

## **The Disjuncture between Australia's Bali Process Commitments and Its Refugee Policy under Scott Morrison**

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### **Abstract**

*The Asia-Pacific region faces complex refugee challenges, particularly after the 2015 Andaman Sea crisis. In response, the Bali Process adopted the 2016 Bali Declaration, which emphasized protection-sensitive approaches, respect for non-refoulement, and regional cooperation in refugee management. However, Australia's role as co-chair of the Bali Process became increasingly problematic under Prime Minister Scott Morrison from 2018 to 2022, as his administration adopted restrictive policies toward immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. This research aims to explain why Australia under Morrison neglected its Bali Process commitments in refugee protection and management. Using an actor-specific approach in Foreign Policy Analysis, this study employs a qualitative interpretive method with discourse analysis of Morrison's public statements, policy responses, official documents, and secondary literature. The findings show that Morrison's security-oriented problem representation, motivation to maintain domestic political support, and emotional distance from refugee protection contributed to Australia's neglect of the Bali Declaration. This research contributes to Foreign Policy Analysis by showing how leaders' perceptions, motivations, and emotions shape state behavior toward regional humanitarian commitments, while also offering practical insights into the domestic political constraints on refugee protection.*

**Keywords:** *Australia, Scott Morrison, Refugees, Bali Process, Human Rights, Foreign Policy Analysis, Actor-Specific*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Conflict and violence within a given territory often compel civilian populations to leave their homes and seek protection in safer areas. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as forced migration. Forced, (or involuntary) migration encompasses a range of legal and political categories, all of which refer to situations in which individuals are compelled to leave their places of residence and seek protection elsewhere. From a human rights perspective, forced migration is not merely a matter of population movement, but also reflects the failure of states and international actors to ensure the protection of fundamental rights, including the rights to life, security, freedom from persecution, and access to protection. Although such individuals are often broadly referred to as asylum seekers or "refugees," these terms represent relatively narrow legal categories within the international protection regime. Forced migration must be understood as both a migration governance issue and a human rights concern, particularly because displaced populations often face heightened vulnerability, limited legal protection, and restricted access to basic rights.

The majority of forced migrants flee for reasons that are not always formally recognized under the international refugee regime. Moreover, many displaced persons remain within the borders of their own countries. Refugees, in a legal sense, are individuals who leave their country of origin in order to escape conflict, violence, or persecution and seek protection in another state (UNHCR, n.d.). The issue of forced migration, which frequently produces large-scale refugee movements, has long been a significant concern within the field of International Relations. Refugee issues began to receive more sustained scholarly attention in International Relations after the end of the Cold War. Prior to this period, refugees were often treated as a marginal issue in the discipline. The issue of forced migration, which eventually generates refugee flows, has

long been a concern in international relations. Refugee issues began to receive greater attention in International Relations studies after the end of the Cold War. Prior to this period, refugee issues were generally regarded as peripheral (Kynsilehto, 2022).

The number of forcibly displaced persons has increased significantly in recent years. According to UNHCR data, by June 2023, approximately 110 million people had been forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, and events that seriously disrupted public order. This figure represented an increase of more than one percent compared to 2022. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees further estimated that the number of forcibly displaced persons could exceed 114 million by September 2023 (UNHCR, 2023). Within this broader global context, the Asia-Pacific has emerged as a particularly complex region in relation to refugee governance. By mid-2022, the region hosted approximately 10.7 million refugees, internally displaced persons, and stateless individuals kewarganegaraan (United Nations High Commissioner on Refugee, n.d.).

In 2015, the Andaman Sea refugee crisis became a critical manifestation of the refugee issue in Southeast Asia. More than 25,000 people fled Myanmar and Bangladesh by boat, while around 8,000 were stranded at sea and an estimated 370 people lost their lives (Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional, 2016b). Myanmar remains one of the largest sources of refugees in the Asia-Pacific region. The country's protracted conflict is rooted in ethnic tensions, political repression, and economic inequality. In Myanmar, the military junta has long been in conflict with various ethnic minority groups. The situation deteriorated further in 2021, when the military junta seized power, intensifying the marginalization of the Rohingya minority in Rakhine State and increasing pressure on them to flee the country.

