

THE STYLE OF AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Address to the Fabian Society Remembrance Day Dinner by Senator Gareth Evans,
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Melbourne, 10 November 1989.

All Governments have certain distinctive styles. One of the best measures of a Government's success - and best guarantees of its longevity - is the extent to which its style is in harmony, and stays that way, with the mood of the time.

The Whitlam and Hawke Labor Governments make an instructive contrast in this respect. Whatever some sceptics may say, both have been governments in the great Labor tradition, intensely committed to social justice and equity, intensely committed to Australian nationalism and the idea of a distinctive Australian place in the world, and intellectually very adventurous in devising strategies to meet these objectives. The differences have been not so much to do with policy goals as with a different approach to the business of governing - different governing styles.

As it came to power in 1972 the Whitlam Government was brilliantly successful in capturing the mood of its time: idealistic in outlook, tumultuously reformist in action, and unashamedly interventionist in its belief in the capacity of central government to strip away the debris and detritus of the past and reshape the future. The excitement of it all carried the Government through its first electoral test in 1974, but then came a sharp change in the economic climate. This demanded a curbing of the glorious individualism which had prevailed hitherto, especially among spending ministers, and a much more restrained and disciplined performance than the Government in fact proved capable of producing, at least by the time of the November 1975 Fraser-Kerr assault which tonight's dinner remembers.

Whereas the Whitlam appeal in 1972 was to change - almost any kind of change - that of the Hawke Government a decade later was to stability and conflict resolution through consultation and consensus: "an end to the politics of division, the politics of confrontation". "Reconciliation" was the first and foremost of the Election Speech "3Rs", and that theme was immediately reinforced by the Economic Summit, the subsequent Accord, and by the Government's approach to just about every major policy issue since - economic, social and otherwise.

There have of course been rows along the way, and the Government has been tough and uncompromising when it needed to be - e.g. with State Premiers over environmental protection, or more recently with pilots over the future of wages policy - but for the most

part those rows have occurred only after the politics of consensus have been exhaustively tried, and they have been conspicuously fewer than occurred in either the Fraser or Whitlam years.

At the outset of the Hawke Government there were in the Ministry a few remaining enthusiasts for the unfinished Whitlamite reform agenda, but since the relevant gyroscopes were readjusted in the first year or two - not least my own - there has been a remarkable consensus within the Government on how to go about the business of governing.

That consensus has involved focusing at all times on the main game - which in domestic policy has meant macro and micro-economic adjustment and reweaving of social security safety nets to match. It has involved rigorously setting priorities in accordance with this focus, and making cool and rational judgments about the art of the possible (while being creatively alive to the possibility of redefining what is possible along the way).

And it has also involved, at least until very recently, maintaining absolutely rigorous internal discipline and cohesion (something made very much easier to maintain by the very high, and probably unprecedented, level of mutual respect which generally prevails within the Cabinet room). It is obviously crucially necessary, in the present political climate, that we rapidly re-establish that internal discipline and cohesion. I have no doubt that this will happen: the events of the last parliamentary sitting week concentrated Ministers' minds wonderfully, as did the Prime Minister's gentle advice to us earlier this week that, on the whole, it is more appropriate for differing policy perspectives to be talked through internally rather than nakedly exposed to the salacious gaze of the press and public.

I have been talking so far about the style and approach of the Hawke Government in general terms, but everything I have said squarely relates to our conduct of foreign affairs and trade policy over the five and a half years that Bill Hayden set the course, and in the year and a bit that I have now been following in his footsteps. Our approach to foreign policy making has been what I would describe as principled in impetus, but pragmatic in its execution; it has been built around a carefully and rationally ordered set of priorities, derived not only from an identification of Australia's most important national interests, but also from a fully developed sense of the art of the possible in advancing those interests.

