

“A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE”

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
10 NOVEMBER 2010

Central to any discussion of foreign relations is our own idea of Australia. Who are we? What do we stand for? What do we hope to achieve? Do we wish to be a mere participant or do we wish to be involved and help build a safer world.

I saw that an historian wrote that Australia's spirit of independence really began at Gallipoli with the birth of ANZAC and everything that that stands for. With the greatest respect to that historian, I believe that to be nonsense. We have not had a sense of independence. We have had no sure notion of self. We have been and we have acted as a dependent nation. None of that is to decry the good things that Australians have done, indeed that Australian Governments have done in many parts of the world, but let me explain.

Until the 2nd World War we had no Department of Foreign Affairs. We had an office in London there to translate our wishes, our views of the world to the United Kingdom, or to act as a post box where we were told what Britain understood and wanted from us. The choice is open to debate.

In 1939 Menzies, Prime Minister wrote to Bruce, then High Commissioner in London, saying in effect that the British did not understand Asia, that they were making the most terrible decisions, mistakes which would cost us deeply. It was time we established our own missions and were advised by our own people. One of the first decisions, of his government in 1939 was to establish Australian missions in Tokyo, Beijing and Washington. That of course was part overtaken by the war. But it was the first understanding of the need to have our own information so we could make our own decisions related to Australia's national interest.

Up until that time we had been convinced that if we were ever under threat we were part of the British Empire and Britain would defend us. We had not envisaged the circumstance where Britain would be so beleaguered that her own survival was for a while in doubt.

Without a blush we transferred our sense of dependence from Britain to the United States and there for far too many Australians and especially for far too many people in Parliament, it has remained ever since.

There have been occasions when we have stood out when we have advanced our own interests with vigour and determination and occasionally we have won a point.

There would have been no ANZUS Treaty if the Americans had not needed Australia's signature on a peace treaty with Japan. The Menzies Government would not sign until there was some kind of arrangement with the United States, which could be interpreted as guaranteeing Australia's future. There were many who wanted a NATO type alliance which is a commitment to defend a member country under attack. We ended up with a commitment to consult in accordance with ones constitutional processes. There are no guarantees in the ANZUS Treaty.

ANZUS itself is much misunderstood. The Vietnam War was explicitly excluded. It was not part of its ambit, not part of its domain. ANZUS was restricted to the territory or armed forces of the member countries in the Pacific theatre. I can remember when President Carter first came to office. My Government was then concerned that his wish to establish some kind of zone of peace or cooperation in the Indian Ocean with the Soviet Union could lead to the sidelining of the ANZUS Treaty. President Carter later came to a more realistic view of the Soviet Union and no such arrangement with the Soviet Union was reached, but for a time it was a real concern.

Quemoy and Matsu, two offshore islands in the Taiwan Straits were being shelled by Chinese in 1954-55. There was fear that the Chinese would launch an invasion of Taiwan. Because of the relationship with Chiang Kai-shek and support given by the United States, an emotional attachment had developed, an attachment that did much to determine relations with China over many years and which gave Taiwan pre-eminence for far too long.

As a consequence of the Chinese shelling, President Eisenhower moved the Pacific Fleet into the Taiwan Straits as a warning. There were many who believed that war could be possible. You won't see it in the headlines, but the Australian Prime Minister of the time told the United States if there is a war with China over Taiwan, we are not part of it, this is not our affair. Menzies was right. It was only a short while after the signing of ANZUS, but ANZUS survived and America understood.

I know of at least three occasions when the United States placed the interests of Indonesia over and above the interests of Australia, as we believed them to be. The first was over West Irian, where the Australian Government had wanted a genuine act of self-determination but that was not going to be supported by the United States or any other significant power. We had locked ourselves into a corner, quite inadvisably.

Foreign Minister Barwick on one occasion tried to fire a shot over Sukarno's bow by saying our troops fighting in Borneo were covered under ANZUS. While there was no public dispute at the time, there was very evident displeasure and Barwick soon ceased to be Foreign Minister.

If we had done what we ought to have done in East Timor in 1974 and 1975, we would have called for the United Nations troops and observers to man the borders between East Timor and Indonesia, at the very least to observe, if necessary to protect. This is an occasion when the Australian Government of the day with total pragmatism virtually supported later Indonesian actions. If we had pressed that view, which I believe would have been the right and proper view we would have had no support from the United States or again from other significant powers.

