in a moment), and nor is it engaged directly in conflict resolution activity like mediation (though it has certainly closely advised behind the scenes many who have played those direct roles). But it is an organization that shares with the 'doers' the characteristic of being very strongly field-based in its staffing profile – not something very commonly found in either international think tanks or campaign organizations.

What Crisis Group does, in short, is three basic things. First, it produces field-based, analytical research seeking to identify, understand and describe in detail the dynamics of situations where there is concern about the outbreak, continuation, escalation or recurrence of deadly conflict. Second, it seeks to translate that analytical understanding into policy prescriptions that are both imaginative and practical – identifying levers and tools that can be used, and the actors, local and international, best placed to use them. Third, it engages in high-level advocacy, designed to persuade policymakers, directly or through those who influence them, not least the media, to undertake the necessary action.

I'll come back shortly with specific examples of how all this works in practice, but first let me give you a brief description of how Crisis Group originated and evolved, its size and scope of activity, and how it is structured and funded.

History and Structure

The idea for the Group was born in Sarajevo in 1993 during the horror of the Balkans war, in conversations involving US diplomat Mort Abramowitz, World Bank Vice President official (later Deputy Secretary-General) Mark Malloch Brown, and a larger than life Texan engineer by trade, and energiser by disposition, Fred Cuny, who had almost single-handedly saved Sarajevo during the siege by constructing a water supply system. They felt there needed to be a new kind of international organization, with which many familiar and forceful names could be associated, which could effectively send wake up calls to the international community to respond more effectively to unfolding man-made catastrophes. The idea was basically to get policy leaders to think about things they didn't want to think about, and do things they didn't want to do.

A series of preparatory meetings took place over the next two years in the UK and US, driven primarily by Mort Abramowitz, involving a significant cast of former presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers, potential financial supporters like George Soros, and journalists and activists like Samantha Power (now US ambassador to the UN) – who later all became Board members, with former Senator George Mitchell the first Chair. One of the liveliest issues to be debated was whether the new group should play not only an assessment, advice and advocacy role, but also aspire to do the kind of coordination of humanitarian relief efforts that Fred Cuny had begun to pioneer (i.e. to seek a role in filling institutional gaps as well as knowledge, normative and policy ones). Given the notorious problems, which continue to this day, of herding NGO cats (let alone government ones) in this area, that role was probably always hopelessly ambitious, but although it took several years to finally fade from the screen, it became largely academic for the group following the tragic abduction and murder of Cuny, who would have led it, on a mission to Chechnya in early 1995.

Enough resources were put together for the International Crisis Group to start life in 1995 as a tiny two-person operation in a small back-room office in London, following a tin-shaking exercise around the world led by former US Congressman Steven Solarz, who persuaded me as then Australian Foreign Minister to provide some start-up funding, but was less successful with others (one European

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foreign minister telling him 'so you are trying to get us to give you a golden stick to beat us over the head'!).

The organization's initial focus was on building a presence in, and energising an effective policy response to, the ongoing crisis in the Balkans, and it quickly built a high-quality field staff there. It rapidly acquired a reputation for shrewd analysis and hard-headed advice (on issues like the dangers of an early rush to elections in Bosnia, before new civil-society actors could consolidate support), and first came into public prominence in the late 1990s working to mobilise support for military intervention in Kosovo in the face of another looming genocidal catastrophe. Crisis Group acquired from the outset a reputation for being, if the circumstances demanded it, at the non-wimpish end of the NGO spectrum!

But there was still a long way to go before the initial dreams of its founders were realised. The first director, former Save the Children head Nicholas Hinton, died in 1997 during a field visit, and the initial managerial replacement arrangements did not work out. Crisis Group had moved its headquarters to Brussels – partly so that it would operate more like a genuinely international and less an Anglo-American organisation, and partly to expand its fund-raising reach – and built up a small central team there, as well as having small teams in the field in the Balkans and Central Africa. But by late 1999 the total size of the organisation was still only around twenty, some serious internal morale problems had become evident, and forward funding commitments – then running at around $2 million a year, mainly from government contributions – were beginning to dry up.

