

The United States Alliance

Ross Cottrill

Despite being over fifty years old, Australia's alliance with the United States continues to demonstrate remarkable vigour and adaptability. This resilience derives from the two countries' common interests and is reflected in shared experiences of conflict, including in Iraq. Australia has not had all of its high priority security needs met by the alliance in the past and it should not have unrealistic expectations in the future. A new Australian Government should adjust the current balance between alliance policy and wider policy for national security.

Alliances have various forms. They are not a fixed or homogeneous group. They have to do with the associations formed between nations, usually with states acting for them. In their relations with other states, sentiment may be prominent in times of stress, but it is interests that, at least to the analytical and reflective observer, seem to be determining. In the traditional view: "We have no eternal allies and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow."¹

Interests can change over time, and alliances can adjust; their strength can wax or wane in the normal ebb and flow of international affairs. It is thus remarkable that the ANZUS alliance has endured for some five decades without pressure for change. Australia and the United States have some cultural affinity and some shared experience as former settler colonies of Britain, but these are not what keep the relationship going, or give it forward momentum. Shared experience of the great wars of the twentieth century and the Cold War has much more to do with it.

Treaty Commitment

The formal basis for the alliance is the ANZUS Treaty signed in 1951. If it had not been for Australian insistence, there would have been no such document. For the US stood pre-eminent among the Western allies at the end of the Second World War, and Australia could add little to its capacity to confront the communist challenge in the Cold War. Reassurance of Australia against any possible revival of Japanese militarism through the conclusion of a form of treaty was, however, an acceptable price for Australian participation in the formal peace with Japan, which would allow the drawing together of forces necessary to confront communist power in the North Pacific, particularly around Korea.

¹ Lord Palmerston (1784-1865), speech, London, House of Commons, 1 March 1848.

With such origins, it was natural that the US should resist the wholesale importation of terms from its recent North Atlantic Treaty, as the Australian negotiators sought. The operative paragraphs (Articles III and IV) of ANZUS only commit the parties to

consult together whenever in the opinion of any one of them the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened in the Pacific.²

Each Party recognized that

an armed attack in the Pacific Area would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.³

Whereas in equivalent provisions of the North Atlantic Treaty the parties undertake that “an armed attack against one or more...shall be considered an attack against them all”.⁴

The differences between ANZUS and NATO grew over the years. There was the pressure of the Cold War confrontation in Europe, requiring standing force commitments, extensive, combined operational planning and the development of common standards and doctrine to facilitate inter-operability. ANZUS was well behind in these areas.

The disparities between the ANZUS allies were, and remain, great. In population, the US is now more than 15 times the size of Australia. In economic size, it has a GDP which is more than 26 times Australia's. Its armed forces are some 27 times the size of Australia's. Its defence spending is more than 40 times larger.

The disparities are exacerbated by the fact that since 1985, when New Zealand and the US parted company over the visits of nuclear powered/nuclear armed ships of the US Navy, the alliance has been bilateral in the way it operates. By contrast NATO retains its multilateral form.

Limits

Mention of the Pacific Area was not really the most pertinent limit to coverage of the alliance. That was the very practical reference to decisions being made “in accordance with constitutional processes”, which points to the role of Congress.

Many of the areas where Australia has taken on continuing security responsibilities are ones which lie on the margins of US security interests.

² Australian Treaty Series 1952, no 2, Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1997.

³ Ibid.

⁴ North Atlantic Treaty, Article 5.

The South West Pacific, including The Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, and even Papua New Guinea, are unlikely to commend them to the Congress as deserving of a direct US military role in support of Australia, should that ally encounter problems beyond its capacity.

An interesting test occurred in the 1960s in the context of Australia's involvement in the Indonesian Confrontation of Malaysia. Australia, having given a commitment of support to Malaysia, expected the US to welcome this development. In a meeting with the Australian Cabinet in June 1963, Averill Harriman replied that

if there should be an overt attack on Malaysia and if Australian forces should become involved, the ANZUS Treaty would according to the advice given to the United States Administration by its lawyers, come into operation.⁵

President Kennedy, when he learned of these discussions, asked for further discussions which led to a firm US statement that US ground forces would in no circumstances be committed to Malaysia, along with a reminder that no US military action could be taken except in accordance with constitutional processes.⁶ The Australian Government of the day (led by Menzies) went ahead with its commitment to Malaysia.

