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**“Our sense of national mission could be so much stronger”**

Paramaribo is a city the size of Geelong on the north east corner of South America. As such, for me, the streets feel manageable. They're busy, but none of the mass traffic congestion which characterises Sydney and Melbourne. The architecture is dominated by wood. Indeed, the magnificent Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul is the largest wooden structure in the Western Hemisphere. Paramaribo is the capital of Suriname, a small country with a population of just over half a million. The country consists of a relatively thin strip of agricultural land producing mainly rice and bananas. But the majority of the land mass is pristine Amazon Jungle, a large part of which is now a World Heritage Site.

Paramaribo is about as far from Australia as it is possible to be: physically and perhaps culturally. And yet here in May of 2012 at the Foreign and Community Relations meeting of CARICOM, the peak body of Caribbean nations of which Suriname is a member, a decision was taken to endorse another nation in its candidacy for the UN Security Council. It was one of the only times CARICOM had ever taken such a step. And that nation was Australia.

Representing Australia at that meeting, to receive such support, so far from home was humbling. And it said much about our standing in the world.

In July of 2012 I represented Australia at the 19<sup>th</sup> meeting of the African Union in Ethiopia. Over the course of three days I met almost every one the foreign ministers of the more than 50 African nations. Again the feeling of good will toward our country was astonishing. We were seen as a developed country with expertise and resources. To be sure our unique friendship with a great power, the United States,

carried weight. And yet we didn't bring to the table the complex issues of meeting with a great power. Nor did we have any of the baggage of the former colonial powers of Europe. We were friendly and easy to work with.

In January 2013 I spent Australia Day in Juba with our Defence Force personnel participating in Operation Aslan – Australia's contribution to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. This is deepest Africa. And yet the role our service men and women have been playing here has built a genuine affection for Australia. My host, the Honourable Joseph Lual Acuil, then Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management had his wife and children living in Melbourne's western suburbs. Australia was literally his second home. And as it turned out there were many South Sudanese who had relatives in Australia. Indeed it was impossible to leave South Sudan without a sense that there is a particular bond – a sense of family – between our two nations.

Given recent events it needs to be said that the African Australian community is critically important to our country. If you've read the incredible book "*Songs of a War Boy*", the autobiography of Deng Adut the 2017 New South Wales citizen of the year, you realise the contribution this newest of our communities is already making to our nation. But in years to come, as Africa continues to rapidly emerge economically, and Australia seeks to benefit from this emergence particularly in the area of mining, our African community will be fundamental in realising this major opportunity. The potential for an Australian role in Africa is not one we talk enough about. Certainly cutting aid to the continent and failing to develop our diplomatic footprint is, in the parlance of my kids' generation, an epic fail. But central to this positive story will be our African community. When Government members seek to politicise local events they would do well to remember this.

As I campaigned around the world for our seat on the Security Council, from Montevideo to the Maldives, from Addis Ababa to Andorra, the essential theme of the positivity of Australia's global standing was reinforced time and again.

It is a product of the more than a century of Australia's soldiers, sailors and aviators playing their part and making sacrifices to ensure the world is a safer place in which human rights are central. It is the product of a diplomatic community who perform an exemplary role in being the literal ambassadors of our nation, having our voice heard and giving a helping hand. And I believe it is a product of who we are as a people and the instinctive and practical way in which we collaborate and work with others.

This good will and the high esteem in which Australia is held is a wonderful base upon which to plot our path in the world; to develop our security and foreign policy. But it is not enough.

For all this, I believe our sense of national mission could be so much stronger. Beyond a sense of being friendly and helpful, exactly who we are and what we are on about in this world are questions that are rarely asked and rarely answered. We

play well in a team, but when it is our turn to lead, and our turn to articulate a specific Australian view of the world, what is it?

What America seeks to be is obvious. In Paris and London the sense of French and British identity is palpable. Even in Suriname, a quick visit reveals the most multicultural country on the planet. There is literally no dominant ethnicity and that is central to Suriname's clear sense of identity. And yet our sense of national mission is not.

