

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
SUMMER SCHOOL CANBERRA

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Opening Address by the Prime Minister, the Hon. E.G. Whitlam,  
Q.C., M.P.

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It is a happy coincidence that this Summer School on Australia's international relations should open on such a momentous day in the history of our region and of the world - the day of the ceasefire in Viet-Nam.

A generation of war and havoc and suffering lies behind us. The problems ahead, in Viet-Nam, in Indo-China and in the region are immense. They will tax statemanship to the limit, yet it is impossible at such a time, on such a day, not to feel a sense of profound relief and profound hope and a sense of excitement at the new opportunity which this week's historic events have opened up for us all. It is in the context of change, of hope, of new opportunities that I put my remarks in opening the Summer School.

On 2 December the nation changed its government, but did not and could not by that act change the essential foundations of its foreign

.../2

policy. Australia's national interests did not change. Australia's international obligations did not change. Australia's alliances and friendships did not change. Nonetheless, the change is real and deep because what has altered is the perception and interpretation of those interests, obligations and friendships by the elected government. The essential change is that the views and policies of the Australian Government - working within the same framework of facts as its predecessors - are now those of the Australian Labor Party. The Australian Government acts on a mandate given to it by the Australian people. On 2 December that mandate was given clearly to the Australian Labor Party.

I make these remarks at the outset not to strike a partisan note, but to place on record a simple, obvious but powerful fact which should never be forgotten at home or abroad, neither by our opponents here nor our friends abroad.

The mandate of the Labor Government was abundantly clear on specific matters of our foreign relations. In the Policy Speech we did not for instance say just in general terms that we would work for normalisation of relations with the People's Republic of China. We said specifically "The Labor Government will transfer Australia's China Embassy from Taipei to Peking." We have done so. We did not just say that we would deplore resumption of French nuclear tests in the Pacific. We said "We will take the question of French nuclear tests to the International Court of Justice." We preparing to do so. We did not just say that we deplored racial selection of sporting teams. We said "We will give no visas to or through Australia to racially selected sporting teams." We shall not.

Beyond, however, these and other quite specific pledges, there were other great matters which were stated more generally and yet which must be given commanding force and weight if we are to take our mandate seriously. For example, the reference in my Policy Speech to Viet-Nam was relatively brief and general. This was not just because in November the ceasefire then seemed much closer than it turned out. It was because there was not a matter in the whole range of policy - domestic or foreign - on which the intentions and determination of the Australian Labor Party and an Australian Labor Government ran so deep, clear and straight.

But on three great matters - the three relevant matters for an Australian political party or an Australian government - there had never been any doubt about the attitude of my Party. Those principles were: opposition to Australia's military involvement; opposition to the bombing of North Viet-Nam; and, thirdly, a determination to use Australia's influence to end the war.

From 28 April 1965 - the day Sir Robert Menzies announced the sending of the first battalion - these three attitudes had never been in doubt nor in question at any level of the Australian Labor Party. Nobody could be under any illusion that once we had formed a government we would delay for a day or an hour in acting upon these policies and these principles - upon this mandate.

Yet our mandate and duty to maintain the American alliance was equally clear. This we will do. The ending of American intervention in Indo-China will remove the really serious difference between the two administrations. There will be another result of profound importance. The end of intervention - with all the bitterness and dissension it brought - will free the spirit and energies of the American people and help mightily to restore the United States to her proper and constructive

role as the world's most generous and idealistic nation. But let me also say this:- At no time in the eighteen years since the United States began her military commitment in Indo-China, or in the ten years since Australia first sent advisers there, or in the eight years since Australia committed troops on the ground in strength, or in the seven years since the bombing of North Viet-Nam began, has it ever been suggested by any President, by any Prime Minister, by any responsible Congressman that Australia's attitude to the war in Viet-Nam or any phase in the war in Viet-Nam was a condition of the continuation of ANZUS. There is no such suggestion now. ANZUS is a legal embodiment of the common interests of the people of Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Those interests remain constant beyond changes of administration in Washington, Wellington or Canberra.

