

# FIRST STEPS

Policy Under Menzies

During the first four decades of the 20th century, there was a consistent attempt by Australian governments to pursue their objectives within the framework of the British Empire. The lack of an independent foreign policy even into the late 1930s is vividly illustrated by the following documents on Australian decision-making.

TELEGRAM RECEIVED (in D.O. Code No.1.) FROM PRIME MINISTER,  
CANBERRA.

---

SECRET

13th November, 1939.

IMMEDIATE.

We are negotiating with Japan for sale of  
wheat portion cash portion terms. Would this  
conflict with British policy. Prompt reply would  
be appreciated.

MENZIES.

*Mr Sterling telephoned  
above to Mr Bruce  
yesterday evening  
and took his instructions  
ved 14/11/39*

Telegram from Prime Minister Menzies to High Commission in London, 13 November 1939.  
John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Japan - Economic, August - November 1939. final selections.* JCPML00870.  
Courtesy National Archives of Australia: MIOO, November 1939

As late as 1939 Australia had made no attempt to establish its own diplomatic representatives overseas and still relied to a large extent on British diplomatic resources and unified Commonwealth policies. Negotiations finally began for Australian representation in Washington and Tokyo in 1939, but were not concluded for another 12 months.

Washington

PRO

A5749/1

Box 70

Reference:-

F.O. 372/3319

Washington

Tokyo

post.

K.121/20

PARAPHRASE TELEGRAM  
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

To the United Kingdom High Commissioner in the Commonwealth  
of Australia.

Sent 11.30 p.m.

29th April, 1939.

No.98. Secret

Reference my immediately preceding telegram. Following is draft telegram to His Majesty's Government in the Commonwealth of Australia. begins. Your telegram of 30th March, No.34, Secret. It is regretted that an earlier reply has not been sent to your telegram under reference, but it was considered desirable to obtain the views of His Majesty's Ambassadors at Washington and Tokyo in order to assist His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom in their consideration of the proposals of His Majesty's Government in the Commonwealth of Australia. His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom are grateful for opportunity afforded for expressing their views and are confident that proposal does not in any way involve any departure from the principle of maintaining close cooperation between the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. So far as the establishment of an Australian Legation at Washington is concerned, His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom do not expect any difficulty on the part of the United States Government, and for their part, they welcome a proposal that holds in prospect the strengthening of the diplomatic representation of the British Commonwealth of Nations in the United States. As regards the last clause of your telegram under reference, in their view, whilst it is not strictly speaking necessary that

Telegram from the British Government to the Australian High Commission, 29 April 1939.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Washington Post, July 1936-May 1940 final selections.* JCPML00870. Courtesy

UK Public Records Office: No. 98 Ref: 372/3319

## Reference:-

P.O. 372/3319

1254

that His Majesty's Government in the Commonwealth of Australia should intimate to the United States Government that the simultaneous establishment of a United States Legation in Australia would be welcomed, there would appear to be no reason why such an invitation should not if they so wished, be given on behalf of His Majesty's Government in the Commonwealth of Australia.

His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom desire to offer the following observations so far as the appointment of an Australian Legation at Tokyo is concerned:-

First, in view of the commercial and other relations between Japan and Australia, the creation, in ordinary times, of an Australian Legation at Tokyo would serve a useful purpose and promote friendly relations between the two countries.

Secondly, however, at the present moment times are not normal: in the view of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, the Japanese Government wish to see the establishment of an Australian Legation because they think that they could use it to weaken the Imperial bond, and they would use its establishment now as evidence that Australia did not share the views of the United Kingdom on the present happenings in China. (In this connexion it may be mentioned that Japanese have done their best to magnify the significance of the visit paid recently to Yokohama by the U.S.S. "Astoria" conveying the remains of the late Japanese Ambassador at Washington, and have endeavoured to use this as proof that American sentiment is friendlier to Japan than in fact it is.)

Thirdly,

Reference:-

F.O. 372/3319

1254

Thirdly, the establishment of a Legation in Washington first would be more of a compliment to the United States than the establishment of Legation at Washington and at Tokyo at the same time. His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom fully appreciate the arguments put forward by His Majesty's Government in the Commonwealth of Australia regarding the desirability of establishing missions at both capitals, and in normal conditions would have welcomed the proposal. For the reasons explained above, however, they cannot disregard the possible consequences of the establishment of separate Australian diplomatic representation in Japan at the present juncture and, therefore, hope that His Majesty's Government in the Commonwealth of Australia will in all the circumstances feel able to defer such a step until a more propitious moment.

The procedure adopted in the case of such appointments following established precedents would be as follows

(a) As soon as His Majesty's Government in the Commonwealth of Australia had decided to establish the proposed Legation or Legations His Majesty's approval would be sought informally.

(b) His Majesty's Ambassadors would obtain informally the views of the foreign Governments concerned.

