

ALLIANCE RELATIONSHIPS: ASIA PACIFIC DEMOCRACIES WORKING TOGETHER.

AN AUSTRALIAN VIEW

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Australia is America's oldest friend and ally in the Asia-Pacific region. We have fought alongside each other in two World Wars, the Korean and Vietnam wars, the 1991 Gulf War, and most recently in Afghanistan and Iraq. The closeness of Canberra and Washington today is without precedent. Australia is now America's second closest ally in the world, after the United Kingdom.

The US has been a crucial factor in Australian defense policy for over 60 years. Washington provides a robust security guarantee for Australia, including extended nuclear deterrence. Australia's self-reliant defense posture within its own region is immeasurably strengthened by highly privileged access to US intelligence, defense science, weapons and military logistics support. The alliance with the US gives Australia greatly added status in world affairs, especially in Asia. But, for the first time since the Vietnam War, there is a debate in Australia about what the US expects from the alliance and about the nature of US power in the contemporary era, and what that means for Australia.

This paper examines Australia's alliance with the US. How robust is it? Are there emerging difficulties and obstacles that are likely to limit future alliance cooperation? How important are domestic political differences in Australia towards the alliance? Will generational change affect the historical rock-solid support for the US relationship? And how can we adapt this historical alliance to meet new regional and global security challenges in the 21st century?

Shared Values, Different Histories

First, let us examine the nature of this relationship. Alliances are not merely the product of rational calculations of national interest.¹ They involve shared values and belief systems and a shared history of doing things together. Australia and the US have long-shared common democratic values and beliefs. America and Australia are among the oldest continuous democracies in the world. For a long time, the US and Australia (along with New Zealand) were the only democratic countries in the entire Asia-Pacific region. Alliances also demand strong domestic political support: public support for the alliance in Australia has been remarkably resilient, even though there has been enormous strategic change over the half-century of its existence. Together, the US and Australia fought against fascism and communism in the 20th century. We share the use of the English language and we are both continental-size New World countries that are ill at ease with many of the traditions and attitudes of old Europe. Australians and Americans get on with each other easily.

There are, however, important differences that arise from our different historical experiences and size. America's historical experience occurred within the context of the country's

¹ Stephen M. Walt, "Why Alliances Endure or Collapse," *Survival*, Spring 1997, p. 156.

religious heritage and experience of classical liberal ideology, reflected in both the US Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Religion and classical liberalism, together with the optimistic experience of national development, form the ultimately defining aspects of the American political culture -- belief in America's exceptionalism and manifest destiny. Without a clear appreciation of these concepts, both foreign to the Australian experience, it is impossible for Australians to make sense of the US and its behavior in the world.²

Australia experienced neither a civil war nor a war of independence. Nation building in a harsh country imposed a strict sense of limits. To this day, a sense of vulnerability of a sparsely populated, resource rich continent prevails in the popular Australian consciousness and informs our defense policy. The legacy of convicts, drought and the arid interior created a mindset that was sceptical, cynical, hard-bitten, self-deprecatory and suspicious of authority. Religion does not play a significant role in Australian politics. And Australia's sense of nationalism is not as fervent as that of the US.

Sheer differences in size should also not be underestimated. America is approaching 300 million people, whereas Australia has only 20 million in a country about the same size as the US. The US spends more than \$US400 billion dollars on defense, Australia less than \$US13 billion. America is the world's only superpower and its neighbors are not unstable or threatening. Australia's immediate neighborhood is potentially unstable and the broader East Asia region carries the risk of major power war, unlike Europe.

The Nature of the ANZUS Alliance

Smaller powers, such as Australia, have always relied on external aid for the accomplishment of the basic goal of all states: survival. Neutrality and nonalignment have appealed to some other smaller powers. But these alternatives have never appealed to Australians. The policy of a protective alliance "has always been the most obvious weapon for the small power, and the one most employed."³ But borrowing someone else's strength can have disadvantages as well as advantages.