This was the situation I inherited when I took over as President and CEO of the organization in January 2000, recruited by its founding fathers – all of whom I had known as Foreign Minister, and who knew both that I had some understanding of what the organization was capable of achieving, and was in the market for a potentially interesting international job following three years suffering acute relevance deprivation syndrome (as I labelled it at the time) after the Labor Government was defeated in 1996. What I had thought of initially as a two to three year job – and what I thought after my first week of getting my head around the organization's problems would be more like a two to three *month* one! – eventually turned into nearly a ten year one. Unquestionably (with the exception only of my period as Foreign Minister) it was the most stimulating and satisfying job I have ever had.

I won't burden you with a blow by blow account of how things evolved during that decade, except to say that two

early factors were crucial: the willingness of the Board to support a rapid and ambitious expansion from a strong Balkans and very small African focus to a genuinely global one, and the willingness of George Soros to support that ambition with a grant of $2.5 million, made on the condition that I leveraged it to get double his contribution elsewhere. With this kind of backing, and the contribution of the incredibly talented people I was able to retain or recruit, and an incredibly distinguished Board (whose chairs since George Mitchell have included Marti Ahtisaari, Chris Patten, Tom Pickering, and Mark Malloch Brown) Crisis Group had grown very dramatically indeed, by the time I left to return to Australia six years ago.

In terms of staff it grew from just over twenty to over 130 (with 60-90 interns a year as well, working three months or more); in terms of budget it grew from just over $US 2 million to over $15 and heading for $17 million; and in terms of countries and conflict situations covered, it grew from a handful to over 60 across four continents. Crisis Group was also by 2009 producing annually around 100 substantial published reports each year (each of which were sent to over 25,000 specifically targeted recipients and over 130,000 subscribers). And it was generating over 200 authored op-eds in the world's major papers, over 20,000 separate media mentions, and some 2.4 million visits to our website.

That coverage and activity level has been maintained (with a few bumps along the way associated with the global financial crisis and its aftermath, which placed huge stresses on NGO fundraising the world over) under my successors Louise Arbour – the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Chief Prosecutor of the Yugoslav and Rwanda tribunals, and Canadian Supreme Court justice, and now Jean-Marie Guéhenno, a former very distinguished French jurist, diplomat and scholar who headed the UN's Department of Peace Keeping Operations from 2000 to 2008.

Crisis Group staff now work from major offices in Brussels, New York, Washington and London and nearly 30 other field offices from which they cover conflicts and crises on a full-focus or watching-brief basis in over 70 countries. Apart from its publications output and media mentions, Crisis Group is now playing the facebook-twitter social media game with an intensity and effectiveness that just wasn't part of my own repertoire at all.

The current budget of the organization is around $19 million. In round figures that income comes, and has been coming for some time, roughly 50 per cent from governments; 20 per cent from major institutional foundations (mainly in the US), and 30 per cent from

individuals, corporates, and gala dinners and other fundraising functions. Very importantly, and unusually, the bulk of Crisis Group's funding has for the most part come in the form of *core* rather than specific project support, for a long time in a ratio of around 80:20, which has given the organization a hugely welcome degree of flexibility in the way it mobilises its resources.

Activity and Impact

What matters more than all the size and output figures is of course the impact on policy and action that Crisis Group can reasonably claim to have made. However much donors yearn for quantitative benchmarks, measuring the achievements of an organisation like Crisis Group is a very inexact science, particularly given that its mission is at least as much about conflict and crisis prevention as well as resolution – where the desired outcome is for something *not* to happen, rather than to fix it when it does. One way of measuring may be to count the take-up rate on the many specific recommendations that are made in Crisis Group reports – and when that is done, it has usually been possible to count over a third of those recommendations bearing fruit within a year of publication.

But sequence doesn't prove causality, and much will depend on how timidly or ambitiously the recommendations are framed. The general approach that I adopted towards crafting recommendations – and I think this continues to be Crisis Group orthodoxy – was to have recommendations that were 'over the horizon, but not out to space'. They would not state the obvious or trivial, but try to identify courses of action that would be genuine game-changers – and that while perhaps outside the relevant players' current comfort zones, nonetheless were by no means unachievable in the real world if the necessary political will and leverage were exercised.

At the end of the day, assessments of the Group's effectiveness have to be essentially qualitative, made by those not trying to count numbers but rather bringing experienced judgement to bear on whether, and to what extent, it has actually made a difference. By that score – with multiple high level endorsements of the group's value-added on the record from senior figures across the globe, and with governments (the hardest taskmasters of all, when it comes to justifying expenditure on a largely intangible product) voting with their purses year after year – Crisis Group's impact has been ranked very highly indeed.

