

## AUSTRALIA'S ROLE IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Address by Senator Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, to Melbourne High School Speech Night, Melbourne, 28 November 1990.

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My memory of these things is getting a little hazy after thirty years, but the enduring image I retain of Speech Night guests during my years at Melbourne High is of a procession of silver-haired old boys, of varying degrees of notoriety, proclaiming, with varying degrees of piety, that their school days at Forrest Hill were the best days of their lives. Now that kind of statement, when you think about it, is a pretty implausible proposition for anyone to utter, and a confession that I certainly don't propose to make: it implies that one's career, not to mention one's personal life, has gone downhill ever since!

While that may well have been true, for all I know, of some of the orators in question, a kinder diagnosis is that this kind of familiar speech night rhetoric is simply a reflection of the impact that good schools and good teachers do have on people's lives, and the way in which that impact keeps on echoing down the years. Certainly in my own case, I remain immensely grateful for the way in which not just a succession of Cadet Under-Officers gave me an early insight into the mysteries of the military mind, but for the way in which a series of first class teachers opened my eyes, in and out of school hours, to a series of worlds I had barely imagined before I came to Melbourne High: the worlds of history, politics, philosophy, literature and the arts. Not least am I grateful for the way in which I was encouraged to set my sights on going on to University, something that no-one in my family had until then remotely contemplated.

Melbourne High School in the late 50s and early 60s really was full of larger than life personalities with splendid idiosyncrasies of one kind or another - people like Norton Hobson, Ben Munday, David Niven, Graham Worrall, Alan Inch, Gerry Smart and Roy Barlow - who I am sure will be remembered with affection by a lot of those here tonight who taught with them, or were taught by them. I was tempted for a moment to add Neville Drohan's name to that list, but - now that he has become, to the delight of us all who care for the place, School Principal - it would hardly be appropriate to concede that he has ever had any idiosyncrasies at all!

Not that I think your current Principal should be tempted to follow a cult of non-personality to quite the same extent as his predecessor in my time. Although an able and charming man, W M Woodfull was utterly determined to ensure that no-one should ever breathe mention that he had been, in an earlier incarnation, one of Australia's greatest batsmen and Test cricket captains, and indeed, with his leadership in the bodyline series, a

genuine national hero. Modesty is all very well when one has something to be modest about - although I don't think even that would be accepted in my own profession! - but I think in Bill Woodfull's case it may have been just a little overdone.

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Rather than descend any further into my anecdotage, I thought it might be better and safer for all of us if I were to talk to you tonight, wearing my present hat as Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, about the kind of world we are now living in as we move into the last decade of the 20th Century, and Australia's place in that world. These are questions that I am constantly wrestling with, and there has perhaps never been a more fascinating time to address them.

They were questions which allowed a fairly straightforward set of answers when I was a student at Melbourne High from 1958 to 1961. The developed world was divided into two armed camps, led respectively by the United States and the Soviet Union: the nuclear arms race was in full swing, the USSR had established its complete dominance over Eastern Europe (most recently in Hungary) and the Cold War was at its height. The Berlin Wall, which symbolised more than anything else the intensity and apparent permanence of that conflict, was in fact built in 1961, when I was in Sixth Form. The countries of Asia didn't count for a great deal in the global scheme of things - although Japan was very much beginning to make its economic presence felt. The line against communism had been held in the Korean War, and the Vietnam War was still in the future. The Third World generally didn't count at all. All of the Pacific and nearly all of Africa still consisted of European colonies, and the system of apartheid had become completely entrenched in South Africa: the Sharpeville massacre, which sent out the first real world-wide shockwaves about the iniquities of that system, happened in 1960 when I was in Fifth Form.

Australia's place in the world, as defined by the Menzies Government - which had already been in office longer than the Hawke Government has been now when I arrived at Melbourne High - was also straightforward. For the Prime Minister, we were acolytes of the United States by defence necessity, but in every other respects a country still "British to our bootstraps". Our location in the Asia Pacific region was an historical aberration: we were a cultural misfit trapped by our geography. The White Australia immigration policy was still in full swing, Papua New Guinea was our colony and expected to remain so at least until the turn of the century, and Asia was, at best, what you had to travel past to get to Europe and, at worst, the source of dark and evil forces putting Australia's whole future at risk.

