

Speech to the Lowy Institute by Bob Carr

27 July 2012

MICHAEL WESLEY: Ladies and gentleman, welcome to the Lowy Institute to this very special lecture today. My name's Michael Wesley, the executive director of the Lowy Institute.

Ladies and gentlemen, Australia must by nature be active on the international stage. We Australians comprise less than one-third of one per cent of the world's population and we occupy a continent comprising just over five per cent of the earth's land surface. We share a land border with no other country and we are bounded on three sides by vast oceans. To our north, of course, is the earth's largest continent, Asia.

Despite its isolation Australia has been very involved in international affairs ever since it became an independent country. We have been involved in every major international conflict since 1901. Australia was a founding member of the League of Nations, the United Nations, the World Bank and the IMF. Australians have commanded the only two peace keeping missions in the Asia-Pacific region in Cambodia and East Timor. Our trade with the world sits at around 38 per cent of the size of economy. In terms of financial integration with the rest of the world the flow of investment out of Australia grew by 95 times between its 1990 levels by 2006. On any given day, over one million Australians are living or travelling overseas.

Now, given the inherent internationalism of who we are, it is no surprise that Australia has had a long and proud history of foreign policy activity. Our diplomatic history in multilateral institutions as peace brokers, as international civil servants, as a source of ideas and initiatives is one that few other countries in the world can match.

But as Lowy Institute research has shown, since 2009, our diplomats have faced stagnating budgets, and our network of 95 overseas missions falls a long way short of the OECD average of 133.

To play the sort of activist, creative international role we can expect, we should be investing in our diplomacy, including in its new frontiers such as e-diplomacy.

Ladies and gentlemen, today it's a great pleasure to welcome back to the Lowy Institute Australia's top diplomat, our Foreign Minister Bob Carr.

He's a very old friend of the Lowy Institute. He was Premier of New South Wales at our founding in 2003, and has been a great supporter of ours ever since. He is of course New South Wales' longest-serving – longest continuous serving Premier, gaining that office in March of 1995, after leading the New South Wales Opposition since t... since 1988.

After some seven years as a private citizen, after retiring from the New South Wales Parliament, he was elected to the Australian Senate on 13 March 2012, and soon after appointed Australian Foreign Minister.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Senator Bob Carr back to the Lowy Institute.

[Applause]

BOB CARR: Thank you Michael, thank you for that welcome. I've got fond memories, discussing with Frank Lowy his conception of a think tank, of the Lowy Institute. And I never dreamt in those conversations – I couldn't have dreamt when we had those conversations about governance and aspirations that it would have developed – would ever have developed into being so formidable an institution.

I value the writings of the Lowy Institute. Michael your think piece... challenging think piece today, or the splendid paper by Rory Medcalf and Raoul Heinrichs which I actually took with me to Washington

and recommended to people in the State Department. Its bottom-line recommendation for confidence building measures – military cooperation – in the seas of East Asia, I thought a very serious and timely contribution to our debate.

I feel intimidated coming to a gathering like this. I think of the story Henry Kissinger's fond of telling – he says he was standing at a reception and a woman came up to him and said, I hear you're a fascinating man. Fascinate me.

[Laughter]

George Brown was Foreign Secretary to Harold Wilson and he was very fond of imbibing, and ended up I think being retired as Foreign Minister because he was too fond of alcohol. He – it's said that he was at a reception in Prague on one occasion, probably in the castle, and clutching his drink he swayed across the room to what he thought was a statuesque, very attractive woman, wearing scarlet.

And in response to his offer, she said no, I will not dance with you Foreign Secretary.

First, I'm not a woman. Second, that is not a waltz they're playing, it is my country's national anthem. And third, I am the Cardinal Archbishop of Prague.

Another Foreign Secretary, Lord Melbourne, when asked to explain the Schleswig-Holstein dispute said he couldn't, he said there are only three people who ever understood it. One of them died, one of them had been committed to a madhouse, and the third was him, and he'd forgotten.

I love the cynicism of 19th century politics, especially that captured by Prince Felix of Schwarzenberg – the Russians, fulfilling their role as the gendarme of Europe, had intervened in Austro-Hungary to help the Viennese put down a revolt of the Hungarian nobles, and when asked if he thought Austria would be grateful to the Russians, Prince Felix said we shall astonish the world by our ingratitude.

I'm honoured to be Foreign Minister. I recently met the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, and Prince Saud has held that honour for 37 years. Naturally I aim to exceed his term. I'm honoured to represent an Australia committed to democracy, committed to human rights, and upholding the rule of law, committed to free trade, and with good credentials in free trade, committed to effective development aid – and it's something I've only appreciated since I've held this job. And I want to share some examples with you – committed to encouraging an overlap of cultures, warning off a clash of civilisations, and a nation committed to preserving the world's built heritage and natural environment, including saving the world's oceans – which gives us a lot to talk about with small island states and other interlocutors.