The conduct of a country's foreign policy is necessarily reactive to a very significant extent. Something is always happening somewhere, usually in twenty or thirty places at once, which bears in some way on Australian interests, and to which a reaction of some kind - be it a vote, a speech, a statement, a demarche, an aid cheque, or a new policy - is required. But good foreign policy making is also proactive - anticipating events, creating new opportunities, and taking new policy initiatives, bilaterally and multilaterally, for

things worth doing.

In addition to all the endless stream of bilateral and multilateral issues, meetings and visits that occupy a Foreign Minister's attention, that has meant, in the Australian context over the last year, on the reactive side, responding in a cool, measured and balanced way to the succession of big and difficult issues that have come out of relatively clear blue skies - e. g. the Yugoslav Consulate shooting, the Beijing massacre and Bougainville. At the same time it has meant developing, on the proactive side, some more sharply focussed political and economic strategies in our neighbouring regions, and getting off the ground at least three major new international initiatives: relating to regional economic cooperation, chemical weapons and the Antarctic environment.

I have been very conscious from the outset of the need to put all this flurry of activity within an ordered conceptual framework: for my own benefit (to clarify my own mental processes about what issues to focus on and what considerations to take into account in thinking through them); for the benefit of my Department (for briefing, organisational and resource allocation purposes); and for the benefit of the Australian community and everyone else with an interest in seeing Australia's foreign policy made as coherent and understandable as possible.

Thus the exercise I went through - in the two substantial speeches since published as a Fabian Pamphlet, *Making Australian Foreign Policy* - to try and describe the basic underlying dynamics of Australian foreign policy, and how these translate into priorities. In another paper, the 1989 Beanland Lecture (also now published by the Footscray Institute of Technology), I have tried to pull those themes together in a sustained practical way and describe how, in the particular context of Indo-China, foreign policy has evolved - for a long time in a way that neglected, and more recently in a way that has been responsive, to Australia's national interests.

I am not suggesting that there is anything breathtakingly new about the kind of conceptual analysis set out in these papers. Nor do I suggest that the priorities for action I have expressly identified have resulted in any very significant difference of practical approach as between me and my predecessor: any more than Moliere's *Bourgeois Gentleman* actually altered his behaviour after discovering from his philosophy teacher that, to his astonishment, he had been talking prose for more than forty years without knowing it!

Taking into account both our international interests and the larger currents that are flowing internationally, and giving priority to that which is not only important to us but realistically achievable, I have been acting on the basis that Australia's external policy should be built around four fundamental priorities.

The first is doing what we can to maintain a positive security and strategic environment in

our region, the South Pacific and South East Asia.

In the South Pacific, I have used the term "constructive commitment" to describe our policy approach. This involves presenting ourselves as a constructive regional partner; a nation which is willing to meet its responsibilities, but which also shows respect for the sovereignty, and sovereign equality, of the island states irrespective of differences in size and economic strength. This was an approach underlying our earlier response - which some people thought too muted - to the troubles in Fiji, and our reaction to developments in other countries, e.g. Vanuatu, which have come under the spotlight from time to time. My impression, after two substantial visits to the region in the last year, is that this approach is widely welcomed, and Australia's standing in the South Pacific is high. There is a genuine appreciation of the efforts we have made and continue to make in the areas of development assistance, defence co-operation and environmental protection strategies, and for what is seen as the sensitive and low-key way in which we have gone about pursuing them.

Within the framework of the South Pacific policy we have been giving particular priority to our relations with Papua New Guinea, in the last year negotiating and bedding down a new long-term aid agreement, participating in the inaugural meeting of the PNG-Australia Ministerial Forum, and trying to help the PNG Government solve its Bougainville problem in as helpful but unobtrusive a fashion as possible.