More recently, East Timor provided another test. After the demise of President Suharto, Australia had proposed to a newly democratizing Jakarta an approach to autonomy for East Timor. When such a process was under way, a reign of terror was created within East Timor at the instigation of those opposed to change, principally elements of the Indonesian Armed Forces. The Australian Government was under strongly growing popular pressure to bring an end to the violence.

The US could have taken the view that Australia's difficulties were at least in part the result of its own actions: insufficiently prudent management of the developing exchanges with Indonesia, taking it out of its depth. But it did not. Representations were made by the US to Indonesia, at the highest levels, including the Secretary of State, over a period of months.

Indonesia's eventual acceptance of a multi-national force was in turn critically dependent on its need at the time for assistance from the international financial institutions, where US influence was crucial.

It was also fortuitous that the APEC summit was due to be held in Auckland on 11-12 September 1999. President Clinton was to attend personally and in a telephone call to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, he cited the alliance with Australia as a factor in his decision to support intervention in East

⁵ Quoted in David Goldsworthy, ed., *Facing North: A Century of Australian Engagement with Asia, Vol 1: 1901 to the 1970s*, Carlton South, Melbourne University Press, 2001, p. 271.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

Timor. The UN Security Council authorized a multinational force under Australian leadership to deploy to East Timor. There was no direct conflict with Indonesian forces⁷.

If Washington had been reluctant to become militarily involved, its reservations were overcome. Though it did not provide combat forces, the US provided valuable transport, communications, materiel and intelligence support. As the Prime Minister told Parliament:

Australia's alliance with the United States clearly works very effectively. The results reflect the effort the government has put into strengthening the alliance since we came into office. Neither Australia nor the region looks to the United States to solve the East Timor problem for us, but the alliance relationship has underpinned a visible and operationally significant US contribution to the peacekeeping force. We are completely satisfied with the scale of the US contribution.⁸

East Timor was the most serious security crisis facing Australia in thirty years. It could have led to a direct military clash with Australia's largest neighbour.

The circumstances were unique. It was not just a close bilateral relationship between Australia and the US, but also the Presidential politics of a visit to APEC, and the limited call on US resources from other quarters, that made possible such a substantial effort. It cannot be assumed that such a response would be routinely available.

Global War on Terror

The government seized the occasion of the "9/11" attacks for a shift toward tighter alignment with the US.⁹ ANZUS was formally invoked for the first time, and Australia embarked on the series of activities, beginning with the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and continuing with the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, in what became known as The Global War on Terror.

On 17 September 2001, the Prime Minister moved a series of motions which *inter alia* expressed horror at the "9/11" attacks, and stated:

that the terrorist actions in New York and Washington DC constitute an attack upon the United States of America within the meaning of Articles IV and V of the ANZUS Treaty.¹⁰

⁷ J. Cotton, *East Timor: Australia and Regional Order*, London, RoutledgeCurzon, 2004, p. 96.).

⁸ Prime Minister John Howard, Hansard, House of Representatives, 21 September 1999.

⁹ See, for example, Prime Minister Howard's speech to the Menzies Research Institute, August 2001, delivered before "9/11".

¹⁰ Hansard, House of Representatives, 17 September, 2001.

The motions were immediately supported and passed on a bipartisan basis. Some reference was made to 'so-called Islamic fundamentalists' as being responsible, but no particular countries or movements were specified. There was no indication as to the period for which the invocation should remain in force.

Though the threat of terrorism was seen as global in scope—and there was much argument about the need to look beyond the region—it proved essential after the Bali terrorist bombings to strengthen cooperation with regional partners in order to deal effectively with terrorist attacks whose intended victims included Australians. Australia quickly moved to conclude bilateral memoranda of understanding with virtually all regional partners for cooperation in counter-terrorism. The invoked alliance needed to be supplemented with regional cooperation.

Iraq was seen as a major part of the War on Terror. Australia committed to that war, and the role it has played has arguably done more to change Australia's place in the alliance than any other development since the end of the Cold War. It was Australia's choice rather than the terms of the ANZUS Treaty which led to it taking on the role, though US office-holders were given to implying that participation was expected of all allies irrespective of the specific terms of the alliance.

