

Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop Asia Lecture delivered by The Hon Julie Bishop

24 August 2022

I acknowledge the beautiful music that we have heard this evening from Fred, the glorious welcome to country from Lois, and I too acknowledge and celebrate the First People on whose traditional land we meet and pay respect to elders past, present and emerging.

I do want to acknowledge a number of people here this evening. Peter Varghese (yes, I was your boss at one point in your glittering career!) Martine Letts from AsiaLink. Vice Chancellor Duncan Maskell. My Vice-Chancellor Professor Brian Schmidt from the ANU, my predecessor in Foreign Affairs and as Chancellor, Gareth Evans. I am so touched that friends - Kelly O'Dwyer and David Davis are here this evening, and the Myer family - Sid, and Edgar and Georgia and Charlie and Susie and Diana Dunlop. I am so touched that you're here this evening representing the Dunlop family. I'm also delighted that the Japanese Consul-General is here this evening and other members of the diplomatic corps.

I am deeply moved by this award, to be the recipient after so many significant names have been given this medal over the years. I'm even more touched to be asked to deliver the annual lecture that honours Sir Edward Weary Dunlop. What an extraordinary Australian. His legacy must forever live on, for he represented the coming of age of Australia. All that is good about this country was reflected in his character, his personality, his courage, his exemplary leadership, his empathy, his compassion and his resilience. It's an example for us all - forevermore.

Much has been written about Weary Dunlop. Many have spoken of the courage he showed in the face of extreme deprivation as a prisoner of war of the Imperial Forces of Japan during the Second World War. The fact that he was able to carry out his medical skills and look after so many other POW s meant that countless lives were saved as they suffered on the Thai-Burma rail. Tragically, despite his best efforts and those of many others, around 2700 Australian prisoners of war died on the Thai-Burma rail.

Clearly, he was conflicted emotionally and intellectually about what he had been through. It took him 40 years to publish his War Diaries in 1986, and then then he

spoke of the “burning hatred” he had for his captors throughout his entire time in captivity. But then, over a short period of time, his attitude changed quite dramatically.

I found an article in the New South Wales Wellington Times, that well known publication, reporting on a speech he had given in 1954 to a local Rotary Club. And he said while he was subjected to intolerably harsh conditions and behaviour, it was a time for forgiveness. He urged Australia to support the reconstruction of Japan through technical aid. He urged the imparting of Christian values “love thy neighbour” in order to nurture global peace and security. When you think about it now, what it must have taken for him to say, as he did in his diaries, I now distrust my judgments that were made when I saw it all as black and white and no grey in between, no shades of grey. He went on to say that it's time for forgiveness - let's put this tragic conflict in context, for the Japanese losses far exceeded ours; vastly exceeded those of Australia.

If Weary Dunlop were here with us this evening and was witnessing the rise in tensions across Asia and beyond, I feel sure he would urge caution, lest any confrontation through miscalculation or misjudgement ended up spiralling out of control into open conflict.

The very qualities that he exhibited, the qualities that guided his leadership and his judgment are so needed at this time. We are living in times of great uncertainty and volatility. War has broken out in Europe with grim historic parallels as an aggressor seeks to redraw sovereign boundaries through the use of military force.

Tensions are rising in Asia as China adopts a far more assertive, indeed combative, approach to its neighbours, and has elevated into the global discourse its long held ambition to integrate Taiwan into mainland China, but now, by whatever means.

China is embroiled in territorial and maritime boundary, disputes with its neighbours with India, and Vietnam, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines. China is using its military assets to change the status quo in the South China Sea, and it is threatening and using economic coercion against those, including Australia, who may not share its worldview. One only had to listen to the speech of the Chinese Ambassador to Australia at the National Press Club recently to understand the shift in China's foreign policy stance to a much more aggressive, assertive foreign policy.

I do recall witnessing this change in China's attitude rather early on in my tenure as foreign minister when on a visit to China. In response to statements I had made months earlier about China's unilateral decision to establish an air defence identification zone over the Senkaku/Diaoyu contested islands of the East China Sea, I was subjected to a most undiplomatic rebuke. A tirade from the otherwise very cool, very calm, and very collected Foreign Minister, Wang Yi. I'm told this is now more than norm than the exception.

Tensions have spiked once more with the visit from US Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan, and one has to wonder, as these nations climb that ladder of escalation, rung by rung; when do they jump off? When do they get off that ladder of escalation? In an environment of such low trust between the United States and China?

