

## Howard, Downer and the Liberals' Realist Tradition

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The successive Howard Governments sought not only to make foreign policy in response to new regional and global agendas, but to respond to and to seek to manage new forms of electoral challenge with new forms of nationalism. This has resulted in a set of important departures from the major Liberal tradition in international affairs, the claim to a realist approach to foreign policy, and has led to the need to manage the consequences of those departures. The boundary that realism sought to draw between the domestic and international politics, as the spheres of values and interests respectively, became increasingly blurred. In relations with the Asian region the expression of strong domestic (nationalist and internationalist) agendas led initially to distancing from Asian engagement. However, from 2002, a more realist-focused external policy led to new forms of state to state re-engagement in pursuit of national interests. In the commitment to military operations in Iraq, the Anzac legend is interpreted to supply nationalist legitimisation which would not normally be required for wars fought for realist (i.e. defensive) reasons. A future Liberal prime minister would lack Howard's touch here. In the debate in the Liberal Party over defence doctrine, an attempt by the Defence Minister to reformulate the realist doctrine of Defence of Australia into an expeditionary construct was rejected.

The incoming Howard Government of 1996 was the first post-Cold War Liberal government, but it came to office long after the party was over for "new world order", after almost a decade of post-Cold War international politics. Liberal government foreign policy makers faced an external setting quite unfamiliar to that of the last period of office under Malcolm Fraser — this was the first Liberal government without the challenge of the Soviet Union, yet with a range of new challenges emerging and others that would unexpectedly present themselves. It was a government that also faced an internal setting equally unfamiliar, as impacts of economic globalisation gathered pace and generated uneven effects around the continent and as global human rights ideas continued to evolve and link communities across national boundaries in common cause. This was a world of new combinations of internal and external pressures upon government. The government's pattern of responses included a set of important departures from its main historical tradition in international affairs, its claim to adherence to a realist approach to foreign policy. Managing the often predictable consequences of these departures from realism has been a hallmark of the Howard Governments.

The Liberal Party tradition of foreign policy realism<sup>1</sup> was based on a number of premises. At the centre was the perception of the international system as a world of

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the realist tradition see C. Bridge, "In the National Interest: Liberal Foreign Relations from Deakin to Howard", in J. H. Nethercote, ed., *Liberalism and the Australian Federation* (Annandale, 2001).

power politics, where power was located in states, and in alliances of states, and based on economic and military strength. The tradition was nationalist in the sense that it was oriented to the question of Australian national security and how to achieve this security in a world of unregulated power, and also in that it assumed a defence posture with a substantial capacity for national self-defence at its core. Yet it was a modest conception of nationalism, the nationalism of state sovereignty, oriented around matters of vital interests of security and survival, and not the myriad sectional interests and ongoing values debates of domestic politics. It accepted that the international system was not an arena for projection of national values, except at the margin, and perhaps in the form of an “enlightened” realism which acknowledged the normative force of what Hedley Bull called “international society”, a “do unto others” approach.<sup>2</sup> It was a realism which saw opportunity and threat in the region, but much more of the latter, and was profoundly ambivalent towards the promise of enhanced regional relationships. Indeed the predominant view was that political and ideological conflicts in the region created potentially serious military threats to Australia, necessitating the ongoing pursuit of great power alliances with the Anglo-American world. These alliances would provide what Spender called the “mighty shield” and underwrite Australian security *in extremis*, and possibly give Australia some influence in global politics though influence over the great power.<sup>3</sup> The alliances were with great powers with which Australia had close cultural affinity, and while it was hoped that this affinity would provide additional strength to alliances, foreign policies after the Second World War were not premised on the existence of some special bond, nostalgia for the British Empire notwithstanding.

What differentiated the Liberal position from that of the Australian Labor Party, whose dominant faction also sought and supported the US alliance from realist premises, was the Liberals’ heightened perception of threats posed after the Second World War by communism, their greater scepticism over the value of any global or regional multilateralism that was not centred around its alliance relationships, and their enthusiasm for great power alliances even in the face of disappointment over what they had delivered (e.g. over West New Guinea). This realist tradition was reinforced by the experience of governing through almost the entire forty-year Cold War, a conflict system with strong tendencies to political and military bipolarity, except for the *détente* phase of the early 1970s and the final phase of Soviet retrenchment and collapse in the late 1980s. These, coincidentally, were the two periods when Labor was in government.

The successive Howard Governments responded to the new external and internal settings, with a new mix of international and domestic strategies, as they sought not only to make foreign policy in response to new regional and global agendas, but also to respond to and to seek to manage new forms of electoral challenge. The sharp lines that realism sought to draw between the domestic and international politics, as the spheres of values and interests respectively, became increasingly blurred. New forms of Australian nationalism developed by Howard produced international consequences, both intentional and unintended. One commentator asked of 2001 whether in fact Australia had entered a radically new phase where foreign policy, once assumed to be attempts to shape world events in pursuit of national interests had in fact been eclipsed by a “new logic” in which “relationships with the outside world are interpreted and

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<sup>2</sup> H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> P. C. Spender, *Exercises in Diplomacy: the ANZUS Treaty and the Colombo Plan* (Sydney, 1969).

responded to according to a certain conception of the values of the majority of Australian society".<sup>4</sup> There was an initial division of task between the prime minister and his long serving foreign minister and confidant, Alexander Downer. Howard was intensely engaged most directly with the domestic dimensions of foreign policy, and with setting a new nationalist orientation, while still taking key decisions. Downer initially sought to develop the more traditional diplomatic discourse and international personality, taking those decisions to external audiences and arenas. He was required also to deal with the international consequences of the domestic logic.

