

6

Official influence in the making of foreign policy: The Washington Study Group on the South Pacific, 1962

Christopher Waters

This chapter is an exploration of the role of embassy and departmental officials in the making of Australian foreign policy. Do embassy staff and departmental officials working in overseas posts such as Washington ever determine foreign policy? Or are their functions restricted to other tasks, such as reporting on developments in the host nation, maintaining good relations with host countries and implementing policy through actions and exchanges with host governments? This chapter takes as its case study the establishment in 1962 of a four-power Study Group in Washington to examine future trends in the political, social and economic development of the colonial territories in the South Pacific. It examines the impact of the Study Group's recommendations in Canberra with a concentration on the Menzies Cabinet's response to their proposals.

While there are obvious dangers of trying to draw any general answer to these broad questions from one historical example, this case study does suggest some interesting, if tentative, answers, at least for the early 1960s. This is an especially important case study as the Study Group's report sparked a full-blown Cabinet discussion about the role of ministers, as opposed to officials, in the making of foreign

policy. The episode also suggests that developments in the history of government practices, especially the use of expert study groups, in the early 1960s were challenging the traditional Westminster principles of government, including ministerial responsibility for policy decisions. It provides insights into the growing potential for the embassy officials in Washington to play a more important role in policy development and thereby sheds more light on the history of Australia's representation in the US.

One of Australia's most distinguished ambassadors of the era of the 1950s and 1960s, Sir Walter Crocker, wrote in his book *Australian Ambassador: International Relations at First Hand* that in his 18 years as an ambassador or high commissioner, 'I had no effect on Australian foreign policy: I had been naive in thinking that I could have'.¹ Here is a definitive statement made by one of the heads of mission in this era most qualified to have made a significant impact on Australian foreign policy. Such a firm negative declaration makes the historian pause for thought before he/she starts the search for a significant role in policymaking for heads of mission, let alone for lower ranked officials in embassies and high commissions. Despite Crocker's blanket denial of influence, these questions are worth pursuing especially in the course of a book exploring the history of Australian representation in the most important capital in the world by the 1960s: Washington.

Without doubt, Crocker was correct in his assessment that he could not change the broad foundations of Australia's international policies in the 1950s, such as the White Australia Policy, the seeking of security through close relations with 'great and powerful friends', the policy of opposing the nonaligned bloc, foreign economic policy such as the 1957 trade agreement with Japan, and the general Australian anti-communist policies during the Cold War. Such broad policy directions cannot be changed by individual heads of mission or their officials. The foundations of foreign policy are determined by the government and are often backed by deep and enduring public opinion that make them difficult to change.² Yet international historians can all point to specific policy decisions down through the decades where we can trace

1 Walter Crocker, *Australian Ambassador: International Relations at First Hand*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1971, p. 1.

2 For a study on the making of Australian foreign policy see Gary Smith, Dave Cox and Scott Burchill, *Australia in the World: An Introduction to Australia's Foreign Relations*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996.

some degree of influence by ambassadors, especially powerful figures such as Percy Spender, Australian Ambassador to the US in the 1950s, or senior officials who were close to their minister, such as John Burton, Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, in the late 1940s; not all policymaking remains the preserve of the Cabinet.³

The focus of this chapter is not on the role of such very high-profile officials, but rather on the diplomats in overseas posts, and those within the department who travel from Canberra on specific missions. These are Australian officials who participate in international consultations or study groups that lay out the groundwork for policy, develop expert understanding of issues and formulate policy options through their own work and official exchanges with the diplomats of other nations that later become recommendations for future Australian policy. While the final decision remains with the Cabinet, the spadework in terms of foreign policymaking has been done by the officials both at home and abroad. Where does the line fall?

The case study is of a four-power Study Group that met in Washington in 1962. This group of officials produced a report on future political, economic and security trends in the South Pacific region and suggested guidelines for future policy as the colonial territories moved towards independence. This first major examination of the future of the South Pacific in the 1960s by the Australian Government was driven by the activist External Affairs Minister, Garfield Barwick. He was an interventionist minister who followed in the tradition of Herbert Vere Evatt and Percy Spender.⁴ A Cold War warrior, Barwick's concern over the threat of communism drove his foreign policy.