(c) If the foreign Governments agree, they would be approached officially by means of a note from His Majesty's Ambassador.

(d) When His Majesty's Government in the Commonwealth of Australia had decided upon the name of the Minister, the name in question would be submitted informally to His Majesty for approval, unless this has already been done under (a) above.

Reference:-

F.O. 372/3319

1254

(e) The name of the person proposed would be submitted informally to the foreign Government in question.

(f) The formal agreement of the foreign Government to the individual would be obtained.

(g) When agreement is obtained, the name would then be submitted formally to His Majesty the King and letter of credence and commission would be prepared.

UK - Dominions

Telegram received (in cypher) from the Prime Minister, Canberra.  
(Addressed to the High Commissioner, London).

13th August 1941

MOST IMMEDIATE.

UNNUMBERED.

HIMSELF ONLY. Urgent confidential and personal to Mr. Bruce himself.

Cabinet has asked me to go to London again as it feels Far Eastern position will require important exchanges of policy and strategy. But, more than this increasingly convinced that our point of view must be pressed in British War Cabinet itself.

As you know I sent my views on Dominion representation to British War Cabinet to Mackenzie King and Smuts but neither of them is interested in it, Smuts going so far as to say in March that we Dominion Prime Ministers should mind our own business and leave Churchill to mind his. This completely overlooks the fact that many matters dealt with by British Cabinet and Foreign Secretary are our business as well as Britain's and that present Cabinet set up excludes us from a real voice at the right time. But I do not need to explain this matter to you. Your own cables to me have 'mooted' it admirably.

I have informed my colleagues that I will put the question before Parliament as a Minister going to London must have backing.

There has been clamouring here by a disgruntled and personally hostile section of the press that I should resign from Premiership and be sent to London as an ordinary Minister. I have pointed out to my colleagues that such a course would be in my opinion fatal, for I could scarcely hope to carry real authority or weight in British War Cabinet if I had in fact been just rejected in my own country. In any event great majority of Government members are completely loyal to me.

As matter will no doubt be discussed thoroughly during next week I would be personally most grateful if you could explore and advise me upon following questions. In getting answers it might be worth having a confidential chat with Beaverbrook as well as going through ordinary channels.

- (1) If a Minister other than Prime Minister were sent to London would he be given a seat in the War Cabinet
- (2) If I went to London not as Prime Minister but as an ordinary Minister would I be given a seat in the War Cabinet.

Telegram from Menzies to High Commissioner Bruce in London, 13 August 1941.



- (3) If I went as Prime Minister but after a month or two felt my indefinite absence from Australia was creating embarrassment here and then resigned Premiership what prospect would there be of my being asked or allowed to continue to sit in the British War Cabinet.
- (4) What is your own opinion on the business generally.

I should add on my return to Australia Government stocks rose very high. There had apparently been almost complete satisfaction with my work abroad but during the past few weeks news print rationing has made (recalcitrant) newspapers bitter petty revolts among a few members have been encouraged and whole atmosphere has become murky though fundamentally I have more confidence in underlying sound sense of the people than have some of my colleagues.

At the same time if you will allow a personal note I believe I am more effective in London than here where at present a hail-fellow-well-met technique is preferred to either information or reason. If you could be admitted to British War Cabinet the whole question would be answered to my perfect satisfaction but have assumed this is not practicable owing to presence of other High Commissioners in London.

MENZIES.

Telegram from Menzies to High Commissioner Bruce in London, 13 August 1941.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. UK - Dominions July-Dec 1941. JCPML00869. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: MIOO, August 1941

These documents provide some background information regarding the establishment of Australia's first legation overseas, the post of Ambassador to the US. The post was eventually awarded to Richard Casey by Prime Minister Menzies.

*File: Australia: Papers in Wash*

PERSONAL &  
CONFIDENTIAL

January 25th, 1939

I have your letter of the 5th December and the Christmas card - an attractive group - which I was glad to have. How the family are growing up! I have not written to you I find since November 30th. The principal news for the month of December was S.M.B. and McDougall's visit, but the former will have told you all about this. His visit was a great success. It was splendid having the chance of talking things over with him, and on the broad basis of British Commonwealth relations the contacts he had with the President and the Acting Secretary of State were very worth while. He talked over with me the subject you refer to in your last paragraph - the question of our representation here, and I will now proceed to give you my ideas.

The position as I see it briefly is this. The present arrangement of an Australian Counsellor at the British Embassy here should be amply sufficient for keeping us supplied with information on the position here and for providing the Ambassador with an Australian adviser when it becomes necessary for him to take some special action on behalf of Australia.

The Honourable  
R. G. Casey, D.S.O., M.C.,  
The Treasury,  
Canberra, F.C.T.