Two major foreign policy areas are explored for their domestic and international dimensions: policies towards the region, and policies towards the United States. Firstly, the pattern of ambivalence in relations with the Asian region is described as *the decline and rise of the idea of regional engagement*, where the expression of strong domestic (nationalist and internationalist) agendas leads initially to distancing from Asian engagement. However, from 2002, a more focused external policy leads to new forms of state to state re-engagement in pursuit of national interests. Secondly, the pattern of enthusiasm for the US alliance, and the commitment to militarily support the US and Britain in the invasion of Iraq and in the post-war order and reconstruction effort, is discussed through the domestic logics. Here the focus on the *reinvention of the Anzac legend* to supply legitimization which normally would not be required for wars fought for realist (i.e. clearly defensive) reasons, and on the *defence debate* within the Liberal Party, where attempts to reformulate the realist doctrine of *Defence of Australia* into an expeditionary doctrine were considered and rejected.

### Decline and Rise of Regional Engagement

*The Traditional Outlook:* Within the Liberal perspective on "the region to the north" (whether that be Asia, East Asia, or just Southeast Asia) there has been a significant element of an optimistic vision: of the region as an area of economic opportunity, of political cooperation and as a potential source of cultural enrichment. Spender's extensive travels in Asia before the Second World War and their impact on the perceptions and policies of the Liberal governments of the 1950s is an example. This optimism, however, has traditionally been the minor key.<sup>5</sup> The major key, underpinning the self-image of realism, was a perception of the region as threat, or source of threats, and an area of profound cultural difference to Australia's Western heritage. This perception explains the ongoing search for great power allies as protectors. Japan's aggression in launching the Pacific War during the Second World War including attack on Australia, was taken as confirmation of the reality of regional threat thereafter. Communist-nationalist movements in Asia after the War were explained via the domino metaphor, widely adopted by Liberal governments in the 1950s and 1960s as a description of the prospects of cascading regional instability.

The larger composition may be described as *ambivalence*, ambivalence towards Asia as so persistent, that it may be called a "tradition". There were indeed many nuances to the ambivalence, many bursts of economic and defence cooperation with

<sup>4</sup> M. Wesley, "Perspectives on Australian Foreign Policy, 2001", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 56, 1 (2002), pp. 47-63.

<sup>5</sup> This is a term used by David Walker to describe Australian attitudes to Asia more generally; see D. Walker, *Anxious Nation : Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939* (St Lucia, Qld., 1999). For a critical assessment of the Liberal tradition of regional engagement, see M. Gurry, "Whose History? The Struggle Over Authorship of Australia's Asia Policies", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 52, 1 (1998), pp. 77-89.

particular governments, and examples of successful policy. And under Malcolm Fraser, there was a major rapprochement with communist China itself, leading on to full diplomatic recognition and suggestions of common strategic purpose. But this was a shift motivated by the strategic maxim about the “enemy of my enemy”, and followed the lead of the USA. It was done in the greater cause of containing the larger threat to China’s north, the USSR, and, in this instrumental purpose can be seen to retain the essentially ambivalent quality.<sup>6</sup> The second rapprochement of note was with Indonesia, where Australian government relief at the transition from the Sukarno to the Suharto era in the mid 1960s led to an accommodative policy towards Indonesia’s forceful incorporation of Portuguese East Timor from 1975, in the name of maintaining good relations with a large and potentially volatile neighbour.

*Labor’s regionalism:* In the intervening space between the Fraser and Howard terms, the Labor governments sought to transcend their own ambivalence towards Asia, and, in the context of the end of the Cold War, to fully embrace the optimistic vision. For a decade, from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s, the once minor key, engagement with Asia, became the major framework of ideas in the structuring of Australia’s foreign policies and security understandings and relationships. The discourse of regional engagement took centre stage position away from Australia’s traditional preoccupation, under Liberal-led governments, with great power alliances.

For Labor’s Foreign Minister Gareth Evans:

The great turnaround in contemporary Australian history is that the region from which we sought in the past to protect ourselves — whether by esoteric dictation tests for would-be immigrants, or tariffs, or alliances with the distant great and powerful — is now the region which offers Australia the most. Our future lies, inevitably, in the Asia-Pacific region. This is where we live, must survive strategically and economically, and find a place and role if we are to develop our full potential as a nation.<sup>7</sup>

Themes were increasingly enunciated in a series of governmental speeches, not just by Evans but by Prime Ministers Hawke and Keating over many years, with a strong constancy of core elements, e.g. the ideas of a historical turning point, new realities, destiny, being *part of* a region, Australia as part of Asia. There were also more specific formulations. For the regional economy, the themes were free trade, “North East Asian Ascendancy”, multilateralism and APEC and the avoidance of economic exclusion. In regional security the themes were seeking security *within* the region and being part of the ASEAN Regional Forum. The idea of an emerging regional community was postulated, included a convergence of values with Australia.

