

# BLACK SWAN

## STRATEGY PAPER

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ANZUS PIVOT POINTS: REAPPRAISING 'THE ALLIANCE' FOR A NEW STRATEGIC AGE



DEFENCE AND SECURITY THROUGH AN INDO-PACIFIC LENS



### Black Swan Strategy Paper #3

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Please direct inquiries to [peter.dean@uwa.edu.au](mailto:peter.dean@uwa.edu.au)

This publication can be downloaded at: [www.defenceuwa.com.au](http://www.defenceuwa.com.au)

#### UWA Defence and Security Institute

M235, 2nd Floor, Old Economics Building (Bldg 351)  
The University of Western Australia  
35 Stirling Highway  
Crawley WA 6009  
Australia

For all general enquiries:

Email: [defenceprogram@uwa.edu.au](mailto:defenceprogram@uwa.edu.au)

Tel: +61 8 6488 4742

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## About the author and editor



### Professor Peter J. Dean

The Black Swan Strategy Papers are edited by Professor Peter J. Dean, Chair of Defence Studies and Director of the UWA Defence and Security Institute. A specialist in Australian strategy and Indo-Pacific security, he is a non-resident senior fellow with the Atlantic Council and a visiting fellow at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at The Australian National University. Professor Dean has been a Fulbright Fellow and Endeavour research scholar

in Australia-United States alliance studies, and was the co-founding editor of the Melbourne University Press *Defence Studies Series*. He is also a member of the editorial board of the *Australian Army Journal*, *Global War Studies* and the *Military Studies Journal* and a former managing editor of the journal *Security Challenges*.

(E) [peter.dean@uwa.edu.au](mailto:peter.dean@uwa.edu.au)



## About the Black Swan Strategy Papers

The *Black Swan Strategy Papers* are the flagship publication of the UWA Defence and Security Institute (DSI). They represent the intersection between Western Australia and strategic studies – both of which are famous for their black swans. The series aims to provide high-quality analysis and strategic insights into the Indo-Pacific region through a defence and security lens, with the hope of reducing the number of ‘black swan’ events with which Australian strategy and Indo-Pacific security has to contend. Each of the Black Swan Strategy Papers are generally between 5,000 and 15,000 words and are written for a policy-oriented audience. The Black Swan Strategy Papers are commission works by the UWA DSI by invitation only. Any comments or suggestions for the series can be directed to the editor.



## Chair Preface



**September 2021 brought many current and past practitioners, and present day students of the Australia-US Alliance to the fore, with their respective analyses of the Alliance, its history, its operation and its effect.**

This of course was driven by the notion of the Alliance at 70 - the 70th Anniversary of the signing of the ANZUS Treaty in San Francisco on 1 September 1951.

Another deeply significant Alliance related event also occurred in September 2021, namely, the Joint Leaders' Statement on AUKUS on 16 September.

In their various analyses, practitioners, students and historians often delineate what they regard as the key phases of the Alliance, starting as most historians do with the period 1942-1951, the first phase or the initial post Pearl Harbour war-time de facto alliance phase, pending signature of the actual Treaty in 1951.

In 2021, some included AUKUS in their analysis of Alliance phases, postulating that AUKUS could perhaps be regarded as the starting of a new phase in the Alliance.

Different historians, students and practitioners have of course different favourite or key phases of the Alliance, none of which are necessarily exclusively right or wrong.

UWA Defence and Security Institute Director Professor Peter Dean, a highly regarded Australian expert on the Alliance, has included in his analysis: the 1942-1951 period, the 1960's as a period of consolidation or entrenchment of the Alliance, the mid to late 1970's post- Vietnam period, the 1989 post-Cold War period, the War on Terror era, the 2011 US Pivot, and now, the current 2021 Integrated Defence and Deterrence era.

I suspect however, with this Black Swan publication, he is to date the only student of the Alliance who describes the Integrated Defence and Deterrence era as now including an "Alliance Revolution", courtesy of AUKUS and Nuclear powered submarines.

Whether his revolution description of the Alliance generally is correct or not, he is certainly correct in his analysis that we are witnessing a new phase in our Alliance with the US.

Over the immediate preceding period or the Obama pivot, the Alliance has also seen the joint development of modern technological approaches to the strategic partnership.

We have referred to these as Alliance practical cooperation measures on 21st Century security challenges, which operate under the Full Knowledge and Concurrence Principle.

These range from space, to satellite and defence communications, to cyber, and include the establishment and deployment of the Jointly Operated US C Band Radar at H. E. Holt Communications Station, and the relocation of the advanced US Space Surveillance Telescope to Australia.

AUKUS adds to the list of modern technological challenges in a deeply significant way, and once you move beyond nuclear powered submarines, it includes quantum technology, AI, data theft, disinformation and propaganda, attacks on critical infrastructure, supply chain disruption, and space.

Whether you agree or not with Professor Dean's analysis, the Australia - US Alliance world will be different. This will be a period of reassessment of what the Alliance does, how it operates, and who Australian directly engages with to achieve its strategic interests.

Like so much of what Professor Dean writes, this Black Swan Strategy Paper on the history of the Alliance, is fully informed, incisive, and both informative and challenging for modern day practitioners.


**Professor Stephen Smith**

*Chair, UWA Defence and Security Institute*

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# Executive Summary

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2021 represented the most significant moment in the Australia-United States Alliance ('the Alliance') since it was signed.
- Understanding the nature and character of the Alliance provides a window to understanding continuity and change in Australia's most important strategic partnership.
- Previously the Alliance has been able to adapt its character to meet changes in policy and the strategic environment at key pivot points in: 1951, 1964, 1976, 1989, 2001, 2011 and 2021.
- The 2021 pivot point however represents a change to the underlying nature of Australia's key strategic partnership, marking it more momentous than the previous pivot points.
- The 2021 pivot point is indicative of a key paradox: the increasing importance of the strategic alliance with the United States at the same time that US power is in relative decline and the potential risks and costs of the Alliance rise.
- The significance of 2021 pivot point means that Australia must reconceptualise the Alliance and forge it along new parameters to meet Australia's future strategic needs.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- At the public level - there needs to be a much more open and frank discussion of the future of the Alliance based on mutual interests and balancing its benefits: including a more detailed discussion of its potential risks and costs.
- At the military level - Defence must undertake an integrated force structure and force posture review to realign the ADF to meet the challenges of major power competition and integrated deterrence.
- At the institutional level - Australia and the US should review existing alliance institutions. This should include upgrading AUSMIN, expanding joint military planning, and investigating the potential for a new combined headquarters for operations in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia.
- At the political level - the language of a 'forever alliance' or 'unbreakable alliance' must be avoided. New rhetoric for a detailed and considered strategic discussion must evolve, reflecting an era of heightened Australian requirements and greater strategic risk in the US-Australia Alliance.
- At the governmental level - Given the changing risk calculus from a new multi-polar Indo-Pacific, including the increased security threats generated by major power competition and climate change, after the 2022 election, the next government must develop a more holistic national security strategy that integrates foreign, defence, industry, climate, energy and geo-economic policies to meet present and future challenges.





## INTRODUCTION: The Alliance revolution of 2021

**Significant changes in international affairs or a nation's security posture can either be sudden, striking and self-evident or can occur with little fanfare or notice, with their significance being revealed only with the passage of time.**

Some changes, like the title of this public policy paper series, are classified as 'black swans' – a surprise event, beyond normal expectations, that have a major impact. The events of 2021 in Australian strategic policy bear the hallmarks of all of these changes.

The announcement of the AUKUS deal in late-2021 caught the public and commentariat completely by surprise. Its commitment to build nuclear-powered submarines for Australia was heralded as revolutionary and stole media headlines around the world. Yet the broader aspects of AUKUS are far more important than Australia's shift to nuclear-powered submarines. Slowly, many commentators and practitioners are articulating the true significance of AUKUS.

The second half of 2021 was also significant beyond AUKUS. The US announcement of a move to 'integrated deterrence' in the Indo-Pacific, the AUSMIN meeting (that ran concurrently with the AUKUS announcement) and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue leaders meeting the same month all mark 2021 as the year of significant shifts in Indo-Pacific security and in the US-Australia Alliance.

Major changes such as those seen in 2021 historically only come about once every decade or so. Moreover, the key events of 2021 are especially significant. They reflect the first fundamental shift in the very nature of the US-Australia Alliance relationship for over 70 years.

The concept of exploring the Australia-United States Alliance through an understanding of its underlying nature and changing character will be familiar to scholars of strategic studies, especially acolytes of the great Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz and his unfinished strategic masterpiece *On War*. Clausewitz's understanding of war was built around the idea that war has 'an enduring nature that demonstrates four continuities ... Conversely, warfare has a constantly changing character ... simply "the means by which war has to be fought," [through] the influence of context [which] is ... paramount.'<sup>1</sup>

To many Clausewitzian purists this relationship is fixed – war's nature does not change<sup>2</sup>, but its character is ever-evolving. However, as Antulio J Echevarria II has argued, 'Clausewitz clearly sought to connect the former [nature] to the latter [character] in the opening chapter of *On War*.' This means that 'Clausewitz believed changes in war's character can lead to fundamental shifts in its nature, and vice versa.'<sup>3</sup>

In adapting this conceptual approach this paper argues that the US-Australia Alliance has had a largely fixed underlying nature for most of its seven decades and a changing character that has been personified by key pivot points in its history. However, in 2021 the fundamental

changes occurring in the Indo-Pacific strategic environment means that the current changes to the Alliance is causing fundamental shifts to the character *and* nature of the relationship.

The paper identifies key pivot points in 1951, 1964, 1976, 1989, 2001, 2011 and 2021. It argues that the underlying nature of the relationship remained fixed during the first six pivot points, adapting its character at these key moments.

2021 marks the most significant moment in Australia's alliance-based strategic culture since the signing of ANZUS in 1951 and the moving of the US-Australian Alliance to the centre point of Australian strategic policy in 1964. For the better part of seven decades, Australian strategic policy has been built around the centrality of the US-Australian Alliance.

2021 did not change this basic fact. However, the signing of AUKUS exposed the fact that many of the underlying pillars of this relationship, which stood firm since the end of the Second World War, have evaporated. This includes the end of US primacy and the end of uncontested US maritime supremacy in the Indo-Pacific, as well as Australia's ability to rely, in its strategic policy, on unilateral US conventional deterrence.



In 2021, the rise of integrated deterrence and AUKUS also highlighted a sea change in US strategic thinking. The US has taken steps to further empower its allies, to redistribute its forces around the Indo-Pacific, and to better integrate its allies into its supply chains and military-industrial planning. This has been done in response to an increasingly revisionist and aggressive People's Republic of China (PRC). This approach, along with the changes to the strategic environment, is why the broader elements of AUKUS, are so important.

Beyond media headlines dominated by questions around nuclear-powered submarines, AUKUS highlights the increasing challenge of a revisionist PRC in emerging areas of competition. These require a new era of collaboration in research and development, deepening intelligence cooperation, the pooling of resources and the need for domestic legislative reform. AUKUS thus has the potential to fundamentally change America's engagement with the region, its approach to technological development and acquisition, and its relationship with Australia and its other allies.

