New Zealand's Foreign Service: A History

The following is a transcript of a panel talk by Ian McGibbon, Steven Loveridge and Anita Perkins, facilitated by Malcolm McKinnon. It was recorded live at the National Library of New Zealand on 12 October 2022.

Transcript

Sarah Burgess: Kia ora, and welcome to the New Zealand History podcast channel, where you'll find talks on Aotearoa New Zealand history, culture and society. These talks are organised by Manatū Taonga the Ministry for Culture and Heritage with the support of the Alexander Turnbull Library. They're recorded live either via Zoom or in person at Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa, the National Library of New Zealand.

Neill Atkinson: Tēnā koutou, ko Neill Atkinson tōku ingoa kei te Manatū Taonga au e mahi ana. Nau mai haere mai ki te kaupapa o te rā nei. Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou tatou.

Welcome everyone, I'm Neill Atkinson, chief historian at the Ministry of for Culture and Heritage. Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage has been delighted to have worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and more latterly, Massey University Press, to research, write and publish this wonderful history, *New Zealand's Foreign Service*, a project which began in 2018, and really gained some momentum in 2019, when the ministry engaged Ian McGibbon as commissioning editor.

It was great to have Ian involved again with this project, after being connected to the history function at Manatū Taonga, and its predecessors in Internal Affairs, for many, many years.

I'm going to introduce Dr Malcolm McKinnon, who's an adjunct associate professor at Victoria University of Wellington. Be well known to many of you, I'm sure, from his

publications in fields of international relations, economic history and other roles, including the general editor of the New Zealand Historical Atlas.

I think Malcolm's played a really important role in this project, sort of more behind the scenes, as a member of the governance group, and also the editorial committee, and I know Ian has expressed his thanks to Malcolm's contribution. So, please join me in welcoming Malcolm up here, and he'll introduce our speakers.

[Applause]

Malcolm McKinnon: Thank you very much, Ian, tēnā koutou kātoa. It's great to see an audience here in the auditorium to discuss this book, and also, I believe, an audience online.

It's great to have reached this point. Neill didn't mention that of course, the course of producing – researching, producing and writing the book took place through the pandemic months and years, and that added an extra level of complexity to getting it done. It's a terrific result that it's come in on time, and is such a substantial and interesting work.

I have an extra copy here, but for those of you who have not yet bought it, copies are available in all good bookstores. Possibly, indeed, in other bookstores, but certainly in good bookstores.

I don't want to dwell further on the book, because we have three speakers here to comment on it, and we'll follow a procedure which I'm going to outline in a second, and then there'll be an opportunity for Q&A from the auditorium audience, and possibly, if it arises, from some online questions.

The procedure we're going to follow is we're going to get the speakers – and I'll introduce them in a second – to address two questions. The first question is, what is distinctive or unique about MFAT's approach to diplomacy in New Zealand and globally? How did that play out in the time period you focused on in your chapter?

The second question will be, what was involved in the process of researching and writing your chapters in the book? What were some of the challenges you faced in this process?

Each speaker is going to speak for some minutes on the first question, and then they'll come back and speak for some minutes on the second question. Then we will have the discussion.

The speakers we have with us today are Ian McGibbon, already mentioned by Neill, long-term colleague and professional – friend of mine. Without – Ian's very, very modest. This book is, in many respects, his creation and it's a terrific tribute to him to see it in print.

He's going to talk first.

Steven Loveridge is responsible for one of the chapters in part two of the book. He also has an impressive career as a younger scholar in historical writing in twentieth-century New Zealand. He will speak.

Then Anita Bryant, who contributed two chapters to the third section, and also has a distinguished career as a writer and a commentator, will contribute by speaking about her part of the book and her responses.

I'm now going to invite you to welcome Ian to the podium, to answer the first question, that will be followed by Steven and Anita, and then I'll briefly remind us of what the second question is.

So, Ian, over to you.

[Applause]

Ian McGibbon: Thank you very much, Malcolm. The early figures in the department had a habit of describing it in sort of biological terms. George Laking said it was an exotic bloom in the harsh environment of the time, of the wartime Prime Minister's Department, and a somewhat strange creature.

Alister McIntosh said it took the department almost as long as it does a human being, to come of age. So, if we follow that metaphor, well, McIntosh undoubtedly was the father of New Zealand, of the Department of External Affairs and of the diplomatic service. Perhaps not the father of diplomacy – which I think we could say was Berendsen, but McIntosh, certainly, was the founder of the department.

My period, to follow the metaphor even further, was really the childhood and adolescence of the department, to come of age in the '60s.

Initially, it was going to be just the period of '43 to '66, which was the tenure of Alister McIntosh. The editorial committee, of which – and basically it was Malcolm – suggested that really, there should be a split at '49, and we – and I agreed, and the governance group agreed that we should have, basically, an earlier part, covering '43 to 49 – the early childhood, and then a later description of '49 to '66.

I've put up there the main issues that were involved.

McIntosh actually said the '43 to '49 period was the golden age of the department, in later life, when he was reviewing his career, but all – the distinctive thing about this period,

really, was the inexperience of our diplomats. They were learning on the job. The insecurity of the department. It came out of the Prime Minister's Department during the war. For the first six years, there was certainly no certainty that the department would continue, that it might not be subsumed back into the Prime Minister's Department.

After '49, 16, the 17 years, only three of those years were Labour governments. The National Party took a very dim view of the department, especially when it was formed. Believed that it was far too expensive for New Zealand to run a diplomatic service.

So, it was a relatively unfavourable climate, so there was insecurity in that regard.

It was only when economic issues began to intrude that the department began to find its feet, in the '60s, when the British made their first attempt to get into the EEC.

So, I would say that the distinctive feature of the early part was insecurity and learning on the job, but also, this was also a period when Britain was still a great power. After 1956, its decline became more obvious, but we were operating in a British world, and our diplomats benefited from that, because we had the weight of the British diplomatic service around us, and we were able, to use a bit of a cliché, punch a little bit above our weight in places like San Francisco, where we took part in forming the United Nations.

Those are the main issues in my period.