Regional engagement was a diplomatic and defence strategy seeking to develop new relations and associations, reshaping the policy framework of alliance. There was, at the same time, an attempt to shape political and social relations at home: a domestic strategy of business exhortation (to export and invest) and desire to promote a kind of cultural transformation. Uncontroversially it might be thought, one plank was the enhancement of “Asia literacy”; more controversially there was an attempt to appropriate to Labor the mantle of wartime nationalist wisdom in the Second World War in focusing on the region, and the national interest, rather than the British idea of the imperial/global interest.

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<sup>6</sup> G. Smith, “Australia’s Political Relationships with Asia”, in M. McGillivray and G. Smith, eds, *Australia and Asia* (Melbourne, 1997), pp. 56-80.

<sup>7</sup> G. Evans, and B. Grant, *Australia’s Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s* (Melbourne, 1991).

Keating injected an ever more partisan edge into the idea of regional engagement, and in the 1996 election campaign, he contended that the Liberal-National Coalition could not be trusted, through lack of interest and skill, to conduct Australia's regional relations effectively, and that the Coalition was viewed negatively in the region for its own negativism towards Asia. Keating's memoir of his Prime Ministership sought to enshrine this motif with the title *Engagement: Australia faces the Asia Pacific*.<sup>8</sup>

*The decline of "regional engagement" 1996-2001:* Labor's claims that it was the champion of vital regional relationships, had, it would seem, no discernible impact on voters, and this lack of constituency is a comment on its failure to engage with the wider domestic electorate over its regional vision of the previous decade. The incoming Howard Government gave renewed emphasis to, on the one hand the US relationship, and on the other, the importance of bilateral relationships over multilateral forums in the region. A further theme developed that there were also no "special relationships" in the region; this was a term that would only be applied to the USA. In the second half of the 1990s, Australia drew away from the engagement discourse both in its multilateral construction and in expressions of affinity, but in maintaining a commitment to the formal idea in formal speeches.

Howard also sought from the outset to define a political constituency in conservative Australians who are apparently not very interested in the region, and for that matter, the republic or reconciliation, the "Three Rs" of the Labor years, which Paul Keating had brought together, along with an emphasis on multiculturalism. In his first government, Howard was momentarily outflanked on the Right by a new political force which claimed to be the voice of the disenfranchised. The Pauline Hanson One Nation movement burst onto the political scene in 1996-7, with racist stances towards Aborigines and Asians as animating forces, aimed directly at mobilising an angry rurally based demographic that felt left out of the age of globalisation and prosperity. Growing support for One Nation threatened to split votes from the Coalition and facilitate the return of Labor. The Howard response to the One Nation challenge was to develop a strategy to reincorporate straying voters with a particular style of nationalism of his own.

The One Nation movement had a paradoxical effect on the Coalition government's approach to regional engagement. Hanson's speeches and Howard's slowness to condemn received such a bad press in the region, that the Coalition stepped back from its initial negative take on Keating's and Evans' engagement, with Foreign Minister Downer making a series of visits to Asian capitals to dissociate the government from Hanson and to give assurances that Hanson did not represent Australia's views on Asia or Asians. Hanson's mobilisation of the anti-constituency to Keating's Asian engagement, propelled the Howard government into engagement activism to limit damage. In a major speech in 1988, he presented a position in basic continuity with Labor, with an element of differentiation around the matter of style:

I believe that future historians will view this period — the years 1996 through '98 — as a historic turning point in Australia's engagement with the Asia Pacific. They will see these years as the time when Australia ceased being the region's 'demandeur', badgering its neighbours for attention

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<sup>8</sup> P. Keating, *Engagement: Australia Faces the Asia-Pacific* (Sydney, 2000).

and recognition, and became a genuinely close partner and regional friend, in good times and in bad.<sup>9</sup>

But in this the larger strategy was domestic, the cooption of the One Nation voter who threatened to damage the Coalition's electoral prospects. A foreign policy emphasising regional engagement was seen as a liability in this task.

The Asian financial and economic crises, which enveloped many states in East Asia in 1997, 1998 and beyond, elicited new forms of ambivalence towards regional engagement. In the early period of financial crisis, Australia participated quickly in financial bailouts and made statements about its practical regional assistance, and that Australia was "not just a fair-weather friend". The unstated assumption behind Australia's all-weather friendship was fair weather at home, which when tested briefly, led to a burst of disengagement rhetoric. The Australian dollar, under pressure in 1998, fell briefly to 55 US cents, and the Treasurer declared to the world that Australia was not really part of the region and didn't deserve the same currency treatment.<sup>10</sup> With the halting of economic growth in parts of the region, it was obvious that the easy assumption of hitching a ride with the ascending economic powers was invalid. But the Australian currency crisis was short lived, and as the Australian economy continued to grow from domestic demand and diversified exports, a new sense of disengagement could arise. It would seem perhaps that the economic significance of the Asian connection had been exaggerated and Australia could even hold some lessons for the so called tiger economies.

