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Australia's International Defence Relationships with the United States, Indonesia and New Zealand

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Dr Richard Brabin-Smith, AO, joined the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University as a Visiting Fellow in 2003, after some thirty years in the Department of Defence. He had held many senior positions in Defence, including Deputy Secretary for Strategic Policy, Chief Defence Scientist, First Assistant Secretary for International Policy, and First Assistant Secretary for Force Development and Analysis. He was a member of the Dibb Review team in the mid-1980s, and a member of the Defence Efficiency Review in the late 1990s. Dr Brabin-Smith has broad interests in Australian and international security policy. His Working Paper 396, entitled *The Heartland of Australia's Defence Policies*, was published by the SDSC in April 2005. This paper represents the author's views alone. It has been drawn entirely from open sources, and has no official status or endorsement.

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolution of Australia's international defence relations with the United States, Indonesia and New Zealand over the past 30 years.

With respect to the United States, much has changed in the overall context, such as the end of the Cold War and the increase in concerns about terrorism. Nevertheless, from a policy perspective, there is little from the last 30 years that does not continue to be relevant. Such continuities include: the shared values and interests for which ANZUS is the emblem; recognition that America's strengths are both unsurpassed and finite; the policy conclusion that Australia needs to retain both the ability to act without direct support from the United States and the ability to contribute to US-led coalitions; the benefits of Australia's privileged access to US Defense; the importance of the United States *not* leaving a security vacuum in the Asia-Pacific; and continuing concerns over potential flash-points such as Taiwan and North Korea. Aside from the end of the Cold War, the biggest *discontinuity* in Asia Pacific has been the rise of China, bringing with it the need for active management by nations to help reduce the prospect of armed tension.

With respect to Indonesia, the political context has changed from one that was tainted to some extent by legacies from the erratic behaviour of the Soekarno regime, to acknowledgement of the benefits of the stability of the authoritarian Soeharto regime, to a welcoming of the processes of democratisation in Indonesia. The latter was tempered by tensions arising from Indonesian perceptions of Australia's role in East Timor's independence. Policy continuities have included the recurring themes of shared strategic interests and the importance of Indonesia for Australian—and indeed regional—security. An overall conclusion is that Australia's strategic geography demands that we continue to build on our common interests and perspectives with Indonesia and to manage the differences and difficulties that from time to time will inevitably arise.

In many respects, the defence and security relationship between Australia and New Zealand has continued to be positive and straightforward. There are nevertheless some important differences, the most significant arising from New Zealand's policies with respect to nuclear weapons and nuclear-powered warships. Differences have also opened up on defence policy more generally. Neither the United States nor New Zealand seem likely to change their respective policies on nuclear matters, so Australia, as an ally of both countries, will have to continue to find ways to manage the issue. The interests that Australia and New Zealand share with respect to the South Pacific serve to emphasise the importance of interoperability between the two countries' armed forces.

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Australia's International Defence Relationships with the United States, Indonesia and New Zealand

Richard Brabin-Smith

Introduction

This working paper is the second to be published as part of a larger project to examine the evolution of Australia's defence policy over the past thirty to thirty-five years—that is, since the changes in policy that governments put in place following Australia's withdrawal from the war in Vietnam. The paper looks at three examples of how Australia's international defence relationships have evolved over this period: those with the United States, Indonesia, and New Zealand.

The paper draws primarily on the four Defence White Papers published over the period under review: 1976, 1987, 1984 and 2000. Other sources include the versions of the strategic reviews desensitised for public release and published in 1989, 1993 and 1997, discussions with colleagues on some specific points, and the author's own recollections from his involvement in defence policy issues over much of this period.

