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To cite this article: Josh Watkins (2017) Bordering Borderscapes: Australia's Use of Humanitarian Aid and Border Security Support to Immobilise Asylum Seekers, *Geopolitics*, 22:4, 958-983, DOI: [10.1080/14650045.2017.1312350](https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1312350)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1312350>



Published online: 25 Apr 2017.



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Bordering Borderscapes: Australia's Use of Humanitarian Aid and Border Security Support to Immobilise Asylum Seekers

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ABSTRACT

This article documents Australia's use of border security support and humanitarian aid as border externalisations immobilising asylum seekers as far from Australia as possible. The Australian Government frames border securitisation through regionalism, as an effort to achieve a "regional solution" to asylum seeking irregular migration. Correspondingly, scholars have documented Australia's externalisations in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. However, Australia's efforts are not regionally circumscribed and this article analyses the spatial and temporal flexibility of Australia's border externalisations; Australia's strategy of targeting borderscapes of asylum seeking as they emerge and change. In doing so, the article examines how the Australian Government has assembled externalisations in South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. Australia's use of humanitarian aid to make places housing asylum seekers more hospitable, yet confining, to the displaced is detailed. Also analysed is Australia's border security support to source countries and countries of first asylum to immobilise asylum seekers. The article demonstrates that Australia has sought to manifest not only a territorial buffer zone in Southeast Asia, but use border externalisations in the Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa to secure places and displaced populations. This is argued to be a preventative strategy of risk management designed to preempt future asylum geographies and forge extraterritorial migration control.

Governing asylum seekers has been a major dimension of Australia's foreign policy since the mid-1970s. From 1975 through 1996, Australia played a significant role facilitating the two multilateral agreements, the Orderly Departure Programme (1979–1989) and Comprehensive Plan of Action (1989–1996), managing the estimated 3 million asylum seekers who fled from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos during that time. The late 1990s, however, dawned a new era of asylum seeking irregular migration in Southeast Asia, shattering the region's preexisting spatial architecture of asylum governance. Unlike the previous era, from 1996 onward, most boat arrivals to Australia

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were not from Southeast Asia but asylum seekers from South Asia and the Middle East – Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, and Sri Lanka, particularly. These asylum seekers were fleeing conflicts in their countries of origin by travelling through Southeast Asia – often Indonesia and Malaysia – en route to Australia to request permanent resettlement. Despite the persistence of conflicts displacing people from South Asia and the Middle East, since 1996 the number of asylum seeker arrivals to Australia per year have varied greatly. Arrivals decreased from 2002 to 2007 and December 2013 through the present primarily due to the Australian Government’s implementation of border security programmes targeting irregular migrants. These programmes, the Pacific Solution (2001–2007) and Operation Sovereign Borders (2013–present), reduced arrivals through expanding domestic border control measures, maritime surveillance, and border securitisations in asylum seeker source and transit countries, also referred to as border externalisations. Australia’s Department of Immigration and Border Protection refers to this strategy as a “layered” approach to border security, what the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service calls a “Border Continuum” of onshore and offshore spaces territorialised to reduce irregular migration.¹ Put differently, “layering” transforms domestic and foreign places in ways designed to immobilise asylum seekers at risk of irregularly travelling to Australia by boat. Framing border externalisation as “layering” actualising a “Border Continuum” is part of Australia’s broader geopolitical discourse of actualising asylum governance through regionalism.

While studies have usefully examined Australia’s “regional approach” to border externalisation in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, this article documents Australia’s border externalisations in countries of origin and first asylum in South Asia, the Middle East, and to a lesser extent North Africa. In doing so, the article demonstrates how Australia has sought to manifest not only a territorial ‘buffer zone’ in Southeast Asia, but deploy trans-territorial and temporal strategies of border externalisation targeting distant places and populations at risk of irregular migration. This is a strategy of risk management designed to preempt future asylum seeking borderscapes. As Colin Flint and Virginie Mamadouh advocate, academic geopolitics must expose the processes of world politics producing the world as it is, challenging oversimplified reifications of geographic truth.² The Australian Government’s framing of border externalisation through a legitimising discourse of regionalism is an oversimplification. An exceptional literature has emerged interrogating the performativity of the Australian Government’s regionalist discourse. However, little attention has been paid to Australia’s trans-territorial practices immobilising asylum seekers in distant countries of origin and first asylum beyond Southeast Asia. To address this, I focus on Australia’s distribution of humanitarian aid to populations at risk of irregular migration and border security support to countries housing displaced people.

I argue that both humanitarian aid and border security support are used to contain people either as internally displaced people or as refugees confined to countries of first asylum. I highlight how humanitarian aid and border security support are explicitly used by the Australian Government, particularly Australia's Department of Immigration, as border externalisations targeting irregular migration borderscapes, both as borderscapes emerge and change through time. In doing so, I emphasise how Australia's irregular migration governance is assembled through territorial, trans-territorial, and temporal strategies of border externalisation to forge a greater geography of migration control.

I first discuss the border externalisation literature, then the literature on Australia's border externalisations. This is followed by an analysis of Australia's use of border security support and humanitarian aid targeting asylum seekers from 1996 through 2014. This section's empirics are derived from a dataset of 169 Australian Government primary source documents. The documents were selected based on their relation to refugee, asylum, and irregular migration governance. The dataset comprises sources spanning the Australian Government, including the Department of Immigration, Australian Customs, the Australian National Audit Office, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Parliament, among others. I do not attempt to represent every border externalisation occurring from 1996 through 2014. Rather, I emphasise the use of humanitarian aid and border security support in the Middle East and South Asia. Specifically, I focus on the distribution of aid and border security support to countries housing populations associated with asylum seeking irregular migration.