Amid the large-scale movement of Rohingya refugees across Southeast Asia and the wider Asia-Pacific region, only two Southeast Asian states have ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, namely the Philippines and Cambodia. The scale and complexity of the Rohingya refugee crisis clearly cannot be addressed by these two states alone. Within this regional context, the Bali Process has served as an important forum for Asia-Pacific countries to discuss migration-related challenges. Formally known as the Conference on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, the Bali Process constitutes a regional cooperation mechanism aimed at developing practical measures to address people smuggling, trafficking in persons, and related transnational crimes in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

Initially, the Bali Process focused primarily on trafficking in persons and people smuggling. However, on 22–23 March 2016, its member states agreed to establish a regional mechanism to respond more effectively to irregular migration, including issues related to asylum seekers and refugees (Haryanto, 2016). This commitment was articulated in the Bali Declaration. The declaration represented a regional response to the Andaman Sea refugee crisis and signaled an expansion of the Bali Process agenda to include asylum seekers and refugees as part of its broader migration governance framework.

In 2018, the Seventh Ministerial Conference of the Bali Process reaffirmed its commitment to addressing refugee-related issues. One component of this commitment was the recognition of developments related to the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration as international cooperation frameworks designed to address displacement and promote well-managed migration (Bali Process, 2018). Interestingly, several Bali Process member states that have not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, have demonstrated relatively constructive responses toward refugee protection. Indonesia, for instance, received Rohingya refugees during the COVID-19 pandemic and was commended by UNHCR for doing so. At a time when many states increasingly restricted refugee entry, Indonesia continued to receive refugees on humanitarian grounds. Malaysia, despite also not being a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, has similarly become an important host country for refugees in the region (Iswara & BBC News Indonesia, 2023).

In contrast, Australia, as co-chair of the Bali Process alongside Indonesia, has increasingly adopted restrictive policies toward refugees, particularly under the administration of Scott Morrison from 2018 to 2022. Shortly after the Bali Process reaffirmed its commitment to refugee protection, Australia did not demonstrate a significant shift toward greater openness. During his election campaign, Morrison and his coalition government pledged to maintain an annual refugee intake of 18,750 people. However, this figure was approximately 30 percent lower than the intake proposed by the opposition Labor Party. Moreover, Morrison was reported to have displayed in his office a trophy in the form of a model migrant boat bearing the inscription “I Stopped These” (Davidson, 2018). This symbolism reflected a broader political orientation toward deterrence and border securitization. Given that many Rohingya refugees are stateless and often travel by sea, Australia’s restrictive maritime border policies have had significant implications for refugee protection in the region. Despite the urgency of the refugee crisis in its regional vicinity, Morrison campaigned on a platform that emphasized limiting refugee intake. After assuming office, his government introduced policies that reduced access to permanent residency and responded strongly against the passage of the Medevac Bill.

Previous studies on Australia, the Bali Process, and refugee governance provide an important foundation for understanding this issue. These studies can be grouped into three main strands. First, Curley and Vandyk (2017) examine the Bali Process as the primary regional forum for addressing migrant smuggling and irregular migration in the Asia-Pacific. They argue that the Bali Process has become an important arena through which Indonesia and Australia contest, negotiate, and reshape norms and practices concerning the human rights of refugees and asylum seekers. This study is relevant because it shows that the Bali Process is not merely a technical forum for migration management, but also a site of normative contestation between security concerns and refugee protection (Curley & Vandyk, 2017).