By early 1962, a number of international developments led Barwick to focus on the South Pacific. These included what Barwick perceived was a growing communist threat to the region, the change of policy by the US, Britain and Australia over West New Guinea that cleared the way for an Indonesian takeover, and the accelerating progress towards decolonisation in other parts of the world, especially Africa.⁵

3 David Lowe, *Australian Between Empires: The Life of Percy Spender*, Pickering & Chatto, London, 2010, ch. 7; Joan Beaumont, Christopher Waters, David Lowe with Garry Woodard, *Ministers, Mandarins and Diplomats: Australian Foreign Policy Making 1941–1969*, Melbourne University Publishing, Melbourne, 2003, pp. 53–4.

4 Beaumont, et al., *Ministers, Mandarins and Diplomats*, chs 3–4.

5 See the papers in CRS A1838, item 277/2 part 2, National Archives of Australia (NAA), Canberra.

The Australian Government's broad aims for the South Pacific were, firstly, to keep the area out of communist control and, secondly, to bring about the establishment of 'politically and economically stable Governments well disposed towards Australia'.⁶ Barwick was determined to develop, with Australia's allies, a broad and detailed policy towards the decolonisation of the region.

The need to concentrate on the future of the South Pacific was crystallised at the 1962 ANZUS (the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty) meeting held in Canberra; Barwick represented Australia; Keith Holyoake, Prime Minister, represented New Zealand; and Dean Rusk, the American Secretary of State, represented the US. They agreed to establish a Study Group on the South Pacific made up of officials of the three ANZUS nations, with Britain and France also to be invited to attend.⁷ The initial New Zealand suggestion, for occasional meetings of officials in Wellington to 'discuss and co-ordinate policies', was accepted at the Canberra meeting.⁸ Rusk subsequently proposed a Study Group based in Washington, made up of official representatives from the US, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and France to 'explore possibility of developing a cohesive plan for the future'.⁹ These officials were, in the words of one New Zealand memorandum, to be experts on the region.¹⁰

Rusk's proposal was accepted with alacrity by Australia, New Zealand and Britain. The Study Group's purpose was to consider the future of the South Pacific. It was great power politics that drove this renewed interest. As Dean Rusk said privately after the ANZUS meeting, the US was determined that 'not one wave of the Pacific should fall under Communist influence'.¹¹ He argued that something needed to be done to protect the colonial territories from subversion and give them some sort of economic and political security. The American Secretary of State understood that the problems were complex – for example, the racial

6 'Prospective Developments in the South Pacific', Australian briefing paper for 1962 ANZUS meeting, n.d., CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 2, p. 193, NAA, Canberra.

7 Cabinet Submission No. 590, 8 March 1963, CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 5; and papers in CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 4, NAA, Canberra.

8 New Zealand Ministry of External Affairs to New Zealand Embassy, Washington, 18 May 1960, cablegram no. 275, CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 2, NAA, Canberra.

9 Ibid.

10 New Zealand Memorandum, 'Washington Talks on the Future of the Pacific Territories', 23 November 1962, CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 5, NAA, Canberra.

11 Beale to Barwick, 14 May 1962, cablegram no. 1239, CRS A1838, item 277/2 part 2, NAA, Canberra.

issue in Fiji and the scattered nature of some of the other island groups – but he was prepared to allocate resources and money to a detailed policy program that was designed to solve them. Rusk believed that Australia and, to a lesser extent, New Zealand should play important roles in securing the region and moulding the decolonisation of the region.¹²

Barwick was delighted by the heightened American interest in the South Pacific. A major aim of his foreign policy had been to draw the US more closely into the region and bind it more tightly into the security of Australia. Indeed, that was a key motivation for the Australian Government in participating in the four-power Study Group. The Study Group met in Washington throughout the latter months of 1962, culminating in a formal three-day conference in late November.¹³ After attending the initial organisational meetings France withdrew, apparently out of the suspicion of what ‘they thought would be predominantly Anglo-Saxon discussions’.¹⁴ The series of meetings led the expert officials from the four nations to prepare position papers on various issues, discuss and debate them at considerable length and reach some shared conclusions on guidelines of future policy. Australia was represented by BG Dexter and AD Campbell from the Australian embassy in Washington and Keith Douglas-Scott, the Australian Consul in Noumea, who flew in for the November conference. The detailed discussion papers and minutes of the meetings enable the historian to follow these discussions closely.