Most significantly, what 2021 revealed was that the US and Australia are finally starting to come to terms with the fact that the former no longer holds, and cannot restore, primacy in the Indo-Pacific. Thus the foundations of both the US and Australia's approach to security in region, which had been in place since the Second World War, have to change.

Restructuring its 'hubs and spokes' alliance system through empowering allies is key to US asymmetric vantage in the region. The US alliance network in the region is unparalleled and one of the key fundamental principles of alliances is that they aggregate power. This is a key determinant in order for the US and its allies to maintain a favourable balance of power in the now multi-polar Indo-Pacific strategic system. Integrated deterrence, a form of collective defence, is also a reflection of the reality that the US can no longer do conventional deterrence in the Indo-Pacific unilaterally.

These are unparalleled changes and will mean the US-Australia Alliance will have to evolve in ways that it has not had to in the past. In assessing Australian strategic culture and security preferences, this paper argues that one of the reasons for the longevity of the Australia-United States security partnership is that this alliance relationship has included an underlying nature and a changing character. Key to understanding the magnitude of the changes that are underway in the Australia-US Alliance, and to chart a path for its future, is to recognise and trace the key elements of the Alliance relationship through understanding this nature and character.

Not all pivot points in this paper are dealt with equally in terms of space and focus. While they all 'imply both micro and macro analysis' the earlier pivot points are dealt with in some detail in order to contextualise the essence of this Alliance partnership and its development.<sup>4</sup> The latter two

pivots are dealt with in more detail as they represent more contemporary and profound developments in the relationship.

This detailed policy paper explores this topic through five chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the conceptual framework, including: the importance of pivot points in international relations, the nature and character of the US-Australia Alliance, and the establishment of ANZUS. Chapter 2 covers the key pivot points during the Cold War in 1964, when the Alliance moved to the centre of Australian strategic policy, and in 1976, when Australia released its first public Defence White Paper outlining its policy response to US strategy in Asia. Chapter 3 outlines the key post-Cold War pivots, the globalisation of the Alliance and its focus on the Middle East. Chapter 4 relates the rise of China, the changing nature of the Indo-Pacific and the Obama pivot point. In this fifth pivot, faith in US hegemony as a response to these changes was maintained in government approaches to strategy and by policy elites, despite the significant structural changes that were underway. Chapter 5 details how the major changes that have been underway in the Indo-Pacific, personified by the AUKUS pact in 2021, are fundamentally changing the nature of the Alliance as it comes to terms with the rise of the PRC, the relative decline of the US and the changing strategic order of the Indo-Pacific. The conclusion outlines key areas for future consideration to ensure the Alliance remains relevant and focused on Australia's security needs.

2021 marks the most significant moment in Australia's alliance-based strategic culture since the signing of ANZUS in 1951.



## CHAPTER 1

# Establishment: Pivot points, the nature and character of ANZUS and the formation of ‘the Alliance’

### Pivot points

A pivot or turning point<sup>4</sup> is ‘the point at which a very significant change occurs; a decisive moment’.<sup>5</sup> They are, as Thomas Kuhn has noted, not something that happens every other year.<sup>6</sup> Yoav J Tenembaum argues in his book *Turning Points in the History of International Relations 1908-2008* that these moments represent ‘an event that alters significantly the present process in international relations, and has long lasting considerable effects ... [it] denotes a dividing line between the events that preceded it and the subsequent events that would come in its wake.’<sup>7</sup>

The turning or ‘pivot’ points selected in this paper are decisive points that saw ‘the Alliance’ between Australia and the United States move in new directions. These points are driven by international events, the strategic environment and the policy choices of the United States and Australia. While broad-ranging in their impact, these points are organised around the application of the Alliance to Australian strategic policy.

This approach identifies such a ‘point ... while observing the wider historical landscape and assessing the historical process that followed’. It is readily accepted that such a process can be subjective. As Tenembaum notes, ‘the principal criteria for deciding what is a turning point in the history of international relations is not necessarily the perspective afforded by them, but the analysis advanced by us.’<sup>8</sup>

The paper advances an understanding of the Alliance built off a conceptualisation of the security relationship in three areas: firstly, the ANZUS Treaty as the legal foundation of the security Alliance; secondly the security partnership (the Alliance) and thirdly the broader bilateral relationship.

The firm focus of this paper is on the Alliance security partnership in Australian strategic policy.

The paper argues that there have been seven key pivot points in the Alliance in relation to Australian strategy: 1951, 1964, 1976, 1989, 2001, 2011 and 2021. While these points are decisive, they are not spontaneous, momentary or instant changes. They should not be seen as lightning strikes or sudden, incomprehensible policy shifts. As Niall Ferguson argues, a turning or pivot point in time ‘is generally slow ... [just like] an oil tanker ... it does not turn on a dime.’<sup>9</sup>

All the Alliance pivot points, as will be detailed, are the culmination of a series of lead-up events and changes that influenced a decisive point in time where a policy change or agreement has been reached. These are reflective of an articulation of a response in Australian strategic policy to changed strategic circumstance.

### The Alliance: its nature and character

While there are important points in deepening the strategic relationship with the US during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the first key pivot point of ‘the Alliance’ relationship did not occur until the signing of the ANZUS Treaty in 1951. The treaty, despite its sometimes-vague language, provides the legal framework and foundation of the strategic partnership.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond the treaty document are now 70-plus years of history, engagements, agreements, personnel exchanges, documents, MOUs, intelligence sharing arrangements and combined operations. This broader set of agreements, architecture and engagements comprises the Alliance relationship - with a capital ‘A’ as it has become known in contemporary Australian policy documents.<sup>11</sup>

As the former Associate Secretary of the Australian Department of Defence and Head of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Brendan Sargeant, has noted:

The ANZUS treaty is a treaty that governs the alliance relationship between the United States and Australia, and the alliance has evolved in terms of what happens under it over the 60 [now 70] years that it has been in operation. As strategic circumstances change, as new challenges emerge, the alliance [has] adapt[ed] to deal with them in a way that is congruent with the interests of both Australia and the United States.<sup>12</sup>

Beyond the legal framework and the Alliance security partnership sits the broader bilateral ‘relationship’ between the two countries. This includes all of the other key engagement areas such as people-to-people contacts, and broader diplomatic, economic and cultural engagement. However, it must be noted, as Maryanne Kelton laid out in her excellent 2008 book *More than an Ally? Contemporary Australia-US Relations*, there is not always a direct correlation between the close nature of the Alliance partnership and other broader areas of the bilateral relationship.<sup>13</sup>

For Australian strategic policy, the key focus is on the Alliance level of the relationship. The Alliance has demonstrated that it has incredible resolve and the ability to adapt to the changing nature of strategic affairs. Despite the changing strategic environment over the last 70 years, the Alliance has been able to redefine itself at key pivot points in international affairs or Australian/US policy so as to maintain a key role, if not the central role, in Australian strategic policy.



One of the key reasons for the adaptability of the Alliance is its two key characteristics: a changing character and an underlying nature.



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The longer-term underlying nature of the Alliance is its more enduring elements that demonstrate a number of continuities. These continuities have helped to fix the Alliance at the centre of Australian strategic policy for almost 60 of its 70 years of existence. The character of the Alliance has been ever-changing and, as noted, has pivoted the focus of the relationship at key points in time that have ensured that it has remained at the centre of Australian strategic policy.

The basis of the Alliance's nature is defined by Australia's underlying strategic circumstances and the way in which the US security partnership has developed in Australian strategy. This includes:

- Australia's geographical location at the bottom of Asia and on the hinge of the Indian and Pacific Oceans
- high levels of engagement with, and support for, the global institutions established at the end of the Second World War for security and prosperity

- ongoing support for a rules-based global order based on international norms buttressed by US leadership
- support for liberal democracy
- a strong commitment to open global trade, including free markets
- an Asia-Pacific strategic order based on US hegemonic power
- reliance upon US conventional deterrence
- reliance upon US extended nuclear deterrence

Despite its changing character, the 'nature' of the Alliance has allowed for a continuation of the Alliance tradition in Australian strategic policy. More broadly, this has allowed the dominant strategic culture in Australia,<sup>14</sup> built on the Alliance framework, to be maintained based on:

- an alliance with a great and powerful friend – firstly Great Britain and now the USA
- the promotion of a local defence capability aimed at deterring conventional threats in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific (where Australia's major power ally does not share the same level of strategic interest)

- active bilateral and multilateral diplomacy
- a liberal internationalist approach to diplomacy
- a state-based focus for national security policy making
- a 'realist' (pragmatic) tradition in foreign policy
- an 'enduring sense of historical anxiety about Australia's perceived security vulnerabilities' in the world (that leads to) a sense of 'pessimism and uncertainty'<sup>15</sup>

Australia has responded to changes in international affairs through the adaptation of its major power alliances and diplomacy in order to shape the strategic environment as best it can to suit its interests.

One of the key factors that has continued to see the Alliance maintain its prominence in Australia's national security policy making has been the ability of the Alliance to evolve and adapt its character at key 'pivot points' in its history. For most of its history, these pivots in the character of the Alliance have been adaptive based on its seemingly fixed underlying nature.

Pivot points	Era	Geographic focus	Years	Length
1951	Establishment	Asia-Pacific	1951-1963	12 years
1964	Entrenchment	Asia-Pacific	1964-1976	12 years
1976	Defence of Australia	Asia-Pacific	1976-1989	13 years
1989	Post-Cold War	Global	1989-2001	12 years
2001	War on Terror	Global	2001-2011	10 years
2011	Pivot/ Rebalance	Indo-Pacific	2011-2021	10 years
2021	Multi-polar Order	Indo-Pacific	2022-	-

**Table 1: Key Alliance 'pivot points'**

← Australian Army soldier Sergeant John Hickey chats with United States marines after a simulated assault on the urban operations training facility, Shoalwater Bay Training Area.



### Establishment: the Alliance's strategic role in the early Cold War

One of the most often asked questions about the Australia–United States strategic partnership is when did ‘the Alliance’ start? This is both an easy and hard question to answer. From a legal perspective, the signing of the ANZUS Treaty between Australia, New Zealand and the United States occurred in September 1951. From that point onwards, ANZUS has never been expanded – nor has it contracted. As then-parliamentary secretary for defence David Feeney noted to the Senate estimates hearing for the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee on 28 May 2012, ‘the ANZUS treaty ... [is] not likely to be reviewed or revolutionised.’

