**Chapter 16. Foreign Policy Making**

**Edward P. Wolfers**

**William Dihm**

**Table of Contents**

[Policy at independence](http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p78541/mobile/ch16.html#d0e9307)

[Policy-making since independence](http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p78541/mobile/ch16s02.html)

[Implementation](http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p78541/mobile/ch16s03.html)

[Conclusion](http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p78541/mobile/ch16s04.html)

[References](http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p78541/mobile/ch16s05.html)

Foreign policy is a notoriously elusive concept. A number of factors combine to blur the distinction between foreign and domestic policies (cf. Rosenau 1997; see also Rosenau 1992). Among the factors of particular contemporary relevance, both in the present case and generally, are: the domestic requirements and effects of globalization; the growing spread and depth of international cooperation and the increasing domestic acceptance and application of international law (which, together, affect almost all areas of public policy in Papua New Guinea, and impose increasingly tight limits on the internal discretion and activities of government across more and more); aid dependency (the more so when general budgetary support gives way to programs and projects requiring joint approval between donor and recipient), and the conditions attached to loans from international financial institutions, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Specifically in Papua New Guinea since the late 1980s, they also include the Bougainville crisis and peace process, especially as these have required involvement in the work of the United Nations Human Rights Commission during the 1990s; the negotiation and management of relations with the South Pacific Regional Peace Keeping Force (SPRPKF) in 1994 (Papua New Guinea 1994), the neutral regional Truce and Peace Monitoring Groups (TMG and PMG) and the Bougainville Transition Team (respectively, 1997–98, 1998–2003, and 2003 (Wolfers and Dihm 1998)), and the United Nations observer mission in Bougainville (UNOMB, 1998–2005); and relations with foreign aid donors providing support for restoration and development, weapons disposal, and other aspects of peace-making and peace-building, including meetings in New Zealand and Australia between the national government and the Bougainville factions.

While other aspects of public policy may sometimes be defined in terms of the policies announced as applying to the functional responsibilities of particular government agencies or discerned in their behaviour, foreign offices (especially, their overseas missions and posts) not only have their own core and other assigned functions but characteristically serve as agents for other government bodies too, charged with pursuing policies which these bodies make, including representations on behalf of the private sector.

To complicate the picture still further, certain institutions and relationships at the critical centre of many countries’ foreign relations, including significant elements of defence cooperation, are conducted with little or no provision for foreign offices’ participation, while others, such as the World Bank and the IMF, make no provision for such participation at all.

Then there are the growing numbers of international meetings at which particular officeholders (members of parliament, ombudsmen, police commissioners, etc.) or representatives of government agencies in almost every area of government activity, including commodity boards, get together to exchange information or develop cooperative arrangements with counterparts from other countries and officials of the organizations to which they belong. The levels of inclusivity of these meetings and organizations extend from the bilateral through the sub-regional (Melanesian) and varying definitions of the regional (Pacific islands, South Pacific, and Asia Pacific) to the Commonwealth, the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group, the functional or commodity-defined, such as the organizations through which cocoa, coffee, natural rubber and tropical timber-producing and exporting and other countries cooperate, to the United Nations (UN) and specialist organizations.

When it comes to trade and investment, the role of government tends to be limited to negotiating, participating in, and monitoring compliance with international agreements, regulation, and promotion. The substance of trade and investment in a market economy like Papua New Guinea’s are primarily matters for the private sector, whether or not they come under the Department of Foreign Affairs or another agency (or agencies) as far as government policy is concerned.

In the case of Papua New Guinea foreign policy, the picture is further complicated by the changing — though, over the longer term, generally contracting — combination(s) of functions for which the Department of Foreign Affairs has been responsible: from foreign affairs, defence and trade, including customs and migration, for much of the 1970s, through foreign affairs and trade, without customs after the early 1980s, to foreign affairs (still including migration, recently described officially as immigration) from about 1985.