The United States

The defence relationship between Australia and the United States is characterised by its depth and complexity. Such characteristics pose challenges to attempts at analysis, and further, many of the issues or points of emphasis have changed over the years, although such evolution is of interest in itself. Not least because it is the most recent comprehensive official statement on the matter, this paper builds on the framework used in *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force* (the 2000 White Paper), although in a different order (Undertakings for Mutual Support, Bilateral Cooperation, and US Engagement in the Region), and includes a separate examination of strategic stability, the nuclear balance and related matters. It starts however with some observations on the changing context for the Australia-US relationship.

The Changing Context

The context for *Australian Defence* (the 1976 White Paper) included the enunciation of the 'Guam Doctrine' in 1969 by US President Nixon, the severe reversal experienced by the US-led coalition in Vietnam in the early 1970s, and the recognition that the military component of Britain's centuries-old interest in Australia's region was by now much reduced and would fall yet further. Perhaps this is why the 1976 White Paper sets almost an apprehensive tone. Australia, it seems to say, is close to being alone, and on some occasions might prove to be very lonely: 'Remote from Europe, we now have one significant alliance—the ANZUS Treaty, with New Zealand and the United States. Both countries are important to us; but it is prudent to remind ourselves that the United States has many diverse interests and obligations.'¹

The context for *The Defence of Australia 1987* (the 1987 White Paper) included a new and specific aspect: US concern that Australia might feel tempted down the same path towards neutrality (in US eyes) that New Zealand had already taken with its policies that imposed restrictions on visits by nuclear-powered and nuclear-capable ships. Given that by then the Labor Government of Bob Hawke had conducted its review of the ANZUS Treaty, reaffirming it without noticeable equivocation, and, four years into its period of office, was demonstrating a generally pro-US sentiment, it is not clear why the United States was so apprehensive.

Nevertheless, representations from the US government had the effect of there being included in the 1987 White Paper clear statements about Australia's unequivocal membership of the US-led 'Western' community of like-minded nations. Two examples out of many will suffice here: 'This policy of defence self-reliance is pursued within a framework of alliances and agreements. The most significant of these is with the United States',² and 'Australia's alliance with the United States is and should remain a genuinely equal partnership. Benefits accrue to both of us from our enhancement of the general Western security position.'³

A major new context for *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994* (the 1994 White Paper) was the end of the Cold War and its consequences for the Australia-US alliance. An Australian concern—but short of an obsession—was that US interest in Australia might now wane. This White Paper goes to some lengths to reaffirm the alliance's continuing centrality, as the following extracts illustrate:

Our treaty relationship with the United States, although more than four decades old, continues to be a key element of our defence policy. It serves Australian, US and regional interests.⁴

The alliance will continue to serve the interests of both [Australia and the United States]. The United States will benefit from Australia's support: we are closely engaged in regional affairs and sympathetic to most American values and interests. More broadly, the alliance strongly supports the United States' continued strategic presence in the Western Pacific, which is of major strategic interest both for the United States and Australia, and for others in the region.⁵

Yet the nature and perception of American interests and the capabilities of US forces will change. American expectations of the alliance will change with them, as the previous emphasis on alliance cohesion against the Soviet Bloc is replaced by a more complex and evolving US posture. ... Increasingly, as we seek security in and with Asia, we will value our alliance with the United States not just for the contribution it makes to Australia's own defence, but also for its broader contribution to regional security.⁶

The 2000 White Paper also gives emphasis to the enduring centrality of the alliance: 'For the past 50 years ANZUS has given the relationship shape, depth and weight. The Treaty remains today the foundation of a relationship that is one of our great national assets'.⁷ Three further general points made in the 2000 White Paper deserve mention. The first is the important reminder that the ANZUS Treaty is strong because it reflects, and builds on, values and interests that Australia and the United States have in common: 'The renewed vigour of the US-Australia alliance is founded on enduring shared values, interests and outlook, as well as common sacrifices that extend back almost a century'.⁸ (The 1994 White Paper makes a similar point.⁹)

