

A platform for informed debate

By **ROBIN NIBLETT**

DIRECTOR OF CHATHAM HOUSE



DR ROBIN NIBLETT has been the Director of Chatham House (the Royal Institute of International Affairs) since January 2007 and his principal areas of study are European integration and transatlantic relations. Before joining Chatham House he was based in Washington at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), one of America's largest and most influential foreign policy think-tanks. There, he served as Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer and, prior to this appointment, as Director of its Europe Programme and its Initiative for a Renewed Transatlantic Partnership.

This year has seen continued and dramatic shifts in world affairs: the deepening euro crisis and the fallout from the Arab uprisings, particularly in Syria, have dominated the attention of policy-makers even as the underlying structure of international relations continues to shift from West to East and North to South.

During such times, it is the role of Chatham House to address the increasingly competitive nature of international politics and to serve as a creative hub for ideas on how to manage the growing interdependence of countries and societies.

Reflecting the growing size and scope of the institute's work, this past year we reorganised our research structure. We now have four research departments: Area Studies and International Law; Energy, Environment and Resources; International Economics; and International Security. We are working to integrate, where appropriate, analysis from these four departments to support our main objective of helping governments and decision-makers to tackle the full range of emerging global challenges.

Area Studies and International Law includes the work of our regional programmes, covering Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe (including Turkey) the Middle East and North Africa, Russia and Eurasia and research on International Law. Chatham House has complemented its work on the dynamics of traditional inter-state power with a greater focus on grassroots and civil society dynamics, including analysis of the rise of new voices in the Arab world, populist parties in Europe, Chinese public opinion and international web-based campaigns.

A key focus is the rise of emerging powers and their deepening interdependence. Together, these forces are creating the demand for new forms of global governance and co-operation which will likely manifest themselves through a new focus on international law. In the past year or two, the rise of new powers has also been accompanied increasingly by the rise of vocal and activist popular movements. Imminent and recent changes in political leadership have been a key theme of this institute's research, including Russia, Burma (Myanmar), China and the United States, as well as the rise of African states as global actors.

Research by the Energy, Environment and Resources

department (EER) continues to explore cutting-edge thinking and solutions towards energy security, environmental change and resource governance. The team has undertaken ground-breaking research on the international political economy of natural resources – food, energy, timber and metals – and the range of critical stresses and uncertainties which are creating new global faultlines and resource insecurity. This and other publications by EER continue to attract global attention. Reports on 'What Next for the Oil and Gas Industry?', 'Preparing for High-impact, Low-Probability Events', 'Famine Early Warning and Early Action: The Cost of Delay' and 'Burning Oil to Keep Cool: The Hidden Energy Crisis in Saudi Arabia' have been widely cited by influential officials, policy-makers, energy sector stakeholders and the media both in the UK and around the world.

International Economics research continues to undertake leading analysis in areas which are key to the changing global economic system. Currently, major projects are analysing the future of the international monetary system, the internationalisation of the Renminbi, and European economic governance. Recent reports have assessed the growth of international financial centres in Greater China, and the role of gold in the international monetary system, while briefing papers covered topics ranging from labour migration to the future of the Renminbi.


Over the past year the International Security research department has reorganised its areas of research to better reflect its international focus and diverse portfolio. Its five new research areas are: International Security, Defence and Governance; Security Beyond the State; Science, Technology and Security; Cyber Security; and Innovative Thinking in International Security. The team is currently involved in new and policy-relevant projects on topics such as; the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, the Creation of Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zones in the Middle East, Cyber and Space Security, and Franco-British Defence Cooperation. As part of its work, the department is engaging with other research programmes at Chatham House, as well as developing collaborative partnerships with other think tanks and organisations around the world to enhance its research and broaden its scope.

All of these recent developments and activities

ensure that Chatham House is constantly engaged with officials of many nationalities and with businesses large and small to explore important questions and to identify emerging trends. While our work has ranged from academic and long-term to the immediate and day-to-day, our comparative advantage is the ‘near future’ – closer to policy issues than most university-based researchers and able to offer more sustained, reflective and forward-thinking than the horizons permitted to most politicians or business planners.

Ever since our founding in 1920, Chatham House has relied on its members to support its mission, especially its role as a platform for informed debate on the most pressing issues in international affairs.

Members are drawn from the worlds of business, diplomacy, academia, politics, the media and civil society. They play an essential role in questioning and challenging world leaders and other speakers when they visit Chatham House. While the majority are UK-based, overseas members (based in 75 countries) form an increasingly significant proportion of the total.

Impartiality and openness to all views are fundamental to our success. Our Royal Charter, granted in 1926, forbids us an organisational opinion – all who speak at or from Chatham House do so as individuals. It is this independence that I believe our members and supporters value most. 

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Previous Chatham House Prize winners clockwise from top left: Aung San Suu Kyi, Burmese democracy campaigner, 2011; HE Abdullah Gül, President of Turkey, 2010; HE John Agyekum Kufuor, President of Ghana, 2008; HE Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva, President of Brazil, 2009