

Richard Woolcott, AC

Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1988-92

Background

Richard Woolcott's tenure as secretary coincided with one of the most active periods of Australian foreign policy under Gareth Evans, who began what would become an eight-year term as Foreign Minister the day after Woolcott was appointed.

Several Australian policy initiatives were active simultaneously. They included Prime Minister Hawke's efforts to bring APEC into being, Evans's determination to contribute to the Cambodian peace process, the development of a security dialogue in the Asia Pacific region (which was to become the ASEAN Regional Forum), attempts to inject more substance into Australia's relations with Indonesia, and Trade Minister Michael Duffy's push to bring to a successful conclusion the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations. Australia also pursued a more active role in the United Nations, the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean.

Clearly, the most significant external event during the period was the end of the Cold War. This required new policy approaches and enhanced cohesion between defence and security policies generally. For Australia, it meant paying attention to its alliance with the United States while enhancing self-reliance. The other major event was the first Gulf War in 1991 (involving the Australian Defence Force).

The department coped well with these demanding challenges during the period. It was also managing technological change in its overseas network, which underwent substantial upgrading during this period. Bedding down the amalgamated department's new organisation and culture continued to be a high priority. The absorption of the trade and information functions into the department came to be regarded as one of the main successes of the 1987 moves towards 'mega-departments'. In time, and after some questioning, it was judged a success by both major political parties and the National Party.

Woolcott's appointment as secretary came later in his career than may have been expected (he had declined to be considered for the position in 1973). He had already served in high profile Head of Mission positions, including a lengthy period as Australia's Ambassador to the United Nations in New York (1982–88), during which he represented Australia on the Security Council for two years.

So Woolcott was already comparatively well known in Australia, the United States and in the Asia Pacific region and was well placed to play a prominent role in the initiatives launched by Hawke and Evans. His relaxed style of leadership was suited to the demanding tasks facing the department and he was a popular secretary.

Richard Woolcott has published *The Hot Seat: Reflections on Diplomacy from Stalin's Death to the Bali Bombings* (Harper Collins 2003). He continues to be a regular commentator on foreign policy.

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While there is a value in talking about the past for the sake of the historical record, I would have preferred to offer some views on present foreign policy issues, especially those which relate to some of the problems with which I am familiar such as relations with Indonesia, with the United States, Iraq and East Timor. But that is not the purpose of this presentation.

I was the 16th secretary, counting from when it was called the Department of External Affairs, which was established in 1901. I filled the office from 1988 until my retirement from the Australian Public Service in 1992. Unlike some of my predecessors, like Peter Henderson, and some of my successors, I was appointed after I had been serving in Indonesia, the Philippines and New York. Except for occasional visits I had been away from Canberra for these 13 years when I came back to take over the position of secretary. We used to have a saying in the public service, especially about promotions, that if you are out of sight, you are out of mind. I had expected to retire gracefully after my posting in New York and was surprised when I was telephoned by the then Foreign Minister, Bill Hayden, and asked to come back.

How did I obtain the job? I really do not know. Looking around I see friends and colleagues who might well have been secretary of the department, in addition to the two who were. Good fortune, or simply being in a particular place at a particular time, together with the interaction of personal situations often entirely outside one's control and, indeed, the chemistry between senior personalities involved in the decision-making process, can all play a major role in such appointments.

I was fortunate to return to Canberra at a particularly active and challenging time. Usually there is a broad continuity in the way that Australian foreign policy is set, but 1988–89 was one of those defining periods; a watershed in world events that caught many ministers and officials by surprise. At the outset of my time the two great challenges of the previous four decades — that of communism and Soviet imperialism — were being simultaneously overcome. At the end of the Cold War there was a major shift in emphasis from global political and strategic issues to economic considerations.

In our own region, 1989 was the year that the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC), a major Australian initiative, was established. It was also the year in which the Cambodian peace process and the regional security dialogue, which led to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), in both of which Australia played a leading role, were launched. So I found myself returning at an extremely interesting but also very active and demanding time.