Whether/

Letter from Keith Officer, Australian Counsellor to the British staff in Washington, to Richard Casey, who would become Australia's first Ambassador to the US, outlining the case for the establishment of a Washington Legation, 25 January 1939.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Washington post, July 1936-May 1940 final selections*. JCPML00870. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A330, 1

Whether it does or not depends only on the success or otherwise of the holder of the post. It also shows to the American official world, and to some extent the public, that Australia takes sufficient interest in their relations with the States to have an Australian on the Embassy staff. It is partly for this reason that I have been getting about as much as possible. But it must be realised that it identifies us very closely with the British Embassy and that in fact the Australian is looked upon as likely to be imbued with the United Kingdom point of view. Finally, it is of course a cheap method of doing things. The advantages of opening a Legation would be first of all that we would give very great satisfaction to the United States Government who I know are very anxious to have us represented here in the same way as Canada and South Africa, and to be represented themselves on a diplomatic basis in Australia. Secondly, it would enable us to make representations on a definitely Australian basis from time to time at the State Department not only formally but informally. For instance, it might have been most useful in the weeks of crisis last autumn if an Australian Minister had been able to indicate in informal discussions that Australia was in accord with the United Kingdom policy and supporting it. So the question boils down to this - what do we want? Merely information, or do we wish to play a more important part? If the latter, we must have our own Legation./

Letter from Keith Officer, Australian Counsellor to the British staff in Washington, to Richard Casey, who would become Australia's first Ambassador to the US, outlining the case for the establishment of a Washington Legation, 25 January 1939.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Washington post, July 1936-May 1940 final selections*. JCPML00870. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A330, 1

Legation. As you know, I was always a supporter of the present system; I admit frankly that I am becoming a supporter of the idea of a Legation mainly for the reason that I believe in these times of stress an Australian Legation cooperating closely with the British Embassy would be some use to British prestige and influence in this country.

But if you are going to think along these latter lines you have got to think of four important matters: first of all, the cost; secondly, the staff; thirdly, the personality of the Minister; and fourthly, the question of foreign policy. As staff is tied up with cost I will take it first. The minimum I think would be a Minister, a First Secretary senior enough to act as *Chargé d'Affaires* when the Minister was on leave, a Third Secretary who could be quite junior, and to some extent a learner, a Commercial Counsellor or *Attaché* who could also do the work of the Trade Commissioner in New York, a clerical staff of probably three and a messenger. Allowing for adequate accommodation I do not believe you could do it under £12,000 a year. And unless you are prepared to put out a certain amount of capital, say £30,000, to buy or build a Legation you would have to spend an additional £2,000 at least on renting accommodation probably of an unsatisfactory nature - Canada has bought and South Africa has built. There might be a slight saving in the cost of the New York office although I  
rather/

Letter from Keith Officer, Australian Counsellor to the British staff in Washington, to Richard Casey, who would become Australia's first Ambassador to the US, outlining the case for the establishment of a Washington Legation, 25 January 1939.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Washington post, July 1936-May 1940 final selections*. JCPML00870. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A330, 1

rather doubt this. The Secretary of the South African Legation has kindly given me the figures regarding their Legation here. They own the Legation property, the land, building and furniture having cost them I understand about £30,000. The cost of the Legation staff for this year consisting of a Minister, one Secretary, two Attachés, a senior and two junior clerical assistants and a messenger will be £9,353; subsistence and transportation expenses cost another £800; printing, stationery, postage, telegrams, books, newspapers, etc., another £550; and the maintenance of the Legation another £300, or a total of £11,003. Their Consulate in New York costs another £5,865. Secondly, by the question of staff I mean that the Department of External Affairs must go on recruiting and training with a view to future development. It seems to me that we should have been doing more in that line the last couple of years, and that Hodgson's staff must be barely adequate for what it has to do at present, and makes no provision for fairly sudden expansion. My own feeling is that the appointment of a High Commissioner in Ottawa is at least as important, and, I believe, more important than the establishment of a Legation here. But that again is going to require a senior and junior External Affairs Officer on its staff, and whoever went as senior to either Washington or Ottawa should have had some considerable experience not only in Canberra but also in London, whilst the junior should have had at least an adequate period of training/

Letter from Keith Officer, Australian Counsellor to the British staff in Washington, to Richard Casey, who would become Australia's first Ambassador to the US, outlining the case for the establishment of a Washington Legation, 25 January 1939.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Washington post, July 1936-May 1940 final selections*. JCPML00870. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A330, 1

training in the Department at Canberra. As to personality, I mean that we must have someone who can impress by both his knowledge and personality and not be a figurehead. I hope the time will come when you will do what Canada is doing and employ career External Affairs men.