Legendary Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, still giving interviews at the age of 99, said recently that he feared the United States and China were manoeuvring into conflict and crisis. He urged the United States to maintain steadiness in all its policy responses.

I do recall a number of meetings with Dr Kissinger during my time as Foreign Minister at his home in New York, and he worried constantly and deeply about the prospect of conflict between the United States and China. He asked the question, how would it end? Two nuclear states? How would this end? It is unthinkable, and I absolutely agree with him.

In our 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, we did speak about the next decade being much more contested, much more competitive, with nations picking and choosing those parts of the international rules-based order that they believed may or may not apply to them. The rise of protectionism and nationalism and all the false hope that comes with isolationism.

We forecast the shift in relative power in our region, but we concluded that, more than ever before, nations had to commit to that international rules-based order. This is the network of treaties and conventions and institutions and norms underpinned by international law that has evolved since the Second World War, designed to manage the behaviour of nations and between nations, and designed to prevent a third global conflict. It's not perfect, but since that rules-based order has been in place, we've seen the greatest expansion of prosperity in human history. Hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of poverty. To put it in perspective, the World Bank

reports that the global percentage of the population in abject poverty in 1980 was 43%. Today it's 9%

While this order is by no means perfect, it's worth considering what would be in its place. Relative to this consideration is the fact that the institution that is charged with responsibility for upholding the international rules-based order is the United Nations Security Council. The permanent five in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China, all have the power of veto over any coordinated global response to even a fragrant breach of international law or the international rules-based order.

Take the sanctions regime, which has been used as punishment and deterrent, to varying degrees of success over the years. If the United Nations Security Council, by unanimous resolution, imposes sanctions on a rogue state, let's call it North Korea, for its ballistic missile testing and its nuclear weapons program, then there is an obligation on every other member state of the United Nations General Assembly to impose sanctions. Of course, a country can decide to impose autonomous sanctions. They are usually done in response to domestic considerations, but often in collaboration with like-minded countries.

But here is the weakness, exposed for us all to see. For if one member of the P5 decides to shield a rogue state, or indeed shield itself, from behaviour that would otherwise be in contravention of international law and the very principles of the UN Charter, then nothing happens.

Take Russia, for example. Annexing Crimea in 2014, a full-scale military invasion of the sovereign independent state of Ukraine in 2022, Russia has betrayed the trust of humanity, and is waging an illegal, horrific war against its neighbour. There is no end in sight.

Europe, the United States, Australia, and others have imposed autonomous sanctions. About 40 countries in all have responded. The United States can of course use its global reserve currency status to have even greater impact on Russia.

The majority of nations, and this includes India and China, have not imposed sanctions, and there is no obligation on them to do so and they feel no such obligation because there is no prospect that the United Nations Security Council will

pass a unanimous resolution that obliges other states to respond to Russia's illegal behaviour.

China must be taking that into its risk calculus when it considers what it does in terms of militarizing features in the South China Sea, or the unthinkable - taking Taiwan back by force. Because China knows, as every member of the P5 knows, that there will be no global response by way of sanctions against them.

Let's face it, the United States has, without UN Security Council backing, changed the regime in Afghanistan, and Iraq, and according to some commentators, has sought and achieved regime change on numerous occasions since the Second World War. The United Kingdom in France got rid of Colonel Gadhafi, changed the regime in Libya, without UN Security Council backing. I do recall Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, saying to me rather dramatically, that this was an example of 'the rape of international law by very clever Western lawyers.'

One can ask, would these outcomes, and there are many, many examples, be different, if any of the P5 believed that they could be subject to a unanimous global response by way of sanctions? Whileever they hold the veto power, that is not a concern for them.

The veto power has always been controversial, from the very outset of negotiations to establish the United Nations at the historic San Francisco Conference in 1945. It was to conclude on the 28th of June. In fact, President Truman was scheduled to fly to San Francisco to sign the UN Charter, but it was delayed for a week. The contentious issue was the veto power of the proposed Security Council. This has been agreed at the earlier Yalta Conference in February 1945 between the USSR, United Kingdom, and the United States. The delegations at the San Francisco conference, in the main said, well, nothing we can do, we just have to trust the members of the P5. Australia was not one of those delegations. In fact, under the inspired leadership of our Foreign Minister and Attorney General, Doc Evatt, Australia stated plainly that it found it unfair for one P5 member to be able to override the wishes of all the other permanent members. Through Doc Evatt, Australia moved numerous amendments to get rid of this veto power. They rallied support from other nations who could see that this was not justifiable. But the P5 stood absolutely firm. The debate raged, according to reports at the time, for a week.