Despite the difficulty, already mentioned, of defining the term, foreign policy has tended to be, almost by definition, beyond the competence of all colonial regimes (external/foreign control over foreign relations is one of the defining characteristics of colonial or other dependency status). It has also been generally the last area of government activity, together with defence, handed over at independence — though in Papua New Guinea’s case, day-to-day responsibility for the country’s foreign relations was transferred on a de facto basis to Papua New Guinean control in March 1975, six months before the country became formally independent. It is, therefore, an area in which successor regimes have tended to have little experience at independence, though generally very powerful legacies to manage. These legacies include the treaties and membership of international organizations to which newly independent states succeed (see Papua New Guinea 1982, Appendices I and II), and, especially, the centrality of relations with the former colonial power (Boyce 1977 contains a detailed comparative history and discussion of the issues involved in the establishment of foreign offices in the context of decolonization, with particular reference to Papua New Guinea in Chapter 4).

The history of Papua New Guinea foreign policy to date can be usefully divided into four broadly defined, sometimes overlapping, periods: the period in which Universalism (in the broader sense, not just the first element discussed below) was the main theme, 1974–1979; a period of transition; followed by the *Foreign Policy White Paper* (Papua New Guinea 1982), which promoted active and selective engagement as the basic approach from 1981 on; and the period since about 1997, when the basic approach has not been as readily applicable in its original form — which may turn out to be another period of transition to what may prove to be a new foreign policy approach following further review.

A great deal of foreign policy, especially in multilateral *fora* such as the United Nations, can be essentially a matter of words. It can often involve little more than expressing a view and, if the matter is raised in an international organization, then voting — especially as far as small states without substantial diplomatic resources and global influence are concerned. The frequency with which potentially controversial issues are deliberately buried in complexly worded, even intentionally ambiguous, consensus resolutions means that votes are not always required, and are sometimes deliberately avoided. Thus, the distinction between policy and implementation, which can be difficult to make in almost any area of public policy, can be even more difficult — and sometimes close to impossible — to apply in relation to foreign policy.

Moreover, even more obviously than in other areas of public policy, implementation is often a matter of negotiation. Insofar as foreign policy objectives are pursued through international organizations or require cooperation based on mutual respect for the sovereign independence of states, there is really no alternative. In any event, quite apart from the niceties of formal diplomacy, a relatively small and not very powerful state like Papua New Guinea can rarely impose its will on other states even if it were disposed to try (which no responsible Papua New Guinean leader has ever even proposed).

Two major paradigms have been developed, in practice and theory, for making, and evaluating, foreign policy: the Realist and the Idealist. The first emphasizes the pursuit of national interests, and the second support for principles as the main considerations. In practical terms, the first often employs the second as its rationale or as an instrument of propaganda (for example, ‘fighting for peace’), though it can also be used domestically to justify participation in international cooperation and support for important principles as being in the national interest. The second can sometimes disguise the first (take, for example, the claims to democracy advanced by states which present themselves as Marxist ‘people’s democracies’ or as adhering to a particular — perhaps Asian or African — cultural form). In certain cases, the distinction is actively denied, obvious instances being the widely held view that the USA has a particular interest in promoting what many Americans see as universal values, such as democracy and respect for human rights, as part of its national mission around the world, and claims that foreign aid to support development in less developed countries serves such universal principles as equity and humanity, not simply the interests of donor or recipient states.

When it comes to performance, the difficulties already outlined in distinguishing clearly and usefully between policy and implementation, and of agreeing about the sincerity with which principles are espoused, make it almost impossible to achieve widely shared evaluations. In any event, some of the most important achievements of a successful foreign policy are often essentially negative — for example, avoidance of wars or crises, including setbacks to development strategies. The role of policy in avoiding alternative, negative outcomes can be very hard to demonstrate at all conclusively.