Shortly after my return to Canberra in August 1988, I had a long private meeting with Prime Minister Bob Hawke. I am not sure that other prime ministers took the same interest as Mr Hawke did in the management of departments, but I was to assume duty on 1 September 1988, which was the day before Gareth Evans became Foreign Minister. So, unlike my predecessor Peter Henderson, I had one Foreign Minister right through my period and I am sure that is a much easier situation to deal with than having a number.

Bob Hawke told me that my first priority would be to see that the amalgamation of the two departments — Foreign Affairs and Trade — was made to work effectively. He used the interesting phrase that it had been a ‘shotgun wedding’, which would never have taken place if a bureaucratic committee had been established to deal with the pros and cons of such a merger. But he argued that it was logical and common sense for the foreign and trade policies of an essentially trading nation situated in East Asia to be closely coordinated.

Secondly, he said that Australia had performed well on the United Nations Security Council in 1985–86. We were now a middle-sized power that had a good measure of international respect and we should be playing a more positive role in regional diplomacy, once the administrative amalgamation was bedded down.

Finally, I was somewhat taken aback when he said that my new Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans, who would be starting the next day, would be on a sharp learning curve and that I would need to ‘keep an eye on him’, an unusual role for the secretary. He said that Gareth was a man of enormous drive and powerful intellect, which I was to discover was absolutely right. But he also thought that he was somewhat driven and there might be times when he would need steady advice. That is really the role of any secretary. Even so, I thought this was a rather interesting introduction to the job.

My first objective as secretary, apart from what Bob Hawke had spelt out, was to bring together the cultures of the formerly quite distinct departments, which had only recently been amalgamated. The Trade people felt they would be swamped in the larger Foreign Affairs Department. The Foreign Affairs people suspected that the Trade tail might wag the dog. My initial objective was to try and bring those distinct cultures together. I was probably at an advantage having been overseas for so many years, because I had not been part of the Canberra bureaucratic infighting which may have preceded my appointment.

My next task was to try to re-define the department's priorities in pursuit of Australia's national interests in the rapidly changing world of the final decade of the 20th century, particularly with a new Foreign Minister taking up duty at this time. Thirdly, I wanted to develop a stronger sense of teamwork and esprit de corps in the amalgamated department and, also, I particularly wanted to improve communication within what was now a larger organisation than it had been.

Then, of course, there was the issue to which Peter Henderson devoted quite a bit of his lecture and that is the need to ensure effective management of a large department in times of increasing financial stringency and accountability.

Also, I was not going to flinch from giving the two relevant ministers the best professional advice available. All ministers say they want frank and fearless advice, but my experience is that in reality few do, particularly if that advice runs counter to what they themselves might want to do, or what they think might be unpopular in a domestic political context.

As if those internal tasks were not enough, my period as secretary encompassed a number of remarkable events which created great volatility in the international situation — the Berlin Wall was demolished and Germany was reunited, symbolising the end of the Cold War. Gorbachev had introduced perestroika and glasnost, marking the retreat from Marxism and Leninism and inadvertently precipitating the disintegration of the Soviet Union, thus playing a major part in bringing the Cold War to an end. Then, of course, we had the first Gulf War in 1991, which followed Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

I found the secretaryship at this time hugely demanding, being responsible for foreign policy advice not only to Gareth Evans, but also to the Minister for Trade, Michael Duffy. On top of that, Bob Hawke as Prime Minister had a close interest in foreign affairs and occasionally wanted direct advice.

In 1988–89 the Department had a budget of \$1,304 million — a substantial budget — and a total staff in 1988 of some 5,000, including locally engaged staff overseas, as well as 90 overseas posts. There were times when I wondered whether I, or for that matter anyone else, could handle the job effectively. I was 61 years old when I took up the post and I asked myself whether I had the physical stamina and the intellectual energy for the work required, especially with such an active Foreign Minister. I even wondered, privately, whether I would fail the task and become an example of the 'Peter Principle' — someone promoted to a level above his or her competence.