Other grounds were alleged for participation, including possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), failure to comply with UN Security Council Resolutions, and collusion with terrorists, among others. As such claims were subjected to critical scrutiny, they frayed and progressively failed. Yet it remained sufficient for Australia that it was supporting its ally, the US. The alliance thus bears the burden of failed policy in Iraq. Thus ANZUS had acquired an "out-of-area" role, like NATO, without direct consideration of the further consequences.

Australia's role in Iraq is itself likely to be brought under critical scrutiny. As a loyal ally it could have offered counsel on the advisability of undertaking the war itself. Instead it seemingly went along covertly at first and then increasingly vocally, repeating the rhetoric crafted in Washington to justify a course which Americans now see as disastrous. Washington was not in a mood to accept such cautions. It was engaged in a "war on terror", the United Kingdom (UK) was involved, with Prime Minister Tony Blair a powerful advocate for it, and Australia had formally invoked ANZUS, apparently in support of that war. Errors of judgement and failure to anticipate consequences and risks compounded to leave little alternative to "staying the course" as long as there was a course to stay. As the term of the current President draws to a close, the risk increases, as it did toward the end of the Vietnam war, or when the US sought to open relations with China in 1971, that US politics will mandate shifts of policy which might surprise Australia.

Apart from navigating these shoals, Australian policy in future will need to restore some perspective which is in touch with both the history of alliance cooperation, with an appreciation of its strengths as well as a realistic sense of what can be expected of the alliance.

This task will be made the harder because of the place of the alliance in the Australian political landscape. It is consistently rated in Australian opinion polls over the last decade as “very important” or “fairly important” by 60-70% of those polled. Defence relations with the US are virtually a non-partisan issue. Defence itself is a second order issue, not likely not change many votes in its own right. It is a complex area, in which the public does not generally have well-formed views, or a clear understanding of the available choices. In this environment parties can compete to be seen as the most trusted guardian of the invaluable alliance. And the task of clarifying Australia’s role in the alliance is made harder.

Intelligence

Cooperation in the intelligence area has often been seen as lying at the core of the modern alliance relationship, with its centre of gravity in the Joint Facilities.

Some analytical distinctions can, however, be made. There is an international division of labor among intelligence partners. The US is at least as dominant in this field as it is in the supply of military equipment and technology. While each partner decides its own national priorities, the US is clearly superior in technical sophistication and in the scale of resources it devotes to the intelligence function. Thus Australia is seen as contributing particularly in its neighboring areas, and Australia depends substantially on its partners for coverage of areas further afield.

Following the Iraq war, the value of such exchanges is more open to question and at least qualification. A number of searching high level enquiries have been conducted in recent years. The bi-partisan “9/11 Commission” in the US established that US intelligence, on which Australia and others depended in some critical areas, had experienced difficulty achieving its goals in regard to the new priorities of the post Cold War era.

In order to overcome difficulties in drawing agencies together, it recommended the establishment of a position of National Intelligence Director. It called on the CIA Director to emphasize, as a first priority, ‘re-building CIA’s analytical capabilities’, building human intelligence capabilities, developing a stronger language program, renewing emphasis on recruiting diversity, as well as some improvements in coordination with other agencies. In addressing the need for change in other areas of the intelligence community, the Commission stressed the principle of unity of

effort, including in the Congress.¹¹ The recommendations were far-reaching, will probably take years to implement, and require many years before their full effects are felt.

In Australia, intelligence made available to government on the issues leading up to the Iraq War, particularly on WMD, came under criticism for inaccuracy and political bias. Controversy also arose over the use that was made of intelligence by the government in putting the case for war to the public.

A bipartisan Parliamentary Committee (Chaired by Hon David Jull) was appointed to review these issues, concluding *inter alia* that Australia was heavily reliant on partner agencies for intelligence on regions other than our own, with some 97% of reports on Iraq in the most critical period coming from overseas partners.¹² Recognizing the potential for policy advocacy and intelligence to become synergistic, the Jull Committee concluded that, where the government perceived some vital interest to be affected by distant events, it is important that some sort of independent judgment be made on the circumstances.¹³ It found in some respects that the picture presented publicly was “not the picture that emerges from an examination of all the assessments provided to the Committee by Australia’s two analytical agencies.”¹⁴ A subsequent report commissioned by the Australian Government found that intelligence on Iraqi WMD was “thin, ambiguous and incomplete”.¹⁵ This latter report declared that

greater rigor needs must be applied to the evaluation of sources. Analysts must, in collaboration with collectors, actually assess the reliability of sources.