And a meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group in Marlborough House in April – I was just enjoying the sunshine in the garden as the meeting was convening – and Foreign Minister of Tanzania came up and introduced himself to me, Bernard Membe. And quick as a flash he said your country means a lot to us, he said, you built a bridge for us and it's helped farmers get from their village to the fields and increased their productivity enormously.

And it's done one other thing as well.

It stopped kids being taken by crocodiles.

And I texted a message to Julia immediately, and I said – I know we're discussing the aid budget in the months ahead. But I want to give you this example. The Foreign Minister of an important African country sees Australia in terms of not just the quantum of our aid, but the quality of the assistance – tailored to their needs.

Saving lives, but boosting farm productivity.

And that's a theme that's been woven through aid contributions I've been honoured to inspect, and familiarise myself with as Foreign Minister.

By the way, I've got a long speech here Michael, and I'm sure you don't mind if I just give it to you to put on the web, or put in the wastepaper basket.

But I will speak around it and bounce off it. I'm sure you'll be happy with that.

And last month in Myanmar – just to elaborate on this a little further – in a country where barely 50 per cent of the population will complete primary school, I went out into the delta to expect very effective Australian aid. It was Australian aid equipping schools and training their teachers, and it was very moving to see these kids in their school uniforms, their hair plastered down by proud parents, and their parents gathered there, a couple of them wearing t-shirts that identified them as supporters of the National League for Democracy.

And there's one father – and I said, pointing to his t-shirt, I said, I met her yesterday, Aung San Suu Kyi, and he came... and he responded, and it was interpreted for me, he responded by saying yes, I saw it on TV.

And there was a little measure, the transformation of Myanmar, that a Foreign Minister from Australia visiting the iconic Opposition Leader was getting reported on their TV.

That little exchange with the parent who turned up to see me visit the school, the school his youngster went to, gave me one practical measure of the transformation in the country – the activities of the Opposition Leader, her visitors are being reported on TV.

And someone who voted for her – and wears her t-shirt – heard about it. But there was a school, and there were youngsters.

And they will finish primary school. And as a result of that, they'll be able to understand health messages, they'll be able to read literature about improving farm productivity, they'll be able to understand messages on family planning, they'll be able to be part of a democracy. But only 50 per cent of them finish primary school at the present time.

Very shortly we'll be the largest aid contributor to Myanmar, the largest. And the bulk of our aid will be in the form of assistance for education, seeing that those youngsters who are able to complete primary school and move on through secondary school... I was very proud of Australia, and proud of the little kangaroos on the corners of the blackboards in those classrooms.

In mid June in Istanbul I was honoured to lend our name to the fourth ministerial meeting of the Non Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative. Now I know when I talk about nuclear disarmament there are people here who are going to think about the story of a man who was told to wait on the walls of a Jewish city in the holy land and wait for the coming of the millennium. When asked what he thought of his job he said from some standpoints it could be considered boring, but consider, the work is steady.

[Laughter]

The work is steady on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Australia sponsored this initiative with Japan, and its goal is that noble one of a world without nuclear weapons. A noble aspiration being kept alive as the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty contemplated it would be kept alive.

In June I visited Algeria and Morocco and spoke to ministers about their plans to unlock their mineral and energy resources. Australia's now part of a mining boom in Africa with, from memory, 70 million – 70 billion in approved or about to be approved mining projects. And all of a sudden with the mining boom from Australia spilling over to Africa we've got a new slab of substance in our exchanges with African countries. We can talk to them, for example, about how our development approval process, our

environmental assessment and planning process applied to the mining sector may be relevant to them. They've got to have a benchmark from somewhere, ours is one that's been proven to work.

All of a sudden we've got a subject of substantive conversation with countries in Africa.

And let me come to another example that will point us in the direction I'm taking here, and it's not random. In July I was honoured to speak on behalf of Australia at a conference in the General Assembly advocating a treaty to rein in the trade in small arms. On 8 July at the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan the largest coalition of nations in history, if you think about it, as hard as the task is of securing a sovereign Afghanistan, I was able to speak after the US and Germany because Australia is the largest non-NATO contributor of security to Afghanistan and the sixth biggest aid donor in the rebuilding of the country.

Today I'm not speaking to you about the American alliance – I did that in Washington in April – nor about relations with China – I've addressed that in the context of my visit to Beijing in May – and I don't intend to dwell on our other many important bilateral relationships. So don't be alarmed if your country which you de jour is not addressed by me today.

What I want to talk about is Australia and multilateralism. And I do so, and Michael's frowning at me already, knowing that there are considered criticisms of multilateralism as a theme in foreign policy. Michael in his much lauded book *There goes the neighbourhood* – and I was on the committee of one of the bodies that awarded it the prize, the John Button prize – described multilateralism as, quote, 'the band aid of Australian diplomacy' unquote, and said 'once an institutional solution is imposed, an institutional solution, it cauterises the need to think about the problem any more. By focusing on the familiar comfortable mechanisms of multilateralism, policymakers can avoid the need to think really hard about the problem itself. Unquote.

