Making Australian Foreign Policy

In a tense and dangerous international environment, this book looks at the important question of how Australia deals with the outside world. It describes the role of the government departments and intelligence organisations that support the government's policy-making, and the thinking of the people who make it, in more detail than ever before. The book discusses the processes, institutions, actors and calculations involved in foreign policy making in Australia, and how these have changed under the impact of globalisation. It draws on an extensive survey – the first ever – of how Australian foreign affairs officials think about the world, and includes case studies of four recent Australian foreign policy initiatives. It concludes by speculating on the challenges ahead for Australian foreign policy making.

This is essential reading for all of those who are interested in Australian foreign policy, and for politics students in international relations and foreign policy courses.

Allan Gyngell has had a long career in making, advising on and implementing foreign policy. He headed the International Division of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and has been posted to many countries since joining the Department of Foreign Affairs in 1969. He was foreign policy adviser to former Prime Minister Paul Keating from 1993 until 1996. He is Executive Director of the Lowy Institute for International Policy.

Michael Wesley is Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations, University of New South Wales.

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ALLAN GYNGELL
Lowy Institute for International Policy

MICHAEL WESLEY
University of New South Wales, Sydney

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Preface

This book began its life over a late-night beer in a hotel in Taiwan in 1997. We two authors – one a political scientist with a background in international relations theory, the other a former diplomat and policy-maker – discovered that we were each interested from our different perspectives in the same questions. Why do international relations theorists and foreign policy practitioners see the process of making foreign policy in such different ways? Why has so little of the writing about foreign policy in Australia successfully reconciled the theoretical approaches to the subject with the actual, erratic, contingent way in which foreign policy making takes place?

In contrast with other areas of public policy – microeconomic or social policy, for example – the gap between foreign policy academics and practitioners is large. They speak different languages. Empirical to their bootstraps, foreign policy practitioners tend to regard theory as an artificial template imposed on an uncertain world. For their part, international relations theorists consider practitioners dangerously limited by their failure to understand, or to have regard for, the broader patterns shaping international events. We consider some of the reasons for this gap in Chapter 1. One important objective of this book is to clear away some of the dust and to help practitioners and theorists see each other more clearly.

Foreign policy is a subject worth taking seriously. If it is conceived and implemented effectively, foreign policy delivers to a country benefits as tangible and significant as those produced by good economic policy. If it is done badly, the consequences are frequently serious and can eventually be calamitous. So both authors believe that understanding how foreign policy is made in Australia, how the key institutions operate, and how the structures and mechanisms are changing are matters of more than simply academic interest.

We are not concerned in this book with the important public-policy question of what particular foreign policy Australia should pursue. We hope,

however, that by investigating the modalities of foreign policy making in Australia we can help frame and give more precision to that vital debate.

For the most part, Michael Wesley conceived and wrote the first drafts of the chapters on theory and the internal and external environment. Allan Gyngell did the same for the chapters on the institutions of foreign policy making and the case studies. We then argued about, edited and rewrote the text until we were each comfortable with the result. The work was completed in early 2003.

We have many people, inside government and outside, to thank for help in writing the book and shaping our ideas. Their contributions – some on the record, some off – will be apparent from the text, although the responsibility for the content is entirely ours.

Among those we would like to thank specifically are the Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, and his predecessor, Gareth Evans. Dr Ashton Calvert, the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, was generous in giving us access to the department and in agreeing to distribute the questionnaire on how DFAT policy officers think about their jobs. In two different positions – as head of Corporate Services and later as Deputy Secretary – Alan Thomas was of great assistance. So, too, in Australia and overseas, were John Dauth, Ian Kemish, Dennis Richardson, Richard Smith, Allan Taylor, Michael Thawley and Hugh White. Michael Costello, Michael Keating and Stuart Harris gave us the benefit of their extensive experience in government and outside it. Over five years while we were working on this book, a number of other people patiently gave us their views on their involvement with the foreign policy process, in structured interviews and informal conversations: we thank Ron Bonighton, Bill Bowtell, Laurie Brereton, Paul Comfort, Wendy Craik, Jane Drake-Brockman, Peter Drysdale, Geoff Forrester, Glenda Gauci, Genta Hawkins Holmes, Bill Hayden, Joanna Hewitt, Cavan Hogue, Mitch Hooke, Lyle Howard, Greg Hunt, Jeremy Jones, Miles Jordana, Paul Kelly, Miles Kupa, Michael L'Estrange, Geoff Miller, Kevin Rudd, Nick Warner, Mack Williams and Kyle Wilson.

For their generosity in reading and commenting on parts of the manuscript, or for providing helpful suggestions on literature and approaches, we thank Chris Black, Glyn Davis, Stephen FitzGerald, Kath Gelber, Geoff Levey and Marc Williams. Michael Wesley tested much of the theoretical framework of this book over the course of a number of seminars held at the Asia–Australia Institute, the School of Politics and International Relations at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), and at the Australian Institute of International Affairs – our thanks to all of the participants in those contexts who responded with useful comments to the papers presented. The theoretical framework was

also tested as the course material for the subject "Diplomacy and Foreign Policy Analysis", a second-year unit in the School of Politics and International Relations at UNSW: many thanks to the students in that subject who participated in lively tutorial discussions and asked often-demanding questions at the lectures.

Shah Eshan Habib translated the results of the DFAT survey into meaningful statistics with the patience and humour of one accustomed to dealing with the mathematically challenged. The staff of the ASIO, DFAT and UNSW libraries provided wonderful professional help.

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