**“As a New World Country which never had an independence movement we are a little unusual”**

The ambiguity about our national mission stems from our history.

As a former colony Australia is unusual for not having an Independence Day. It is not tomorrow, nor is it the first of January. While the birthday of the Australian polity is 1 January, no one on 1 January 1901 believed they were creating an independent nation. Instead this was an exercise of turning six colonies into one colony driven significantly by a desire to improve trade within the continent.

Real independence for Australia did not happen until 9 October 1942 with the signing into law of the *Statute of Westminster Adoption Act 1942*, an act of the Commonwealth Parliament brought about by the Curtin Government. As John Curtin understood that Australia's interests in World War II were starting to diverge from those of mother England and lay more in East Asia with the threat from Japan, the need for independent security and foreign policy became clear.

This is when we became independent. But there was no mass independence movement which led to that moment. And each year 9 October passes quietly by without comment or acknowledgement.

As a New World Country which never had an independence movement we are a little unusual. While our indigenous community certainly have millennia of history, the immigrant nation which Australia has largely become does not have the centuries of history which characterises the likes of France and Britain, nations of the Old World. Our identity is not found there. And yet nor did we have a national discussion, such as occurred in the United States or in so many other smaller countries like Suriname, which can be a reference point for our sense of national mission.

Who we are and what we are on about are questions which deserve to be asked and our security and foreign policy, which are acute expressions of our national mission, would be well served by some answers.

Knowing that I'm making these comments on the eve of Australia Day, and in the midst of our annual conversation about the place of this holiday in the calendar, let me say for the record that I am a supporter of Australia Day. It obviously needs to be handled with enormous sensitivity to our indigenous community and in the process

Australia Day activities should and do celebrate indigenous Australia. But what I love most about Australia Day is the growing tradition of having large citizenship ceremonies on this day. It is the recognition of the final step in a journey of migration and speaks to one of the defining features of modern Australia: of any country in the world we have almost the largest proportion of our citizenry born beyond our shores. Migration is a huge part of who we are. And those who came to Australia on 26 January 1788 were the first wave of migrants.

So I hope that the celebration of immigration becomes a growing and intrinsic part of what Australia Day is about.

### **“Security and foreign policy ... activism is central to the Labor policy tradition”**

While Australia’s sense of national mission is not as strong as it could be this is far from saying that our security and foreign policy has only been reactive. Since Federation there have been many examples of an activist Australian security policy, and while not the exclusive province of Labor, it has been largely Labor which has led the way.

As I’ve stated, formal Australian independence was an act of the Curtin Government. So too, the Alliance with the US – which is the cornerstone of our modern security policy – began with Curtin’s 1942 New Year’s message, delivered on 27 December 1941, in which he stated:

*“Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.”*

The significance of these words at the time and ever since has been fundamental to Australia.

The Fisher Government was responsible for the establishment of the Royal Australian Navy and legislation creating the Duntroon Military College.

In the aftermath of World War II the Chifley Government prominently supported the independence of both India and Indonesia. Not only did Chifley support Indonesian independence he was an advocate for the unity of Indonesia rather than separate independence movements seeing the creation of a series of smaller nations.

The Chifley Government was critical in Australia’s support of the Bretton Woods institutions which are at the heart of the global rules based order today. Doc Evatt’s contribution to the creation of these institutions and the United Nations was acknowledged by his becoming the President of the General Assembly of the UN in 1948. It was during his tenure as the President that the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As Opposition Leader in 1971 Gough Whitlam took the incredibly bold step of visiting Beijing with a view to moving to Australian recognition of China. His bravery in this visit is highlighted by the fact that it actually pre-dated a visit with a similar agenda of Henry Kissinger. On taking office Whitlam negotiated an agreement with China within three weeks to establish diplomatic relations.

