

Monday 15th October 2018

**The AIIA National Conference
2018**



9:00-10:45

Australian Foreign Policy

Senator the Hon Marise Payne, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Senator the Hon Penny Wong, Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs

Allan Gyngell AO FAIIA, National President of the Australian Institute of International Affairs

Chair : Zara Kimpton OAM, National Vice-President, Australian Institute of International Affairs

And so the day began, with Zara looking anxiously to ensure her esteemed first speakers were arriving, given that the audience filled the auditorium. I believe the numbers exceeded 300 and were certainly an illustrious lot! Pleasingly the NSW Branch of the AIIA was well represented.

Our first speaker was the newly minted Minister for Foreign Affairs, Marise Payne. Mind you, prior to this appointment she had served as Minister for Defence and would have had some knowledge of the territory or at least the security aspects of her portfolio.



Zara looking for her speakers



Marise Payne addressing the meeting

Payne’s remarks were not controversial. She acknowledged we were living in challenging times and that we needed to be engaged and agile, words we would hear often today. She emphasised that our policy framework was already outlined in the Foreign Affairs White Paper¹ released previously by Julie Bishop and today spent much of the time speaking about our role in the Indo-Pacific region. She noted our support for the US alliance, spoke of our need to partner other democracies or countries that have open trading economies, emphasised a need to have a positive relationship with China and then spent considerable time speaking about the importance of ASEAN.² She repeatedly stated that we would work through ASEAN to solve issues and referred us to the March 18th 2018 Sydney Declaration made by Turnbull³.



Of interest in her remarks on the Major Powers were statements that their powers were strengthened by “rules and norms” and the institutions that we have relied on since WW2. They remain fundamental despite “some challenges”. This was more than an implied criticism of Trump and I must also note that the words “climate change” did emerge from her lips.

Penny Wong reminded us that she had already spoken on two other occasions and had covered the USA and China on those occasions. This time she opted to concentrate on delivering a carefully worded statement on how we might eventually ban nuclear

¹ <https://www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/foreign-policy-white-paper>

² ‘ASEAN is the collective voice of South East Asia’

³ <https://aseanaustralia.pmc.gov.au/Declaration>

weapons. She had already referred to this in a media statement⁴ in March 2017 when the Australian Government boycotted negotiations for a new global nuclear weapons treaty and the transcript of her speech today is available for us in full on her own webpage along with a transcript of the questions she faced.⁵

Essentially she argued that the “NPT was, and remains, the bedrock of international efforts to limit the possession of nuclear weapons. One hundred and ninety-one states are currently party to the Treaty”. However she said that progress to disarmament has now stalled, that the nuclear weapons states are risking the entire bargain and that new measures must be taken. She then outlined ways to firstly have states agree to a “no first-use” declaration, before leading to minimisation and then elimination.

It was a measured, careful speech and the audience was not just those of us in the room.



Allan Gyngell acknowledged that China was more assertive, that there was a new bipolar divided emerging in the region and that China’s cultural understanding of itself as a central civilization matched the US concept of its own exceptionalism. However he was clear that these times were no more challenging than on previous eras and warned us that we should not use “Othering” as a tool. The “Us/Them” divide is dangerous and certainly

⁴ <http://www.pennywong.com.au/media-releases/un-nuclear-weapons-treaty/>

⁵ <http://www.pennywong.com.au/transcripts/qa-aiia-conference-canberra/>
<http://www.pennywong.com.au/speeches/the-disarmament-challenge-in-a-time-of-disruption-australian-institute-of-international-affairs-national-conference-canberra/>

not useful. We are, he stated, not living in another Cold War and should not “Other” China.



Two of the Euan Crone Asian Awareness Scholarship recipients

10:45-11:15 Morning Tea

11:15-12:45

Enhancing Australia’s Prosperity

Chair : Tom Rayner, Director, Deloitte Risk Advisory and National Treasurer, Australian Institute of International Affairs

Dr John Edwards, Adjunct Professor, John Curtin Institute of Public Policy and Fellow, Lowy Institute

John’s address tried to address why the trade war has opened up between China and the USA. He said it is commonly believed that it is about the trade deficit but then showed that the evidence does not support this contention for since China entered the WTO US trade to China and increased seven fold while China’s trade to the USA had only doubled. He also said that even on current growth rates it will take decades before China’s economy matches that of the USA. Indeed he basically said there was no logical reason why Trump should embark on this program but if the USA is trying to pull China down Australia should have no role to play. He would not have found favour in the session after lunch!



John Edwards

Penny Burt, Group CEO, Asialink, drove the following message: that while much has changed in trade terms with Asia our awareness is still poor and we need to do much more to increase that awareness



Fiona Simson, President, National Farmers Federation, argued for the importance of rural exports, claiming that they bring in up to 14% of total exports per annum, and argued for reform of non-tariff barriers to this trade. We also need to reform current investment strategies.