And I acknowledge – I acknowledge the force of that criticism and I want to – I want to weigh it in the things I say in favour of multilateralism. And [Indistinct] consultations with all my predecessors as Foreign Minister I'll be seeing Alexander Downer for our second consultation on Monday. But he was very dismissive of multilateralism in an address to the National Press Club in June 2003, as it happens, a couple of months after the invasion of Iraq. He said quote 'Increasingly multilateralism is a synonym for an ineffective and unfocused policy involving internationalism of the lowest common denominator' unquote.

Well I've got a different view, I've reached – I've been strengthened in a different view since I've been in this job, and I'm just drawn to observations made by Hillary Clinton. And I'll just quote her. She spoke about the aims of US foreign policy in clearly multilateral terms, and I find it pretty persuasive. Now this quote comes from *The New Statesman* I believe. Strange source. Didn't know people were still reading *The New Statesman*. But she said, quote 'To strengthen and mature effective regional and global institutions that can mobilise common action and settle disputes peacefully. To build' – she's talking about the aims of US foreign policy – To strengthen and mature effective regional and global institutions that can mobilise common action and settle disputes peacefully. To build consensus around rules and norms around rules and norms to help manage relations between peoples, markets and nations, and to establish arrangements that provide stability and build trust'.

I would call that creative multilateralism, and it's a very good summation of the approach I'm attracted to while acknowledging the robust criticisms that are being made by people like Alexander Downer and Michael [Indistinct]

The point is does it serve Australia's interests? Can our interests be served by a multilateral approach? I'll give you an example of bilateralism that I've been able to get underway. I spoke earlier about Myanmar and the challenge of this wretchedly poor country subject to all the defamations and degradation that comes with years of dictatorship. If we think about Syria, we think about Libya, decades of dictatorship, and indeed the nations of Eastern Europe and Russia itself, decades of dictatorship degrade and deform and deprive. Think of Libya without any legal system after decades of rule by Gaddafi. So Myanmar faces comparable problems.

When I was in Indonesia last week and met with Foreign Minister Mr Natalegawa we committed Indonesia and Australia working together to assist Myanmar strengthen its democracy and built its capacity in governance and human rights.

Now just think of the qualifications of Indonesia in this respect. It's carried out successful reforms. Indonesia has managed its position from military [Indistinct] to a return by the Indonesian military to the barracks. And as chair of ASEAN in the East Asian summit Indonesia was able to speak with authority on Myanmar on the process of democratisation.

Indonesia and Australia will now work together to assist Myanmar's broader development. We have the prospect for example of areas where Indonesia and Australia have worked together in an advanced way, for example on disaster preparedness and response, and translating that experience, those templates to Myanmar. If you think about it both Indonesia and Myanmar are subject to serious natural disasters.

I'll give you another example of what I think is inspirational – this is an example of inspirational multilateralism. In the next few hours we'll have a decision out of the General Assembly, a conference of the General Assembly on whether a small arms treaty in a viable form can be agreed to.

Let me share with you this; there are an estimated 2000 people a day killed by illegal small arms. When I turned up at the meeting at the UN to talk about this – and Australia I'm proud to say is one of seven original sponsors of the treaty concept – a Kenyan official, not the minister, but an official of his Government and he said on the weekend in two churches in northern Kenya militia from Somalia armed with Kalashnikovs and grenades crossed the border and killed 10 of the congregation, and another 50 were wounded.

This was reported in the world media, but it happens on a daily basis somewhere in Africa or Asia or in the Caribbean. The illegal trade in small arms is such it's estimated there are 800 million illegal small arms in the world, not just AK47s but grenades and rocket propelled mechanisms to send them hurtling at a target. The world is awash with this. As Amnesty International said there is more control of some foodstuffs than there is of small arms, of light weapons.

We're trying to correct that. And the other sponsors with us include Kenya, and its first hand experience of the havoc wrought by this, and Costa Rica speaking for the peoples of the Caribbean who have been subjected to this in civil wars and insurgencies. We're talking about small arms that are sold knowing the likelihood of them reaching terrorists and criminal gangs. We're talking about the sale of weapons that end up in the hands of boy soldiers in Western Africa, the Kalashnikovs almost as big as them, and each of these being able to claim 60 lives with a few – a little pressing of the triggers. And we, Australia, in that multilateral forum, are trying to bring some order so that nation states will be obliged to take account of the arms that are sold from their jurisdictions. And they'll be under an obligation not to allow the sales where they're going, for example, to civil wars, where there's a danger of them ending up in the hands of criminal networks or terrorists. The first controls, the first serious controls we would have.