During the period of the Hawke and Keating Governments, Australia played an instrumental role in the creation of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Paul Keating greatly enhanced our defence cooperation with Indonesia in a way which gave practical expression to his eloquence when he said that Australia:

*“... has changed our thinking about our defence – on the basis that Australia needs to seek its security in Asia rather than from Asia.”*

During this time, Australia as an active leader within the East Asian Time Zone was demonstrated by Gareth Evans' role in Cambodia. This was a critical piece of Australian leadership in peacemaking which helped give rise to modern Cambodia emerging out of decades of conflict which included the appalling period of rule by the Pol Pot regime.

The Rudd/Gillard years also saw the Asian Century White Paper and our election to the UN Security Council. Kevin Rudd understood innately the importance of Australian activism and the tendency too often to shy away from it. In speaking to the East Asia Forum on 26 March 2008 he captured this sentiment beautifully:

*“... Australia intends to prosecute an active, creative middle power diplomacy ... We believe this is the rational thing to do in pursuit of our own core economic and security interests. We also believe this is the right thing to do because Australia can be a greater force for good in the world. The truth is that Australia's voice has been too quiet for too long ... That is why ... the world will see an increasingly activist Australian international policy in areas where we believe we may be able to make a positive difference.”*

To be fair the Conservatives have also had significant security and foreign policy achievements. The involvement in East Timor, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands and the Bougainville Peace Agreement all come to mind. But when it comes to activism in security and foreign policy Labor has clearly led the way and this activism is central to the Labor policy tradition.

**“It is at a premium for us more than most to be taken seriously”**

Yet if questions remain as to who are we and what are we on about then answers must be given to give direction to this activism in the future.

In my First Speech to Parliament back on 18 February 2008 I gave my thoughts about an Australian identity. I spoke about insecurities which have beset us and our

need to face up to them as a nation. But I also spoke about the most wonderful Australian quality of mateship.

*“Mateship is an Australian ideal, but it does not seek to define the ideal Australian. Mateship is about all Australians—men and women, black and white, rich and poor—mucking in together and then celebrating that fact. It is fantastic. It is uniquely Australian ...”*

I still believe that mateship is central to the Australian character and is a huge part of why Australia and Australians are liked and respected around the world in the way I've described.

But beyond questions of character it is important that we embark on a more practical analysis of our global situation.

Australia has the 13th largest economy in the world and the 12th largest defence budget. As such we are a middle power with choices. We can play big or we can play small. And what we should do is not obvious.

As a middle power the relationships we have with great powers will be critical to our security and wellbeing. I believe this is an aspect of our strategic situation that we have understood well since the time of Federation. Back then it meant making the best of our relationship with Britain. Today it is about our Alliance with the United States, continuing to develop our relationship with China and seeing the potential in a bigger relationship with India.

We are situated in the East Asian Time Zone. Yet we are not a member of ASEAN. Unlike an African nation as a member of the AU or a European nation that is a member of the EU, we are not – to use a Labor Party term – in a faction. Of course we are in an Alliance with the United States but that is different to sharing a perspective with a country sitting in the same geographic location. Your physical place in the world inevitably shapes your view of the world.

We are actually a member of a regional bloc, the Pacific Island Forum. And as I have stated many times this is a part of the world which needs to occupy more of our attention.

The point in all this, is that our security and foreign policy is something that in large measure we have to work out for ourselves. With the exception of New Zealand, our situation does not afford us any luxuries in meaningfully working it out with others.

Immediately this demands that we must have a very contemporary sense of what is happening in the world. Being learners needs to be a fundamental of Australian security and foreign policy. This in turn means we have to sit around tables and in forums where we can learn. That more than anything else was the reason we needed to run for the UN Security Council and why we should continue to do so on a

regular basis. The campaign over many years to win the seat plus the experience of the two years sitting in the seat has helped keep us up to date and sharp.

Now you cannot sit in these forums and around those tables without playing big.