Thus, while New Zealand has played a much-diminished role since the 1980s (on September 17, 1986, the United States suspended its treaty obligations toward New Zealand) the trilateral treaty remains the legal instrument for engagement on what is now fundamentally an Australia–United States bilateral alliance relationship.<sup>16</sup> Thus from the time of the New Zealand step-back, the term ‘ANZUS’ has often been used in Australia as shorthand for the Australia–United States alliance relationship.<sup>17</sup>

Although the treaty date is clear, the strategic relationship between the two countries is much harder to date. On 4 July 2018, the Australian Government launched a ‘100 Years of Mateship’ celebration with the United States – dating that event to the First World War and the battle of Hamel, when Australian and United States troops first fought side by side.<sup>18</sup> This historical event was of minimal strategic significance, but artfully used by the Australian Government 100 years on for a public diplomacy campaign in Washington DC. Among the turmoil of the Trump presidency, the 100 Years of Mateship campaign was used to shore up support for the Alliance with the US Congress and senior members of the Trump administration.<sup>19</sup>

More generally, the war in the Pacific (1942–1945) is seen as one of the key defining points of the bilateral relationship. This is often dated to Prime Minister John Curtin’s ‘turn to America’ statement on 27 December 1941, as the region buckled under the pressure of the early Japanese military offensives.<sup>20</sup> However, the relationship during the Pacific War, while critical to the future establishment of the strategic relationship, was much more of a coalition – that is a ‘temporary ad

hoc arrangement united against a common enemy’.<sup>21</sup>

In the lead-up to the war, there had been little in the way of a military partnership between the two countries, no joint planning, no joint exercises and little work on interoperability.<sup>22</sup> In the end, Australia looked on the wartime coalition with the United States as essential, but always with an eye to Australia’s role more broadly being ‘anchored’ in the centrality of the British Empire.<sup>23</sup>

The late Professor Desmond Ball has made further claims to the start of the strategic relationship. While stating that the ‘alliance effectively began’ with Curtin’s statement in December 1941, he famously argued that the ‘essence’ of the Alliance is actually the intelligence sharing relationship formalised in the 1948 UKUSA agreement that established the Five Eyes (United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) intelligence relationship: ‘the most important international agreement to which Australia is a party’.<sup>24</sup>

This agreement was a legacy of the close intelligence sharing relationship established during the Second World War. More recently, the Five Eyes group of countries have been used as an expanded form of minilateralism,



with meetings being conducted around broader diplomatic issues than intelligence. In April 2021, four of the members (NZ being the exception) 'jointly condemned China's treatment of its Uyghur population in Xinjiang province', expressing 'concern over China's de facto military takeover of the South China Sea' as well as jointly condemning the PRC's 'suppression of democracy in Hong Kong'.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the ANZUS Treaty being signed in 1951 and the undeniable importance of the United States to Australia's strategic affairs since the turn of the century, the early period of the bilateral relationship from the First World War to the mid-1960s was heavily influenced by Australia's cultural, economic and strategic attachment to the British Empire.

Most significantly for Australia, the signing of ANZUS in 1951 was not simply the replacement of one 'great and powerful friend' (Great Britain) for another (the United States). The evolution of the Alliance to the centre of Australian strategic policy was, at this time, not assured. It would take ANZUS another 13 years to become pre-eminent in Australian strategic policy. Yet its very establishment in 1951 is a critical pivot point, as the treaty gave the Alliance its firm foundation.

While ANZUS laid the foundation for closer Australia-US strategic relations, Australian military operations in the period 1951-1963 were dominated by Australia's relationship with the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. During the Korean War, Australian land forces fought largely as part of British Commonwealth formations using British tactics and equipment. However, Australia's strategic engagement in the Korean War in 1951 was tailored specifically to influence the negotiations over the ANZUS Treaty, about which the US military and Pentagon were unenthusiastic.<sup>26</sup>

**SEATO was not much of an alliance, not really Southeast Asian and not an adequate organisation.**

During the 1950s and 1960s Australia was deeply involved in the Malayan Emergency and Konfrontasi with the British. This was a result of Australian defence policy being largely centred on its engagement with the British Far East Strategic Reserve focused on the Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia (ANZAM) area. During the early 1950s, Australian strategic planning had been based on sending a proposed third Australian Imperial Force to the Middle East in support of the UK in case of the Cold War going hot. Later Australia worked assiduously (and in large part successfully) to convince the United Kingdom and the United States of the importance of ANZAM and Southeast Asia as a core part of the defensive line in the event of the outbreak of a third world war.<sup>27</sup>

Australia's deep engagement in collective defence during this period was bolstered in 1954 with the establishment of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO).<sup>28</sup> This 'Asian NATO' formed the bedrock of Australia's strategic planning in the mid-to-late 1950s. Initially, Australia placed strong faith in SEATO. However, it soon became apparent that the United States' commitment to this multilateral defence alliance was limited and it was very far from a NATO-style treaty organisation. What's more, SEATO's make-up, which included United States, France, Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia, the

Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan, was a rather odd collection of states for Southeast Asia's security.

This meant that in many senses, SEATO was not unlike Voltaire's characterisation of the Holy Roman Empire, which he saw as neither holy, nor Roman, nor in fact an empire; equally SEATO was not much of an alliance, not really Southeast Asian and not an adequate organisation, lacking as it did a security guarantee, depth of institutional development, joint planning and a multinational headquarters. SEATO was described by the diplomat James Cable as 'a fig leaf for the nakedness of American policy' in the region and it soon became moribund. In the end, the alliance pact was put out of its misery in 1977.<sup>29</sup>

By the mid-1960s, the moribund nature of SEATO and the decline of British power in Asia – soon to be institutionalised by their withdrawal from 'east of Suez' – recast the role of the Alliance for Australia.<sup>30</sup>

← An Australian Army soldier from the 8th/9th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, and soldiers from the Armed Forces of the Philippines disembark a United States Marine Corps MV-22 Osprey aircraft during a simulated assault on the urban operations training facility, Shoalwater Bay Training Area.

## CHAPTER 2

# Cold War pivots and the centrality of ANZUS

### Entrenchment: putting the Alliance at the centre of Australian strategy

In the period of the mid-to-late 1960s, Australia's relationship with the British Commonwealth changed as the United Kingdom moved to reduce its engagement east of Suez. Economically, the relationship with Britain changed irreconcilably when the UK joined the European Common Market in 1972.

In addition, by the late 1950s and early 1960s, ANZUS was of growing importance for two other major reasons: Indonesia's political leadership oscillating between support for the Communist Bloc and the West, and the spread of communist movements throughout Southeast Asia. As a result, the Alliance in this period also saw a dramatic increase in the sale of US military technology and weapons systems to Australia, as well as the development of improved mechanisms to manage the security relationship and to improve defence cooperation.

The three-year conflict with Indonesia in Borneo and on the Malay Peninsula over the incorporation of the former British colonies of Sabah and Sarawak into Malaysia, known as Konfrontasi or 'Confrontation', was a critical security issue for the Australian Government in the period of the early 1960s. Not only was this the last time that Australia provided military assistance to a largely

British-led conflict, Konfrontasi became a critical test for Australia regarding the limits of the ANZUS Treaty.

The Australian government was eager to clarify with the US the applicability of ANZUS to the conflict. The US, however, remained reticent to clarify any potential commitments. The US made it clear that it could not replace the UK's role in Southeast Asia vis-à-vis Malaysia and Confrontation with Indonesia. The US stated that in an 'overt attack on Malaysia and if Australian forces should become involved, the ANZUS treaty would, according to the advice given the United States Administration by its lawyers, come into operation'. However, The Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Averell Harriman, noted that internal security issues, such as Confrontation, were a UK-Australia problem.<sup>51</sup>

Konfrontasi, as Sir John McEwen, the leader of the Country Party, noted, was a 'grey area' and this was being exploited by Indonesia. He saw the US distinction between subversion and an overt attack as 'too black and white'. He noted to the Australian Cabinet that what was key in terms of US support was 'not necessarily the fighting support, but public verbal support and an unambiguous attitude'.<sup>52</sup> Prime Minister Menzies and his government were so forthright on the issue of US support for Australia

in Konfrontasi that they were willing to engage the US on this matter even if it meant clarity of Australian commitments to the US in any potential conflict in Taiwan and in the applicability of ANZUS to the conflict in South Vietnam.<sup>53</sup>

Australia, however, was unable to get the clarity it sought over Konfrontasi with the US. In fact, Australian persistence on this issue with the US Government was eventually met with a striking blow by President Kennedy, who noted to the Australian Minister of External Affairs, Garfield Barwick, that 'people have forgotten ANZUS and are not at the moment prepared for a situation which would involve the United States'.<sup>54</sup>

Australia's response to this outcome was dual tracked. It hedged through a 'substantially increased military expenditure, raising the strength of the regular army, purchasing 40 additional Mirage fighters, a third DDG [US Charles F Adams Class guided missile destroyer], and ordering 24 F-111 bombers ... [to develop an] Australian capability to act independently of allies against Indonesia'<sup>55</sup>, while also engaging more deeply with the US in Southeast Asia through commitments to the war in South Vietnam.

Australia's engagement with the war in South Vietnam remains controversial. However, the rationale to the government at the time seemed clear. During the 1950s-1980s, Australia was a key US ally in Asia, but this was an area of secondary importance to the Cold War whose centre of gravity was fixed in Europe and on NATO.<sup>56</sup> Despite this, Asia had been key to fighting more peripheral conflicts in the Cold War. Rightly or wrongly, Australia's strategy was firmly centred on keeping the United States engaged in Southeast Asia – Australia's core area of strategic interest.<sup>57</sup> Reflective of these changes, the 1964 Australian Strategic Basis Paper finally saw the Alliance with the United States as Australia's most significant strategic partnership,<sup>58</sup> making 1964 the second key pivot point in the Alliance.





As such, the Australian Government took a proactive approach to its engagement with the conflict in South Vietnam at this time.<sup>39</sup> This was predicated on the belief that the commitment of a small military task force would strategically support the deepening relationship with the United States and keep them engaged in the region. Australia's objective, as one diplomatic cable on 11 May 1964 noted:

should be ... to achieve such an habitual closeness of relations with the US and sense of mutual alliance that in our time of need, after we have shown all reasonable restraint and good sense, the US would have little option but to respond as we would want.<sup>40</sup>

Prime Minister Menzies and his foreign affairs minister, Sir Paul Hasluck, believed that the prompt gesture of combat support for Vietnam plus offers of US intelligence bases in Australia together with 'strong political and diplomatic support would obscure how small a military contribution Australia was capable of making'.<sup>41</sup>

Four years later, the centrality of the Alliance was reaffirmed. The 1968 Strategic Basis Paper noted that 'we have had such a tradition, first to fit comfortably into British strategy and more recently in that of the US. In this latter case we have placed our trust in ANZUS'.<sup>42</sup>

Australia's strategy in Southeast Asia from in the 1950s and 1960s collapsed when it spectacularly failed to appreciate the nature of the war in South Vietnam. The 1969 Nixon Doctrine, presaging US withdrawal from Vietnam in 1972, outlined US requirements for its allies in Asia to be more self-reliant. Nixon, in response to a question from a journalist noted that:

[A]s far as the problems of military defense, except for the threat of a major power involving nuclear weapons, ... the United States is going to encourage and has a right to expect that this problem will be handled by, and responsibility for it taken by, the Asian nations themselves.<sup>43</sup>

### The Nixon Doctrine and the 1976 White Paper pivot

Leading Aircraftmen Jarrad Matson (RAAF) (left) and 1st Lieutenant Jennifer Silvers compare publication references and equipment during Red Flag 12-3

## The 1964 Australian Strategic Basis Paper finally saw the Alliance with the United States as Australia's most significant strategic partnership.

The Nixon or Guam Doctrine set the tone and tenor of the Alliance from the late 1960s. While most of the focus is often centred on Nixon's impromptu remarks in Guam in July 1969, the logic and rationale of the Nixon Doctrine wasn't solidified until February 1970 with Nixon's 'US Foreign Policy for the 1970s' statement to Congress. The British withdrawal from Southeast Asia and the Nixon Doctrine meant an effective end to Australia's policy of forward defence.