For instance, Australia--as the junior partner-- is not accustomed to being a frank ally. Although there are extensive bilateral mechanisms for consultation and deliberation on a wide range of policy issues, Australia does not have the record of speaking up in the way that the United Kingdom does. It has been suggested that Australia should speak up and the United States should listen more.⁴

As Prime Minister Tony Blair has said: the price of British influence is not, as some would have it, that the UK has obediently to do whatever the US asks. The *Australian Foreign Policy White Paper* of 2003 echoes this theme when it states that: "Even when US actions do not suit our interests, our strong ties mean that we are better placed to put our views to Washington and that the United States will listen to them."⁵ More plainly, some argue that the alliance should offer Australia ways to dampen current US tendencies to unilateralism.

² "Understanding Goliath: on the sources of American conduct", *The Australian Financial Review*, 16 July 2004. (Myself and a senior Australian journalist wrote this article).

³ Robert L. Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 45.

⁴ John Baker and Douglas H. Paal, "The US-Australia Alliance" in Robert D. Blackwill and Paul Dibb [eds], *America's Asian Alliances* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), p. 108. General John Baker is a former Chief of the Australian Defense Force.

⁵ *Advancing the National Interest: Australia's Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper* (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2003), p.xvi.

One of Australia's leading experts on America, Owen Harries, has argued that the great sympathy felt for America immediately after September 11 has quickly evaporated and been replaced by suspicion and hostility. He states that, after the outrage of September 11, he does not believe that the United States could have reacted in any way other than it did. But doing so carries a cost. It forced America decisively along a course of action that "by emphasizing her military dominance, by requiring her to use her vast power conspicuously, by making restraint and moderation virtually impossible, and by making unilateralism an increasing feature of American behavior...(this was) bound to generate widespread and increased criticism and hostility towards her."⁶ Harries fears this may turn out to be the real tragedy of September 11.

In fact, of course, the second Bush Administration has drawn back from unilateralist tendencies, as the recent development of its relations in the Asia-Pacific region -- and not least with Japan and Australia -- clearly demonstrate. The nature of Australia's alliance with the US is that it is resilient enough to survive perturbations that exist from time to time (as in the Vietnam War), as long as Australian politicians do not wage a public campaign of virulence against the US. And as long as Washington does not take Canberra too much for granted.

Key Obstacles to Good Alliance Relations

So, are there any serious obstacles to good alliance relations between Australia and the US? That will depend upon the nature of US military expectations of Australia. Let me address three points. First, the Australian Government has already demonstrated firm resolve in the war against terror. Only a matter of days after September 11, Prime Minister John Howard invoked the ANZUS treaty, for the first time in its history, to come to the assistance of the US. Since then, we have not only provided combat troops in Afghanistan and Iraq but we have spent large sums of money on domestic counter terrorism capabilities and developed close antiterrorist cooperation agreements with countries in our region, especially in Southeast Asia.

Second, the US--and others--needs to recognize that the Australian Defense Force is quite small. The total size of the regular force is scarcely 52,000, plus some 20,000 reserves. The army, which is being used most intensively in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan, fields only five battalions as well as a special forces/commando regiment. The realistic military contribution that Australia can make to alliance operations is what the Defense Minister terms "niche contributions." These include capabilities that are in short supply in the US military inventory: such as air refuelling tankers, special forces, certain types of electronic surveillance and intelligence, conventional submarines and, in future, highly capable early warning aircraft.

Australia's leading journalist, Paul Kelly, has described Australia's contributions to alliance operations as "calculated and ruthlessly cynical." So, for example, in the Iraq war Australia sent 2200 troops to Iraq, including Special Forces and Commandos, fighter and electronic surveillance aircraft, surface warships, and clearance divers. But they were withdrawn as soon as the combat phase ended. The Prime Minister then announced that 1500 troops had to be sent to the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific, which had become a failed state. Failed

⁶ Owen Harries, *Understanding America* (Sydney: The Centre for Independent Studies, 2002), p.30. Harries was the editor of the *National Interest* in Washington, D.C. in the 1980s and 1990s.

states can breed terrorism and international crime. Australia's strategic geography has its own imperatives, including scenarios where US assistance is not expected.

