Global Instabilities: 101 years after the commencement of World War I

Professor Wayne Cristaudo
Professor of Political Science, Charles Darwin University

Professor Wayne Cristaudo lectures in the School of Creative Arts and Humanities at Charles Darwin University.

He has held positions at the University of Adelaide and the University of Hong Kong. He has also lectured in Europe, the USA and China. He has written and edited 17 books (one of which has been translated into Chinese) and special journal issues on areas as diverse as political philosophy, religion and politics, revolution, love and evil, metaphysics, literature, and European identities. He is presently writing a book on philosophy in the social sciences and the social circulation of ideas.
Professorial Lecture Series

Global Instabilities: 101 years after the commencement of World War I

Professor Wayne Cristaudo
Professor of Political Studies

Tuesday 16 June 2015
Global Instabilities: 101 years after the commencement of World War I

Professor Wayne Cristaudo

I thank you for this opportunity to reflect upon World War I, or the Great War as it is also known, and its relevance to our present geopolitical circumstance. In this talk I will provide a rapid overview of the geopolitics of the last century, of how they were deeply connected to World War I, and then compare our current circumstances with those at the time of the War. I will conclude by outlining what I think is a possible, albeit, worst case geopolitical conflagration.

World War I drew every inhabited continent into its maw. It was not the first war to take place on several continents – the Seven Years War (1754–63) involving Europe, North and Central America, India, the West African coast, and the Philippines had achieved that dubious feat – but it forced a precarious kind of global connectedness. The precariousness of that connectedness would play itself out ideologically in the next world war and the Cold War. It is still being played out today.

Going to War
The forces that culminated in the outbreak of World War I had been mounting over time. This was as true of the military build-up, as of the imperial and nationalist tensions, as of the fears that led the great powers to ensure their protection by forming alliances of such magnitude that an enemy would be very careful about going to war. The Bismarckian strategy of balancing power had worked well enough – except for those who suffered defeat at Bismarck’s hands – but it was precisely the magnitude of those great powers that meant the War was not a relatively brief affair, as had been the initial hope of the Kaiser.

War in the early 20th Century was seen as intrinsic to the ‘nature of things’ and hence enmity was an ever vital presence. In addition each empire and nation had its grievances, and hence each had its own particular reasons for going to war. For the French, the bitterness about Bismarck’s annexation of Alsace-Lorraine lingered hard.
France’s economic industrial interests in Serbia and Russia were also significant, and those interests drew them into the alliance with Russia. For their part, the Germans retained memories of what Napoleon had inflicted upon them. This simply cannot be underestimated if one wants to understand Bismarck’s imperial ambition, and the mood of the Germans. Going even deeper into German social memory, religious divisions following the Reformation had culminated in the destruction of the German Empire and the total horror of the Thirty Years War. The desire for a united Reich (which was also to play a major role in the support behind Hitler) went hand in hand with a determination never to suffer humiliation at the hands of others again. This was also behind Germany wanting a strong central alliance with Austria.\textsuperscript{2} For their part, the Austro-Hungarians needed Germany’s support in the likelihood of conflict with Russia – a likelihood exacerbated by Russia’s spread of Pan-Slavism and its meddling in the Balkans. Among other things, Pan-Slavism was a means for Russia to ameliorate its domestic problems. All players in the war were subject to the domestic social and political turmoil that accompanied the expansion and intensification of mass political demands and organisation. That war was a possible means of defusing domestic problems was sensed by all.

Although Britain allied itself with France, it retained a general fear of European usurpation (Rosenstock-Huessy 1920: 34). With their mutual mistrust of France, the Germans were a far more natural ally for the British – and apart from that, the Kaiser was a grandson of Queen Victoria. But Germany’s desire to be a major naval power deeply aggravated its relationship with Britain, and such silly posturing as the notorious Kruger telegram only convinced the British even more that Germany could not be trusted.\textsuperscript{3} For their part, the Germans did not believe that Britain would enter into a European war – in the immortal words of Chancellor Bethmann-Holweg: ‘For a scrap of paper, Great Britain is going to make war?’

As for the last of the major imperial powers, the Ottomans, they had suffered severe territorial losses with the nationalist uprisings in Europe, commencing with Greek independence, and flowing into the Balkans wars. Their defeat by the Russians in the war of 1877–78 had led to loss of territory and the ongoing Armenian ‘problem’ meant Russia’s enemy would be their friend. The Ottomans were the most precariously poised of all the great powers, and Russia was an immediate enemy threatening their very existence.
In sum, that each of the imperial powers looked upon their neighbours with varying degrees of suspicion, and that they sought alliances was simply part of the logic of empire. The relative stability of the alliance system had only served to conceal the accumulation of powers waiting to explode. Some 101 years after the eruption, the explosive chain has still not come to an end.