We originally planned to have one chapter in the book covering diversity, the development of the ministry, or the diversity of the ministry.

Eventually, it became obvious that it wasn't going to work. We needed a more chronological treatment.

In my period, up to 1966, it wasn't really a difficult issue, because there was very little diversity. It was really a white male institution. In the early part, there were some women who were appointed. McIntosh was not averse to appointing them, until he found that they all got married, as soon as they were posted to Washington or London, so then he became adamant that men were the only people to invest in, as diplomats.

I also wrote two dedicated chapters on diversity for the second and third parts. I'm not going to go into them here, because I've only got six minutes, but I would say the distinctive aspect of that is the 1970s, the tenure of Frank Corner, who, I would say, was the star in terms of setting the ministry on the course of adjusting to societal changes, and women and Māori came into the picture in the '70s, in a way they hadn't been in the early part of the department.

I will stop now, and pass back to…

Steven Loveridge: Kia ora all.

If we continue the popular metaphor that Ian has introduced, of casting the foreign service in biological terms, then my chapter, my period, 1967 to 1989, might make it the adolescent years.

Indeed, aptly, we see changes, experiments, a new-found strength – sometimes of an uncertainty on how to use it. A growing sense of confusion about a changing world, and one's place within it, but given time constraints, I'm going to stick to three points of how this period wrought a distinctive diplomacy.

The first concerns the fundamental changes in the geopolitical environment diplomats operated within.

Imagine a world in which New Zealand participated within the US-led isolation of China, in which sincere echoes of Savage's, 'where Britain goes, we go,' are still familiar to the public ear. In which the diplomatic footprint is in the early part of growing beyond its older stomping ground of the English-speaking world. In which ANZUS and forward defence in South-East Asia are central planks in defence policy. In which a military commitment in South Vietnam is seen as critical in affirming New Zealand's credibility as an ally. In which the Cold War is among the most prominent features shaping the geopolitical environment.

Imagine a world in which New Zealand has opened relations with the People's Republic of China, in which diplomatic missions have spread well beyond the English-speaking world, into new territories in the Middle East, Africa, South America, and where Pacific relations have attracted enhanced attention. In which, where Britain goes into the EEC, we cannot.

In which forward defences faded, and New Zealand's role in ANZUS has been suspended. In which New Zealand sponsors a united Vietnam's entry into the UN. In which the Berlin wall – that quintessential symbol of east/west division – was about to fall.

This is the same country separated by roughly 20 years and is indicative of the vast amount that changed in the period I had to review.

While I'm obviously showing the deck in lieu of the cards here, these shifts demanded a distinct approach to diplomacy, and the book's contents illustrate how diplomats were at the sharp end in efforts to manage some of the dramatic shifts in New Zealand's place in the world.

Secondly, obviously, New Zealand was changing alongside the wider world over these decades, and the shifting domestic environment constitutes a second factor in shaping diplomacy in this period.

Political opinion and public protest regarding foreign policies and international issues were not new, but 1967 to 1989 certainly showcases a heightened attention and capacity to mobilise bodies and make noise.

The period saw protests over news that the United States planned to build a global navigation station in New Zealand, which was thought to have military applications – the Omega station. The Vietnam War. Protests over sporting contacts with apartheid South Africa. Protests over nuclear testing in the Pacific. Protests over visits from warships neither confirming nor denying whether they carried nuclear weapons or were propelled by nuclear propulsion. Protests over French security agents sinking the *Rainbow Warrior*.

Moreover, these protests were not simply between the public and officials, but played out in the arena of party politics, ending the previous era of bipartisan consensus on foreign policy.

Again, diplomats operated within a sometimes volatile environment, and a sense of prudency in approaching some issues did not always align with political opinion.

To pick one example, as secretary of foreign affairs, in the aftermath of the *Rainbow Warrior* bombing, Merv Norrish, in his words, sought an honourable settlement, which would permit New Zealand and France to put the episode behind them, and to avoid a damaging confrontation, in which France possessed far greater resources.

This favouring of prudency and pragmatism was, I think, to put it lightly, at some remove from a general outrage in the aftermath of the bombing.

To take this theme of change one step further, social shifts were felt within the foreign service itself. A third factor that made diplomacy distinctive.

As chapters in the book attest to, the sexual revolution, biculturalism and gay liberation all played out within the foreign service, alongside wider society.

Moreover, an expanding diplomatic footprint, which was pursuing a more diverse agenda, demanded wider skill sets. The need for greater language proficiencies offers some vivid examples.

In the mid-1960s, Alister McIntosh bemoaned the lack of staff fluent in Italian. The Rome embassy was an important site in addressing Britain's entry to the EEC, and one of the critical objectives in Italy was to get to know and influence the Italian minister of agriculture, the most senior Italian official who went to Brussels, to lodge Italy's vote on matters affecting New Zealand's agricultural imports to Europe.

Likewise, anticipation of increased contact with China in the early 1970s brought home forcibly, as the secretary of foreign affairs George Laking put it, that the ministry had no officer fluent in Mandarin. In the face of limited resources, a crash course was instigated to build up a core of Chinese speakers.

In summary, New Zealand was not an island against these seminal and complex changes, which unfurled around the world between 1967 and 1989, and this was especially so on the diplomatic front.

I think all this gives some sense of why my chapter was entitled, ‘Meeting New Challenges’.

Anita Perkins: Tēnā koutou katoa. Ko Anita Perkins tōku ingoa. Nō Aerana, Kotirana, Ingarangi me Parani ōku tīpuna. Nō Ōtepoti ahau. E mihi kau ana ki ngā tangata whenua e pupuri ana i te mauri of te whenua mā tātou. Nō reira tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

I’d just like to acknowledge the people of the land, Taranaki Whānui and Ngāti Toa.

My name’s Anita Perkins, although I’m sure Anita Bryant is amazing [laughs].

The chapters that I covered looked at the period from roughly about 1990 to the present. I took a slightly different approach, trying to sum up the New Zealand approach to diplomacy, in almost a typology of characteristics. I think, as I’m speaking, it may be interesting for you to think about whether you think this is typical of New Zealanders in general, or whether it’s something specific to our foreign affairs and diplomats.