Australia's military contributions to alliance operations do, of course, carry much more political weight than their modest numbers would suggest. For example, it was only the United Kingdom and Australia who supplied significant combat forces to the war in Iraq.⁷

Even so, while Australia has a long history of contributing to distant wars--and suffering substantial wartime losses--it has not recorded any deaths in combat since the Vietnam War. It remains to be seen what impact even modest casualties would have on the Australian electorate in the contemporary era.

My third issue is how Australians would react to US involvement in a major war in Asia. Memories of the Vietnam War, to which Australia made a significant contribution, linger on. So, how would Australia respond to another war in Korea? My view is that in the event of North Korean aggression Australia would, as a signatory to the UN Armistice Commission, be involved in combat operations with the US. But they would not, for example, include large ground force commitments.

But Taiwan would face Australia with a different sort of dilemma altogether. China is becoming a big influence in the Australian economy, having recently displaced the US as the biggest source of imports and as Australia's second largest export market. The Chinese Ambassador in Canberra talks about a "strategic economic relationship." Australia's Foreign Minister has questioned whether the ANZUS Treaty would automatically apply in the event of a US war with China over Taiwan. While there is nothing automatic about the Treaty, there is no doubt in my mind that Washington would be correct in invoking it in the event of an unprovoked Chinese attack. Australia would probably be the only US ally in the Asia-Pacific region that Washington could turn to for help.⁸ If Canberra said no, that would seriously damage the alliance -- perhaps irreparably.

The Howard Government is clearly troubled by the prospect of a conflict with China. Its preferred policy option is to hope that it will never be faced with this call on our alliance with the US. Managing the key security relationship with its US ally *and* with an emerging strong and confident China is going to be the great test of diplomacy for Australia in coming years.

Domestic Political Differences

There has traditionally been extremely strong domestic political support in Australia for the alliance with the US. A recent survey shows that 72% of Australians say that the ANZUS alliance is either *very important* or *fairly important* for Australia's security, and only 7% rate it not at all important.⁹ The same poll, about which there has been some controversy, found that 68% of Australians believe that Australia takes "too much notice of the views of the United States in our foreign policies," with 32% saying that they were very worried about US

⁷ But the United Kingdom, with three times Australia's population provided 20 times as many troops to the war in Iraq.

⁸ It is highly unlikely that Japan, South Korea or any ASEAN country would provide combat forces to a war with China over Taiwan [neither would any European country, including perhaps even the UK].

⁹ The Lowy Institute Poll 2005 (Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 28 March 2005). A more recent poll by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, in June 2005, shows that 84% of Australians think that the alliance with the US is important.

foreign policies and 25% being fairly worried. Even so, 58% of Australians have positive feelings about the United States, with 39% being negative.

What is unclear about this poll is whether these results reflect some disenchantment with the particular US administration at the moment, or whether as memories of the Second World War fade the constituency for the alliance relationship needs to be rebuilt. Much more fundamental research needs to be done on this subject before we draw firm conclusions: for instance, there is no evidence that the younger generation of Australians is any less supportive of the alliance.

There has, however, been a problem with the Opposition Labor Party recently. In last year's general election, the then Leader of the Opposition proclaimed that he would withdraw Australia's troops from Iraq before Christmas [before being made Leader, he had made insulting remarks about President Bush]. The Labor Party was decisively defeated in the 2004 election and the current Leader of the Opposition is noted for his commitment to the alliance and his high-level connections in Washington.