Finally, by my reference to foreign policy I mean that these posts abroad are only going to be useful if we have passed from what I think of as the 'information' stage to the 'action' stage. By the former I mean the period during which the Department was more or less satisfied with collecting an adequate amount of information on any question that was likely to arise, so that it could, if the need arose, inform the Government of all the facts. By the 'action' stage which I take it we have not reached, I mean that the Department should have expanded to the extent that it is considering constantly any situation which may affect Australia in the remotest way on the facts in its possession and its stating from time to time in London or elsewhere its views as to the action that should be taken. I am saying this particularly in the light of my visit last week to Ottawa. There I feel they have built up a big Department of External Affairs and a numerous series of Missions abroad with very little use or effect, for my very definite impression is that they get very little if any more information in spite of their Missions than we get depending as we do on the Foreign Office, and that they have no policy on any subject except to do nothing or say nothing for fear that/  
that/

that they say I or say the wrong thing. And of course our Legation would need to be supplied regularly with the fullest information of the Government's policy and action. I hope the above is not too long. You will I hope let S.M.B. see it.

Letter from Keith Officer, Australian Counsellor to the British staff in Washington, to Richard Casey, who would become Australia's first Ambassador to the US, outlining the case for the establishment of a Washington Legation, 25 January 1939.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Washington post, July 1936-May 1940 final selections*. JCPML00870. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A330, 1

COPY

## DECODE OF CABLEGRAM.

Secretary of State for  
Dominion Affairs,  
LONDON.

DATE SENT

30th March, 1939.

No. 34.

SECRET.

You will recall that during 1936 the question of the appointment of Australian Counsellors at British Embassies was discussed with the United Kingdom Government, and as a consequence an experiment was made with the appointment of a Counsellor at Washington.

The system of liaison has worked well in practice and has proved beneficial to the Commonwealth Government but it is felt that our constantly increasing international contacts make it imperative we should have more direct representation in those countries which are of considerable importance to Australia, especially in the region of the Pacific Ocean.

You will remember at the last Imperial Conference I raised the question of a Pacific Pact on the broad principle that regional agreements by separate members of the British Commonwealth in the promotion of friendly collaboration and mutual understanding with neighbouring countries would not only be of assistance to Great Britain but would materially help in the general cause of peace.

We regard the above considerations of paramount importance in the present state of international affairs, and are of opinion that the time has arrived when the Commonwealth of Australia should establish separate Missions commencing with Legations at Washington and Tokyo.

The promotion of goodwill and a spirit of cooperation with the United States and the British Commonwealth are considered vital. In addition we have considerable trade interests, and the increasing direct contacts in the social, cultural and scientific spheres makes Washington obviously the first selection.

The establishment of a Mission at Washington would in our opinion render necessary a similar and simultaneous Mission in Tokyo. In view of present tendencies, the establishment of a Mission at

*Department of External Affairs, Washington -  
Tokyo Mission - File No 152 CR 8 8981*

Cable dated 30 March 1939 from Prime Minister J A Lyons to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, London, regarding the increasingly pressing need to establish Australian Legations overseas in Washington and Tokyo. This situation was inherited by Robert Menzies when he became prime minister only a couple of weeks later.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Washington post, July 1936-May 1940 final selections*. JCPML00870. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A981, Exte152



## DECODE OF CABLEGRAM.

DATE SENT

- 3 -

Washington and not at Tokyo would probably be regarded as a deliberate slight and as a desire to promote friendly relations with America at the expense of Japan. Moreover, it is in Australian national interests to maintain and extend friendly contacts with Japan, and an independent Mission we feel sure will be productive of much good. In this respect the last two Consuls General have on several occasions intimated that Japan would warmly welcome the establishment of a Legation by Australia.

Recently we have received strong representations from the Consul General about alleged anti-Japanese sentiments in Australia, and an Australian Minister would be in a position to counteract any such false impressions in Japan, and prevent possible deterioration in our relations.

You will recall the fact that over a long period of years the policy of successive Australian Governments has been against the establishment of direct diplomatic representation abroad. Australia has steadfastly stood for the maintenance of the common British diplomatic front. We are still of this opinion and by the proposals contained in this telegram we do not in any way mean to imply that this common diplomatic front will be in any way endangered. We are moved to the present proposals solely by reason of the necessity to improve and cement Australian-American relations which we believe might be valuable to the cause of improved Anglo-American relations.

We should be glad if you would give consideration to these proposals and furnish your views at an early date, including, in anticipation of your favourable reaction, the best method of raising the question with the two Governments and whether it should be intimated that we would welcome a reciprocal Mission to be established simultaneously in Australia.

Copy to External Affairs Dept. 31/3/39

Department of External Affairs, Washington - Tokyo  
 Liaison - File No. 152. CR39921

Cable dated 30 March 1939 from Prime Minister J A Lyons to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, London, regarding the increasingly pressing need to establish Australian Legations overseas in Washington and Tokyo. This situation was inherited by Robert Menzies when he became prime minister only a couple of weeks later.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Washington post, July 1936-May 1940 final selections*. JCPML00870. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A981, Exte152

PERSONAL

DECRYPTER OF CABLEGRAM FROM THE HIGH COMMISSIONER, LONDON.