One of the key characteristics, I think, of the period that I covered is about fair-mindedness, and listening to all voices. One of the areas in which this played out was in the 2015/16 Security Council campaign for a seat.

The planning for that began in around 2012. One of the really key messages there was New Zealand is fair, practical and constructive. This was something that really resonated with the general approach of New Zealand diplomats in trade and other multilateral arenas.

Another key element, I think, is being strategic.

One of the areas in which that played out was when New Zealand was really trying to think about re-engaging with the US, after we’d fallen out over nuclear matters, and some of the

efforts, for example, from Roy Ferguson, in the early 2000s, and taking a New Zealand Inc approach, in engaging on a number of fronts, was quite a strategic thought programme.

Another element I think is quite distinctive for us is thinking long term.

In terms of trade negotiations, for example, before you sign a free trade agreement, there are years and years of building relationships, and that's where, for example, the work of diplomats on the ground, building those relationships, whether it be through meetings or cocktail parties, or whatever it is, really lays the foundation for trade negotiators coming in, later on.

Another area was an insistence on working within the international rules-based system.

If you listen to just about any media release from MFAT, you'll hear about the way in which we really ground all of our approaches on international rules-based systems, but at the same time, also maintaining an independent foreign policy voice.

That's something that we've done consistently, in a number of different contexts, even when we've been under quite a lot of pressure from other players, including with the US on the nuclear issue.

I also think there's a fair amount of courage. Sometimes our diplomats are in really high-pressure situations, where they're negotiating all night long, or sometimes they're actually in situations which are quite dangerous. So, they're really putting themselves out there for the interests of New Zealand.

So, also, tenacity, adaptability, innovation, humility, humour, and sometimes even self-deprecation.

I think we've had a number, for example, of representatives working in the World Trade Organisation, and some of our chairs have become very well known for their sense of humour.

Also, I think, I would add to that list a lack of pretence, and a good dose of pragmatism. One of the interviews I did was with Jonathan Austin, who was the New Zealand representative in Timor. He had Helen Clark visiting him at one point. He had a Land Rover, and he was trying to brief the prime minister on what was going on, but he didn't have enough seats, so he had to fashion himself a stool [laughs] to sit extra on the Land Rover, but also while doing this formality. So there's a bit of pragmatism there as well.

I think there is an innate devotion to advancing New Zealand's interests, in working with other countries towards better global outcomes, whether that is in trade, conservation, nuclear disarmament or climate change.

A lot of these times, in these meetings, people are working very long hours, and it is a really career-long commitment. The diplomats are often career diplomats, and they're devoting their whole lives, and they have a real passion and drive for doing what they do.

Although it wasn't really a focus of my two chapters, I also would like to make note of the way in which te ao Māori, tikanga and kawa have made Aotearoa's approach to diplomacy unique. I think we see this quite strongly in the language and concepts of Minister Mahuta, that she draws on in some of her foreign policy speeches.

A couple of moments that really stood out to me, in terms of the research that I did.

One was our top trade official, Vangelis Vitalis, interviewing him, he was telling me about a really stressful negotiation that he was involved in, when he was actually working in an independent capacity as a chair of the negotiations in 2015. He had to try and achieve consensus among all 154 states on the decision on agricultural export competition. He'd been working, chairing this for four nights in a row, in sessions that finished at 4 a.m., and then restarted three hours later.

He tried to encourage the negotiations by withholding the full text, but refused to budge, even when two of the biggest players importuned him to reveal the text with them. I just think, the people on the street don't always know about these moments of intense stress, where people that are putting themselves under. I think that really shows, also, this principle of fair-mindedness playing out. The motion passed, so, that was a successful outcome.

There was also the story of Judith Trotter, who was working at our embassy in Rome, and then in the '90s, when the situation in Bosnia deteriorated, New Zealand sent a 250-strong infantry company to Vitez, north-west of Sarajevo. New Zealand needed to have credentials established for that. So, Judith Trotter had to make her way to Sarajevo, which, at the time, was under siege. As she arrived at the presidential palace to present her credentials, four missiles hit the back of the building, and there were injured people being taken away.

So, the odd mix of decorum and danger of the situation was highlighted by the response of Trotter's local interpreter, when she complimented on her smart appearance. The interpreter said, 'we, in Sarajevo, wear our best clothes every day, because it could be our last.'

Just the tenacity and the dedication and devotion to what was needed for New Zealand at that time, I think is really illustrated in that example from the ’90s.

The story that probably hit me the most, in doing this research, was about the work that New Zealand did on the Bougainville crisis, where deputy secretary Neil Walter, former high commissioner to Papua New Guinea, John Hayes, McKinnon’s private secretary, Bede Corry, and Roger Mortlock, the NZDF chief of operations at the time, went to Bougainville to attempt peace talks.

That was not without risk – Hayes’ helicopter actually came under fire, as they were attempting to do that – but they were able to convince some of the warring parties to come over to Burnham camp, near Christchurch. They didn’t set a time limit for those talks, but had time, space and encouragement. The result, after two weeks, was the Burnham Declaration, which served as a basis for the peace process.

Tikanga Māori also played an important part in that talk, and Bede Corry observed that the pōwhiri welcome had an almost transformative effect on the participants and reminded them that New Zealand was of the Pacific.

Those are some of the – it’s really hard to pull out, because there are so many amazing examples from that time period that I looked at, but I think those are some of the key characteristics of what perhaps makes New Zealand diplomats unique for the time period that I covered.

[Applause]

Malcolm McKinnon: Thank you very much Anita, and my mea culpa about your name [laughs] – that was Freudian – and to Ian and Steven, as well.

You'll appreciate that in that question, the speakers were being asked to really talk about the actors, the diplomats, and the role that they played. There are many of them in the auditorium today. I hope you recognised a lot of those commentaries.

The second question takes us more to the task of these individuals as historians. How they approached the task of writing these chapters, as historians. The challenges they faced. So, we'll start again with Ian, followed by Steven, and then followed by Anita. Thank you.