It was recommended that resources for the main assessment agency, the Office of National Assessment, be increased “significantly”, and its staffing to be doubled to 150 by 2006.

Additional resources cannot guarantee there will never again be confusion of intelligence with policy advocacy. “Sources and methods” of intelligence collection need to be protected. The process of testing data and judgments is thus necessarily limited. Experience with the Iraq War demonstrated the risks that could be incurred if intelligence is not tested sufficiently, rigorously and independently. The danger is, of course, compounded if the intelligence provided by major partners in the US and UK is led by policy commitments already made by those governments. In those circumstances, it is probably

¹¹ *Final Report of the National Commission on the Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States: The 9/11 Commission Report*, 13.2-5.

¹² Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD, *Inquiry into intelligence on Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction*, Canberra, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, p. 45.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁵ Philip Flood, *Inquiry into the Australian Intelligence Agencies*, July 2004.

expecting too much to rely on professionalism and contestation within the intelligence community to sift out the element of bias.

Military Technology

The 2000 Defence White Paper declared: “The kind of ADF that we need is not achievable without the technology access provided by the US Alliance.”¹⁶ The US budget for defence is roughly equivalent to the whole Australian GNP.

Australia has long looked to the US, and other foreign suppliers, to meet its needs for defence technology. With its limited defence industry base, Australia has an interest in being able to purchase from as wide a range of possible international suppliers as possible, consistent with a range of practical considerations, including inter-operability, systems integration, and assurance of supply and support. We try not to be too dependent on any single supplier, apart from our closest allies, if there is any potential for differing views to put continuity of supply or support at risk. We have sought in the past to preserve open competition among overseas suppliers and making disciplined selections from the best offerings, according to our own assessment of needs, including the need to develop and maintain within Australia as much relevant technology as possible at reasonable cost.

If there is a narrowing of the sources of supply, it is not clear how these needs can be met without increasing dependence.

There are several distinct but inter-related centres of decision-making in the US with roles in the granting of access to classified military technology.

Commercial producers seek to maximize their sales within various legislative and other regulatory limits, consistent with satisfying larger customers such as those in the US military system.

The Administration sets policy guidelines which balance the need to protect sensitive technologies with the attractions of export revenue and support for allies and friends. The Congress—or rather elements within it—at times promote variations which involve some harder or softer interpretations of existing restrictions seen as conferring advantage for sectional interests.

The US has many formal allies and friends, some more special than others. It seeks to manage access as a tool of statecraft. At least since the 1970's, the underlying policy has been that classified information is a national security asset which must be conserved and protected, and shared with foreign governments only where the US obtains a clearly defined advantage in terms of US foreign policy or military security. Release of military

¹⁶ Department of Defence, *Defence 2000 White Paper*, Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia, 2000, p. 35.

information is subject to specific assessment of the recipient's ability and willingness to protect the information, and it is limited to the extent necessary to satisfy US Government objectives.¹⁷

Buying the Best

Decision-making on acquisitions involves essentially three stages: strategic analysis and the identification of the broad capability requirement; identification of more specific solutions, prioritization and budget allocation; and competitive selection.

Decision-making in this disciplined framework requires, as was shown in the 2000 White Paper, clear distinction between priorities for national defence in the regional context on the one hand, and those required for expeditionary operations further afield on the other.

In recent years there has been a tendency to favour US solutions on grounds of inter-operability and capability, rather than going for the best available world-wide, at least for larger items. After "9/11", the notion that "everything has changed" seems to have led to an accentuation of this trend. There has been a tendency to blur any distinction between security in the regional context on the one hand, and the threat of terrorism, seen as a global phenomenon which also has a regional presence.