The discussion papers prepared by each nation were based on their expertise and knowledge of their own Pacific territories. The New Zealand Department of External Affairs, for example, authored a significant paper entitled ‘The United Nations and the South Pacific’.¹⁵ The paper drew heavily on their recent experience of bringing Western Samoa to independence.¹⁶ It noted that the United Nations’ interest in the South Pacific had been so far ‘spasmodic and relatively mild’, but considered this was likely to change in the near future.¹⁷ This change

12 Ibid.

13 Record of meetings of the Pacific Working Group, 26–28 November 1962, CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 4, NAA, Canberra.

14 Cabinet Submission No. 590, 8 March 1963, CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 5, NAA, Canberra.

15 Paper, ‘The United Nations and the South Pacific’, 3 October 1962, CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 4, NAA, Canberra.

16 See James Wightman Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa: The Emergence of the Independent State of Western Samoa*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1967.

17 Paper, ‘The United Nations and the South Pacific’, 3 October 1962, CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 4, p. 1, NAA, Canberra.

would be driven by the anti-colonialist sentiment of the new members of the UN, mainly in Africa and Asia, which had recently decolonised. As a result New Zealand proposed a positive, not an obstructive, policy response to the likely growing interest by the anti-colonial bloc of nations in the UN. Such a response would include policies of economic, social and political development in the colonial territories themselves and a welcoming attitude to UN visiting missions to the region. While it recognised there would be strong criticisms and difficulties, it argued a positive approach by the four powers would be the best policy in the long run.¹⁸

As another example of the expertise brought to the Study Group's deliberations, Britain produced a paper entitled 'Sino-Soviet bloc interest in the Pacific' about likely communist bloc interest in the region in the future. The British paper identified the UN as the major forum through which the Soviet Union took an interest in the colonial territories of the South Pacific. It predicted that the Sino-Soviet bloc would use the continued colonial control by the Western powers of the South Pacific as a situation to exploit for their own ends. Even the smallest territory could become a target of their criticism, which might complicate the task for the colonial powers in finding long-term political solutions for these tiny entities. The direct involvement by the Soviet Union, mainly in the form of the ship visits, was limited to Fiji. The British paper also drew attention to the activity of Australian and New Zealand trade unions and local communist parties in supporting strikes and workers' campaigns in Fiji. The local Chinese communities were also seen as potential fronts for Chinese communist penetration of the region. Yet the conclusion of the paper was that communism was 'unlikely to gain a real foothold at present'.¹⁹ Again there was a concerted effort at an official level to bring together the evidence of communist activities in the region so that countermeasures could be developed.

Specific papers on each colonial territory were drawn up by each colonial power and circulated to each member of the Study Group for discussion. These papers set out the geographic, historical, demographic, economic, social and political profiles of each of the territories. The problems each territory faced were identified and potential solutions were presented. Papers were authored on, for example, the Gilbert and Ellice Colony,

18 Ibid.

19 Paper (UK), 'Sino-Soviet bloc interest in the Pacific', n.d., CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 4, NAA, Canberra.

the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, the Fiji Colony, and the New Hebrides Condominium.²⁰ A careful process had been initiated of gathering the facts, identifying both existing and future problems and canvassing possible political and economic solutions, including different forms of continuing relationships between the colonial territories and their respective colonial powers. It was a case of drawing together expertise and knowledge on the island territories in order to come up with viable long-term solutions.

In the preliminary meetings in October and November 1962, there were some frank and revealing exchanges on the interests and policies of the four governments. On the future of Micronesia, for example, the American representatives explained that their political plans envisaged representation by a non-voting member in the US on the Puerto Rican pattern, but not full independence, even in the long term.²¹ In its initial meetings, as another example, the Study Group agreed that the future of Melanesia, indeed for much of the Pacific, would be 'greatly influenced, if not determined by developments in Papua-New Guinea'.²² The Study Group was touching upon delicate ground in discussing future political and economic developments in Australia's colonial territories as there was no representation from the Australian Department of Territories, which was responsible for the administration of both New Guinea and Papua. There were also discussions regarding the 'possibility of a Melanesian Association of Australian and British territories'. The Australian position was that while this would ultimately be a question for the Melanesians to decide for themselves in the future, their decision would obviously be influenced by Australian and British actions and policies.²³ There was general agreement that it was important that 'progress in the Australian and British territories were kept roughly in line'.²⁴ It was clear that the Study Group was already going well beyond the task of gathering facts on which policy decisions could be taken to floating policy ideas that might be taken up by their respective governments in the future.