Ian McGibbon: The first essential in writing chapters, especially if you're doing three chapters, is to work out a plan of how to approach it. To some extent, that was resolved in the early stages of this project, when we – or the governance group – agreed that there should be a 10-chapter book, three chapters – three parts of three chapters each, covering the periods '43 to '66, which was McIntosh's tenure – by far the longest – 1966 to '89.

There was a natural split in '89, with the passing of the State Sector Act and also huge changes on the international scene. The Berlin Wall came down, the Soviet Union dissolved, the two issues that had been the main issues in the early part, decolonisation and the Cold War, basically had gone, by 1989, so we started in a new period.

The idea was that each section would have one chapter covering the structure, the organisation of the department, the creation of posts and the role arrangements, I think what particular elements of the department would be doing.

That would set the scene for the second chapter, which would be on challenges, and then a third chapter would be on the achievements.

Okay, this, immediately people said, well, there's problems, really, defining what's a challenge and what's an achievement, because an achievement is overcoming a challenge.

I could see the point, and to some extent, that was a problem in the later chapters, but I think, in my period it wasn't, because there were a number of clearly defined challenges.

One was the attitude of politicians to the department and to diplomats in general. That was based, to a large extent, on public opinion, which tended to think that diplomats went overseas on the taxpayers' purse and lived the high life – a completely wrong assessment of what diplomats actually do.

One of the other challenges that I had to focus on was, of actually serving overseas, especially in those early years, because it was really an ad hoc arrangement. Each diplomat had a set of conditions set out by the minister. They could differ – the issue of working out the cost of living in countries they were going to was difficult. Berendsen always complained that his pay had halved while he was in Washington, because of changes in the rate of exchange. That was merely one of his many grievances, I must say.

There was also the challenge of working – within New Zealand all diplomats were part of the public service. They had to take leave when they went to serve at an overseas post, but within New Zealand they were part of the public service, controlled by the Public Service Commission, which had its own ideas on promotion and all that sort of thing.

A lot of McIntosh's time was spent trying to persuade the commission that the department was different to the traditional New Zealand departments, where you entered as a cadet, and you moved up through the grades, and eventually, you may become secretary of the department.

Foreign Affairs – well, External Affairs had a lot of highly qualified people in the lower grades, all moving up, and certainly, the Public Service Commission just couldn't get a handle of how to promote people through the grades in that period. So, that's one of the challenges.

The challenge – and I mentioned the public perception of diplomats – the challenge of serving overseas, I think, was an important element of that second chapter that I wrote.

Just finding a house was really a hassle. Shanahan went to Singapore, and he looked at 30 houses. Admittedly, he was finicky about what he was willing to live in, but eventually he found a house, but that was symptomatic of the problem. You arrived in a big city, and unless someone was leaving, and had their flat, and they could let you go to it, you had to go and find a flat or an apartment or a house, and that was always a difficult issue.

The other challenge was, especially in those early years, was because of the Cold War, the problem of security – McIntosh had a reputation for appointing people with left wing opinions – drove Berendsen crazy, because he actually described them as 'those infernal little Bolsheviks in Wellington' – lower members of the department. But there were issues of security in relation to Bill Sutch, who went to New York, and according to the Mitrokhin Archive, was actually recruited by Soviet intelligence while he was serving in New York, and

McIntosh had to make a rushed, dashed trip to New York at one stage, to look into allegations that were being made about Sutch.

One of the points in the book I make is about our – a leading woman diplomat at the time, who was his underling in New York, and got on the wrong side of Sutch – unfairly, I think, and I portray in the book, but Sutch believed she was telling tales to the government, about his speeches in the UN, which were very pro-Soviet.

But there was also Paddy Costello, who had served in Moscow, and was – certainly, British intelligence regarded as a communist agent of some form. There's some tentative issues in Mitrokhin Archive about Costello, but as I make the point in the book, as a public servant, and a diplomat for New Zealand, you can't really fault his performance. We can't, in this forum, go into why I say that, but you can read it in the book.

So, there were a number of challenges that were quite substantial, that had to be overcome by the department in those early years. The achievements, I think, I've listed there, security accomplishments, because Frank Corner, in his later years, said that, in his opinion, the greatest achievement New Zealand Department of External Affairs made in those early years was securing a security guarantee from the United States.

That's an opinion, of course, that Berendsen would have completely endorsed. He called it the greatest prize that a – sorry, Doidge said it was a greatest prize. Berendsen said it was the greatest thing that a great country could afford to a small, insignificant country in the South Pacific. I can't remember the exact words, but it's along those lines.

To Corner, the ANZUS Treaty was a major achievement of the ministry.

During the ’50s there was a lot of work on defence planning in South-East Asia, and we became involved in SEATO. I wouldn’t call that as much an accomplishment, but our diplomats were much involved in that procedure and established a good reputation, working in that forum.

The Colombo Plan, which was not enthusiastically – or the original approach of McIntosh was very unenthusiastic, so was Berendsen, but New Zealand eventually put a lot of effort and time into the Colombo Plan, and McIntosh came around, eventually, to believing that it was a very valuable effort on New Zealand’s part.

The other achievement, I think, is the early response to Britain’s attempts to enter the EEC. That’s when the ministry as a department, began to reveal to the government that it had a – it was a useful tool in preserving New Zealand’s interests in the economic sphere, because the ministry, up till then, had not – department ministry had not been a major player in that area. The old departments Customs and Treasury, and Industries and Commerce, controlled that area.

I’ve already mentioned how, in the end, we split, split the two, but at least they had a plan. That plan was basically all the other chapter -— parts, were supposed to be in the same format. The first chapter of each part really looks at structure, the appointment of diplomats overseas, the creation of posts, and challenges, which Steven did, for his part, and Hamish McDougall did the achievements, which was more focused on the EEC area. In the third part, Diana Morrow did the structure and the posts, and Anita took on both achievements and challenges – very well, too.

So, we had the plan, and then the idea was to find the material to write it up. In my period, I was the fortunate one of the three of our authors, because I had the McIntosh papers, covering the whole period of my part. The McIntosh papers are just a sensational research tool, really. His correspondence with a variety of people at different levels in the department, and people outside the department.