Border Externalisation and Australia's Borderwork

Since the end of the Cold War, there have been unprecedented increases in voluntary and involuntary transnational migration. In response, developed countries have desperately sought to restrict asylum seeking irregular migration. Refugee scholar Matthew J. Gibney refers to the contemporary era as one of "engineered regionalism", where developed, primarily Northern, states have attempted to confine asylum seekers to the global South.³ Scholars refer to the strengthening of migration management to reduce irregular migration as border securitisation.⁴ Border securitisation is well known to the academy, most often understood as the biopolitical targeting of irregular migrants' 'othered' bodies and the intensification of border security in territories adjacent to international boundaries.⁵ A subset of the border securitisation literature has identified and analysed the expansion of states' migration and border policy to countries not necessarily geographically contiguous to those states.⁶ Geographers Maribel Casas-Cortes, Sebastian Cobarrubias, and John Pickles, for instance, have documented how the European Union (EU), and

its member states, have engendered border externalisations in non-EU countries, primarily in North Africa, through development initiatives, migrant policing, and other arrangements.⁷ While most of the border externalisation literature is focused on Europe, the United States and Australia also have received attention.⁸ While not always termed as such, there is now a rich interdisciplinary literature documenting the use of detention and deportation,⁹ maritime interdiction and surveillance,¹⁰ airline liaison officers,¹¹ and various forms of transnational policing to increase border security extraterritorially.¹² Criminologists, for instance, have documented how asylum seeking is policed as a transnational crime by law enforcement.¹³ Such works have analysed how a variety of government agencies across the developed world – from federal police to immigration officers – have transnationally policed asylum seeking through anti-people smuggling initiatives.¹⁴ Legal scholars also have contributed to the border externalisation literature by documenting the rise in “regional approaches” to irregular migration governance and how such schemes often lead to restrictions on asylum seeking.¹⁵ Relatedly, prominent refugee scholar Alexander Betts, along with other international relations scholars, has noted the rise in bilateral and multilateral refugee burden-sharing agreements, and their propensity to secure popular destination countries from asylum seekers.¹⁶

As an analytic project, the border externalisation literature has emphasised the ‘mobility of borders’, how borders ‘move’ due to states’ transnational borderwork. This borderwork has been argued to reshape territory in source and transit countries.¹⁷ As bilateral and multilateral endeavours, border externalisation has been said to manifest “transnational sovereignties”, producing spaces and places challenging traditional notions of territorial sovereignty.¹⁸ Due to the proliferation of externalisation, scholars often stress the need to reject an understanding of ‘the border’ as a fixed and static line and instead view borders as deterritorialised through their multiplication abroad, as spatial and temporal processes in constant flux.¹⁹ In short, it is argued that the externalisation of migration governance beyond a state’s sovereign territory equates to a stretching, moving, or topological proliferation of a nation-state’s border.

Despite usefully documenting important practices of mobility control, in my opinion, language referring to borders as ‘moving’ in this way can be confusing. As commonly understood, a nation-state’s border (as a noun) only moves when that state gains or loses geographic territory. Thus, to those unfamiliar with this field, it makes little sense to speak of borders as moving, multiplying, or stretching in ways beyond the acquisition or loss of territory. In my view, the term bordering, when used in ways not synonymous with ‘the border’, is a clearer way to describe the assemblage of territorial and trans-territorial processes deployed by states to stymie irregular migration. Bordering, as opposed to ‘the border’, is instantly recognised as a verb

denoting processes of exclusion, restriction, and containment. Exclusion, restriction, and containment of certain people extraterritorially is indeed what the border externalisation literature documents. Furthermore, the term bordering better captures the trend within critical border studies of reflecting the uneven application of socio-spatial control upon different people, the fact that borders are not everywhere and different people experience varying forms of immobilisation or marginalisation even in the same space-times.²⁰ Relatedly, understanding border externalisation less as a process of ‘moving’ borders than as one playing a part in the (re)production and modification of borderscapes is beneficial.²¹ Like the term bordering, the borderscape concept is sometimes used to describe ‘the border’ as moving and multiplying, yet as Chiara Brambilla has eloquently detailed in this journal, the borderscape concept is also used to describe transnational spaces as collaborative, diverse, processes of interaction between states and people.²² Thus, to speak of borderscapes is to reference not merely the sites of bordering manifested through border externalisations, extraterritorial statecraft and subjugation, but also the fluid spaces of cross-border migration, migrant agency and transnational placemaking.²³ Such a view makes sense as border externalisations are used not merely to manifest contiguous transnational territories of intensified border security, but also to target the routes migrants take across many countries, not necessarily touching one another, when travelling to particular destinations.²⁴ As such, Maribel Casas-Cortes, Sebastian Cobarrubias, and John Pickles’ reference to EU member states’ border externalisations as an “ad hoc transnational bordering assemblage” is instructive.²⁵

In my view, analysing border externalisations as assemblages of strategically lodged and connected territorialities makes sense given the topological, iterative, nature of border externalisations. Assemblage thinking conceptualises socio-spatial phenomena, whether cities, regions, or border externalisations, as contingent manifestations of material and discursive elements, or parts, acting upon each other across space and time.²⁶ Thus, conceptualising border externalisations through assemblage thinking encourages border externalisations to be viewed not as a number of autonomous ‘borders’, but as connected parts constitutive of a greater whole; a transnational migration governance. Like assemblages more generally, border-making has been productively conceptualised as connections of transboundary flows associating socio-spatial entities.²⁷ Connection is forged not necessarily through being geographically contiguous, but through locales becoming associated in impactful ways across space. The larger agencies and impacts of such associations are derived from “distributed processes of interaction”.²⁸ When border externalisations are viewed as distributed processes of interaction the way individual externalisations contribute to a greater geography of migration governance comes to the fore. As such, securitisation through

