INSTITUTE OF
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
AUSTRALIA
ACT

02 6154 9800
PO Box 4349 Kingston ACT 2604
admin@act.ipaa.org.au
www.act.ipaa.org.au

ABN 24 656 727 375

TRANSCRIPT OF EVENT | SECRETARY SERIES

ON UNITY: THE ELEMENTS OF SOCIAL COHESION

MICHAEL PEZZULLO AO
SECRETARY
DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS

Hosted by DR STEVEN KENNEDY PSM, Secretary of The Treasury and IPAA ACT President.

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Enquiries should be directed to Caroline Walsh on 0413 139 427 or at caroline.walsh@act.ipaa.org.au

STEVEN KENNEDY: Good morning everybody. It's lovely to see people in person. I'm getting used to it again. Today's one of those events where we'll be both in person and we're also streaming and recording. Good morning everyone and welcome to today's Secretary Series event with Michael Pezzullo AO. My name is Steven Kennedy, and I'm the Secretary to the Treasury, President of IPAA ACT and your Chair today. To begin, I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people, the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting and from which this video and lecture is being broadcast. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. I would like to acknowledge and welcome any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event and to the elders of all lands this live streamed event reaches.

STEVEN KENNEDY: The Secretary Series is an important and popular part of IPAA's calendar providing an opportunity for my colleagues to speak about their portfolios or areas of interest. This is the first Secretary's event that's being held face-to-face. This event, this year, this is also being broadcast live to those who can't be here in person. So welcome to all of those people. This morning Mike will be speaking about the development of social cohesion, exploring the factors that contribute to it and the impact of globalisation, communication, and technology. Today the event will follow the following format. The keynote address, followed by a short in-conversation session with myself, then we'll wrap up and have some time for morning tea and networking.

STEVEN KENNEDY: We are photographing today's event and photos will be posted to the IPAA website. The livestream is also being recorded and will be made available online. It's now my pleasure to introduce our keynote speaker, Michael Pezzullo AO. Mike began his distinguished public service career in the late 1980s as a Graduate in the Department of Defence and after five years moved to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. He later joined the Ministerial staff of the Foreign Minister, Senator the Hon Gareth Evans QC, before serving as the Deputy Chief of Staff to the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Kim Beazley MP.

STEVEN KENNEDY: Mike returned to the Department of Defence in 2002, and in 2004 he became Chief of Staff of the Australian Defence Headquarters. In 2008 and 2009, he led the Defence Whitepaper team, and was the principal author of the 2009 Defence Whitepaper, a paper which is still ringing through policy considerations today. Mike joined the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service in 2009 as the Chief Operating Officer, and become a Chief Executive Officer in 2013. During his tenure in customs, he was responsible for offshore maritime security, border related intelligence, national security, law enforcement programs, and undertaking a major structural and cultural reform.