Malcolm McKinnon: Time.

Ian McGibbon: Sorry?

Malcolm McKinnon: Time.

Ian McGibbon: Time, okay. Sorry, I've got time. I will quickly say, the records of the State Services Commission and the External Affairs Department, they're a huge volume, mostly in archives. We didn't really have time to delve deeply. We had to search out particular papers. Laking's and Corner's papers were very useful, as well.

The challenge, really, from my point of view, was making sure that I didn't completely focus it on – it's not a biography of McIntosh, it's using his material to shape the chapters.

Seeing I've run out of time, I won't carry on to talk about diversity, but, the Foreign Service Association records are a huge source for that area, too, especially in tracing what 'happened during the 70s, with women and Māori coming through, eventually, to a major element in the department. Thank you.

Steven Loveridge: Okay, again, I'll devote my time to three main points on the challenges of writing this history.

The first of these is rather prosaic, and I imagine not at all unique. It's the simple matter of logistics, namely, doing justice to the many complicated things that happened in a relatively small space. Some people may not say the book is small, but it looks different when you're writing it.

Books could be written – have been written – on the seminal events of my briefing, the end of the Vietnam War and the situation in Cambodia. Nuclear politics, including testing. The end of ANZUS and the *Rainbow Warrior* affair. Recognising China. Negotiations around Britain's entry into the EEC. Public outreach in an age of protest. New attention to the South Pacific, and a few other issues besides. My briefing had an allowance of 10,000 words. Which I think I broadly kept to? Ian, don't answer that.

In short, writing the chapter was a real exercise in concision and precision. The process started with writing out masses and masses of notes on history in foreign policy, which then informed trawls through archival records, personal papers and interviews, in the search for inputs and perspectives of foreign service officials and personnel.

Reviews then sought to compact the general history, and to make it a contextualising point within the study of the foreign service, not the story itself.

A second, and related point, is the challenge of seeking to map out the intersections of policymaking where various inputs and influences were in play.

Obviously, looking at what happened is a lot easier than figuring out why what happened, did. In many cases, we have timelines that note the decisions made. Sometimes we can track the origins of those decisions, but often it's a little bit more quieter about what happened in between.

Were outcomes the results of consensus, compromise or contestation? Forced by events, or favoured by particular personalities?

Churchill once colourfully described Kremlin intrigue as a dogfight under a rug, in which the outsider can see some shapes, hear some growls, but can only deduct what happened when one dog emerges and another does not.

Now, thankfully, happily, allusions of fatalities are not applicable in this case, but the measurement of actual outcomes against possibilities that stayed under the rug, is, I think, apt.

A good example is the shifts that occurred in the forward defence strategy, which centred on maintaining an infantry battalion on the Malay peninsula, in coordination with Britain and Australia, with the objective of building up regional security.

This came under review from April 1967, when Wellington was advised by Whitehall that Britain intended to draw down its military presence east of Suez.

The prospect that British forces would be completely withdrawn by late 1971 had major implications for New Zealand and Australia, as their contributions were integrated with British logistical systems that could not, obviously, be replaced.

What did eventuate is quite clear. In June 1968, talks between Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore laid the foundations for the Five Power Defence Arrangements, which came into effect on the first of November 1971, and which endure, roughly half a century later.

Prime Minister Holyoake presented the decision as a national watershed, recalling the Second World War and evoking a sense of independence. Once it may have made sense to say, where Britain goes, we go. Now, as Britain leaves – or withdraws – from South-East Asia, it makes no sense to say, when Britain leaves, we leave.

Likewise, Secretary of Foreign Affairs George Laking recalled the decision to stay as part of the post-imperial approach, a New Zealand assessment of New Zealand interests, and claimed the decision was, without question, one of the most significant of the post-war era.

Behind the public statements were somewhat more intricate manoeuvres and some differing perspectives between External Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, and the Joint Intelligence Committee, in the aftermath of Whitehall's 1967 announcement.

The chiefs of staff generally rarely stated the rationale of forward defence, and favoured maintaining a presence in Singapore, in cooperation with Australia. However, an initial External Affairs briefing argued that Britain's withdrawal compelled an obligation, and I quote, 'to re-examine the basis for maintaining a military presence in the area, and propose that the ambition to promote collective security in South-East Asia will be best served through a' – sorry, 'better served by a tighter collaboration with the United States.'

Quote, 'since we can play no independent role, and can find a military place in South-East Asia only by associating with a major ally, we have no choice but to prepare to transfer our efforts into the American sphere.' Close quote.

Consequently, proposals were prepared for a transfer of military assets to Vietnam. This decision, however, withered on the vine, as news came from the United States of the mood created in the aftermath of Tet Offensive.

Frank Corner reported from Washington that the offensive had created an air of gloom, almost disaster, within the Johnson administration, and that he had overheard frank talk that the US might cut its losses.

In summation and looking at what did emerge from under the rug, there is a challenge to keep an eye out for other dogs.

A third challenge, which is hardly unique to diplomacy, but has a particular resonance within it, is the challenge of tracing the human face within decisions and actions.

Diplomacy is undertaken within institutions and in concert with wider political systems and bureaucracies, whose records perhaps inevitably de-emphasise personal factors.

It is worth reminding ourselves that diplomacy, more than many things in life, is entwined with personalities, opinions, moods, relationships, and immediate conditions.

Gerald Hensley, an official with notable experience in diplomacy, puts it well in a recollection of his reaction to examining a political science student's thesis, in contrasting very apt consultation and citation of archival records with a general sense of, 'it wasn't like this.'

In his words, 'the files often lack the human thumbprints of those who made them. All the muddle and misgivings, the arguments and atmospherics, which precede what actually happened.' Close quote – and shades, I think, of dogs under rugs, perhaps.

Elsewhere, I've pored over the July Crisis which preceded the First World War, and had been reminded that the involved officials were facing a fluid and high-stakes situation, while

being tired, confused, stressed, and operating under various constraints, and, as Anita reminded us, this is not confined to what some might consider the history of a century ago.