Second, other scholars have criticized the Bali Process for its limited commitment to refugee protection. Bali Process has been strongly shaped by a security-oriented agenda, particularly in relation to people smuggling and border control. From this perspective, the forum tends to prioritize state security and migration control over the protection of refugees and asylum seekers. This strand of literature is important because it highlights the tension between the Bali Process formal commitment to cooperation and protection, and its practical tendency to reproduce restrictive migration governance (Kneebone, 2014 dalam Moretti, 2022). Furthermore, Hirsch (2017) provides a critical analysis of Australia’s extraterritorial migration controls, arguing that Australia actively utilizes regional frameworks and offshore processing to deliberately evade its legal obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Hirsch’s study demonstrates how deterrence policies, which were aggressively maintained under Operation Sovereign Borders, are systematically designed to shift the burden of refugee protection to neighboring transit countries. This externalization strategy not only militarizes border control but also institutionalizes human rights violations by trapping asylum seekers in prolonged uncertainty outside Australia’s sovereign territory.

Third, studies on Australia’s refugee and asylum seeker policies show that Australia has adopted an increasingly restrictive approach, despite its formal commitment as a state party to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Australia has often been described as a successful immigration country, where migrants, including refugees, have contributed to economic development and cultural (Hugo 2011; Wise 2010; Tazreiter 2004; Tavan 2005; Tazreiter, 2017). However, this positive image contrasts sharply with Australia’s treatment of spontaneous arrivals, particularly asylum seekers and refugees arriving by boat. Tazreiter (2017) argues that boat-arriving refugees in Australia have often been dehumanized and rendered invisible to public empathy. This restrictive approach became more visible through policies such as Operation Sovereign Borders, launched in 2013, which enabled military-led operations to intercept and turn back vessels carrying asylum seekers or transfer them to offshore detention facilities. The Australian

government framed this policy as a measure to prevent people smuggling and strengthen border protection (Pusat Hukum Pengungsi Internasional Kaldor, 2020; Kneebone, 2014).

The previous studies discussed above are useful for identifying Australia's foreign policy orientation and its position within the Bali Process. However, this article seeks to offer a more specific analysis of Australia's refugee and asylum seeker policies under the administration of Scott Morrison. Under Morrison's leadership, Australia appeared to adopt an increasingly restrictive stance toward refugees. This was reflected in its immigration policies and its limited commitment to the protection of asylum seekers and refugees. As a state that claims to uphold democracy and human rights, has ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, and serves as co-chair of the Bali Process, Australia's restrictive approach raises important analytical questions. In practice, Australia has shown limited hospitality toward asylum seekers and refugees in need of international protection. By contrast, countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, despite not being parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention, have demonstrated relatively more constructive responses in receiving refugees.

Australia formally committed to refugee protection and migration governance through the 2016 Bali Declaration, a commitment that was reaffirmed in 2018. However, its foreign policy under the Morrison administration appears to have moved in a contradictory direction. Therefore, the central research question of this article is: Why did Australia under Scott Morrison's leadership disregard its commitment to the Bali Process in relation to refugee protection and management. To address this question, this article utilizes Foreign Policy Analysis. Foreign policy is formulated by individual decision-makers who must navigate various pressures arising from both the domestic system and the international environment.

More specifically, this study employs an actor-specific analytical framework that focuses on the central role of political leaders, referring to the model elaborated by Evi Fitriani (2015). Although personality does not determine policy in an absolute manner, leader's characteristics, such as their worldview, political style, motivations, and experiential background, significantly shape the direction of the decisions they make (Hermann, 1988; Hudson & Day, 2020). Therefore, this analysis aims to examine Scott Morrison's individual motivations, emotions, and problem representations, demonstrating that a substantial part of state behavior can be explained by understanding the psychological processes operating within the minds of foreign policy decision-makers.

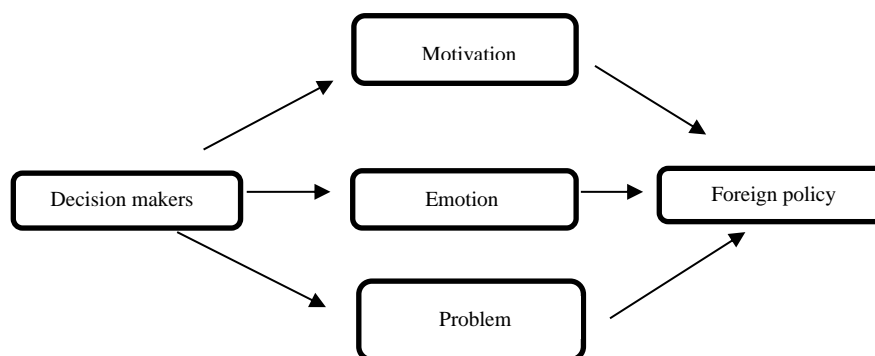


Figure 1. Foreign policy analysis based on actor-specific theory

Source: The author's interpretation of Foreign policy analysis based on actor-specific theory (referring to Evi Fitriani, 2015).