The UK Ambassador to the UN stated that no member of the P5 would join the UN if the Australian amendment got up. The US Ambassador rather dramatically tore up pieces of paper as a symbol of what would happen to the UN Charter should Australia succeed. The vote was put on the Australian Amendment. 10 voted in support, 20 opposed, 15 abstained, 5 didn't turn up. The veto was retained.

Evatt continued to campaign against the veto – that is was unfair, unjustifiable, but he knew that the United Nations was more important. Australia became a very significant contributor to the United Nations and has been ever since. In fact, Doc Evatt was the third President of the UN General Assembly, from 1948 to 1949.

I wonder whether, in light of recent events, we shouldn't revisit Doc Evatt's critique. I, for one, cannot justify one nation being able to thwart the efforts of the rest of the world when it comes to flagrant breaches of international law that undermines global peace and security.

I do think an opportunity was missed, as an aside, that when the USSR collapsed and was replaced by a less powerful nation-state in Russia, should not that have been a time for countries like Australia to say, What about India? What about Indonesia? What about Japan?, but that moment has gone.

I believe it is time for countries like Australia to once more make a case for reform. There have been so many attempts at reforming the UN, the Security Council, and of course, it's a circular argument because the P5 can veto any attempt at reform. But shouldn't we be one of those voices making a case for change?

It brings me to the question of leadership. When you think of Weary Dunlop you think of courageous, visionary, competent leadership. I'm afraid we have a global deficit of such leadership at present.

When I was Foreign Minister, I used a measure for leadership to explain the tension between what I called conditional and unconditional leadership. Conditional leadership is when the decisions of the leader and the benefits of those decisions follow the leader, the supporters, the immediate community of that leader.

Unconditional leadership, which is far more rare, is when the decisions and the benefits from the decisions of the leader are spread way beyond the leader's circle; across communities, across nations, in fact, the whole world. We know in our personal lives, of course, it's a natural human instinct to want to protect those around

you, those who support you, but there have been examples in history that show the impact of true, unconditional leadership.

We did learn lessons after Versailles, after the First World War and in the aftermath of the Second World War, the US-led Marshall plan to rebuild the economies of Europe, particularly Germany, was a courageous act of true unconditional leadership, and the parallel plan to reconstruct Japan at a time when there was deep resentment and hatred amongst populations. This was leadership. Sure, it benefited the United States, which went on to become the world's largest economy, but it also rebuilt Europe, and Japan led the way in Asia, and the globe benefited from this act of unconditional leadership.

I'll have to go back to the United States, for an example of conditional leadership. Might I suggest that President Trump's 'America First', which many in our region saw as 'America Only' is an example of conditional leadership.

There were many occasions when I was called upon to put Australia's national interest first, and on issues in our region, like people smuggling or asylum seekers or terrorism or trade, I would be protecting and promoting Australia's national interest. But I was always mindful of the fact that we needed to build relationships for the benefit of all in our region.

I attended many regional forums, many of which Gareth nurtured over his time as Foreign Minister, ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the Bali process, even IORA, the Indian Ocean Rim Association, and APEC, the East Asia Summit. I was always conscious of, sure, protecting Australia's national interest, but knowing that if we were protecting and promoting that interest in the whole region was able to benefit from the decisions we made. I took a particular pride in developing relationships, personal relationships and friendships with my counterpart foreign ministers.

Mind you, the warmth of those friendships sometimes waned, depending upon the circumstances. I recall a particular ASEAN regional forum in Cambodia. There was a cultural performance that went on for a very long time. We were sitting at a large square table with twenty-seven foreign ministers around the table. In the middle there were traditional Cambodian dancers and singers and instruments- a lot happening in the middle.

I was sitting next to the Cambodian Foreign Minister, the host, and my friend Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the other side. There was no alcohol - it's a religious country, there was no alcohol, - and I was sitting there with my little cup of green tea with the lid on it. I was engrossed in a conversation with Wang Yi - I suspect we were talking about the Defence Identification Zone - and I took a big swig of the tea and then spat it out. It was whiskey. I looked up and through the weaving Cambodian dancers, I could see Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. He opened his jacket - there was a bottle of Johnny Walker whiskey. He'd somehow managed to bribe the waiter to fill my cup, but it did give me an insight into how he got through cultural performances.