Interviews and personal accounts were invaluable in meeting this challenge, and a good reminder that diplomacy always involves people. They added some sense of what it was like to learn Farsi in a relatively tight timetable.

The sense of being isolated in a Pacific posting, in times of much slower communications and sporadic shipping timetables, the details which impressed the mood in Fiji, in the lead-up to the first coup, the clash between seminal events in small moments of life. My favourite is Piera McArthur's recollection of the start of the coup in Chile, with her husband skidding around the corner, out of the bathroom, with shaving cream on his face, yelling, 'it's happening, it's happening'. It's not quite how Hollywood would do it, I think.

Despite the larger systems they operated within, it was officials on the ground who carried the immediate risks during air strikes in the Iran–Iraq war, or in taking in fugitives during the Iranian revolution, after coups in Chile and Fiji, or in smuggling people out as the fall of Saigon approached.

In summary, researching and writing this record presented some intriguing challenges, but it was a fascinating history to track. You are all, of course, most welcome to purchase a copy, and to check our thinking on this – available, of course, in time for Christmas, if you'll forgive one less than diplomatic remark. Thank you.

[Applause]

Anita Perkins: I think it was about the year 2019, there was a SEEK ad, looking for researchers to contribute to this book on the history of MFAT, and I didn't even see it, but two different people who I know sent it to me and said that it sounds like me.

I have a background in academia. I've published my PhD as a book, and I've worked as a public servant and a researcher, including at MFAT. So, you can understand why people thought that I would be a good person for the role.

I worked at MFAT for two years, and doing this role was a little bit of a shift in position from MFAT for perhaps two years, writing my story, to me, writing MFAT's story.

I had two roles while I was there. One was working in the environment division, for example, on the International Whaling Commission, and the other one was working in the bilateral space and New Zealand's relationships with Europe, for example, preparing the Angela Merkel visit to New Zealand.

To be candid, during my time at MFAT were some of my career highs, and also some really challenging times. One of the highlights for me was attending the International Whaling Commission meeting in Slovenia, at a time where New Zealand and Australia had won a case in the International Court of Justice, and we were seeking to pass a resolution into the convention on whaling, on the scientific whaling programme, from the court decision.

So, it was interesting to go from working on the inside, to working from the outside.

Having worked at MFAT gave me some street cred, or organisational navigation skills, in terms of knowing some of the people, the language, the acronyms, and how things work

there, but I still had some independence, having been away for a few years, and from my work as an independent researcher.

My chapters were about events that took place over around the last 30 years. To put it curtly, it's more difficult to talk about the experiences and events involving people who are still alive than those who are no longer with us. It's a bit of a double-edged sword, because of that difficulty, but it means that I get to interview people, which is something that I love to do, but it's also harder in making sure that I accurately resent (sic) people's stories, and where there are different points of view about how a story is told, for example, in the editing process.

One of the biggest challenges of this research was the editing process. It included multiple people, and often with contradictory suggestions on how to edit very recent history.

That's quite an understandable point, when you consider that people can experience the same event in quite different ways. There are perception issues and legal risks associated with describing New Zealand's foreign policy, and a lot of people who work for MFAT are career diplomats, and their careers and lives are very intertwined. To put it short, it's personal.

Some of the sources for my research included biographies from people who work for MFAT, such as Gerald McGhie, news stories and journal articles. We were also given access to MFAT emails and documents. There were recorded oral histories of MFAT, and a YouTube series made for the seventy-fifth anniversary, but the main area was in interviews, and I just want to acknowledge the work of Charlotte McGillen, who worked at MFAT, and now works here, in helping us with that process.

The highlight of the research process, for me, was the experience of interviewing some of our most amazing leaders, including Vangelis Vitalis, New Zealand's lead trade negotiator, or people like Dell Higgie, who've made enormous, massive contributions to – internationally on nuclear disarmament, or people like Victoria Hallum and Andrew Gillespie, who gave their all on helping to bring into effect the Christchurch Call.

I take the process of doing interviews pretty seriously, in terms of preparation, asking good questions and following ethical processes.

I'm often complimented for asking good questions. It's about doing good research in advance, putting yourself in the other person's shoes, being an active listener, and being open to the conversation going in new and unexpected directions.

Sometimes you actually end up almost throwing the questions away when you're in the conversation, as well.

You'd be surprised at how much people relish the opportunity to step out of the everyday and reflect on their career, and be listened to.

I often gain people's trust quickly, and that's partly because I assure them that I won't share the recording, if they don't want, that I'll run the draft write-up past them. That's because I hold the opportunity and gift of representing people's stories as a serious responsibility. Some people might think that's a bit over the top, but I think it's very, very important, when someone gives you their time, trust, energy and language, to treat that with the utmost respect.

The reviews that we got of the book were mostly good. I was quite surprised to be reviewed by Simon Bridges [laughs].

The feedback that actually meant the most to me was feedback that was unexpected. One person who had since left the ministry wrote to thank me for the inclusion of his story, and another person who works there now, and is included briefly in one of the chapters, wrote to say it was a great read. Things like that, that are unexpected, were quite meaningful to me.

This is what it means the most to me, because at the heart of it, from my point of view, is the representation of people's stories, and using the skills that I have, to do that, in this process.

[Applause]

Malcolm McKinnon: Thank you very much, Ian, Steven and Anita for those terrific accounts of the challenges of actually writing the history.

Now we do have some time. We have until about half past one, so about another 25 minutes, for question from the floor. If anyone wants to make a question or comment.

Audience Member 1: Hi. This is to all three. Were you subject to any lobbying, from any direction, about what should or shouldn't be in the content?

Malcolm McKinnon: Ian.

Ian McGibbon: I'll start. In my period, no, I was not subject to any content suggestions by anybody, although the governance group provided comments about what they thought might be in the history, but the short answer is no.

The diversity chapters I wrote, I had no direction or nothing that I wasn't allowed to say. So, my answer to you would be, no.

Steven Loveridge: Yeah, again, the short answer is no. There were a few rounds of feedback from various people within and beyond MFAT, including Malcolm, that provided a lot of great feedback and did refine some elements of the chapter.