Professor Mark Beeson, Professor at the University of Western Australia and Research Chair, Australian Institute of International Affairs returned to the rivalry between the USA and China and stated that the two greatest powers were neither willing nor capable of providing international leadership. That provided an opportunity for middle power diplomacy.



What did disturb me in this session on enhancing prosperity was the total failure of any in the group to mention climate change. I raised it in question time and for the rest of the day the topic ran hot! Other questions dealt with what is meant by prosperity and I was disappointed that the best that Edwards came up with was a very flawed use of GDP.

12:45-1:30 Lunch - always a good time to network! And I was very pleased Christine Milne came up to me to congratulate me about that question on climate change!

1:30-3:00

Strengthening Australia's Security

Professor Rory Medcalf, Head of the National Security College, Australian National University argued that we can no longer neatly define domestic and international security, that there was an overlap and this is happening during a time of disruption of Great Power status. He stated that China was “expansive” and that its Belt and Road was its version of our “Indo-Pacific”, for which he thought meant the QUAD (USA, Japan, Australia and India). He then said we needed to increase our sovereign capabilities.



He did suggest that we needed to “enhance our security infrastructure” and when challenged if this meant more “guns and bombs” actually said cybersecurity, intelligence infrastructure and energy security as well as an effective Radio Australia were all more important.

Dr Elsinia Wainwright AM, Senior Fellow, US Studies Centre, University of Sydney and Non-Resident Fellow, Center on International Cooperation, New York University



She analysed the deep seated instincts of Trump, his protectionism, scepticism of alliances and his mixed messages but noted traditional Republican ideas such as the infrastructure initiative. She noted that the American National Defense Strategy had reiterated broad concerns about China and Russia, said that Australia had a window of 5-10 years to respond and also wanted us to develop sovereign capability. We needed to be open to new and different systems of governance.

Dr Rebecca Strating, Department of Politics and Philosophy, La Trobe University spoke specifically what a “rules based order” might mean in the concept of maritime matters, referring to the South China Sea, to UNCLOS⁶ and teased out that geographic way of defining maritime boundaries compared to historic claims of sovereignty.

James Brown, President of the Returned and Services League NSW among other titles, raised the question of should we consider going nuclear, noted that the topic was being raised in Canada and in Germany and said that what was once a fringe topic might become mainstream. He also noted that Pence has changed the rhetoric against China to talk about the “free world”, a return to Cold War language.

Chair : Professor Clinton Fernandes, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, UNSW Canberra at the Australian Defence Force Academy

⁶ http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf



Rebecca Strating



James Brown



Richard questions James



Geoff ponders the wisdom of the remarks

3:00-3:30 Afternoon Tea

3:30-5:00

Australia's Contribution to Global Issues

Why is this topic last on the agenda? It would be nice to see it swapped with security to see just how serious we in Australia take our world citizenship for it is within this topic that many of the big questions that address the lives of ordinary Australians and that might help engage Australians in the importance of our relations with the world.

Christine Milne AO, former Leader of the Australian Greens and former Senator for Tasmania, addressed the existential problem of climate change, noting that we live on a finite planet and that our security is dependent on a healthy biosphere.



She stated that far from being a leader Australia had been a recalcitrant drag on its world commitments, that it had not been a good citizen. Apart from climate change she spoke about human rights.

Associate Professor Helen Evans AO FAIIA, Nossal Institute for Global Health, University of Melbourne detailed the way health is not just an outcome of economic growth but also a driver of it, noted the threats imposed by pandemics, antibiotic drug resistance and climate change and added that displaced persons and increased inequality all made it difficult to provide effective health cover though she did note that our scientists had delivered and that we also were supportive of effective public health

strategies. Her warning was that we had cut our ODA and that we were becoming seen as unreliable partners.



Professor Toby Walsh FAAS, Professor of Artificial Intelligence, University of New South Wales warned us all about the dangers of autonomous weapons and urged us to regulate their use before it was too late.

Professor Steven Freeland, Dean, School of Law, Western Sydney University
Chair: Professor Toni Erskine, Director of the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, Australian National University gave us an outline of the legal frameworks involved in regulating space and the global issues that might follow the military use of space.



Toby Walsh



Steven Freeland

5:00-5:30 Concluding Remarks

John McCarthy AO, former Ambassador/High Commissioner to the US, Japan, Indonesia, Mexico, Thailand and India and past National President, Australian Institute of International Affairs summed up but in the process warned us all that our failure to have a proper policy on “boat people” was our moral failure and one we would live with for many years!



Melissa Conley Tyler, National Executive Director, Australian Institute of International Affairs Australian then wrapped up and thanked all and sundry and forgot to thank herself for her own great work!