As divergences began to appear about how best to respond as a region to crisis, Australia positioned itself in the "stay on course" position, advocating pressing on with the economic liberalisation agenda that was developed prior to the crisis, when many states were now looking for new forms of intervention to protect them from the vicissitudes of the global system, including controls on speculative capital movements. At the 1998 APEC forum, Australia appeared genuinely surprised that its attempt to show leadership along the lines of more liberalisation did not find followers.<sup>11</sup> East Asian caucusing on economic regionalisation developed from this point without Australian participation. Australia in turn looked to multiple bilateralisms to advance economic interests, as Labor's multilateral creation, APEC, ran out of economic relevance.

In stark contrast to the One Nation pressure, the other domestic challenge came from the persistence of the supporters of an independent East Timor, located more on the Left, and who were also part of a growing international movement centred on expanding the domain of human rights. The series of events which led to the independence of East Timor were able to unfold after the collapse of the Suharto regime in Indonesia in 1998, a collapse which was in turn directly linked to the currency and economic crisis at this time. The domestic supporters of East Timorese independence connected to an influential international movement which had come to engage significant state constituencies in Europe and the US. The Howard Government's response to the pressure to support self-determination was to shift from

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<sup>9</sup> A. Downer, "Australia's Future in the Asia Pacific: Cooperation, Economic Reform and Liberalisation", speech to the Melbourne Institute Conference — *The Asian Crisis — Economic Analysis and Market Intelligence*, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 8 May, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 July 1988; 28 November 1988.

<sup>11</sup> G. Smith, "Perspectives on Foreign Policy 1998", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 53, 2 (1999), pp. 193-207.

total rejection in 1997 to total acceptance in 1999 (after the ballot), an outright policy reversal. Its initial shift of ground to promote change in Indonesian policy caught and catalysed a moment of change in that policy, and the Australian government then moved quickly to a political and military strategy which assisted the creation of a new state, in a sometimes uneasy collaboration with the United States.

This is not the place to explore the international and domestic pressures on the Australian Government over East Timorese self-determination which led to a reversal of Australia's position of recognition of Indonesian sovereignty. It was certainly a course of action that Liberal and Labor governments had not seriously contemplated in the preceding years or decades, and a fundamental departure from the realist premises behind the willingness to accommodate Indonesia's security concerns. A sudden change of policy stands in need of interpretation and some attempt to establish consistency on larger purpose and interests while making a U-turn. Australia's role in brokering the independence of East Timor and leading the INTERFET force, with its unanimous UN Security Council mandate, could be represented as obvious, practical, evidence of Australia's engagement with the region reaching new levels — and as a demonstration of Australia's role as international citizen. What is intriguing is how relatively late in the piece these themes were invoked and how, instead, nationalist interpretations were offered, in ways that invoked elements of an ANZAC tradition. "Australia has a very proud military tradition. It's a tradition that has never sought to impose the will of this country on others, but a tradition which is designed always to stand up for what is right."<sup>12</sup>

The development of a nationalist theme seemed curious as it was quite unnecessary for the task of mobilising public support for the East Timor intervention, as public opinion was so firmly in favour of it. It was clearly a theme that linked to the wider perspectives that Howard was developing. The ANZAC motif was to emerge in much sharper political prominence in the lead-up to and in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq, when public support for the war was more problematic.

Then there followed the unnerving period of the "Howard Doctrine" where Howard allowed the meaning of Australia's regional role to be constructed in a "US deputy" framework, after his interview and headline in the *Bulletin* magazine in September 1999. After a hectic week Howard made a retraction in Parliament (27 September) and, uncharacteristically, for an outstanding unscripted speaker, read a written recantation, restating the commitment to the basic realist position on international affairs rather than of an Australia acting "above and beyond" its interests. In the meantime there had been an explosion of negative comment from public officials and the media of a great many countries in the region about Australia's junior imperial pretensions<sup>13</sup> and genuine puzzle from realists about why it was allowed to run over a number of days — it seemed to both offend everyone and to mean nothing — and like the smile of the Cheshire cat would vanish then would reappear sometime later in an unexpected place. The Howard Doctrine episode may be understood, however, as an attempt by a government after a moment of crisis over East Timorese intervention, to find a realist power politics construction of what Australia had in fact done: broken with the realist prescription of twenty-three years of accepting the Indonesian incorporation of East Timor in the name of regional stability and good relations with the Indonesian state.

<sup>12</sup> J. Howard, *7:30 Report*, 20 Sept 1999, <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/stories/s53334.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> R. Leaver, "The Meanings, Origins and Implications of the 'Howard Doctrine'", *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 14, 1 (2001), pp. 15-34.

Perhaps if this burst of “idealism” could be presented as a stance deeply associated with US power, then Australia might not look so exposed to an ongoing security dilemma in its relationship with Indonesia.

Through the late 1990s and into the new century, the Dean of Asian Studies at the Australian National University, Professor Anthony Milner, wrote with increasing eloquence and frustration of the risks to Australia internationally of being seen as or becoming at odds with its region.<sup>14</sup> In 2001, the election was fought and won, in the shadow of 9-11 and the fear of mass casualty terrorism, on the principal issue of the government’s toughness towards illegal immigrants, and its right to imprison unwanted arrivals indefinitely, in Australia or offshore. Although not directly a matter affecting relations with East Asia, it tapped into that set of anxieties about foreigners which further deepened ambivalence to the region, and may mark 2001 as the weakest moment for the idea of regional engagement.