There continues to be strong bipartisan support for the presence of very important US intelligence facilities in Australia [they are not bases but joint facilities], joint military exercises, and host support for visiting US military forces -- including (unlike in New Zealand) nuclear capable and nuclear powered warships. There is also strong support for close cooperation with the US in countering the threat from terrorism. There is, however, no bipartisan agreement on the issue of missile defense and Australia's potential role in it—which, at present, is limited to scientific research and testing that was begun under the previous Labor Government. And neither political party would countenance the establishment of a dedicated American military base in Australia, for which there would be little popular support.

Other issues which have bipartisan political support include the roles and missions of our Armed Forces, where Australia has a major role to play in terms of alliance burden sharing -- as well as protecting its own national interests -- in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. With regard to military interoperability, it is also agreed politically that the Australian Defense Force's priorities are: first, improving interoperability of our own armed forces; second, interoperability with US forces; third, interoperability with regional forces.

Australia is, with some exceptions, increasingly reliant upon purchasing high technology weapons systems from the US. The Air Force is almost entirely equipped with US aircraft, and Australia will probably acquire up to 100 Joint Strike Fighters (as well as UAVs such as Global Hawk or Predator). The Navy has chosen the Aegis combat system for the next generation of air warfare destroyers, and depends on the US for assistance with developing the next generation combat system for the Collins submarines. The Army has ordered Abrams tanks but its new armed reconnaissance helicopters are from Europe. The Australian Defense Force is also increasingly reliant on the US for the purchase of precision missiles. But it may be that Australia finds more relevant and affordable developments in network centric warfare from the UK and Sweden than from the US. Some areas of European military capabilities are more cost-effective for Australia's unique operating environment.

Meeting Emerging Regional and Global Challenges Together

It is obviously in the interests of both Australia and the US to encourage the spread of prosperity and democracy in the Asia-Pacific region. Twenty or more years ago democracy

in this part of the world was basically confined to Japan, Australia and New Zealand. Now, democracy is the predominant form of governance in the region, having spread to South Korea and Taiwan, to most Southeast Asian countries [but not to Indochina or Burma], and to most South Pacific countries. India, the world's largest democracy, has removed itself from its client state relationship with the former Soviet Union and is forging a new relationship with America. But, unlike Europe, the Asia-Pacific region still has communist states: North Korea, China and Vietnam. The region is also flanked to the north and west by authoritarian and potentially unstable countries, such as Russia, Pakistan and Uzbekistan.

In Australia's case, a most serious outcome would be if the democratic movement in Indonesia failed and were replaced with a nationalist Islamic state. Australia must necessarily direct a lot of its future diplomatic, security and economic effort to helping Indonesia. That is why the Howard Government so generously offered \$1 billion in tsunami aid relief last year. It sometimes seems in Canberra that the U.S. Congress does not understand how important Indonesia is, as the world's fourth-largest country and the largest Muslim state, to the stability of Southeast Asia. The next extreme Islamic threat to the US might just emerge from Southeast Asia, and yet the U.S. Congress continues to punish Indonesia over East Timor and refuses to restore full military relations. This is strange when America accords major non-NATO ally status to such an authoritarian country as Pakistan.

Given its preoccupation with the Middle East, the US will look to Australia to take the lead in emerging regional security challenges in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. This is already occurring in the field of counter terrorism, including intelligence, military and police force training. Australia has particularly strong relations in this regard with Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines, as well as East Timor, Papua New Guinea and islands of the South Pacific. In the South Pacific, it is important for the US to understand that Australia will work closely with New Zealand.

In Northeast Asia, Australia's closest relationship is with Japan. Prime Minister Howard says that Japan is Australia's best friend in Asia, and has described Japan as a strategic partner. We have had strategic discussions with Tokyo since 1990.¹⁰ This relationship not only includes military-to-military and political/military discussions, but it has now been expanded to include an annual meeting at the level of foreign ministers between the US, Japan and Australia. Japan sent an engineering battalion to East Timor and Australian troops currently guard Japanese engineers in Iraq. Australia welcomes the decision by Japan to expand the role of its self-defense forces in this way, and to take a more active role in regional and global security affairs.