In 1989 the department faced what I considered to be an unusually demanding situation, because in addition to the issues I have already mentioned, Gareth Evans, whom I believe history will judge to be our most active Foreign Minister, had launched four new initiatives. In addition, the Prime Minister had launched

a major initiative — all of which proved to be very time consuming and a real problem for the department in trying to handle them simultaneously.

The Prime Minister had launched the initiative to bring APEC into being. Gareth Evans was determined to make a major contribution, both to the Cambodian peace process and the development of a regional security dialogue. He also wanted to put a lot of effort into what he called getting more ‘ballast’ or substance into our very important relationship with Indonesia. Moreover, Michael Duffy, the Minister for Trade, was determined to bring the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations to a successful conclusion, which would include new benefits for Australian agriculture.

How were we to deal with such an extensive agenda? I decided the only way to handle it properly was to delegate as much as possible. I remember I once went into the office of one of my predecessors, Keith Waller¹, and noticed his desk had no paper on it. I made the throwaway comment saying that I was surprised to see his empty desk. His reply was: ‘My boy, I always regard an officer’s intelligence as inversely proportional to the amount of paper on his desk. The secret of this job is delegation.’ It is something which has stuck in my mind.

What we decided to do was to give the deputy secretaries specific tasks. Besides the amalgamation process, I focused on Mr Hawke’s request to bring APEC into existence. Michael Costello, then a deputy secretary and later to be secretary, worked tirelessly on Cambodia.² The late Peter Field devoted himself almost full time to trade facilitation and liberalisation through the Uruguay Round. And Costello and I gave special attention to paving the way for a regional security dialogue. The other deputy secretaries, Michael Lightowler, Dick Smith³ and Paul Barrett, who later became secretary for Defence, dealt with the other general duties.

I now want to touch on an issue that was raised in Peter Henderson’s contribution, as an example of what can be the political aspects of the job. I was concerned to hear rumours that the Opposition was sceptical about the amalgamation of Foreign Affairs and Trade and was considering reverting to two separate departments should it regain power at the 1990 election. So, with the amalgamation under potential political threat, I decided it would be useful to talk to the Leader of the Opposition, Andrew Peacock, and the then leader of the National Party, Charles Blunt.⁴ It is not appropriate for a secretary to undertake such activities with an opposition party without clearing it with his minister and I did that.

It turned out to be very productive in that Peacock was persuaded that it would be foolish to try to ‘de-amalgamate’ the departments. Blunt’s view was different — he wanted to keep an open mind on it depending what portfolios his party

might get if the Coalition won the election. Anyway it was all, in a sense, water under the bridge, because the Government was returned and the situation of confronting this question did not arise. I do feel, however, that had the government changed, the department would have remained amalgamated and I had taken the right course in dealing with this delicate political consultation.

As secretary, I decided to pay considerable attention to the appointment of Australia's representatives overseas — ambassadors, high commissioners and consuls general. From the sidelines I had witnessed a number of poor appointments which had contributed little to Australia's international standing and some which had even damaged our international reputation. Such appointments were usually politically motivated, but some career officer appointments were not as effective as they should have been.

It is quite clear that it is prerogative of the Minister for Foreign Affairs to make such appointments and no secretary would question that. Gareth Evans normally requested two or three names to be put forward by the secretary for each post, even if he had a person in mind for it. It was then left for the minister to consult the Prime Minister on the appointments to some of the major posts, usually Washington, Tokyo, Beijing, Jakarta, the United Nations and — for reasons mainly related to prestige and to our history — London.

I understand that this situation has since changed. My understanding is that the Prime Minister now [John Howard, at the time of Woolcott's lecture] wants to approve all appointments, even those to our smallest posts. This seems to me to be a means of complicating the appointment process and reducing the authority of the Foreign Minister.

