

# Public Address by the Australian Foreign Affairs Minister

*Address to the Annual Diplomatic Corps Christmas Party, Canberra,  
3 December 2007*

THE HON STEPHEN SMITH MP\*

Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Michael L'Estrange.  
Thank you for that introduction.

Your Excellencies.

My parliamentary colleagues, the Minister for Trade, the Hon Simon Crean, and the  
Parliamentary Secretary for Trade, the Hon John Murphy.

Chief of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshall Angus Houston.

Peter Shergold, and other Department Heads;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure to be here this evening with my Cabinet colleague, the Minister for Trade, Simon Crean. As you know, I was sworn in this morning and as a consequence, this is my first official function as Minister for Foreign Affairs. For over the last decade your host has been Alexander Downer — Australia's longest-serving Foreign Minister.

I had the chance to speak with Alexander this afternoon. He asked that I pass his thanks and best wishes to you and express his appreciation for the work of your missions over not just the past year but his period in office. I also take this opportunity, whatever our policy differences, to acknowledge his personal contribution in our national interest in the Foreign Affairs portfolio.

It is a great privilege for me to be here tonight as Australia's 35<sup>th</sup> Foreign Minister, the sixth from Western Australia and the sixth Labor Foreign Minister since the Second World War. I am very conscious of the role my Labor predecessors have played in helping to establish Australia's name and reputation in international affairs. I aspire to carrying on that Labor tradition of service.

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At the heart of the new Rudd Labor Government's foreign policy approach lies the responsibility to protect, defend and enhance Australia's national security, to maximise our economic opportunities and to advance Australia's national interest across the range of international issues.

There are three pillars that underpin the Labor Government's approach to foreign policy. First, our relationship with the United States. Australia's alliance with the United States was forged during the Second World War. John Curtin is a hero in my own State of Western Australia, not because he lived in Cottesloe, but because through his forging of the US alliance, he saved our nation at its moment of greatest peril.

That alliance has since been supported and developed by both major political parties in both of our countries since that time: Labor, Liberal, Democrat, Republican.

It remains a key pillar of our foreign policy approach. Our friendship with the United States is deep and valued by both sides. I look forward to pursuing that in a way which advances both our nations' mutual interests.

Second, our membership of the United Nations. The international legal obligations and responsibilities that brings are another fundamental pillar of our foreign policy approach. Australia, through Prime Minister Ben Chifley and Foreign Minister Herbert Vere Evatt, was instrumental in helping to found the United Nations. We took, for example, an active role in the first phase of United Nations activity, helping Indonesia achieve its independence. We will work cooperatively with and in the international community on the mutual challenges we face. We will play our part in finding solutions to what are sometimes difficult issues.

Third, our strong focus on Asia and the Pacific. We are in a unique position as a nation State, a country of 21 million people nestled in the Asia-Pacific region. Our diverse region is our home and home to many of our closest friends and neighbours.

We have important relationships with New Zealand and the Pacific Island countries.

We have significant relationships with the countries of South-East Asia. We are closely linked to the economic powerhouses of North-East Asia. Our relationships with our traditional post-World War Two trading partners, Japan and Korea, and our relationship with the rapidly developing powerhouse, China, are crucial to our future economic and social prosperity and our national security.

We will build on the strength of these relationships — both bilaterally and through our regional and multilateral diplomacy — in the period ahead. These three pillars are the framework through which we can achieve our foreign policy goals and enhance Australia's national interest.

In government, the great task of the Australian Labor Party is twofold; to uplift the lives of our citizens and to uplift the spirit of the nation — to give working Australians the opportunity to realise their dreams and give our nation the opportunity to realise its potential.

Australia is a great trading nation. Our social and economic prosperity has always depended on international trade. That remains the case even more so today. To uplift the lives of working Australian families, we must continue to look outwards.

Governments also represent their people and should reflect their national characteristics, values and virtues. For an Australian Labor Government, that means reflecting the quintessential Australian value of a 'fair go.' It means putting out a helping hand to those less fortunate and standing by them.

Just as we want a 'fair go' at home, we must deal with other nation States with civility, dignity and respect. That is a good basis for a government dealing with its nation's citizens. It is also the basis of being a good international citizen — civility, respect and dignity: at home and abroad.

I am unashamedly a proud Western Australian. Sometimes I look at the world from a Western Australian perspective. In the past this may have been seen as parochial. Not today. And not for the future. The great outlying State of Western Australia underlines the importance of international trade to our nation's economic and social prosperity. Western Australia looks naturally to the Indian Ocean. When the sun sets in the West, it sets on the Indian Ocean, not the Pacific.

I believe it is essential to ensure that Australia looks to our important neighbours and partners to our west. India's remarkable development only encourages me to bring us closer together. I look forward to working with the Indian Government and the Indian people to add depth and vigour to our relationship.

Ladies and Gentlemen it is a great pleasure to be here with you tonight. I hope that this is just the first of many meetings. I look forward to working with you, and through you, your governments, in the period ahead. Whatever issues, difficult or otherwise we confront, the Labor Government, on behalf of Australia, will deal with them and your governments in a cooperative and productive way.

Thank you.