In South East Asia, we have continued to build on the very close political relations we have had with the ASEAN countries, and to encourage dialogue and co-operation on regional security issues. Australia's relations with Indonesia - the most significant, but in the past also the most volatile, of our relationships in South East Asia - have in the last year acquired more depth, warmth and substance, with four major Ministerial visits being made to Australia in the last 10 months to reinforce the point. We are making good progress in the agenda that Foreign Minister Ali Alatas and I set since we found ourselves both coming new to our jobs last year, namely to add some stabilising ballast: in the form of increased trade and economic co-operation, especially through the Timor Gap negotiations successfully completed last month; the creation of the Australia-Indonesia Institute, and with it the prospect of increased exchanges of journalists, academics and students; and increased political co-operation in bilateral problem solving, e.g. fisheries, and multilateral diplomacy, e.g. Cambodia.

In pursuing our security interests in South East Asia, I have worked very closely with Defence Minister Kim Beazley. Far from there being a conflict in the two portfolio's assessments of regional policy, as some rather breathless press reports have suggested, foreign policy and defence policy have been working in tandem, in the region as elsewhere. Both arms of national policy are working towards the same agreed objectives, and so far from feeling that defence and foreign policy are in some way at odds with each other, I have often described the coherence and independence of our new Defence self-

reliance policy as in a sense liberating Australian foreign policy, freeing us as it does from our traditional preoccupation with attracting the protective attention of great and powerful friends.

Both Kim Beazley and I are conscious of the potentially significant changes that are under way in the region, and the need for Australian policy to be able to anticipate and respond to such change. To this end, I have directed my Department to conduct a wide-ranging review of Australia's regional interests and policies, not because I think any major change of direction is required, but because such a review is timely, and because in foreign policy - as in other policy - it always pays to subject our assumptions to critical scrutiny.

That review is being carried out in very close cooperation and consultation with Defence: we have learned from the failures of the past, particularly in the 1960s with our wrong-headed involvement in Vietnam, how important it is to have foreign and defence policies developing and operating in tandem, and we won't repeat those mistakes in the future.

One theme that I expect the review to develop is the multi-dimensional character of security policy. It is impossible these days to ignore the crucial link between economic security and strategic security. A sound security policy is one which adopts an integrated approach: an approach which embraces a prudent mix of defence preparedness and diplomatic reassurance, as well as development of a diverse array of political, economic, development assistance, social and cultural linkages.

This means, among other things, that when we look at our security interests in our region, we recognise that economic growth and expanding commerce are important supports of stability; and that by pursuing policies which strengthen economic growth - such as greater economic co-operation - we also help to strengthen the security of our nation and of our region.

Which brings me to our second external policy priority: pursuing trade, investment and economic co-operation.

Over the last few years, and especially since the creation in 1987 of the amalgamated Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, trade concerns have been brought into the mainstream of our foreign policy. We have made a great deal of progress in evolving an integrated approach, although in the future it may be that we will need to place a little more emphasis on the trade and commodity policy function of my portfolio so as to ensure effective liaison with other relevant departments and a fully integrated approach to our traditional foreign and trade policies.

Our activities over the last year on the trade and economic front have spread across the full range of bilateral, regional and multilateral relationships, but two stand out - the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) initiative, on which I want to say just a little more, and our continuing high profile in the Cairns Group and Uruguay Round negotiations, where my portfolio colleague Michael Duffy's leadership has superbly complemented that earlier given by John Dawkins.

The APEC initiative to establish a regional economic consultative forum has been driven from the start by three basic objectives: to improve the prospects of success of multilateral trade liberalisation in the Uruguay Round negotiations; promote the liberalisation of regional trade barriers, but in a non-discriminatory way as against the rest of the world; and advance sectoral co-operation in areas like infrastructure development, where complementarities can be identified. The essence of the concept is the development of a better flow of information and analysis to enable the identification and advancement of common interests.

Of course many people have over the past two decades espoused the virtues of such co-operation, but no-one had even made it to the starting gate until the first Ministerial-level meeting of the APEC 'core' countries, held in Canberra earlier this week. The meeting brought together 25 Ministers from 12 countries - the six Aseans, Japan, the United States, Canada, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand and Australia, was essentially exploratory in nature, but was unquestionably a success.