Australian diplomacy - which had reached a high point a decade earlier when we played, through Dr Evatt, a major role in the founding of the United Nations - had lapsed back

into a mixture of sycophancy and irrelevance. What mattered most was not winning the respect of our region or the wider world, but rather retaining the affection of our great and powerful friends: only then could we be protected against the downward thrust of Asian communism.

The picture I have been sketching is one that is now almost completely unrecognisable. It is well to remember, however, just how much of the big change has been concentrated into the last few years, and in particular the last two years - during the time, in fact, that most students here tonight have been at Melbourne High. The collapse of the USSR under the weight of its own accumulated contradictions, the liberation of Eastern Europe, the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany and the end of the whole Cold War, have all come with breathtaking speed. So too has the imminent collapse of the apartheid system in South Africa, under the weight of its own contradictions and injustices and the impact of international pressure.

So too, at breathtaking speed, has come the resurgence of the role and authority of the United Nations, for decades reduced to impotence by the effect of Cold War driven Security Council vetoes, and now liberated from that constraint. That new authority has been, of course, almost immediately put to traumatic test by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait - the first great test of post Cold War crisis management, and a test that may well determine the course of world history for decades to come.

Other changes have been occurring over a longer timeframe, but their cumulative impact has been no less fundamental. A whole new agenda of international issues - unrecognisable as such thirty, twenty or even ten years ago - has come to occupy the attention of Foreign Ministers and diplomats: the global environment, international health issues like AIDS, unregulated population flows, the drug trade. Communist ideology, and communism as a threat, has for all practical purposes had its day not only in Europe but in Asia and the rest of the developing world as well - although a number of internal developments still have to take their course in China, North Korea and elsewhere. Britain, although still a significant economic and political player, is rapidly becoming merged into the new single Europe (more rapidly still with the departure of Mrs Thatcher!), and it simply would not occur to any Australian politician these days to think, as did Menzies, of Britain's and our interests as indistinguishable. The United States, while still unquestionably a superpower in its own right, has less relative authority as other big nations, and groups of nations, grow and develop, and is for this and other reasons rethinking and reshaping its world-wide military role, not least in our own Asia Pacific region. Japan is now firmly established as the world's second most important economic power, and the Asia-Pacific region as a whole is becoming the centre of gravity of world production and trade: Australia is no longer, geographically, on the outer fringes of the developed world, but near the centre of one of its most dynamic areas.

As these tumultuous event unfold in the world around us, and as the various certainties

that have sustained us for the last generation or more evaporate one by one, how should we in Australia define our place in this new world? What kind of role should we be playing over the next decade and beyond, as the students here tonight leave school, choose careers, grow to maturity and make their own contribution to the nation and the world?

To some extent the process of adjusting Australian foreign policy to a new order of reality has been a continuing process since the Whitlam Government began the task of sweeping away the cobwebs in the early 1970s. But, with things moving as fast as they have in recent years, particular responsibility has fallen upon the shoulders of the Hawke Government to define and articulate where we should be going.

Every country necessarily has to shape its foreign policy on the basis of what is in its own national interest, and Australia is no exception. That does not mean our foreign policy has to be narrowly nationalistic or selfish in character. It is in every country's national interest these days to recognise the forces of internationalism that are at work, and to respond creatively and effectively to them; and I will also be suggesting that there is a very real place for selflessness - or, if you like, for idealism - in the conduct of international relations. In my view Australia has three broad areas of national interest which we should be simultaneously pursuing in our external relations, and I want to say something about each in turn.

The first such area is the protection of our own security. That means acting in a variety of ways to maintain a positive security and strategic environment in our own Asia-Pacific region, and also doing what we can to contribute to global security.