That impact is perhaps best understood by describing three distinct dimensions in which Crisis Group's role plays out. The mission is always the same – the prevention and resolution of deadly conflict; and so is the basic three-legged

methodology – field-based analytical research, practical recommendations, and advocacy to achieve action. But there are three different kinds of intended impact.

First, identifying the right policy responses. Crisis Group's core business remains the production of full-length, 20-30 pages on average, reports and briefings – scores of them every year – analysing in meticulous detail challenges and opportunities for good policy arising at all stages of the conflict cycle: long term prevention, short term prevention, conflict management, conflict settlement, and post-conflict peacebuilding.

Whether it's been showing the impact of educational institutions on Islamic extremism in Pakistan and Indonesia, or mapping possible solutions to the Israel-Palestine conflict or Iran nuclear crisis, or identifying ways of making the national army in the Congo behave better, or securing better control of public revenues in post conflict-Liberia, or what's been described as 'gold standard' analysis of the Jemaah Islamiyah movement in South East Asia and how to respond to it, or addressing literally hundreds of other similarly important problems, Crisis Group has been there, explaining, cajoling and very often succeeding in achieving the necessary policy changes. I'm not sure that Crisis Group has done any better than anyone else in proposing solutions to the catastrophe in Syria, but it hasn't been for want of trying.

And those analytical reports and briefings have been the foundation for the often-important behind the scenes support for conflict mediation processes that the Group has given – offering a flow of information and ideas about both process and substance – in situations like Southern Sudan, Kosovo, Northern Uganda and Aceh.

Second, ringing early warning alarm bells. Crisis Group has played a widely acknowledged central role in early warning alarm bell ringing, month after month through the *CrisisWatch* bulletin, which monitors the deterioration or otherwise of conflict and potential conflict situations across the world, and in specific cases like Darfur in 2003-04 and Ethiopia-Eritrea in 2007 where we could reasonably claim to have been among the very first urging government, UN and regional organisation action, and in the latter to have actually energised the Security Council process which stopped the outbreak of a whole new war.

In addition to alarm-bell ringing in specific cases, Crisis Group worked hard, certainly during my time there, to put in place the general intellectual and institutional foundations for effective early warning and response in the specific case of mass atrocity crimes. Drawing from our early organisational experience in responding to such

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catastrophes in the Balkans and Central Africa (and in my own case Cambodia), Crisis Group played a quite central role in supporting the emergence and application of the new global norm of 'the responsibility to protect', which offers for the first time in centuries the prospect of a reflex, consensual, effective response to future catastrophes of this kind – with the global reaction to the killing and ethnic cleansing in Kenya in early 2008 being in dramatic contrast to the indifference and impotence which greeted the Rwandan genocide fourteen years earlier, and the full potential reach of the norm being on graphic display in Cote d'Ivoire and Libya in 2011, if not, unhappily, in Syria since then.

Third, reconceptualising issues. Beyond all that again, I think it is fair to say that Crisis Group has had a major impact – significantly greater than other comparable organisations – on the way in which a number of major, intractable conflict situations have been conceptualised, and where necessary reconceptualised, by the international policy community. It has challenged received wisdom, and been way ahead of the curve, on a number of important issues. For example, from my own period as its President:

- Arguing the need (spelt out in a long series of reports since 2002) to recognise that the Musharraf military regime in Pakistan was the problem there, not the solution.

- Insisting in the case of the Israel-Palestine conflict that Oslo-style incrementalism was dead, and it could only ever be resolved by an endgame-first rather than incremental policy approach (first spelt out in a series of reports in 2002 that lay behind the Geneva initiative and most of the detailed debate since). That this conflict remains at an impasse is I think not a comment on the proven inadequacy of that policy approach, but rather of leadership on all sides willing to apply it.

- Arguing from the mid-2000s that the Iran nuclear issue was potentially solvable (as has now at last been demonstrated) by an approach which did not seek to reverse Tehran's fissile material capability, but rather to draw the red-line against actual weaponisation.

- Arguing the need to understand the huge differences between different strands of Islamic activism (missionary, essentially democratic, and intractably violent respectively), spelt out in the seminal *Understanding Islamism* report in 2005;

- Recognising the impossibility of trying to outlaw or marginalise Hamas, given the reality of its popular support in Palestine.