**War Without End**

World War I did not conclude at the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month 1918 with a peace treaty, but with an armistice. Although Germany signed the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919, France, Great Britain and the United States remained oblivious to the rancour and festering sense of betrayal that many Germans had towards the ‘back stabbers’ who brokered the end of the war. Only with the end of World War II in 1945 did Germany, and its allies Italy and Japan, accept complete defeat. As the subsequent Cold War and now the post-Cold War period has illustrated, Nazism (and hence the German problem), fascism and the Japanese Empire were only some of the problems opened up by World War I. In this section I list the other ‘offspring’ of that war.

- World War I did not create nationalism – indeed it was in part a result of nationalism – yet it intensified nationalism and facilitated the fascist marriage between the military and nationalist state beyond anything that Bismarck had envisaged. Without World War I, Mussolini, who in 1914 was one of Europe’s leading socialists, would not have had the ‘vision’ that nationalism rather than socialism was the necessary modern myth that was needed for political solidarity. France’s determination to extract its pound of flesh from the defeated Germans, in large part as payback for its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, unintentionally unleashed and galvanised the forces of German reaction that culminated in National Socialism.

- The destruction of imperial Germany and the insertion of a democratic constitution released anti-Semitic forces – on the political left as well as the right – in Germany. (Thus the expression of despondency and alarm at the Kaiser’s abdication by the most important inter-war Jewish
German philosopher Franz Rosenzweig [Rosenzweig 1984: Letter to his mother 19.10.1918, no. 577].

- World War I enabled communism to be realised in Bolshevism. In 1917, the Germans helped Lenin return to Russia from Switzerland believing it would help Germany’s own war effort. By October Lenin had successfully overthrown the Kerensky government. The Bolsheviks attracted mass support in the major industrial centres, largely due to their total opposition to the war. Germany had not only thrown the Russian Empire the most unlikely lifeline in the form of a socialist empire, but it had created a superpower that would play a crucial part in the defeat of Germany in the next world war.

- World War I intensified the globalisation of nationalism. The roots of modern nationalism are invariably traced to the French Revolution and its aftermath. When Napoleon had commenced his campaign of saving France by spreading the doctrines of the French Revolution, he was defeated by an imperial coalition, while becoming an emperor in the process. Nevertheless, he had managed to ignite European nationalism, in general, and German nationalism in particular. Nationalism was the central line of continuity that united what is often called the long 19th Century and the short 20th Century. The spread of nationalism stands in the closest relationship to the end of European empire.

- The losers of World War I lost their empires, though the Ottomans, having used the war to slaughter what is usually estimated to be between one million and one and a half million Armenians, staggered on for a few years after the war. On the side of the Entente powers, the tsardom would not survive the war, and for France and Great Britain the victory proved to be pyrrhic, at least concerning the imperial fortunes of the victors. The next war would leave the other European colonial powers too economically and militarily drained to hang on to their colonies against the upsurge of nationalist revolts that spread through Africa and Asia in the aftermath of World War II.
• If the two world wars were the unravelling of European empire, they were also the making of the United States as a geopolitical global force. In 1917, as in 1941, the United States was reluctantly drawn into global events. On each occasion it emerged as a stronger power in world politics. At the end of World War I, Woodrow Wilson seized the opportunity to try to spread a global liberal order. The failure of that initial attempt was part of a larger failure of liberal democracy to entrench itself as the typical modern state formation. With the defeat of national socialism and its allies, and the economic exhaustion of Europe's victorious powers, the United States found itself the hegemon of a liberal world order. The United Nations was brokered along geopolitical lines that made its objectives more of a reality than those of the League of Nations. But the Cold War rendered the United Nations ineffective. The post-Cold War period has confirmed that the liberal dream behind the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights does not have universal appeal.

• World War I (as with World War II) was a trigger for revolts, wars of independence, and civil wars leading to population expulsions, new nations and redefined national boundaries. Solutions proved repeatedly to be time bombs. Southern Ireland gained its independence from Great Britain, but the north of Ireland remained troubesomely British. The break-up of Austro-Hungary seemingly liberated nations from empire, but in reality the break-up fuelled Germany’s expansionist desire to annex Austria, crush the Czechs and exterminate the Poles, while ‘liberating’ their German minorities. Yugoslavia became a kingdom – where hatred brewed, breaking out in World War II with Ustasha Croats attempting to completely exterminate Serbs. Tito’s Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia kept a lid on ethnic rivalries between Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and Albanians, and the less troublesome Slovenians and Montenegrins, but with the break-down of communism, the rivalries that broke out were more bitter than ever.
• World War I enabled Lithuania, the Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia and Finland independence from Russia but, with the exception of Finland, independence would be lost in World War II and not come again until the end of the Soviet empire.

• The final demise of the Ottoman Empire led to an independent Turkey, which is still paying the price for the Kemalist nationalist vision that did not sufficiently transform the ‘hearts and minds’ of its Muslim people. Armenia became a state in its own right – it too would be engulfed by the USSR.

