

Former PM Keating -- Kowtowing to US must stop

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Whatever your opinion of outspoken former PM, Paul Keating -- and mine is far from favourable -- his recent speech delivered at the Keith Murdoch Oration in Melbourne was spot on.



Paul Keating

Keating blasted all his successors from servile lackey, John 'deputy sheriff' Howard, show pony, Kevin 'do nothing' Rudd to infamous and nationally reviled Washington doormat, Juliar 'five bases' Gillard.

Keating spelled out what most people know; that serving Oz politicians have forfeited national sovereignty and taken the apron string approach with the USA. Keating warned that this infantile attitude would cost Oz dearly in the future, as no sovereign nation would take Australia seriously, viewing us instead as just an extension of US foreign policy in the region.

Keating stopped short of mentioning the word treason in reference to the current crop of obsequious 'knee walkers' in Canberra but he left no doubt as to the consequences of allowing the US to dictate foreign policy to Australia.

The following report by Chip Le Grand in The Australian is perhaps the most balanced:

Deferring foreign policy to US must end, Paul Keating warns

SUCCESSIVE governments have downgraded Australia's global influence by deferring foreign policy to the interests of the US and allowing our relationship with Indonesia to languish, former prime minister Paul Keating warned last night.

In a forceful re-entry into the national debate, Mr Keating said Australia was clinging to a shrinking sphere of influence among Western powers and had abandoned the "era of effective foreign policy activism" marked by the creation of the ASEAN regional forum, the establishment of regular APEC leaders' meetings and a bilateral defence agreement with Indonesia.

Delivering the Keith Murdoch Oration in Melbourne last night, Mr Keating urged Australia to develop an independent foreign policy focus on Southeast Asia and the

emerging economic and military power to our immediate north.

"Indonesia remains the place where Australia's strategic bread is buttered," Mr Keating said. "No country is more important to us - and it is a country which has shown enormous tolerance and goodwill towards us.

"Whichever way we cut it, Australia must lay a bigger bet on its relationship with Indonesia."

While Mr Keating's speech was in part self-serving - most of the major foreign policy successes he cited were achieved during his government - he spared neither side of politics in lamenting how "we have rolled back into an easy accommodation with the foreign policy objectives of the US".

"More latterly, our respect for the foreign policy objectives of the US has superimposed itself on what should otherwise be the foreign policy objectives of Australia."

The cost, Mr Keating said, was that Australia had been "traded down in the big stroke business".

"Even states like Indonesia are dubious of us because they do not see us making our way in the world or their world other than in a manner deferential to other powers, especially the US," he said.

"This became apparent during John Howard's prime ministership; it has remained apparent under the prime ministerships of Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard."

Mr Keating set his speech in broad historical terms. He noted how Australia had exercised disproportionate influence throughout the 20th century as a "paid-up member" of the Anglosphere and an "associate member" of the West in the aftermath of both world wars and during the Cold War that followed. "That world has changed," he said.

"Now, we have to be propelled not by regard of withering associations but by our enlightened sense of self. Knowing who we are and what we are and what we want.

"The fact is, Australia's former sphere of influence is diminishing."

Mr Keating listed Mr Howard's "deputy sheriff" deference to US foreign policy in Iraq and Afghanistan, Mr Rudd privately advising the US to reserve a military option against China and Ms Gillard inviting US President Barack Obama to launch "an oral and policy assault" against China from the Australian parliament as examples of Australia's declining "sense of independence" in foreign policy.

Mr Rudd's advice about the US reserving a military option against China was given to US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at a lunch in 2009 and subsequently published within a WikiLeaks cable. Speaking last night on the ABC's Lateline program, Mr Keating described the advice as "both embarrassing and, I believe, wrong".

Mr Keating said the timing of his speech - delivered while Mrs Clinton and US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta are in Perth for Australian-US Ministerial consultations - was coincidental. He doubted whether the Americans would take offence. In his speech, Mr

Keating drew a distinction between Australia's historical and cultural affinity with the US and the strategic objectives of both nations.

"While we will always have a close relationship with the US based on our shared history and similar cultures, it is obvious that the right organising principle for our security is to be integral to the region - to be part of it rather than insulating ourselves from it, hanging on in barely requited faith to attenuated linkages with the relatively declining West."

Mr Keating said Australia should centre its foreign policy on Southeast Asia, which he described as the "fulcrum" between India and the subcontinent and China, Asia and the western Pacific. He said Australia should pursue the long-term goal of becoming a full member state of ASEAN to formalise our trade, commercial and political links within the region.

Mr Keating welcomed Australia's inclusion in the East Asia Summit during the Howard government, Mr Rudd's lobbying of China to include the US and Russia in ASEAN and recent comments by Foreign Minister Bob Carr supporting closer engagement with ASEAN as "good and significant" changes. However, he criticised as short-sighted the Gillard government's handling of Australia's relationship with two of our most important neighbour states, Indonesia and Malaysia.

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