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research utilizes an interpretive qualitative approach, drawing on Neuman's (2014) principles, to investigate the underlying reasons for Australia's non-compliance with the Bali Process during Scott Morrison's premiership (2018–2022). To examine this phenomenon within its natural socio-political context without variable manipulation, the study systematically compiled primary texts, specifically Morrison's remarks at the March 2019 Joint Press Conference and his formal reactions to the Medevac Bill, alongside secondary materials such as academic journals, biographical accounts, and official government archives. The collected data was evaluated using discourse analysis framed within the actor-specific model of Foreign Policy Analysis. By decoding the underlying rhetoric surrounding key events like Operation Sovereign Borders and the Andaman Sea crisis, the analysis focused on how the Prime Minister framed policy problems, his domestic political motivations, and his emotional disposition toward asylum seekers. Through data synthesis and source triangulation, the study descriptively illustrates how domestic political pressures, combined with the distinct psychological profile of the head of government, collectively hindered Australia's adherence to the regional refugee protection standards established in the 2016 Bali Declaration.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

As co-chair of the Bali Process, Australia holds a significant regional responsibility, particularly under the 2016 Bali Declaration. Point 5 of this agreement clearly obligates member states to provide humanitarian protection and strictly respect the principle of *non-refoulement*. However, despite these established commitments, Prime Minister Scott Morrison's administration systematically shifted away from its regional duties by introducing highly restrictive immigration policies. This shift was evident in several key measures, such as cutting the permanent migration intake from 190,000 to 160,000, freezing the refugee quota at 18,750, and continuing Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB), a militarized policy that forcibly turned back asylum-seeker boats from Australian waters.

This disregard for regional humanitarian standards reached its peak with the administration's fierce opposition to the Medevac Bill. Although this legislation was designed to allow emergency medical transfers to Australia for critically ill refugees held in offshore detention, it faced strong resistance from Scott Morrison. Instead of aligning with the protection-focused goals of the Bali Process, he responded to the bill's passage by immediately reopening the Christmas Island detention center. Ultimately, this move highlighted a clear policy choice, prioritizing border security over established commitments to human rights and refugee protection.

### Discussion

#### **Australia's Commitment to the Bali Process and the Refugee Issue**

Australia has long been involved in refugee-related issues. This is reflected in its ratification of the 1951 Refugee Convention during the Menzies administration. One of the most important principles contained in the Convention is the principle of non-refoulement, which stipulates that states must not expel or return refugees to territories where their life or freedom would be threatened on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. Historically, Australia's refugee policy was not highly controversial. However, since the early twenty-first century, refugee policy has become a highly contested issue in Australian domestic politics (Neuman, 2015; Maley, 2016).

Australia has also been an active participant in the annual meetings of the UNHCR Executive Committee, through which it has expressed its priorities and policy concerns (Maley, 2013; Maley, 2016). Since the establishment of UNHCR, the Australian Government has provided support to the institution, particularly in relation to the resettlement of Hungarian refugees fleeing the Soviet suppression of the 1956 uprising against communist rule (Maley, 2013; Maley, 2016). Over time, however, Australia began to face increasing public pressure, particularly in 2015 following the death of a three-year-old refugee child who drowned while attempting to reach Europe (King and Johnson, 2015; Maley, 2016). In 2015–2016, Australia provided only 6,000 refugee resettlement places. This figure represented merely 3.2 percent of the 190,000 places allocated under the country's overall migration program (Maley, 2016).