In the period immediately after the announcement of the Nixon Doctrine, the Australian basis of the Alliance was put into flux, leading to 'much incoherence and drift' in Australia's international policy.<sup>44</sup> Australia had to align its withdrawal from South Vietnam with the US while also balancing the repercussions of the British withdrawal from the region. The latter it achieved by pulling back the majority of its forces in the region, while maintaining a small presence in the region through the Five Powers Defence arrangements (FDPA) between Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand and Britain signed in 1971. The FPDA included the Integrated Air Defence System (IADS) HQ at Malaysia's Butterworth Air Base. This involved an RAAF fighter squadron remaining in Butterworth until 1988 while the IDAS has, to this day, been commanded by an RAAF officer.<sup>45</sup>

The issue of the US pull-back under the Nixon Doctrine had more far-ranging consequences. The world was still a dangerous place in 1969, and Asia was an unstable region. Growing Soviet assertiveness in the Pacific and Indian Oceans; an evolving nuclear weapons state in China, characterised by profound ideological hostility towards the West; and concerns the US would retreat to an offshore balancing posture were all hotly debated. While in many ways the Nixon Doctrine was a shock to the region, Australia had already experienced the limitations of US engagement in Southeast Asia via its disagreements over Indonesia in the 1950s and 1960s. It also had been thinking through the consequences of the British withdrawal for a number of years by 1969.

In 1967, Australia had already started to consider 'independent Australian influence in Southeast Asia' with a focus on economic and political support for the region. In the 1968 Strategic Basis Paper, the Australian Government had also considered that 'greater independence from the United States would lead to greater discretion in the use of force' in the region.<sup>46</sup>

However, the Australian Government under Prime Minister Gorton was ill-prepared for these strategic debates. While 1968 Strategic Basis Paper 'represented the views of a deputy Secretary of Defence, the Director of the Joint Staff, the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, and a representative of External Affairs ... the reappraisal was not politically acceptable to the government which was deeply divided, and in the end failed to decide on any new policies at all.'<sup>47</sup>

Gorton's government was increasingly politically reliant on the Democratic Labor Party, who were quick to denounce the Nixon Doctrine, thus limiting Gorton's ability to direct foreign policy. This however did not stop the prime minister from publicly floating the idea of a 'fortress Australia' defence policy or an 'Israeli type' defence posture as a response to the Nixon Doctrine.<sup>48</sup> Gorton's public musings reflected the paralysis of the government of the time. As Eric Andrews notes, the government was 'slow to admit publicly the full implications of this revolution, or listen to its responsible defence advisors [as] the matter was too intensely political for that.'<sup>49</sup> Coral Bell argues that Gorton was essentially brought down from office due to defence and foreign affairs issues as a 'vote of general no confidence in his abilities in these fields was orchestrated by then-defence minister Malcolm Fraser, who led the effort to depose him'.<sup>50</sup>

The protracted policy debate as to the consequences of this new US strategy in Asia did eventually lead to policy coherence, but it was a slow process. Sir Arthur Tange, secretary of the department of defence, noted that the Nixon Doctrine was the beginning of the process towards the defence of Australia – a policy based on 'survey[ing] the world situation and [offering] strategic objectives, set ... on capabilities to defend our own soil and nearer neighbourhood'.

The concept of 'Defence of Australia' (DoA), first appeared in the 1972 Strategic Assessment. However, it wasn't until the first public Australian

Defence White Paper Australian Defence, released by the Fraser government in 1976, that the government formally adopted DoA and constructed a framework for understanding Australian strategy in response to US policy in Asia.<sup>51</sup> This document marked the third pivot point for the Alliance in Australian strategic policy.

With the 1976 white paper and DoA, the Alliance remained central to Australian strategy. Strategic policy focused on warning time, capability-based defence planning, core concepts such as Australia's military forces maintaining a regional 'military capability edge' and a 'self-reliant' posture in order to achieve the Defence of Australia against low level threats.<sup>52</sup> Notably, in order to achieve relative advantage in regional military capabilities, Australia relied heavily upon access to United States' 'classified defence technology, doctrine, logistics support arrangements and intelligence and policy considerations, as well as joint exercises and training'.<sup>53</sup>

### Joint facilities

The other central plank of Australia's approach to the Alliance during the period of the 1960s and 1970s was the establishment of joint intelligence facilities with the United States in Australia. The close nature of this part of the relationships was first comprehensively documented by the academic Des Ball.<sup>54</sup> Ball noted that Australia is a major beneficiary of both the bilateral intelligence relationship and the Five Eyes relationship more broadly. Peter Jennings has argued that 'without the alliance, Australia would be substantially blind in many critical areas of intelligence gathering and assessment [and] we cannot afford the investment levels necessary to duplicate America's intelligence gathering capability'.<sup>55</sup>

The US-Australia joint intelligence facilities in Australia are personified by the most well-known bases at Pine Gap and North West Cap. The key elements of this relationship have been the Australian focus on the preservation of sovereignty through

the 'joint' nature of the facilities, and an emphasis on 'full knowledge and concurrency' in access to the information that the joint facilities collect.<sup>56</sup>

The joint facilities were a major area of debate and controversy in the Cold War, especially over the extent to which they made Australia a target in the event of a nuclear war versus their role in monitoring nuclear disarmament, providing nuclear early warning capabilities and providing nuclear deterrence. Des Ball has noted that the hosting of these facilities and their attendant risk during this period meant that they 'represent[ed] Australia's most meaningful contribution to the alliance'.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, in the period of the 1970s to the end of the Cold War, the Alliance was characterised by:

- the centrality of the Nixon Doctrine to US strategy in the region and the Alliance
- the low priority of Australia and its immediate region in the Cold War
- the relatively benign strategic nature of the Asia-Pacific in the period from the end of the Vietnam War
- US uncontested maritime hegemony in the region
- Australian defence equipment and capabilities being increasingly of US origin
- the asymmetry of the Alliance relationship and Australia's ongoing concerns about 'abandonment' in the relationship given its geography
- recognition of the limitations in the ANZUS Treaty document
- recognition of the limitations of direct US combat support in Australia's immediate region over West Papua and Konfrontasi and in light of the Nixon Doctrine.





‘we have had such a tradition, first to fit comfortably into British strategy and more recently in that of the US. In this latter case we have placed our trust in ANZUS.’



## CHAPTER 3

# The Alliance goes global: the post-Cold War pivots

### The 1989 Pivot and the Post-Cold War Alliance

The fourth major 'pivot point' would come in 1989 with the end of the Cold War. At this point it might have been expected that the role of ANZUS would have declined. Neorealist literature on alliances would argue that having been forged in the midst of the onset of a Cold War, the Alliance should have drawn to an end with the fall of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism, or at least it should be downgraded in importance. As Stephen Walt has argued in his classic Survival piece 'Why Alliances Endure or Collapse' 'it follows that alliances will dissolve whenever there is a significant shift in the level of threat that its members face.'<sup>58</sup>

However, the underlying nature of the Alliance remained firmly in place and in fact the emergence of the US as the only global superpower entrenched its importance to Australian strategic policy. This era was what Charles Krauthammer has described as the 'unipolar moment' where 'the center of world power [was] an unchallenged superpower, the United States, attended by its Western allies.'<sup>59</sup>

This upheaval to the international order, despite the ANZUS Treaty having a specific focus on the Pacific, meant that the Alliance went global in scope and grew in stature. Former defence minister, leader of the Labor Party and Australian ambassador to the United States Kim Beazley has noted, 'the paradox of Australia's contemporary alliance with the United States is that having been conceived in 1951, as the ultimately frozen structures of global politics in the Cold War emerged, it now involves a more intense relationship that it did when the Berlin Wall came down and the Cold War ended.'<sup>60</sup>

One of the keys to this evolution was that although the US remained the only superpower and the post-Cold War era did deliver some 'peace dividends' to the US and its allies, this era would soon be characterised by destabilisation, failing/failed states and an increase in peacekeeping

and military operations. Australia's heavy involvement in peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations in this period was also congruent with its long-standing approach to exercising its diplomatic influence through international organisations, and its commitment to liberal internationalism and to being a 'good international citizen.'<sup>61</sup>

Australia's role in international affairs was recognised by the US in the 1995 US Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region, often referred to as the 'Nye Report' after its principal author, The Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Joseph S. Nye, Jr. In the face of concerns about regional security, the potential for Japan to challenge the US economically and questions about the applicability of the US alliance system in the post-Cold War era, the Nye Report reassured Japan and other US allies in the region. The commitment of the US to its regional alliances and the importance of US military presence in the Asia-Pacific region, especially East Asia, for regional stability was reaffirmed in the report.

In addition to providing reassurance to East Asia, the Nye Report noted that:

Australia increasingly plays a global role in promoting international security. Australia, Singapore, and many other nations contribute to regional security by providing access for United States military forces. Asian countries also contribute significantly to global peace-keeping and development aid ...

The United States-Australia alliance makes a major contribution to regional stability and facilitates United States military activities and deployments in the region, through providing access to Australian ports, airfields and training facilities, through bilateral and multilateral exercises, and through vigorous programs for intelligence and scientific cooperation.

Australia shares many key American foreign policy goals, is a major contributor to international peacekeeping and nonproliferation

efforts, and is a strong partner in international fora such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the United Nations. These many practical contributions make Australia an invaluable strategic partner; accordingly we will continue to nourish the relationship as we approach the next century.

The Nye Report committed the US to 'work[ing] closely with our ally Australia to pursue the numerous security objectives our nations share.'<sup>62</sup>

The most significant strategic decision in the immediate post-Cold War era, however, was the Australian commitment of military force to the US led operations to free Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion, which included the RAN's significant role in the Maritime Interception Force in the Persian Gulf.<sup>63</sup> The commitment of Australian military forces to the US-led operations Gulf War in 1991 and an ongoing Australian naval presence thereafter in the Persian Gulf brought much closer military-to-military ties with the United States as well as a strengthening of the formal structures around the management of the Alliance.

### The War on Terror pivot

The Post-Cold War era and Gulf War I presaged a period of long-term US-Australian military engagement in the Middle East. The next pivot point for this were the events of September 11 2001, which led to Australia's participation with the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

It is widely known that John Howard was in Washington DC during the attacks on September 11. Upon his return to Australia, Howard held a press conference with the foreign minister, Alexander Downer, and the deputy prime minister, John Anderson, and announced that: 'the federal cabinet ... came very quickly to the view that the provisions of the ANZUS Treaty should be invoked in relation to the attack upon the United States. Quite clearly these are circumstances

to which Article IV of the ANZUS Treaty applies.<sup>64</sup>

The focus in this period was on accelerating close cooperation in military operations. The increasing levels of interoperability between Australia and the United States were built not just on military operations but also on technology transfer and on people-to-people exchanges.<sup>65</sup> The supposed 'revolution in military affairs' ushered in by the US's overwhelming victory in the First Gulf War, through its superiority in military technology, further emphasised the importance of the Alliance to Australia's defence posture and capabilities, and its desire to maintain a small but regionally superior military.<sup>66</sup>

While the Iraq war in 2003 was particularly controversial, Al Palazzo has argued that Australia 'won' its war given that the Howard government's strategic objective was not regime change in Iraq but rather a much more limited goal of a much closer strategic and military partnership with the United States.<sup>67</sup> It has been argued that Howard was influenced by his experience in East Timor in 1999, whereby President Clinton rebuffed Howard's request for US 'boots on the ground'.<sup>68</sup>

Howard's response in Iraq had resounding echoes of Australia's approach to South Vietnam in 1965 in light of the concerns that had been raised over the lack of US commitments during Konfrontasi. While diplomatic, strategic and logistical support from the US was forthcoming in East Timor and pivotal to the success of the operation Howard remained fixed on securing a much closer relationship with the US.<sup>69</sup> The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was, however, launched on the basis of dubious, and now thoroughly discredited, evidence of weapons of mass destruction. This conflict also lacked bipartisan support or broad-based international support through the United Nations, in contrast to the operations launched in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan seemed to be more aligned with Gulf War I with its UN-sanctioned mandate, clearer strategic rationale in 2001-2002 and limited ADF commitment. Upon the Rudd government coming to power in 2007, Australia withdrew from Iraq and moved its military efforts to the



ill-fated nation-building effort in Afghanistan. Australia withdrew the bulk of its forces in 2015 but continued to support Afghanistan with training assistance and development support. From 2014-2017 Australia also undertook military operations in Iraq as part of the International Global Coalition to counter the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Meanwhile, the mission in Afghanistan finally drew to a close in 2021, when the Taliban reclaimed power in the country.