David Miliband, the former UK Foreign Secretary – stark contrast to the George Brown I described in my opening anecdote – has phoned me to say how excited he is by the prospect that we're getting there after years of advocacy.

This is something that would be translated into safer living conditions in African villages, throughout the Caribbean, think of Haiti and in various situations in Asia. And it can only be done multilaterally. It's not going to be done by a nation acting on its own. It's not going to be done by a coalition of the willing. It can only be done in multilateral fora.

In the – let me give you another example of how we can grope our way towards a better world through multilateral approaches: in the 1980s I – when the Cold War still prevailed, I'd kick around with a friend of mine, John Wheeldon, former Senator, former foreign editor of The Australian, the idea of a community of democracies.

Given that so many countries in that era were locked up in dictatorship, some people were beginning to ask, why can't we have a representative – an international organisation representative of the world's democracies? Of countries that can say proudly, our governments are determined by free ballot. It would have been a standing affront to the dictatorships of the time.

And the idea got a bit of air space, but it was overtaken by what happened, beginning in 1989; the collapse of dictatorships in Europe at that historic moment. It must rank – the early '90s; '89 to the early '90s the collapse in dictatorships ranks as one of the most thrilling things any of us here have witnessed in world affairs.

But just think of that old idea, a community of democracies. We are working on a charter for the United Nations – for the Commonwealth of Nations. The Commonwealth of Nations has never had a charter.

It attempts to capture the values that all nations hold in common and the ministerial group charges it – which I had the honour of chairing a couple of months ago – has now got a draft that will go to all the ministers of the Commonwealth of Nations when they meet in New York off the back of the General Assembly in September.

That charter defines the Commonwealth as a community of democracies; it defines it as a community committed to human rights; as a community of nations opposed to all forms of discrimination, whether rooted in gender, race, colour, creed, political belief or other grounds, for the first time.

In other words, this old Commonwealth of Nations, regarded by many here, I'm sure, as a rather fusty antique, is defining itself as a community of democracies committed to the rule of law and human rights.

In that context, of course, it has taken on Fiji and it's now actively engaged on the offence to good governance that occurred in the Maldives. But just think about it, the Commonwealth of Nations explicitly becoming – redefining itself as a community of democracies.

I find this very exciting and at the last meeting – that last meeting I referred to, the one I was honoured the chair – something else emerged as well. And it was in discussing what the Commonwealth was about, I saw the Seychelles and – Seychelles sitting there with Vanuatu – with the – sorry, with the Solomon Islands.

Both Foreign Ministers made the point in our discussion that the Commonwealth is the one forum that takes small island states seriously. If you think about it, that's true; 20 of the 54-55 Commonwealth nations are small island states.

And given the diminutive size of their populations, their diminutive populations, where do they get a forum; where can they walk into a forum where they've got equality with every other participant, including India – a nation as large as India, the second largest population in the world?

And that's the interest of the Commonwealth. And there's Rwanda that has put its hand up to join the Commonwealth, now in the process of redefining itself as a community of democracies committed to good governance and the rule of law – that old notion kicked around in the '80s.

And I find that very interesting and I think it presents a lot of opportunities for us. But again it highlights that multilateralism presents us with opportunities.

Let me talk about the challenges of the Pacific Island some more. I was in Fiji, a member of the Ministerial Contact Group, five foreign ministers drawn from the Pacific Islands Forum. And our role in Fiji was to test the sincerity of the acting government on the transition to democratic norms and have a constitutional consultation.

We set a goal of 2014 for a fair and free election. We spoke to representatives of the government, including to one minister who said, look, we've got to get it right this time; we've got to become a robust or a resilient democracy. In other words, not a regime subject to a culture of coup, coups, a coup upon coup.

And we were able to talk to – we insisted on talking to opposition figures as well, members of non-government organisations, members of previous governments. To keep discussions going, we will do – Australia will do what middle powers do, what you do when you're working in a multilateral forum.

On Monday in Sydney we – I and our New Zealand – and my New Zealand counterpart will sit down with the Foreign Minister of Fiji and we will discuss progress for its engagement and its engagement to test the completeness of their transitional commitment here.

It's very important that we have a community of Pacific Islands Forum that explicitly supports the rule of law and democracy and works with a government that has seen a retreat from those standards to enable it to retain those standards.

In Nauru and Solomons and Fiji you've seen multilateral approaches to assist members of the Pacific Islands Forum struggling with difficulties. In the paper that I will give you, Michael, I deal with the history of Australia's involvement in peace keeping United Nations.

I'm in two minds about Herbert Vere Evatt. But in working at the UN, he did capture as no other participant did – I'm talking about the San Francisco conference of 1945 and later meetings of the General Assembly – the aspirations of small or middle powers. I think the term middle power was first used around this time.

And Evatt said in 1946, quote: No power is so great that it can ignore the will of the peoples of the world expressed through the Assembly. And no power is so small that it cannot contribute to the making of world opinion through the Assembly.

