



15

PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

SEPTEMBER 27, 1976

TEXT OF ADDRESS GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE ROY MILNE
LECTURE IN SYDNEY.

It gives me great pleasure to be here to deliver the Roy Milne Lecture.

Tonight I would like to talk about aspects of foreign policy: the problems and possibilities that the construction of foreign policy in a democracy poses; the resources that a democracy has in developing and implementing foreign policy; some of the Government's perspectives on international issues; and the types of influence that Australia can have in the world.

The basic goals of our foreign policy are quite simply ensuring the continuance of a vigorously democratic Australia - working effectively towards a world where people have the opportunity to live in dignity and self-respect.

This, of necessity, must be a world in which the dangers of war and conflict are diminished -- and where the international environment is favourable to these ends.

These foreign policy goals are ambitious ones, their pursuit will take patience and persistence and require the skillful use of our nation's resources.

Many people, however, regard democracies as being incapable of pursuing foreign policy goals effectively.

It is often argued that the advantages democracies have in domestic affairs are: the responsiveness of democratic political leaders; the positive influence of democratic public opinion; and the openness of the political life of democracies; are antithetical to the achievement of foreign policy goals in a complex world of sovereign nation states.

Alex de Tocqueville put this view in commenting on the United States in the early 19th century:

"foreign politics demands scarcely any of those qualities which are peculiar to a democracy.
- They require on the contrary the perfect use of almost all those in which it is deficient.

..A democracy can only with great difficulty regulate the details of an important undertaking, persevere in a fixed design, and work out its execution in spite of serious obstacles.

It cannot combine its measures with secrecy or await their consequences with patience."

Rather more recently, Walter Lippman attributed weaknesses in democratic foreign policy to public opinion, saying:

"The unhappy truth is that the prevailing public opinion has been wrong at the critical junctures - the people have imposed a veto upon the judgements of informed and responsible officials."

"they have compelled the governments which usually knew what would have been wiser. Or was necessary. Or was more expedient. To be too late with too little, or too long with too much. Too pacifist in peace and too bellicose in war. Too neutralist or appeasing in negotiation or too intransigent."

This is a formidable indictment, even if the people who draw it up betray a rather aristocratic disdain for the good sense of the democratic people - a preference for decision-making by a select elite with the best knowledge and true insight on what the nation's best interests are.

Historical experience, however, provides a basis for these observations.

Non-democratic leaders do not need to be highly responsive to popular demands. Consequently, they are capable of rapid policy changes to take advantage of emerging opportunities.

They are not constrained to a similar degree by compelling considerations of public morality.

They are not under the constant scrutiny of independent and influential mass media.

It cannot be denied that on occasion, democratic governments have failed to conduct foreign policies in accord with their nation's best interests.

The nineteen thirties stand out as perhaps the starkest instance of the failure of democracies in foreign policy.

Manifestly, in this period, the world's democracies failed to respond adequately to the menace of fascism.

Seeking to appease fascism they succeeded only in increasing its strength, capacity and appetite.

Their policy of appeasement brought democracy to the brink of disaster and toppled the world into six years of war.

This failure has often been attributed to the impact of public opinion on politicians. Faced by depression, and by domestic conflicts between left and right wing ideologies the democratic peoples of Europe are said to have turned inward.

Desiring to ignore the reality beyond their borders they implicitly threatened democratic leaders with electoral rejection if they acted to stifle aggression while it was still weak.

One by one, the milestones towards the second world war were passed, German rearmament, the impotence of the league of nations, the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, and Munich.

The desire of the people for peace was clear, but the overriding responsibility of democratic leaders was to make known to their people, the consequences of inaction.

Instead they avoided responsibility in the attempt to gain a transient and soon to be shattered popularity.

The failure of the democracies in the 1930s was not the product of the inability to perceive the many consequences of inaction - the failure was produced by an abnegation of responsibility on the part of democratic leaders.

Characteristic of this abnegation, was the behaviour of the French Premier, Edouard Daladier on his return from negotiating the Munich Agreement, which sacrificed Czechoslovakia to Hitler.

As his aeroplane landed at Le Bourget Airport, a happy crowd rushed forward to meet it.

Not knowing what the crowd's attitude was, frightened that the crowd was demonstrating against the agreement, Daladier hesitated to alight.