The implication was that relevance to Australia's enduring strategic needs could be subordinated to inter-operability with the leader of the "War on Terror". In the various reviews of defence undertaken after "9/11" to examine the need for additional capability relevant to dealing with terrorism, and to justify operations in Afghanistan and then Iraq, priorities became confused. In some minds the concept of priority for security in the regional context was associated with the previous ALP government, and was scorned by the Minister of the day as the "concentric circles" approach. Lacking a clear and adequate substitute, the result was to bring confusion to issues that had been clarified in the 2000 White Paper. The confusion was such that when the new Defence Minister took office in 2006 and declared that we needed "a bit of both", his comments were taken as offering useful clarification. No new White Paper has been produced to clarify planning for the medium and long term.

Since "9/11", a series of decisions has given remarkable predominance to US-sourced equipment, including the Joint Strike Fighters, Wedgetail Airborne Early Warning and Control (AWACS) aircraft, *Aegis* destroyers, and A-1 tanks. Not all of these have gone to final procurement decision. Some have been pre-selected by deciding on a particular technology. The effect of decisions taken has, nevertheless, been to increase dependence on the US,

¹⁷ US National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 119, 1971.

and to create follow-on effects which bring systems integration arguments into play, along with inter-operability issues, against non-US suppliers in future.

The *Collins* class submarine project has in many ways led the way. Its design, originally acquired from a Swedish company, involved the construction largely in Australia of a fleet of highly-sophisticated, conventionally-powered submarines. A favourite of the ALP government in the 1980s and 1990s, shortcomings in performance made it fair game for the incoming Coalition government.

The combat weapons system of the submarines needed to be replaced. The Coalition government commissioned an external review (the Prescott-McIntosh Review), which recommended a process of open tendering using “military off-the-shelf” technology. There were tenders from several capable suppliers, not all from the US. It was apparently felt by one of the tenderers that unless a US contractor was involved in its bid, access to necessary technology could be impeded: STN-Atlas thus included Lockheed-Martin in its consortium. Nevertheless, the tender process was suspended in late 2000 and in July 2001 the contract was awarded to a US company (Raytheon).¹⁸

At that time, Australia also happened to be in the process of negotiating with the US an extensive agreement specifically dealing with co-operation on submarines, even though there were already in existence far-reaching agreements on exchange of information and protection of sensitive information, which would have covered any newly agreed co-operation on submarines. As announced by the Minister, the new agreement provided for “our respective navies to assist each other in providing fully capable, sustainable and inter-operable submarines forces” through “warfare data exchange” and “other co-operation”.

The purposes of co-operation were stated to be to “engage in collaborative activities that will enhance the ability of submarines to operate effectively in the prevailing strategic circumstances”, “to share training opportunities to increase mutual skills in warfare discipline”, “to facilitate participation in collaborative ventures designed to maximize the Participants’ advantage in submarine warfare in the region”,

to facilitate the exchange of test, evaluation and warfare data, plus the analysis of information that flows from this data in support of mutually determined objectives

and

¹⁸ ‘Minister opts for US subs fix’, *Navy News*, 23 July 2001; P. Radford, ‘The Price of Loyalty: Defence Procurement and the Dilemma of Alliance Diplomacy’, *OCIS Papers*, Canberra, ANU, 2004.

to maximize the mutual benefits of interoperability and the synergy of equipment production and logistics the results from increased opportunities for both Participants' industrial bases.¹⁹

With such a sweeping statement of joint US-Australian interests in the project, it is not surprising that some non-US parties gained the impression that their participation was unlikely to be welcome.

Similar features emerged in the project to acquire heavy-weight torpedoes for the new submarines. A request for proposals was issued in April 1999. Several responses were received. Some months after the suspension of competition on the combat weapons system, the competition on the torpedoes was also cancelled.²⁰ A feasibility study on arming the submarines with Raytheon torpedoes was undertaken in September 2002 and a contract signed with Raytheon in April 2003.

There might have been reduced integration risks because of the choice of another Raytheon system, but the episode illustrates a tendency for sourcing decisions to flow on from one system to a related one. A comment made publicly by a senior US Navy official that the US "would not countenance non-US built torpedoes being fired at US submarines in exercises", also brought inter-operability considerations into sharper focus.²¹

The case of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF), intended as a replacement for the F/A-18 and the F-111, was more complex. Available air superiority fighters apart from JSF were either of the current generation of aircraft—though very capable ones—or simply unaffordable, like the F-22. The government chose to commit *early* to participatory status in the JSF, rather than waiting to see how the project developed. An amount of \$210m was committed for the right to compete for development work on the JSF.