While I was very conscious that Australia's interests were global, our focus was regional, but our responsibility was in the Pacific. I came to understand Australia long-standing commitment to the security and stability of the Pacific Island nations. I was conscious of our relationships, particularly with PNG and the other Melanesian islands, but also the Polynesians and to a lesser extent, the Micronesians.

I did not ever talk or act in a way that made them think that I saw the relationship through the prism of aid donor-aid recipient. I always spoke about the partnership, the economic and security partnership between Australia and each Pacific Island nation.

The impact was profound. Not once, in all my visits to the Pacific, did a Pacific Island leader ever asked me for more Australian aid. What they wanted was access for their young people to our labour market. They wanted more private sector investment. They wanted investment in infrastructure. That's how they wanted to be seen, and that's how they wanted the relationship to be considered.

I have continued my focus on the Asia-Pacific, the Indo-Pacific, through my work as Chancellor at the Australian National University, and also through my work as a Henry Kissinger Fellow at the John McCain Institute, at Arizona State University. One of my research projects was to make recommendations to the US State Department on how it could be better engage in the Pacific at a time when the Pacific was becoming a much more contested region, and how there could be more US presence, and believe me, the region wanted it.

I interviewed a number of former political leaders and business leaders and community leaders. Two themes emerged, time and time again. The first was economic; that the Pacific Islands wanted to be economically resilient. They wanted

to share in the aspiration of Asian nations that had walked away from aid and had embraced economic resilience, and South Korea was probably the exemplar in that regard. They saw China as their leading partner through the Belt and Road Initiative and felt, in many instances, they had no other options, even though they were concerned about the level of debt, and perhaps debt equity swaps.

The second issue that was raised often was the political governance model on offer. These nations were struggling with the narrative from China that their centrally planned authoritarian model was the most sustainable, in contrast to what they said was a dysfunctional, declining Western liberal democracy as exemplified by the United States. One Pacific Island leaders said to me that, this contest of ideas between the Chinese narrative and the United States narrative "is a struggle for the soul of my nation." He did say that as a tribal based society, he probably felt that a democracy would better serve his nation's interests, but he was torn.

It brought home to me that our political and economic system of governance has to be resilient, full of integrity and transparency and accountability. It's not only impacting on Australia if we don't have our house in order, it has significant international implications for those developing nations that are weighing their options.

Earlier this evening, Duncan in the citation mentioned the New Colombo Plan. If I am ever honoured to have a legacy as the 38th Foreign Minister of Australia, I hope it will be my conceptualisation, instigation and implementation of the New Colombo Plan. Taking its name and spirit from the original Columbo Plan of the Menzies government in the 1950s that saw students from post-war Asia studying in Australia and gaining qualifications and going home to rebuild their countries, I saw the New Columbo Plan as a long-term investment in Australia's future, where undergraduates from all our universities would have the opportunity to live and study and work in countries in our region.

From the time of inception, through the brilliant work of Secretary Peter Varghese, to the time I left five years later, about 40,000 young Australian undergraduates from all of our universities had experienced life in one of 38 nations in our region, from Mongolia to Fiji, from China to Sri Lanka, Japan to PNG (and Grace to Micronesia). It became, and I hope it will forever be seen, as a rite of passage for young Australians.

There was a recent NCP study that said 98 percent of the participants - and I think it would be double that now - 98 percent of the participants said it was a life-changing experience. Believe me, I am hunting down that 2%.

But it's more than an educational experience. These young ambassadors come back to Australia with new perspectives, new ideas, new skills, a second language with friendships and connections and networks that will last a lifetime and be of enduring benefit to Australia's place in the region.

I remember being so proud, as leaders like President Xi Jinping and the late Prime Minister Abe and Prime Minister Lee of Singapore, when addressing joint sittings of the Australian Parliament, each mentioning the New Colombo Plan, with a degree of amazement that Australia would actually pay for our students to study in their universities. They saw this as a significant expression of Australia's soft power diplomacy.

Between 1956 and 1958, Weary Dunlop, under the auspices of the original Colombo Plan, carried out surgery in Thailand, Sri Lanka and India, and then he advocated strongly for students to come to Australia to hone their medical skills. I feel sure that he would have approved of the New Colombo Plan. In that sense, I feel that I have in some way built on the vision that he had for Australia's rightful place in our region.