Therefore, without too much analysis any consideration of Australia's strategic circumstances makes it patently obvious that it is at a premium for us more than most to be taken seriously.

### **“The absence of a stronger national mission has given rise to blind spots”**

While I believe that there is more to do in thinking about who we are and the situation in which we exist so as to develop our national mission, our current approach is not a failure. As I've stated we are a well-liked country which has a tremendous platform in place for an excellent security and foreign policy. But the absence of a stronger national mission has given rise to blind spots.

A critical blind spot is our role in the Pacific. More than any other part of the world this is where Australia is expected to demonstrate leadership and take responsibility. While Australia has a significant presence in the Pacific in terms of defence cooperation, development assistance and our diplomatic footprint: our policy over decades has largely been characterised by maintaining a holding pattern. Australia's failure to articulate a vision for the Pacific bewilders our allies, and leaves the countries of the Pacific wondering more about our commitment than we would want. The countries of the Pacific have choices. That Australia is the eternal partner of choice for our Pacific neighbours is far from inevitable.

In contrast if we had a vision for the Pacific, our leadership would be deeply appreciated by our Pacific neighbours. It would also demonstrate to the United States that Australia as an alliance partner is not only dependable (which we clearly are) but willing to share the burden of strategic thought. This could only help in encouraging the US to remain an active presence in our region.

If playing big and being taken seriously were at the heart of our national mission then fulfilling our expected role in the Pacific would be obvious and natural.

In a different context a clearer national mission would help in articulating a proper rationale for the development of a domestic defence industry.

The development of this industry is now bi-partisan policy which is important. But establishing a defence industry is a huge undertaking pursued over decades underpinned by a deep national decision having been made by politicians, the bureaucracy and the military itself.

The Government is making their case in terms of jobs. To be sure jobs are critical. This is Labor bread and butter. For the Conservatives though this is less familiar

ground. They are on it now as a reaction to their government's loss of the car industry. But if the argument goes no deeper it is hard to imagine a Conservative Government of the future, that is not reacting to the loss of the car industry, maintaining a commitment to an Australian build of key defence materiel.

A deeper argument is needed, based on a sense of our national mission, in order to make this national decision. Such an argument exists.

A defence industry unlike any other has the potential to help project a nation's power. Part of the projection of American power are marine bases and aircraft carriers, but part of it is also being the home of Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin.

If being taken seriously were understood as being at the heart of our national mission then the development of an Australian defence industry begins to make sense in terms of our security policy. But this in turn only works if we are exporting the product of our defence industry. It's important for jobs that we build as much of the ADF's kit as we can here. But the bigger benefit, including for jobs, is in leveraging these procurements to create export industries in Australia.

While the Government may talk the talk on exports, some of its recent procurement decisions leave me wondering whether they truly have thought through how these export opportunities may be developed.

If Australia is truly to develop a defence industry we need to have bi-partisan support for it not just now but for the next century. This national project needs to have the genuine buy-in of politicians, senior bureaucrats and the star ranks of the military. It needs a clear rationale underpinning it which will be impossible to develop without first having a clear sense of our national mission.

**“A ... national mission will ... be critical in negotiating the difficult ... world in which we ... live”**

Having a clear eyed sense of our national mission will also be critical in negotiating the difficult and volatile world in which we now live.

China is rising, economically and in terms of its defence projection in our region. This is legitimate and in large measure we ought to embrace it. China is not a modern incarnation of the Soviet Union. It does not seek to export an ideology. It has also presided over the largest alleviation of poverty in human history. While there are human rights issues to be raised with China, on the positive side of the ledger this is a human rights achievement of gigantic proportions. China deserves credit for it and too often I believe many can be too mean in failing to give it.

At the same time China's actions in the South China Sea around the development of artificial islands at Fiery Cross Reef, Subi Reef and Mischief Reef is a cause of anxiety and has been found to be in breach of the UN Convention on the Law of the

Sea. With the majority of Australia's trade traversing the South China Sea this is an issue at the heart of our national interest. We need to be honest and robust, as Labor has been, in expressing our views to China about its behaviour in the South China Sea with a view to our own national interest.