LONDON 19th September, 1939, 8:46 p.m.

MOST IMMEDIATE.

MOST SECRET.

PERSONAL. HIMSELF ONLY.

MOST SECRET

Your personal cable. I entirely share your views as to the importance of Australian Minister in the United States and the invaluable service individual with right personality could render in promoting better British-American understanding and maximum assistance in supplies, finance, etc., while neutral, and greatest co-operation if the United States engaged in hostilities.

Being uncertain where I could render most useful service I decided best course was to consult the Prime Minister. He entirely shared the views expressed above but stressed that, important as Washington is, it is transcended in the present circumstances by London. He urged that unless and until you personally can come to London and as Prime Minister of Australia sit in the Imperial War Cabinet, it was essential that I should continue as High Commissioner owing to personal contacts and the position which I have in London enabling me to function in a way it would be difficult for anyone else to do. We then explored the practicability of me covering both places in the same way as Diplomatic Ministers are accredited to two Governments, spending part of the time in each place; for example the Canadian Minister accredited to Holland and Belgium.

If such an arrangement were practicable the Prime Minister saw great merit in it as I could act as connecting link between the United Kingdom and the United States Governments, which was lacking owing to the impossibility of sending a British Minister to the United States in view of the reactions of Congress and American public opinion, and as I could say things, being an Australian, which no one from here could. While there are obvious objections to such an arrangement, there are very real advantages and if you are in grave difficulties in finding a suitable person to send to America it could be explored. It would of course be subject to its being acceptable to the United States Administration, and this I could ascertain privately and

Cable from High Commissioner Bruce to Prime Minister Menzies, 19 September 1939.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Washington post, July 1936-May 1940 final selections*. JCPML00870. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: CP290/6 Bundle 1

confidentially. In the event of your deciding that you want to use me in this way, presume an announcement suitably worded would be made down the lines that an Australian Minister was to be appointed to the United States and that I was to be first Minister and that I was proceeding immediately to the United States to present my credentials and establish Legation but that owing to the existing war situation it was necessary for the present that I should retain my position as High Commissioner in England and that I would spend my time in such proportion between London and Washington as circumstances required.

BRUCE.

---

## DECODE OF CABLEGRAM.

DATE SENT

TO Secretary of State  
for Dominion Affairs, \_\_\_\_\_  
LONDON.

SECRET

SECRET AND PERSONAL.

Following for Prime Minister.

Thank you for your cable regarding Bruce and the proposed Legation at Washington. I greatly appreciate your statements regarding the importance of having Bruce in London.

What I first had in mind was appointing Bruce to Washington and sending somebody like Casey to London. In reply to this suggestion Bruce pointed out that he thought his experience would be more useful in London, particularly during a time of war, and on consideration I agreed with this.

I then suggested that Bruce might make a very brief visit to Washington to establish the Legation and then return to London. By that time Casey would be back in Australia and would have made his report and could be appointed to Washington.

My difficulty is that there is a growing impatience here at my failure to make a Washington appointment and that sending Bruce to Washington for a few weeks would have satisfied this agitation. If Bruce is not to go then I may have to defer any action in relation to Washington until after Casey's return, in which case criticism will become very acute.

If you will think it undesirable for Bruce to go even for a brief period would be glad if you would at once take the necessary steps through Lothian to secure approval of the establishment of an Australian Legation at Washington with reciprocal appointment of American Minister to Canberra, and at the same time ascertain whether I could open Legation with a Charge d' Affaires and defer the nomination of my Minister for, say 3 months.

Kind regards.

MENZIES.

*File*



AUSTRALIAN LEGATION,  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

January 17th, 1942



CONFIDENTIAL

Was. No. 8/42.

Sir,

I have the honour to enclose herewith three copies of a broadcast interview over the Mutual Broadcasting System on Friday, January 9th, 1942, when Mr. Richard Eaton questioned me regarding Australia's relation to the present situation in the Pacific.

The Mutual Broadcasting System is one of the three large chains of Stations in this country - the other two being the National Broadcasting Corporation and the Columbia Broadcasting System.

The abovesentioned radio-interview was carried by about 180 Stations throughout the United States.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

The Minister for External Affairs,  
Canberra, A.C.T.,  
Australia.

Copies sent to Minister External Affairs & Prime Minister. 5/3/42

36

9/1

Letter from Richard Casey, Ambassador for US, to the Minister for External Affairs, 17 January 1942.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *USA Representation in Australia; Washington DC - Australian Legation; possible Curtin visit to US, 1942.* JCPML00869. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A981, Far 14 Part 2

BROADCAST INTERVIEW OVER THE MUTUAL BROADCASTING SYSTEM

FRIDAY - JANUARY 9th, 1942 6 p.m.