*Asian Engagement Rises Again 2002-2005:* Since then, there has been a rapid rebuilding of elements of regional cooperation in the areas of security, economy, and even touching the social and community level. This was not initially through any embrace of grand ideas of regional multilateral architecture or values convergence, but in a series of issue-centred collaborations and initiatives. These were arguably building into a larger edifice and by 2005, after the devastation of the first tsunami in Indonesia in particular, Howard took the opportunity to make a very large commitment of financial support, and to shift beyond ambivalence to claim the optimistic ground of far-reaching, long-term engagement.

The “War against Terrorism” was declared after the devastating attacks on New York in September 2001 and one of the immediate consequences was the search for a global coalition of states who would put aside other differences and pursue a united strategy against al Qaeda and similar organisations. This coalition in action was evident in the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and Australia was a willing participant. However, it was the mass killings in night clubs in Bali in October 2002 that led to the creation of a new scale of regional Southeast Asian collaboration and in particular, a bilateral Australian-Indonesian collaboration to combat militant Islamic groups that sought to destabilize the states of the region. Very rapidly new forms of practical cooperation were developed between federal police, customs and other state agencies with counterparts in Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia — cooperation which had first developed around people smuggling, now extended into intensive anti-terrorism efforts. Engagement over vital security matters had reappeared in new forms.

Developments in regional economic relations also took on a new pattern of intensity, as negotiations over bilateral trade agreements in Southeast Asia achieved outcomes: FTA agreements signed with Singapore in 2003 and Thailand in 2004. But the fundamental driver for the Southeast Asian economies, and beyond that to the wider regional and global economies, was increasingly China, whose refusal to float its currency appears to have contributed substantially to ending the late 1990s Asian economic crisis. China sustained strong year-on-year growth through the 1990s and into the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, a boom of greater impact than Japan’s in the 1960s and 1970s, in its impact on global growth, and its specific impact on the volume and price of Australian mineral and energy resources. The idea of the *North East Asian Ascendancy*, proclaimed in the 1980s in the Garnaut Report

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<sup>14</sup> A. Milner, “What’s left of Engagement with Asia?”, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 54, 2 (2000), pp. 177-184.



(1989)<sup>15</sup> seemed to be back with us, but focussed strongly on one particular East Asian economy. The Prime Minister came to be closely identified with the progress of the Australia-China economic relationship, assisting the conclusion of LNG negotiations, supporting WTO membership, inviting the Chinese President Hu Jintao to address the Australian parliament, and pursuing discussions for an FTA.

A further enhancement of regional reengagement took place at the socio-political and internal security level: the sudden rediscovery of the Island Pacific and the concern for the dangers that might be posed by weak and failing states in Melanesia. The intervention in the Solomons, at the request of the Solomons Government, and at the prompting of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute,<sup>16</sup> was followed by a program (on and off) of police and public service cooperation with Papua New Guinea. These new commitments were linked rhetorically to the War against Terrorism, in that unstable states in general were said to be potentially attractive environments for terrorist organisers. There was an echo here of the concern in the Cold War for Soviet agents in the Pacific Islands, a concern which some island states used to good effect to attract additional aid from Australia. Was it Australia's turn to play the strategic threat card? As Flitton and others observed, the Solomons commitment in particular may be less of a fundamental reassessment of the South Pacific as strategic backwater, and more a demonstration to the US of how busy Australia was with deployments in our immediate region in order to minimise US expectations about troop commitments to Iraq.<sup>17</sup>

The renewed commitment to state-building in near neighbours did not lead the Australian government to accept the median EEZ boundary with Timor L'Este, which would allow the lion's share of gas and oil royalties from the Timor Sea to underpin this task in a poor and war ravaged country. Australia's preoccupation with the "Timor Gap" in the international maritime boundary with Indonesia has a long history, and led to a complex and eventually defunct treaty with Indonesia. In the post-1999 period, with the newly independent East Timorese, Australia's stance here seem to have the potential to cause ruptures within the emerging micro state. A key driver for Australia's policy has been its desire to avoid re-opening the whole EEZ negotiation with Indonesia, which had been resolved in clear treaties in the early 1970s on terms which today would be considered excessively favourable to Australia, as they acknowledged continental shelf arguments rather than median lines. For a government informed by realist precepts, these larger interests with Indonesia would lead to an Australian willingness to make a very substantial compromise on royalties in return of deferment of boundary issues with Timor L'Este, and it was surprising how intransigent Australia appeared to have become in this area.

In sum, these new regional engagements at the security and economic level in East Asia, and even the deepening of support for the internal stability of Pacific island states, could seem to be grounded in Australian interests for the most part, and to be broadly successful in achieving results supportive of those interests. Australia had arguably achieved much without the multilateral frameworks that had been so central to the Labor idea of regional engagement.

<sup>15</sup> R. Garnaut, *Australia and the Northeast Asian Ascendancy : Report to the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade* (Canberra, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> E. Wainwright, "Responding to State Failure — The Case of Australia and the Solomon Islands", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 57, 3 (2003).

<sup>17</sup> D. Flitton, "A Pacific Escape: Australia, the United States and the Solomon Islands", *AQ: Journal of Contemporary Analysis*, Vol. 75 4 (2003), pp. 6-8.