• The Arab revolt of 1916–1918 would free the Arabs from Ottoman suzerainty and occupation. The establishment of Saudi Arabia in 1932 would create a new geopolitical power in a region fraught with political volatility. Other Muslim nations such as Egypt and Iran (though neutral in the war, Iran could not avoid the war being fought on its territory) asserted their independence. Nowhere was the time bomb analogy more apposite than in the carving up of the Ottoman Empire by the British and French. France, under the auspices of the League of Nations, had the mandate of Syria and Lebanon, Great Britain the protectorate of Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Palestine (including Transjordan). In 1917, the Balfour Declaration pledged Britain’s support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This act was Britain’s response to the wave of 19th Century anti-Semitic forces (such as the Dreyfus Affair in France and the Russian pogroms) that had fuelled, by way of reaction, the modern Zionist movement led by Theodor Herzl. The subsequent ‘exodus’ of European Jews at the end of World War II would create the Jewish–Palestinian war, and the state of Israel, which remains an object of hatred for every one of its neighbours.
**Another World War?**

It has frequently been said that the century prior to World War I had been a long peace. Thus, for example, Karl Polanyi argues that in the 19th Century ‘England, France, Prussia, Austria, Italy, and Russia were engaged in war among each other for altogether only eighteen months,’ compared to an average of 60 to 70 years of major wars during the 17th and 18th centuries (Polanyi 1944: 5; MacMillan 2014). But this masks the sheer number of wars (including wars of independence) and revolutions that took place in Europe in the 19th Century. A more accurate summary of the period comes from Kalevi Holsti:

> the ninety-nine years after the Congress of Vienna had a 13 percent lower occurrence rate of war and armed interventions than the previous period (one war every 3.3 years compared to one every 2.8 years for the 1715–1814 period). Early in the period there were armed interventions to quell or support constitutionalist/liberal/nationalist revolutions in Italy, Spain, Belgium, and the Ottoman Empire. Toward the late nineteenth century, new, small states became significant war participants, often launching fairly blatant aggressions. But except for the three brief wars of German nation building and Russia’s armed interventions into Hungary and Poland at mid-century, the centre of Europe running from London, through Paris, Berlin, and Vienna constituted a significant zone of peace. The populations of this area were to know only a few months of war during the entire century (Holsti 1991: 142).

Despite a ‘significant zone of peace’ within Europe, this peaceful zone could not help but be drawn into the Balkan conflict on its periphery. Likewise, today in spite of being a ‘significant zone of peace’, especially after the end of the Cold War and the final quelling of the Balkan wars, it is far from obvious that Europe can remain immune to the civil wars and conflicts taking place in North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia.

After the Cold War, Europeans generally acted as if they would never be involved in catastrophic war again. Germany and France’s decision not to support the Iraq invasion, and the millions of anti-war marchers throughout Europe, were symptomatic of a common European conviction that it had discovered the way to peace. Indeed prior to the
2008 Global Financial Crash and subsequent Euro crisis, Europe not only exercised ‘soft power’ through economic incentives rather than old fashioned belligerent behaviour, but also there was a widespread consensus in Europe. Indeed, prior to the Global Financial Crash and Euro crisis, Europe’s ‘soft power’ – power exercised by inciting good behaviour through economic incentives rather than the old fashioned belligerent behaviour of states like the USA (e.g. Leonard 2005) – was frequently lauded as the way of the future. It was also true that the scale of devastation of World War II had exhausted Western Europe’s military ambitions. When this exhaustion was combined with the youthful fervour of the 1960s to free the world from all fascist residues, there was no place for the cultivation of military virtues.

This has proved to be problematic as the Balkan crisis of the 1990s and more recently the ongoing Ukraine crisis demonstrate. For Western Europe has found itself incapable of initiating any serious united military effort within its ‘sphere of influence’. Thus, in the Balkan crisis in the aftermath of the Cold War, it was the United States, not Europe, that took decisive military action against the Serbs. In spite of its desire to be independent of US militaristic incursions, European strategic security, including that of many former communist countries, remains allied with the United States.

If we are to talk about the contemporary geopolitical character of Europe, then we cannot ignore its internal strains. For as the two world wars unequivocally demonstrated, geopolitics is not merely based around reactions to external forces, but is hugely shaped by internal forces.