(Rt. Hon. R. G. Casey - Mr. Charles Eaton)

Mr. Casey, your two years in this country must have brought it home to you that we Americans have a very warm spot in our hearts for you Australians - but at the same time you have probably learnt that we don't know much about Australia - I want to ask you if you can't tell us some of the outstanding points about your country and your fellow countrymen?

Q. Yes, certainly, I'd be glad to - although it's a big job to do in a short time. Australia is just about the same size as the United States - but we've only got the population of New York City - just over seven millions. We are a people very much like yourselves - friendly, self-reliant, independent-minded, not much concerned with the old world formalities of life. We Australians feel completely at home in the United States and you people get on equally well out with us in Australia.

Q. How is this war situation affecting the population of Australia generally?

A. Well, you could hardly say that we have had "business as usual" in Australia for a long time. War has been our main business for two years - but there has been a vast speeding up in Australia since the first bomb landed on Pearl Harbor. Australia is an armed camp today. A large proportion of the men between youth and middle age are under arms - and the rest - men and women - are either making munitions day and night - or are concentrating on some aspect or other of the war effort.

Q. That sounds like total war?

A. Yes, that's about it. There are very few motor-cars in the streets of Australia today - other than Army trucks and cars. People don't take holidays or time out any more. The enemy is at the gate. We are ready to defend ourselves at any moment. Before very long we will be attacking - and we will not be attacking alone.

Q. I can quite believe that. Our men and yours mixed pretty well in France, didn't they, in 1918?

A. Yes, indeed. I think the close contact between your troops and ours in France was the beginning of the mutual friendship and regard between Americans and Australians - and it looks as if further opportunities of this sort are going to occur again before long.

Q. Would you tell us something about the geography of your part of the world - Australia and the South West Pacific?

A. Yes - but it's easier if you look at a map - where's that map? - yes - here you are - a map of the world is the best thing - now look here - at the South West Pacific - on the other side, the west side, of the Pacific from you - and below the Equator - all this area, the South Western Pacific is going to be in the news in the time ahead. I have always said that this South Western Pacific area is, from the point of view of war, one single area. Imagine Australia as the great central land mass or core - half surrounded by a chain of great islands - beginning with our sister British Dominion of New Zealand, 1400 miles east of Australia, the northwards through New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, New Guinea, the Netherlands East Indies up to Singapore and Malaya.

Q. You haven't said anything about the Indian Ocean - on the other side of Australia?

A. Well - I hadn't got round to that. Australia and the Netherlands East Indies and Singapore represent the places that separate the Pacific Ocean from the Indian Ocean. Probably the main reason why the Japanese are so active against Malaya and Singapore is the fact that Singapore is the main obstacle that blocks the Japanese from the Indian Ocean. They'd like very much to have a free run into the Indian Ocean.

Q. So that you regard Singapore as a most important place?

A. Yes, very much so - a most important place - and not only for Australia - but for British and American interests generally - and for the indomitable Dutch.

Letter from Richard Casey, Ambassador for US, to the Minister for External Affairs, 17 January 1942.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *USA Representation in Australia; Washington DC - Australian Legation; possible Curtin visit to US, 1942.* JCPML00869. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A981, Far 14 Part 2

It's not only important for us to hold Singapore - but it's most important that this great gateway between the Pacific and the Indian "ceans should be denied to the Japanese.

Q. Australia has very considerable munitions manufacture, guns, airplanes, and all the rest, haven't you?

A. Yes, we've been working very hard indeed for some years and we're rather proud of what we've done - but our need for weapons and munitions grows greater every day. We still need a good deal of assistance from you. Although our production is going up every day - our warlike necessities are going up at an even faster rate - as the war gets close to us. We are still looking to you for weapons and munitions, in addition to what we make ourselves. We say in effect "You give us some straw and we'll not only make the bricks - but we'll join with you in throwing them."

Q. Mr. Casey, did you people in Australia feel that this war with Japan was inevitable - did you know it was coming?

A. Well - we hoped for the best and prepared for the worst. As you know, very considerable numbers of our troops went overseas to fight - in North Africa - Greece and Crete and Syria - but at the same time we thought it was wise to keep even greater numbers of Australian troops in Australia itself and in Malaya - and when I say "troops", I mean soldiers and sailors and airmen. We regarded ourselves as having a twofold task in this war - to do all we could to aid Britain against the common enemy overseas - and at the same time to keep our own defenses in order in the event of trouble in the Pacific, if the Japanese forced war on us.

Q. So that Singapore and Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies have been much in your minds for some time?

A. Most certainly they have. We have constantly emphasized the high strategic importance of Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies - and the very great importance of their being held. Just lately you may have noticed that our Australian Prime Minister, Mr. Curtin, has been speaking very pointedly about the necessity for adequate reinforcement of Singapore and Malaya - and indeed of the South West Pacific area generally.