In 1947 Australia was the first UN member state to formally request the Council to exercise its responsibility to uphold international peace and security. And the documents which are published in the volumes that give an account of Australian foreign policy, discuss the discussions in Canberra about what we could do.

It was a big ask for Australia to break with the Brits and to break with the United States, but to break with them in the cause of an independent Indonesia. And so we did.

In July 1947, when the Dutch attacked Indonesian republican enforcers in Java and Sumatra, the Indonesian Government asked Australia – the Indonesian Republican Government asked Australia to help and to raise the issue at the UN.

We agonised but by the end of the month Australia did refer the conflict in Indonesia to the UN Security Council as a breach of international peace and security. And on 1 August the Security Council ordered a ceasefire.

Indonesia appointed Australia to represent its interests at the UN Good Offices Committee which negotiated the Truce Agreement of 1948; that crucial step in Indonesia achieving full independence.

And Australia's assertive diplomacy is remembered by Indonesia today – an early demonstration of Australian concern for our region and for another; and for doing that through the opportunities afforded by an international forum.

In the paper I'll leave with you I talk about peacekeeping and the experiences of Cambodia and East Timor and Bougainville and the Solomons. But I think it's significant that Ban Ki-moon says the economy of Timor-Leste has recovered remarkably since the 2006 crisis; a near double-digit growth rate has been achieved over the last four years.

And in UN circles, our participation there is seen as something of a model for peacekeeping. And Ban Ki-moon has praised Australian peacekeeping in other regions.

This week I was pleased to host the Director-General of the Organisation of the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons – the body that leads practical efforts against chemical weapons. And I reflected that in 1992 it was Australia that had produced the draft which was the basis of the Chemical Weapons Convention and how important this was, I suppose, is confirmed by the news out of Syria.

Syria not only has the chemicals, which mixed, can provide weaponry but has already mixed them has gone the step further of installing them in shells ready to be fired as artillery and perhaps in bombs ready to be dropped from the air. Syria are, I think, one of half a dozen or eight nations that held back from the treaty and its commitment.

Twenty-five years ago Bill Hayden in Australia, led the establishment of the Australia Group with more than 40 members voluntarily placing export controls on materials which could be used to make chemical and biological weapons. And that was the first step that drove this process forward.

Nuclear disarmament, which I referred to at the outset, is another area where we make a contribution to the noble task of ridding the world of nuclear weapons.

The International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, chaired by Gareth Evans and another former foreign minister, Yoriko Kawaguchi, reinvigorated thinking on nuclear disarmament in the lead-up to the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

If you consider that this is giddy in its light-headedness, just consider as well that hard-headed realists, George Schultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn in a joint statement in January 2010 said – and I quote: The four of us have come together to support a global effort to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons to prevent the spread into potentially dangerous hands and ultimately to end them – to end nuclear weapons as a threat to the world.

Even those hard heads can see that this is a goal that belongs on the agenda. And as distant as it might look, what was laid out in that treaty of 1968 is worth returning to, that the nuclear weapons states themselves should give up their arms.

And they said in that statement – I'll quote this additional paragraph, quote: The accelerating spread of nuclear weapons, nuclear know-how and nuclear material has brought us to a tipping point and we face a very real possibility that the deadliest weapons ever invented could fall into dangerous hands – unquote.

In Istanbul at the conference we had with the Japanese and the Turks and other partners, we recommitted to the goal of keeping this process alive, of keeping it on the agenda. Kevin Rudd said, when he addressed the African Union, quote: We're not America. We're not Europe. We are Australian and we're located in the Indian Ocean and we look to Africa – unquote.

I've used that when I've spoken at the United Nations to some of our friends from African states. I've used it with a slight emendation when I've spoken to the fifteen members of CARICOM, the nations of the Caribbean or placed in the India Ocean with the Pacific. But they've got a terrific dialogue with Australia.

I've had two meetings with them. You'd think that the Caribbean couldn't be more distant in its concern from Australia, not so. We're both interested in the blue economy, in the health of the world's oceans. They've got a lively interest each and every one of them in climate change and what it means for small island states in particular.

They're talking about the relevance and the flexibility of Australian aid programs and again, they like the exchanges with us because we are not America and we are not Europe. They see us as a creative middle power the way, I'm sure, everyone here would want to see Australia.

That just brings me to a cautionary point I make which moves a bit beyond the theme of multilateralism but is still anchored in it. The danger of us being attracted to speak about an anglosphere, I think there's a great danger in this.

And no-one is fonder of the common heritage that's shared by – the heritage that is shared by us, by New Zealand, by Canada, by the United States, the United Kingdom; no-one's fonder of it. And – but I just caution Australians that to nod too vigorously in the direction of that concept would be misinterpreted immediately in the nations to our north and with our new interlocutors in Africa and I think in the Caribbean and elsewhere.