STEVEN KENNEDY: Mike became the Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection in 2014, before the transition to Secretary of the Department of Home Affairs in 2017. It's been quite a remarkable career for Mike so far. Mike has a Bachelor of Arts Honours in history from Sydney University and enjoys spending time with his family, cricket, rugby league, and reading. Please join me in welcoming Mike to the stage.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Thank you, Steven. It's a great privilege and honour to be able to serve with you as a fellow Secretary on the Secretary's Board, and I'm delighted at the collaboration and the partnership that our departments have formed in recent times. Can I welcome colleagues, too many to all name and acknowledge, but I really do appreciate you coming out quite early in the morning and dealing with the Canberra traffic such as it is.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: My address today is entitled *On Unity: The Elements of Social Cohesion*. The Department of Home Affairs undertakes a great deal of work in the broad field of social cohesion. In a diverse range of areas, such as immigration and settlement services, engagement with culturally diverse communities, the provision of translation services and adult English training courses, citizenship services, countering misinformation and disinformation, countering espionage and foreign interference, protecting the electoral system, countering violent extremism and terrorism, and policy in relation to dealing with abhorrent material on technology platforms, the Department leads efforts, or significantly contributes to efforts, to bolster the social cohesion of the nation.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Today I should like to take a broader lens to the concept of 'social cohesion' and lift the discussion above specific policy and programme objectives. Modern policy discourse regarding social cohesion tends to centre on 'harmony', and the celebration of ethnic diversity and multiculturalism. These are important policy objectives, both in their own right, and in relation to how they bear on the policy and programme activities already mentioned. Today I should like to suggest that (conceptually at least) we need to adopt a much broader conception of social cohesion, one which is not synonymous with multiculturalism. My argument follows. As always I will avoid making comment on matters of policy.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Our understanding of 'social cohesion' has evolved over two centuries or more, as a result of industrialisation, the specialisation of labour, the increased complexity of capitalist societies, and the associated breakdown of the traditions and norms of centuries-old patterns of life on farms, in villages and in pre-modern towns and cities. In those earlier times, the bonds of family, clan, region, language and faith, amongst other factors, loomed larger in the formation of individual identity and social consciousness.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Writing mainly before the First World War, Émile Durkheim and Max Weber were amongst the first scholars to analyse and identify the fracturing of those bonds and communities, and the associated atomisation of modern life. Since they studied and wrote, with the upheavals of major wars and the dissolution of empires, further industrialisation, and the mass movement of peoples through the 20th Century, the question of social cohesion is today a very different one from that which would have been posed in pre-industrial societies. That is even before we factor in the more recent advent of social media and new technology platforms, which are likely to change the social cohesion equation again in this century.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: I am not a social cohesion pessimist. Indeed during the bushfires and pandemic of 2020, Australia has shown itself to be a socially cohesive nation and community. Today, societies generally are more socially cohesive and economically stable as compared with Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Then we saw fracturing at the heart of European civilisation, and the rise of Fascism and Nazism. The latter was the most monstrous tyranny that has ever darkened this world. It abused the notion of a 'united' Germany, and twisted it into an evil dictatorship which generated its malign power from oppression at large, and the specific, targeted brutalisation of fellow Germans and others who in the most horrendous case of 'the Final Solution' were deemed not to be human – and fit only for the unspeakable horror of the gas chambers. We must never forget. We are not today remotely close to that state of affairs.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Today, I should like to pose a very specific way into the question of 'social cohesion'. I should like to begin with the individual, as distinct from social formations such as communities and nations, and build out from there. For this purpose, our starting point should be the inherent moral worth and dignity, and autonomy, of all human beings. Whether such a standpoint is derived from a theistic or a secular belief system; and whether it is predicated on the existence of 'natural rights' under 'natural law', or otherwise, these and related questions are not material for today. Philosophers and theologians will debate these issues until the end of days. However derived, let us presume individual autonomy and an inherent moral equality across the human species. Further, let us all agree that human action is framed within moral rules, and a view to ends and purposes, and a calculus of consequences.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: If this starting point is accepted, how does social cohesion amongst autonomous and equally worthy individuals come about? The first matter to be examined is the following: does autonomy and inherent moral equality entail the same level of obligation to all humans? Or does obligation ripple out from our family, to our friends, our neighbours and co-workers, our fellow citizens – most of whom are complete strangers to us – and then to humanity at large? To deny the reality of differentiated obligation would fly in the face of learnings in social psychology, anthropology, sociology, and evolutionary biology, and of course our own lived experience.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Let us more closely examine this 'rippling' of the waves of social connection and obligation. In our private sphere we are, or should be, recognised, respected, loved and nurtured in the most immediate and intimate ways possible. It is here, at least in democratic societies, that we are free to live as we please, within law.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: As a side note, when I refer here variously to living freely, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, this should not be viewed as a narrow hedonism, which is based on a reductively utilitarian view of 'pleasure'. There is broader utility to be found in good works, altruistic conduct, and sociability, doing justice to others and receiving it within law, building a better life for your children and a better community into the future, as inter-generational tasks, and so on. The ends of living encompass the pleasant and the useful, as well as doing what is just and right.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Let us go further on the journey of the rippling waves of social connection and obligation. Our identity as individuals is a function of our upbringing and evolutionary biology, our personal experience and cultural formation (which encompasses ancestry and race, class, gender and so on), and our outlook as expressed through beliefs, ideals, customs, values and attitudes of conscience.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: We are of course also social beings, and as social beings we live in the socio-cultural domain. That is, we inhabit networks of families and friendships, and other social connections, neighbourhoods, work, trade and professional networks (we find meaning through work, even by way of COVID-induced remote working), as well as sporting and recreational clubs, churches and religious organisations, community groups and so on. Our identity is logically also a function of being situated in these different networks. In the socio-cultural domain, cohesion is generated by collaboration, shared purpose, mutual respect and inclusion, all of which are mediated by code, rule, custom or convention, and most likely by a combination of some or all of these.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: This domain is the locus of 'social capital', which is in part a function of trust and community-mindedness (for instance in the face of disasters and crises), and in part a function of state effectiveness, to which I will shortly turn. Scholars such as Zygman Bauman, Robert Putnam and Francis Fukuyama have explored the trust and social connections which are grounded in private and voluntary networks, and other associations in the socio-cultural domain, which constitute communities of shared purpose and values. For centuries, social capital was generated on the basis of locality or 'place', but in more recent times social connection has become more global (in a globalised world) and more virtual (in a technology-enabled and connected world).