Security involves of course much more than military preparedness, although the new policy of defence self-reliance developed by Kim Beazley when Minister for Defence puts us in much better shape in that respect than we have ever been - much better able to look after ourselves without having to rely on great and powerful friends. Security in a regional context is best guaranteed when military capability is backed by effective diplomacy and trade and other contacts - building up a set of relationships, and networks of interdependence, that will minimise the likelihood of conflict ever breaking out. Our efforts, so far very successful, to get our previously very volatile relationship with Indonesia back on an even keel, can be seen, among other things, in that light. Regional security also involves working to solve apparently intractable regional problems - and our major effort over the last year or so to solve the tragic conflict in Cambodia, an effort which has been acknowledged world-wide for the creativity - and stamina - with which we have pursued it, is a major example of how Australia can help here.

The contribution Australia can make, as a middle-sized power, to global security is necessarily somewhat limited. But the great issues of arms control and disarmament cannot be left just to the superpowers to resolve, and Australia is nowadays one of the

most active countries in the world in pursuing - through the United Nations and other negotiating forums - a treaty completely outlawing the possession or use of chemical weapons, the effective implementation of nuclear non-proliferation, and a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. Even though the Cold War is over, we still live in a world where there are 50,000 nuclear warheads in existence, with a destructive capacity of 800,000 Hiroshimas - or putting it another way, 3.3 tonnes of TNT for every person on earth (not insignificant when you think it would take less than half a ton to blow up the whole of Melbourne High School - maybe even less than that if the building is still in the state of repair it was in my time!).

Nobody needs to be reminded about the implications of chemical weapons with the threat of war upon us in the Gulf. In acting as we have done in response to the invasion of Kuwait - sending naval ships to enforce the blockade, and giving every support to the United Nations and the international community as it struggles to bring Iraq to its senses (we all hope by peaceful means, but by appropriate military action if that does eventually become necessary), Australia is acting squarely in defence of both global security and our long-term regional security. The Gulf crisis is important, from our perspective, not so much because of the interests of the Gulf states immediately concerned, or the implications of the crisis for world energy supplies, but simply because it does represent - as I have already said - the first post-Cold War test of crisis management. Regional bullies guilty of naked territorial aggression simply have to be stopped by the combined weight of United Nations and international reaction: if they can get away with it in this case, no part of the world will be safe from such bullying in the future.

Australia's second major interest is in developing trade, investment and economic cooperation. We have all become conscious in recent years of the fragility of our external account and the need to dramatically expand Australian exports by improving our competitiveness (through domestic policy) and improving the access of our goods to other countries (through international trade diplomacy). Foreign policy and trade policy are inextricably mixed together these days, and that reality is now recognised by the amalgamation of the old Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade into a single new ministry.

Australia has embarked upon two very high profile international initiatives in this area. One of them has won us very real influence world-wide - our inauguration and chairmanship of the "Cairns Group" of 14 agricultural countries who push the banner of fair trade in policy battles with the EC, United States and Japan. The second, which has won us a good deal of respect in our own region, has been our initiation last year of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) process. This is an idea about which people had been making speeches for two and a half decades, but which Australia brought to actual fruition, bringing together as we did the twelve major trading countries of the region (including the United States and Japan) to work together on freeing up trade policy world-wide, freeing up trade within the region, and working together on major

cooperative projects in areas like energy, transport and human resource development.

The remaining area of national interest which we pursue is what I call, simply, Australia's interest in being, and being seen to be, a good international citizen. There is, as I have said, a whole new emerging area of international relations - a "third agenda", to add to the familiar political and economic ones - based on the growing realisation that there are a series of major problems which countries cannot really solve by themselves, because they are problems which need cooperative international solution. Protection of the global environment is the clearest example, and the one that has captured the most popular imagination world-wide: everyone is now conscious, in a way that simply was not the case a few years ago, of the threats to the global climate from CO2 and other greenhouse gasses, and the danger of destruction of the ozone layer. Australia is rapidly rising to prominence as a very active country in promoting international solutions to environmental problems, and not just on climate-related issues. We have been a leader in the Pacific nations' fight against driftnet, or "wall of death", fishing methods. And we have been, with France, the world leader in promoting the move to ban altogether mining and drilling activity in Antarctica, that uniquely fragile and irreplaceable wilderness continent.

