

Australian Diplomacy Today: striving for influence and better outcomes in a complex and volatile world.

A much needed, timely and frank symposium on Australian Diplomacy Today took place at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on a wintery Canberra day in late August 2015. The event was organised by the Australian Institute of International Affairs in partnership with the ANU College of Diplomacy and Bond University with the kind support of DFAT. The symposium brought together the small but growing community of practitioners, scholars and change agents from civil society with an interest in Australian diplomacy. The aim was to reflect, share ideas and critique recent successes and developments in Australian diplomacy and to consider challenges and opportunities ahead.

The opening address by Peter Varghese AO, Secretary of DFAT focused on the systemic challenges facing DFAT in the 21st century. These include the impact of transformative technology, institutional reform, innovation, increasing the gender imbalance and leadership. There is no doubt that DFAT is in excellent hands as it is led by our world class Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and her outstanding Departmental Secretary. This is based on their sharp and nuanced capacity to understand and explain the value of diplomacy and to drive continuous change and innovation in a complex policy, financial and organisational setting.

The symposium focused on Forums, Tools, Actors and Themes in Australian Diplomacy Today.

The Forums part in Australian Diplomacy examined the UN Security Council and how Australia can add more value to world peace and security. It is pleasing to note that Prof. Jochen Prantl and Dr. Jeremy Farrall from the ANU Asia Pacific College of Diplomacy have secured an ARC Discovery Project grant to analyse and document how to influence the agenda and policies of UN Security Council. Economic Diplomacy in the context of G20 and DFAT priorities was carefully examined by Dr. Tristan Sainsbury from the Lowy Institute. The role of Regional Organisations such as MITKA, IORA and ASEAN was examined by Dr. Susan Harris Rimmer from the ANU. Dr Rimmer explained how Nordic Foreign Ministries are using 'Open Situation Room' tools to engage all key stakeholders in innovation of foreign policies and diplomatic practices. The Impact of Refugees was analysed by Professor William Maley. The message was that all nations should engage in burden sharing of the global and regional refugee problems and look at ways to avoid creating new waves of refugees.

The Tools component in Australian Diplomacy focused on Aid, Humanitarian, Consular and Cultural Diplomacy. Mr. Ben Bay, PhD candidate at the ANU, expressed concern about the impact that the slashing of Australia's Aid budget will have on Australia's global reputation. He lamented the ending of the 'Golden Consensus' towards Aid and International Development Assistance and the shallow, narrow and isolated support for Aid by key stakeholders. Dr. Jacinta O'Hagan from ANU noted that Australia has a moral and legal obligation to support Humanitarian Law and Practices given our strong identity in this area and the fact that we are signatory to a range of UN and Regional Conventions. Ms. Alex Oliver, Director of Polling at the Lowy Institute noted that DFAT has developed and implemented its

Consular Strategy 2014-2015. This strategy sent a strong signal to Australian citizens to accept more responsibility for their actions overseas and to understand that Australian Consular assistance is a privilege not a legal obligation.

Dr. Alison Broinowski, made a compelling case why Australia needs to boost its investment in high impact and long term cultural diplomacy given the need to shape positive impressions of Australia in our culturally diverse region. Hitherto, Australian Cultural Diplomacy has been neglected because it has not been perceived as highly important in domestic politics.

The Actors component in Australian Diplomacy focused on Civil-Military Diplomacy, Parliamentary Diplomacy, Sports Diplomacy and Diaspora Diplomacy. Major General (Retd) Michael G. Smith is working on a paper on Security Sector Reform. He reminded the audience that Defence Diplomacy helped Australia to work in partnership with Indonesia to resolve the Timor Leste independence challenge and to address issues in other parts of our region. Janelle Saffin, reflected on how the Australian Parliament supports Australian diplomacy through Parliamentary Friendship Groups and other initiatives. Elected politicians can often complement the work of DFAT and other agencies with an international agenda by having more room to engage and speak openly. Dr. Stuart Murray from Bond University outlined the process and key advantages of the recently released Australian Sports Diplomacy Strategy 2015-18. It is pleasing to note that sport has been officially recognised by DFAT as an important diplomatic strategy for raising Australia's profile and for widening and strengthening its links with the rest of the world. Prof. Diane Stone from the International Public Policy Association used the Advance Australia network as a case study of Australian Diaspora Diplomacy in action.

The Themes part of the symposium focused on Public Diplomacy, Diversity in Diplomacy and Decency in Diplomacy. Dr. Caitlin Byrne from Bond University shared her insights on Public Diplomacy and how to migrate from image making to relationship building. Australia's Public Diplomacy needs to get much more funding and support from the Australian Government, the Australian Parliament and the wider community as it is a crucial strategy for building perceptions and relationships in our culturally diverse region. Australia is well behind Canada, the USA, the UK, Indonesia, China and India when it comes to Public Diplomacy investment and impact.

The topic of Diversity and Diplomacy was examined by Melissa Conley Tyler, National Executive Director of the AIIA. Her research revealed that DFAT's strategy for recruiting and retaining indigenous graduates is yielding positive results with one Head of an Australian Mission and a number of indigenous Australians serving the nation with distinction in Australia's diplomatic network. Melissa and her team of capable interns may focus on ethnic diversity in Australian diplomacy in their next research project.

The sensitive issue of Decency and Diplomacy was explored by Mr. William Fisher, Former Australian Ambassador for Counter –Terrorism and other areas at DFAT. Mr. Fisher noted that Australian diplomats and political leaders must take much greater care about decency and ethics in formulating and implementing foreign policies and diplomatic campaigns. Australia's ability to address pressing issues and to shape the

new international order depends to a large extent on its reputation for decency, transparency and ethics. Australia also needs to boost its diplomatic network in order to reciprocate and build relations with countries that have diplomatic missions in our country. The diplomatic network has been extended by five posts and positively transformed by our innovative and resourceful Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and her support team.

The quality, reach and effectiveness of Australia's diplomacy can be enhanced by all key stakeholders in Australia and internationally. Australia needs to nurture quality relations with all nations in the Indo-Pacific region and globally. It needs to harness the knowledge and good advice from former diplomats like John McCarthy, President of the AIIA and many others who work collaboratively with DFAT to improve Australia's diplomatic capabilities and impact. Australia needs to incorporate the latest research from its top academics and think tanks into its diplomatic decision-making and create evidence based policies and evaluation frameworks. United we can drive positive change in Australian diplomacy and advance our national and international interests in a complex, inter-dependent and volatile world.

The United Macedonian Diaspora has been calling on the Australian Government and the Australian Parliament to support decency in diplomacy by abandoning its biased, unjustified and unsustainable policy of institutional discrimination and delegitimisation of the Republic of Macedonia which has been operational since 1994. Such diplomatic policies and practices do not advance Australia's image and reputation as a good international citizen and are out of step with the rest of the free world. So far, DFAT and both sides of Australian politics have failed to address the legitimate concerns of the Australian Macedonian community and the Republic of Macedonia. DFAT does not publish its secretive assessments on its policy on Macedonia. DFAT needs to acknowledge that in a liberal democracy such as Australia, citizens and communities should have equal input into foreign policies that affect them.

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