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: These private or voluntary associations cannot, however, generate the totality of 'social cohesion' which brings 'a people' together to live civilly, confident in the institutions and norms of their community, and where they are able to resolve differences of view and settle on agreed courses of collective action. Social cohesion beyond our immediate networks, which might on average consist of around 150-200 known persons, which is to say, persons who are known to us in a meaningful sense, and not the 'likes' and 'links' of social media, has to derive from something other than personal recognition. Existentially speaking we are 'strangers' to millions to whom we owe civic obligations, such as our fellow citizens. Legally of course, most of our fellow citizens are strangers, but they are not 'alien' to us within the meaning of s51 (xix) of the Australian Constitution.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Social cohesion entails a number of elements which are broader than private and voluntary webs of association, such that one can have cohesion amongst strangers. First, protection or 'security' in the positive and unifying sense of which I spoke in my address last month to the National Security College of the Australian National University (13 October 2020), where I made the case for the nation-state being the 'unit of security' for the purposes of our ability to live securely, with reasonable levels of assurance in relation to our protection. Mutual protection generates an equity for all which contributes to social cohesion, at least insofar as it generates the minimal collective assurance that flows from unmurderous cohabitation.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Second, economic stakeholding, including employment, asset and property ownership, retirement wealth, the equitable burden of taxation, and the provision of public goods. Economic stakeholding generates mutual interest and an equity in the success of the economic unit of which one is a member. Economic dislocation and disadvantage is harmful to social cohesion, as is the circumstance where the professional class feels more connected to their counterparts in global cities than to their fellow citizens in the outer suburbs of large, congested cities, in declining industries and in regional or peri-urban locations. Educational attainment, employment status and 'class' are factors in social cohesion.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: I will not rehearse here the reasons for the claim that I made recently in a paper on economics and security (22 October 2020) that the 'unit of prosperity' for these purposes is also the nation-state, as the constituent component of the international network of states as they function as national economies. Such 'units' have authority to frame the circumstances of commerce (by designing, regulating and otherwise operating markets, for instance).