- Arguing over and again in relation to Myanmar – long before the recent events that have given us all some hope – that the West should recalibrate its hardline sanctions policy as counterproductive to achieving the necessary political change.

What Makes for NGO Success

In my experience of working in and with a number of NGOs, not just Crisis Group, over the course of my now rather long public policy career, I have come to regard four criteria as absolutely essential for an NGO to become successful, and to remain so over time.

Meeting a need. It is crucial for a start to be seen to be adding value: meeting a need that is not currently being met well, sufficiently or at all. In the peace and security area the primary unmet need seen by Crisis Group's founders was to compensate for the growing incapacity of governments to have an accurate take on what was happening on the ground – the issues that were resonating and the personalities that were driving them. For a variety of reasons, mainly security and budgetary, traditional diplomats have not been performing this function in as much breadth and depth as they previously have – it's hard to get out and about when you are locked up in a fortress or have minimal staff resources – and both early warning and effective prevention capacity have suffered as a result. Another endemic problem with diplomatic reporting is its tendency to stick within unadventurous analytic boundaries, over-conscious of positions already staked out by ministers – or alliance partners.

Open source reporting and commentary by the media has not done much to fill these gaps; because of resource shortages, particularly in the quality print media, international media coverage of sensitive and difficult situations has been dumbing down to a perhaps even greater extent than professional diplomacy.

With its teams of highly mobile, linguistically expert analysts on the ground, and uncluttered by existing orthodoxies and inclined to support Deng Xiao Ping's dictum that "what matters is not whether the cat is black or white but whether it catches the mouse", Crisis Group has been seen as very much helping to fill some of these clear gaps.

Clarity of mission. The most successful NGOs tend to be those that find a very clear niche and stick to it. When Amnesty International broadened its focus from traditional political and civil rights to the whole range of economic, social and cultural rights, it for quite a long time seemed to lose its direction and impact. Crisis Group has resisted the temptation to broaden its focus from conflict prevention and resolution issues to human

rights advocacy, which sometimes does lead to a different take, e.g. on peace v. justice issues (especially amnesties in ongoing conflict situations) where Crisis Group and Human Rights Watch have on occasion been very much at odds. It has also regularly resisted the perhaps even greater temptation to move into think tank territory and apply its experience in individual cases writing reports which theorise and proselytise on thematic issues. An occasional exception has been made, e.g. the report on *Understanding Islamism*, but only in contexts where the organization felt a strong practical need to clarify an issue that was inhibiting conflict prevention and resolution.

The most insidious temptation to muddy an organisation's mission comes when money is potentially available for some project which is not its core business, and for which it does not have readily available internal expertise. Resources get hired which are then difficult to fire, more project funding in that marginal activity is then chased to keep the organisation ticking over – and the organisation is on a fast track to losing its way.

Independence. Any non-governmental organisation in the business of giving advice it wants to be taken seriously must be absolutely scrupulous about being, and being seen to be, independent of particular vested interests. Some organisations like Human Rights Watch solve the problem of potential government influence by banning government funding absolutely. Crisis Group doesn't do that but has always been absolutely insistent on saying whatever needed to be said, however much it might offend current or potential donors, and letting the chips fall where they may, and in practice governments have been remarkably tolerant of specific criticism, provided it is well-evidenced and well-argued. The Group has been periodically attacked for the makeup of its Board – what the *New Left Review* described in 2010 as a 'rogue's gallery' of 'poachers turned gamekeepers', and a blog on the site calling itself *Electronic Intifada* in 2012 described as a 'blood-soaked elite' – but I don't think any fair-minded observer would claim that that has translated into any consistent ideological position in its reporting and recommendations. If there has been any dominant ideology over the years it has been simply pragmatism – what is most likely to work in preventing and resolving deadly conflict.

Nor do I think it possible to find any trimming of any kind in response to the views of foundation, corporate or individual supporters. George Soros has been from the beginning a significant donor, and a key member of the Board, but he deeply believes in the contest of opinion, and he has been the last person to insist on his own views being embraced. Of course it makes it easier, at least optically, if no one donor has a really dominant stake in the organisation, and

Crisis Group certainly now (if not during its earliest years) has that luxury, with no one stake-holder contributing more than 10 per cent of the yearly budget.