Practical and commercial advantages, along with capability considerations, were seen as justifying these decisions. But they have effectively led to the pre-selection of major weapons system in ways that reduce international competition among Australia's potential suppliers. The alliance has been deepened, as has Australia's future dependence on the US.

The wide scope of some of the arrangements entered into also raises questions about the degree of autonomy Australia can expect to have in supporting and operating equipment when it is in service. After an acquisition has been made, securing access to the technology needed to

¹⁹ "Statement of Principles for Enhanced Co-operation between the United States Navy and the Royal Australian Navy in Matters Relating to Submarines", *Media Release* by Minister of Defence, Hon Peter Reith, 11 September 2001.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²¹ M. Kelton, *More than an Ally? US-Australia Relations since 1996*, cited in Radford, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

enable to operate well can be problematic. Experience with the F/A-18's Hornet in the 1980's and 1990's demonstrated such difficulties.

Information about problems encountered by the UK is relevant here. The UK has positioned itself as close to the US as any ally during the Iraq War, but also has difficulties regarding access to US technology. Despite having committed to the JSF project, the UK failed for five years to obtain a waiver of the International Traffic in Arms Regulations, which limit the transfer of arms technologies to foreign countries. Only Canada has such a waiver. In 2004 the US Congress undertook to pass a measure giving the UK and Australian requests "expedited status", but still left it short of UK needs.²²

The issue was taken up with President Bush by Prime Minister Tony Blair in May 2006, who reportedly threatened to withdraw the UK from the JSF project, to which it had already committed some \$2bn. The UK sought "the ability to successfully operate, upgrade, employ and maintain" the JSF, such that it "retained operational sovereignty over the aircraft".²³

Similar representations were made by Australia's Minister to Secretary Rumsfeld in June 2006 in connection with signing up to two more years' participation in the project. Assurances were given that "all (Australia's) requirements would be met on the JSF".

In the past such generalized assurances have been found to be inadequate.

On the Wedgetail AWACS aircraft, for example, as the Australian Auditor-General has reported that a lack of US Government export licenses for some of the project's advanced technology precluded local industry gaining some \$44 million worth of business in areas such as design and development of sensors, mission systems, communication systems, electronic warfare systems, electronic security measures systems and tactical intelligence sub-system. Also off limits for Australian industry were system integration tasks and through-life support of software, test and evaluation, and operational and logistic support. Elsewhere in the same report, the Auditor General noted that similar constraints had limited Australia's ability to verify and validate certain hardware, software, technical documentation/data and know-how as part of the project's test and evaluation program.²⁴ Access issues are on-going and virtually continuous. Neither the requirements of interoperability, nor firm acquisition commitments, necessarily secure access to later refinements, upgrades and supplements.

An area of particular sensitivity for the future is the category of "command, control, communications, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance",

²² *Financial Times*, London, 22 November 2005.

²³ *Financial Times*, London, 26 May 2006.

²⁴ Auditor General, *Wedgetail Airborne Early Warning and Control Aircraft: Project Management*, Audit Report, no. 32, Canberra, National Audit Office, February 2004.

where the US is investing heavily in research in the expectation that it will yield substantial future military advantage through enhancing capability in “network centric warfare”. This is an area where in the future Australia will need a capability “edge” in many of the acquisitions sourced from the US. For these reasons, the degree to which Australia’s dependence has deepened should be examined on a regular basis to ensure that Australia retains adequate operational independence.

Interoperability is usually a term applied to operations with US forces. There is some tension between expanding capacity to operate with US forces on the one hand, and the capacity to operate with the forces of regional partners on the other. Regional countries assign varying degrees of priority to interoperability with the US, and each tends to move at its own pace. But Australia has significant interests in sustaining and developing co-operation with regional partners, and so needs to minimize barriers to future cooperation. There needs to be an examination of how forthcoming acquisitions are likely to impact on scope for interoperability with regional partners.

