

## **Sir Robert Menzies on International Relations and Defence**

### **Australian Foreign Policy Principles**

“I am one of those old-fashioned Australian politicians who think that our nation’s foreign policy should not be aimed at noisy demonstration or assertion. A little man waving a big stick is not only faintly absurd, but liable to lose his balance.

Situated as we are in the world, washed on our western and northern shores by potentially hostile seas, and numerically incapable – despite intense defence preparations – of defending ourselves for long against all-out attack by a great power without massive aid from our friends, it seems to me to be clear (and my Government acted on that belief) that our foreign policy should be to cultivate friendly relations with our neighbours; to do what we could to help their development and stability; to encourage every means of peaceful economic and financial co-operation; to avoid avoidable war; to play our part in helping to prevent tensions among our neighbours; to be loyal members of the United Nations while having no illusions about its present protective effectiveness.

But if, in spite of all effort to live at peace, a war comes, the business of foreign policy is to see that we enter it with great and powerful friends.” R.G. Menzies, ‘Pacific Policy’, *Measure of the Years* (1970) 48.

### **Forward defence**

“My Government’s defence policy was one of forward defence: to keep any war as far away as possible from our own shores; to provide Australian defence in depth; to help to produce a secure environment for our neighbours with whom we are bound to have a close association as the years go by. The other view, still I think warmly held by the Labour Party, was the Australian defence should be local; confined to our own shores; a sort of ‘Fortress Australia’ or Maginot Line concept.” R.G. Menzies, ‘Changes in Defence’, *Measure of the Years* (1970) 79-80.

### **Nationalism and the United Nations**

“When the United Nations Organisation was being established, there was a widespread belief that we were making a notable experiment in a direction which favoured an inter-nationalism which would reduce the occasions of conflict in the world. After the war it was thought that nations would, seeing the advantages of international action, become less nationalistic; less self-contained; more conscious of the existence and interest of other countries. I confess that I have seen no symptoms that this result has been achieved. On the contrary, I would think that the tendency all around the world and particularly in the newer countries is to intensify nationalism. We are frequently told that strange and revolutionary events in many of the new countries are merely evidence of a struggle for nationalism. Yet there are some paradoxes. These new nations get their national existence acknowledged by membership of the United Nations, but when they attend the General Assembly they fall readily into groups or blocs designed to impose their ideas upon other nations. They are much more concerned, vocally at any rate, to criticise and condemn other nations than to look at themselves and ask how they can make themselves fit into international affairs in a constructive way.

Just as the Commonwealth has begun to fall to pieces because many of the new members, feeling and expressing no obligations to the Commonwealth, devote their energies to telling other members how they ought to run their own affairs, so in the United Nations an exactly similar process goes on. If that process continues, the United Nations will disintegrate for reasons exactly similar to those which we have observed in action in the Commonwealth itself.” R.G. Menzies, ‘Looking Forward’, *Measure of the Years* (1970) 211.

### **The United Nations and Domestic Policy**

“The United Nations was not created to provide means by which a group of nations can without consent interfere, if necessary by arms, with the domestic affairs of another country; quite the contrary. But should this deplorable process be encouraged, we may all find ourselves and our autonomy put at risk in the presence of a well-organized ‘mob’ sentiment.” R.G. Menzies, ‘A critical examination of the modern Commonwealth’, *Afternoon Light* (1967) 225.

### **Relations with the United States of America**

*“The nature and form of our association*

I shall begin with a little bit of history. When I made the Jefferson ‘oration’ at Monticello on 4 July 1963, I took the opportunity to point out that when the famous American Declaration of Independence was made and followed up by a successful War of Independence, the American colonies actually created, without knowing it at the time, two new nations. One was, of course, the United States. The other was Australia! Up to that time the American colonies had been the recipients of convicts transported from England; many thousands of them; though, as I have sometimes pointed out to England audiences, most of the persons convicted over the period of transportation remained in England! When the American colonies became independent, transportation naturally ended. So another destination had to be found. Thus it came about that the Southern Continent of Australia, especially made known to Great Britain by Captain Cook, received, at Botany Bay and Sydney, the first white settlers, the convicted persons and their military custodians, in the fleet commanded by Captain Phillip in 1788! From this somewhat murky origin has grown a nation of life, character and purpose. This is what I mean when I say that two nations were created by the one act.

Again Australia, sixty-five years ago, became a Federation with a Constitution in some material ways modelled upon that of the U.S.A. We have much experience in common of the problems which are presented in adjusted the relations between a Nation and its constituent States. As a lawyer engaged in Constitutional cases in Australia, I used to read, and occasionally quote, decisions of the United States Supreme Court. I think the traffic was reciprocal; I know in particular that my late friend Mr Justice Felix Frankfurter was an avid and prompt reader of the judgements of the High Court of Australia.

And, most eloquent of all facts, American and Australian troops have fought together in two great wars, and since in Korea and Vietnam, in the common cause.