### The 'Canberra Consensus' and alliance sentimentality

Another key feature of the Alliance in this era was the emergence of a 'Canberra Consensus' on the US Alliance. This orthodoxy, especially after the withdrawal from Iraq, saw the Alliance become fiercely bipartisan and based on a belief by some policy elites of the need for reciprocal loyalty with the United States.<sup>70</sup>

This consensus arose in an era of few major disagreements in the bilateral relationship. Military-military relations deepened to their strongest point ever including combined operations throughout the Middle East and Australian military officers holding very senior posts in US and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) commands in Afghanistan. Technological ties were also massively expanded through key capability purchases such as radar and fire control systems, the programs to develop the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter and the P-8 Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft, and the purchase of Growler electronic warfare aircraft.

This also impacted broader public discourse on the relationship which historian James Curran has described as 'alliance sentimentality'.<sup>71</sup> Post-9/11 values came to dominate the political and public discourse on the Alliance and the asymmetrical nature of the Alliance was evident in the Middle East. In this region, Australia was largely content to defer to the USA as few core Australian strategic interests were at stake.

This combination of a period of alliance sentimentality<sup>72</sup>, a focus on values, few bilateral disagreements and competitive bipartisan support were also combined with (largely) stratospheric popular support.<sup>73</sup> Lowy Institute polling data has shown consistently high support for the importance of the Alliance among the public in the range of 70-80%. The low point came during the Bush presidency and the controversy over Iraq in 2007, with a dip to 63% support; the high point after the Obama pivot in 2012, at 87%. The Alliance was to also maintain high levels of public support during the controversial Trump years.

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(L-R) HMAS Brisbane and USNS Carl Brashear of the United States Navy conduct a replenishment at sea in the North Pacific Ocean during a Regional Presence Deployment.

## CHAPTER 4

# The rise of China and the Obama pivot

### Obama's pivot

While the Alliance was militarily focused on the Middle East, as was much of the domestic debate of its importance and utility, major strategic changes were underway in Asia. The rise of the PRC as an economic power house was fundamentally changing the balance of power in the region. China rose to become Australia's leading trading partner after 2009, as it did for almost 200 nations around the globe. As China's economic power grew, it started to exert considerably more strategic power, including radically recapitalising and expanding its military capabilities.<sup>74</sup>

ANZUS had initially been conceived with a focus on the Asia-Pacific region, specifically as a response to the need for a peace treaty with Japan and to combat the rise of communism, including the communist ascension to power in China in 1949 and the threats to the security of Southeast Asia. These threats dominated the Alliance until the announcement of the Guam Doctrine and Nixon's visit to China to normalise relations in 1972. Nixon's China visit ushered in a strategic era in Asia underpinned by uncontested US primacy.<sup>75</sup> This strategic dynamic created the conditions that had allowed the Alliance to take on its more global posture in the post-Cold War era.<sup>76</sup>

During the first decade of the 21st century, it became evident that major strategic shifts were underway in the Asia-Pacific region. Driven by China's rise as well as the 'tiger economies' of Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, the region emerged as the new global centre of gravity. This shift of economic and strategic power is set to be a long-term trend. Projections out to 2050 show that the 'Chinese economy will grow to \$105 trillion, almost 1.5 times that of America's', India will emerge as the third largest economy and Indonesia the fourth largest economy in the world by 2050.<sup>77</sup>

This has changed the strategic weight of the region and with it a re-ordering is occurring, with significant strategic implications. The Asia-Pacific region has been subject to broad-based military modernisation and many Asian defence budgets, especially China's, have grown significantly while those in the US, UK and Western Europe have contracted. This has raised long-term implications for Australia in areas such as the maintenance of a regional military capability edge and opportunities for further engagement with an economically and strategically stronger Asia, especially Southeast Asia.<sup>78</sup>

Increasing Chinese assertiveness in areas such as the East and South China Seas and the announcement in November 2011 of the US 'pivot' (later 'rebalance') to the Asia-Pacific region saw the focus of the Alliance move away from operations in the Middle East to once again be concentrated on Asia and China. Thus the role of the Middle East and the global focus that the Alliance that developed over the preceding two decades was slowly replaced by its original geographic focus.<sup>79</sup>

This was further formalised in the 2013 Defence White Paper that spoke of 'a phase of re-orientation in the Alliance: away from operations further afield towards the increasing security dynamics in Australia's own region'.<sup>80</sup> The most visible manifestation of the emergence of a new era in the Alliance was the drawdown of commitments to operations in Afghanistan and the broader Middle East.

Significantly, the change inherent in the 2011 pivot point is one in which the Alliance has taken on significantly greater importance to both partners. As one of Australia's most important strategic thinkers, Coral Bell, noted back in 1988: 'it was clearly an omen of the future that the first American interest in Australia [in 1941] ... was a by-product of [US] interests in Asia.'<sup>81</sup> The greater the US interests in Asia, the greater their interest in Australia.

In 2013, a US think tank report on Australian defence strategy and the future of the US Alliance noted that Australia had moved from 'down under' to 'top centre in terms of geographical import'. It went on to argue that, 'we are now in the most significant time in the relationship in terms of the overlapping of US and Australian strategic interest in the region since the end of the Pacific War.'<sup>82</sup>





One of the major consequences of the moving of the global strategic centre of gravity to the Asia-Pacific is the corresponding change in US strategic interest with regard to Australia's geography. This geography was once a source of Australian anxiety manifested in what historian Geoffrey Blainey's described as a 'tyranny of distance'<sup>83</sup> and which strategist Michael Evans later claimed has caused a 'tyranny of dissonance' in Australian strategy. In the contemporary strategic environment Australia's geography has now become one of Australia's greatest sources of strength, opportunity and risk.<sup>84</sup>

President Obama announced what was to be later termed the 'pivot' or 'rebalance' to Asia in the Australian Parliament in November 2011. This policy was outlined by Obama's secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, as being personified by a:

sustained commitment to ... 'forward-deployed' diplomacy [through] strengthening bilateral security alliances; deepening our working relationships with emerging powers, including with China; engaging with regional multilateral institutions; expanding trade and investment; forging a broad-based military presence; and advancing democracy and human rights.<sup>85</sup>

The first major pivot initiative, announced by President Obama and Prime Minister Gillard, was a new force posture initiative with the establishment of a 2,500-strong US marine air-ground task force in Darwin by 2017, and an increase in the presence of US Air Force and US Navy assets in Australia.

What was clear with this force posture announcement was the criticality of Australia's geography. In an age of increasing long-range anti-access weaponry, especially in China, Australia was seen as being able to provide US forces in the region with strategic depth, forward operating bases, a logistical hub and training

facilities. In addition to the annual rotation of US Marines and US Air Force units through Darwin, the Australian naval base in Western Australia, HMAS *Stirling*, has also long been acknowledged for its ability to provide a safe and secure port facility for visiting US naval ships operating in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia. Australia's offshore assets such as the Cocos Islands also provide an excellent location for future increased reconnaissance and surveillance operations the India Ocean.<sup>86</sup>

Force posture was just one part of the modernisation of the Alliance during this period. The Alliance was upgraded to address what were called '21st century security challenges'. This included: a joint Statement on cyberspace; a space situational awareness partnership; a joint statement on space security; a defence satellite communications partnership and combined communications gateway; the establishment and deployment of the jointly operated US C-band radar at the Harold E Holt Naval Communications Station; and the relocation of an advanced US space surveillance telescope to Australia.<sup>87</sup>

Australia followed up the pivot's force posture announcements with a Force Posture Review in 2012 and a new Defence White Paper (DWP) in 2013.<sup>88</sup> This included a move from an Asia-Pacific to an Indo-Pacific strategic construct, which had first appeared in Australian policy analysis in 2008 and was embedded in the 2013 DWP. The Indo-Pacific lexicon was later reflected in US official language, including the renaming of US Pacific Command to Indo-Pacific Command in 2018.<sup>89</sup>

As a result of this Alliance modernisation, there was a significant increase in Australia-US military engagement in the region. In 2012, an Australian naval officer commanded a significant portion of the combined fleet in the United States-run rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) naval exercises. In 2013, the frigate HMAS *Sydney*

undertook operations out of Japan as part of the US Seventh Fleet. From 2013, an Australian major-general has served as Deputy Commanding General (Operations) US Army Pacific. Developments such as these have seen a deepening of engagement between the ADF and the US military in the region.<sup>90</sup>

During this period, Australia provided stronger political and diplomatic support for the United States and its allies over maritime and territorial disputes with China. These include the strong statement from the Australia United States Ministerial (AUSMIN) meeting in 2013; Australian support for United States and Japanese concerns over the Chinese declaration of the Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea; the 2014 Joint Statement from the Japan-US-Australia Defense Ministers Meeting at the Shangri-La Dialogue; and Australian support for the US calls for a 'freeze on provocative acts in the South China Sea' at the ASEAN Regional Forum in August 2014, which provided evidence of the Abbott government's determination to provide stronger diplomatic and strategic support to the US and its allies in the region.<sup>91</sup> Australia also looked to broaden its regional engagement during this period.

Another significant move in the 2013 Defence White Paper was the subtle but significant redefinition of the notion of 'self-reliance'—a concept that has been key to Australia's interpretation of the Alliance since 1976. In the 2013 DWP, 'self-reliance' was interpreted in a new way, expanding its scope to the 'Alliance with the United States and our cooperation with regional partners'.<sup>92</sup> This regional focus was also reflective of the 2013 DWP's emphasis on regional engagement and shaping operations and the emphasis on Australia developing 'deeper, broader tailored long-term defence partnerships' in the Indo-Pacific, 'reinforcing [Australia's] value as a strategic and defence partner' to countries in the region.<sup>93</sup>

←  
United States Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Minister for Defence Stephen Smith hold a press conference at the Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) 2012 in Perth.