The two greatest destabilising issues in Europe today revolve around the economy and immigration, and both are very much connected with various crises taking place outside Europe. On the economy, I will just say that the Eurozone debt crisis has created a more nationalist mindset within the working and lower-middle classes, particularly among the non-tertiary educated. This nationalist mindset tends to be anti-immigrant and has led to the rise of right-wing political parties such as the Golden Dawn in Greece and the United Kingdom Independence Party, as well as strong support in France for the National Front. Anti-immigration also underpins the Austrian Freedom Party, Geert Wilders’ Dutch Freedom Party, the Italian Northern League, Vlaams Belang in Belgium and the Danish
People’s Party. These parties can be broadly divided into three kinds: old style neo-fascist parties such as the Golden Dawn, the Austrian Freedom Party, and (less conspicuously so since the infighting within the Le Pen family) the French National Front; radical liberal anti-Muslim parties such as Geert Wilders’ Freedom Party; and regional cultural protectionist parties such as the Northern League, UKIP and the Danish People’s Party. They appeal to nationals disillusioned with mainstream political parties who they believe have destroyed their society’s culture and values. The anti-immigration parties are driven in part by domestic reactions to large numbers of refugees fleeing war zones, illegal immigrants and human trafficking, unemployment and a perception that migrants are taking advantage of generous welfare payments. But most of all, European anti-immigration parties have formed in reaction to the growing number of Muslims and Muslim areas within Western Europe.

For decades, the adoption of multiculturalism in Western European countries has concealed deep national divisions between a dominant public political culture and more nationally conservative sub-cultures. Multiculturalism was a political solution to a host of social and structural problems emerging out of racial and ethnic prejudice and inequality. It was a progressive policy that had assumed the greater liberal ends of freedom and equality, and it assumed a secular social and political order, just as it assumed the compartmentalisation of life into the private and public, commercial, religious and social. This was not the set of assumptions held by the large influx of Muslim immigrants coming into Europe from the late 1950s. As Muslims in Europe became more numerous and politically vocal, they did what all groups do: they reacted to what they found unconscionable. The demonstrations against Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* and the violent attacks upon translators of the work, as well as the destruction of bookshops, and the subsequent (politically opportunist) *fatwa* upon Rushdie by Ayatollah Khomeini were the first public symptoms in Europe of widespread Muslim animosity to the religious insensitivity of Western secular culture. The fundamental problem, however, was not merely one of being more sensitive about the use of freedom of speech, it was about the ultimate grounds of appeal.
The West had ‘solved’ the ferocious religious problems that plagued it from the Reformation through to the Thirty Years War by making the state the ultimate arbitrator of public matters (a Leviathan, as the great English political theorist, Thomas Hobbes christened the state), and one’s own faith, a private matter of choice.

At best, this is deeply problematic within Islam, which does not make religion a matter of personal choice for those born Muslims. Moreover, three kinds of laws (sharia) are integral to being a Muslim: the laws of the Koran, the laws revealed to the prophet, and the Sunnah or the laws taken from the lifeway of the prophet.

So long as Muslims accept the idea that religion is a private matter, an idea purchased in the West with much bloodshed, there is no problem. But what in the West is called radical Islam is seen by its adherents as simply what Islam is, and the so-called radical Islamists rebuke liberal Muslims for being ‘sell-outs’, or, worse, not Muslim.

This problem has been intensified in Europe by two things. The first is the increase in the numbers of Muslim groups in Europe who are vocal in their animosity to European liberalism. These include groups such as Hizbut-Tahrir (banned in most Arab countries), which had been very publicly active in British universities before being forced to appear under various front organisations (Hussein 2007: 272). Supporters of Hizbut-Tahrir want to re-establish the pure Muslim community of the caliphate, but they do not publicly support terrorism. There are also various Islamic organisations serving as fronts for various jihadi groups such as Muslim Brotherhood (Vidino 2010), or Al Qaeda or ISIS.

Then there are the problems of Islamic terrorism. Islamist terrorism commenced proper in Europe with the Madrid train bombing of 2004 and, later that year, the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh. The Madrid bombing was in reaction to the US-led war in Iraq and Spain’s participation. Rather than being a response to the larger geopolitical concern, the van Gogh murder was committed in defence of Islam’s honour, which had been slandered in van Gogh’s film Submission about the persecution of Muslim women at the hands of their men.
Such actions inevitably bred reactions. The most notorious example was Anders Breivik’s murder of 69 teenagers at a political camp in Norway in 2011. According to the online manifesto he wrote setting out his reasons for these murders, he was a European culture warrior and his action was a wake-up call to Europeans against the Islamist destruction of European values. The other reaction, which is the flip side of the Islamist coin, is that according to an EU guesstimation (BBC News 26 September 2014) more than 3000 Europeans in 2014 joined ISIS. This illustrates internal domestic tensions are flowing into dangerous geopolitical waters linking up with civil wars in North Africa and the Middle East through to Central Asia.

Prior to these events, Europeans had been largely ignorant of the rise of Islamism within the Middle East, Central Asia and Northern Africa, and, concomitantly, the Islamist use of terror outside the Israel-Palestinian conflict. The terrorist attack at the Munich Olympic Games, for example, was more typical of nationalist terrorist behaviour, such as the IRA and ETA, or groups espousing world revolution, such as the Red Brigade in Italy and Red Army Faction. There were also right-wing groups, such as the one that perpetrated the Bologna massacre in 1980. In other words, terrorism was not new to Europe, but Islamic terrorism when it arrived in Madrid was. Moreover, in the 1960s and 1970s, migrants were generally thought of in terms of their national not religious identities. This all changed in the third millennium.