It is true that the changed Australian attitude to Viet-Nam did lead to an alteration in the degree of consultation on American policy in Viet-Nam between Washington and Canberra. That alteration had nothing to do with the change of government. It occurred under the previous government as the Australian commitment was wound down. As the significance of the Australian commitment lessened, the less Australia was told - and the previous government did not and could not complain. But this was an alteration related solely to Viet-Nam. It had nothing to do with ANZUS.

However, for all its enduring importance, adherence to ANZUS does not in itself constitute a foreign policy. It is a treaty at the centre of our relations with only two nations, albeit one our closest partner and the other the world's greatest power. Yet insofar as ANZUS represents a security guarantee in the ultimate peril, reliance upon it as the sole objective of our foreign policy would in fact place our foreign policy in suspension - until the peril emerged.

The real test of a successful foreign policy is the extent to which a balance is struck and kept between a nation's commitment and a nation's power. The United States herself now accepts that its cold war commitment to global containment of Communism represented a gross over-extension of her real power. This was one of the inexorable lessons of Viet-Nam. To see the change which has occurred because of Viet-Nam it is enough to compare the circumspection of President Nixon's second Inaugural with the sweeping rhetoric of John Kennedy's Inaugural with its vision of an unlimited universal acceptance of burdens by the United States.

In my Policy Speech I said:

"A nation's foreign policy depends on striking a wise, proper and prudent balance between commitment and power. Labor will have four commitments commensurate to our power and resources;

"First - our own national security;

"Secondly - a secure, united and friendly  
Papua New Guinea;

"Thirdly - achieve closer relations with our  
nearest and largest neighbour,  
Indonesia;

"Fourthly - promote the peace and prosperity  
of our neighbourhood."

The fourth of those is, of course, an extremely general proposition. Yet Australia's actual situation in our region makes it a meaningful objective for an Australian Foreign Policy. It is a commitment realistically commensurate with our power, our resources and our interests.

Australia's actual situation is this: We are far and away the richest nation in the neighbourhood. We have a gross national product equal to that of all the countries between the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea. Those countries have twenty times our population. We are an island continent with one of the most formidable natural defences in the world. We have no serious conflict of interests with any of our neighbours and there are no foreseeable conflicts likely to arise well beyond this decade.

We have an assured economic partnership - a relationship of interdependence, not dependence - with Japan, the strongest power in the wider region. Both Australia and Japan are moving swiftly into an area of better understanding with the largest power, China.

If I appear to be placing such great emphasis on the rosier aspects of our present situation, it is because I wish to contrast the new realities with the old fears, shibboleths and suspicions. One might say, with Canning, in a very different context and very different sense, "I call the new world into existence in order to redress the balance of the old." I hasten to say that absolutely no significance whatever is to be attached to my preferring Canning above Metternich.

To give an independent view from the other side of the world I quote from the "Guardian" of 15 January:-

"Australia is the richest most powerful and most advanced country in a part of the world that is otherwise empty of influential states. It is proper and healthy that Australian policy should reflect this political and economic fact.

"But until the new government came along a succession of governments in Canberra had tended to accept for Australia a more dependent status than the country actually enjoys. Since the Second World War Australians and Americans have understood each other and have

depended upon each other to a degree that was unknown before Pearl Harbour. But friendship between Australia and America does not require Australia to be subservient."

I am determined that under this Government the Australian people will be encouraged to shed the old stultifying fears and animosities which have encumbered the national spirit for generations and dominated, often for domestic partisan purposes, the foreign policy of this nation.

The other great theme our Government will wish to stress both with the great powers and our neighbours is that with the end of foreign intervention in Viet-Nam the region has a second chance. The West threw away an opportunity for a settlement in 1954 after Korea, after Geneva. I believe the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan and China are determined not to let the second opportunity slip because assuredly it will not be offered a third time. In particular the Australian Government will discourage at all levels the kind of thinking which would place North Viet-Nam in the role of the new antagonist as a replacement for China and which would place Thailand in the role assigned to South Viet-Nam in the early '60's. Accordingly, we shall support the ASEAN proposal for a zone of peace and neutrality in South East Asia and encourage the other countries involved in the region to endorse the proposition.