This framework outlined a new approach to both the Alliance and Australia's broader security relationships in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>94</sup> In addition, the military strategy in the 2013 Defence White Paper aimed to 'project power by deploying joint task forces in the Indo-Pacific region and support the operations of regional partners when required'.<sup>95</sup> As Stephan Frühling has noted from 'a strategic concept in response to limits to US assistance [as set down in the Guam Doctrine of 1969], "self-reliance" now seems to be morphing into a statement of Australia's geographic priorities in a coalition conflict in Asia'.<sup>96</sup> This was a fundamental change to Australia's approach to its strategy, but one that lacked clear defence planning logic. This lack of logic was a direct result of the debates over the Alliance and its position in an era of evolution in both US and Australian strategy in the Indo-Pacific.

A change in government in Australia in 2013 led to yet another new Defence White Paper in 2016 and a Foreign Policy White Paper in 2017. Both of these papers demonstrated a high degree of consistency with the previous administration, especially in the areas of Australia's strategic objectives, its focus on the Indo-Pacific and the Alliance. The Foreign Policy White Paper noted: 'The Alliance is a choice we make about how best to pursue our security interests. It is central to our shared objective of shaping the regional order. It delivers a capability edge to our armed forces and intelligence agencies, giving Australia added weight and regional influence'.<sup>97</sup> The preceding year's defence paper noted that 'the world will continue to look to the United States for leadership in global security affairs and to lead military coalitions that support international security and the rules-based global order'.<sup>98</sup>

### Limits to Obama's pivot

This pivot point was not without its limitations and difficulties. Over time, the Obama administration's 'pivot' became a (watered down) 'rebalance' and was seen as more and more ineffectual.<sup>99</sup> Washington was ineffective in responding to the Chinese seizure of the Scarborough Shoal in 2012, which 'demonstrated the reluctance of the Obama administration to jeopardise the US-China relationship for anything less than vital US interests, and cast doubt on whether the rebalance would protect the interests of Asian allies'.<sup>100</sup> Australia proved unwilling to undertake Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) against Chinese claims in the South China Sea despite the repeated urging of the United States.

In 2015, Australia resisted strong lobbying from the US over its support for the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). In the same year, Prime Minister Tony Abbot publicly dismissed remarks made by Assistant Secretary for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs David Shear, who stated to the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee that "we will be placing additional Air Force assets in Australia as well, including B-1 bombers and surveillance aircraft."<sup>101</sup> Relations were further strained when Australia leased the port of Darwin to a Chinese company for 99 years and the US claimed that detailed consultations had not been undertaken.<sup>102</sup>

In addition to these issues, the USMC rotations through Darwin proceeded slowly with delays to the number of troops and disputes between Australia and the US over costs. By 2016, less than half of the original proposed commitment of US Marines had arrived.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, there were delays to proposed USN ship visits to HMAS *Stirling* and US Air Force assets in northern Australia.

By far the biggest failure of the Obama pivot-rebalance was the lack of an integrated US economic

strategy for the region. The Obama administration had heralded the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a large multilateral trade deal for the region. Despite leading the efforts for this trade deal, the US would eventually withdraw from the agreement. US domestic politics became so toxic on this issue that one of its leading architects, Hillary Clinton, publicly opposed the plan during her run for the presidency against Donald Trump. The US withdrew from the agreement in January 2017.<sup>104</sup>

### The Obama pivot, the nature of the Alliance and US primacy

During this period, Australian Government policy, and more broadly a significant portion of policy elites in Australia, continued in the belief in the importance of the US Alliance as a reflection of Australia's traditional approach to its security, to the rules-based international order, democracy, capitalism, human rights and free markets. Support among the political and policy elites and the general populace for the US Alliance in the 2012 Lowy Institute poll, the year after the Obama pivot point, remained high at 82%, and the basing of US forces in Australia was an increasingly popular policy, favoured by 61% of the population.<sup>105</sup>

This pivot point in the Alliance was undeniably related to the changing nature of the Indo-Pacific region and China's rise. One of the key debates in Australia, especially after China surpassed the US as its number one trading partner, was the concept of Australia having to choose between its primary trading partner and security partner – a policy stance rejected by all Australian governments in this period.<sup>106</sup> This debate, along with government policy, was predicated on a belief that while under pressure, the underlying nature of the Alliance remained intact. Most significantly, while US power was deemed as under challenge, the belief in US regional hegemony remained at the forefront of facing the China challenge.



The 2013 Defence White Paper (DWP) noted that, ‘we consider a strong and consistent US presence in the region will continue to be as important in providing future confidence in the Indo-Pacific’s rapidly changing strategic environment *as it has in the past*’ and that ‘as an Alliance partner, we will also continue to support the United States in playing a leading role in maintaining global stability in ways consistent with our interests and priorities.’<sup>107</sup> Certainly the belief in the centrality of US primacy remained throughout this period. The 2017 Trump administration’s US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific listed ‘maintaining US primacy in the region’ among its four ‘top interests’ in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>108</sup>

For mainstream Australian strategic elites, while cognisant of the changes to the Alliance that were underway, the strategic debate on the relationship remained focused on the traditional, age-old quandary: the degree of dependence upon a major alliance partner versus the degree of self-reliance in Australian Defence capability. This internal debate in the period of the Obama pivot was characterised by a CSBA report on Australia as the consideration between alliance minimalists (e.g. Hugh White), alliance maximalists (e.g. Ross Babbage), and incrementalists (e.g. Ben Schreer).<sup>109</sup>

For both sides of politics and the majority of the strategic policy community, the changes underway in the Indo-Pacific region at the time did not affect the underlying nature of the Alliance.<sup>110</sup> If anything, in a much more contested Indo-Pacific, the very nature of the Alliance was seen as even more important to Australia’s interests. Thus the widespread view was that Australian’s strategic interests were best served by the US continuing to play a hegemonic role in the Indo-Pacific region in order to preserve the pre-existing regional order.<sup>111</sup> As Iain Henry has noted, this helped to feed an ‘era [of] reflexive enthusiasm for the alliance’, reaffirming its centrality.<sup>112</sup>

↑  
United States Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel arrives at Sydney Airport ahead of the Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) 2014. Secretary Hagel is greeted by the Australian Secretary of Defence, Dennis Richardson AO, while United States Ambassador to Australia, John Berry looks on.



## CHAPTER 5

# September 2021: a multipolar Indo-Pacific and the AUKUS pivot

Almost a decade on from the Obama pivot point, the strategic challenges in the Indo-Pacific have only accelerated. This new period is reflective of a number of changing strategic issues. In particular, these include the continued relative decline of US power in comparison to rising states such as China and India; the end of American unilateralism in global affairs; the rise of a world with multiple centres of power or influence<sup>113</sup>; and a resurgent China that has directly challenged US primacy in the Indo-Pacific. These significant shifts mean that the Alliance has, and is, being recast in both Australian and US strategic thinking.

These changes to the global strategic environment have focused discussion on the two most persistent questions in Australian strategic culture: how and when will Australia use force independently or in partnership? And how much will Australia rely on its major alliance partner or be responsible for its own defence?

While these questions are persistent in Australian strategic culture, the answer to them in the third decade of the 21st century is fundamentally different than at any other time in the 70-year history of the Alliance. As Alan Gyngell has noted, 75 years on from the existential threat of 1942, 'we are facing another global shift, not as perilous as in 1942 but much more complex ... [this is because] the post-war global order in which Australia's foreign policy has existed, has ended.'<sup>114</sup>

This makes this the most important era for reassessing the Alliance. This is the first time since the inception of the ANZUS Treaty in 1951 that Australia faces an Indo-Pacific region where there is a genuine contest of power. It is also a period in which Australia's relative strategic weight is in decline in comparison to its neighbours and in which, for the first time in Australian history, its major alliance partner does not hold uncontested maritime supremacy in the region.<sup>115</sup>

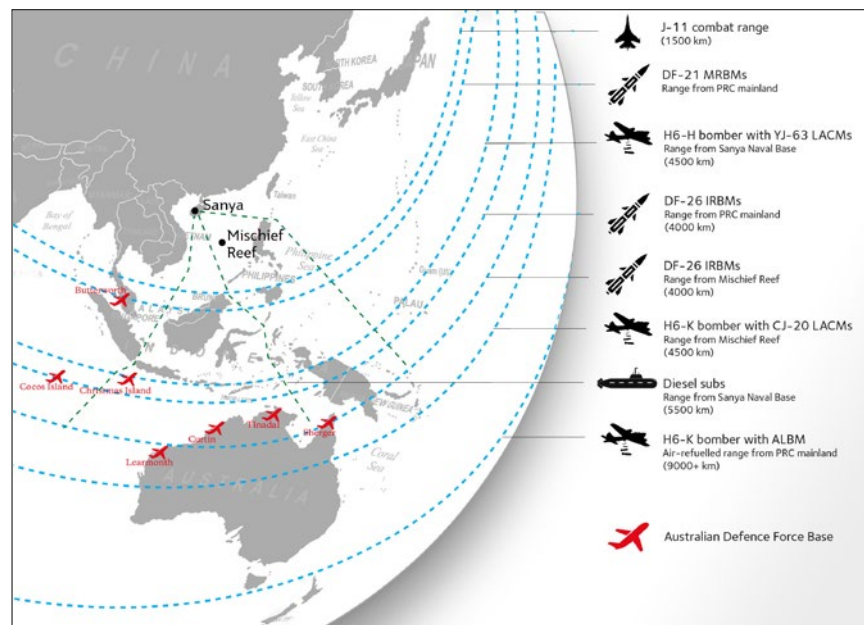
China under the leadership of Xi Jinping, especially since 2014, has undertaken a much more aggressive foreign policy, ending the Bob Zelleck 'responsible stakeholder thesis.'<sup>116</sup> The militarisation of the South China Sea; dismantling the 'one nation, two systems' in Hong Kong; the deplorable treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang; the clashes on the China-India border; trade coercion against South Korea, Philippines and Australia (among others); as well as intellectual and commercial property breaches and cyber security attacks have shown China as a power focused on contesting the regional and international order and willing to use coercion and force to achieve its objectives.<sup>117</sup>

The reconceptualisation of China in Australia has been captured in the polling data from the Lowy Institute on the collapse of Australian public perceptions of China. Australian views of China as an economic partner or security threat have changed remarkably in six years. In 2015, 77% saw China as more of an economic partner and only 15% a security threat. These two indicators crossed over in 2020 and by 2021, 63% of Australians saw China as a security threat and only 34% as an economic partner.<sup>118</sup>

In 2021, the Lowy Institute, among others, also outlined the increased capabilities of the PRC military during its period of major military expansion and recapitalisation. The report notes that 'China's recent military development constitutes the greatest expansion of maritime and aerospace power in generations ... based on its scope, scale, and the specific capabilities being developed, this build up appears to be designed to, first, threaten the United States with ejection from the western Pacific, and then to achieve dominance in the Indo-Pacific.'<sup>119</sup>

While it has been noted that 'the prospect of immediate Chinese military action against Australia remains low [China's] ... newly developed military capabilities arm it with long-range power capacities that "dwarf anything Japan threatened Australia with during the Second World War."<sup>120</sup> These capabilities and changes to the regional balance of power, the report notes, 'could leave Australia and others open to coercion at the hands of the PLA.'<sup>121</sup>

Most significantly, the rise of China and its more aggressive foreign policy has revealed the reality of the expiration of uncontested US



hegemony in the Indo-Pacific that had been in place since the end of the Vietnam War. With China rising, along with India, Iran and other countries, US power is in relative decline and the world is becoming more multipolar. As a result, some key areas of the underlying nature of the Alliance are now also changing.