At the regional level, Australia has also been actively involved in various forums concerning immigration and migration governance. One of the most prominent of these forums is the Bali Process, co-chaired by Australia and Indonesia. As a multilateral regional process, the Bali Process emerged from a regional “security” discourse on irregular migration that had developed since the 1990s (Kneebone, 2014). In its approach to migration issues, the Bali Process shares several characteristics with ASEAN, particularly in its tendency to avoid explicit human rights language when framing refugee issues (Kneebone, 2014). The Bali Process was initiated at the Regional Ministerial Conference on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime in February 2002 (Bali Process, n.d; Kneebone, 2014).

The Bali Process has often been criticized for its limited discourse and restricted access to information. This criticism is partly rooted in the fact that, at its inception, the Bali Process was linked to the 1999 Bangkok Declaration on irregular migration, which referred to the Manila Process and the Inter-governmental Asia-Pacific Consultations on Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants (Bali Process n.d.; Kneebone, 2014). These processes are commonly known as Regional Consultative Processes, which are generally led by the International Organization for Migration as a non-governmental organization operating in the region. Such processes typically do not involve ministerial-level consultations or broader external representation. Nevertheless, the Bali Process has gradually become more open over time. Its membership has expanded and become more comprehensive, including not only states but also international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Australia occupies a significant position within the Bali Process as co-chair alongside Indonesia. In 2015–2016, the Bali Process faced strong pressure to respond to the massive Rohingya refugee crisis in the Andaman Sea. During this period, global displacement reached approximately 60 million people, the highest level recorded since the Second World War (Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional, 2016a). In the first half of 2015, around 32,000 people were estimated to have attempted dangerous sea crossings. Approximately 8,000 people were reportedly abandoned at sea by smugglers and subsequently experienced a form of “ping-pong” treatment, as destination countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia refused to accept them. As a result, hundreds of people died, while others reportedly fought over dwindling food supplies on board because they were not permitted to disembark (Daniel, 2021).

This crisis represented a crucial opportunity for the Bali Process to strengthen its regional role. Ministers should not have missed the opportunity to reach an agreement on responding to forced migration in Southeast Asia (Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional, 2016a). The large-scale displacement of Rohingya refugees in 2015 further highlighted the urgency of the issue. Yet, during the crisis, the Bali Process appeared slow to respond. Critics argued that the forum's silence during the crisis was striking and that its inactivity in addressing the refugee emergency was difficult to justify (Daniel, 2021).

In 2016, the Bali Process began to respond by establishing the Task Force on Planning and Preparedness. The purpose of this task force was to facilitate a more effective response by

coordinating national-level plans and providing an early warning system. Bali Process members also adopted the 2016 Bali Declaration, which was later reaffirmed in 2018. Through this declaration, member states pledged to provide safety and protection to vulnerable groups (Daniel, 2021). Point 5 of the Bali Declaration on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime states:

*“We acknowledge the importance of a comprehensive approach to managing irregular migration by land, air and sea, including victim-centered and protection-sensitive strategies, as appropriate. We recognise the need to grant protection for those entitled to it, consistent with relevant international legal instruments and in all cases, the principle of non-refoulement should be strictly respected. Against a backdrop of increasingly mixed migratory movements, we welcome efforts by member states to improve identification of those with protection needs, including through effective and efficient screening processes, paying particular attention to the needs of vulnerable groups. We encourage states to work to identify more predictable disembarkation options. We welcome efforts by members to strengthen information sharing to provide accurate data on the whereabouts of migrants and vessels stranded at sea. We encourage further capacity building of the relevant agencies in search and rescue operations.”* (UNHCR, 2016)

The point above underscores that Bali Process members acknowledge the importance of a comprehensive approach to the management of irregular migration by land, air, and sea, including victim-centred and protection-sensitive strategies where appropriate. The declaration further states that Bali Process members recognize the need to provide protection to those entitled to it, in accordance with relevant international legal instruments. In all cases, the principle of non-refoulement must be strictly respected. In addition, point 14, the final provision of the Bali Declaration, states that:

*“ We reaffirm the value of the Bali Process as a voluntary, inclusive, non-binding forum for policy dialogue, information-sharing and capacity building, and we are committed to have a mechanism of the Bali Process to facilitate timely and proactive consultation to respond to emergency situations. We underline the need to translate political commitments into concrete actions. We acknowledge the tangible efforts by governments and also welcome the work of the Regional Support Office in this regard”* (UNHCR, 2016).