20 See the collection of papers in CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 4, NAA, Canberra.

21 Australian Embassy, Washington to Canberra, 11 October 1962, cablegram no. SAV.1057, CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 4, NAA, Canberra.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

The formal four-power conference that was held in Washington commenced on 26 November 1962 and lasted three days.²⁵ It enjoyed a high-powered membership. The US was represented by five Department of State officials, the US Commissioner from the South Pacific Commission, one official from the Department of the Interior and two officials from the Department of Defence. The British sent four officials from their Washington embassy and one senior official from the Colonial Office in London. Australia was represented by one official from the Department of External Affairs in Canberra and two officials from its embassy. New Zealand's representation was one official from the Department of External Affairs in Wellington, one from its delegation to the UN in New York and two officials from its embassy.²⁶

As in the previous meetings, there were full and frank exchanges on key issues and discussion centred on the future direction of policy for all their colonial territories and for regional organisations such as the South Pacific Commission and the South Pacific Council. The discussions covered the political problems faced by each of the Pacific colonial powers in their territories, possible constitutional settlements and the methods to be adopted to meet the increasing interest of the UN in the region. In particular, the Study Group considered what forms of constitutional arrangement with the respective colonial powers, short of full independence, might be achieved that would be acceptable to the local peoples and to world opinion. The level of future interest from Asian and African nations and by the communist powers was also assessed. The three Australian officials played a full part in the discussions, including an outline of Australian policy in Papua and New Guinea and on the future of Nauru. The minutes of the meeting indicate that, at times, the meeting was more like an academic conference than a gathering of government officials. The Study Group inevitably continued to go beyond a fact-gathering and problem-identifying exercise to a consideration of policy alternatives for the future.²⁷

Out of the whole process came a paper of agreed conclusions by the Study Group. The conclusions were a series of judgements and principles drawn up to be guidelines for future policy on the South Pacific.

25 For the full record see Minutes, 'Pacific Working Group: Record of a Meeting held in Washington, D.C.: 26–28 November 1962', n.d., CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 4, NAA, Canberra.

26 Minutes 'Pacific Working Group: Record of a Meeting held in Washington, D.C.: 26–28 November 1962', CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 4, NAA, Canberra.

27 Ibid.

The conclusions reached included assessments of the viability of the colonial territories for future independence, the possible timing of decolonisation for the different territories in the region, alternatives to full independence for some of the colonial territories, the diplomatic strategy needed at the UN to defuse the criticism by the anti-colonial nations, and policy ideas for maintaining the Western hegemony over the South Pacific. The Study Group considered that only three of the island territories were candidates for full independence: Fiji, Tonga and Papua and New Guinea. Their logic was that Fiji would be viable as an independent nation if the internal issues could be resolved, Tonga could not be denied on historical grounds and the precedent of Western Samoa, while Papua and New Guinea, with the British Solomon Islands Protectorate possibly included, also had the size and population required.²⁸

For the other island territories the Study Group concluded that, as they could never be viable independent nations, solutions short of full independence would be required, such as integration or association with the colonial power or some form of federation. It was recognised that any such solutions would need the consent of the local peoples. The Study Group recommended that practical cooperation between the island territories that may come together should be encouraged, but 'artificial groupings should not be pursued for their own sake'.²⁹ The meeting suggested that all possible steps should be taken to anticipate and avoid outside pressure pushing island territories into independence where that outcome was not desired by the inhabitants. These steps should include action at the UN to deflect such pressure and garner support from UN members for solutions short of full independence. They urged long-term planning to establish frameworks of self-government within which the ambitions of the islanders could be fully realised and which were defensible at the UN. The Study Group recommended that the four powers take pre-emptive action at the UN to gain the 'maximum acceptance by members of solutions short of independence'.³⁰ The meeting also found that the greatest care should be taken to ensure that after any transfer of power the security of the region was not placed in any jeopardy. In other words, where independence was to be granted, the governments must be of a nature that they will align the new nations