With the emergence of Al Qaeda and more recently ISIS, Europeans and Western peoples, more generally, have become increasingly conscious that there is a great battle going on within Islamic peoples that has several political dimensions. But in spite of the above focus upon Europe, it is primarily a battle taking place outside of Europe and the West – though some like Al Qaeda, ISIS and the Muslim Brotherhood take the entire globe as the ‘object’ of their political ambitions. It is played out on territories and within nations that emerged out of decolonisation and the break-up of the European, Russian and Ottoman empires that were part of the fall-out from World War I – Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, modern Turkey, Syria and Iraq and (indirectly) Israel all owe their existence to World War I.

It is a battle fought in different ways between different groups, including the battle between Sunni and Shia; the battle against traditional power brokers in Sunni countries; and the battle between
groups having local linkages, tribal associations and hegemonic
dreams. Thus, for example, Saudi Arabia, which can easily be seen
as one of the most conservative Islamic countries and which has been
globally exporting its Wahhabism (Guardian: 6 December 2010) as
well as funding various Islamist organisations and fuelling the flames
of jihadism, is hated by ISIS for its materialistic corruption, and for its
lack of a genuine application of sharia law. Groups such as Al Qaeda
and ISIS – once allied but now at war with each other – offer not
only a literalist form of Islam but a new caliphate free of the corrupt
clientelism, tribalism and geopolitical compromises with enemies
such as the Jews and Americans (who are depicted as the Crusaders)
(Wood 2015).

As Al Qaeda and ISIS have demonstrated, the political struggles going
on within Europe are part of a far larger set of political conflicts
involving much of the Islamic world. And those conflicts cannot be
separated from the larger geopolitical contingencies and hegemonic
confrontations, which in turn impact upon greater geopolitical
powers. The Bush regime’s intervention in Iraq and its support for
the subsequent Shia government, the Obama regime’s air strikes on
Gaddafi, and the Alawi (hated by the Sunnis) Bashar Al-Assad’s grim
determination not to be overthrown by the Sunni majority in Syria
have all played a major part in destabilising the power balance within
the Middle East, and thus enabling a new hegemonic aspirant in ISIS.

Although the Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928, Westerners
were too preoccupied with fascism and the Cold War to believe that
ideas of reinvigorating Islam as a geopolitical power could ever pose
a serious threat to Western hegemony. During the 1950s and 1960s,
domestic politics in the Middle East, Persia and Central Asia were
largely played out along lines of national independence, ideology or
sheer personal might. Nasser in Egypt, the Ba’ath party in Syria,
Gaddafi in Libya, Hussein in Iraq, Kemalism in Turkey and the Pahlavis
in Iran were in different ways parties of modernisation and not
Islamist. If the House of Saud, through its arrangement with Wahhabi
clerics, was far more traditional in its modernisation, the dynastic
system of the House was never going to be palatable to Islamists. For
their part, the Wahhabi deal with the House of Saud only damaged
their chances as Islamist hegemons.
It is a great irony that the first successful Islamist revolution came from the Shias and Persians. Khomeini’s revolutionary vision and the mode of governance in the new regime was not ‘traditionally’ Shia, and the new regime soon found itself embroiled in a bloody war with Iraq. Iran sees itself as a hegemonic force restoring the Persian Empire Islamically, and presently it stands in a geopolitical play-off with other powers in the region. It is an important source of revenue for Assad in Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shia strongholds in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province, as well as the power behind the 2015 coup in Yemen. The American invasion of Iraq only facilitated the Iranian influence within Iraq, and further radicalised Iraqi Sunnis against the Iraqi government. Iran’s political positioning has also facilitated stronger relations with Russia, which has the Chechen problem and other potentially turbulent Sunni neighbours ‘beneath’ it, as well as with China with its Uighurs (Sunni) in Xinjiang (Goldman: 2015), and, most surprisingly, with the ‘Great Satan’ itself – as Khomeini famously called the United States – as it attempts to angle a loosening of America’s antipathy to its nuclear program. Iran, of course, has also been bellicose in its anti-Semitism (Guardian: 27 October 2005). In his speech 2 March 2015 to the American Congress, Israel’s Prime Minister Netanyahu urged the United States not to ‘pave Iran’s path to the bomb’.