However, despite the reservations outlined above concerning the possibility of systematic comparison with public policy-making, policy and implementation in other areas of government activity in Papua New Guinea, the following discussion of Papua New Guinea foreign policy since independence is organized under the same subheadings and follows the same sequence as other contributions to this volume — to facilitate such comparisons as can be fruitfully made, and assist in highlighting both the differences and the similarities they reveal.

**Policy at independence**

Papua New Guinea is unusual (if not unique) among former dependencies in having had a foreign policy in place at independence — officially, not just in the political manifesto of a political party or the colonial government’s successor regime. The main elements of Papua New Guinea’s first official foreign policy were sketched out by the responsible minister, Sir Albert Maori Kiki, even before the Australian government transferred day-to-day responsibility for the actual conduct of foreign relations (and defence) some six months before independence (Papua New Guinea 1976). That policy owed a great deal to recent history and current concerns, as policies often do, in which the legacy of Australian rule was a major factor (see, for example, the preoccupation with Australia in Griffin (1974, passim), especially the contributions by the editor and Papua New Guinea’s first two foreign ministers, Sir Albert Maori Kiki and Sir Ebia Olewale).

Like other United Nations trust territories, New Guinea, in particular — and, to a lesser extent, Papua, because of the impossibility of understanding the one without the other, especially after their ‘administrative’ amalgamation following World War II — were both involved in international relations well before independence (New Guinea had been a League of Nations’ mandate between World Wars I and II, but the system then involved neither visiting missions nor any other form of direct interaction between the Permanent Mandates Commission and people from the territories under its purview, as it did when New Guinea became a United Nations Trust Territory after World War II). Certain governments went to some pains to maintain the distinction between the two territories (a French member of a United Nations Trusteeship Council visiting mission declined to accept an invitation to accompany his colleagues on a short visit to centres in Papua, other than the capital for the combined territory, Port Moresby, apparently, out of concern at the possible implications for United Nations’ involvement in France’s Pacific territories). But the reality was that policy and policy recommendations for the one had direct implications for the other, and, increasingly, applied without any distinction in both.

The triennial United Nations visiting missions provided occasional opportunities for Papua New Guineans to be actors, not merely objects of interest or concern, in at least one international forum (as confirmed in frequently cited memories of the first requests for self-government and early demands for Bougainville’s secession at meetings with such missions during the early 1960s). So, to a lesser extent, did meetings of the Trusteeship Council at United Nations headquarters in New York, where selected Papua New Guineans attended and sometimes spoke, as members of the Australian delegation, in the annual debates on New Guinea (and rather more freely outside, for example at a cocktail party in New York in late 1971, when a prominent Papua New Guinean political leader, beer glass firmly held in his shirt pocket, demanded of a senior Indonesian diplomat when Irian Jaya would be allowed self-determination — notwithstanding the nationalist sensitivities of the official to whom he was speaking, or the United Nations-approved *Act of Free Choice* two years previously).

In a regional context, the South Pacific Conferences which were held under the auspices of the South Pacific Commission following World War II allowed — again, selected — aspirant Papua New Guinean leaders to interact with counterparts from other Pacific island territories. In addition to raising awareness of issues such as the transfer of West New Guinea from Dutch to Indonesian control (following a short United Nations interregnum), and providing opportunities for aspirant politicians to engage in informal exchanges of ideas outside the formal meetings about matters such as political party organization and platforms, these meetings were important in building the mutual understanding and institutional foundations for subsequent cooperation in the Pacific, both among island countries and region-wide.

Then, during the 1960s, increasing numbers of actual and potential Papua New Guinean leaders visited Australia on political education tours, where they met Australian political leaders and officials at different levels of government. Increasing numbers of senior Australian politicians and officials visited Papua New Guinea too.