I approached the issue of appointments with three main aims: Firstly, I wanted to resist political appointments, many of which did not serve Australia's diplomatic interests and could undermine morale in the career service if there were too many. There were six non-career heads of missions when I became secretary, including those in London, The Hague, Dublin, Wellington and New York. I derived some satisfaction from the fact that all of these had been replaced by career officers when I retired and there was only one non-career appointment overseas by March 1992. One of the reasons for this change was that Gareth Evans took quite a strong stand against political appointees who he did not feel would do the job effectively.

Some political appointments were successful and served Australia very well, like Sir Robert Cotton⁵, who was both an excellent Consul-General in New York and an effective and popular Ambassador in Washington. On the other hand, Senator Vincent Gair — the former Leader of the Democratic Labor Party — was not a success.⁶ Gough Whitlam imagined that, by moving him out of the Senate in 1974, he would get control of that chamber. I have to say I was really

surprised when visiting Dublin in 1974 to hear some of the tales that were widely circulating in the city at that time about Mr Gair.

My second aim was to ensure that recommendations for appointments, which I put to the minister, were the best qualified and most suitable officers available for the particular posts. My third intention was to recommend more female officers on the basis of merit for Head of Mission appointments in what for years had tended to be a male-dominated area. That is not necessarily the fault of my predecessors or previous ministers, because for a long period of time a career female diplomatic officer was obliged — quite wrongly in my view — to resign if she got married. I was disappointed that, when I retired, we had only two female Heads of Mission, but it would not be long before that number could be substantially increased.

An initiative adopted during my period as secretary was to have a ministerial directive prepared for each newly-appointed Head of Mission. These were prepared at a senior level, vetted by me and signed by the minister. Their purpose was to set out for the Heads of Mission at the beginning of their assignments, the objectives to which they would be expected to work during their appointment and the major issues with which they would be expected to deal. There were, of course, unpredictable issues, but it was the extension of a process aimed at ensuring our Heads of Mission overseas were properly informed about policy thinking in Canberra and better equipped to make an input into the policy formulation process. This went back to 1971 when the then secretary of the Department, Keith Waller, and deputy secretary, Mick Shann, established the Policy Research Branch, which I returned from Ghana to head at that time.⁷

We also introduced the Department's first Corporate Plan to cover the period 1990 to 1993, which was launched jointly by Gareth Evans and Neal Blewett, who was then the Minister for Trade Negotiations. It smacks a little of managerialism, but it was a useful tool. It set out three-year programs for bilateral relationships and trade relations and, while I was initially a little sceptical about its value, it did turn out to be quite useful.

I was, as I have noted, secretary during the first Gulf War. It is instructive to compare our involvement then with our participation in the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Of course, the war added significantly to the pressures on the department. How does one handle this sort of situation? I established a departmental task force in a special operations room that was open round the clock and led by Ric Smith, a calm and able officer who later became secretary of the Department of Defence.

I think Mr Hawke's handling of the Iraq situation was considered and constructive. He invited me as secretary to attend some of the meetings he had with the cabinet sub-committee he had established to deal with the war. This committee included Paul Keating, Gareth Evans, Senator Robert Ray and Senator

John Button.⁸ With the decision to make a contribution to Operation Desert Storm virtually made, I saw my role as one of bringing possible foreign policy ramifications to the notice of Senator Evans and the Prime Minister. I said that we had a clear case of aggression by one member of the United Nations against another and it would be useful nevertheless — because the situation involved the Middle East — to explain our policy, preferably in advance, to those countries in South East Asia which had Islamic majorities including Indonesia, Brunei and Malaysia, as well as those with important minorities — the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand — and suggested to Bob Hawke that he stress the Australian Government had no hostility towards Islam; that the military campaign was purely an exercise to repel aggression.