In the statement above, Scott Morrison stated that Australia’s migration intake would be capped at 160,000, a decrease from previous years when the intake had reached 190,000. He further explained that this policy was intended to ensure that population planning, infrastructure investment, and the implementation of the plans discussed with the relevant minister on that day could generate benefits across the country. As cited by *The Conversation*, Morrison also announced that the government had transparently informed the public of both the reduction in the overall migration intake and the number of individuals admitted under Australia’s humanitarian program (The Conversation, 2019a). Under the Morrison administration, Australia’s immigration policy increasingly prioritized migrants with specific skills.

Moreover, Australia continued to implement Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB). This operation sought to prevent refugee boats from entering Australian territory by forcing them to return. Since the implementation of OSB, Australia has consistently denied that it exercises jurisdiction or effective control over offshore detention facilities located in island states such as Manus and Nauru. Instead, Australia has framed its relationship with these island states as a form of support arrangement (Australia, 2015; Barnes, 2022). Scott Morrison expressed strong pride in the achievements of OSB and therefore continued the policy. He even stated that the turn-back policy under OSB was indeed unpopular, yet Australia had succeeded in saving thousands of lives while maintaining the security of its borders (Armbruster, 2021). However, this policy can be understood as contravening the principle of non-refoulement, which constitutes one of the most fundamental principles for states that have ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Australia's actions under the Morrison administration also reflected a disregard for the Bali Declaration adopted through the Bali Process in 2016 and reaffirmed in 2018. It is important to note that Rohingya refugees are forced migrants who flee without adequate skills-based qualifications and, in many cases, without clear citizenship status. Most of them seek safety by undertaking dangerous journeys by boat. The continued implementation of OSB by Scott Morrison, despite the Bali Process commitment to respond comprehensively to the Rohingya refugee crisis in the Andaman Sea, demonstrates that Australia failed to uphold its regional commitment to refugee protection and management.

### **Scott Morrison's Problem Representation and Motivation in Handling the Refugee Issue**

To analyze Scott Morrison's problem representation and motivation regarding his disregard for the refugee issue, it is necessary to look comprehensively at his political career, Australia under his leadership, the scandals involving him, and his policy motivations.

Scott Morrison was born on May 13, 1968, in Bronte, New South Wales, Australia. He grew up in a devout Christian family in the eastern coastal suburbs of Sydney. His father was a chief police inspector and an independent politician who served for 16 years on the local council and became the mayor of Waverley (Britannica, 2024). Morrison was exposed to politics from a young age. At nine years old, he began learning about politics by handing out "how to vote" cards in support of his father. He also appeared as an actor in several television commercials (Britannica, 2024). Educationally, he attended a prestigious high school (Sydney Boys High) and continued his studies at a renowned university (University of New South Wales), equipping him with knowledge in economics and geography. This information provides insight into Morrison's personal and educational background, which helped shape his political career.

Scott Morrison began his career in the industry sector, becoming quite prominent in tourism. He worked for the Tourism Task Force before joining the Tourism Council of Australia (1996-1998). At the age of 21, he got married and moved to New Zealand. There, he became the Director of the New Zealand Office of Tourism and Sport (1998-2000), where he oversaw the highly successful "100% Pure New Zealand" tourism campaign (Britannica, 2024). His political career, meanwhile, began when he served as the state director of the New South Wales Liberal Party (2000-2004) (Britannica, 2024). In 2007, Scott Morrison ran for the House of Representatives. He sought the Liberal Party's preselection for a safe seat in the House of Representatives representing the electoral division of Cook in Sydney's southern suburbs.