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Third, state effectiveness, whether for the purposes of security and protection, or the delivery of public goods and other economic effects, or otherwise, also adds to social cohesion as it enhances the trust that the people have in the ability of their government to work to the ends and purposes of the people. There is a vital connection back to the economic dimension, as state effectiveness in nation-building builds inter-generational economic stakeholding and therefore social cohesion. Think of the common purpose and positive preference that we have to build a better community for succeeding generations through infrastructure, transport, communications, urban development, immigration, agriculture, resource and energy development, manufacturing, sovereign wealth, and so on.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: As I have covered the topic of state effectiveness and the role of the public service extensively in my two previous addresses to this body, I will not restate those arguments here, save to restate the observation that I made in my address of May 2016 to the effect that nation-states can possess all of the requisite visible features of the rule of law and constitutionality, and yet still be incapable of delivering basic public services. We should be very proud of how we measure up in the Australian Public Service, insofar as we contribute to state effectiveness and therefore directly to the functioning of a well-ordered and administered society and economy, which prospers and coheres as a result.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: If we have these elements – life, liberty and happiness in our private domain; the trust and community-mindedness which is suggested by the notion of 'social capital'; 'security' in its broadest and most positive sense; economic stakeholding and prosperity over an inter-generational horizon; and state effectiveness – then I would contend that the essential elements of social cohesion are present. All, that is to say, save one.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: We are missing one key element. That is, what I termed the politico-legal domain in my address to the 3rd Advancing Community Cohesion Conference earlier this year (11 February 2020). How do we come together as 'a people' which is able to live civilly, confident in the institutions and norms of their community, and where we are able to resolve differences of view and settle on agreed courses of collective action? Following Fukuyama in his major recent work Against Identity Politics, we still need to consider our 'creedal national identity' – which is built not narrowly around personal connections or 'identity', but rather around agreed politico-legal values, beliefs and conventions.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: From a different perspective, Edmund Burke relevantly put it in his famous address to the electors of Bristol in 1774, where taking parliament as the focal point of cohesion he argued that parliament should not be conceived of as a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests, but rather as a deliberative assembly with one interest, that of the whole, where the 'general good', resulting from 'the general reason of the whole', overrides 'local purposes'.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: I will now tread very carefully so as to avoid the appearance of expressing any view whatsoever on the conduct of politics. Rather my purpose is to reflect on a meta-political challenge which should be of interest to all concerned with democracy, whether they are elected or appointed to public office, whether an expert or simply an interested citizen.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: The unity implied in the constitutional idea of sovereignty in a democracy of 'the people' denies the power of the 'interests and factions' (following Burke) to segregate society in terms of religion, gender, class or other signifiers of 'identity', where the greater emphasis is placed on difference, and social and cultural grievance. That same unity should, more importantly, stand against extra-constitutional actions and violence which is aimed at the achievement of political ends. The ultimate breakdown in social cohesion is domestic war, where irresolvable political disagreements are resolved through a violent clash of wills.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Our polity can only function civilly on the basis of the pragmatism which is inherent in government in its broadest sense across the legislature, public administration and the judiciary. This requires communicative action in order to arrive at common points of understanding, which are in turn required to underpin and legitimate collective actions with which we all agree, or at least accept. Democracy relies upon the resolvability of difference, the capacity to arrive at 'the public interest', and resultant actions which are taken under law.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: What is 'communicative action'? I have adapted this term from its usage by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, although in doing so I would not endorse his entire thought system. With Habermas we can argue for the value of Truth, of critique, and of reasoning in discourse. In politics, public administration, commerce and everyday life we should stand against lying, disinformation and propaganda, circular reasoning, deception, misinformation, and conspiracies to the extent that such actions preclude freedom in political communication and reasoning in the public square.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: On this view, social cohesion is constituted through the legitimation of power in the form of legal authority and the capacity for authorised officers (whether elected or appointed) to act publicly, on behalf of 'the people'. In a cohesive society, different viewpoints are moderated through a process of deliberation and decision-making, as expressed in laws and regulations, executive decisions and actions, and judicial determinations, such that we are free to live by conscience within law, assured of just treatment, as well as social connection, mutual protection, economic stakeholding and fair access to effective state services.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: In Australia, the discourse regarding the freedom of political communication in our jurisprudence has best surfaced the idea of 'the people' in this sense. Our constitutional doctrine has found in it a bridge between politics and the law, and between government and its source of sovereign authority. As the State can engage in coercive measures such as conscription, the acquisition of property, the curtailment of rights, the cessation of citizenship, the detention and incarceration of persons, lawful killing and so on, it is especially crucial that the mandate and consent of 'the people' be granted and managed as an active and substantive process. In some countries, actions are undertaken under the sign of 'the people' and 'legality', but they in reality lack legitimacy, as they are expressions of the arbitrary will of the Regime.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: By way of brief detour, it staggers me that the proponents of 'critical theory', and those who still follow the teachings of the French post-structuralists and the deconstructionists, such as Foucault and Derrida, say next to nothing about issues such as power, discipline, and 'discourse' in authoritarian regimes, despite the fact that they are engaged in the most pernicious surveillance, social control and repression against their own populations.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: I contend that the 'unit of cohesion' is again, as with security and prosperity, the nation-state. I say this not because 'the people' are subordinate to the State, or that 'unity' is an absolute value which commands the obedience and acquiescence of the 'the multitude'. That is the orientation of authoritarian regimes and dictatorships. For a period of time, social cohesion can of course be manufactured and compelled as occurred in the Soviet Union, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. A topic for discussion on another day might be whether manufactured and compelled cohesion is in fact sustainable in the face of the arc of history's telos of freedom.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: I contend entirely the opposite: unity should not be suggestive of conformance, suppression and obedience. In a democracy, 'the people' create the State and command its obedience, this being both constitutive and representative of their positive liberty – their ability to live freely and by conscience within law - and their liberty from the oppression of living under a Regime.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Why should this concern us, as Australian Public Servants? To summarise the case that I made when I last addressed you (see my address of 30 October 2018), our institutions of national governance – separated powers, parliamentary sovereignty, representative democracy, responsible government, the rule of law, and the machinery of executive government, including the public service – anchor our democracy such that we can enjoy the fruits of the polity just described. Our role is to act with such precision, effectiveness, professionalism, accountability and virtue that the trust of 'the people' in the ability of the government to work to the ends and the purposes of 'the people' is assured and enhanced.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: It is the institutional norms, procedural safeguards and long-established conventions that comprise our foundational constitutional doctrine regarding the exercise of politico-legal power which underpins our social cohesion in the deepest sense as I have it set out above – namely, how we come together as 'a people' which is able to live civilly, confident in our institutions, and where we are able to resolve differences.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Today I should like to add another layer to my arguments. Again, I will tread very carefully. We need to avoid the temptation of 'post-political' thinking, which is to say that democratic communicative action has had its day in a disrupted world, which is seeing cleavages of place, race and class emerge; along with illiberal politics and authoritarianism; declining trust and civility; 'post truth' falsehood and conspiracy theories and misinformation; the fragmentation of discourse through the 'echo chambers' of social media, and the blurring of fact and opinion in the news media; subversion and state-sponsored disinformation; and the advent of 'post-national' global technology companies.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: I argue that a turn to, not away from, 'the political', which is to say communicative action and the deliberative moderation of different standpoints with a view to deciding on common action, is the best and only way to deal with the age in which we find ourselves. Communicative action relies on reason and its application. Reason is the guiding light for deliberation, decision, review and accountability (in the sense of a reasonable person being able to see the basis for another's decision or action, even where their own preference would otherwise be for a different decision or course of action). For reason to work in a polity, we have to hold that 'truth' can be arrived at for the purposes of informing deliberative action - through investigation, experimentation, data analysis, research, modelling, as well as reasonable conjecture about the future.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: The epistemology of democracy requires a capacity to engage in the reasoned attainment of an 'objective view' of reality, on the basis that as we become aware of more perspectives through open forms of communicative action, the greater our objectivity. An unmediated and perfectly comprehended reality is 'out there' but the descriptions and understandings of that reality are not. They have to be fashioned through inquiry and reasoning, which have rules of evidence and methodology, estimative language, accepted authorities, models of calculability and projection, and so on.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Democracy's episteme entails a bringing together through open communicative action of facts and values - facts through positivism in knowledge formation, and values through reasoned normative moderation where interests, moral judgements, value-oriented conduct, strategic vision and future preferences, policy ideals come together, transparently and deliberatively. On this view, 'facts' require a commonly accepted episteme which is not a mindless commitment to uncontested versions of 'the truth' but rather a refutation of the 'post truth' claim that reality is (1) a 'simulation' which is composed of references without referents in a 'hyperreality' (the French postmodernist view epitomised by Baudrillard), or (2) that reality is known only to those who are aware of the 'truth' of conspiracies which are being effected at massive scale by sinister and powerful groups which are not visible to the unaware and compliant population at large.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: I should add in passing that the antidotes to the obscurantism and madness respectively of postmodernism's simulated reality or the imagined reality of the conspiracy theorists is very traditional epistemic discipline – which is based on empiricism, falsifiability, and the 'open society' in the sense meant by Karl Popper in The Open Society and its Enemies (1945).