It must be a matter of serious concern that China and South Korea are currently taking such a belligerent attitude towards Japan. This can only help to raise tensions in Northeast Asia and undermine regional security. As important as Australia's relations are with China, and with South Korea, the nature of our relationship with Japan is at a fundamentally different level strategically. Both America and Australia share this view of relative strategic priorities in Northeast Asia.

The current disagreements between China and South Korea on the one hand and Japan on the other contradict the theory that growing prosperity in Asia will lead to the lessening of

¹⁰ As deputy secretary of defense in Australia I inaugurated these discussions in March 1990. I was accompanied by the vice chief of the Australian Defense Force.

tensions.¹¹ History is full of those who have predicted the obsolescence of war because of rising prosperity and increasing economic interdependence.¹² It is not credible to assert that there “will be an Asian counterpart to NATO by 2020” and that the “embryonic form of this grand Pacific Rim alliance will be a China-centric free-trade area that appears over the next decade, one that includes India, Australia, and ultimately all of NAFTA.”¹³ Other American musings have included the idea that there should be “increased coordination and cooperation among the US, Japan, South Korea and Australia” because Asia “is becoming a more integrated geo-economic and geo-political whole.”¹⁴ This laudable idea has been seriously undermined by South Korea's hostility towards Japan, and Seoul's increasing alignment with Beijing.

The Asia-Pacific region, despite increasing economic prosperity and the spread of democracy, is likely to feature major challenges to US security interests in the coming decade. And none is more important than the rise of an undemocratic China. It is important that Washington does not take its eye off the geopolitical ball here. Before the events of September 11, the Pentagon's Quadrennial Defense Review was focused on the potential military challenge of a rising China. The concern has to be that Washington is now so preoccupied with the war on terror, and rogue regimes possessing nuclear weapons, that it overlooks the dangers arising from more traditional security concerns. As Ian Buruma points out, economic success has given Asian technocracies an advantage over earlier forms of dictatorship.¹⁵ Within China, prosperity without politics has a wide appeal, much wider than the superficially egalitarian poverty of Soviet-style scientific socialism. America's democratic allies, who care about freedom and openness, should not succumb to the temptation of believing that we are better off with a China without politics, or organized dissent, or such troublesome things as independent trade unions, opposition parties or a free press.¹⁶

Some Conclusions

Australia will remain a committed ally of the US for the foreseeable future. There will be no inclination towards a New Zealand, or Canadian, defense posture: Australia's defense force will not be structured primarily for peacekeeping or peace-enforcement, as distinct from conventional military capabilities. There is no evidence that the Australian polity is moving away from firm support for the ANZUS alliance. And should the Labor Opposition come to power in 2007, under the leadership of Kim Beazley, there will be no wavering on central alliance issues. But it must be plainly understood that a US war with China over Taiwan would face any Australian government, of whatever political persuasion, with choices that they would rather not face.

Australia and the US have close commonality of views when it comes to fighting the war on terror and dealing with the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Our common support for the success of democracy, in such places as Indonesia and Iraq, and for preventing the

¹¹ Contrary to the views of Thomas Barnett, just because China and South Korea are integrating into what he calls globalization's Functioning Core, it does not follow that peace will endure between them and Japan. See Thomas P. M. Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2004).

¹² See Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1910).

¹³ *The Pentagon's New Map*, page 382.

¹⁴ Robert D. Blackwill, "An Action Agenda to Strengthen America's Alliances in the Asia-Pacific Region" in Robert D. Blackwill and Paul Dibb (eds), *America's Asian Alliances*, p. 114.

¹⁵ Ian Buruma "The Indiscreet Charm of Tyranny", *The New York Review of Books*, May 12, 2005, p. 37.