If we recall that these elements in our common history have an enormous background of inheritance of a common history before the late eighteenth century, of language and literature, of the Common Law, of the great principles enshrined in the phrase ‘the

Rule of Law', of popular self-government, of religious faith, and of a common passion for individual and national freedom, we will at once see that enmity between the United States and Australia would be not only unthinkable, but 'most foul, strange and unnatural'... R.G. Menzies, 'Our Relations with The United States of America', *Afternoon Light* (1967) 259-260.

"The United States is now the greatest power in the world. In earlier years it was clearly isolationist, and could afford to announce the Monroe Doctrine and its detachment from the problems of the old world in Europe to the new world in the East, because Britain was the greatest naval power; while the long-range aircraft, the inter-continental ballistic missile, and the nuclear and thermonuclear weapons had not been devised. The First World War snatched her out of her isolationism, but her abstention from membership of the League of Nations turned her thoughts once more to home. Her crucial participation in the Second World War, and her magnificent and generous policy thereafter, changed the picture. Power always connotes responsibility in a civilised country. We had all seen the dreadful Hitlerian tragedy of power without responsibility, and have no desire to see it again. It was the great American sense of responsibility which took her into the Marshall plan, into the Berlin airlift, into NATO, into Korea, into SEATO and Vietnam, into ANZUS.

It was inevitable that questioning voices should be raised in the United States, for the burdens lie heavy on the American people, 'Why should we be the world's gendarme?' But, as I took the liberty of pointing out in a recent lecture at the University of Texas, there is a vital middle course between being a defender everywhere abroad, and a defender nowhere except at home. I have always believed and said no more than this, that great powers have great responsibilities, and that the greatest has the greatest. We in Australia are by no means a great power; but we are sufficiently rich and strong to have responsibilities to our neighbours and discharge them, as we do in relation to Papua and New Guinea, the Colombo Plan, SEATO and its consequences, and in various other ways.

The truth is that a great power cannot make itself available at call anywhere, as if it were a fire-brigade. It must select tasks commensurate with its resources and the willingness of its people. As a world power, it will know the sources of world danger to the freedom of which it is an exemplar and defender. America's policy and actions in relation to Western Europe are a splendid example; but they are reasonably predicated upon Western European powers, including Britain, taken their fair share of the burden. It is not called upon to intervene in every local conflict, or, for that matter, in every limited war. But it intervened Vietnam because, more clearly than any of the European powers, it saw the defence of South Vietnam as a defence against the aggression of Communist China, an aggression which is backed by a vast population and a developing technology, including nuclear capacity, and which, if unrestrained, could threaten the peace and security of the whole world.

Looking to the future, I cannot see the United States going isolationist; withdrawing its overseas support, and leaving the rest of the world to look after itself. From a moral point of view, such a policy would be repellent to respectable and respected American opinion. From a hard-bitten, practical point of view, it would, in the long run, gravely damage the United States." R.G. Menzies, 'Looking Forward', *Measure of the Years* (1970) 213-214.

“But a great and civilized power must accept world responsibilities, must set out to discharge them, not priggishly, but with a real vision of what the world needs for the prosperity and happiness of its people. In the performance of its duties, it will need patience and tolerance. It will encounter selfish objections in various quarters. It should never seek to make excuses, but if objections arise, it must have no fear of them. A true consciousness of destiny is not to be brushed aside as ‘imperialism’. For a great nation without a sense of purpose will not remain great very long. What it gives to the world will be the true measure of its greatness.” R.G. Menzies, ‘Our Relations with The United States of America’, *Afternoon Light* (1967) 261.

“America has not become our friend and defender simply for love of the countries we inhabit. On the contrary, she knows that, in the most real sense, we are the same kind of people, with the same ideas, with the same ideals, with the same high faith, with the same basic belief that governments exist for the people, that they are the servants and not the masters.” R.G. Menzies, ‘The British Commonwealth of Nations in International Affairs’ *Speech is of Time* (1958) 14.

### **ANZUS**

“Now, apart from our ancient and largely unwritten ties with Great Britain and the Commonwealth, the most significant features of Australia’s modern foreign policy was this mutually defensive treaty with the U.S.A. and New Zealand, ratified in accordance with constitutional requirements in all three countries. Its continued validity and effectiveness have been affirmed by successive American Presidents and Secretaries of State. It amply deserves some brief explanation in the context of this chapter.

At a period when it has become almost fashionable to make critical remarks about America and American policy, such remarks being made both at home and abroad, it is good for Australians to recall the provisions and circumstances of the ANZUS Treaty. Nothing can better demonstrate the role which the United States has accepted since the Second World war, and its willingness to match great responsibilities with great power, than this brief but significant treaty. The United States has seventeen or eighteen times the population of Australia and almost sixty times the population of New Zealand. Clearly what Australia and New Zealand could do to assist the United States would be a very small fraction of what the United States could do for Australia and New Zealand. But the Americans made the treaty and ratified it.” R.G. Menzies, ‘Pacific Policy’, *Measure of the Years* (1970) 55-56.