Turning to one of his party, he said of the Agreement:

"It was not brilliant, but I have done all that I could. How will they receive it?"

When assured that the crowd was welcoming him, he snapped:

"Idiots. They do not know what they applaud."

And he did not tell them. Instead he represented Munich as a triumph of statesmanship.

These facts show that democracies do have weaknesses in the implementation of foreign policy.

A particular type of public mood, conflict dividing society, a lack of will on the part of political leaders, the fear that they will be reproved for stating the truth about the international situation, combine to paralyse democratic foreign policy.

This paralysis is manifest in Stanley Baldwin's statement "supposing I had gone to the country and said that Germany was rearming and we must rearm, does anybody think that this pacific democracy would have rallied to the cry at that moment? I cannot think of anything that would have made the loss of the election from my point of view more certain."

We cannot wave history away and assert that our system of government does not have the potential for failure.

We cannot deny that on occasions democracy has failed everywhere but in the ultimate test of strength, - a test that has been fraught with greater risks and met at a higher cost because of the policy failures which precipitated it.

We cannot accept however, that potential weaknesses need inevitably be translated into actual weaknesses. It is only pessimism that deems the worst possibilities to be on the verge of realisation.

Despite the possibility of failure, a willingness to look reality in the face shows that the diversity of opinion and the wide distribution of power characteristic of democracies are not merely compatible with an effective foreign policy, but in the proper combinations, they are resources of unparalleled potency.

An active and informed public conducting an extensive discussion and debate of international issues is a prerequisite for the very formulation of a foreign policy which is appropriate to the time and circumstances - a foreign policy which is adaptive and flexible, and which can respond to events while still retaining its integrity and purpose.

If foreign policy is to have these attributes the process of foreign policy formulation cannot be restricted to governments alone.

This would involve the denial, the unwillingness to use resources which could improve the quality and depth of our foreign policy.

The complexity of the world and Australia's geographic position imposes special requirements if the Government's perceptions of world trends are to be adequately developed by sound information, a sophisticated and objective process of evaluation.

Governments have considerable resources with which to gather information about foreign events, about the postures, intentions and capabilities of other governments, international political and social tendencies, and the opportunities and risks that exist in the world.

The Australian Diplomatic Service composed not only of Foreign Affairs personnel but also personnel from other Departments, such as Treasury, National Resources and Defence is by any standards one of exceptionally high quality.

It is staffed by people of the highest expertise and motivated by a sense of duty to Australia's national interest.

The efforts and expertise of our diplomats provide the foundations on which the foreign policy perspectives and actions of successive Australian Governments are based.

The high quality and dedication of Australia's diplomats does not however mean that other non governmental perspectives of foreign policy, other interpretations on the world, and how to best pursue Australia's national interests are redundant.

The foreign service does not monopolise the expertise available in Australia. The public voicing of alternative views, the existence of different emphasis adds to the possibilities for an effective foreign policy.

In part, this is because the very organisational structure which makes the work of the foreign service so indispensable, also establishes some pressures towards inertia.

Henry Kissinger has put the problem in the following way:

"It is a paradoxical aspect of modern bureaucracies that their quest for objectivity and calculability often leads to impasses which can be overcome only by essentially arbitrary means."

By "arbitrary means" of course he means extra bureaucratic ones, particularly the personal diplomacy of which he has been the twentieth century's prime exemplar.

In the modern international system, personal interventions, top level meetings between the representatives of a nation are unquestionably of particular importance - they bring additional depth to international discourse and often give national leaders a greater understanding of one another's perspectives and problems.

But these men alone cannot form foreign policy. Not only is there a requirement for first class official advice - beyond this there must be stable and institutionalised sources of non government influence on foreign policy.

Only if there are these injections of expertise from the outside - the injections of adrenalin into the perspectives of the politicians and the foreign service - can tendencies towards over-routinisation, forcing new issues into old images be overcome.

We all like our stereotypes, our established ways of looking at the world.

They are comfortable and reassuring.

It is through constant stimulus from society that our understanding of the world can respond to change in ways enabling us to influence events before the time for exercising such influence passes.