But in 2005, the multilateral issue returned to the table as new institutions were being established to respond to the importance of China to the regional economy of the larger East Asian world, and to the world economy. In 2005, the Howard Government began to campaign in earnest for its inclusion in the forthcoming East Asian summit, where the ASEAN 10 were to meet with China, Japan and South Korea. The wish reflected the view, popularised by Evans, that it is better to be the “odd man in” than the “odd man out”, in forums which may make decisions which impinge on Australia’s interests. Here nationalist symbolic gestures appear to have impeded reasonable prospects of inclusion, prospects which all the practical engagement activities and the post-tsunami assistance had facilitated. These gestures were the unwillingness to sign on to the ASEAN Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, and the occasional prime ministerial utterance about the right to launch pre-emptive attack. Together, these signals seem to be conveying the message (as was seen with the “Howard Doctrine”) that Australia claims more than the realist right to self-defence in its international relations that all states are entitled to claim. Regional opinion makers would be encouraged to interpret Australia’s signals in this light, especially as the self-defence argument by the US (and Australia) in relation to Iraq, which justified a preventive war, was now acknowledged by the US administration to have been taken on mistaken intelligence.

Australia’s unparalleled generosity in its response to the tsunami’s effects on Indonesia in 2005 may go some way towards Australia being accepted as a participant in multilateral talks. Yet this embracing signal at the social and community level seems to be partly counter to the effects of the distancing signals at the strategic level. A realist approach to Indonesia would avoid gestures of either extreme and look at more long term strategies for meeting the oft-discussed need for more “ballast” in the relationship. “No good deed goes unpunished” is a (realist) maxim that may need to be heeded, as Australians may become disappointed when acts of generosity by their government do not lead to instant solutions to the complex problems that emerge between different societies and cultures, including the severe punishments for those convicted of smuggling drugs.

#### **Iraq, ANZAC legends and defence policy**

The commitment in 2002, to join the invasion of Iraq in 2003, was firmly in the historical mould of Australia offering support for great and powerful friends, and in this case the absence of almost any other supporters was compensated for by the fact that Britain was so squarely on board. We could perhaps see here the Anglo-American alliance in a rare moment of joint action, which some Liberal ministers of the 1950s might have dreamed of. However the intervention lacked broad public support in Australia and it seemed that the majority was not convinced, despite the historical template in which it was cast. The post-Cold War climate made it difficult for government ministers who may have held the traditional realist position to present the insurance argument, rather than hint at it. Realists for whom forward defence is essentially about paying an insurance premium on future great power support for Australia in the event of a security crisis, are constrained in stating this as a main reason for going to war, even where it may be felt to be so. The very idea of insurance is predicated on the assumption that the great power may not support the smaller power unless premiums are paid, a statement which does not sit well with the declarations of shared values and shared purpose. It is also predicated on nominating other threats (from other states) than the one being addressed, a potentially offensive and

counterproductive exercise for a government in a period in which there were no obviously aggressive states in the region to point to.

If it was difficult for Liberal policy-makers to do much more than hint about the realist-insurance motive for supporting the war in official speeches, the message was nevertheless put out on the hustings that we could not expect the US to help us in a future security crisis in the future if we did not help them in theirs, and in any case it was also our vital interest because the idea of terrorists with WMD was a threat to us all. The overall justification of the war was cast in defensive realist terms even if the perspective on why Australia should be involved was muted.

The collapse of the official justification for the war as a necessary defence against the threat of the use of weapons of mass destruction is so well known it does not need to be restated here. The substitute idealistic cause of overthrowing an oppressive tyrant sounded hollow to anyone of realist inclination, given the routine tolerance of degrees of tyranny in countries that were strategic or economic partners, and also in light of the fragmented and conflict ridden society that emerged under the occupation of Iraq. Another justification was needed for the public, particularly if there were ongoing risks to the lives of Australians. The ANZAC legend, capable of being presented in a way that does not reflect on the purposes or ethics of particular wars, may fill an important gap in sustaining domestic support for an international commitment that the government felt obliged to escalate after the 2004 election.

Howard's thinking on ANZAC, wars and Australian values is deeply rooted and needs teasing out in relation to his deployment of the ANZAC legend. He is unashamedly nationalist, and his starting point seems to stem from Australia's experience of the First World War. His interpretation is one of a "coming of age" for Australia through involvement in the war, and an incipient sense of separateness from Britain that would develop gradually thereafter. This is how Howard, the self-confessed Burkean conservative, embraces nation-building. Gradual, evolving change thereafter, with the familiar, whiggish tone of maturation is how the Prime Minister describes what happened in the wake of the war. In his study of Howard's speeches, James Curran points to his eulogy for the last Australian Gallipoli veteran, Alec Campbell. The Prime Minister suggested that: "Within this one man's journey, we can chart the story of Australia itself. Within this one life are illustrated the living values that transformed Australia from the hopeful young federation of Alec's childhood to one of the great developed nations of the modern era."<sup>18</sup>

On Anzac Day 2005 Howard reiterated this equation of ANZAC with Australianness, recalling his delight at meeting Australian defence personnel helping survivors of the tsunami in Aceh: "To be reminded of just what wonderful people we have in our defence forces. Everything about them was so beautifully Australian. They were direct, they were friendly, they were tough, they were courageous but they were also compassionate."<sup>19</sup> He drew a straight line from these latter day ANZACs to those fallen soldiers he was remembering:

They epitomised everything about our way of life that we believe in and we treasure, their commitment, their decency, their love, their compassion, their cheekiness, their cheerfulness, all of those things that are so beautifully Australian. And so as we gather in the shadow of the greatest

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in James Curran, *The Power of Speech: Australian Prime Ministers Defining the National Image* (Melbourne, 2004), p. 243.