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: On this view I am wary of treating our own societies as an 'information battlespace', the supposed site of information or 'cognitive' warfare in the 'grey zone'. This approach strips out values and the normative dimension, in favour of an unthinking veneration of technique. Such approaches have little contribution to make to domestic policy in relation to countering foreign inference, and the protection of our democratic institutions.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: I am similarly sceptical of the abstraction of the 'data base' as the best mode of powering inquiry and reasoning. We should be wary of being seduced by the scale, immediacy and the patterns of data which are all around us – and of the techno-utopian pretension of the data and platform companies as we stand on the threshold of the age of artificial intelligence. While their capabilities and techniques can inform communicative action, the resolution of moral questions, the determination of value-oriented conduct and the dispensation of justice will always be best done by humans using reason as directed by virtue.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: On a previous occasion, in May 2016, I made the point to this body that effective and accountable administration turns on good record keeping and clear writing. For another occasion it may be worth turning our minds to the links between the development of writing and our profession. The oldest fragments of writing often concern law, administration and government. Today I should like to make a rather different point. Today, speech is privileged because it is thought to have a presence and an immediacy which writing lacks. This is a phonocentric view which privileges speech over writing, notwithstanding the fact that it is by the latter that discoverable reconstructions of reasoning and decision-making can be created and maintained. Writing is the evidence of reason or logos for the ages.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: In its highest form – and yes, even when written for the purposes of being spoken – the written text can convey facts, values, decisions, reasons, actions, consequences and an engagement with the contingency of an always uncertain future in the most memorable ways, and even on occasion with supreme moral force: consider Lincoln at Gettysburg in 1863; or his Second Inaugural in 1865; or Churchill's wartime speeches in the darkest hour in 1940 of the British nation and Empire. Of course both men were steeped in literature, scripture, the classics, history and philosophy, all of which equipped them to exhibit the highest forms of communicative action in the Western canon. With language that was urgent, direct, orientated to action, and infused with purpose and moral power, they laid before 'the people' the explanations and outlines of their decisions and judgments, robed in the most sublime expressions and phrases that have ever been written to be uttered by elected officials.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: These are texts which 'speak' to unity in common purpose: at Gettysburg, for the Union that had been brought forth, conceived in liberty, four score and seven years earlier; in 1940 under the bombs of the Nazis, for the cohesion and fortitude of a fearful Britain, which was with its Commonwealth facing for a time the most monstrous tyranny alone.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Cicero is little remembered today, much less taught. He was remembered well as a philosopher of politics, governance and administration through the late Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and most valuably for us today by the thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries who did most to formulate our modern conceptions of liberty and democracy: Locke, Montesquieu, Hume, Burke, Paine, the framers of the United States Declaration of Independence and Constitution, such as Jefferson, Madison and Hamilton, and most relevantly for us the British parliamentarians, judges and philosophers such as John Stuart Mill, who fashioned the conventions of the representative democracy and the form of responsible government which is practised in Australia. In this great tradition, the West fashioned the foundational elements of our politico-legal order – with the separation of power at its peak, whereby an executive is authorised by a legislature and checked by a judiciary.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: For Cicero, public office had a distinctive character. Public duties are attached to such offices and are exercised impersonally by officers who hold such positions for limited periods of time, and not by right. Public offices are vested with trust by 'the public', to serve the interests and purposes of the public, and nothing else. Subject only to lawful limitations, service in public office has to be conducted 'in public'. Writing in 44BC, in De Officiis (usually translated as On Duties), Cicero set out the rules which should guide those who hold public office – rules grounded in the virtues of truth, justice, fortitude and decorum, along with good judgement. Jefferson in his writings credited Cicero as the principal inspiration of the concept of 'the public right', which we today more often term 'the public interest' and the public sphere – the concept of governing in the interests of 'the people' who form 'the public', as distinct from governing for private interests, or worse for corrupt gain. We should in the battle of ideas concerning models of governance decline to be impartial as between our tradition, however imperfect our attempts at implementation, and other traditions which are not similarly grounded in ideals regarding the autonomy, and the inherent worth, of each and all.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: We tend to think of a technology as a machine or an implement. Technology can also be the knowledge of techniques and processes, in the sense of 'technique', which can encompass reason, method and practice. In this sense, our mode of social and political organisation is a 'technology' which can be applied for ends and purposes of our choosing in the public interest, consistently with the autonomy and the inherent worth of each and all. Over several millennia, and especially since the 17th and 18th centuries, we in the West have fashioned a technology of social and political organisation which best combines the private domain where we spend the most meaningful moments of our lives, the socio-cultural domain that we inhabit more generally, and the politico-legal realm of 'the people', which properly balances power, authority and legitimacy in a common-wealth of common purpose.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: We should take pride in the legacies upon which we have built our democracy: the assembly from ancient Athens; ideals of civic obligation and 'public right' from ancient Rome; individual conscience and free will from Christian Europe; inquiry and reasoning as it emerged in the Enlightenment; political liberty and the model of separated powers that burst forth in 17th and 18th century Britain, France and in the American Revolution. When Lincoln wrote, and then spoke, of government of the people, by the people and for the people, he authored a formulation that has universal application as the most distilled expression of the cohesion required in all 'unions' – a cohesion which flows from legitimacy, from self-government in the public interest, and from each of us having a stake in that common-wealth of common purpose.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: In the end, narrative and a historical form of meaning speak to who we are. The data base model - where there is just 'the multitude', to be diced by data analysts for the purposes of objectifying individual human beings, too often as points of monetary gain and value - can at best only tell us what we are. As our existence is time-bound, our narrative as 'a people', and not a multitude, is perhaps the most valuable instrument of social cohesion.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Our narrative of public duty, irrespective of personal advantage, the rule of law, of enlightened reason, of placing the public interest ahead of the familial and kin loyalties of pre-modern times, and to 'regimes' through the ages, is our best defence against social fragmentation on the one hand, and tyranny on the other.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Thank you very much.