### **Britain’s contribution to the world**

“I invite you to remember with pride that it was in the free world that the two great institutions of liberty, parliamentary self-government and the rule of honestly administered law, were fashioned. They have made a mark on this century compared to which a Sputnik is unimportant. It is too frequently forgotten, and sometimes by countries which should remember it, that, if Great Britain has not as yet fired a satellite into space, she has, by a creative modern policy, converted colonies into independent nations, founded upon parliamentary sovereignty and enriched by the rule of law, while the Soviet Union has been busy converting independent nations into

colonies under the rule not of law, but of the tank and the bomb.” R.G. Menzies, ‘Modern Science and Civilisation’ *Speech is of Time* (1958) 242.

### **South East Asia**

“My final observation is that, given a satisfactory conclusion to the Vietnam war, Australia will be more and more occupied with the great tasks of establishing our relations with [South East Asian] countries on a basis of friendship and co-operation; with an increasing supply of technical assistance and financial and economic aid being provided by Australia.

For we should see these nations, protected against aggression, not only as a *codron sanitiare* between us and the potential enemy, but as a source of economic strength, making an important contribution to the world and providing a good neighbourhood for them and for ourselves.” R.G. Menzies, ‘Looking Forward’, *Measure of the Years* (1970) 214-215.

### **Papua New Guinea**

“The ultimate granting of political independence was always our objective. Whether the time is ripe should be a matter for their own decision, and not a matter for Canberra alone. We should not prematurely wash our hands of responsibility for the government of the territories, and run the risk of another Congo. On the other hand, we should not delay action too long, so that when self-government comes it arrives in an atmosphere of resentment and hostility. In other words, ‘much too soon’ would provoke disaster; ‘a little too soon’ would be preferable to ‘a little too late’.

That these territories will achieve independence, I have no doubt. That they will, after political independence, need large economic and financial aid from Australia is inevitable. That they will get it is certain. They will not become a State in the Australian Federation; the difficulties so created would, in my opinion, be politically insuperable.

But I believe that they will remain our friends, growing in prosperity and living standards in what, as I have said, I hope will be a peaceful and co-operative South-East Asian neighbourhood.” R.G. Menzies, ‘Looking Forward’, *Measure of the Years* (1970) 215-216.

### **Colombo Plan**

“For we saw quite clearly that one of the greatest underlying problems, which, until it is solved, will produce tensions which threaten the peace, is that of the gap between the living standards of the great industrialised nations with enormous physical and technological resources and therefore rapid growth, and those of the emergent nations with more primitive industry, limited industrial assets, and slower growth. Clearly, if this gap is to continue to widen, there will be much ill-will and frustration. New countries, having increased their export surpluses with technical and financial aid, must be provided with markets for their products at prices which will enable them to develop their capital resources and living standards.

This was the first major initiative of my new Government. It was a positive approach looking well into the future. It involved Australia closely with the countries and peoples of Asia. This association has persisted ever since and has been a major

element not only in the policies and dealings of the Australian Government but also in helping to shape the background and attitude of individual Australians. Australian ministers and officials, private firms, and universities are in frequent contact with their counterparts in Asian countries. Many thousands of Asian students had studied in Australia by the time I retired, and the process continues. The daily association of Australians with students and scholars from Asian countries has greatly widened the experience and understanding of our own people, and is a major achievement for which our Government can claim credit.

The Colombo Plan was also important in another respect. We wanted the industrialised countries of North America and Western Europe to give more attention to the economic needs of Asia. After the Second World War great economic aid had gone to Europe, primarily from the United States. The Marshall Plan which followed was a major and most generous programme by the United States to set Western Europe on its feet again economically. The justification for concentrating on Western Europe at that time was that it already had the skills and the basic economic capacity to enable it to become again a major element in the world economy and therefore to contribute to the economic well-being of all. At the same time, in the United Nations valuable work was being done in helping to promote and give practical effect to the idea of international responsibilities for economic development.” .” R.G. Menzies, ‘Pacific Policy’, *Measure of the Years* (1970) 51-52.

### **Nuclear weapons**

“It is hard for me to understand those who would seek to abolish nuclear and thermonuclear weapons as the first step to disarmament and peace. In common with most democratic leaders, I am convinced that, uneasy though the peace may be which the existence of these weapons protects, their disappearance tomorrow would dreadfully increase the dangers of war.” R.G. Menzies, ‘Modern Science and Civilisation’ *Speech is of Time* (1958) 231.

### **Weaponry and freedom**

“Let us constantly remember that scientific defence provision is, for us, solely a means of preserving democratic freedom and civilized individual rights. It would be the ultimate tragedy to abandon the purpose of defence in order to prepare as the potential enemy prepares. In actual war, we put many particular freedoms in pawn so as to preserve the great freedom. But such a process should not long survive when war has been won. *A fortiori*, it should not become an established feature of what may well be a prolonged period of uneasy peace. If provision for military scientific research and development comes to be regarded not as a free national effort but as something requiring the abandonment of freedom and the acceptance of authoritarian control, we shall have abandoned the case against Communism in the very course of making ourselves ready to maintain it.” R.G. Menzies, ‘Modern Science and Civilisation’ *Speech is of Time* (1958) 239.