In retrospect, I believe Bob Hawke's and Gareth Evans's approach was eminently sound, especially as it was the first time that Australian forces would be committed overseas since Vietnam. The Prime Minister himself briefed all the Middle Eastern Ambassadors and the announcement was delayed for about 12 hours while our Heads of Mission in South East Asia informed the foreign ministers of those countries. I believe this was a sound approach. It was an approach which, unfortunately, was not followed, as far as I know, when Australian forces were committed to the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

I think in fairness to officials who were involved during this period, there was a substantial difference between the situations of 1991 and 2002–03. Senior officials and the heads of intelligence organisations were dealing with a decision already taken at the highest level between the Prime Minister and the President of the United States in 2003. The role of the bureaucracy and the intelligence organisations was therefore reduced to one of implementation.

I am going to say something about the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, really as an example of how the secretary needs to be a 'jack of all trades'. The secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was the alternate Governor to the Treasurer on the Bank's board.

The Treasurer, then Paul Keating, telephoned me and said he was going to go to the inaugural meeting of the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, but he could now not attend. As I was the Deputy Governor I would need to go in his place. So I got on a plane, flew to London, made a speech and flew back. I worked out when I got back to Canberra that I had been in the air for much longer than I had been at the conference. So even with the advantages of modern air travel, situations are not always as attractive as they might seem to be.

I decided shortly after I became secretary that we should have a Management Information Report (MIR). We already had a highly classified Policy Information Report (PIR), which I had launched in 1971 in order to keep Heads of Missions in the field involved in the policy process in Canberra. So the Management

Information Report (MIR) was introduced. Senator Hill was participating in a Senate Estimates Committee hearing and he asked me what the MIR was about. I said that I had always believed — and my predecessors and successors would probably accept this — that an effective Department, or for that matter an effective Australian Mission abroad, must rest on a sound and competent administrative footing. I believed that good management is critical to the effectiveness of the department. That was the theme we used in the Management Information Report to keep our people updated on managerial changes and issues.

The conduct of Australian foreign policy is a continuing process and the secretary, together with his senior support staff, has a major role in advising ministers on a wide range of political and administrative issues. Officials do not make policy, although the myth is sometimes perpetrated in the media that they do. Ministers are responsible for policy decisions.

I found that one of the satisfactions during my time was observing younger officers grow into the task of understanding our external interests and our role in the wider world. I was enormously impressed by the qualifications, intelligence and dedication on the part of many of the younger officers and I could not escape the feeling that they were probably better qualified than my generation for the jobs they were going to do.

It is really for others, not for me, to judge how the department worked during my period in charge. People tend to gloss over the shortcomings and accentuate the merits of the about-to-retire and the newly dead. When you embark on a job like the secretaryship, you start off wanting to build some sort of highway to the future, but I am afraid that we all end up mending a few potholes and hoping that one day successors, other officers, will complete the highway.

In conclusion, all I can say is that it was an exacting, demanding and extraordinarily interesting position and, despite the strains, the long hours and the pressures it imposes on families, I felt honoured to have been given the opportunity to do something for this country and its people. I did my best to achieve the tasks the Government had set for the department, together with those I had set for myself. I do not think one can do more than that.

One final point I want to make in closing is that the officers of the department, despite the enormously increased pressures on them, responded very creditably to those pressures at all levels during my period in charge between 1988 and 1992.

Question: Were cables sent back by Missions overseas given sufficient weight?

This is always an issue. In any particular post you have a better grip on what is happening in that country. In Canberra, the minister, his officers and the

department are looking at the whole picture, not just one aspect of it. So I think it is an important part of the Head of Mission's role to keep pushing the issues of concern to his own area particularly when they are going to impinge on Australian foreign policy.

I am not in a position to comment on the 'culture of compliance', which many say has grown up in the public service. It certainly was not the case during the period I am talking about. The best thing people in the field can do is to continue to put their cases. I do not know whether that is done so much now because of modern technology. E-mails have tended to replace cables; the telephone can be used if you want to say something you may not want recorded.