In spite of Iran finding itself with powerful ‘friends’, it can never achieve much more than its own regional security – and its alliances are shaky at best. China, like America, still wants access to oil, and neither wants to sever ties with the Saudis. The Saudis themselves, in a tactic of self-preservation, have been exporting their form of Islamism, even supporting the very jihadists whom they lock up at home to fight abroad. Saudi is fraught with local antagonisms largely assuaged with oil money, but for how long no one knows. The fact that it is the ‘home’ of Mecca and Medina adds to its narrative of legitimacy, but its form of governance is seen by Islamist forces as a total betrayal of all that the prophet stood for. Its wealth is its bastion but, while that may pay for mosques and imams in Indonesia and Europe, it does not placate its potential opponents. When the Arab Spring broke out, the Saudis were deeply nervous, and their previous alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood (another now somewhat chastened hegemonic aspirant) came to an end.
The other major Islamist hegemon, though more in imagination than fact, is Turkey. While Erdogan may dream of restoring Ottoman glory, and in spite of his ‘Islamism by stealth’, his government cannot even achieve concordance with its own Islamists. For more than a year Erdogan has been attacking the Fethullah Gülen movement, which has great influence in Turkish schools, universities, media, police force and judiciary, and has been a spearhead of Islamism. Turkey also has a large Alevi minority (anywhere between 15–25 per cent), which has Sufi influences that are repellent to most Sunnis. It also has a Kurdish ‘problem’ – a problem shared by Iran, Iraq and Syria. While the majority of Kurds are Sunni, Kurdish Sunnis are generally more syncretistic than traditional Sunnis. In addition, ethnicity defines their political identity, which makes them a thorn in the side for any Islamist hegemonic aspirant. And, on top of all that – the Arabs will never allow themselves to be ‘re-Ottomanised’.

There appears to be only one kind of hegemonic Islamist aspirant that has the slightest chance of any large scale success, and that is the kind of aspirant that ISIS and Al Qaeda are. ISIS and Al Qaeda appeal to those who have little power or wealth (the vast majority of Sunnis in the Islamic world), who are left out of client–patron relationships, to those for whom the nation means little or nothing, and who belong to tribes or ethnic groups that have little or nothing to lose. Al Qaeda and ISIS are literally a ‘godsend’.

My talk about World War I has led me into a geopolitical vortex within the Middle East which has increasingly opened up since that war. This all too brief consideration of the geopolitical players and their alliances has drawn us to Al Qaeda and ISIS. At the moment the running is with ISIS – it has established a caliphate that it is grimly trying to hang on to and expand. The momentum of ISIS lies precisely in its negations (much the same could be said about fascist and communist narratives as they evolved). Its radical nature is not simply in its desire to replicate the social world of the earliest Muslim warriors, but in its complete antipathy to Western social formations, such as the nation state and liberal democracy, even when those nation states are deeply anti-democratic, anti-secular and ostensibly Muslim, which is to say all the states in the region. While its members cannot dispense with Western military, transport and communication technologies, which is to say any chance of their victory is predicated on the ‘fruits’ of the world they detest, they promise a world of total purity: to the outsider
an ISIS house of horror, to the insider a life of submission cleansed of
the stench of spiritual meaninglessness and idolatry, which they see
as the horror to be escaped.

The great appeal of ISIS is to those for whom modernity has not
delivered materially (thus we can also identify a link between the
break-down of socialism/Marxism in the Middle East and the rise of
Islamism), communally (dissatisfaction with the tribalism that plagues
Islamic countries) and spiritually, which is the attraction for the youth
from Western countries. The geopolitical growth of ISIS relies upon
its ability to attract other regional Sunni forces of rebellion, at which
it has been relatively successful. Thus, while in Afghanistan ISIS and
the Taliban have been killing each other, in Pakistan the Taliban has
pledged its loyalty to ISIS. Again, while presently ISIS and Al Qaeda
have severed relationships, alliances are a movable feast and could
just as quickly be re-established. Some other supporters include the
Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement in the Philippines, Islamic
Movement of Uzbekistan, Jund al-Khilafah in Algeria, Ansar al-
Tawhid in India, Ansar al-Shariah in Tunisia, ISIS in Gaza, Ansar
al-Sharia, Boko Haram in Nigeria, and the mastermind of the Bali
bombings Abu Bakar Bashir in Indonesia.8 Alliances of such groups
can change very quickly. And the brutality of ISIS inevitably draws
out enemies as well as supporters, and its brutality inevitably creates
enemies among the relatives of those it has ‘punished’.

ISIS has emerged swiftly and, while it may collapse swiftly, ultimately
it has to be seen as the most successful ‘brand’ with a strategy (hence
its edge over Al Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood – which was for
the ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi ‘more words than action’) of a
greater chain of Sunni uprisings (Cockburn 2015). There is a strong
argument to be made that the insurmountable problem for any
Islamist hegemonic aspirant – one confronting every form of Islam
since the death of the Mohammad himself – are the entanglements
of allegiance, compounded by diverse socio-economic, tribal, ethnic,
national, patronage systems of the region. It is these and similar
allegiances that constitute relatively discrete traditions with their
diverse hermeneutical answers to the question of what it means to be
a Muslim. What we are all witnessing in the Islamic world is a large
scale civil war. Whether that war will draw others into its maw is much
c harder to assess – though as we have seen, Westerners and Muslims
in Western countries cannot completely escape these convulsions.