### President Trump

The election of President Trump in 2016 merely added a layer to an already complex and changing strategic landscape. Trump's election not only cemented the notion of a more multipolar world; it also threatened to radically reshape two other key foundations of the Alliance: open and free trade, and a rules-based global order underpinned by US power, both of which Trump rejected. Trump's disdain for US allies was well known<sup>122</sup> and at the end of his presidency doubts abounded as to his support for liberal democracy as well.<sup>123</sup>

Most significantly, Trump's election challenged the values emphasis in the relationship. As Senator Nic Xenophon artfully noted on Trump's election, 'the US-Australia alliance was built on shared values. If president-elect Trump trashes those values, we'll need to rethink the alliance.'<sup>124</sup>

The election of the 45th president left Australian politicians and policy makers scrambling to outline an alliance based less on values and more on strategic interests. As Iain Henry has argued:

President Trump cannot be solely blamed for changes in the alliance; the underlying cause of discord will be gradual changes to national interests. But President Trump's illiberal inclinations and the tone of the recent phone call [with PM Malcolm Turnbull] have accelerated this process. Australian politicians will simply no longer be able to rely on the rhetoric of 'shared values' to justify the alliance and will now have to speak convincingly about shared interests.<sup>125</sup>

The election of Trump led to an end of a lot of alliance sentimentalism and much of the unreflective consensus on the Alliance. Labor's shadow minister for foreign affairs, Penny Wong, 'suggested Australia should take a more critical approach to the US alliance' and that 'Australia should not automatically side with the US considering what is already known about the policies of US president-elect Donald Trump but should "work harder" with its Asian neighbours to strengthen economic and security ties.'<sup>126</sup> The Turnbull and Morrison governments' attempts to wedge Labor on being weak on the Alliance following these and other comments, a tactic in broader national security debates that it had used very effectively in past decade, failed to hit home. In fact, Labor turned this tactic back on the Coalition in 2020, accusing Scott Morrison of 'pandering' to President Trump and damaging relations with the new Biden administration.<sup>127</sup>

Given the Canberra Consensus on the Alliance in the period of the War on Terror, in some quarters, many of the responses to this new debate were unreflective, with some defenders of the 'new orthodoxy' on the Alliance seeing the debate as a zero sum game: for the Alliance or against the Alliance, often based on supposed questions of loyalty.<sup>128</sup> This debate on the Alliance has, at times, been also wrapped up in debates on Australia's China policy and responses to Xi Jinping's much more assertive foreign policy.<sup>129</sup>

One of the other key changes in this contemporary debate, compared to the period of the Cold War and early post-Cold War, has been less of a focus on concerns around US abandonment of Australia in a crisis and much more emphasis on potential for US entrapment of Australia in a conflict with China.<sup>130</sup> This has been prominent in both the heightened tensions with North Korea during the Trump Presidency and more recently in debates over the potential for war over Taiwan.<sup>131</sup>

For many analysts, the Trump Presidency was seen as an aberration, with a return to normalcy in US foreign policy under President Biden. Certainly the 'American public remains overwhelmingly supportive of the US playing a leading role in world affairs and staying deeply engaged in Asia.' The Chicago Council on Foreign Affairs polling also shows that 'American's support for their allies has grown.'<sup>132</sup> However, the future of the US domestic polity remains in doubt. A key question remains: is Trump or Biden the aberration in modern US politics? Even after Trump's defeat, he maintains an iron grip on the Republican Party as he looks towards another potential run for the presidency in 2024. This and broader structural issues within the US, such as economic development, infrastructure, debt levels, poverty and social and political division, continue to raise questions about the longevity of US resolve and its presence in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>133</sup>

### The 2020 Defence Strategic Update

The first clear public indications from the Australian government of an acceptance of the significant shifts in Australian strategic policy in the previous four years came with the 2020 Defence Strategic Update. This document 'marks a step change in Australia's strategic calculations' and a recognition of Alan Gyngell's assessment that the old strategic order is over. The document paints a much darker and more dystopian view of the strategic environment and at its launch, Prime Minister Scott Morrison made analogies between the current strategic environment and the existential threats that Australia faced in the 1930s and 1940s. One media commentator noted, 'if it sounds like war talk, that's because it is.'<sup>134</sup>

The 2020 Defence Strategic Update upended Australia's longstanding approach to its 'dominate way of war.'<sup>135</sup> Most significantly, it represented yet another redefining of self-reliance in the Alliance framework. This document took

another step forward, from the reconceptualisation of this concept in the 2013 DWP, by removing any doubt that Australia was no longer centring self-reliance on low-level threats. Strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific and the threats from high-end conventional warfare in the region are now front and centre. Self-reliance is now reconceptualised to mean: 'build[ing] resilience' through increasing the 'range and quantity' of 'weapons stocks' in order to 'grow the ADF's ... [ability to deliver] deterrent effects' and 'to enhance the ADF's self-reliance ... in the context of high-intensity operations'.<sup>136</sup>

In terms of the US-Australia Alliance, this policy response was highly consistent with past strategic assessments. The 2020 DSU fits easily within the arc of Australia's strategic developments over the last two decades with its efforts to 'continue to deepen Australia's alliance with the United States' in the region.<sup>137</sup> This is based on the idea that the US and the Alliance are key to the international order in the Indo-Pacific and that the security arrangements and extended US nuclear and conventional deterrence remain some of its key features. The cost-benefit analysis of the Australian Government continues to see the benefits in the alliance with the US in this new strategic environment as far outweighing the risks.

### **AUKUS, September 2021 and a pivot point for a new age**

While a critical document that kept the Alliance at the centre of Australian strategic policy, the 2020 DSU presaged the decisive pivot point that would occur in September 2021. As late as November 2020, five months after the launch of the DSU, the Australian Prime Minister was still arguing that 'sovereign Australia is free to choose both China and America [and that] ... being forced to make a binary choice between China and US is not in Australia's national interest'.<sup>138</sup> This approach was reflective of almost three decades of government policy in Australia that had argued that we could have 'our cake and eat it too'.<sup>139</sup>

Six months later, by the time Scott Morrison was on his way to the G7 meeting in June 2021, and to a sideline meeting that would lock in the AUKUS deal, the Prime Minister's

tone had changed. In a speech to the Perth USAsia Centre, he noted that the challenge Australia faces is 'nothing less than to reinforce, renovate and buttress a world order that favours freedom'.<sup>140</sup> By the time we reached September 2021, a series of key meetings and announcements would outline a decisive shift in Australia's strategic approach.

The most publicly significant event was the announcement of the new pact between Australia, the United States and Great Britain. In a press conference of less than 12 minutes, the leaders of these three countries announced a new security cooperation agreement called AUKUS. This announcement has driven an avalanche of media, articles and commentary. Most of the focus on AUKUS has centred on its first initiative: the decision of Australia to cancel its submarine contract with France and enter into an 18-month development period with its AUKUS partners to build a nuclear-powered attack submarine for Australia.

More significantly, although generally overlooked, is that fact that AUKUS is a pact that meaningfully accelerates cooperation by these three countries in science and technology initiatives; supply chain resilience; space cooperation; cyber, data theft, propaganda and foreign interference; critical infrastructure protection and investment, quantum computing, biotechnologies and artificial intelligence cooperation. Its other key feature is high-tech missile and defence technology sharing. Significantly, these are all key areas of 21st century competition in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>141</sup>

In parallel to AUKUS was the meeting of AUSMIN in Washington DC that occurred concurrently with the AUKUS announcement but has received little attention despite its importance. The communiqué from this meeting advances significant developments. It reinforces the nuclear-powered submarine decision and reiterates and accelerates the original force posture initiatives from the 2011 Obama pivot. This includes a large expansion of US Air Force units in northern Australia 'of all types' (ending the vacillations of Tony Abbott in 2015); provides for a 'combined logistics, sustainment, and maintenance enterprise [a joint base] to support high-end warfighting and combined military operations in the

region' and increases the scale and complexity of multilateral exercises. In line with AUKUS, AUSMIN further sets the foundations for a much-expanded engagement for Australia with the US national technology and industry base.<sup>142</sup>

Another significant development in September 2021 was the meeting of the Quad Leaders' Summit meeting in Washington DC. The Quadrilateral Dialogue between Japan, India, Australia and the United States had been created back in 2007 but it had failed to develop as a significant mini-lateral grouping. Its revival started on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in 2017. However, this mini-lateral group took major steps forward in 2021 when President Biden set a virtual meeting of the Quad leaders as his first major foreign policy initiative. This was followed up by the first, in person, leaders' meeting on 24 September 2021. To many commentators, the AUKUS and Quad initiatives represent a clear indication of Australia's focus on working multilaterally to counter China strategically in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>143</sup>

September 2021 was the moment the Australian Government came to terms with the repercussions of a more assertive China, a more multipolar global order and changing US power. This is also clear acknowledgement that the future of the Alliance, while still central to Australian strategy, would be different in tenor and tone.

While discussions of nuclear-powered submarines continue to dominate the public discussion and much of the commentary on the events of September 2021, Ferguson Hansen has noted that:

lost amid all of the meetings and activities and submarines has been a far more powerful development. It is one of those inflection [pivot] points that will bend the arc of Australian history ... remarkably, it passed almost without notice [that] in signing the AUKUS pact and embracing the expansive Quad agenda, Australia has effectively and decisively made its choice.<sup>144</sup>

As ABC journalist Stan Grant noted, September 2021 'buries the notion that Australia does not have to choose between its biggest trading partner China and its strategic alliance, shared values and friendship with the United States. We have returned to



a world of great power rivalry with the risk of war – Morrison says ever present and growing – and Australia has chosen. It was the choice we would always make: we are all in with America.<sup>145</sup>

### The changing nature of the Alliance

Significantly, the events of September 2021 confirm that we are not just seeing another change to the character of the Alliance, but also changes to some of its underlying nature. These changes to the nature of the Alliance are centred on the changes to the Indo-Pacific strategic order as well as changes to US power. In parallel to the lead up to the AUKUS announcements and the Quad leaders' meeting was a significant change to US defence strategy in the Indo-Pacific, personified by the announcement of an 'integrated deterrence' strategy in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>146</sup>

US Secretary of Defense Austin outlined this new approach as being centred on 'emerging threats and cutting-edge technologies [that] are changing the face and the pace of warfare ... integrated deterrence means using every military and non-military tool in our toolbox, in lock-step with our allies and partners' to meet a range of regional challenges, including 'the spectre of coercion from rising powers'.<sup>147</sup>

As the Australian diplomat Jane Hardy has noted, '

some allies and partners [like Australia] will seek high-end integration with the United States... [under integrated deterrence; however, success in this approach requires a broader]...fostering [of] military interoperability among the largest possible grouping of like-minded nations' in order for the US to achieve its defence and security aims across a wide spectrum of strategic competition with China.<sup>148</sup>



For integrated deterrence to be a success, it will require a further 'deepening combined strategic, diplomatic and military planning between the United States and Australia' including in 'high-value deterrence scenarios'. Consistent with the outcomes of AUSMIN 2021, this will 'accelerate the long-standing bilateral defence integration agenda'.<sup>149</sup> The move to integrated deterrence as a formal part of US strategy, long explored in various forms for a number of years in the Indo-Pacific under the guise of networked, collective or federated defence<sup>150</sup>, is recognition that the US is no longer able to unilaterally provide extended conventional deterrence.