The contributions that can be made to Australia's foreign policy by public involvement are of great significance - the Australian people are increasingly well educated, - the issues which face us are no longer clear cut, black and white issues - if ever they were - and simple responses are no longer appropriate to the international situation.

The importance of the nature and quality of debate in the public arena to a successful foreign policy means that those responsible for Australian foreign policy are growing in number.

It is worth considering carefully what "responsible" means in this context.

In a Constitutional sense, the responsibility of the government has not altered. The Government takes the decisions which direct the instruments of policy, and remains accountable for those decisions to the people.

There is a broader sense of "responsible" however, which extends to all those who actively contribute to the foreign policy debate.

In this sense, people share a responsibility for the outcome of the debate because their contribution influences that outcome.

In this wider sense, all of us who take an active role in discussing the nation's foreign policy have a part of the responsibility for what happens in Australia - how successfully we navigate the shoals and use the opportunities of our international environment.

This is a responsibility that requires us at all times, to express our views on Australia's policy in a way that will contribute to an effective role for Australia, and not in a way geared simply to cause sensation or gaining the approval of some special interest or group.

This is a responsibility which requires the debate to be conducted in terms of moderation and reason, not as a crusade on behalf of revealed truth.

Because it involves the nation's security, the foreign policy debate is one of democracy's most critical debates.

Because foreign policy often requires a long term perspective and deals with events and circumstances that often appear remote and of little relevance, it is too easily made the focus of emotion rather than reason, and exploited for domestic purposes unrelated to the nation's needs.

In this process of public discussion, all sections of the community, the media, political parties, institutions of higher learning, and the many associations concerned with the examination of international affairs have important parts to play.

Inevitably participation involves costs. The sheer time and effort it takes to keep up with international events. The intellectual rigor required to put the facts into an interpretive framework. And the forswearing of the emotionally satisfying partisan response to events and actions in the interests of detached - even if not bloodless - analysis.

The media have a critical role to play in the development of a democratic foreign policy.

They are the most potent disseminators of news and the most widely received evaluator of facts in our society.

Few people have direct experience with foreign affairs - their appreciation of the world, of operative forces in it the actions of politicians and the consequences of these actions are received from the mass media.

Politicians and policy makers in turn rely on the press, to sample public opinion, and to test the substance of the arguments which journalists and leader writers put forward, against their own.

Unlike undemocratic regimes, the Government cannot dictate the news or the sort of coverage that they think an issue deserves - rather it is up to the judgement of the press to decide what to print.

All this gives the media considerable power although not always quite as much power as the media thinks it has - and a great responsibility.

The role of the media in Australia is particularly important because of the obvious problems of the time lag in the receipt of overseas publications reporting and evaluating international events.

How many people have had the opportunity to read the best newspapers from overseas in time for the impact of their reports and evaluations to have an immediate impact?

The facts of geography - even in a period of near instantaneous communications means that there is a risk of Australia being isolated from new currents of thought and new assessments of situations.

The result is that there is a danger that Government statements and perceptions will appear to come out of the blue to the public and often to the press because the facts the Government is placing before the people have not previously been given a "run".

There is a responsibility on the media to report foreign affairs in a way that subjects them to adequate and objective analysis over a period of time.

There is a need for coverage of foreign affairs to be more systematic and extensive.

The public should be alerted to developing situations in the international arena as these situations emerge so as to be able to gain an awareness of the factors relevant to the situation and the ways in which Australia's interests may be involved.

At this point I should say something about the two apparently conflicting principles of the democratic right to know, and the need for secrecy which effective Government sometimes demands.

Usually the media and the Government are cast as the protagonists of the two different principles.

The contest between the democratic right to know and the sometimes inevitable demand for secrecy, is softened although not completely resolved if it is recognised that what is at issue is not a conflict of absolutes.

Traditionally, the conflict has been seen as being between journalists' duty to inform the public, and policy-makers who assert that the public has no right to know about foreign policy.

This is no longer an accurate representation of the situation if ever it was.

There is a conviction on the part of this Government that public involvement in policy making is an essential component of effective foreign policy.

Secrecy is only warranted or justified, where its absence would compromise what is basically the outcome of an inherently democratic process.

There are obviously some matters which, for security or operational reasons, cannot be disclosed until long after the event.