In 2013, Scott Morrison was appointed Minister for Immigration. He had served as Shadow Minister for Immigration from 2009 to 2013 and became Australia's Minister for Immigration in 2013. Morrison was a key figure in the establishment of Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) with the slogan "Stop the Boats" (Lo Surdo, 2024), a program that continues to run to this day. He later served as Minister for Social Services and Treasurer before ultimately running for the leadership of the Liberal Party in 2018 (when Peter Dutton challenged Malcolm Turnbull). Morrison won and became Prime Minister. He subsequently led the Coalition to victory in the 2019 election (Lo Surdo, 2024).

During his time as Prime Minister, Scott Morrison continued to enforce strict security measures at Australia's borders, maintaining his focus on the immigration sector. Based on a speech delivered by Prime Minister Scott Morrison at a joint press conference with the Minister for Cities, Urban Infrastructure and Population in Canberra (Wednesday, March 20, 2019), he began his address with the following statement: *"This is a very important day, because today we are launching Australia's first Commonwealth serious plan to manage population growth into our future, ....."* (Australian Government, 2019). This served as an opening for Morrison to then explain his regulations concerning population. He continued his speech with the following sentence,

*"This plan is about protecting the quality of life of Australians right across our country, in our urban areas, in our regional parts of the country, .....,The first is ensuring that we have a*

*responsible and well-planned and targeted migration programme. A programme that of course, has integrity and that programme will be capped at 160,000. That programme enables us to pause at that level over the forward estimates, but as always the Government has the opportunity to respond to changing circumstances in the future,.....”* (Australian Government, 2019).

His statement that he would reduce the permanent migration intake to 160,000, along with his campaign promise to freeze the refugee intake, sufficiently illustrates that Morrison represented this issue as a potential threat. This form of problem representation reflects a tendency to disregard Australia’s commitment to the Bali Declaration. The policies adopted by Morrison did not significantly differ from those of the previous Turnbull administration. The securitization of migration remained the underlying basis of Australia’s policy approach, while the controversial Operation Sovereign Borders continued to be implemented.

Scott Morrison’s motivation in addressing refugee issues was closely related to domestic political considerations. Based on the 2019 Lowy Institute Poll, Australian public opinion on border protection was relatively divided. However, the largest proportion of respondents, 40 percent, believed that Australia’s border protection policy had no effect on the country’s international reputation. This figure was higher than those who believed that the policy would improve Australia’s reputation, at 30 percent, or damage it, at 28 percent (Lowy Institute Poll, 2019). Regarding immigration policy and national identity, the majority of Australians stated that Australia’s openness to immigrants from around the world was essential to the country’s national identity. Nevertheless, 41 percent also stated that if Australia became too open to immigrants, it would risk losing its identity as a nation. Viewed in light of the 2019 survey, Morrison’s policy orientation, which framed immigrants as a potential threat, appears to have remained aligned with the preferences of a significant segment of Australian society. He also maintained his political image by repeatedly claiming the success of Operation Sovereign Borders.

Based on the discussion above, Morrison’s motivation to frame population issues through the reduction of migrant intake was shaped by both his political background and the persistence of similar perceptions among segments of the Australian public. His commitment to the Bali Declaration tended to be neglected because, at the domestic level, Morrison continued to receive considerable political support for restrictive migration policies. Therefore, he was able to articulate his position on immigration issues assertively. This was also consistent with his campaign promise to reduce the number of migrants entering Australia and to freeze the refugee intake at 18,750 places (The Conversation, 2019a).

### **Scott Morrison’s Emotional Orientation toward Refugee Protection**

Specifically in relation to refugee issues, Scott Morrison made a controversial decision during his administration by opposing the *Medevac Bill*. The *Medevac Bill* was legislation that allowed sick refugees and asylum seekers held in offshore detention facilities to receive medical treatment in Australia. However, Prime Minister Morrison argued that the legislation posed a national security risk (BBC, 2019a). UNHCR also responded to the rejection of the *Medevac Bill*. After more than 3,000 refugees and asylum seekers had been forcibly transferred by Australia to offshore processing facilities since 2013, and after six years without any certainty regarding durable solutions, UNHCR expressed deep concern that the health conditions of asylum seekers and refugees would continue to deteriorate (UNHCR, 2019).