These points are made to put ANZUS into perspective. It is not a guarantee, it is a commitment to consult and of one thing you can be very sure, great powers act out of their own self-interests. If that coincides with your self-interest that is fine, but if it doesn't you will not get the support that I believe too many Australians think will automatically come because of some special relationship. You do not win brownie points with a great power.

Do not interpret this wrongly. I am a supporter of ANZUS, I am a supporter of the American relationship but I am sure the best of America expects us to have our own mind, to express it. Sometimes we will agree and others we will not. The United States does not expect a country such as Australia, merely to go along because it suits current American policies.

One more piece of history. I have indicated before that in retrospect with the knowledge we now have, the Vietnamese conflict was misconceived. But at the time with the knowledge then available, the right decision was made. But we were wrong because we believed communism to be monolithic and it was not. There were significant differences between the Soviet Union and China. China has always had a sense of nationalism which is probably more important than a sense of communism. Vietnam was

fighting for national independence. They had defeated the French. Their military support came from the Soviet Union, where else could they get it? But that didn't make them communists in the Soviet sense.

Vietnam was important because with many hundreds of thousands of American troops and with a very large South Vietnamese army it was not possible to enforce a system on South Vietnam against the wishes, against the force of North Vietnam. The South Vietnamese army was heavily infiltrated by the Vietcong. After the assassination of Diem, there was never a leader with the sense of purpose, of commitment and inspiration needed to unify the South in that particular fight. The assassination itself was a ghastly American failure. Those who do not know the details should read McNamara's book *"In Retrospect"*.

I can remember as Army Minister I tried to get Fairhall as Defence Minister to press for a voice in planning the strategy of the allies in Vietnam. As Army Minister, while our own people performed with heroism and with success in Vung Tao, in other parts of the country we knew the story was different. Allan Fairhall was probably wiser than I. He wasn't interested in pressing America for a voice in the inner council. He knew that we would not get that voice and we still have not.

As a result of Vietnam and as a result of what I learnt then as Defence Minister, I have said on more than one occasion that I would not want to be involved as a partner of the United States in a major conflict unless we had a voice in the inner council where the strategy of that war was being discussed and determined. The British had no problem in giving Australia a seat in the British War Cabinet, but the American policy is to do these things for themselves and inform its allies of the consequences. I would like to think that the AUSMIN talks that have taken place this week represent a genuine opportunity for Australia to put views concerning Afghanistan but the American practice of determining these things in Washington is deeply ingrained. A change of culture is needed if the views of allies are to be given real consideration. I also hope that we have views of our own. Nothing much of consequence seemed to emerge from the parliamentary debates between the major parties.

Too readily we followed America and Britain into Iraq. I don't believe there is any need to go into the details, but we now know we went to that war on a falsehood. The powers had to know that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction and did not have means of delivering weapons of mass destruction.

The idea of a foreign infidel army, establishing an American style democracy in a country whose culture and history is so very different was always a hopeless cause. The Neo-Conservative Statement of Principles published in 1999, virtually meant that America would only be secure if the world was democratic in the American image. It was America's boundless duty through the next century to establish such a world, if possible by persuasion, if not by force of arms.

We still don't know if the Iraq venture will be successful or a total failure. We do know they have not been able to form a government even though they had an election in March. We do know there are bitter sectarian differences and the bombings and killings continue. We do know that the Neo-Conservative idea of establishing democracy in Iraq, from which democracy would naturally flow to other countries in the Middle East was as shallow and false as any idea could possibly be.

Iraq was chosen in part because Saddam Hussein was a brutal leader, but it was also believed in America that they could create the myth of weapons of mass destruction to justify war. There has been no measure of his brutality against the hundreds of thousands killed since. The collateral damage, the numbers never counted by the so called allies, because to count them would be to underline and quantify the human cost. The tragedy of these situations is that young Australians, by command of government, serve their country well with commitment and dedication and believe their government has acted wisely.

The Sunnis after the battle of Fallujah, clearly altered their tactics. They seemed prepared to cooperate with occupying forces. But now, the Americans are in a state of withdrawal and there are signs that the Sunnis are once again altering their approach. One of the ironies of the war in Iraq is that the country was bitterly opposed to the growth of Iranian power. It had been supported by Britain and the United States in particular in a long drawn out war with Iran. Now we see the possibility of Iraq cooperating closely, perhaps forming an alliance with Iran.