Q. I imagine, then, that this recent decision to create a unified command in the South West Pacific is the beginning of better things in your part of the world?

A. Yes - we hope and believe so. This unified command is a recognition of the vital importance of the South West Pacific to the United States and Britain and to the Dutch as well as to Australia - and it is a sign of our combined determination to hold this area.

Q. Do you think that the people of the United States appreciate the importance of the South West Pacific?

A. Yes, I believe so. At any rate the Chiefs of the United States Army and Navy - and the British Chiefs of Staff are thoroughly aware of what is at stake in the South West Pacific - and I believe their combined plans, as to what is going to be done about it, are well ahead.

Q. Mr. Casey, what would you say was the relationship between the war with Japan and the war with Germany?

A. They are both, of course, parts of one war. We don't under-rate Germany - and we don't under-rate Japan. They are both formidable and malignant enemies. The Japanese can do a great deal of almost irreparable damage unless we combine quickly in applying sufficient force to stop them and drive them back. We can do this without taking away from our combined ability to defeat Germany. We hold that the war with Japan is not a side issue but a campaign of first-class importance.

Q. Do you think this war will be a long business?

A. It may well be. We have stubborn and aggressive enemies on all sides, exceedingly well equipped - and undoubtedly it will take time and great combined effort to fend them off and then take the offensive against them. We are fighting with you, not for expansion, not for gain - but to hold and maintain the right to continue to live our own lives - and to rid ourselves of the continual menace of domination by outside aggressor powers - and this ~~will~~ will take the undivided

efforts of every man and woman in both our countries - and I believe I can say - with you - that we will not cease our efforts until the task is well and truly done.

Letter from Richard Casey, Ambassador for US, to the Minister for External Affairs, 17 January 1942.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. USA Representation in Australia; Washington DC - Australian Legation; possible Curtin visit to US, 1942. JCPML00869. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A981, Far 14 Part 2

This document, prepared by the Curtin Government within a week of taking power, overviews Australian diplomatic representation abroad at the end of 1941.



DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS.

Agenda No.

Copy No.

*See also for other  
Correspondence.  
F.A. Liaison officer  
abroad general.*

AUSTRALIAN REPRESENTATION ABROAD.

Netherlands East Indies.

It was decided by the previous Government in July last that the Netherlands should be invited to exchange diplomatic representatives with Australia. It was proposed that Australian representation should be by means of the accrediting of an Australian Minister in London with nominal relations with the Netherlands Sovereign together with the appointment of a Counsellor or First Secretary at Batavia to enable contact between the Commonwealth Government and the Netherlands East Indies Administration in which from the point of view of Australia would consist the actual advantage of the exchange.

2. The High Commissioner in London was instructed to approach the Netherlands Government accordingly. He was also authorized if the Dutch did not wish to receive an openly diplomatic appointment at Batavia to suggest that an Australian representative should be appointed there in conjunction with a Minister in London with the designation of (a) Agent-General or, alternatively (b) Consul-General.

3. In its reply early in August to Mr. Bruce's approach, the Netherlands Government urged an early exchange of Ministers but pointed out that it was not compatible with the constitution of the Netherlands to receive a full diplomatic officer as the Netherlands East Indies was merely a colony and further, that such an appointment would create a precedent which might lead to serious difficulties with other Powers. No State has a Minister in the N.E.I., the status of which (in relation to the Kingdom of Holland) corresponds to that of a Crown Colony (in relation to the United Kingdom).

4. As regards the further suggestions by the Commonwealth Government, the Dutch replied in September that they would agree to the appointment of an Agent-General in the Netherlands East Indies but that they wanted the purpose for which he would be appointed publicly defined on the ground that if there were no limitation of his functions the Japanese would demand a similar appointment. The definition suggested was "trade, shipping and war requirements."

5. The fact must be accepted that the Dutch Government in London are definitely unable to accept a diplomatic appointment in their colony. I think it would be undesirable to drop the idea of an exchange altogether. The only practicable alternative therefore is to put forward the suggestion for the appointment of an Australian Consul-General at Batavia.

6. The rank and designation of Consul-General are internationally recognised and require no definition. An Australian Consul-General at Batavia would have the same standing

with the/

Department of External Affairs Report on Australian Representation Abroad,  
14 October 1941.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Australian representation abroad – general; War Cabinet Submission, October 1941.* JCPML00869. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A981, Exte 156

with the local Government as the British, United States and Japanese Consul-General, and the appointment would give us substantially the advantages looked for, though falling short of the original intention of a full diplomatic exchange. In the N.E.I. Australia's representative would have a status corresponding to the maximum status enjoyed by the representative of any foreign power.