But there can be no hard and fast rule about what falls into these categories and what falls outside them.

In making a decision on any particular matter, both politicians and journalists have to use their judgement about what is in the public interest - they will sometimes differ.

This Government has sought to play its part in stimulating a public debate on Australia's foreign policy by stating its view of Australia's place in the world, and some of the problems Australia in common with other nations, faces.

Both the Foreign Minister and I have pointed to the problems presented by the contemporary international environment.

This environment provides grounds for concern to people who are willing to look at the world as it is rather than as they would like it to be.

Without a conception of a desirable future our foreign policy is rudderless, condemned to an arid pragmatism that permits us only to respond to events rather than shape them.

By asserting that the millenium of peace and security has arrived, we compromise, perhaps irremediably any chance of achieving such a world.

Tensions have not been eliminated from the contemporary international environment.

Some states have manifested a continuing readiness to pursue their interests by the use of force.

The influence of countries opposed to the freedom and respect for the individual is growing.

Detente has not meant the stabilisation of tensions between the super powers.

The internal political and social problems of many countries have led to uncertainty in their external relations .

Problems of energy and raw material supplies present the international community with a new set of problems which could add to the possibilities of conflict and confrontation if ineffectively handled.

The widespread problems of poverty, hunger and disease both affront human dignity and threaten conflict between nations.

In the course of initiating such a debate, it seems regrettably almost inevitable, that for a variety of reasons, distortions will occur. Misperceptions become repeated and treated as if they were fact.

One reason misperceptions may occur is because technical terms are misunderstood.

Specialists use language in one way, the same terms are understood differently by people who are not specialists.

One term which gives rise to such difficulties is "threat". When a military officer or defence expert uses the term "direct threat", it refers to identifiable forces mobilised for aggression.

A statement that there is "no direct threat" to Australia does not mean that there are no foreseeable problems or dangers in our international environment.

It simply means that there is no country foreseeably prepared to launch an assault on Australia.

Yet in the recent past we have seen the claim that there is "no direct threat" to Australia now or for the next fifteen years, taken to mean that there are no risks or dangers in the international environment - that our defence capacity can be run down without any adverse consequences for our security, and that our foreign policy can largely ignore issues of security.

Another term which has been a source of serious misunderstanding is "detente".

"Detente" originally referred to certain principles of relations which it was hoped would lead to a genuine overall relaxation of political and military tensions.

To many people, however, "detente" was taken to mean that such a secure relaxation had actually taken place - that the objectives of policy were real achievements.

Misunderstandings of both these terms -- "threat" and "detente" -- have led in the Government's view to inaccurate assessments of Australia's international environment.

The Government believes that it is a serious distortion to see foreign and defence policy simply as a response to "threats". Such a simplistic approach will simply hinder us from responding effectively to the complexities of our international environment.

I made this clear in my statement of first June. It is a position I have reiterated since, on a number of occasions.

On June first I said: "the contemporary international situation is a test of the capabilities of democratic leaderships and democratic peoples. It is an environment with disturbing tendencies and shifts in balance. This diffuseness and complexity is the test".

It is the shifting balance of influence in the international situation which was one of the grounds for concern I expressed at that time.

I said: " ..A nation does not have to face a threat of imminent invasion before it has grounds for concern at the international situation.

From our own point of view, the primary concern is an international environment which could progressively limit the capacities of Australia, her friends and allies, to advance their interests and ideals, which reduces options, which almost imperceptibly weakens the capacity to pursue our interests and advance the cause of human dignity."

The position of the Government on the Soviet buildup in the Indian Ocean and in Europe, has been stated within this framework. Our concern has been consistently expressed at the strategic significance of a shift in the balance of influence in the vital north west sector of the ocean.

What we have said consistently is that we seek balance and restraint. Let me quote again from the June first statement:

"We have supported the U.S. development of logistic facilities at Diego Garcia so that the balance necessary for stability in the area can be maintained. We also strongly support the recent appeal by the United States administration for restraint so that the balance can now be maintained at a relatively low level."

This was the view that I reiterated in discussions with Government leaders in Japan, China and the United States.

It was therefore with some surprise that I read in a Sydney newspaper column a couple of weeks ago that my view of a direct Soviet threat to Australia had received a rebuff from an American admiral who stated that he did not believe there was a direct threat to Australia from the U.S.S.R.