We again followed the United States into Afghanistan. Unlike Iraq, I supported the involvement in Afghanistan because the Taliban were giving shelter to Al-Qaeda, and the conflict was legal because it was sanctioned by the Security Council. At the outset the purpose was to hunt Al-Qaeda and to attack the government that sheltered them, when this was unsuccessful the role became one of establishing an American style democracy in a country

where such a standard of government is probably incapable of achievement.

Both the invasion in Iraq and the continuing war in Afghanistan have in fact diverted billions of dollars from the hunt for Al-Qaeda. While the Bush government claimed Saddam Hussein was involved with Al-Qaeda that was one of the falsehoods attempting to justify a war that Bush wanted anyway.

Trying to establish a democracy in the country whose traditions are so different from those in the west, who regard a western army as an infidel army to be fought and expelled. It is not a cause capable of success. Australia has followed blindly as other countries have without thinking of the consequences.

Afghanistan once used to be a liberated country where women were treated with respect and equality but it has always been a country divided by warlords, those who hold sway in certain regions, but with a very loose relationship with Kabul. The idea of establishing a strong central power is foreign to such interests.

I do not always agree with foreign affairs articles written by Greg Sheridan of the Australian, but he wrote an article published in the Weekend Australian of 16 October pointing out how to win in Afghanistan. Victory he said would have to be redefined down to the lowest possible level. Well, that means how do you get out with honour, how do you get out proclaiming victory probably in your heart knowing it is defeat. The West has learnt that lesson on more than one occasion.

We know there are talks going on between President Karazi and the Taliban. We now know that the United States has sanctioned at least part of these talks. After the 10 years of fighting, Afghanistan is more dangerous, more at risk and our people have suffered greater casualties. For what purpose? Al-Qaeda now has their home in a number of countries, Yemen, probably Somalia and Pakistan. Are we safer by being there or has the war in Afghanistan put the world more at risk?

The sooner a negotiated exit can be arranged, probably the better it will be. I am not in favour of Australia just pulling out, but we should be urging the United States to create the conditions where everyone can get out. The surge has not created greater security, as reports from Afghanistan are clearly indicating. Indeed when Generals speak of Afghanistan they remind me of Generals in Vietnam. Give me more troops, I will change the strategy

and we will win. On the conventional understanding of winning, that was never true and it is still not true.

There is a significant difference between the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Vietnamese war. After the victory of the North, the region settled down. There were massive problems in Cambodia. The largest and most successful United Nations operation, overseen by Gareth Evans proved to be successful. One could say that the end of fighting resulted in a more secure region. A significant part of that was a 1970's decision of China to place government to government relationships over and above party to party relationships in different parts of East and South-East Asia.

In contrast as a consequence of the war in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan, together with the continuing problems between Israel and Palestine, I believe the world is a more dangerous place and we are more at risk than before the original invasion of Iraq.

The Australian Government and its predecessor have identified themselves totally with the United States. We are told it is in our interest to do so, but even in America many people have come to ask whether we have a mind of our own and in other countries they do not believe that is so. Ten years after Afghanistan, the parliament is only now, because the Greens demanded it, debating about Afghanistan.

We are more at risk because the two conflicts have made it so much easier for the Taliban or for Al-Qaeda to recruit. Foreign armies invading Islamic countries, an overwhelming emphasis on Islamic fundamentalist terrorism and an identification of Islam itself with that terrorism, fundamentalists can use western actions to advance the madness of their own cause.

All religions have or have had their fundamentalists. The IRA, nearly succeeded in blowing up Mrs Thatcher and her entire government. Protestant evangelists in some American churches preach hatred of Islam as though it were a threat to Christianity as a whole. The victories of Islamic moderates are often ignored. Those moderates, reasonable, sensible people with whom I had interfaith meetings in Jakarta in 2003, have been able to remain in control of their Islamic movements in their own country. That is important for Australia. We were told that western policies made it harder for the moderates to maintain control than it would otherwise have been. We should ask ourselves why and how?

We should be more concerned about Pakistan. It represents potentially a greater danger to the peace of the world, than anything that has happened in Iraq or Afghanistan. Democracy has always been weak and fragile in Pakistan. It is not credible to suggest that the army is totally united and that there are not Taliban sympathisers within its ranks or even within the intelligence services themselves. It is a common view in Pakistan that the country has been used to serve American interests, which are not necessarily Pakistani interests. These are dangerous elements to have abroad in a country already fragile, already at risk.