<sup>19</sup> Howard's Address on the National Day of Thanksgiving, Great Hall, Parliament House, Canberra, <http://www.pm.gov.au/news/speeches/speech1327.html> — accessed 1 June 2005.

national commemoration that we Australians mark, that is ANZAC Day, we give thanks to their lives. We offer our love, and our support, and our compassion to those that have been left behind. We thank them for what they have done in our name and we give thanks for their representation of the virtues and the values of the country we love so dearly, and the country they loved so dearly, and the country they died in the service of and in the service of all humanity.<sup>20</sup>

There is an echo here, of Menzies' organic language, especially his idealised concept of moral order and cohesion in international affairs. In Menzies' case, such order revolved around the British empire. For Howard, Britain can no longer play that central, organising role in international affairs, but it represents a potent legacy, namely his sense of himself and his fellow Liberals as standard bearers of accumulated wisdom from the British world. There should never be a sense of "disconnect between foreign policy and national values", and those national values flow from Australia's identity as "a Western country". This is the type of language that is often used to frame discussions of Australia's vibrant bilateral and regional relationships with Asian countries, which are very "different" from Australia.<sup>21</sup> In a speech to the Lowy Institute in March 2005 Howard even insisted that Australia did not have to make a choice between the oft-mentioned pair of opposing determinants, history and geography, in its overseas outlook. We had arrived at a time when we could do both: history's legacy was the global outlook, which was still crucial, as "we are a Western liberal democracy with a profound interest in the structures and ideas that govern the international system". Australia's most immediate interests and responsibilities would, however, be in the region.<sup>22</sup>

Howard's construction of his nation-leading task at home provided a resource to turn to when committing the nation to war. As Judith Brett has described, Howard has been one of the most imaginative of contemporary Liberals for building his sense of leading the *nation*. He has achieved this by a double-act of eschewing class differences and sectional interests while melding familiar nationalist symbols taken from the ANZAC and bush legends with modern day preoccupations: the "battlers" translated from pioneers to those trying to make good in suburbia; and the "mateship" woven seamlessly from Gallipoli to practical forms of help for indigenous Australians rather than anything more symbolic, addressing their past losses and injustices.<sup>23</sup> In capturing vernacular nationalism, Howard has been able to build popularity for a society that gives priority to values with lineage rather than bold social or cultural innovation, and for government management of "national interests" ahead of sectional ones. In this picture, apparent sources of internal conflict can be marginalised.

In a perceptive piece on Howard's embrace of the theatre surrounding troop farewells and welcome home events, Mark McKenna has argued that Howard has donned khaki to shape public discourse on Australia's involvement in the war on Iraq. For his usurping the former role of the Governor-General as spokesperson at such events, he has simultaneously refashioned his role to one more akin to an American President. And references to Australian soldiers, whether those fighting in Iraq or those who fought in past wars, blend into the one common theme of valour:

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Howard's address to the AsiaLink-ANU National Forum, "Australia's Engagement with Asia: A New Paradigm", 13 August 2004, <http://www.pm.gov.au/news/speeches/speech1069.html> — accessed 2 June 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Howard's Address to the Lowy Institute for International Policy, "Australia in the World", 31 March 2005, <http://www.pm.gov.au/news/speeches/speech1290.html> — accessed 2 June 2005.

<sup>23</sup> J. Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class* (Cambridge, 2003).

Like the Anzac Day parade, the ethos of the welcome-home parades under Howard is entirely uncritical and deeply conservative. All wars become one. The distinction between the volunteer citizen soldier, the conscript and the professional soldier is lost. Veterans from World War II and Vietnam join the crowds to cheer the marchers on. The specific political, legal and social context of each is forgotten. What matters is not only why we fought but that we fought. Performance, duty and sacrifice above all else — 'Advance Australia Fair'.<sup>24</sup>

For the Liberal tradition of a realism, which is a perspective on how a small country achieves security by pursuing an alliance with a more powerful one, the most fundamental dilemma arises if the great power sets off a course in which it is passionately committed, but which strikes Australia as misguided. To stand against the great power on the basis of rational argument risks jeopardising the longer term relationship with a country that wants and expects a supportive chorus. Owen Harries used the ABC Boyer lectures to mount a realist critique of the capture of US policy by a neo-conservative movement, leading to the pursuit of high risk and unobtainable objectives.<sup>25</sup> It may seem remarkable how little debate there seems to have been on this matter within the Liberal Party, given its tradition of realism, with former prime minister Fraser as a notable exception. This is partly explained by the fact that the initial case for war was made in defensive realist terms about the dangers of WMD, and the idea that this case was based on false intelligence was not contemplated. The broad argument fitted the realist template, even if the US view of imminent threat seemed exaggerated.