STEVEN KENNEDY: Thank you, Mike. That was excellent. I don't know, so many places to start, so we'll follow-up after the discussion.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: I got in economic stakeholders.

STEVEN KENNEDY: You did. That was brilliant. Look, I want to draw out two things to begin with, if that's okay? Or ask you to talk about two things, and neither of them are the ones that were suggested by your office to me if that's okay with you?

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: It's a bit of a fail.

STEVEN KENNEDY: They were very good questions. The first one is, you presented a very comprehensive framework for thinking about social cohesion. Of course, in the interests of time, you didn't have time in a sense to reflect on how Australia, the sovereign state, is working in a sense against that framework, or some observations on that. And then secondly I wondered if you could just extend your observations about Australia and then what Australians might think about because of their own experience. Obviously you've studied if you like, global history very carefully. Is our experience being replicated in other Western nations, or other nations, and what's your sense of social cohesion then globally? Are Australians getting a sense of global developments partly because of their own experience?

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Steven, I might start with the second question first, if I might start globally, and come down to Australia. Or focus in on Australia I should say, rather than come down. Historical perspective matters. It comes through no doubt in what I've said. It comes through in how I think about the world—and it's really important that we don't ... I'm really concerned about this, by the way—that we don't lose historical consciousness of what's happened before. What happened in the 20th century was beyond the comprehension of certainly anyone who didn't live through it, and where most of us in this room either have got parents or grandparents who are probably the last of the generation that passed through that era.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Whether it was the end of the First World War and the horrors of that war, the breakdown of communities, the breakdown of social cohesion, particularly in Europe, in some of what as I alluded to in my remarks, the most civilised nations on earth, that had brought us high culture, music, philosophy, literature, and their descent into the madness of fascism and Nazism in the '20s and '30s. And then of course the horror, the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust, ostensibly undertaken by a state that was speaking in the name of the people, in the name of a unified Germany, and doing those unspeakable things ...

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Just as a sidebar, I think as we go forward in the decades ahead, we have to work very hard to preserve the memory of that. Because if that's just simply in your Google feed or your social media feed, and you're not particularly attuned to that, because it's not taught, and it never comes up through the feed, we're probably only half a generation away, and look, we've all got ... A lot of us have got kids who are millennials, and they're very bright, they're incredibly talented, they're fantastic researchers, but it's a frenetic, rushed ingestion of data that they're constantly getting.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: I fear, and I've had occasions at times to speak to some of the Jewish groups in our communities. They are concerned that there might be a loss of memory, and that is one of the anchors that we have. If we're going to be true to the creed 'don't forget so it never happens again' well history has to be the anchor. Now, for all of the difficulties in the world, and there are difficulties, I alluded to them. Post truth, authoritarianism, the rise of what is sometimes called illiberal politics. We're nowhere near that.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: We are so far away from that, and as you know better than me, we've gotten through a number of economic shots in recent decades, which did not have the political and social and cultural impacts that say the Great Depression had, with war and conflict and the rest of it. How are we travelling globally? Well, if you take your comparator as the middle of the 20th century, very well. But that's not the only comparator, and should we be complacent? No.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: In terms of Australia, two comments. One, Mr Tudge gave a very extensive speech in August on social cohesion in Australia, and it's very important for us as very senior officials to steer very clear of major speech topics given by our ministers. I can't imagine you ever competing with the Treasurer on his ground, when he gives a speech, so mine was very conceptual and I don't propose to say anything other than I agree with the minister, because we helped him draft his speech, but I will make a couple of observations drawn from his address in August.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: He foreshadowed at that time as I think you're aware, from other deliberations, that he intends to bring down a more comprehensive statement, or at least commentary on social cohesion early next year. He's made comments to that effect. Let me just draw on a couple of the points that he's made, a couple of points that Mr Morrison made, and indeed a number of Mr Morrison's predecessors.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Our multiculturalism is well regarded around the world. The Prime Minister and the government speaks about the most successful multicultural society in the world. That is supported by data, particularly the longitudinal data that is generated through the Scanlon process with Monash University. A lot of metrics around that. A lot of lived experience. There is always certainly reflecting on my own circumstances as the first generation born here, so the second generation of Italian Australian migrants. There were issues growing up with racism and lack of inclusion, but compared to the benefit of living here, the prosperity, the security, the cohesion, the three big themes that I'm seeking to promote of prosperity, security, and cohesion, certainly all of the people of my parents' generation say there's nowhere that they would have rather have come.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Particularly out of the devastation of the post-war Italy, post-war Europe. Again, should we be complacent? No. Of course not. Do we need to work at programs that Mr Tudge has spoken about around Australian values, support for linguistically diverse communities so that they understand their rights and obligations, including in relation to things like domestic violence? Yes, there's more to be done. As you know, we've appointed a Coordinator General for Migrant Services to ensure that the integration of migrant services with civil society groups, with states and territories, increasingly local councils are getting into this space. Better Brought Together. Alison Larkin's doing a terrific job there. Look, I could sound off a number of other points of what we're doing here, but it would start to sound like the minister's speech, so rather than duplicate it, I'll refer you to his speech.