28 Memorandum, 'General Conclusions of the meeting' in *ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*

to the West and not the communist bloc. Additionally, the meeting concluded that Japanese economic penetration of the South Pacific should be watched, any Indonesian influence should be discouraged and, while there was as yet little evidence of communist activity in the region, 'a close watch should be kept for signs of it'. The Study Group noted that France could probably not be dissuaded from conducting nuclear testing in the South Pacific, but recognised such action would bring unwelcome international attention to the region.³¹

In summary, the conference of officials in Washington from the four powers had concluded that only three of the South Pacific colonial territories had the potential to become viable nations. The remainder of the territories were too small or too scattered. The alternative policy strategies recommended by the officials for these smaller territories included their reorganisation into larger bodies with limited, but permanent, self-government, which would stand alongside continuing links to their colonial power. The Study Group also considered it desirable that international powers, outside of the four members of the Study Group and France, be kept out of the region. Its view was that the UN's intervention in the region would be counterproductive and should be minimised. Underlying the thinking of many of the officials at the meeting was the imperative of the Cold War and the future potential threat of communism to the region. The Study Group had proposed that the process of decolonisation should be gradual and carefully controlled with any timetable not to be influenced by actions in other parts of the world or pressure from outside the region.³² In effect, the Study Group had laid out a detailed blueprint as to constitutional and political development in the region, as to policy at the UN, as to future cooperation between the four powers and as to their continuing hegemonic control over the South Pacific. The officials from the four nations were, in effect, actively formulating policy proposals for each of the governments.

Barwick was very pleased by the results of the Study Group's meeting in Washington. Heartened by the increased American interest in and commitment to the South Pacific, the Minister for External Affairs was also very positive about the Study Group's blueprint for the future political development of the region. While acknowledging there was

31 Ibid.

32 Christopher Waters, "Against the tide": Australian Government Attitudes to Decolonisation in the South Pacific, 1962-1972', *The Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2013, pp. 194-208.

something of 'a lowest common denominator' about the conclusions, he felt they were a sound basis for future discussions and policy.³³ Barwick incorporated the conclusions into a paper he took to the Cabinet in April 1963 for endorsement by ministers as broad guidelines for Australian policy towards the South Pacific.³⁴ In the Cabinet submission the Minister for External Affairs reported that the Kennedy Administration was using the Study Group's conclusions to formulate, for the first time, 'a general policy for the Pacific'.³⁵ He stressed the importance of continuing to encourage the 'new-found American interest' in the region and the need to continue discussions with the other colonial powers on future policy directions.³⁶ Barwick's Cabinet paper became the occasion for a lengthy and detailed discussion by ministers over not only the specific conclusions of the Study Group, but more importantly over the role of Cabinet as opposed to officials in the development and determination of policy. The Cabinet notebook makes for fascinating reading.³⁷

In introducing the paper to Cabinet, Barwick stated that the establishment of the Study Group had achieved two objectives. The first was that it had induced American interest in the region – a key goal of Barwick's foreign policy – and Washington had adopted the Study Group's conclusions as US policy. The second objective had been to provide the Australian Government with guidelines for future policy in the South Pacific. Accordingly, Barwick requested that Cabinet endorse the Study Group's conclusions. Nothing in the paper, Barwick assured the Cabinet, involved an intrusion into Australia's own colonial territories. Yet this proposal stirred up a hornet's nest. Not surprisingly, Paul Hasluck, the Minister for Territories, was first to launch an attack. While he acknowledged that it was important to get the Americans involved in the region, Hasluck argued that some of the issues and actions outlined in the guidelines were matters for Cabinet to decide and not some group of officials working internationally. As an example, he stated that Australian policy towards Japanese activity in the South Pacific was for Cabinet to decide, not public servants. He asked the Minister for External Affairs what endorsement of the conclusions in the paper would actually mean. Specifically, Hasluck was concerned that

33 Cabinet Submission No. 590, 8 March 1963, CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 5, NAA, Canberra.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Cabinet notebook, 30 April 1963, CRS A11099 item 1/60, NAA, Canberra.

the paper pre-judged matters of individual interest to ministers that had not yet been put to Cabinet. He was also worried that, if the Study Group continued along the same lines, it would get closer and closer to issues that fell within his own portfolio of Territories. He warned that officials would go too far and 'present Govts [sic] with so little elbow room as to be meaningless'. For Hasluck, the key questions were what endorsement of the paper meant to the Cabinet, and what it meant to the Americans.³⁸