It was only later, as the WMD rationale collapsed, that the question of legitimisation required a new framework, and where ANZAC themes have been most directly deployed. The Howard government was greatly assisted here in 2004 in containing Iraq as an election issue by the tactical mistake of the ALP leader Mark Latham in making "troops out by Christmas" the focus of the political debate. This cleared the way for the "cut and run" riposte, a quintessential ANZAC theme that could be utilised throughout the campaign. At the time of writing, the Iraq crisis was far from resolved, and with more Australians exposed to increasing risk, the limits of the ANZAC theme as a legitimating story was still to be tested. It was also difficult to see how Costello, or any of Howard's potential successors as leader, could deploy nationalist symbols in a similar way. His successor may have to confront the dilemma in a more direct way: explain the commitment as motivated primarily by a desire to support the Australian-US alliance, or attempt the extrication of Australian troops without alienating the United States.

### Defence Doctrine and Realism Confirmed

An important conceptual debate developed within Liberal ministerial circles in the aftermath of the Iraq commitment, a debate over defence doctrine. The argument was put forward by the Defence Minister Senator Robert Hill, that Australia's "Defence of Australia" doctrine, as set out in a series of White Papers, was outdated, based on obsolete concepts of geographical determinism and the proximity of threats.<sup>26</sup> New security challenges could occur anywhere in the world and Australia needed to develop the mobility to meet those threats anywhere in the world. Moreover the US had reached

<sup>24</sup> M. McKenna, "Howard's Warriors", in R. Gaita, ed., *Why the War was Wrong* (Melbourne, 2003), pp. 182-83.

<sup>25</sup> O. Harries, *Benign or Imperial? : Reflections on American Hegemony* (Sydney, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> R. Hill, *Beyond the White Paper: Strategic Directions for Defence*, Address to the Defence and Strategic Studies Course, Australian Defence College, Canberra, 18 June, 2002.

an unsurpassable level in military technology. These factors would mean structuring forces, not for geographically based defence, but to fit in more seamlessly with those of the United States. Other supporters of the idea would describe this, in neutral tones, as an expeditionary approach, and would find further evidence for its need in both the pattern of distant peacekeeping that Australia had been involved in and in the nature of the “new security challenges” Australia was likely to face, whether terrorism, pandemics, WMD proliferators.<sup>27</sup> This was far more than a return to “forward defence”, the name given to the military component of an alliance foreign policy strategy in the 1950s and 1960s, aimed at meeting threats in Asia before they reached “Australia’s shores”. In the last thirty-five years, and longer, the Liberal Party has supported the evolution of the Defence of Australia doctrine as expected by the US itself since the enunciation of its Guam Doctrine of 1969.

The dangers of the development of an expeditionary defence doctrine from a realist perspective are that it undermines the practical and ethical foundation for the use of force in foreign relations — self-defence. From the practitioner perspective, this would leave Australia with a military force comprising a series of components designed to be interoperable with the forces of others internationally without being interoperable in the most effective way nationally. Australia’s capacity for self-reliant defence would be diminished. Australia has lived through the experience of the decline of one powerful protector, etched in the national psyche with the bombing of Darwin and the collapse of Singapore. The post-ANZAC “lesson” here is that, while in a period of US military pre-eminence the expeditionary option may seem attractive, the support of an otherwise engaged powerful friend in Australia’s local crisis cannot be assured. Indeed, this seemed the case in early 1999 over East Timor. Furthermore, the expeditionary approach would create annexes to US forces which the US might then expect to be able to use in any conflict in which it was involved, with less tolerance for a separate Australian consideration of its national interests.<sup>28</sup> It deepens the entrapment-abandonment dilemma of small powers in alliance with larger ones.<sup>29</sup>

Such a proposed shift also undermines the ethical foundations of realism, in which self-defence is the fundamental justification for maintaining armed forces, and for using them, whether alone or to assist allies in their defence. Interestingly, despite some ANZAC overtones in the expeditionary position, and the seeming resonance with the realities of the Iraq venture, Howard overruled the Defence Minister’s bid and reiterated commitment to the Defence of Australia doctrine. It is likely that Howard’s successors would do the same. Liberal departures from realism have been episodic, even impulsive, illustrated by the fact that both the apparent doctrinal innovations, as “US deputy” and asserting the right to “pre-emption” existed largely in media comments and in parliamentary theatrics, and were not set out in statements of national strategy. *Defence of Australia* remained the strategic doctrine, grounded in a realist framework of self-defence, self-reliance and instrumental alliance formation in the national interest.

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<sup>27</sup> A. Dupont, “Transformation or Stagnation? Rethinking Australia’s Defence”, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 57, 1 (2003), pp. 55-76.

<sup>28</sup> H. White, “Australian Defence Policy and the Possibility of War”, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 56, 2 (2002), pp. 253-64; P. Dibb, “Does Australia Need a New Defence Policy?”, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, RSPAS, ANU, *Viewpoint* (June 2003) [http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/sdsc/viewpoint/paper\\_030811.pdf](http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/sdsc/viewpoint/paper_030811.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> See R. Leaver, “The Meanings, Origins and Implications of the ‘Howard Doctrine’” for a discussion of these terms.