Professionalism. The final criterion that has to be met by an NGO that wants to be taken seriously, at least by government policy makers, is absolute professionalism: if you want to meet governments on their home ground, you have to provide product of a quality that the best of them are used to. That meant for me, when I was leading Crisis Group, being absolutely obsessive about the quality of research, writing and presentation in our reporting; being obsessive about making corrections on the record if we ever made an error – easy at least on the website if not in already distributed printed material; and obsessive about consistency of our policy positions over time – not to the extent of never changing positions if circumstances changed, which would be mindless, but always, if such changes were demanded, explaining why they were made in subsequent reporting. I have never doubted the extent to which professionalism in these senses played over time in Crisis Group's favour, distinguished our product from a great deal of lighter weight journalism, and distinguishes it now from a great deal of the rapid fire blogging which is now clogging so much of the internet. But maybe I am just an old fogey in this respect.

Just a final personal note in conclusion. There's no doubt that you need a certain masochistic streak to get involved in the conflict prevention and containment business, and even more so to do it – after you have been in government – at the NGO level, when you are at least one remove from the decision-making action. When the focus is on prevention, and the blood isn't yet running in the streets, the media don't find it nearly as fascinating as peacemaking, and the attention of decision makers is hard to grab. The most frustrating thing of all is that when a government or an intergovernmental body, urged on by NGOs like Crisis Group, does actually put together a conflict prevention or containment strategy which triumphantly succeeds – so that instead of the feared violence nothing at all happens – then you can be almost certain that nobody will notice!

The frustrations notwithstanding, I found this a deeply satisfying business to be in. Nothing is worse to contemplate – against the background of all the horror that has been wrought this last century – than the thought of the pain and terror and misery that lies ahead for so many men, women and children if we fail yet again to prevent what is preventable, and deadly conflict breaks out. To play a part, however small, in making that horror just a little less likely, as I think Crisis Group can

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reasonably claim to have done, is to be as richly rewarded as one could ever be.

And that I think has been the experience, in one way or another, of legions of people around the world who have chosen to spend the whole or significant parts of their lives working with civil society organizations. There are plenty of non-state actors who have been manifestly evil, or who have contributed far more problems than solutions to the task of global governance. But there are a great many others who have been unequivocally a force for good, and I hope and expect that their influence will continue.

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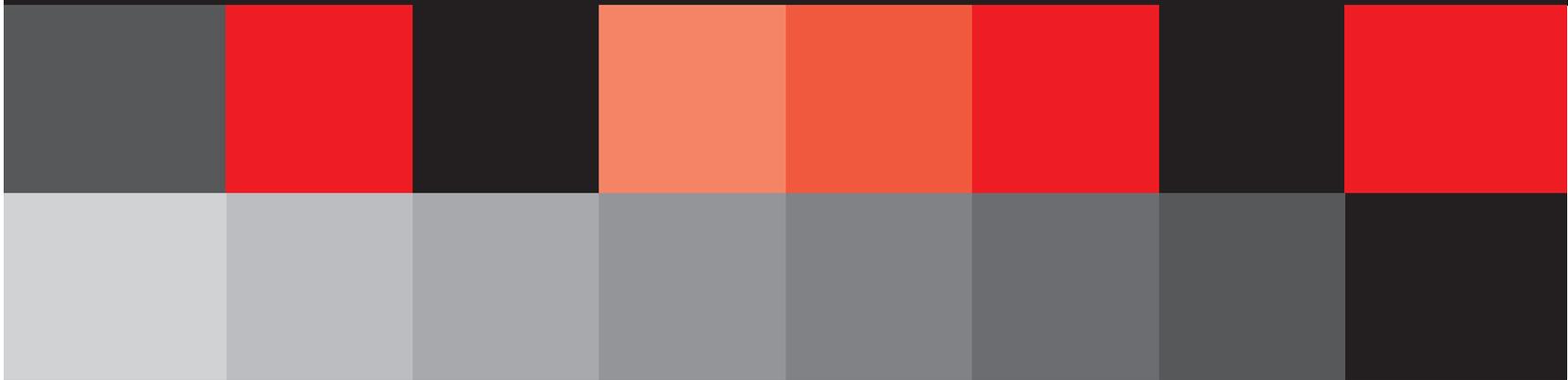The Whitlam Institute within Western Sydney University

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