border externalisation is conceptualised not only as the hardening of bounded territories or unique sites, but as components of a trans-local borderscape. Thus, assemblage thinking encourages an empirical focus on tracing how iterative territorialities and spatial processes interconnect in ways unconfined to preexisting spatial imaginaries.²⁹ In many ways, the border externalisation literature has emphasised the association between externalisation and spatial imaginaries – whether frontiers, buffer zones, or socio-cultural regions. Given the exceptional literature documenting how externalisation has securitised frontiers and regions – EU states’ borderwork in North Africa or the United States’ in Central America, for instance – I think it would be fruitful to draw from assemblage thinking’s emphasis on investigating topological connections. Examining border externalisation through an assemblage approach helps avoid reifying frontiers, zones, or regions as static scales,³⁰ territorial traps of methodological regionalism reproduced in research projects as natural backdrops and assumed to contain all externalisations.³¹ In short, I am arguing the geographic scope of a state’s border externalisations is a matter of empirical documentation and should not be assumed, *a priori*, to be confined to a certain territory.

The Australian case is instructive. While relatively sparse compared to the literature on Europe’s border externalisations, there are several studies analysing Australia’s externalisations.³² The Australian Government has framed border externalisation through regionalism, a “regional solution” generally meant to encompass Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Relatedly, studies have documented the various ways Australia has externalised border security in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.³³ Australia’s offshore detention programme, the use of Papua New Guinea and Nauru to detain asylum seekers, has been a focus.³⁴ Australia’s use of island detention has been usefully placed in the international context of island detention – the manifestation of “enforcement archipelagos”.³⁵ Scholars have also noted that to detain asylum seekers on islands, Australia has had to, ironically, legally excise thousands of island territories where asylum seekers land and even the Australian mainland from the country’s official migration zone.³⁶ As a signatory to the Refugee Convention, Australia agreed to hear protection claims from asylum seekers arriving to their territory. Excising islands and the mainland, arguably, allows Australia to avoid this responsibility. Australia’s funding of immigrant detention, primarily in Indonesia, has also been observed as an externalisation of detention.³⁷

Under both major political parties, the Australian Government has been relentless in its use and defence of offshore detention. Yet, this is a deterrence of last resort. Successive Australian administrations have sought to deter asylum seekers before they set sail and deflect them at sea. Scholars have documented Australia’s use of maritime securitisations like increased naval surveillance, boat interdiction and turnbacks to deflect asylum seekers.³⁸

There also have been studies of Australia's bilateral and multilateral efforts to encourage other countries in the region to intercept and turnback boats.³⁹ Relatedly, collaborations between Australian authorities and Southeast Asian countries to disrupt people smuggling networks have been examined.⁴⁰ Consideration of Australia's maritime securitisations and borderwork in key source and transit countries in Southeast Asia and the Pacific is important and should continue. Yet, what requires greater attention is Australia's externalisations outside Southeast Asia. Despite using Southeast Asia as a transit point, since the late 1990s most asylum seekers arriving to Australia by boat have come from the Middle East and South Asia. Thus, greater consideration of how Australia has sought to immobilise asylum seekers beyond Southeast Asia and the Pacific is warranted.

Australia's Securitisation of Borderscapes in the Middle East and South Asia

Australia's border externalisations extend beyond Southeast Asia and the Pacific (Figure 1). This section traces Australia's use of border security support and humanitarian aid to immobilise asylum seekers in the Middle East and South Asia.

The spatial and temporal flexibility of Australia's border externalisations have enabled the Australian Government to securitise new borderscapes of asylum seeking irregular migration as they arise. Periods of intense securitisation, the Pacific Solution (2001–2007) and Operation Sovereign Borders (2013–present), specifically, have led to decreased asylum seeker boat arrivals (Figure 2).

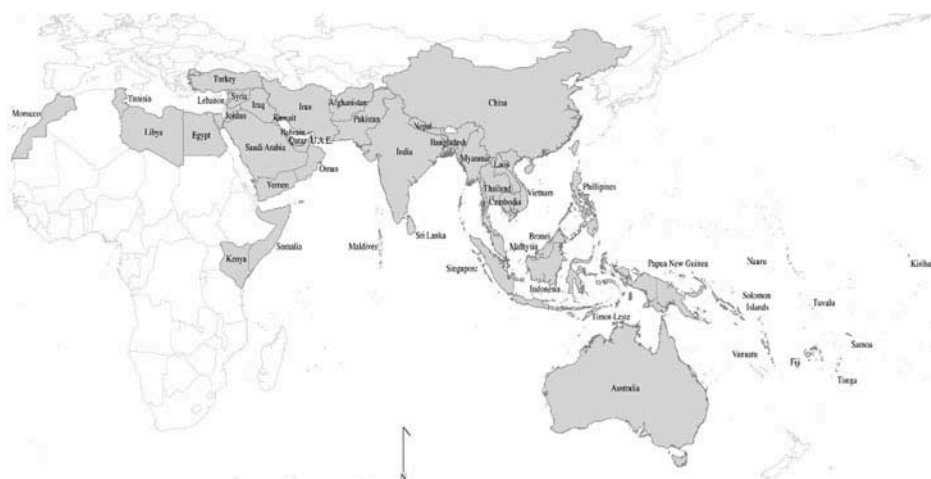


Figure 1. Map of Australia's border externalisations, 1996–2014.
Source: Compiled by author. Map created by Sean Pries.