Thus it was that, even as Papua New Guinea opened up to the wider world during the 1960s and 1970s, Australia remained, by far, the dominant external factor in Papua New Guinea’s foreign relations at independence (and, arguably, not so very external when one considers the relative predominance of Australian aid not only in overall foreign development assistance but in government revenue; Australia’s continuing contribution to foreign investment in and overseas trade with Papua New Guinea; the number of Australian public servants still on the job if, in certain respects, on the way out, as well as other Australian residents; and the ongoing, close educational, communications and cultural links, as well as the personal, even political, ties between Papua New Guinea and Australia).

The Australian legacy was, therefore, central to almost every aspect of Papua New Guinea’s foreign relations at independence. That legacy was not just a matter of links and shared interests with Australia. It also affected the way in which the new state viewed, and dealt with, other parts of the world, notably the Pacific islands and Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia (as discussed below).

Thus, the process of opening-up further to other parts of the world, or diversifying Papua New Guinea’s foreign relations, following independence implied some dilution of relations with Australia (not necessarily in absolute, but certainly in relative, terms, as Papua New Guinea began to deal with new players and relations with them grew). It has meant that, even today, important issues in, and relations with, other countries are often refracted through lenses in which Australian perceptions and sometimes suspicions of Australia have tended to have substantial influence on what Papua New Guineans (especially, those who were adults at independence) perceive, say or do.

The ready initial identification of Papua New Guinea with other Pacific island countries also owed a great deal to orientations and contacts successive Australian governments had encouraged before independence (through the South Pacific Commission and Conference, as well as the Central Medical School in Fiji). Christian missions which had close relations with counterparts, or were part of much bigger regional operations, played a significant part, too, in forging links and identifications across national boundaries, and with the wider region.

Relative inexperience in dealing with Asian governments and people — apart from residents of Chinese or Ambonese descent, and then mainly on the New Guinea side — was another aspect of the Australian legacy (the White Australia policy had applied to immigration to Papua New Guinea under Australian rule, and also to Papua New Guineans seeking entry to Australia (Wolfers 1975)). The combination of pre-independence experience and orientations in relation to the Pacific and Asia meant that members of the Papua New Guinea government and educational elite at independence had had relatively little direct involvement with or knowledge of the county’s closest and largest neighbour, Indonesia. The sole exception of any significance was in relation to the (West) Papuans who had participated in South Pacific Conferences until 1962, those who had come to Papua New Guinea for education, including a number of doctors, and others who had entered and remained behind, sometimes without being officially noticed (like the 300 or so people from (West) Papua who lived on a hillside above the Port Moresby suburb of Badili during the mid-1960s, passing themselves off as people from Papua New Guinea’s Western District), and other illegal border-crossers and refugees. Insofar as Papua New Guineans developed attitudes towards Indonesia, they were often likely to be influenced by experience and identification with those (West) Papuans they had met, as well as the residue of Australian fears of possible Indonesian expansionism during the Sukarno era.

Thus, the main reference to Asia in Papua New Guinea’s first foreign policy was expressed in a metaphor whose practical implications and application were unclear: Papua New Guinea was — or aspired to be — a bridge or link between Asia and the Pacific, without any clear explanation of what, if anything, might be expected to follow in operational terms (the observations that the main role of a bridge is to be walked over and that a link in a chain is liable to be pulled from both sides, or even wound around someone’s neck, were made publicly only some years later).

The Australian legacy was reinforced by the continuing presence of Australian personnel in key positions in government agencies engaged in border administration and related activities, the centrality of the common border in policy and interactions with Indonesia, and the apparent reluctance of some Australians to train, let alone trust, Papua New Guineans to deal responsibly with Indonesian issues and officials. A related time-lag that affected Papua New Guinea policy towards Indonesia was a tendency to deal with Indonesia and the border in a national-security framework which owed quite a deal to fears not only of Indonesia but of the likelihood and possible implications of Papua New Guineans identifying with the Melanesians to the west — hence the theme and title of the published proceedings of the first Papua New Guinea-Indonesia dialogue in 1984, *Beyond the Border* (Wolfers 1988), which