Menzies too waded in vigorously, querying what Barwick meant by endorsement of the report. The Prime Minister said he assumed it meant acceptance of a line of policy. He did not know this had been the purpose of the Study Group, which the Prime Minister thought had been simply 'to study and exhibit a problem'. Menzies continued that, if the Study Group was to make recommendations, it was badly constituted; for example, there was no representation from the Department of Territories. Declaring that if Cabinet endorsed the report and made these principles Australian policy, this would be a 'major decision', Menzies questioned whether the Cabinet took decisions on that basis. He accepted the need to stay in touch with other governments, but he did 'quarrel with accepting policy the ultimate implications of which we don't yet foresee'. Realising he was losing the battle, Barwick defended his approach. He countered by saying that on the fate of West New Guinea, Australia had not acted soon enough in supporting the US. There was, he declared, no 'meeting of minds' on that issue until it was almost too late. Barwick said this was an opportunity, under ANZUS, to think clearly about Oceania and line up our views with the Americans with the aim of keeping Chinese or communist influence out of the region. This Australian initiative, he stated, was designed to get the other powers involved and safeguard the future of the region. It was not, he continued, foreclosing on policy for Territories. He defiantly concluded, '[t]his [is] a sensible not to say necessary look ahead'. Menzies was not persuaded. He challenged Barwick to state what authority attached to these points: 'What does endorsement mean?' he repeated.³⁹

Recognising he was losing the argument in Cabinet, Barwick retreated a little. Stating that 'guidelines' may have been the wrong word, he said he should have put forward the views expressed in the report as his ideas

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

as minister, which he added they were. Barwick also noted that in the future the Study Group would only do what the government asked it to do and nothing more. Sensing victory, Hasluck suggested that he would accept the word 'note' rather than 'endorse'. Other ministers supported Menzies and Hasluck. Shane Paltridge, for example, said that the Cabinet should not delegate to the Study Group the capacity to go forward with new policy issues. It should continue its study and report to member governments the results. He concluded that it had 'beyond that no power whatever'. William McMahon said the Study Group had been a worthwhile exercise. He generally agreed with Barwick on the contents of the report, but he too could not accept the conclusions as 'guidelines for policy'. Menzies did acknowledge that the Study Group had given Australia access to American thinking as its policy was developing. He described Barwick's historical point about events in West New Guinea as 'powerful'. But Hasluck was not prepared to concede even this point. He saw the process of establishing the Study Group as a 'bad method' of developing sympathetic American interest in the region. Barwick attempted to save something from the wreck. He suggested that the form of the recommendations had created the trouble for Cabinet. Barwick said he too did not want the Study Group to have any status beyond that of a Study Group. He suggested an alternative form of words: that the Cabinet notes the broad lines of the minister's thinking and with certain exceptions, sees no objection to the minister using his stated lines of thought as a basis for further discussion with the other three powers, and that he be allowed to continue to participate in the Study Group as a Study Group. Ministers did not even like this watered-down version.⁴⁰

Bringing the discussion to a conclusion, Menzies declared that he did not like Barwick's amended proposal because it implied that Cabinet endorsed the conclusions of the Study Group. This would, he continued, only encourage the Study Group to make more recommendations. Menzies noted that in substance there was much in the report that seemed right and that could be supported, but these were matters for Cabinet decision. He concluded, '[f]or myself I would say we note the document, but point out it might be embarrassing to the Governments to have these as policy lines. The Study Group to be a Study Group with

40 Ibid.

limits excluding policy-making or policy recording'. With this clear, Menzies said they should record in their own words their judgement on some of the propositions. The Prime Minister continued:

The central thing is that this brings the US for the first time in a rational and sophisticated way. This is a major matter. But policy must always be for us. Not direct or indirect approval of Study Group proposals. Not in any way cede our policy responsibilities.⁴¹

Ministers agreed with this statement, but the Cabinet notebooks do record one last Hasluck barb delivered against Barwick. The Minister for Territories said he liked Paltridge's 'view of getting decisions on particular cases – not manifestos'.⁴²