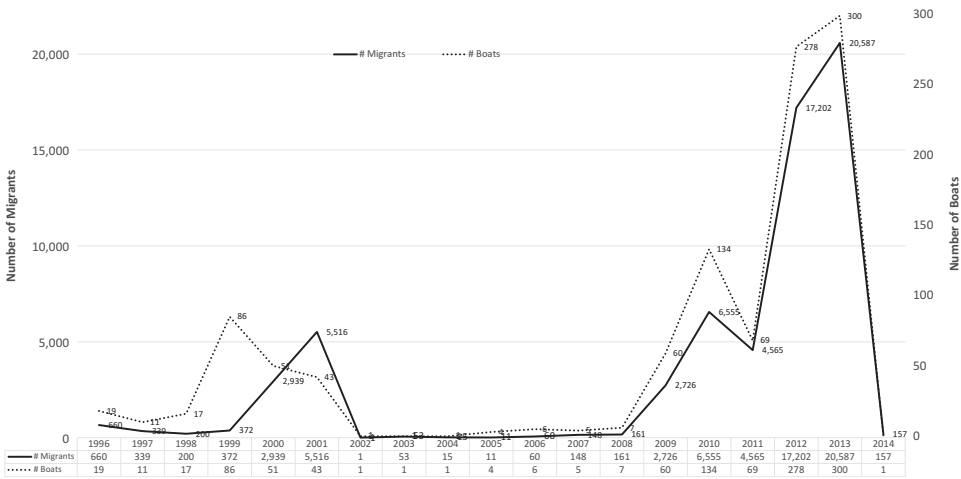


Figure 2. Number of asylum seeker and boat arrivals per year, 1996–2014.
 Source: J. Phillips, *Boat Arrivals and Boat ‘Turnbacks’ in Australia since 1976: A Quick Guide to the Statistics* (Parliament of Australia 2015).

As discussed in the previous section, the literature examining the Pacific Solution and Operation Sovereign Borders has focused on Australia’s maritime securitisations, offshore detention in the Pacific, and externalisations in Southeast Asia. I focus on border security support and humanitarian aid to show the interconnection between the militarisation of waterways and securitisation of Southeast Asia’s transit countries with externalisations designed to stymie irregular migrants before they reach Southeast Asia. In doing so, I document how Australia targets the sites and routes of the displaced, on demand, to engender a responsive assemblage of preemptive asylum seeker deterrence.

Australia’s Use of Border Security Support to Contain Asylum Seekers

Australia has established an interconnected geography of border externalisations in source countries, countries of first asylum, and transit countries to make it more difficult for asylum seekers to cross borders. This geography has changed over time, responding to the characteristics of displacement and irregular migration. The Department of Immigration identifies containing asylum seekers as their strategy for reducing asylum seeker boat arrivals:

Australia’s strategy against unauthorized arrivals is designed to address the range of conditions which lead to outflows in the first place and to secondary outflows of refugees from countries of first asylum.⁴¹

In other words, Australia’s ‘first line of defense’ against asylum seekers is immobilising them before they reach transit countries in Southeast Asia. In

2000, the Department of Immigration described its irregular migrant deterrence strategy as building “relationships” across source and transit countries to create an “interlocking web of bilateral and multilateral agreements”.⁴² Such “relationships” have manifested as border externalisations designed to contain potential irregular migrants. The Department of Immigration has used externalisations to extraterritorially transform, securitise and harden, places viewed as potential sites of cross-border displacement. As such, Australia’s approach is like the EU’s *European Neighbourhood Policy* (2004) and *Global Approach to Migration* (2005) policies which also are designed to target migrants’ routes with externalisations.⁴³ Yet Australia’s targeting of asylum seeking borderscapes predates these policies. In 2000, the Department of Immigration listed “prevention strategies...focusing on minimizing illegal outflows of people at their source” as the first element of its approach to reducing asylum seeker boat arrivals, furthering in 2002 that it was focused on “prevention tackling refugee problems where they arise”.⁴⁴ Indeed since 2001, the Department of Immigration has used border externalisations to securitise not only source countries but transit and countries of first asylum to prevent “secondary outflows” of asylum seekers “bypassing effective protection” en route to Australia.⁴⁵ In reviewing the Australian Government’s activities to deter asylum seeking irregular migrants up to 2002, the Australian National Audit Office emphasised the role of “offshore” activities as the “first line of defense in protecting the integrity of the Australian border” (Figure 3).⁴⁶

The Australian National Audit Office identified several types of “offshore activities” as important to deterring boat arrivals, recommending their continued use and expansion.⁴⁷ These included: offshore refugee status processing; foreign aid and economic assistance; technical training and support; bilateral and multilateral engagement; and, return and repatriation agreements.⁴⁸ These border externalisations have been vital to Australia’s strategy of immobilising asylum seekers. From 1996 through 2014, “technical training and support” and “bilateral and multilateral engagement” have manifested through the transnational provision of border security support and training to source countries, countries of first asylum, and transit countries to better contain asylum seekers (Table 1).

Compared to the literature on offshore detention and maritime securitisation, this dimension of Australia’s externalisation programme is comparatively under researched. From 1996 to 2014, Australia, in fact, provided many countries outside Southeast Asia and the Pacific with border security training, funds, collaboration, or equipment. It is clear, however, that Australia has adopted a different approach to providing border security support based on geographic proximity. In Southeast Asia and the Pacific, Australia has sought to establish long-term border security arrangements to more permanently expand the border security capacity of source and transit countries.