STEVEN KENNEDY: Okay. Thanks, Mike.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: I'll stay at the conceptual level and stay out of the way of ministers.

STEVEN KENNEDY: Look, I think it is a really important perspective. You talked about being I think about optimistic, or maybe I just read the optimism that was in your speech. But it is easy for us to forget the very significant advances in health, in the broader wellbeing of individuals. Of course, there are very large challenges, be they in the environmental domain-

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Incomes globally.

STEVEN KENNEDY: ... in other ... Exactly. There's sort of that perspective is sometimes forgotten. In that vein, and in your comment on history, I wanted to just ask you, you made some very important points about discovery of truth and reasoning, and debate and contest. What are your thoughts about sometimes this comes up, about the role of experts? Because we think a lot about that in the public service, that debate and a reasoned contest is always remaining open to the idea that something may be contested, but respecting that two views aren't necessarily of equal value, which is often the way they are reported. That journalism is often about showing, is wanting to balance one view with another view.

STEVEN KENNEDY: But while remaining open to contest, one has to respect there will be people who know a little more, and we've seen that in the response to the pandemic, and we've seen it in the response to other policy. It goes to your issues of reasoning and truth. What's your sense of how that process, your comment about younger people, thinking about history and discovering truth, what's your sense about how that evolves? Do you also remain optimistic there, or do you feel fractures or tensions about that?

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: I remain generally optimistic. Although, in the work that we do around disinformation, but more particularly especially in relation to the premise of your question, misinformation, the ability of the internet to rapidly amplify conspiracies, which have got no basis in science. Like, it's not even a question of contestation, treatments for COVID for instance, that is worrying. Because you are starting to find ecosystems or systems of discourse which are shutting themselves out from any form of contestability, because people are just reinforcing both by the feeds that they receive, what they like, what they don't like, what they comment on, like-minded views.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: I am concerned about the rise of conspiracies, particularly when fused with a sense that government can't be trusted, the experts can't be trusted, so I'll trust this blogger, or I'll trust this person who seems authentic to me, and pretty sure you're not that far away, and I don't want to disparage a whole group of people, you're not that far away from being convinced that Queen Elizabeth is actually the leader of the lizard people that are running through some sort of global conspiracy.

STEVEN KENNEDY: You know a lot about conspiracies.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: In the counter misinformation game, you come across it all. There's a UFO in Woomera, because we got one of the UFOs out of Roswell. There's Dan Brown novels to be written-

STEVEN KENNEDY: I hope you take me for a look one day. That would be fantastic. Anyway.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: So, yes, I am concerned. What is the antidote of that? Two points. One, and it's really more centrally on point. That is a concern about the conspiracy misinformation, and then disinformation is then the conscious manipulation of that susceptibility, typically by propagandists working for state actors. Let's park that. What is the democratic response to that environment? Two things. One, experts themselves often disagree, so them being honest, whether you're a macroeconomist, an epidemiologist, a physicist, putting your assumptions out, your model, having the humility to engage in falsifiability, and you know this in your field better than anyone in this room, having the open contest of ideas.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: There's never typically one expert. I'm always wary, not for reasons to do with the conspiracy thinking, of saying, "Yes, but the expert said" or even, "The experts said." Because typically they themselves have to have contestation. So, how they moderate within their own ... How you moderate views of eminent experts in the field of economics, about how to deal with inflation or deflation or productivity, you know better than me just how contested that field is. So, how you expose in a sensible fashion, the assumptions, the models, where models and assumptions have to be corrected, where they've been falsified, that's really important.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: And then even if you get that right, so let's say the class of epidemiologists, or the class of macroeconomists, or the class of physicists, the question then becomes how do you aggregate expertise? Because typically, and Brendan Murphy talks about this, he himself is not an epidemiologist, so he was ... When he was CMO, responsible for moderating and managing that. He had deep medical knowledge that allowed him to engage in that discussion, but then he says, "But we're only experts in one thing."

