

Conclusion

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One of the difficulties for those seeking to identify the attributes most likely to bring success for an Australian diplomat in Washington is the diversity of those who have held the lead position of minister (before 1946) or ambassador. Such diversity and the varied circumstances behind choices suggests that Canberra has not been overly concerned to join with commentators in cultivating a distinctive ideal of what works best for the Australian Government in Washington. Or, at least, that governments have not acted on any ideal they may have. As the chapters in this volume show, for some time Australian governments chose their men in Washington (and it is noteworthy that in 2016 it remains the case that there have as yet been no women in the lead role) with domestic political considerations that were arguably ill-suited to the importance of the post, but common enough in other Western democracies and perhaps even more understandable during the infancy of Australia's professional diplomatic corps. Australian prime ministers have proven willing to institute major changes in Australia's overseas representation, including the Washington post, a disposition that was especially on display during the tenures of Gough Whitlam and his successor Malcolm Fraser.

None of the chapters in this book suggests that they chose poorly, nor do the writers here make a case for superior virtues of either political appointees or professional diplomats over the 75 years examined. Such were the opportunities for different forms of diplomatic building work in the Washington of the 1940s and 1950s that the different attributes Australian representatives brought to their post could be wielded effectively. The first, Richard Casey, has been described as a model diplomat, winning confidences and networking brilliantly with

Washington's policymaking elite in the early 1940s.¹ His successor, former Labor politician Norman Makin, was an abstemious man admired for his integrity, Methodism and cultivation of embassy morale, but who hated the cocktail circuit and was reluctant to engage on key policy issues. And Makin's successor, Percy Spender, former senior politician in the Liberal Party and Australia's most activist Ambassador, loved Washington parties as much as he loved the idea of being a second Australian Minister for External Affairs telling Canberra what to do. In other words, even among three early political appointees, the variability between ambassadors makes it clear that the professional/political line has limitations as a means of distinguishing the characteristics and performances of Australians in Washington. Similarly, during the turbulent years from the mid-1960s to early 1980s, Australia's ambassadors were the cream of the department's professional diplomats, including three former permanent secretaries, Sir James Plimsoil, Alan Renouf and Sir Nicholas Parkinson. Yet, their respective experiences varied hugely, with the consequences of withdrawal from Vietnam, searching questioning of the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) and difficult dynamics between the two countries' leaders shifting the ground beneath their feet.

More recently, Kim Beazley, of course, was a former Labor Party leader. Before him were two senior public servants who were trained in External Affairs/Foreign Affairs and Trade: Michael Thawley, AO, and Dennis Richardson, AO. Before them was former Liberal Party leader, Andrew Peacock, AC. This pattern of two department-trained professionals and two former politicians was also reflected in the mix of Australia's ambassadors over the whole 75 years. Of the 20 different Australian Ambassadors to the United States during this time, 10 have been professional appointees, moving to Washington either directly from External Affairs/Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) or from another senior public service post, and 10 have been from beyond the career service: seven former politicians, one judge, one diplomatically experienced public servant, Frederic Eggleston, and one senior public servant, Don Russell, who emerged not from DFAT but Treasury prior

1 While we have counted Casey as one of the non-career appointees, on the basis of his having been an elected member of Australian Governments prior to his posting, he could also be said to represent professional diplomats, having served earlier and very successfully in the Foreign Office in London, before a professional Australian diplomatic service existed.

to his becoming principal adviser to Treasurer Paul Keating.² The recent appointment of Joe Hockey as Australia's current Ambassador to the US now puts political appointees in a very slight majority.

If there is an evenness in the balance of political/professional Australian appointees to Washington, then both categories have experienced both continuity and profound change in their roles, too. Among the themes to emerge from the 'Witness Seminar'³ connected to this study was the rise of Congress as a focal point for Australian diplomats, and the relative decline in opportunities for meeting with Washington's most senior members of government. Instead of Percy Spender advancing Australia's interests in the 1950s over one of his semi-regular dinners with US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, today Ambassador Hockey might work hard to meet with a Congressional power-broker in relation to legislative measures affecting Australia's interests. Since the 1980s the ease with which ministers in Australian can and do communicate with their counterparts in Washington has also meant that Australian ambassadors are more routinely kept in the loop of exchanges indirectly rather than directly, but this has hardly seen a decline of work for the embassy. One of the more constant themes, as Beazley reminds us, is the importance of the embassy staff building structure alongside the policy foundations of ministers.

Still on the theme of continuity, face-to-face meetings, such an important means by which ambassadors gather information, formally and informally, and convey the views of Australian governments, remain grist to the diplomats' mill, but no guarantee of successful diplomacy. However many meetings in the 1960s Howard Beale and Keith Waller held with the most senior of the American establishment, including President Kennedy, they struggled to firm up a stronger American commitment to contingencies in Southeast Asia that would trigger the operation of the ANZUS Treaty. Some of the most uncomfortable meetings were those experienced by one of Australia's most experienced diplomats, James Plimsoll, who calmly endured the wrath of President Nixon and some of his advisers in the wake of Whitlam's public opposition to the Americans resuming their bombing of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam at the end of 1972, and then Whitlam's subsequent diplomatic recognition of the Democratic Republic.