My surprise was based on the fact that far from rebuffing the Government, the said admiral in fact was stating an identical position to ours.

This misperception of the Government's position - which I hope is not widely shared - most probably stemmed from the fact that in the June first statement I expressed concern at the general growth of Soviet power (at a time when the military forces of the west were static or declining.)

I further expressed concern that some Soviet actions seemed to be inconsistent with the aim of reducing world tensions.

I stated that "the Soviet Union is engaged in a major political offensive, backed by the known presence of force, by training and by propaganda."

Now that is indisputably true: the concern I expressed was almost identical to that expressed by the Ministers and Defence Councils of NATO. It is similar to the concerns expressed by Dr Kissinger and Mr Carter in the United States.

I suggest that my statement of concern attracted the attention it did in Australia because in recent years we have become used to not expressing our views on the major facts of world power which indisputably concern us.

It is a measure of how far the foreign policy debate in Australia had lapsed into unreality.

The central facts of importance to our security had become matters on which we were accustomed to be silent. Basic questions of national security had slipped from view.

For some time now some of the major contributors to the debate have thrust from the centre of their foreign policy concerns the issue of national security, and refused to recognise the critical issues which arise out of the changing balance of world forces.

I would like to support this with two extracts from a recent speech by the Shadow Minister for Defence. In this speech, the present Government was criticised for expressing concern about the increase of Soviet power in what he called "distant Europe 14,000 kilometres away."

I should not have thought it possible that an Australian Shadow Minister would imply so strongly the irrelevance of the European situation to our security.

The comments he made on the causes of the Soviet buildup in the Indian Ocean also require little comment. He said:

"It can be credibly argued that it developed as a defensive response to the transfer...of the...chagos archipelago -- which included Diego Garcia - from the U.K. to the U.S. for interalia defence purposes."

This breathtaking suggestion was followed by a rap over the knuckles for "the two western allies, Great Britain and the United States" for behaving in a way that can so easily be interpreted as "crude colonialism".

In the whole speech, there was a failure to mention, let alone evaluate, intervention of Cuba and the Soviet Union in Angola.

Clearly there is a significant weakness in the foreign policy debate when one of our two major parties so resolutely refuses to analyse for itself the facts of world power.

I want to say that I do not wholly blame the Labor Party for the state of the foreign policy debate over the last few years.

The trauma of Vietnam, the reassessment by America of its world role, created a period of uncertainty which inevitably made foreign policy discussion more difficult.

Hopefully that period is now coming to an end. Since the release of our foreign policy document last year, and more particularly during this year in Government, we have sought to stimulate again national discussion on basic issues of foreign policy in a spirit of realism.

One of the central issues which we must face as a nation and bring to bear on it both our idealism and realism is the problem of development in the countries of the third world.

The existence of great differences in economic development between the industrialised nations and the developing countries has the capacity to subject the world to great strains and tensions.

The slow progress in nations that aspire to rapid development raises inevitably questions as to why others cannot do more to assist. To these questions are added third world nations' feelings that they have historic and immediate grievances against the developed nations.

These felt grievances are moral, psychological, economic and political.

They have their roots in the colonial past and the memories of foreign administration, and in the frustrations of the grudgingly slow economic haul of the post independence period.

They gain sustenance from the belief that the terms of trade are inherently weighted against developing countries in order to benefit the industrialised nations.

Many third world countries are resentful of the manner in which the U.S.S.R. seeks to expand its influence. The Western industrialised nations, however, are regarded as benefitting disproportionately from the international economic system within which developing countries largely operate.

The Soviet Union's tough bargaining in its purchases of raw materials from the third world is largely ignored. In part, this is because there is much less in the way of trade between developing countries and those nations with centrally planned economies. The common sentiments of developing countries have produced a sense of solidarity between them.

This at present, focusses on demands for a new international economic order which will achieve a redistribution of wealth and of economic activity in favour of the developing countries. There are still wide differences between the developing countries as to the thrust of a new international order and specific measures envisaged under it. However, the solidarity of the developing nations has been maintained.