Global Instabilities 15
Indeed the problems occurring with Islamism and Islamic terrorism in Europe, North America and Australasia are deeply connected to the civil wars happening within Islamic countries and hegemonic powers seeking to take control. It is ultimately a question of the scale of the uprisings and whether ISIS, or some more broad-based Islamist group similar in its ferocity and ability to draw in large numbers of disaffected militant Sunnis, can sufficiently unify its forces to topple those powers that have reigned through much of the last century.

The picture I have been painting suggests some fierce violence within Western Europe may result as Islamism and neo-fascist parties find themselves in terrorist collision courses, but the greatest violence is likely to gather momentum within Muslim countries – and at its most horrific this could engulf the entire Muslim world from Indonesia through to Chechnya. And that could not help but become a global conflict. Israel could not escape this conflagration and thus nor could the United States, and it would demand NATO (and hence European) support. Iran, China and Russia would not be able to isolate themselves from a great united Sunni uprising, nor could India and Pakistan, who have been itching to destroy each other since their creation and division. This would indeed be a third phase of the war that broke out in 1914. This is the worst case scenario. It is unlikely – but when history is being made, people rarely realise the history they have been making. We make the future with the materials we have ready to hand – the shards of our past are mediated by the fleeting certitudes of the present and the fragments of future hopes. When Mussolini and Hitler emerged from World War I, they were originally nothings, ‘nothings’ with a deep sense of what it was that others like them were aspiring to. That their victories proved to be pyrrhic, that their dreams were evil and mad did not change the fact that they garnered millions of supporters and were the makers of another phase of the world.

This picture is at odds with other geopolitical scenarios in which China and, much less likely, Russia emerge as threats to global peace. I think there are too many factors in the way of China emerging as a military hegemon any time soon. Commercial imperatives will continue to outweigh military ones in China for a long time to come, and their geopolitical game is regionally circumscribed.
Then there is the USA. Since Paul Kennedy’s *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* there has been a literature predicting the decline of US hegemony. However, while the US has proven to be an ally hard to trust (apart from Saddam Hussein’s misreading of the USA, which led him to venture into Kuwait, its abandonment of President Thieu in South Vietnam and the Shah of Iran are conspicuous examples) or simply unable to complete the job at hand – Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq – its economic resilience and power combined with its unrivalled military technology make its presence on the geopolitical landscape robust enough. Its commitment to Israel, and Israel’s geographical location makes it the force ISIS and any of its allies will have to ultimately do battle with if it really wants to take on the world.

The very thing that enabled the US to stay out of the two world wars for so long and then clean up was its location. And its location is its great military advantage, especially when military advantage is technological rather than one of personnel. What the US has not been able to do is capture the hearts and minds of those who have different historicities to it – indeed it finds it difficult to imagine how the Other could really be Other (in spite of the endless discussion of otherness in American universities) when given a chance at living something like the American dream. Ultimately its isolation, combined with its economic potency and technologies, is the key to its strength. It is this power that makes it the ‘saviour’ of the powers ISIS would like to attack, which includes the Saudis and Iranian ayatollahs. That the USA, like Europe, is so spiritually bereft and has more than enough of its own internal critics is undeniable, but in civil wars one usually sides with one’s own demons.

The songbook of the generation that has largely shaped the Western World we now inhabit contained such hits as ‘Happy Xmas (War is Over)’, ‘All You Need Is Love’ and ‘Give Peace a Chance’. That was the response of Europeans (and North Americans) who were exhausted by two world wars and thought not only that the wars had really ended, but that war itself could end. World War I, unfortunately, is not over, even if, at best, the fires now burning can be contained.
Endnotes

1 This is highly conspicuous in the writings of many of the most influential thinkers of the 19th Century who would shape the subsequent century, such as Carl von Clausewitz, who provided the vision of the modern militaristic state in arguing that war was ‘a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means’ (Clausewitz 1918: 23); Charles Darwin whose key ideas are expressed in the very title of his seminal work – *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*; Karl Marx, who saw all social life and history prior to communism as class war; and Friedrich Nietzsche, whose metaphysical doctrine of life being ‘will to power’, left no room for such liberal shibboleths as human rights. Nietzsche’s popularity was so great in Germany in 1914 (though not just Germany) that he was identified as the real brains behind Germany’s militarism (Nicholas Martin in Fred Bridgham 2006: 147–67).

2 Figures vary – for a long time the received wisdom was that two thirds of the German population lost their lives during the Thirty Years Wars. Geoffrey Parker (Parker 1984: 188) argues the figure is closer to 15 to 20 per cent. I cannot judge the accuracy of these revisionist figures, but in 1914 the ‘mythic’ figure was a real belief.