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: So even to the extent that we reach a consensus, that's in a pandemic, the epidemiology. What about supply chains? Or re-supplying grocery stores? Or ensuring that children can be properly educated safely at home? We're not experts on that. So you need lots of experts, diverse experts in diverse areas, and then it gets to the nub of the point I made in my speech. Facts and expertise is one thing, but then values then have to overlay. What other trade-offs? And let's take the pandemic. The Prime Minister speaks about this. What are the trade-offs that you're going to have to endure about the assumptions you make about things like lethality, mortality, the impact on mental health, the impact on community, the impact on economies?

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: These are very finely calibrated judgements that our chief ministers and our premiers also talk about. So they then have to bring their own expertise which is really in a sense what we pay them for, which is to bring that value and moral judgement , which is then accountable through the democratic process. That itself is a type of expertise I suppose you could say. In very simple terms, respect expertise, yes, but understand the fallibility of expertise. Not in a conspiratorial sense, but the fact that expertise itself involves at the peak of any profession, high degrees of contestation, and hopefully a respectful moderation of differences. But even if you've got all of your expert blocks lined up, how do you join those up in a policy sense to then apply value judgements?

STEVEN KENNEDY: Yes. Look, I very much agree. This will surprise people in the room, but at Treasury we try to talk more about expertise with humility, because it's understanding that we will really not know all the answers, that we have to remain open to contest. But there has to be some respect for knowledge gained over time. Move outside of Australia, Mike, because you think a lot about other countries around the world. What's your sense working back towards your social cohesion framework, when ... What are the things that drive people away from being attracted to that contest and reasoning? Almost if you like, it's not the safest world you can be, to be told there is an absolute answer, but we are more comfortable in a world that seeks to find truth and seeks to find an answer.

STEVEN KENNEDY: There are many nation states that aren't in the position that we're in, and where truths are often represented as absolute, from the centre. What's your sense of, given your deep study of these things, of when nation states drift across into that? Or, is it just a lot of things breaking down at the same time?

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: There certainly needs to be a lot of things breaking down at the same time. I'd very quickly go back to that century of tragedy. I mean, think about the impact of the First World War, the break-up of empires, the complete overthrow of systems that had been in place for decades, whether in Russia or in Germany, et cetera, then a peace that was never really, as John Maynard Keynes and others wrote about was never really fully settled.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Then of course the rise of the disaffected, typically former soldiers who missed the camaraderie of the trenches and formed the fascist groups. A lot of things had to go wrong for all of that to occur, but it's like a plane crash, right? You can pull all the factors together to say, "Why did this plane crash?" Well, a thousand things had to go wrong. Well actually, a thousand things did go wrong.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: I know in other fora you have to label me quite understandably as a black hat, but I'm actually quite optimistic that we're nowhere-

STEVEN KENNEDY: No, I called you optimistic today.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Yes, indeed. We're nowhere near that. We are nowhere near that. I am concerned, though, about, and this might be a tipping point, I don't know, it's early days yet. If you haven't seen it, The Social Dilemma on Netflix is a sensational exposé I guess you'd almost say, of former, quite senior technocrats, who were utopians at the start of the journey. "I thought this was going to be a way by which we're all connected. I thought this was going to be a way by which we all passed information and knowledge to one another, that we supported one another. I had no idea that it was going to be used in these" ... Well, partly had no idea, because there was a very limited technocratic gene pool of coders and developers.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: No moral philosophers, no one who could ... And some of the people, it's about an hour and 20 minutes, it's well worth the watch, saying, "If I'd known then what I know now about law, justice, how democracy works," well, you could have actually ... You could have picked up the phone, actually spoken to someone at the time. And how we pull that back, that is my one ... Because that is, I think, there is evidence that that's starting to change neural systems, it's starting to change the way in which people ingest information. It is starting to break down some of the discourse pathways that I mentioned.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: It's nothing like the '20s or '30s or '40s, don't get me wrong, but the advent of these platforms, they're amoral, not immoral, but they're amoral settings, and the way in which they're just surrounding us with amazing research capability and knowledge, but also stunting and distorting our perspective on what's happened before, and also potentially narrowing down our ability to think for ourselves from the starting points of virtue, justice, reason. None of which needs a social network. None of which needs a database. Just read some of the classics.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: If you're faith-based, you can read your scripture. Otherwise read philosophy or otherwise. The great works of ethics have been around for a couple of thousand years. You don't need a feed. That is the one tipping point potentially that I see, which will be very different from what happened in the 20th century, but will then amplify the disinformation, the misinformation, the rise of extremist groups, the Dark Web phenomena that we've spoken about in other fora, that is something that we're keeping a very close eye on.

STEVEN KENNEDY: Thank you very much, Mike. I think we'll wrap it up there. We have a gift for you, I believe. We're going to present it to you in a COVID safe way, I understand.

MICHAEL PEZZULLO: Right. Excellent. Okay. There you go.

STEVEN KENNEDY: Thank you very much. Can you all join me in thanking Mike very much?