There was one issue that was perhaps a bit more sensitive, but ultimately, that went in the book as originally written, so – return to my short answer, no.

Anita Perkins: As I just mentioned, there were a few instances where different people interpreted the same situation in a different way, so we had to work through that and resolve some of those things. But when we were given the chapters to do, we had an outline of the particular topics that we would cover, so we worked with Ian on that.

So, yeah, there were a few things to just talk through, and make sure, for example, when I did an interview, and I would send back the draft content that related to that interview, that the person was happy with how that was written up, but there was no direct lobbying, or anything, as I would put it, in that language.

Ian McGibbon: If I can come back, the most controversial issue, really, is how we treated the Ministry Business Model, in 2012. There was some comment that unless we addressed it, the book would have no credibility with members of the ministry.

We weren't told any particular way that we had to cover it. I think – well, this chapter was really Joanna Spratt – Joanna's chapter. We had a draft, which we circulated a lot to people, and at the end, we circulated it to John Allen. I expected, as editor, that there may be some

problems, but John Allen came back and, to his credit, said, well, I don't agree with everything that's written here, but there's only one thing I think you need to fix. This is a factual error that, quite rightly, he picked up, but he didn't object.

We sent it to Brook, as well. I don't think Brook had time to actually read it, just out of courtesy. But, no, we didn't receive any instructions about how we were to treat that period. So, I would say we were under no editorial – censorship of any type in the project.

Malcolm McKinnon: Okay, other questions or comments? Here, and over here.

Joan McCracken: Kia ora to the panel. Can the panel comment on the policy impact of the nature of the relationship between ministers and Foreign Affairs officials in the period each has covered?

Malcolm McKinnon: [Laughs]. Well, that's going to take care of the rest of the time [laughs].

Ian McGibbon: Well, again, I'll start. In the period that I wrote about, the relationship was relatively okay between Fraser and McIntosh. Fraser was a very adept – probably our greatest foreign minister, I think, but when the National Party took over, McIntosh had little respect for the minister of external affairs, Doidge, Frederick Doidge. The succeeding ministers were equally problematic – or in his opinion. So, I wouldn't say the relationship between the ministry and the politicians was that good, in the early '50s.

When Walter Nash came back in, McIntosh expected it would be much plainer sailing, because Nash had been New Zealand's first diplomatic head of mission, and he expected that he would get a better hearing, but Nash turned out to be very difficult to deal with,

also, because he wouldn't make a decision, and was very parsimonious about spending on diplomatic activities.

Holyoake came in. McIntosh had also been dismissive of him, but to Holyoake's credit, I think he realised the value of the Department of External Affairs, and the need to appoint people who are competent to overseas posts. A few political appointments were made, but Holyoake appointed Laking to Washington and Corner to New York. So, he revealed himself as a pragmatic prime minister, that he was willing to meet the department's wishes to have more career diplomats in overseas posts.

So, the relationship was fraught at times, but became better towards the end of McIntosh's period.

Steven Loveridge: Yeah, I'll aim to be quite concise, to move through these. Again, continuing from Holyoake, into the Laking years, '65 to '72, Holyoake tended to have quite a hands-off approach with many of Laking's initiatives, most notably his idea of public outreach and trying to bring a public consensus along with foreign policy and the work the External Affairs / Foreign Affairs was doing.

Moving into the Marshall years, the overall impression I have is of the relationship regarding the EEC, in which there seems to be a general consensus of a very effective partnership between Marshall and the work that was trying to be done in responding to that.

Kirk – and we're now moving into the Corner years from '72, there seemed to be a natural rapport between Kirk and Corner, both who were interested in New Zealand taking up a new role in the Pacific and in global affairs. I don't think we ever quite cracked it, but the idea of sending a frigate to Mururoa, to protest French testing had initially been pitched, a

decade earlier, in the Holyoake years, by Corner, and I think McIntosh's response, was, 'for goodness sake, don't tell Holyoake that, he might go for it,' or words to that effect. I don't know if it was Corner who took that back off the shelf, but for whatever reason, Kirk was certainly keen on that idea.

In the Muldoon years, more complicated, in many ways. Muldoon made various comments that – well, I imagine if External Affairs staff were less diplomatic, they might be pulling their hair out, particularly the one that comes to mind is regarding President Jimmy Carter, as a peanut farmer.

Then, into the Lange years and the fourth Labour government, again, a lot of complicated things are happening, which have many impacts on the policies the ministry was pursuing, but it's a managed time, it's a managed affair, it's a working relationship, and I think echoes some of the points Ian raised previously.

Anita Perkins: I'll make two comments. One, from my own experience of having worked at the ministry, which was from around early 2013 to early 2015. I was the desk officer for the International Whaling Commission. That would involve a lot of drafting media releases and speeches, and things, for, at the time, Minister Murray McCully. I never met him in person, but by the end of that period, I felt like I knew his voice and I knew what he was wanting to say, in those lines. It's an interesting relationship, sometimes, when you're working within the building, and you are writing things on behalf of a leader, in that respect.

One of the areas, I think it's fair to say that there are some policy approaches that the ministry and its ministers will be on the same page at, but there are other ones, where it

involves some negotiations. Where sometimes people who work at the ministry will have to influence and try and convince ministers of the merit of a certain approach.

One of the areas where I talk a little bit about that is in trade, where some of the people who were working within the ministry could really see the opportunities for New Zealand to build free trade agreements with some of our Asian partners and it took a little bit of convincing for us to build some of our longer-term strategies. Ian may have some more comments on the more recent time period.

Ian McGibbon: No, not really, but I would comment that the Vietnam combat decision was one where the ministry persuaded Holyoake that he needed to make a contribution in Vietnam. It's quite clear that Holyoake was adamantly opposed to doing anything in Vietnam, and the ministry, you would say, pressured him into finally making a decision in favour of sending a token force up to Vietnam.

It sort of raised some eyebrows, because the ministry was basically pushing a political policy. They knew it was important, diplomatically, in terms of relations with the United States, but it could be argued that they were stepping across the line, to some extent. Government didn't want to do anything.