7. I recommend that Mr. Bruce be instructed to convey this proposal to the Netherlands Government in London without further delay, intimating at the same time that the Commonwealth Government desires the appointment of a Netherlands Minister in Australia. As a Consulate-General is a recognized mode of international representation, I do not think it absolutely necessary that the Commonwealth Government should make a reciprocal appointment of a Minister in London accredited to Queen Wilhelmina. However, if the Dutch Government in London regards it as absolutely necessary, I think we should be prepared to accredit the High Commissioner to the Dutch Court in London. (The relevant documents are attached - Annex "A").

#### Russia.

8. The previous Government felt that some positive step should be taken by the Commonwealth in recognition of the fact that Russia and the United Kingdom had become allies in the war. It was decided at the end of July that while no formal approach should be made direct to the Soviet Government at that stage, the High Commissioner in London should be instructed to suggest informally to the Soviet Ambassador that the Commonwealth Government would welcome the appointment of a Soviet Consul-General in Australia.

10. On receiving these instructions, Mr. Bruce pointed out that in his opinion the result of raising the question of the Consul-General would probably be to bring a straight-out request from the Soviet Government for an exchange of Ministers. Before approaching M. Molotov therefore he asked whether the Commonwealth Government was prepared to accept an exchange of Ministers with Russia. He was informed in reply that this was not desired and that having regard to his views it was left to his discretion to raise the subject with M. Molotov if and when an opportunity occurred.

11. No approach has in fact yet been made to M. Molotov, but the High Commissioner has now reported by telegram of October 7th that he has reason to think M. Molotov would probably be content with the appointment of a Consul-General in Australia and would not press for the establishment of a Soviet Legation at Canberra involving reciprocal action on our part at Moscow. In view of this, Mr. Bruce has asked to be advised of the wishes of the Commonwealth Government. (The relevant documents are attached - Annex "B").

#### New Zealand and South Africa.

12. Similar grounds to those in the case of Canada exist for an exchange of High Commissioners between these two Dominions and the Commonwealth, namely, that the development of relations, particularly in time of war, has reached a point where means for direct inter-Governmental communication are highly desirable. In South Africa there is no Australian representation at all. In New Zealand, the Commonwealth Government maintains a Trade Commissioner, but his status and functions are not appropriate

for/

for maintaining contact between the two Governments on general political matters.

13. In August of last year the then Minister for External Affairs, obtained the authority of Cabinet to approach the New Zealand Government with a suggestion for the exchange of liaison officers between the respective Departments of External Affairs. The New Zealand Government in reply welcomed the proposal but stated it would appreciate time to consider it. The suggestion was not followed up, owing, it is understood, to shortage of staff in the New Zealand Department of External Affairs.

#### Near and Middle East.

14. The Commonwealth Government has maintained since 1936 an Australian Government Commissioner at Cairo, with jurisdiction extending over all Middle Eastern countries and functions covering primarily questions of trade and secondarily political intelligence. In this latter respect, however, the capacity of the Commissioner is necessarily limited by his non-diplomatic status.

In the meantime it is evident that the importance of Egypt and the Near and Middle East region to Australia, both politically and militarily, has substantially increased. The whole region now plays a most significant part in Imperial policy, a fact which has been recognised by the recent appointment of a member of the British War Cabinet as a Minister of State in the Middle East with headquarters at Cairo.

#### Japan.

15. Sir John Latham accepted appointment as Minister in Tokyo on the understanding that the term of office would be for one year. This period expired on October 12th.

16. Sir John Latham is at present on his way to Australia. He had suggested at the end of August making a visit to Singapore for consultation with Mr. Duff Cooper. He was informed that it seemed preferable that he should come the whole way to Australia timing his visit to coincide with the expected visit here of Mr. Duff Cooper early in November. Before this arrangement was finalised, however, Sir John Latham on his own responsibility embarked on a ship leaving Japan on 27th September and due to arrive at Singapore on October 14th.

17. In a telegram despatched on October 4th to reach him on arrival at Singapore Sir John Latham was informed that the Government considered that any prolonged absence from his post was undesirable in the present circumstances, and that it was desired that he should not be away long and should return to Tokyo as soon as possible after his visit here. It was suggested that he should proceed by first flying-boat from Singapore direct to Australia without stopping at Batavia. (The relevant documents are attached - Annex "C").

#### United States of America.

18. Mr. Casey has suggested that a visit by him to Australia for consultation would be useful at the present time.

He was/

He was informed on October 9th that Sir John Latham was arriving here about the middle of the month and asked to "ascertain and advise" us whether he could reach here in time to synchronise with the latter's visit. Mr. Casey misinterpreted this provisional enquiry as a definitive invitation and I had to send him a very clear disclaimer on Saturday morning last as he actually proposed to announce to the press that he was about to make the visit. (The relevant documents are attached - Annex "D").

H.V. EVATT.

MINISTER FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS.

14.10.41.

Department of External Affairs Report on Australian Representation Abroad,  
14 October 1941.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Australian representation abroad – general; War Cabinet Submission, October 1941.* JCPML00869. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A981, Exte 156