What would the West do if a civil war started in Pakistan, if a Taliban sympathetic government gained control over Pakistan's nuclear arsenal? What would India do? The consequences of even a limited nuclear war between Pakistan and India cannot in today's world be entirely dismissed as a nonsense that could not occur. If that were to happen, you could trace the causality back to the Bush/Blair/Howard invasion of Iraq.

We have a President in the United States who stands for what I believe to be the best of America. He has had significant achievements. He has altered America's nuclear posture against significant domestic opposition. He supported the United States in its instrumentalities emphasising his wish to achieve multilateral solutions. He has made it plain he wants a world free of nuclear weapons. He has won health services for many Americans formerly excluded from healthcare. He has introduced reforms on Wall Street. He still has significant economic problems because the hands off attitude of the Bush and Clinton years in relation to financial prudential regulation, encouraged the worst of capitalism that led to greed, to excess and financial breakdown.

The Tea Party movement is playing on the popularity of isolationist America on the uniqueness of America, on the entrenched conservatism of a very conservative country. It plays upon the belief that the role of Government should be limited to an extent that few if any people could contemplate in Australia. Their policies of economic rationalism at their very worst, minimum government, maximum freedom for business seems to be all that matters. Those who want to understand what is happening in the United States should read an article in *The New Yorker* by Jane Mayer "*Covert Operations*".

The possibility of Sarah Palin becoming a republican candidate for Presidency cannot be dismissed. What kind of world would that be? What kind of danger would that create for America and for us?

President Obama has had to struggle with the Iraq and Afghan problems, a legacy of the Bush years. It is a situation of extraordinary difficulty. We should not cut and run ahead of America out of Afghanistan, but we should be talking with America about possibilities and objectives and time scales. We should be talking and encouraging discussion with elements of the Taliban especially exploring whether they can be weaned from Al-Qaeda.

President Obama has also more than any other President sought to advance the peace process between Israel and Palestine. Countries such as Australia, Britain, countries of Europe could do so much more to help if we had the will, the political courage and the vision to understand that resolution of this issue is central to the resolution of Islamic fundamentalism and its pursuit of terrorism. Instead of helping on critical issues, western countries have remained silent. For many years Australia maintained an even handed policy. I am not sure that exists anymore.

The West promoted elections in Palestine in a democratic process. If we believe in democracy that involves accepting an outcome that we do not necessarily like. Aid workers in Palestine would have known that Hamas were going to win that election, but governments were not prepared to talk to Hamas, who were pushed back into a corner and isolated.

A peace process cannot be successful without their involvement. Hamas is rejected because they refuse to recognise the State of Israel. Palestinians have been promised the two-state solution, but they do not know the boundaries of what may be a Palestinian State. They do know that the boundaries of such a state are being diminished as Israelis settlements expand on the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Israel has also suggested that a Palestinian state would be a state with less full state powers.

In the recent attacks on Gaza, over 1400 Palestinians were killed and 13 Israeli soldiers were killed. A totally disproportionate response to foolish provocative rocket attacks by Hamas. Attacks which are unlikely to do anything except give Israel a propaganda weapon against Hamas.

The past history needs to cut through. New formulas should be found that both Israel and Palestine, including Hamas, can accept. Would it be so unreasonable to suggest that on the day acceptable boundaries of a Palestinian state are determined and agreed by the parties, on that day Hamas will fully recognise the reality and the existence of Israel.

Because the freeze on settlements has been ended and because construction and building proceeds, it leads one to wonder whether Israel prefers the status quo because Israel becomes larger and what could be Palestinian becomes smaller.

On these issues, President Obama has wrestled hard. Have we or other western countries tried to help? I know we have voted in the United Nations against the expansion of Israeli settlements but with a nod and a wink to Israel, it doesn't mean too much. When opposition to the expansion of settlements could have counted over the last several months, what has Australia done, or Britain or countries of Europe, to support President Obama? To let Israel know that such policies are totally counter to the pursuit of peace and are unacceptable and that if they continue they will have consequences.