3 In 1896 the President of the Transvaal Republic, Stephanus Kruger, received a telegram from the Kaiser congratulating him on quashing an uprising by some 600 British irregular troops. The British were furious at the Kaiser’s meddling in their sphere of influence. The Kaiser apologised, but the damage had been done.

4 In 1921 Franz Rosenzweig published his extraordinary work *The Star of Redemption*. In it he attempted to draw liberal German Jews back into what he saw as the tremendous fecundity and depth of the Jewish tradition, while convincing non-Jewish Germans of the value of their Christian (as opposed to their pagan) tradition, and hence their dependency upon Judaism. It was in other words an attempt to defeat anti-Semitism in Germany’s post-World War I infancy.

5 The German romantic nationalist movement can be traced back to J.G. Herder (1744–1803), whose cosmopolitan ideas on nationalism preceded and grew with the French Revolution he supported. But it was Johann Fichte’s *Address to the German Nation* (1806) – a reaction to the Napoleonic conquest – that stressed Germany’s cultural purity and ‘genius’ that was seminal in creating the nationalist myth that would be so central to its modern imperial growth.

6 More recently, there have been numerous reports on a wide number of Islamist groups in Great Britain operating in universities and schools (cf. Economist 15 March 2015)

7 In the US such ostensibly mainstream Islamic groups as the Muslim Students Association, North American Islamic Trust, the Council of American Islamic Relations, the American Islamic Council, the Islamic Society of North America have been financed by the Muslim Brotherhood. Some of these organisations have had spokesmen working publicly with the White House (Mintz and Farah, 2004; Vidino, 2010, pp 166–98).

References


Martin, Nicholas, 2006, ‘Nietzsche as Hate-Figure in Britain’s Great War: “The Execrable Neech”, pp. 147–66, in Fred Bridgham (editor), The First World War as a Clash of Cultures, Rochester: Camden.


Previous Professorial Lectures

Drains, mains and pipelines: a civil engineer’s journey through our hidden infrastructure
Professor Charlie Fairfield,
Power and Water Corporation Chair in Sustainable Engineering

Making Australian threatened species legislation more effective and efficient
Professor Stephen Garnett,
Professor of Conservation and Sustainable Livelihoods

Our Asian centuries: provenance and proximity
Professor Sharon Bell,
Deputy Vice-Chancellor

Full employment abandoned: the triumph of ideology over evidence
Professor Bill Mitchell,
Chair in Economics and Director for the Centre of Full Employment and Equity

The preservation of biodiversity and maintenance of ecosystems in a changing world
Professor Sue Carthew,
Pro Vice-Chancellor, Faculty of Engineering, Health, Science and the Environment

The myths we live by: reframing history for the 21st century
Professor Giselle Byrnes,
Pro Vice-Chancellor, Faculty of Law, Education, Business and Arts

Mrs Bach and the Cello Suites
Professor Martin W. B. Jarvis,
Professor of Music
Emeritus Artistic Director of the Darwin Symphony Orchestra

The full text of the Professorial Lectures can be found at:
W: cdu.edu.au/mace/publications
By Professor Wayne Cristaudo

Religion, Redemption, and Revolution
The New Speech Thinking of Franz Rosenzweig and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy
University of Toronto Press, 2012

Religion, Redemption, and Revolution closely examines the intertwined intellectual development of one of the most important Jewish thinkers of the 20th century, Franz Rosenzweig, and his friend and teacher, Christian sociologist Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. The first major English work on Rosenstock-Huessy, it also provides a significant reinterpretation of Rosenzweig’s writings based on the thinkers’ shared insights – including their critique of modern Western philosophy and their novel conception of speech.

A Philosophical History of Love

In this book, Wayne Cristaudo argues that love is a materialising force, a force consisting of various distinctive qualities or spirits. He argues that we cannot understand Western civilisation unless we realise that, within its philosophical and religious heritage, there is a deep and profound recognition of love’s creative and redemptive power.

Fusing philosophy, literature, theology, psychology and anthropology, the volume reviews major thinkers in the field from Plato and Freud, to Piece, Shakespeare and Flaubert. Cristaudo explores the major themes of love of the Church, romantic love and the return of the feminine, the conflict between familial and romantic love, love in a meaningless world and the love of evil, and the evolutionary idea of love.
Global Instabilities: 101 years after the commencement of World War I

Professor Wayne Cristaudo
Professor of Political Science, Charles Darwin University

Professor Wayne Cristaudo lectures in the School of Creative Arts and Humanities at Charles Darwin University.

He has held positions at the University of Adelaide and the University of Hong Kong. He has also lectured in Europe, the USA and China. He has written and edited 17 books (one of which has been translated into Chinese) and special journal issues on areas as diverse as political philosophy, religion and politics, revolution, love and evil, metaphysics, literature, and European identities. He is presently writing a book on philosophy in the social sciences and the social circulation of ideas.

Profesorial Lecture Series 4
Lecture 1 June 2015