Remember that theme, we're not Europe, we're not America, we're Australia with our own approaches. Remember the danger we got into in the first year of the Howard Government when Pauline Hanson was running wild and when we tripped up in some key elements in our relationship with China.

John Howard very quickly corrected them, sitting down with [indistinct] and saying let's start with a clean slate. But the misunderstandings caused by those two factors, unrelated but linked in the region to our north, took a lot of correction.

With our heritage, that heritage of white Australia and membership of the British Empire – just remember that Australia didn't leave the British Empire, we're too fond of it; the British Empire left us – it's too risky for us even to glance in the direction of talk of an anglosphere. It revives all those – what would be considered, all those unfortunate recollections and associations.

I acknowledge English is widely used, for example – I understand it's the language of ASEAN diplomacy but it's precisely because of the attraction, the familiarity, that comfort zone it provides that we should not slide into thinking in these terms.

And I acknowledge that we've got a good familiarity with foreign ministers of all of those countries because of the shared heritage and similarities.

But that just means we've got to work harder at the dialogues in Africa, in the worlds of Arab civilizations, in Asia of course and in South America where, as in Africa, a mining boom is giving Australia more substance. A mining boom involving Australian companies is giving Australia more substance in our dialogues with those nations.

We've got the opportunity to stretch the reputation and the self-image and the standing of Australia by engaging with Africa, the Middle East and South America as well as those parts of Asia where English isn't the unifying language.

And if we even hint to the world that our self-definition is tied up in being part of the anglosphere, we give the impression we're fundamentally more comfortable with that sphere, if it exists – if anyone wants to belong to it or define themselves as being in it – than we are with nations with a different history and different cultures.

We'll confirm the most out-dated stereotypes about Australia. Stereotypes that a lot of people, a lot of Australian leaders, a lot of Australian spokespeople have worked hard at living down and stereotypes that are supported by the nature of the Australian population, which is more culturally diverse than the population of any other country you can think about.

A higher percentage of Australians born overseas than Americans born overseas and talk of an anglosphere is antique and presents us as something different from what we are.

If we limit ourselves, we deal ourselves out. If we allow an impression, even for a flickering moment, that Australia prefers the anglosphere, that Australia's only comfortable on the anglosphere we sell ourselves short.

That was one of the reasons I was so keen to see Australia take a more forward-leaning position on lifting, not just suspending our sanctions against Myanmar. And it was a reason I decided, when I was talking to Australian businesspeople in Singapore, to make my own verbal contribution to the Henry report.

In Singapore one Australian businessman said to me, we see Singapore as an extension of the Australian economy and Singaporeans see us as an extension of their economy. And there you had, I thought, a model of Australia's economic integration with Asia. That is a good starting point for the considerations that will flow from the whitepaper on the Asian century.

I thank you very much, Michael, for this forum. Thank you for allowing me to depart from the paper and talk more discursively. Naturally, I would be delighted and honoured to answer any questions, thank you.

MICHAEL WESLEY: Well, Minister, many thanks from a most entertaining tour around our international relations, particularly multilateralism which is very close to my own heart, as we mentioned.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have about 20 minutes for questions. Can I please say the Minister earlier this week suggested that there be a ban on press gallery reporting of leadership speculation and I think I'll extend that to the Lowy Institute. Nothing about domestic politics, let's keep the questions about Australia's foreign affairs.

And we'll start with this gentleman just here.

QUESTION: [Inaudible question].

BOB CARR: I'll just say you've never had a foreign minister more interested in Russia than I, and at a dinner in Adelaide last night I sat next to a member of the Tatarstan diaspora and spoke about the appeal of me revisiting Kazan. Which is of course – I say this for the audience, not for you – part of Russia. To Russia what Scotland is to the United Kingdom. As Napoleon said, scratch a Russian and you'll find a Tatar.

I'm fascinated by Russia and I hope to be there. I'll have an opportunity if foreign ministers of the – get together at Vladivostok before the summit later this year to do this. And I look forward to an engagement. I think the west needs to reflect on how the expansion of NATO following the collapse of communism was viewed in Moscow, and I think in the spirit of re-evaluation the west can reflect on that.

I think there is a challenge to see things as Russia sees them. Russia has – we've got to consider this – a 3000 kilometre border with China. Russia faces demographic challenges. Russia has difficulty in lifting the population of Siberia, and would be challenged by any concept of Asian workers, Chinese for example, being used there as guest workers. Russia for centuries has thought of itself as an empire and now contemplates an independent Ukraine, for example.

Russia has a large Islamic population, I think 10 per cent of the country's population, and borders Islamic republics. They must take seriously what happens in the future of Afghanistan.

I think the western world is very often unable to imagine the perspectives of countries beyond its immediate community, and Russia presents an example of such a failure of imagination. I think opportunities for more sensitive engagement with Russia are there for all of us.