The Canberra meeting was significant for two outcomes. First, the Ministers gave unequivocal support for further liberalisation of multilateral trade through a successful conclusion to the Uruguay Round - an action which sends a strong message to the European Community as we move into the crucial final stages of the Round. In this context Trade Ministers from participating countries will meet in early September next year to further push for a successful conclusion, and again in Brussels in December 1990 on the eve of the concluding session.

Secondly, the APEC meeting has given life and momentum to the Australian initiative. Ministers agreed to a second Ministerial-level consultative meeting in Singapore in mid 1990, with a third meeting to be held in the Republic of Korea in 1991. They identified the basis for the development of an ongoing work program which will take the debate beyond agreement on principles and into the realm of tangible benefits flowing from specific projects. Senior officials from participating countries are commencing work as soon as possible on two major projects, and on putting together the other elements of a viable short to medium-term work program. .

Some important questions remain to be resolved down the track, including the longer term nature of support mechanisms for the process, and the issue of possible wider membership.

What is clear, however, is that a well thought out and well executed Australian policy initiative has set in train a process that should provide mutual economic benefits, and may prove to be crucial to the future well-being of many countries in the region.

Our third policy priority is contributing to global security.

This Government has I think demonstrated to even the most determined sceptics that a middle-sized country like Australia can, with well crafted policies, play a significant and influential role not just in its own region but in the larger global security context.

A central part of Australia's contribution to global security has been our active involvement in the multilateral disarmament process. With our appointment of a full time specialist Disarmament Ambassador, we have been active across the whole agenda of multilateral disarmament, but this year we have given a particular priority to the urgent issues of chemical weapons.

In August this year Australia hosted a regional seminar on chemical weapons for officials from South East Asia and the South Pacific. But of even greater significance was a major international conference on chemical weapons which I chaired in Canberra in September: a conference which brought together, in a way that was innovative and indeed I think diplomatically unique, government and industry representatives from over 70 countries. Its purpose was to foster a government-industry dialogue on chemical weapons so as to involve the world's chemical industry in the design, and prepare it for the implementation, of a comprehensive Chemical Weapons Convention, which hopefully will banish these appalling weapons from the face of the earth once and for all.

This meeting was also successful, producing for the first time a united statement from companies representing around 95 per cent of the world's chemical industry expressing strong support for the early conclusion of a CWC. GICCW worked to lend impetus to the Convention negotiating process in Geneva, with a general view now held that the major substantive issues for negotiation should be able to be completed within the coming year.

The Canberra conference has added significantly to the reputation Australia has built, especially in recent years, as a leader in global consideration of this particularly hideous form of weaponry. Our efforts now seem to hold out hope of real disarmament progress.

Part of the credibility Australia has in seeking to play a role in arms control, disarmament, and general global security matters is that we have been putting our money where our mouth is in hosting the Australia-US Joint Facilities at Pine Gap and Nurrungar. They expose us to risk, as we have acknowledged, but these facilities, with their early warning and verification capacity, are crucially important in both maintaining a system of stable nuclear deterrence and in creating the preconditions for disarmament and arms control

agreements.

It should be said in this context that our relationship with the United States in the course of the last six and a half years, not only in global and regional security issues but across the whole range of our dealings, is a healthy, mature and durable one. It has been very different from that formidable combination, which so often characterised that relationship in the past, on the Australian side, of stridency from the left and sycophancy from the right, and on the US side of matching beady-eyed suspicion or patronising indifference. We continue to have our differences - over such matters as the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty and the Farm Bills - but we talk through them comfortably as partners and friends, as Kim Beazley and I did with James Baker and Dick Cheney in Sydney only last week. We are countries whose key government players now know each other well and who respect each others general policy judgment if not agreeing with every policy detail.

The fourth and final priority I have identified is that of contributing to what I like to call the cause of good international citizenship.