In supporting the rise of China we need to constantly urge China to take its growing place in the world as a supporter of a rules based international order. This is what has underpinned the security of East Asia over many decades and the economic growth that has been allowed to ensue.

Since World War II the principal guarantor of that rules based order has been the United States. The shared commitment that Australia and the US has to this rules based order remains at the heart of the US-Australia Alliance.

Yet for some time now, and pre-dating the election of Donald Trump, there is a discussion about the innate American commitment to its existing place in East Asia and the World. There are no shortage of analysts who emphatically make the case that the US is in retreat, and their first piece of evidence for this case is the American withdrawal from the Trans Pacific Partnership.

I do lament the US withdrawal from the TPP, and as a country situated in the East Asian Time Zone it is clearly in our national interest that the US presence remains. We need to keep encouraging the US to continue its presence in East Asia. And there is much we can do in this regard.

That said, we should not lose sight of the fact that in military terms the pivot to East Asia which began under President Obama has continued under President Trump. Indeed the US military presence in East Asia will be larger at the end of President Trump's first term than at the beginning. That is good. And I do take comfort from the comments of Secretary Mattis on Saturday that, while maintaining the fight against terrorism, the US will ensure that it retains military primacy as a state actor. It does suggest to me an ongoing commitment on the part of the US to contribute to the shaping of the geopolitics of East Asia and the Pacific. This is also good.

In addition to the changing nature of China and the US in our region, North Korea remains the most immediate threat to peace and stability in the region and the world. Any conflict on the Korean Peninsula is unimaginable and horrendous. Yet way before any of that plays out, this crisis is occurring in the middle of our most important trade zone containing three of our five largest trading partners. Serious instability in North East Asia will inevitably affect livelihoods in Australia. And in the longer term the detrimental effect that a nuclear enabled North Korea will have on the cause of nuclear non-proliferation will be profound resulting in a vastly more dangerous world for our children.

The silver lining to this cloud, I hope, will be an increased co-operation between China and the US on security issues.

We are not alone in the strategic circumstances that we face and one of the key strategic opportunities of our time is to grow our relations with those countries which share our place in the world. For many decades this has included Japan. Right now we have more strategic issues in common with India than we've ever had. The recent meetings of the Quad have been important and Labor welcomes the outcomes that these meetings promise.

Making ASEAN, and Indonesia in particular, a bigger focus of our security and foreign policy is critical. More broadly, as I mentioned earlier, growing our relationship with Africa has so much to offer.

### **“The grandest of Labor traditions”**

Sailing these tricky waters, and doing so without blind spots, is the challenge we must meet. And it cannot be achieved without a clear sense of national mission.

I have little faith in the development of this sense of national mission under the current government. Nothing in their behaviour suggests either the inclination or thoughtfulness to even begin the conversation.

Yet I fervently hope that under a future Shorten Labor Government this is exactly what we do. It would enable us to deal with critical blind spots in respect of the Pacific and developing an Australian defence industry. It would help in navigating the increasingly complex region and world in which we now live.

Back in 2008 in my First Speech I said:

*“[Identity] is the source of all collective action. It is the source of all public policy. Politics at its grandest is all about identity: searching for it, clarifying it, giving expression to it ...*

*And yet we have a need for a strong national identity now more than ever, because borders are far more transparent than they were in 1901 and we no longer sit under the umbrella of an empire. Who we are and what we stand for is there for all the world to see. Whether or not we can confidently assert an Australian brand into a globalised economy has everything to do with whether or not Australia will succeed in the global economy. But to do that we need to understand our own brand first.”*

We need to develop our sense of national mission more. And were a future Labor Government to do it, our actions would be consistent with the activist security and foreign policy of our Labor forbears and accordingly be in the grandest of Labor traditions.

**ENDS**