QUESTION: Thank you Minister Carr for those comments. I was very interested in your comments regarding effective foreign development aid, which I think is one of our most important outreach activities in Australia. But I'd be interested in your thoughts about multilateralism in the context of our foreign development aid, which is historically a bilateral [indistinct].

BOB CARR: Well a lot of Australian aid is actually dispensed through multilateral organisations. I had a meeting this week with the Fred Hollows Foundation, and their work in Cambodia is funded in part by our aid.

And when I was there in March I inspected an eye hospital near Siem Reap, and any Australians would be bursting with pride that our money had funded the training of the local medics. And there were peasants by every appearance, dirt poor, queuing to have the operation. They were being operated on by medical personnel trained by Australians. There they were with the bandages on their eyes, waiting for the moment when they could be taken off. And there they were seeing the world for the first time in decades.

That's Australian money. As a result of that aid, dispensed through an NGO, avoidable blindness will be abolished in Cambodia in 2020. And Australia's contribution to that is, I'm told, very significant.

Our aid is delivered not just through NGOs but through UN organisations. But it has been subject to an effectiveness review. The evidence of fraud is very, very low. Obviously that gets tested in a jurisdiction like Afghanistan, if I can call circumstances in Afghanistan – if I can baptise them a jurisdiction. But we're conscious of the need to see that fraud is abolished as a component in how other organisations, multilateral organisations, spend Australian aid money.

QUESTION: [Indistinct] news about the Small Arms Convention and Australia's contribution to it. I saw this on the net this morning and already predictably the criticisms of it started in the United States media, as you would know. This is what I suppose they should call on television a courageous decision on Australia's part and one that is going to get up the noses of the American allies.

Can we expect that you're going to be similarly courageous with other things that we voted [Indistinct] Palestinian territories, for instance, [Indistinct] A few other things [indistinct] in the last few years, but from very small minorities in the United Nations with the United States?

BOB CARR: We judge things on their merit, not on whether they antagonise or please America or not. I have lobbied America on the Small Arms Treaty and I was told that any influence – I was assured that any influence the National Rifle Association of happy repute would try to exert on this would be resisted. I pointed out that if this treaty is in place, many of the objectives and goals that the US has would be more easily met, for example in combating terrorism.

I'm not up to date on what's happened in the last few hours. We are that close to a resolution of this one way or the other. We've changed our position on seven or eight UN resolutions on the Middle East under this government. I'm not sure about the Cuban embargo, I'm not – I'd need to take advice on that.

MICHAEL WESLEY: Okay, the gentleman just here on this side.

QUESTION: [Inaudible question].

BOB CARR: Could I take the first part of the question on notice and get to you through the Institute a considered response? I'll do that with East Timor oil and gas as well.

But Indonesia right now is very proud that it's been able to give a billion dollars to the IMF. And when I read that, sitting at one of these fora in Phnom Penh, I sent a note to their foreign minister congratulating him on it and congratulating him on his declining to gloat over it.

MICHAEL WESLEY: The gentleman just right down the front, sorry Anita, the very front row.

QUESTION: A question to you. When you were Premier of this state you were instrumental in having this state become the first state in Australia to recognise the events of 1915, which were the Armenian Genocide. In the motion that you were instrumental in passing they called on the Federal Government to recognise the events of 1915. As Foreign Minister, what is your current position of the event that occurred?

BOB CARR: Yeah. As a government, we don't take a stand on this historic dispute.

QUESTION: Senator, thank you very much. I'm not Australian so I'm very interested in one question. You said ...

BOB CARR: [Speaks German].

QUESTION: You said you are not British, you're not American, you're not Australian. How would you define the specific identity...

BOB CARR: I didn't say we're not Australian.

[Laughter]

MICHAEL WESLEY: Sorry. Could you just repeat the question?

QUESTION: How would you define [indistinct] identity of Australia?

BOB CARR: Well, I'd say we are a funny, friendly, benign country where the rule of law applies. We're a country that threatens no one because we come to a halt for a horse race and our most successful comedian is a mad-cap female impersonator.

[Laughter]

BOB CARR: We – I've argued that there are three elements in Australian patriotism. The first is the response to the land itself. It's unique, it's beautiful.

The second was the people. We are literally a motley people. A motley people in the objective sense. We're drawn from all over the place. We're utterly diverse. I mean that in the most generous way, meaning an immigrant people from diverse sources, from almost every country in the world now reconciling ourselves to an ancient indigenous people who held the continent for longer than even the oldest among them was able to remember. It's a country that has the weirdest animals, none of them predators and a country where the birds laugh at us.

[Laughter]

QUESTION: [Inaudible question].

BOB CARR: Well, you need to reflect on the decision of Rwanda to join the Commonwealth. Why did they do it? What advantage did they see in it? They saw it – obviously saw it as relevant; obviously saw it as giving them another forum and an opportunity where they'd have equality with the other member states and an opportunity to discuss things in common.

