

BEYOND TRADITIONAL FOREIGN POLICYMAKING: THE AUSTRALIA 2020 SUMMIT

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With the increased impact of globalisation on all aspects of life, the process of developing foreign policy has become a matter of broad national interest. No longer something that is established behind closed doors, foreign policy now is relevant to many people and groups who are all demanding a role in the process. The Australia 2020 Summit, called by Australia's Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and held in Canberra on 18-19 April 2008, was a reflection of this changed environment and recognition of the relevance of a range of views and concerns in the formation on foreign policy. The traditional structures that have long been the hallmark of developing international policy were temporarily opened, when, for the first time in Australia's history, 100 participants were selected to formulate foreign policy recommendations in an open process of deliberation and debate. As an experiment in opening up policymaking to new voices, the 2020 Summit can be seen as milestone in Australia's foreign policy.

This report examines the 2020 Summit process to contribute to understanding of such deliberative forums in the foreign policy arena. This paper begins by providing an overview of Australia's system of government, how foreign policy is traditionally made in Australia and how the effects of globalisation are stretching an already under-resourced foreign service. The second part of this report outlines the selection of participants, the deliberative processes used at the Summit and the policy recommendations made by participants and the response they received. It suggests that the Summit had a positive effect in opening up greater space for foreign policy deliberation in Australia.

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Australia's System of Government

The Commonwealth of Australia's system of government is based on the British Westminster system with a constitutional democracy based on the division of powers between the federal and state governments.¹ The Australian Constitution defines the responsibilities of the Federal Government, which include foreign relations, defence and trade. At federal level, government is based on a popularly elected parliament with two chambers: the House of Representatives and the Senate. From these two chambers ministers are appointed to the cabinet which acts as the executive of the government.²

Although the Commonwealth of Australia was created in 1901, the Federal Government remained restricted by the role of the British Government which maintained power over Australia's foreign and defence policies until 1931 when Britain passed the Statute of Westminster formally giving Australia independence and power over all of its policy matters.³ Interestingly, Australia continued to allow London make its foreign policy decisions until 1942 when the Government adopted the Statute and established its own Department of External Affairs (now known as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade).⁴

In Australia, foreign policy making has always been an elite policy domain. So elite that for the first 42 years of nationhood not even Australia's own government could determine how its foreign affairs were to be managed! Not surprisingly, foreign affairs gained a reputation as a policy area that is conducted behind closed doors, remaining inaccessible and beyond the reach of the electorate.

¹ The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "About Australia: Australia's system of government" (August 2009) available online: http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/sys_gov.html (accessed 3 August 2009).

² Patrick Weller, 'Parliament and Cabinet: The Institutions of Governance', in *Business, Government and Globalisation* eds Elizabeth Van Acker and Giorel Gurrán, (Frenchs Forest NSW, Pearson Education Australia), 2002.

³ Australian Government, 'Our Government', available online: <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-government> (accessed 3 August, 2009).

⁴ Statute of Westminster Adoption Act (1942), National Archives of Australia, available online: <http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/scan.asp?sID=27> (accessed 3 August, 2009).

Traditional Foreign Policymaking

Defining foreign policy

A government's foreign policy is a body of decisions that articulates how the state sees its role in the international system. Defining foreign policy is problematic as its exact nature is not agreed: some see it as an activity which should be focused on issues of direct national security such as defence strategies, while others view foreign policy as encompassing broader notions of national interest like human rights.⁵ In their book *Making Australian Foreign Policy*, Allan Gyngell and Michael Wesley have defined foreign policy as:

a general undertaking or commitment of state; as an ideal of a coherent plan of action against which behaviour can be evaluated; and as the specific actions taken by state representatives in certain situations to influence certain states of affairs⁶

Foreign policy is unique: sitting at the intersection of both global and domestic politics it must respond and manage international and domestic issues concurrently. The effects of globalisation has greatly expanded the scope of national security and contributed to the blurring of the lines between the internal and external dimensions of making foreign policy, making it more complex than many other policy areas.⁷ Traditional policy concerns such as security alliances and military conflicts have been extended to encompass an extraordinary amount of complex global issues including international terrorism, climate change, cyber-crime, global health epidemics, humanitarian crisis and migration.⁸ Never before has the breadth and depth of foreign policy been as challenging as it is today.

⁵ Glyn Davis, "Executive Government: Cabinet and the Prime Minister", in Summers, J., Parkin, A and Woodward, D., (eds.), *Government, Politics and Power*, 6th ed. (South Melbourne: Addison Wesley Longman Australia Pty Limited), 1997.

⁶ Allan Gyngell and Michael Wesley, *Making Australian Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2007, p. 19.

⁷ Hugh Smith, "Politics of Foreign Policy" in Mediansky, F.A, (ed.) *Australian Foreign Policy: into the new millennium* (South Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia Pty Ltd) 1997; p. 26-31.

⁸ "Australia's Diplomatic Deficit", Blue Ribbon Panel, *The Lowy Institute for International Policy*, available online: <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Search.asp?pubtype=1&process=search> (accessed 2 April, 2009), p. 14.