2 This includes the three Ministers of the Legation between 1940 and 1946, Casey, Owen Dixon, and Frederic Eggleston.

3 See blogs.deakin.edu.au/contemporary-history-studies/witness-seminars/.

The ongoing work around the ANZUS Treaty has, not surprisingly, been a constant focal point for ambassadors, and something of a barometer of the Australia–US relationship more broadly, in the eyes of Australian representatives. Ambassador Parkinson astutely observed at the beginning of the 1980s that Australians were now dealing with a new generation of US leaders without strong memories of World War II and its aftermath, in which the foundations for ANZUS were laid. This made for especially testing times then in the mid-1980s for Ambassadors Cotton and Dalrymple, who helped steer the US Administration through the shock of New Zealand’s leaving ANZUS, while preserving the Australia–US component. ANZUS was important in subsequent ambassadorial interventions: indirectly in the case of Michael Cook’s facilitating the phone call from George HW Bush to Hawke in 1991 that saw the Australian Government commit armed forces to the Gulf War; and directly in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, when Michael Thawley appears to have been influential in encouraging Howard to invoke the ANZUS Treaty as Australia’s response.

Parkinson was also alluding to the need for Australian officials to extend their influence beyond the US executive government, a trend we have noted above in relation to the focus on the US Congress, and this also reflected the persistence of thorny trade and tariff issues. Issues of trade and economics were often an irritant in Australia’s relations with the US, especially after Australia’s acceptance in 1942 of Article VII of the Mutual Aid Agreement. This agreement presaged Australian cooperation with the US in taking concerted action to expand international trade and to eliminate discriminatory treatment in international commerce. Australian policymakers reluctantly accepted the resulting limitations on longstanding imperial preferential arrangements with the United Kingdom. They were not, however, happy with Australia’s treatment under the rules of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that came into force in 1948. While these rules worked to liberalise trade in manufactured goods, agricultural commodities – by far the majority of Australian exports until the early 1980s – were treated as an exception. This was graphically demonstrated in the early 1950s when the US was granted a waiver without time limit to exempt from GATT disciplines Section 22 of the US Agriculture Adjustment Act, which required the administration to impose quantitative import restrictions whenever agricultural imports interfered with a US farm program.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, Australian governments, and therefore ambassadors and the Australian embassy in Washington, were frequently at odds with the US over its methods of disposal of agricultural products, amounting to dumping in Australian eyes, its restrictions on Australian access to markets like beef and sugar, and its high tariffs on commodities like lead and zinc.

Over the same time period, however, American investment became increasingly important to Australia. North America's share of overseas investment increased from 32.6 per cent in 1959–60 to 42.8 per cent in 1964–65. This trend continued during the mining and resources boom of the second half of the 1960s and 1970s. The benefits of increasing US investment in Australia, however, were accompanied by an increasing public concern about the high level of foreign, and particularly American, ownership and control of Australian mineral resources such as coal and iron ore. On the US side, application of American law with extraterritorial reach to combat Australian mining companies participating in a worldwide uranium cartel involved much work by the Australian Government and its embassy in Washington in protecting the interests of Australian-based enterprises.

Disagreement between Australia and the US over issues of trade and economics reached its high point in the 1980s. The period from 1982 to 1985 was generally marked by a growing crisis in world trade in agriculture, a crisis that the US met by enacting the 1985 US Farm Bill to introduce direct subsidies on US agricultural exports for the first time in history. The Australian embassy, led by Rawdon Dalrymple and Michael Cook, was centrally involved in coordinating Australian opposition to US protectionism in agriculture in the second half of the 1980s and into the 1990s. Australia–US cooperation in the Uruguay Round of the GATT from 1986 to 1993 to reduce agricultural protectionism globally substantially eased friction over trade and economic issues from the mid-1990s onward. Australia–US collaboration of trade and economic issues was enhanced with the establishment of the Australian-led Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1989 and by APEC economic leaders meetings from 1993.

Further steps were taken in the early 2000s to establish a bilateral framework for trade between Australia and the US. In 2005 the Australia–US Free Trade Agreement, negotiated by Prime Minister John Howard and the administration of George W Bush with the extensive involvement of Australia's diplomats in Washington, came into

effect. While some have criticised the agreement for the worsening of Australia's trade deficit with the US, others have attributed that decline to the appreciation of the Australian dollar along with the China-inspired resources boom of the first decade of the 2000s. Issues of trade and economics have always been issues at the centre of the work of Australia's ambassadors and the embassy in Washington and are likely to remain so in the future.

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