Wearing our good international citizenship hat, we also work directly, and in cooperation with other sympathetic nations, to alleviate poverty in developing nations, to help resolve the human tragedy of massive flows of refugees and displaced persons, to try and grapple with international drug and health problems, and to advance the cause of human rights in pursuit of the values enshrined in the United Nations Charter and Covenants.

Australia is probably, in fact, the most active country in the world in pursuing human rights issues on a bilateral basis: for example in the last year (1989/90) alone we made direct representations at ministerial or official level in relation to 443 different groups or individuals in 87 different countries. This kind of activity, together with the policy positions we take in the United Nations, the leadership role we have continued to take in the struggle against apartheid (particularly within the Commonwealth, and particularly in areas like sports boycotts and financial sanctions), and the way in which we have shaped our relations with countries like China after Tienanmen, all win us a great deal of credibility and respect from the international community. But it is also the kind of activity that most often causes diplomatic difficulties and dilemmas for us: in human rights matters one is always walking a tightrope between saying and doing too much, and too little.

The conduct of foreign affairs is about responding realistically to the world as you find it: you cannot always make, or remake, the world as you would like it to be. You have to have trade relations with many regimes of which you disapprove. You have to have working relations with many forms of government that you think less than ideal. You have to balance, as an Age editorial put it very nicely a few weeks ago in the context of Australian policy on Fiji, the "champion(ing) of international morality" against the

"pragmatic acceptance of irreversible fact". You sometimes have to have a multi-track policy, seeking to send two or more different signals at once: to adapt the immortal words of Lyndon Baines Johnson, in this business you have to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time! In international relations the luxury of absolutism is denied to its practitioners: that luxury is available only to those who write and talk about us - in the press, the universities (dare I say schools as well?) and elsewhere.

For Australia to be wrestling with these kinds of dilemmas is in itself something fairly new. For most of our previous history we haven't chosen to play a particularly activist role in regional or world affairs, and if we had nobody would have taken a great deal of notice. But we are in the process now of evolving a foreign policy that is not only independent and assured, but relevant - in both its global and regional dimensions - to the kind of world that is evolving around us.

The kind of foreign policy Australia is capable of pursuing, and should be pursuing, in the years ahead is I think very well illustrated by the half-dozen high-profile Australian initiatives of recent times that I have specifically mentioned - Cambodia, Chemical Weapons, APEC, the Cairns Group, Antarctica, and aspects of the fight against Apartheid. There have been a number common characteristics running through them - careful identification of opportunities for action by a middle-sized power; creative imagination in devising solutions; a focus on coalition building strategies; and the application of professional diplomatic skill and sheer basic energy in seeing the issue through.

Our recent higher-profile foreign policy has won us a good deal of favourable attention internationally, and the Cambodia and APEC initiatives in particular have constituted something of a watershed in our relations with our own region. Although we are never likely to be perceived as an Asian country in the fullest sense of the word, there is no doubt that we are now being increasingly seen within this region as a genuinely participating and contributing partner, rather than as a perennial outsider - or as someone nicely put it recently, no longer the "odd man out" in Asia but the "odd man in".

Ours is also now a foreign policy - and this is the note on which I would like to conclude - that very much marries realism with idealism. The world cannot be changed overnight, but it can be changed - gradually - for the better. Nation states and peoples should be allowed to develop their own distinctive capacity and individual personality. Their systems of government and economic management should not be such as to deny fundamental political, economic or social rights to their own peoples. Those great liberating ideas of the 1960s, racial equality, the 1970s, sexual equality, and the 1980s, protection of the environment - all have their place in international affairs. The rules of international behaviour should not be different from those governing every other kind of human behaviour. And problems abroad as well as at home are best resolved by consultation and cooperation rather than confrontation.

This is the kind of vision to which I and the present Australian Government are committed as we continue to shape our foreign policy priorities in a world that never ceases to change around us. And at this pivotal period in world history - when opportunities really do seem to be present for some fundamental new approaches to the conduct of international affairs - I believe it is a vision which stands an excellent chance of becoming a world-wide reality. It will be very much the task not just of my generation, but yours, to ensure that it does become so.

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