Refugee advocates stated that, of approximately 1,000 people who remained on Manus Island and Nauru, around 70 required medical treatment (Young, 2019). There were also reports that an 11-year-old child had attempted suicide in Nauru and on Manus Island (BBC, 2019b). Prior to the passage of the *Medevac Bill*, sick refugees had to wait an average of two years before being transferred to Australia to receive medical care. The *Medevac Bill* ensured that there would no longer be political interference in medical assessments and evacuation requests for individuals requiring urgent medical transfer (Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, n.d.).

The bill was passed in Australia's lower house by a narrow vote of 75 to 74. The leader of the Labor Party, Bill Shorten, stated that ensuring people held in offshore detention facilities had access to adequate medical care was a test of national character (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2019). Scott Morrison, however, argued that the legislation would increase deaths at sea because it would encourage people to attempt to reach Australia by boat. He stated:

*"My job now is to do everything within my power, and the power of the government, to ensure that what the Parliament has done to weaken our borders does not result in boats coming to Australia,"*

Prime Minister Morrison considered the passage of the *Medevac Bill* to be a measure that would weaken Australia's borders against refugees and asylum seekers. This indicates that Morrison's emotional orientation was not closely aligned with refugee protection concerns. Rather, his attention was primarily focused on security considerations. Indeed, as part of his effort to maintain border control, Morrison announced in the same week as the passage of the *Medevac Bill* that the Christmas Island detention facility would be reopened (Butler, 2019). He stated: *"My job now is to ensure that the boats don't come. My job now is to do everything within my power and in the power of the government to ensure that what the Parliament has done to weaken our borders does not result in boats coming to Australia"*. (Butler, 2019)

Scott Morrison's statement demonstrates the extent of his emotional distance from the protection of refugees. It reflects a disregard for point 5 of the Bali Declaration, which affirms the commitment to provide protection to those in need. The serious health needs of refugees and asylum seekers held in Australia's offshore detention facilities should have been regarded as Australia's responsibility. However, Prime Minister Scott Morrison's response clearly indicated a lack of concern for refugee protection. More broadly, this response also reveals a lack of concern for human rights, particularly the for refugees and asylum seekers.

## CONCLUSION

Although Australia has been actively involved in the Bali Process, its response to refugee crises has continued to attract criticism for being slow and ineffective. Australia's domestic policies have also tended to disregard its commitments under the Bali Declaration, which was adopted through the Bali Process. This can be seen in the decision to reduce the number of incoming migrants and the rejection of the *Medevac Bill*, both of which can be viewed as measures that contradict the principles of refugee protection.

Scott Morrison's motivation in addressing refugee issues was driven by concerns over domestic security, the need to maintain an image of policy success in order to secure public support, and his emotional distance from the protection of refugees and asylum seekers. This was reflected in policies such as *Operation Sovereign Borders* and the rejection of the *Medevac Bill*, which Morrison framed as necessary measures to protect Australia's borders. Although Australia has formally committed at the international level to human rights principles and refugee protection, its domestic policies under Morrison were shaped more strongly by political considerations and domestic security interests.

Overall, Australia's approach to refugee issues under the Morrison administration reflects a disjuncture between its international commitments and its domestic policies, which were more focused on national security and domestic political interests. Although the Bali Process has provided a framework for regional cooperation and stronger protection for refugees, there remains a significant gap between Australia's rhetoric and its actual practices in addressing refugee issues. This gap is important not only because it concerns refugee governance, but also because it reflects the extent to which Australia's commitment to human rights protection is implemented in practice.

The author acknowledges that the actor-specific theory cannot fully explain foreign policy in its entirety. Therefore, future research is expected to provide a more comprehensive contribution to the study of Australia's refugee policy, both in terms of the impact of Australia's domestic policies on refugee welfare and the evaluation of the implementation of the Bali Declaration among other member states. More comprehensive research in the future is expected to contribute to the formulation of better and more effective solutions for addressing refugee issues in the Asia-Pacific region, while also ensuring that international commitments to refugee protection and human rights are realized in practice.

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