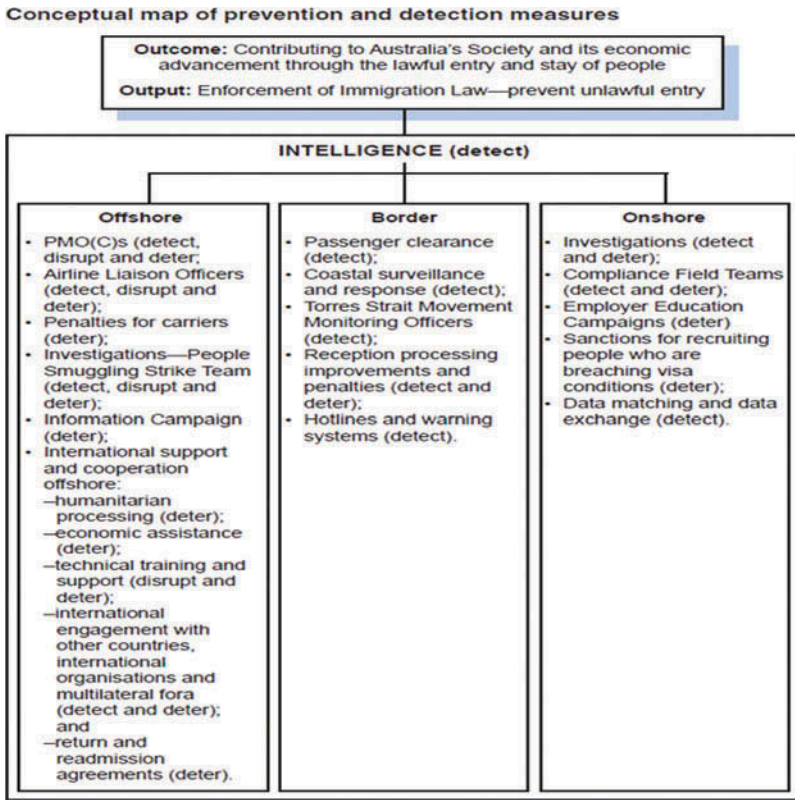


Figure 3. “Conceptual Map” of Australian border security.

Source: Australian National Audit Office, *Management Framework for Preventing Unlawful Entry into Australian Territory* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia 2002) p. 33.

These have primarily been forged through Memorandums of Understanding. Memorandums of Understanding enable countries to externalise border security in ways less visible and accountable to the public than formal treaties, thus providing an equally effective but more secretive instrument of border externalisation.⁴⁹

Outside Southeast Asia and the Pacific, Australia has only established long-term border security partnerships with Afghanistan (2003; 2011) and Sri Lanka (2003), even gifting Sri Lanka naval vessels to intercept asylum seeker boats.⁵⁰ Australia has more often used one-off initiatives and international agencies, primarily the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), to channel border security support to source and transit countries in South Asia and the Middle East. Such allocations represent a spatial strategy of migration governance designed to contain the displaced as close to their country of origin as possible by leveraging the IOM and other international agencies’ vast international presence to target displaced populations with externalisations. This practice also exhibits a temporal strategy of externalisation designed to harness the IOM and other international

Table 1. Location and type of Australian border externalisation, 1996–2014.

Source: Compiled by author.

	Border security funds or equipment	Border security training	Humanitarian aid
Afghanistan	x	x	x
Bangladesh			x
Bahrain		x	
Brunei		x	
Cambodia	x	x	x
China		x	
Egypt		x	x
Fiji	x	x	
Kenya			x
Kiribati	x		
Kuwait		x	
India			x
Indonesia	x	x	x
Iran		x	x
Iraq	x	x	x
Jordan		x	x
Laos	x	x	
Lebanon		x	x
Libya		x	
Malaysia	x	x	x
Maldives		x	
Morocco		x	
Myanmar	x	x	
Nepal			x
Oman		x	
Pakistan	x	x	x
Papua New Guinea	x		x
Philippines		x	
Qatar		x	
Samoa		x	
Saudi Arabia		x	
Singapore		x	
Solomon Islands	x		
Somalia			x
Sri Lanka	x	x	x
Syria	x		x
Thailand	x	x	x
Timor-Leste	x	x	x
Tonga		x	
Tunisia		x	
Turkey			x
Tuvalu	x		
UAE		x	
Vanuatu	x	x	
Vietnam	x	x	

agencies' offices and personnel around the world to immobilise recently displaced populations as quickly as possible. This strategy corresponds to a broader trend in the management of displacement Jennifer Hyndman has pointed to, specifically the fact that international agencies increasingly cross borders to implement projects designed to decrease the ability of refugees to do so.⁵¹

For example, as violence escalated in Afghanistan in 2009, and the number of displaced Afghans in Pakistan grew, Australia paid the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to study irregular migration between Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁵² This came at a time when many Afghans, Pakistanis, and Afghan refugees living in Pakistan, particularly the highly persecuted Hazara minority, were fleeing through Pakistan and on to Southeast Asia en route to Australia. In 2011, the Afghanistan-Australia Memorandum of Understanding on Migration and Humanitarian Co-operation was signed. This agreement facilitated Australia's provision of border security training and migration management assistance to the Afghan Government, the placement of an Australian Department of Immigration agent in the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, and the return of Afghan asylum seekers from Australia, Iran, Pakistan, and other transit countries.⁵³ The following year, as the United States' military "surge" in Afghanistan began winding down, Australia paid the IOM to upgrade border centres, digitise identity documents, and develop passport and visa systems in Afghanistan.⁵⁴ Later, in 2013, Australia paid the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to implement a project enhancing Pakistan's border security to reduce irregular migration into/out of Pakistan, thus putting the above mentioned study's findings to work.⁵⁵ The Afghanistan-Pakistan borderscape has been a vital corridor for the movement of militants and the shipment of arms. Yet, the porousness of that border has also been vital in enabling Afghans to flee the Taliban in search of refuge.