The decision by Rwanda is therefore very interesting. And I think the decision to discipline members of the Commonwealth who junk democracy says a great deal as well.

QUESTION: Foreign Minister, thank you for your [indistinct] Your wonderful optimistic interpretation on where you stand in the world. Tell me about [indistinct] Is there a possibility that we must modify our views, join other like-minded countries [indistinct]?

BOB CARR: Well, the present president gave his – President Obama expressed – his first expressed political view was on nuclear non-proliferation. And I – in the paper which will shortly be posted – you'll see me address the agenda of non-proliferation and talk about the implementation of all aspects of that 1968 treaty which places a burden on the nuclear weapons states of 1968. And Australia's committed to keeping that agenda alive.

MICHAEL WESLEY: [Indistinct] Right next to him.

QUESTION: Senator Carr, I'll preface my question by saying it's very good to see someone who's obviously enjoying the job.

[Laughter]

QUESTION: I'm going to define my [indistinct] by saying you've said a number of interesting things about Indonesia. One of the things that really has shocked me in the last few months is the way the alternative government has started talking about Indonesia as if it's a small country where [Indistinct] send the boats back and so on. [Indistinct]. This is an important country with a couple of hundred million people I think, the leading country in South-East Asia. And I wonder if you people haven't let them off a bit on this stance. Particularly given the issue which comes out of us – background of our racial past [indistinct].

Next year I think is the fortieth anniversary of the abolition of the White Australia Policy. While many of us may have forgotten it, I don't think people in our region probably have or are more likely to remember the [indistinct]. So I wonder if you can comment on that. And I'll make one final comment.

Unless you were looking for an effortless way to achieve the feeling of intellectual superiority, I would suggest talking to Alexander Downer would be a complete waste of time.

[Laughter]

BOB CARR: Look I'm very conscious of Australia's national interest. I've been painstaking in talking to former Coalition foreign ministers, former Labor foreign ministers, former Coalition prime ministers.

And Malcolm Fraser, who's not missed an opportunity to make call after call to press on me his view of international relations.

But if you've got an opportunity to argue the case for Australia, it is nice to do it with a background feel for previous controversies and previous discussions and previous policy options. So I'm going to continue to keep in touch with people from the Coalition who have the responsibility of dealing with similar problems, similar challenges.

With Indonesia, look I just share with you this. I was there speaking to their Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Policy and Defence. Every member of the committee had studied in Australia and one member of the committee had grand-children studying here. Another member of the committee had a son or a daughter married and living here, and that is repeated everywhere you go in Indonesia. Their Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa did his PhD on nuclear weapons, as it happens, at the ANU.

In Adelaide last night, I [Indistinct] him with a story that he ventured to Adelaide to see the Grand Prix and it was the one year that the Grand Prix had been washed out. And after 10 minutes, the race was called off and he had to get on the bus and go back to Canberra. He said he saw a lot of Australia.

[Laughter]

BOB CARR: We – our aid program is very – I mean I kept crossing bridges that have been built by Australians outside Yogyakarta. I saw aid programs that had been tailored to the needs of the Indonesians. AusAID figures very big. We built thousands of schools and madras' in Indonesia.

Our work is appreciated. Our work's a very serious contribution, but Richard Woolcott said in his submission to the Australia in the Asian Century Report we've got to cultivate the habit of mind of consulting Indonesia the way we consult Washington. And I think that's – from that very experienced diplomat, that's a good bit of advice.

And we've got to avoid this – the trap that Tony's fallen into of reducing the relationship to these transactional issues. As a punitive prime minister of Australia, he's saying he'll elevate people smuggling to define the relationship with Indonesia. And we're responsible as a government for getting it wrong on live cattle exports. And the other issue we – before some of them, not all the time are the consular issues in Bali about young Australians caught up in the legal system.

We've got to get this relationship understood on both sides as being – and understood by the Australian people – as being about more than these three transactional issues; Australians in trouble on drugs, live cattle exports and people smuggling.

And there is more. Our biggest embassy in the world, if you take out the defence personnel located in Washington; our biggest embassy, our biggest concentration of diplomats in the world is Jakarta. Our aid program, the biggest we've got. And the people to people contacts, the most substantial.

And now, I believe there are habits of consultation that both sides are adhering to. But I think as the Indonesians may see us from time to time, we've been subject to sudden lurches and enthusiasms, and they would obviously appreciate a bit more predictability. And Tony's not about giving them that.

MICHAEL WESLEY: Well, ladies and gentlemen, there are more questions there. I do apologise to those we didn't get to. We like to try and finish up on time.

Minister. Paul Keating used to describe foreign policy as the domain of the marketplace of ideas, and I think what we've heard from you today is a foreign minister who loves ideas, loves to debate ideas and I think that's a very good thing for all of us.

So we're very grateful to you for spending time to talk to us here at the Lowy Institute about your vision of the world and multilateralism. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in thanking Senator Carr.

[Applause]