I have spoken on several occasions in recent months of the great importance we attach to the development of our relations with Indonesia and stressed it in the Policy Speech. The importance of Indonesia to Australia is indisputable. We need, however, to see the development of our relations with Indonesia within the wider South East Asian regional context. I do not want to give the impression that by giving priority to our relations with Indonesia we would do so at

the expense of our relations with other ASEAN countries. Indonesia is, of course, closer geographically and much larger than the other members. But our standing in other regional countries is not irrelevant to the importance which Indonesia will attach to Australia. In the same way as our destiny is inseparable from Indonesia, so Indonesia cannot separate her own destiny from those of her immediate neighbours to the north in ASEAN. So the continued development of our relations with Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines is important not only in the wider regional context, but in the context of our own relations with Indonesia. We see our relations with Indonesia as complementary to and not in any way competitive with her or our relationships with other ASEAN countries. This is what I mean in saying that in giving priority to the development of our relations with Indonesia we are not doing this at the expense of our relations with the other ASEAN countries.

I might sum up our general approach to the affairs of our region by stating the situation I expect to exist by 1975. With New Zealand, relations will have grown even closer through a series of co-operative endeavours to promote the welfare and harmony of the South Pacific.

We shall have as our close neighbour an independent Papua New Guinea which will have for the rest of this century the first call on our substantially increased foreign aid programme. We shall be working closely in co-operation with the Government of Papua New Guinea through a specific and guaranteed economic programme.

We do not see any immediate threat of external aggression to the countries of South East Asia. We do not want to look on South East Asia as a front line in terms of the old cliché of forward defence.



We do not see South East Asia as a frontier where we might fight nameless Asian enemies as far to the north of our own shores as possible - in other people's backyards.

To meet the new realities and our perception of them we shall be seeking new forms of regional co-operation. In its present form, ASPAC no longer reflects those realities. In particular, the continued presence of Taiwan makes ASPAC anachronistic. Three of ASPAC's members - Australia, New Zealand and Japan - recognise Peking as the sole legal government of China. We will not be withdrawing immediately from ASPAC although we consider that unless there is a change in its present membership, it cannot function effectively or continue for very long.

In Wellington the New Zealand Prime Minister and I expressed our intention to work with our Asian and Pacific neighbours in making adjustments to existing arrangements and seeking new forms of co-operation. We shall be consulting with our neighbours - including Indonesia, Japan and others - before any final decisions are reached on how we should proceed. There is no question of seeking to change or enlarge ASEAN. We should like to see all our ASEAN neighbours in a larger regional association for Asia and the Pacific, but ASEAN itself is a sub-regional grouping which is doing valuable work and any enlargement of the organisation is a matter for its members.

Regional co-operation will be one of the keystones of Australia's foreign policy for the 70's. We shall be charting a new course with less emphasis on military pacts. It will be based on an independent outlook in foreign affairs and will be directed towards a new regional community geared to the realities of the 70's.

The guidelines of the regional community that I foresee will be an organisation genuinely representative of the region, without

ideological overtones, conceived as an initiative to help free the region of great power rivalries that have bedevilled its progress for decades and designed to insulate the region against ideological interference from the great powers.

I do not intend that Australia should try to impose a detailed formulation for setting up such a community and we shall not seek to intrude beyond our realistic capacity to participate and assist in the realisation of this concept. We shall be patient and punctilious in our consultation and prepared at every turn to take account of and participate in the genuine aspirations of the region. But we shall be active in seeking this end. I have already initiated efforts in the relevant Departments of my Government and I shall continue to advance this concept as an earnest of Australia's genuine interest in the development of a truly representative regional community.

I conclude by expressing our profound satisfaction that this auspicious day should mark a new beginning or at the very least a chance for a new beginning in our region. I take it as a happy omen indeed that this should have occurred so early in the life of the new Australian Government. Events of this week add a new importance and a new dimension to this Summer School. Australians like yourselves who wish to help us frame new policies and take the debate on foreign affairs to a new level can now do so free of the overwhelming preoccupation of Viet-Nam.

I have long stressed that a Labor Government would seek and welcome the help of Australians in framing our policies at all levels. Your views and ideas are doubly welcome at this time.

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