Anyone who worked for the Minister for Territories would have understood that Hasluck was an absolute stickler for the Westminster practice of ministers, not officials, being absolutely responsible for policy.⁴³ Sometimes he went to extraordinary lengths in implementing that practice in his own department and his stand should have come as no surprise to Barwick. Indeed, Hasluck had already advised Barwick of his objections to the form of his proposals and the procedure he had adopted prior to the Cabinet meeting.⁴⁴ Menzies too was firmly in the camp that required the principles and practices of the Westminster system of government to be strictly followed, although he was the dominant personality in his cabinets and always welcomed the advice of his senior public servants.⁴⁵ He shared the suspicions of ministers such as Hasluck over the use and value of study groups and experts in general, except as a means to provide the facts on any given situation. It seems strange that Barwick, by then an experienced minister, so badly misjudged his Cabinet colleagues and brought forward the proposals in the format that he did. This was especially surprising as the conclusions did not just represent the ideas of Australian officials, but also the shared conclusions of officials from three other nations.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid. After this lengthy exchange on process there was little actual discussion of the substance of the Study Group report and no decisions were taken on its conclusions at this meeting.

43 See Robert Porter, *Paul Hasluck: A Political Biography*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1993, especially pp. 83–6, 276–7.

44 Paul Hasluck, Minister for Territories to Garfield Barwick, Minister for External Affairs, 27 January 1963, letter, CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 5, NAA, Canberra.

45 David Lee, 'Cabinet' in Scott Prasser, John Raymond Nethercote and John Warhurst (eds) *The Menzies Era: A Reappraisal of Government, Politics and Policy*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1995, pp. 123–36.

Cabinet had asserted its ultimate authority over the bureaucracy and its officials in Australia and in Washington. The Westminster system and principles had been given renewed authority under the Menzies Government with ministers being the sole arbiter of both the general thrust and the detail of foreign policy. It would seem that the diplomats in the Australian embassy in Washington, in the Department of External Affairs in Canberra and Garfield Barwick had been sent a strong message that officials do not make foreign policy.

Yet that is not quite the end of the story. The Study Group conclusions do provide an important insight into how Barwick and his officials viewed the future decolonisation of the Pacific in early 1963. Moreover, Menzies and the Cabinet did recognise the merit of much of the Study Group's report.⁴⁶ Such reports sit in departments as a digest of reflections, views and potential actions. As such they both summarise the existing international situation, but also contain the assumptions, detailed information and world views that can be drawn upon and shape future Cabinet submissions, briefing papers for ministers and guidance notes for heads of missions.

In these ways the conclusions of the Study Group were reflected in much of Australian ministerial and official thinking and action towards the South Pacific for the remainder of the 1960s. While not every recommended action was carried out, the Study Group's report did stand as a blueprint for Australian policy towards the South Pacific. The Australian governments throughout the 1960s continued to doubt whether the colonial island territories in the South Pacific could ever make viable nation-states. They continued to work at the UN to deflect criticism by anti-colonial members at the slow rate of change. They continued to support only gradual constitutional and economic development in Australia's own colonies.⁴⁷ It is arguable that Australian governments followed the Study Group's broad guidelines until the early 1970s when events such as the independence of Nauru in 1968 and Fiji in 1970 led to an acceleration of the decolonisation of the rest of the South Pacific, with the exception of the French colonies, and forced a re-evaluation of Australian policy. In this way, despite Cabinet's best efforts, detailed studies by officials in overseas posts and at home can define the boundaries of policy choices, can become the guidelines on

46 Cabinet Decision No. 992, 30 April 1963, CRS A1838 item 277/2 part 5, NAA, Canberra.

47 See Waters, 'Against the tide', pp. 194–208.

which policy is based and can provide the precedent for detailed policy decisions. As Hasluck feared, study groups and expert reports can sometimes leave governments with ‘little elbow room’.⁴⁸

The tension over responsibility for policymaking that led to the lively and lengthy discussion between ministers in April 1963 also suggests that in this era something important was evolving within state institutions as to the principles and processes of policy development. The clash between Barwick on one side and Menzies and Hasluck on the other is evidence that the procedures and principles of foreign policy formulation were starting to change by the early 1960s.⁴⁹ The case study of the Washington Study Group from the early 1960s does illuminate new developments in both the history of foreign policy development and government practice, but also in the history of the social sciences and their relationship to the government.⁵⁰ The increasing application of the methods of the social sciences and indeed the expertise of these disciplines to the art of government was a feature of 20th-century history. World War II saw this development reach a new height with economists, anthropologists, philosophers, and historians, among many other experts, deployed to use their expertise to ‘win the war’.⁵¹

By the early 1960s, the US Government had taken this use of social science expertise and methodology in the formulation of government policy to a much higher level. The research activities of the RAND Corporation and the approach to government of President Kennedy’s Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, spring to mind as important examples of the belief in and use of experts, their techniques and their knowledge in government.⁵² The belief had developed in some government circles that if you get all the relevant information into a policymaking machine manned by experts, the right decision would come out of the other end of the process.