¹⁶ *ibid*

emergence of failed states, in such places as the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, establishes the basis for a strong alliance partnership for the 21st century.

But there are two areas where drift could set in. The first is that the alliance is now heavily underpinned by the close relationship between Prime Minister Howard and President Bush, both of whom will eventually depart the political scene. Australian public support for the alliance is contingent upon Washington's success in convincing us of both the necessity and legitimacy of its policies.¹⁷ The promotion of conservative Christian values, as an inherent part of an American national identity, is a cultural current few Australians relate to. This seems little understood in America. Another point is that Australia should not be seen, or described, in the region as "a deputy sheriff" of the US. That is very damaging. A more apposite label -- if one must be used -- is that of Kurt Campbell: "Australia has become our Britain in Asia."¹⁸

The second area of potential difficulty in the alliance is over China. Prime Minister Howard states that Asia is poised in coming decades to assume a weight in the world economy it last held more than five centuries ago.¹⁹ Central to this is the growing economic mass of China, which is set to outstrip Japan in economic size -- and perhaps, eventually, the US. As a regional power, Canberra needs influence in Washington *and* Beijing. Howard proclaims: "Australia does not believe that there is anything inevitable about escalating strategic competition between China and the US."²⁰ True, but it looms as an ever present risk so long as there is serious tension over Taiwan.

Even absent the Taiwan problem, history tells us much about the likelihood of tension and conflict between a rising major power and an established power. I have argued that we must not allow our realist stance towards the inevitable emergence of China undermine our upholding of democratic values and freedom. The strongly positive views of China that currently are held in Australia may shift in future if Beijing's growing economic and military influence is felt less benignly across the region.²¹ But at present the greatest potential threat to the alliance may be the absence of a common approach to Beijing. Blumenthal argues that Canberra must realize its role is not to mediate between Beijing and Washington, but rather to help ensure that China's rise is indeed peaceful and that the US maintains its pre-eminence in Asia.²² I agree.

A deeper appreciation is required in Washington that Australia has a significant role to play in securing American interests--as well as its own --in the Asia-Pacific region. Australia has become a more assertive power in supporting alliance interests in Japan. And Canberra now has greater geopolitical clout in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific -- which are both important areas with regard to the fight against terrorism and failed states. US policy in both these regions has been essentially one dimensional -- emphasizing the counter terrorism

¹⁷ Dan Blumenthal, "Alliance takes diverse China roles", *The Australian*, 2 May 2005. Blumenthal is a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.

¹⁸ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 April 2005.

¹⁹ "Australia in the World," speech to the Lowy Institute for International Policy: Sydney, 31 March 2005.

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ According to the Lowy Institute poll held in March 2005, 69% of Australians have positive feelings about China compared with 58% for the United States. Only 34% of respondents think the Free Trade Agreement with the United States will be good for Australia, compared with 51% who believe that the idea of a free trade agreement with China will be good for Australia. Even so, 35% of Australians are very worried or fairly worried about China's growing power.

²² *The Australian*, 2 May 2005.

agenda almost to the exclusion of anything else.²³ This preoccupation has promoted an impression that the US does not really care about other important regional interests, and is giving China an opportunity--especially in Southeast Asia-- to gain influence at America's expense.

In the final analysis, the most critical issue for the security of the entire Asia-Pacific region is the nature of the relationship between the major powers—China, Japan, India, Russia and the US.²⁴ Australia relies on a balance of power in Asia in which the US continues to play the predominant role. Asia without America would be a dangerous place for Australia.

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²³ See Robert M. Hathaway, "George Bush's Unfinished Asian Agenda", Foreign Policy Research Institute, May 13, 2005 (www.fpri.org accessed 13 May 2005).

²⁴ *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force* (Canberra: Defence Publishing Service, 2000), p.17. [This is the Howard Government's Defence White Paper].