Considerations for the Next Government

The ANZUS Treaty has stood for more than five decades. Its terms are unexceptionable, but not well known to the public in Australia, or the US. It does matter in Australia that this is the case, but not in the US. With the end of the Cold War such ideological rancour as existed against ANZUS has gone. Its durability is not in question. The focus now has to be on the many areas into which its influence extends, where there are matters requiring attention as has been shown above, and on the degree of prominence it has in Australia’s overall national security policy.

There is a tendency to feel that if bilateral relations are particularly close, the US might do more in a future security crisis to assist Australia than it has undertaken to do in the ANZUS Treaty, and go further than its own interests require. An understanding of the way nations interact in the world and of the history of the Australia-US security relationship would suggest that such an approach says more about Australian fears and aspirations than about future US actions. It was George Washington who observed: “no nation can be entrusted further than it is bound by its interests” and “there can be no greater error than to expect or calculate on real favours from nation to nation”.²⁵

In future, if Australia has significant misgivings about an impending war such as that in Iraq, or on other major issues, it should bring them up with its old senior partner in the alliance. It should never hold back from sharing such

²⁵ Quoted in Owen Harries, *Benign or Imperial? Reflections on American Hegemony*, Sydney, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2004, p. 88.

views even when the US seems firmly set on its course. Australia would first need to develop views of its own, of course, testing them thoroughly before sharing them with others.

The degree of bilateral closeness that has developed over the Iraq War is unique. It has to do with a unique conjunction of circumstances, including the coincidence of two conservative governments supporting each other in electorally difficult times. With the war going badly and the end of the Presidential term approaching, this closeness cannot be expected to endure. There is a risk that Australia will need to move with little notice to adjust to US policy shifts, and might be left clinging to positions from which the US has moved on. There may be some disjunctions here and there, but Australia will make adjustments, and the alliance will adjust too. At that time though, US preoccupations other than those to do with the close alignment with Australia will crowd in on new leaders in Washington, and other allies and friends will return to take places left empty in recent years.

Even if the need for change is clear, it is unclear exactly what the new shape of US policy will be. It might be that the “Global War on Terror” will morph into a new, as yet ill-defined “Long War”. Or it might be that a suite of more discriminating strategies will be devised to deal with terrorism and other security challenges. Until the direction is clear, Australian policy is in “pause” mode. When the way is open, Australia needs to be ready to restore its longer term perspectives and apply them to the development of defence and security planning. Lost time will need to be made up. Australia will then need to craft an approach to engagement with the region which fits not the Bush White House strategies for the “Global War on Terror”, but with the post-Bush policies of Australia’s major ally.

The question of the place of the alliance in Australia’s overall security policy is more difficult. In the community, ANZUS has a high profile reliably attracts the support of two out of three Australians responding to opinion polls. Major parties compete to be the more reliable alliance partner. Issues involving the US dominate the daily news, and meetings with US leaders confer prestige on those participating. By contrast, in an environment where Australia faces no identifiable threat, even though its strategic circumstances are demanding, policy to match security needs is necessarily complex and often rather remote from the everyday world.

The alliance cannot meet all Australia’s high priority security needs, even in relation to terrorism. On the threat of nuclear proliferation there is no substitute for effective multilateral diplomacy. In Australia’s region, the alliance can complement cooperation among regional partners, but not replace it. And there is the possibility that the US may again shift toward a less interventionist stance in world affairs—as prevailed for some years following the Vietnam War. Then, the US saw itself as drawing a distinction between protecting allies against nuclear threats—for which it would provide

a shield—and other situations, involving non-nuclear aggression, where the US would “look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for defence”.²⁶ In combination, these considerations point to a need for balance between alliance policy and wider policy for national security policy—a balance in which it is quite difficult for the wider but less politically salient policy to be adequately supported. That is a challenge that now needs to be addressed.

Ross Cottrill served as a diplomat in Asian posts and in Washington before becoming moving to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet as Assistant Secretary. He was First Assistant Secretary in the Department of Defence responsible for strategic policy and international policy for a decade. He subsequently became Special Adviser to the Secretary and Chief of the Defence Force, and Foundation Director of Studies at the Australian College of Defence and Strategic Studies. He was Executive Director of the Australian Institute of International Affairs 1998-2004. He is a Visiting Fellow of the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy, ANU. cottrill.ross@gmail.com.

²⁶ Henry A. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1994, p. 708.