48 Cabinet notebook, 30 April 1963, CRS A11099 item 1/60, NAA, Canberra.

49 On Cabinet government in Australia see Sol Encel, *Cabinet Government in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1974 (second edition); and Patrick Weller, *Cabinet Government in Australia, 1901–2006*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2007.

50 See Stuart Macintyre, *The Poor Relation: A History of Social Sciences in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2010.

51 Geoffrey Gray, Doug Munro and Christine Winter (eds) *Scholars at War: Australasian Social Scientists 1939–1945*, ANU E Press, Canberra, 2012.

52 Alex Abella, *Soldiers of Reason: The RAND Corporation and the Rise of the American Empire*, Harcourt, Orlando, Florida, 2008; Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*, Vintage Books, New York, 1996.

Now, the Australian Government had not gone as far down this road as the best and the brightest of the Kennedy Administration, but under Arthur Tange, Secretary of External Affairs for nearly a decade after 1954, there had been some growth of institutional capacity, in the department and in overseas posts, to address long-term developments in world affairs and to generate long-term thinking and more specialist expertise on policy issues.⁵³ For example, regular meetings of regional heads of missions had been instituted in the second half of the 1950s to discuss broader policy issues.⁵⁴ The small policy planning section was established within the department in 1962 to produce planning papers on key long-term international developments.⁵⁵

The Washington Study Group, gathering together officials with expertise on the region to decipher long-term trends and suggest possible policy guidelines, was another such example of this general trend in government practice and procedure. Clearly by the early 1960s the Australian embassy in Washington was developing its capacity to play an active role in international study groups and other forms of consultation. These initiatives were all giving officials both in Canberra and overseas more of an opportunity to contribute to long-term planning away from the hectic pace of day-to-day diplomacy. Like his counterparts in Washington, Rusk and McNamara, Barwick was a supporter of this new approach to government. By his actions in this episode, Barwick seems to have favoured this American model of using experts and officials to formulate policy proposals for government endorsement.

The impact of these developments on Australian foreign policymaking should not be exaggerated. Historians should not underestimate the suspicion and objections of Menzies, Hasluck and other ministers to these intrusions on the prerogatives of Cabinet. But the 1962 Washington Study Group case study is an example of the growing capacity in the

53 On the Kennedy Administration, see David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, Barrie and Jenkins, London, 1972. For Arthur Tange as an administrative reformer, see Peter Edwards, *Arthur Tange, Last of the Mandarins*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2006, ch. 5. For the institutional development of the Department of External Affairs during the Cold War, see Adam Henry Hughes, 'Manufacturing Australian foreign Policy 1950–1966', PhD thesis, The Australian National University, 2012.

54 For examples of these meetings of regional heads of mission see CRS A1838 TS3004/11/36 (Southeast Asia) and CRS A1838 80/1/3/4 parts 2 and 3 (Europe), NAA, Canberra.

55 For the establishment of the Policy Planning section see departmental papers in CRS A1838 625/2, NAA, Canberra.

Department of External Affairs and its officials in overseas missions such as the Washington embassy to contribute meaningfully to the foreign policymaking process.

In conclusion, this case study suggests that a complete picture of the history of Australian representation in the US requires not only study of the work and impact of individual ambassadors, but also of the work of those whose analyses informed their work: the diplomats, the military attachés, the intelligence liaison officers, those officials responsible for economic issues, scientific exchanges. These officials came together in working groups, liaison committees and other international bodies. By charting the activities in which they participated, especially in study groups and other committees, by exploring the place of experts and their expertise within the embassy and changes in government procedures and systems at home, historians will develop a more nuanced and deeper understanding of the role of embassies and their staff in the formulation of Australian foreign policy and how it has evolved from era to era.

This text is taken from *Australia goes to Washington: 75 years of Australian representation in the United States*, edited by David Lowe, David Lee and Carl Bridge, published 2016 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.