Malcolm McKinnon: Alan.

Audience Member 2: Thanks. From the research resource that you dealt with, were there any periods which were particularly thin, in what was available? Secondly, from a citizen perspective, it always seems, looking back, that 1956 Suez must have been pretty a seminal moment, but it seems that New Zealand was pretty supine, and going along with the British

line. Is there more to it than that, or was it in fact, was there anything in particular special about the New Zealand response to the Suez debacle?

Malcolm McKinnon: Maybe, Anita and Steven could answer the first question, and you could answer the Suez one, Ian, so, do you two want to go first, maybe, and answer Alan's first question? About whether there were periods that were very thin, for you?

Anita Perkins: In terms of resource, to talk about them?

Malcolm McKinnon: Yeah, exactly. Was there an unevenness in the coverage for your period?

Anita Perkins: I don't think so. I think between having some of the access to the MFAT files and people being very forthcoming, and allowing me to interview them, and share their stories, and also some of the oral histories. There's a great library of oral histories, in MFAT, and just because of doing a more recent period, there's a lot of information online, so, it wasn't particularly uneven or challenging, from the areas I was looking at.

Steven Loveridge: The part of my chapter on new attention to the Pacific was an interesting challenge, possibly more for me, than in general. I owe a great debt to many former Pacific hands, who were willing to be interviewed, who could really shine light on that perspective. So, that was a case where maybe there was a scarcity of resources in some sense, but also a solution.

Malcolm McKinnon: Ian.

Ian McGibbon: Before I talk about Suez, just talking about resources. Because the ministry in about 2000, moved to a digital recordkeeping, we did strike a few problems there, not so

much in Anita's chapters, but certainly in Joanna's. It was very late in the piece that we finally got to see the Ministry Business Model. They claimed that they couldn't find it, and eventually they did.

The message that was sent back by the 40 heads of mission about the changes, we couldn't find a copy of that in the official records of the ministry, or, at least, Charlotte couldn't, because she was – Charlotte McGillen was our point person. Eventually, George Troup produced a copy that he had in his private possession.

So, to me, there were some issues about researching in records after 2000, if you're a historian. Fortunately, my career is over.

[Laughter]

Ian McGibbon: I only dealt with paper files, and I love paper files, but researching in the digital records seems to me to present some challenges.

Suez? Yes, we went along with the British, but, if you read the McIntosh papers, McIntosh was tearing his hair out, not only at Holland – Sidney Holland, the prime minister's, go with the British, come what may, attitude – but also with the British. The British didn't consult New Zealand in the way that we felt, as a Commonwealth country, that we should have been. We should have been receiving more information about how the British government was approaching the problem.

Then the problem of the *Royalist*, the New Zealand cruiser, which the British almost drew into their plan, into their military operations, McIntosh managed to persuade Holland that

the cruiser had to be extracted straight away, because it would be very likely to be involved, militarily. So, behind the scenes, yes, there was a totally different picture.

Interestingly, they had a radio station set up at Makara, to listen in to the UN debates, live, which, nowadays, we would sneer at – snigger about, but in those days that was a big thing. It was the first time, I think, we'd listened, in Wellington, live, to the debates being held in the UN about Suez. Yeah, it's an interesting story, from behind the scenes.

Unfortunately, in the book, it's really a couple of paragraphs. I couldn't go into it in the detail that really, it warrants.

Malcolm McKinnon: There's a great study by Malcolm Templeton.

Ian McGibbon: Of course, yes, I should have mentioned that. Malcolm has done a whole book on the subject. He's gone into those aspects really deeply, as well.

Malcolm McKinnon: Okay, we've probably got time – oh, we've got one more online.

Joan McCracken: Kia ora, from Alex. MFAT doesn't have a formal diplomatic training academy. I'm not sure if it ever has – question. Does the panel have any views about whether or not such a formal diplomatic training academy would be worthwhile, in the present day?

Ian McGibbon: Well, I'll start again. Yes, I think it probably would be, but if you had the resources for it. McIntosh took an attitude towards training diplomats that they'd learned their job on the – or they learned the trade – the craft, on the job.

We did send Bryce Harland to a diplomatic school in the US, and more lately, some people went to Australia's academy of – whatever that's called, but there's never been a suggestion

of setting up an academy. Nor of having competitive exams to enter the diplomatic service, as Canada had. I'm not sure. I believe the numbers are increasing quite a lot, so, I suppose, if you had the time and the money, that would be a desirable development.

Malcolm McKinnon: We may have to – just very quickly, Steven, if you want to…

Steven Loveridge: Oh, sure. It's a major feature in my chapter too, is that if it's too professionalised, the service, or get particular skill sets often, cobbled together a lot of things. People take language courses all over the globe, and plug into other people's systems. Doubtlessly, it would have some advantage to have some sort of in-house – well, I don't want to say, in-house, but a local professional means of achieving that.

Malcolm McKinnon: Anita, do you want to add anything?

Anita Perkins: Yeah, I remember the first day at MFAT, and I rang my parents and told them that I was working on whales, and they said, do you mean the animal or the nation?

[Laughter]

So, there is a certain amount of throwing yourself in there, which I think is characteristic of New Zealand, anyway, obviously, there was a set of skills that I was hired for.

Also, sometimes, MFAT is seen as apart from other parts of the public service, and I think that recently, maybe over the last ten years or so, there's much more of a flow of people around the public service, so that's beginning to change, but there could still be some merit, definitely, in having some kind of academy programme, I think, as long as that's integrated into the wider public service, in the New Zealand Inc approach that we're trying to achieve in our interactions overseas.

Malcolm McKinnon: Thanks. Unfortunately, we have to bring the Q&A to an end. Before I hand over to Neill, who's going to just close this session, I'd like you to join me in thanking the speakers. They have spoken very eloquently about the book. They've been prepared to answer a lot of quite tricky questions, and I think we all owe them a great debt of gratitude.

Neill Atkinson: Thank you everyone. Just to reiterate again my thanks to Anita, Steve and Ian and Malcolm for this really insightful discussion of how this great book has been put together. So, thank you everyone.

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