The concept of good international citizenship is not the foreign policy equivalent of Boy Scout good deeds. It reflects the reality of international interdependence: the fact that global problems such as environmental degradation, AIDS, refugee resettlement, and human rights violations, require worldwide actions to solve them. Of all the many areas of multilateral diplomacy bearing on these issues in which Australia has been recently involved, two merit a special mention: Southern Africa, and the environment, particularly Antarctica.

Throughout its term of office the Labor Government has taken an intense and passionate interest in the fight against apartheid, with Prime Minister Hawke mounting a number of significant personal initiatives at successive Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, including the Eminent Persons Group concept and the commissioning of a major report on the role and impact of financial sanctions. I have tried to maintain that close involvement through my own participation in the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers' Committee on Southern Africa, which met in Harare in February, in Canberra in August and in the context of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kuala Lumpur just a few weeks ago. . A major item on the agenda of both the Canberra and Kuala Lumpur meetings was the financial sanctions question, with the Committee having before it an authoritative Australian study based on the original Hawke-initiated report, which I commissioned in book form from Tony Cole and Keith Ovenden. The study, *Apartheid and International Finance*, makes a persuasive case for the efficacy of financial sanctions and confirms the view of the Australian Government that these are not only the cleanest, sharpest, quickest and most effective kinds of sanctions, but ones which the world should continue to apply with rigour as the new National Party Government decides just how far, if at all, it wants to inch down the reform path.

The sanctions issue is just one of many to need international support to be effective. Heading off environmental disaster is another. Australia accepts that it has a responsibility to join with the rest of the international community to help tackle threats to our atmosphere, our waters and our land. A good start was made in March this year when, together with 23 other Heads of Government or their representatives, I signed on behalf of the Australian Prime Minister the historic Declaration of the Hague on the protection of the atmosphere. Australia further established its international credentials with the Prime Minister's announcement of a major Pacific-based study of climatic warming and its impact on sea levels.

A major new element in our international environmental campaign is, of course, the initiative we have now taken to promote a Comprehensive Environment Protection Convention which will make the Antarctic a wilderness reserve. At the recent Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in Paris we achieved, through hard diplomatic persuasion and the logic of good argument, our objective of having convened in 1990 a special meeting of the Consultative Parties to the Antarctic Treaty in order to draw up and adopt a comprehensive convention which would lay down principles for regulating and prohibiting human activities which are harmful to the fragile and unique Antarctic environment - bypassing in the process the recently negotiated Minerals Convention which, while it sets major constraints on resource development activities, nonetheless recognises that these activities may occur.

Our achievement in Paris was hard won, and we recognise that on this issue we have set our sights high. We know that it is going to be neither easy nor quick to secure agreement to such a significant change of approach in the management of Antarctica. But I think we have made a solid start, and the support already given by the governments of France, India, Belgium, the Italian Parliament along with the sympathy expressed by a number of others, has been a boost to the initiative. I am presently planning to follow this up early next year with a visit, in company with our new environment Ambassador Sir Ninian Stephen, to the crucially important Latin American Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties.

Let me say in conclusion, referring back to the theme I developed at the outset, that the wide range of important, ground-breaking initiatives upon which we have embarked in foreign and trade policy in recent times is very much a product of the time we have been in office, the experience we have accumulated over that time, and the credibility that has flowed internationally both from the duration of our term in office and the stable and sensible way in which we have conducted ourselves in office.

Australia is listened to internationally; our voice is taken seriously; we are seen as a country with a balanced and sensible view of the world; we are seen as a country with a real appreciation of other countries' problems and aspirations right across the East-West and North-South divides; and we are seen as a country which, by its effective performance

in all these ways, has earned the right to thoughtful and careful responses to anything we propose.

Of course it is the case that governments can run out of energy and imagination if they are around too long, but the Hawke Government is manifestly not one that is getting old and tired or in any way running out of creative breath. Rather, as I hope my excursion through the field of external policy has demonstrated to you, we have been steadily building up throughout our period in office an accumulated body of experience, and an international reputation and credibility which can, and will, serve this country admirably for a long time yet to come.

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