I have done that myself. I remember that in Indonesia when Malcolm Fraser became the caretaker Prime Minister after Gough Whitlam's dismissal, he sent a message to President Suharto which he wanted me to give to him without any publicity. I arranged to do this at his house, but there was a phrase in the message that I had doubts about. This was to tell the president that Fraser wanted to have the same sort of close relationship that Gough Whitlam had developed and Australia would like to see a solution to the East Timor problem in terms of Indonesia's interests.

I sent a telegram back saying that President Suharto would probably ask what this meant. I said the Government's policy had always been that the use of force could not be condoned and I presumed that in a caretaker situation that would remain, but it was not in the message. There was silence from Canberra, so I telephoned John Menadue, who was the secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. After 24 hours he rang back and said the Prime Minister had said the words stand on their own merit and they were not to be interpreted by the Ambassador.

I saw Suharto and he asked what the phrase meant. I said, under our constitution, existing policy is not changed by a caretaker government and our policy is that the use of force cannot be condoned. I realised that I had exceeded my instructions and I did not have the guts to put it in a cable. E-mails did not exist then, so I telephoned the late Graham Feakes, who was then Head of the South East Asian Division, and told him what I had said and suggested he might endorse the file to this effect for the record.

Question: Do you consider that three years is an optimum period to be secretary? It would be considered an incredibly short period for the chief executive of a large bank.

The period depends on the individual. Health and age can be factors. You have someone like Sir Arthur Tange, who was secretary first of External Affairs and then of Defence for a total of about 21 years, with an interval of five years as High Commissioner in New Delhi.⁹ On the one hand, you have the value of

accumulated experience but, on the other, depending on the pressures, a danger of burnout. When Sir Keith Waller retired, I asked why he was going and he said, 'If I stay in this job another year it will kill me.' When I was secretary I became more aware of what he had meant.

Three years is too short. Perhaps four is right, although I would suggest not more than five. Things were different in the past. Senior public servants had somewhat more influence, the pace was slower and the problems less complex. You also need to think of opportunities for the younger up-and-coming officers.

Question: There is a general impression that in the last 10 years the Australian Public Service has become not a service of the public, but a ministerial service. Do you think there has been this change in Foreign Affairs?

The people here today who are in Foreign Affairs are probably able to give you a better answer. What happens, when a Government has been in office for a long time and with senior officers now on contract, is that there is a general reluctance to be the harbinger of bad news.

You have seen that in the 'Children Overboard affair'. You have seen it more recently with the Australian Wheat Board. In the case of the Wheat Board there are only two possible explanations for what happened. The idea of amalgamating Foreign Affairs and Trade was that the differences between trade policy and foreign policy would be solved under the one roof. Yet here you have a situation where the interests of a former government agency, recently privatised, is to protect the wheat market in Iraq. At the same time the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister were preparing to invade Iraq.

It seems extraordinary that the Prime Minister, the Minister for Trade and the Foreign Minister never saw any of the warning messages. One explanation is that they may not be telling the whole truth; the other is that there has been a measure of reluctance to ensure ministers saw the messages they should have seen. I would have thought the ministers' staffs would have taken the cables and said, 'you need to look at this'. When ministers say they get thousands of cables a day and they can't look at them all, that is true, but the role of ministerial staff is to make sure they see those they need to see.

You hear about the culture of compliance, that staff do not want to pass on bad news. It also enables plausible deniability by ministers. I do not know if this is true but, if it is true, it is unhealthy.

Question: There has always been tension between the departments because of the different focus and interests. Could you tell us what was the issue that caused you most trouble in that regard and did you think the inter-ministerial mechanisms that were in place in your day were sufficient to cope with this.

This sparks a thought on which I should have focused. During my period there really were no great tensions. We had a mechanism — I do not know whether it still exists — that we called the policy coordination meeting. That consisted of the secretary and the deputy secretaries meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Trade and their respective chiefs of staff. We would go through current issues. Normally someone from the Prime Minister's Office would sit in on that too. The whole purpose of it was to see that responses to issues were coordinated. Whilst there were some fairly robust arguments from time to time, it seemed to be a very effective mechanism in preventing the problems you are talking about.