The US decision to embrace integrated deterrence is yet another example in 2021 of an acknowledgement that some of the key underlying features of the nature of the US-Australian Alliance have changed. While some of these key features remain in place, such as Australia's geographical importance, its engagement with global institutions, and reliance on US extended nuclear deterrence, it is no longer able to rely on US regional hegemony, US uncontested maritime supremacy and the US's ability to provide unilateral extended conventional deterrence.

In addition, the fractures in US domestic politics leave their commitment to open and free trade and liberal democracy in some doubt. Significantly, AUKUS has also outlined one new change to the nature of the Alliance: a foundational commitment to advanced defence science, technology and innovation partnerships in key areas of regional competition such as hypersonics, missile technology, quantum computing, cyber, AI and automation, among others.

As Table 2 sets out below, the events of September 2021 highlight some of the key changes not just to the character of the Alliance but to its underlying nature. The table lays out the longer-term nature of the Alliance that existed through the 1951 to 2011 pivot points and contrasts these against the 2021 pivot point. It identifies these areas of continuity, three key changes, two unresolved issues and one new critical area.

↑ Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison visits the ANZUS Corridor that honors the 1951 Australian-New Zealand-United States security treaty, at the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., Sept. 20, 2019. The prime minister visited the corridor following talks with U.S. Secretary of Defense Dr. Mark T. Esper. (DoD photo by Lisa Ferdinando).

Nature of the Alliance 1951-2021	Nature of the Alliance post-2021	Comments
<b>Continuation of:</b>		
The geographical location at the bottom of Asia and on the hinge of the Indian and Pacific Oceans	The geographical location at the bottom of Asia and on the hinge of the Indian and Pacific Oceans	Growing important of Australia's geography to US interests in the Indo-Pacific
High levels of engagement with, and support for, the global institutions established at the end the Second World War for security and prosperity	High levels of engagement with, and support for, the global institutions established at the end the Second World War for security and prosperity	The weakening of US global power and difficulties of global institutions in a world more dominated by great power competition
Reliance upon US extended nuclear deterrence	Reliance upon US extended nuclear deterrence	Changing nuclear balance in the Indo-Pacific and Trump's vacillations on nuclear non-proliferation
<b>Three key changes:</b>		
An Asia-Pacific strategic order based on US hegemonic power	Indo-Pacific strategic order based on strategic competition, multi-polarity and a balance of power	The rise of China, India, Indonesia et al and the relative decline of the US
Reliance upon US conventional deterrence	Australia's role in collective 'integrated deterrence' with the US and other partners	Reflective of the relative decline of the US and the criticality of its alliance networks and partners to aggregate power
Ongoing support for a rules-based global order based on international norms buttressed by US leadership	A changing rules-based order based on multi-polarity	The relative decline of the US
<b>Two open questions:</b>		
A strong commitment to open global trade including free markets	A strong commitment to open global trade, including free markets?	US has no current economic strategy for the Indo-Pacific and is not a member of CTPP. US domestic politics on both the left and right are not openly supportive of multilateral trade deals or 'free trade'
Support for liberal democracy	Support for liberal democracy?	The long term impact of the erosion of democratic rights in the US and the repercussions in US domestic politics of the 6 Jan 2021 storming of the Capitol building remain unknown
<b>One new area:</b>		
N/A	Advanced science, technology and defence industrial cooperation	As reflected in AUKUS: a new focus on supply chains, defence industrial cooperation, and the sharing of defence technology in areas such as hypersonic, missile technology, quantum computing, cyber, AI and automation

Table 2: Changes to the Alliance's underlying nature in 2021

→  
190711-N-PJ626-5231 CORAL SEA (July 11, 2019) The amphibious assault ship HMAS Canberra left, the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76), left-center, the amphibious assault ship USS Wasp (LHD 1), right-center, and the Japanese helicopter destroyer JS Ise (DDH 182), right, during Talisman Sabre 2019. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Kaila V. Peters).







## CONCLUSION: the challenges ahead

### Adapting the Alliance for the new multi-polar Indo-Pacific

As noted in the beginning of this paper, a key pivot point is a moment 'that alters significantly the present process in international relations, and has long lasting considerable effects ... [it] denotes a dividing line between the events that preceded it and the subsequent events that would come in its wake.'<sup>151</sup> In this history of the pivot points of the US-Australian Alliance, 2021 stands out.

Unlike the 2011 Obama pivot point, which clung to the long-standing notion of US hegemony in the Indo-Pacific and the underlying nature of the Alliance, the announcements and strategic events of September 2021 pivot are part of an recognition that some of the key foundational underpinnings of the Alliance have irretrievably changed. This means that Australia's thinking on the future of the Alliance and its role has to adapt.

This does not mean that the Alliance is any less valuable. In many respects, it increases in value. The changes inherent in the 2021 announcements mean that Australia must recognise

the gravity of the changes underway in its region and the increasing complexity of the strategic challenges that it faces. In doing so, it must evolve its thinking about the Alliance. Critically, while the Alliance will remain a key element in Australian strategic policy, it must not be seen as an end in, and of, itself.

During the period from the early 2000s to the 2020 Defence Strategic Update, Australian strategic policy emphasised that engagement with the US was about 'broadening and deepening' the Alliance. However, there was no end point nor a clear rationale as to how broad or how deep the Alliance needed to get or what shape or form it should take. This means that in this period, the Alliance was often seen as the end goal of Australian strategy rather than as a key tool in the ways and means to further Australia's strategic interests.

The 2021 pivot point and the clarity provided on Australia's strategic choices in the region has changed some key areas of the nature of the Alliance. This means that there is a now an opportunity to reframe the

Alliance in ways that return it to its essential role as part of the ways and means (rather than ends) of Australian strategy.

For the Alliance to resume its rightful place in the formulation of Australian strategic policy, through a recognition of its changing nature, it must also be acknowledged that these changes present the potential for a significant increase in risks and costs to Australia. The risks, costs and benefits of this new approach must be thoroughly examined and publicly debated to ensure confidence and clarity around the expectations and commitments (on both sides) of the Alliance.

In addition, it must be recognised that the era of few strategic differences between Australia and the US (that was witnessed in combined operations in the Middle East) is vastly different to the new regional order of the Indo-Pacific. Australia and the US will not always be mutually aligned. As such, in this new Alliance era, the use of political rhetoric reminiscent of the past Alliance sentimentality, such as a 'forever alliance' or 'unbreakable alliance', must be avoided. Otherwise,



it risks the setting of unrealistic expectations of the Alliance, which will undermine public trust when disagreements do occur and could well contribute to entrapment in alliance relations.

With the move to great power competition, the end of unilateral US conventional deterrence and the rise of integrated deterrence, the Australian Defence Force's posture and structure are outdated. The ADF's current macro force structure is a relic of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. It was designed to meet low-level regional threats independently, to maintain a regional military edge in a period of US regional hegemony and to contribute to niche operations far from Australia's shores. This is no longer relevant. The last force posture review of 2013, while addressing issues relative to the importance of Australia's north and north-western approaches, did so under a threat and risk matrix that did not include major power competition and expanded long-range PRC military capabilities.

For this new force structure and posture to take effective shape Australia and the US need to review existing alliance institutions. In doing so, they should consider upgrading the scope and coverage of AUSMIN, the expansion of joint military planning and undertake an investigation into the potential for a new combined headquarters for operations in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia. This could be developed from the proposal in the dying days of the Trump administration for a new First Fleet Headquarters for the

**With the move to great power competition, the end of unilateral US conventional deterrence and the rise of integrated deterrence, the Australian Defence Force's posture and structure are outdated.**

Indian Ocean. An expanded joint headquarters based at HMAS *Stirling* in Perth could provide a platform for developing new operating concepts, the operationalisation of integrated deterrence and the expansion of US force presence in Australia, as highlighted in the 2021 AUSMIN communiqué .

While these changes are critical starting points, they do not represent all of the myriad of challenges and changes that are underway in the bilateral relationship. There are also a number of major challenges not explored in this paper that will also be critical to the future of the US-Australia strategic partnership. This includes the role of climate change in the contemporary and future security partnership; demographic changes in Australia and the United States; and youth perspectives from a generation in Australia who have grown up watching the failures and defeats in Iraq and Afghanistan, the disappointments of the Obama pivot and the challenges of the Trump presidency.

This younger generation have a much broader focus on cooperation in the US-Australia relationship and are looking to 'leverage its potential for pursuing shared geopolitical interests in the Indo-Pacific' and to 'advance shared interests in overcoming non-traditional security threats – such as climate change and energy – as well as cooperating in the creation of new values and norms in non-traditional areas such as space'.<sup>152</sup> These areas demand much more attention and analysis.

Finally, the Australian Government should not overly rely on the Alliance for Australia's security. The challenges of the new multi-polar Indo-Pacific are far too great and far too integrated, representing challenges in both traditional and non-traditional security areas. As a result, it must develop a more holistic national security strategy, one that integrates foreign, defence, industry, climate, energy and geo-economic policies to meet present and future challenges in a new strategic era.

← United States Army officer Brigadier General Jered Helwig (right), US Indo-Pacific Command's Director for Logistics and Engineering, is shown an aspect of the Roll of Honour during a tour of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.



## Endnotes

- 1 See 'Nature and Character of War and Warfare', US Army, <https://www.benning.army.mil/mssp/Nature%20and%20Character/>. See also Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, ind. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).
- 2 For example see Ben Barry, *Blood, Metal and Dust: How Victory turned to defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq* (Osprey: Oxford, 2020) 16.
- 3 Antulio J. Echevarria II, 'War's Changing Character and Varying Nature: A Closer Look at Clausewitz's Trinity', *Parameters*, Vol 5, Issue 4, 2021 <https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com/article/wars-changing-character-and-varying-nature-a-closer-look-at-clausewitzs-trinity/>
- 4 This phrase has been used in a significant number of scholarly works to define a major change. For instance see Daljit Singh & Malcolm Cook, *Turning Points and transitions: Selections from Southeast Asian Affairs 1974-2018*, (Singapore: ISEAS, 2019); Michael J Nojeim and David P Kilroy, *Days of decision : turning points in U.S. foreign policy* (Washington, DC : Potomac Books, 2011); Nissan Oren; Makhon li-yeh asim, Benleumiyim al-shem, Leonard Daiv is, *When patterns change : turning points in international politics* (New York : St. Martin's Press ; Jerusalem : Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1984.); Mark R Brawley, *Turning points : decisions shaping the evolution of the international political economy*, (Hertfordshire : Broadview Press, 1998); Yang Razali Kassim, 'The South China Sea disputes : flashpoints, turning points, and trajectories'
- 5 'Turning Points in History', Smithsonian Institute, <http://smithsonianeducation.org/turningpoints/whatisa.html>
- 6 Thomas Kuhn as cited in Niall Ferguson, 'Turning Points', *The New York Times*, 30 November 2021.
- 7 enebaum, *Turning Points in the History of International Relations 1908-2008*, 7.
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