In another example, in 2009 and 2010, Australia paid the IOM to enhance Syria's border control through providing new equipment and training to Syrian border security officials.⁵⁶ This border security aid was intended to help Syrian officials reduce irregular migration into and out of the country.⁵⁷ During this time, Australia also paid the IOM to help the Syrian Government draft migration and refugee legislation.⁵⁸ Australia's efforts to shore up Syria's border took place prior to the Syrian civil war which began in 2011. Rather, this programme seems to have been intended to target and contain Iraqi refugees living in Syria. By 2009, 1.2 million Iraqi refugees had fled to Syria to escape violence in Iraq.⁵⁹ Even prior to the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iraqis had comprised a major component of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. Unsurprisingly, Australia also provided funds directly to the Iraqi Government to enhance the country's migration and border management, thereby reducing the ability of persecuted people, and people fleeing the mass violence that has ravaged that country since 2003, from crossing borders in search of safety.⁶⁰

In addition to bilateral initiatives, Australia also organises and participates in multilateral forums to circulate border security policy mobilities and provide border security training to key source countries, countries of first asylum, and transit countries. Multilateral forums have been sites where Australia has disseminated border management policies and best-practices

to normalise more restrictive approaches to irregular migration governance. The occurrence of such forums increased after the Comprehensive Plan of Action ceased in 1996, but also occur in response to periodic surges in irregular migration, used to establish mostly non-binding agreements articulating irregular migration governance norms. In 2000, the Department of Immigration described its participation in such multilateral fora as part of their strategy to “disrupt people smuggling and refugee forum shopping”.⁶¹ In 2002, Australia and Indonesia initiated the Bali Process, now with 48 members, to ‘combat people smuggling’ and harmonise irregular migration governance. Susan Kneebone sees the Bali Process as mechanism for shifting responsibility for asylum seeker governance to source and transit countries in the global South,⁶² while Michael Grewcock describes the Bali Process as the Australian Government’s preferred mechanism for pressuring states into adopting certain policies.⁶³ Correspondingly, the Bali Process brings together not only Southeast Asian and Pacific states, but key Middle Eastern and South Asian countries. These include Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and the UAE.

In another example, in 2014 Australia “hosted” the IOM’s Middle East Dialogue on Strategic Border Management forum in Jordan. The forum’s goal was to tighten border security and border security cooperation amongst Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and the UAE.⁶⁴ This event was designed to enhance border security between these countries at a time when the region was engulfed in conflicts; such conflicts include the civil war in Syria, the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and the ongoing strife in Libya, for instance. By 2014, these conflicts had already displaced millions across the region, Jordan and Lebanon housing millions of displaced Syrians and Iraqis living precarious lives in camps and urban areas.

Australia’s Use of Humanitarian Aid to Contain Asylum Seekers

Scholars have recently taken note of nation-states’ use of humanitarian organisations to help govern mobility.⁶⁵ The role of non-state actors in search and rescue missions in the Mediterranean Sea has been a particular focus,⁶⁶ yet the securitisation of aid along land borders has also been examined.⁶⁷ Adrian Little and Nick Vaughan-Williams have analysed the securitisation of humanitarian discourse in Australia, finding the Australian Human Rights Commission’s discourse has become intertwined with logics justifying transnational borderwork.⁶⁸ While Little and Vaughan-Williams usefully analyse the discourse of an important political actor, following Jennifer Hyndman’s seminal insights on the geopolitics of managing displacement, it is also clear that since the early 2000s Australia has used humanitarian aid as a preventative “strategy of containment”.⁶⁹ Despite not traditionally being a focus of Australian aid, as

asylum seekers from the Middle East and South Asia began arriving to Australia the Government began refocusing aid towards displacement hotspots there. Since the late 1990s, Australia has continuously provided aid to strategic sites and displaced populations in the Middle East and South Asia, and to a lesser degree North Africa, to shape refugee source countries and countries of first asylum there as less likely to produce asylum seeking irregular migrants. This tactic corresponds to the Department of Immigration's strategy of "addressing push factors at the source" as "the most effective way to deter irregular migration".⁷⁰ Hyndman refers to such provisions as "ad hoc political tools" used by states to avoid resettlement responsibilities.⁷¹ Correspondingly, Australia has used aid to target groups who become asylum seeking risks, shifting the focus of aid as new groups emerge. Again, this is both a spatial strategy of immobilising displaced people as far from Australia as possible and a temporal strategy of providing aid when needed and as long as needed.

Undoubtedly, Australian humanitarian aid helps vulnerable people. However, as will be demonstrated below, to argue Australia uses aid as part of a strategy to contain asylum seekers in precarity is simply drawing from the Department of Immigration's own statements. More importantly, Australia's observable pattern of dispersing aid to places and people associated with asylum seeking irregular migration points to this being the case. Most Australian aid, however, goes to Southeast Asia and Pacific Island States to address human and economic development issues unrelated to irregular migration. Furthermore, containment aid designed to immobilise asylum seekers is no doubt only a tiny fraction of Australia's annual aid budget, a budget of several billion dollars each year. It has been noted, however, that in convincing Nauru and Papua New Guinea to house Australia's offshore detention centres, Australian aid was leveraged.⁷² Similarly in September 2014, Australia granted Cambodia a A\$55 million aid package for their agreement to resettle refugees from Nauru. Yet, as early as the year 2000 humanitarian aid was explicitly described by the Department of Immigration as a border externalisation, classifying "targeted aid funding" as a preventative externalisation playing "a crucial role in mitigating the conditions that cause population outflows from countries of origin and secondary movements of refugees".⁷³ More recently, the Department of Immigration has referenced the recommendations of the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers, commissioned by Prime Minister Julia Gillard in 2012, to justify targeting asylum seekers with containment aid.⁷⁴ In 2012, for example, the Department of Immigration referenced this recommendation when describing the Department's *Displaced Persons Programme*.⁷⁵ The Department highlighted how this programme had used aid to help prevent secondary movements of refugees, a tactic corresponding to the Department's strategy of channelling aid to "populations that make up key sources of irregular maritime arrivals to Australia" in order to reduce boat attempts.⁷⁶