This solidarity is in itself no mean achievement since developing nations lacking in oil were more seriously harmed by the OPEC oil rises of 1973/74 than was the West. There is little likelihood that the thrust of the developing countries concerns vis a vis the West will dissipate.

The problems faced by the developing countries, the human misery inherent in continuing poverty, and the interests that industrialised nations have in assisting these problems to be overcome are clear. By no measure can the developed nations claim that they have acted with sufficient foresight or will in assisting the developing nations.

Both the developed and the developing nations must cooperate in finding practical solutions to the challenge of economic development. In this process, we must avoid the spirit of confrontation and recognise that the fates of the world's nations are linked together.

We must foster a much greater understanding of the essential elements in economic progress, an appreciation of the realities that have to be faced by all concerned. Australia's approach is based on a recognition of the aspirations of the developing countries and a willingness to contribute to the building of a stable and equitable international economic structure.

A consistent theme of the developing countries is improved access to the markets of developed countries for their products. Australia supports the need for greater trade liberalism, particularly in processed and unprocessed primary products which would assist solid economic development in the developing countries.

Australia recognises the need for increasing assistance to developing countries in ways that avoid, wherever possible, adding to their debt burden. Hence virtually all our aid to developing countries (and all aid in the case of the least developed nations) is in grant form.

We have long supported the idea of commodity agreements to which could contribute to greater stability in international commodity trade. As a major commodity producer and exporter, we recognise the need for improvement in the conditions of world commodity trade, and have been disappointed with past efforts of the international community in this direction.

We are actively participating in efforts to conclude firm agreements providing realistic prices which are in the interests of producers and consumers.

The Australian government supports changes in economic policies affecting the international economic system, which are both practical and viable, which serve the interdependent interests of both the developed and the developing nations. We believe that preservation of the essential elements of the present economic system continue to hold the greatest hope for economic progress.

Changes to the international system of the magnitude envisaged in the new international order proposals, would, however, almost certainly be counter-productive. Thus for instance: Commodity agreements which seek to ameliorate short term price fluctuations are one thing, but attempts to set artificially high prices in OPEC type commodity arrangements are another. Such arrangements might bring short term benefits. In the longer run, the short term gains are generally more than offset by the long term costs attendant on declining demand and substitution.

Similarly, while Australia supports greater market access and has taken steps in this direction, the impact on domestic industries must be a critical concern of proposals in this area. Failure to acknowledge the structural effects of any changes will only result in internal industrial and economic disruption, leading to the re-establishment of protective barriers.

There must be a sensitivity and responsiveness to the legitimate interests of the developing nations, and a commitment to supporting those proposals that will realistically assist the developing nations in the international economic community.

The fostering of the illusion that redistribution of the world's existing wealth will resolve all problems serves no ones interest. Redistribution has a place in the world's economic agenda - but much more important is soundly based international economic growth, and most fundamental of all, the pursuit by developing countries of domestic policies which foster enterprise and initiative.

If we do not frankly say this, then we and the developing countries, run the risk of raising unrealistic expectations which would inevitably be shattered. The frustration this would engender would be gravely destabilising both for the governments of the developing countries, and for the international system.

The problems which face Australia are not unique; they are problems which face many countries in the contemporary era. In this environment, one important way in which a medium power such as Australia can exercise some beneficial influence, is by the quality of our analysis on international questions. That quality is significantly a function of the quality of the foreign policy debate. There is an overriding need to adopt an attitude of dispassionate analysis - to avoid both stridency and an unwarranted complacency.

Some people believe that what is required for Australia's foreign policy is a bipartisan approach. I think it would be fruitless to aim at a sterile bipartisanship in which difference in approach and emphasis are lost by pitching foreign policy at the lowest common denominator. In any case, under present conditions, bipartisanship is not a realistic possibility.

What is desirable is that the discussion of foreign policy, of the options open to Australia, and the different approaches which characterise the approaches of the two major parties, should be discussed rationally, and without attempting to distort positions.

Only if these differences are realistically and objectively canvassed, can the Australian public come to adequate conclusions and have an effective appreciation of the realities of international life.

What should be sought is a consensus on the fundamental assumptions of foreign policy. The debate will be most productive if there is a recognition of the fact - and it is a fact - that Australians overwhelmingly share values and certain key assumptions about the world.

....oOo....