Question: What were the highlights of your career, both as secretary and before you were secretary?

There are always highs and lows in any job. I suppose the highlights were the successful establishment of APEC in 1989 and, before that, representing Australia on the UN Security Council in 1985–86. On APEC, I was in Canberra at the time. I tended to accompany the Prime Minister on overseas visits, but when Mr Hawke went to Korea, I did not accompany him because Gareth Evans was away in Washington. That was when Mr Hawke launched the idea of an Asia Pacific Economic Consultative forum on the good grounds that the world was in danger of breaking up into three financial blocs — the Deutschmark bloc, a Dollar bloc and a Yen bloc — and Australia would be marginalised.

Canberra diplomatic missions were ringing me up and all the journalists were ringing me up and asking what this was all about: a huge new initiative out of the blue over lunch in Korea. Gareth Evans was also quite angry because he was in Washington and, because of the time difference, Jim Baker¹⁰ who was the US Secretary of State, knew about it while Evans did not.

Baker was angry, asking how could Australia take this major initiative without even consulting America, even excluding the United States from the list of participants? So I prepared a note, outlining what needed to be done to convince the ASEAN countries they were not going to be marginalised. We needed to consider the status of America, also that of China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. There were a number of difficult issues to be resolved.

Mr Hawke made the announcement in January 1989 and the first APEC Ministerial meeting took place in Canberra in November of that year, so we took

only 11 months to get a really major and, initially, somewhat criticised, initiative up and running, which I think has been very valuable to Australia. Every so often people say that it is moribund, but it is not. APEC has achieved much and it is still doing a lot of practical, useful things for the business community, such as harmonising customs regulations. So I suppose, if I were to identify a high point, it would APEC.

Another highlight of my career was helping to secure Australia's election in 1984 to the UN Security Council with a then record majority. I then had the honour to represent Australia on the Council for two very active and stimulating years. That was a demanding but essentially successful exercise. I feel we advanced Australia's standing at the United Nations.

It is strange but I feel I am becoming like a British colonial governor — an extinct species — because I was our last representative on the Security Council. We have not been on it since 1986 and it does not seem we can get elected in a secret ballot at present, unless we can secure an uncontested spot. This is not good for our standing in the United Nations and I hope this situation will change in the future.

ENDNOTES

¹ Sir Keith Waller was secretary of the Department of External Affairs from 1970-73.

² An authoritative account of the negotiations with Cambodia, including Michael Costello's role, is contained in Ken Berry's 'Cambodia - from red to blue: Australia's initiative for peace', *Studies in World Affairs*, Australian National University, Department of International Relations, 1997.

³ Richard J. (Dick) Smith was Deputy Secretary of DFAT from 1988-1991 and, later, Australian High Commissioner to the UK 1991-94.

⁴ Charles Blunt, Member for Richmond (1984-90), was Leader of the National Party from 1989-90. He lost his seat in the 1990 election.

⁵ Sir Robert Cotton was a former Liberal Party Minister for Industry and Commerce (1976-78) who served as Australian Ambassador to the United States from 1982-85.

⁶ Vincent Gair, Senator from Queensland, served as Ambassador to Ireland from 1972-74, after leading the Democratic Labor Party from 1964-73.

⁷ Sir Keith Shann became Ambassador to Tokyo (1974-77) before serving as Chairman of the then Public Service Board (1977-78).

⁸ Robert Ray was Defence Minister at the time and John Button was Leader of the Government in the Senate.

⁹ Sir Arthur Tange served as Secretary of the Department of External Affairs from January 1954 to April 1965 (11 years and two months) and as Secretary of the Department of Defence from March 1970 to August 1979 (nine years and seven months).

¹⁰ James Baker was Secretary of State in the George H. Bush Administration from 1989-92.