Australia provides containment aid directly and channels funds through the IOM, UNHCR, other United Nations bodies, intergovernmental organisations, and NGOs. Displaced Afghans and Iraqis have been a priority as both groups have irregularly migrated to Australia in large numbers. In 2000, for example, Australia budgeted A\$20.8 million in aid to be distributed over four years to displaced Afghans and Iraqis.⁷⁷ From 2000 through 2014, Australia directly provided Afghanistan with nearly A\$1 billion in various forms of aid distributed through several Australian Government agencies.⁷⁸ This grew from a mere A\$7 million in the 2001 fiscal year to nearly A\$200 million by the 2014 fiscal year.⁷⁹ From the 2001 through 2007 fiscal years, the Department of Immigration's A\$21 million in aid spending in Afghanistan was second only to AusAID's A\$131 million.⁸⁰ Hyndman points out that while useful in the short-term, camps for the internally displaced and refugee camps in countries of first asylum have become sites of containment where aid is used to warehouse displaced populations.⁸¹ In 2001, as a United States led force (including Australia) began battling the Taliban in Afghanistan, Australia spread A\$12 million in aid to support the Maslakh camp for internally displaced people in western Afghanistan and Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran.⁸² This aid seems to have been designed to make those sites more hospitable, thereby encouraging people to remain there rather than fleeing in search of permanent resettlement elsewhere. Globally, as the containment of refugees has become developed countries' primary means of managing displacement, a range of new kinds sites of refugee management have arisen.⁸³ Australia has long used aid to engender sites of precarity to house and otherwise manage displaced people. Along with funds directed to traditional camps, as early as 2002 Australia began funding a transnational network of sites facilitating the return of displaced Afghans from transit countries and countries of first asylum back to Afghanistan. In 2002, Australia paid the IOM A\$1.1 million to develop an asylum seeker and refugee return centre in Kabul and the UNHCR A\$1 million to facilitate repatriations.⁸⁴ Later, the IOM was paid to enhance border and transit centres used to process Afghan returnees.⁸⁵

In 2005, the Department of Immigration initiated its largest and most ambitious project in Afghanistan, the A\$9.5 million AliceGhan housing project for landless Afghan returnees and internally displaced people. The project was intended to incorporate housing provision, social services, job training and employment opportunities to encourage the "sustainability" of returns.⁸⁶ In other words, the project included social welfare assistance designed to help ensure returnees did not again deem it necessary to flee the country. Construction was set to commence in September 2006 at a site 50 miles north of Kabul, yet landmine, water supply, and property rights issues delayed construction until mid-2008.⁸⁷ AliceGhan was completed December 2009. Having constructed 1,030 homes, the project is nonetheless

widely seen as a failure.⁸⁸ In 2012, the Department of Immigration admitted that only around 20% of the homes were occupied.⁸⁹ Fifty miles from Kabul's labour-market, the only viable jobs for residents of AliceGhan were in agriculture. Yet neither the Department of Immigration, the United Nations Development Programme (who the Department of Immigration paid to administer parts of the project), nor the Afghan Government could establish a stable water supply to AliceGhan.⁹⁰ In 2013, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that more than half the homes were still vacant and falling to disrepair, the town's population nowhere near the 10,000 returnees once envisioned.⁹¹ In 2016, the United Nations Development Programme estimated that despite the construction of over 1,000 homes only 300 families lived in AliceGhan, and that Australia had recently granted them more funding to upgrade homes and provide job training to 100 female residents.⁹²

Despite the failure of AliceGhan to meet expectations, through 2008 the Department of Immigration estimates 124,000 Afghan asylum seekers received Australian return grants and/or reintegration assistance (various forms of social welfare support) to return to Afghanistan.⁹³ As the war in Afghanistan worsened from 2009 through 2012, Afghan boat arrivals to Australia increased.⁹⁴ The Department of Immigration responded through expanding various aid programmes targeting internally displaced people in Afghanistan, Afghan returnees, and Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran.⁹⁵ Even during a time of increased violence in Afghanistan, the Department of Immigration placed a priority on facilitating the return of Afghans from Pakistan and Iran and providing services to returnees to encourage them to remain in Afghanistan – household goods, transportation, cash grants, medical care, and food.⁹⁶ Globally, such “assisted voluntary return” and reintegration assistance has been normalised by states and the UNHCR as the ideal outcome for the displaced.⁹⁷ Australia has been at the forefront of advocating return and reintegration assistance. Return and reintegration assistance is explicitly described by the Department of Immigration as helping “ensure repatriation is a permanent solution”,⁹⁸ encouraging refugees to return while reducing the likelihood of future flight.⁹⁹ Australia has return programmes not only for Afghans, but for other nationalities deemed at risk of travelling to Australia to request asylum, asylum seekers detained by Australian authorities, and for refugees in Australia on a temporary visas. Return programmes began in 2000, becoming available to offshore detainees on Papua New Guinea and Nauru in 2002; first offered to Afghans then all nationalities. In 2002, detained Afghans were offered A\$2,000 per person/A\$10,000 per family to return, later this package was extended to all nationalities.¹⁰⁰ In 2010, return grants for detainees and visa holders were capped at A\$4,000 for Afghans and Iraqis, and A\$3,300 for everyone else, with reintegration assistance individualised to fit returnee circumstances.¹⁰¹ Assisted voluntary return and reintegration assistance is used to entice displaced and detained

asylum seekers to return to, and remain in, their countries of nationality regardless of individual protection needs or the safety of the country of return. This is particularly concerning in the case of countries like Afghanistan where the security situation is in constant flux, mass violence and persecution normalised, and government services limited.