There are some who may regard these remarks as contrary to the interests to the state of Israel. On the other hand I would say that acceptance of these arguments would make Israel a much safer place than a continuation of present policies because a continuation of Israel's present policies will build greater disenchantment, greater hatred and make peace even harder to find. In many ways this particular conflict is central to the problems of Islamic fundamentalism. If there had been no Israeli Palestinian problem it is arguable that Islamic terrorism would never have gained the strength that it has. On that argument, the settlement of this issue is critical to overcoming Islamic terrorism.

Where does all this leave Australia? What ought we to do? We need a more mature relationship with the United States. A more forthright and open debate. Our voice needs to be heard in the inner councils where if we are a partner in a war with the United States, we have a part in determining strategy. This would not threaten our alliance, it would strengthen it because we would be a real partner.

There is one other issue that I should mention where Australia could take a lead. We started then faulted, then stopped.

The two over-riding global challenges that will determine the future health and prosperity of Australians, like everyone else, are achieving zero nuclear weapons and preventing rampant climate change. On both of these we are arguably currently more a part of the problem than the solution, and are failing to lead by example or provide moral leadership.

To build a world freed from nuclear weapons, there are some promising bases to build on. Australia has previously led on banning chemical weapons. In partnership with Japan the Australian government in 2008 established the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND). Last year's parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Treaties' report on how Australia could enhance its contribution to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation was unanimously supported by members of all political parties.

Yet the commitment that the Rudd government would lead the international agenda on a nuclear weapons convention – a comprehensive treaty to outlaw and eliminate nuclear weapons – has been dropped. The ICNND report drew only a perfunctory response. The opportunity to move action towards a world free of nuclear weapons forward as a bipartisan humanitarian issue has not been grasped. At this year's 5 yearly review conference of the 189 parties to the nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, perhaps the most significant development was the support expressed by 140 governments for negotiations to commence on a global treaty to abolish nuclear weapons. A number of governments are now working together to explore how this might best be done. Australia is regrettably not among them. We cannot credibly say that we want a world without nuclear weapons, and in the same breath assert that nuclear weapons are central to Australia's security, as the 2009 Defence White Paper does.

President Obama's vision and agenda for the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons faces powerful entrenched interests and political obstruction. The most effective way for Australia to act as a true friend and ally of the US, and support President Obama in the global as well as Australians' interests, would be for Australia to make clear that nuclear weapons have no role in our defence and security, and work with the US and other US allies such as Japan and Germany to ensure that Australian policies, facilities and personnel never contribute to the possible use of nuclear weapons.

There are so many issues that could be discussed. Our behaviour in relation to refugees, the reversal of 40 years humanitarian policy and the impact that has on Australia worldwide. How do other countries view us, for what we are and for our compliance with the United States? There is a question of balance between relations with China and America. Too many talk of a choice between the two. It is not a question of picking China or picking America. We need to follow our own agenda. It is a question of sound judgement and commonsense. To suggest a choice creates a totally

wrong mindset. Hugh White's recent article in the Age spelt out the consequences. It emphasises the need for independent and originality in Australian policy. If we are a real ally of the United States, we will help the United States modify its own role so that the United States itself will not feel threatened by China's increasing influence in Asian and world affairs.

The United Nations remains one of the best hopes for a peaceful world but it is no better and no worse than the countries that make up its membership. Major powers can make it work or guarantee its failure. Australia's attitude has been thrown into doubt by Opposition statements that in power they would withdraw our bid to win a seat in the Security Council. Does that represent a view of the United Nations and its instrumentalities, reminiscent of the Bush years or does it represent a belief that an Abbott Government with its enunciated policies would never achieve sufficient support to win a seat on the Security Council? These are all issues which have a significant impact on Australia's international reputation.

The emerging change to population policy within Australia seems to have a bi-partisan element of support. Our attitudes to growth and population are turning inward. There is an apparent unwillingness to make the investment in infrastructure, in resources, in the environment that would enable us to handle population issues with balance and good sense as many other countries have done. Government and Opposition seem to want to avoid decisions in future investment by avoiding the issue and by saying we are going to limit growth more severely than at any time since the Second World War.

These are all issues which have an impact on Australia's reputation worldwide. We need a vision for the future. We should understand that our real influence comes not by being a compliant ally of the United States, but by working with other like minded countries, Canada, Sweden, and other Nordic Countries, other countries that have dedicated their policies over years to a peaceful and cooperative world. Working together, such middle ranking powers have a significant influence on the great issues before us all.

There is an opportunity to be seized, hope to be fulfilled.

4990 words