Iraq and Syria have presented similar issues. Like Afghanistan, neither Iraq or Syria are traditional recipients of Australian aid. Yet as Iraq and Syria began releasing large numbers of asylum seekers, Australia began directing containment aid towards those countries' internally and externally displaced populations. Between 2003 and 2014, Australia provided A\$382 million in humanitarian aid to Iraq.¹⁰² The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade estimates that Australian aid has gone to around half a million displaced Iraqis during this time.¹⁰³ In 2008, five years after the United States invaded Iraq, there remained over a million displaced Iraqis across the Middle East, while Iraqis continued to arrive to Australia by boat. In 2008, Australia decided to allocate A\$10 million to create "protection space outside of Iraq" for displaced Iraqis in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Syria, Malaysia and Indonesia, and to provide displaced Iraqis in those countries with vocational training.¹⁰⁴ Vocational training is used to help asylum seekers in countries of first asylum and transit countries establish incomes. It was also used to provide jobs skills tailored to Iraq's labour-market, thereby encouraging the recipient to return to Iraq and stay there. Both are efforts to reduce the likelihood of recipients irregularly migrating to Australia. As the Islamic State began taking territory and displacing more Iraqis from 2014 forward, Australia developed a special Iraqi Humanitarian Programme to assist displaced Iraqis. This programme has provided food assistance, shelter and daily necessities, healthcare, and legal assistance to around 1.4 million displaced Iraqis.¹⁰⁵

More recently, Syrians have become a focus due to their mass displacement. Australia has used similar approaches to those already discussed to target vulnerable Syrians with containment aid. From 2011 through 2014, Australia provided A\$130 million in humanitarian aid to Syrians. This aid has primarily focused on the internally displaced inside Syria and has been distributed through the UNHCR.¹⁰⁶ During this time, Australia also targeted Lebanon and Jordan with smaller amounts of aid earmarked for Syrian refugees there, A\$22.6 million and A\$23.4 million respectively.¹⁰⁷ However, in 2014 when President Bashar al-Assad's forces began making advances against rebel forces, and the number of Syrians fleeing increased dramatically, Australia changed its approach. As more Syrians began fleeing Syria in search of refuge, Australia shifted the focus of their aid from those internally displaced to Syrian refugees living in neighbouring countries.¹⁰⁸ This aid has been tailored towards improving the quality of life of Syrian refugees. While hopefully helping some of the world's most vulnerable people, unfortunately,

this effort must also be understood as part of Australia's broader strategy of using aid to contain asylum seekers. This aid being part of the Australian Government's effort to use humanitarian aid to stabilise populations in countries of first asylum, to decrease the number of irregular maritime arrivals to Australia, and avoid resettling undesired refugees.

Conclusion

In 1998, the Australian National Audit Office released a report, *The Management of Boat People*, assessing the Government's approach to governing asylum seeking irregular migration.¹⁰⁹ It is striking how the report's conclusions on deterrence correspond to the Government's subsequent approach of using preventative border externalisations to discourage potential asylum seekers. The report found that as arrivals increased in the mid-1990s, Department of Immigration officials began to focus on how their policies either encouraged or discouraged future boat arrivals.¹¹⁰ In praising measures the Department of Immigration deployed to preemptively deter boat arrivals, the report states that practices to discourage unauthorised arrivals "are important because prevention is likely to be much more economical for the Australia taxpayer" than other means of processing asylum seekers.¹¹¹ The report concludes that the Government should adopt a flexible "risk management" approach to asylum seeker policy that balances the risks of increased boat arrivals, costs to taxpayers, non-compliance with the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the damage to Australia's international reputation restrictive policies may engender.¹¹² Nearly 20 years after this recommendation, it is evident the Government came to view undesired asylum seeker arrivals as far riskier than abandoning its obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention or damaging Australia's international reputation through adopting extreme policies to stop the boats.

This article has traced some of the less extreme tactics to emerge; Australia's use of border security support and humanitarian aid to preemptively contain asylum seekers in source countries and countries of first asylum. The securitisation of nation-states prone to producing asylum seekers, and secondary outflows of refugees from countries of first asylum, is part of Australia's risk management strategy of implementing iterative externalisations across borderscapes of asylum seeking irregular migration. These borderscapes become targets of investment. Border security support and humanitarian aid is used to invest in places, spaces, and diasporas of displacement as they emerge to prevent asylum seekers from travelling far from their country of nationality in search of refuge. The sums spent in the Middle East and South Asia discussed in this article are no doubt a tiny fraction of Australia's overall spending on asylum seeker prevention. Due to the Government's policy of secrecy, and the complicated nature of border

security operations, what is spent to immobilise and deflect asylum seekers is difficult to estimate. Yet, in 2016 a joint report from Save the Children Australia and UNICEF Australia estimated that from 2013 through 2016, Australia spent at least A\$9.6 billion on mainland and offshore detention, boat turnbacks, and other regional programmes associated with Operation Sovereign Borders, finding that offshore processing alone costs over A\$400,000 per person per year.¹¹³ The joint report furthered that “the true financial cost [of Operation Sovereign Borders] is likely to be much greater”.¹¹⁴ These estimates do not seem to include the relatively limited monies spent in the Middle East and South Asia discussed in this article. However, given the growing numbers of displaced worldwide and the costs of processing asylum seekers under Australia’s current policy of offshore detention, it seems likely Australia will expand such programmes, continuing to target sites of displacement and precariousness – wherever they may be – as they emerge and change.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Kira Williams for thoughtfully reviewing an early draft of this article. I also want to thank Sean Pries for developing the article’s map and the reviewers for their excellent input.

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