The second point is a reflection that US power and influence have limitations as well as strengths. On the one hand, the United States has a preponderance of military capability and strategic influence. This primacy supports a generally stable strategic environment, which most nations acknowledge serves their interests, including in the Asia Pacific.¹⁰ But on the other hand, the US global role may come under pressure if the issue at hand has insufficient weight for the United States to support the costs, including duration, casualties and international criticism. Further, while its global power would remain unchallenged for some decades, the United States 'could become obstructed and frustrated at the regional level'.¹¹

Finally, the 2000 White Paper puts in a plea to remember the importance of the independence of Australia's foreign policy and interests: 'At times, of course, the United States and Australia will differ in our approaches to issues, or on the priority we give them. When that happens, it is important that Australia has an ability to pursue our interests independently'.¹²

Undertakings for Mutual Support

Much ink has been spilt over the years in arguments about what the ANZUS Treaty 'would mean' in the event of armed conflict in the Asia Pacific region. The different treatments of this topic in the White Papers under analysis reflect in part the particular complexion of the public debate at the time. Nevertheless, some themes persist, at least in part.

In particular, however, is the central judgement that, while Australia would welcome and could expect US military support in the event of a serious attack on Australia, Australian governments were not going to follow policies which presumed that such assistance would always or automatically be available.

The 1976 White Paper sets the scene:

Our alliance with the US gives substantial grounds for confidence that in the event of a fundamental threat to Australia's security, US military support would be forthcoming. However, ... we owe it to ourselves to be able to mount a national defence effort that would maximise the risks and costs of any aggression.¹³

It is not our policy, nor would it be prudent, to rely on US help in all circumstances. Indeed it is possible to envisage a range of situations in which the threshold of direct US combat involvement could be quite high. This is as it should be.¹⁴

The 1987 White Paper continues in a similar vein:

The defence relationship with the United States gives confidence that in the event of a fundamental threat to Australia's security, US military support would be forthcoming. Short of this major, and less likely situation, we could face a range of other threats that we should expect to handle independently. It is not this Government's policy to rely on combat assistance from the United States in all circumstances.¹⁵

By the time of the 1994 White Paper, the tone of the argument has become less didactic and more descriptive:

Australia's self-reliant defence policy requires that our defence capabilities enable us to defend Australia without depending on combat help from other countries. It follows that we do not rely for our defence on combat assistance from the United States. Nonetheless, the undertakings in the ANZUS Treaty, and the United States' strong record of standing by allies, mean that we would expect substantial and invaluable help in a crisis.¹⁶

The coloration is changed yet further in the 2000 White Paper:

We believe that, if Australia were attacked, the United States would provide substantial help, including with armed force. We would seek and welcome such help. But we will not depend on it to the extent of assuming that US combat forces would be provided to make up for any deficiencies in our capabilities to defend our territory. A healthy alliance should not be a relationship of dependency, but of mutual help.¹⁷

There are in addition other aspects that get mention in only some of the White Papers.

First, the 1987 and 1994 documents both observe that a potential adversary would need to consider that the United States could well come to Australia's aid, even if Australia itself would not make such an assumption: 'While it is prudent for our planning to assume that the threshold for direct United States combat aid to Australia could be quite high in some circumstances, it would be unwise for an adversary to base its planning on the same assumption',¹⁸ and '[the expectation of substantial US help] would seriously complicate the planning of any potential adversary'.¹⁹

Second, the 1987 and 1994 White Papers make it clear that the terms of the ANZUS Treaty oblige Australia to make provision for its own defence: *

Australia's alliances with the United States and other nations impose upon us the obligation to provide for our own defence. This obligation is spelled out in Article II of the ANZUS Treaty, and American expectations in this regard have been stressed by US administrations since the late 1960s.²⁰

Our alliance with the United States does not mean we can expect it to provide for our defence. Indeed, that alliance obliges us to provide effectively for our own defence.²¹

* Article II of the ANZUS Treaty reads: 'In order more effectively to achieve the objective of this Treaty the Parties separately and jointly by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.'

Third is the mutuality of support. This is made explicit—and quite vivid—in only the 2000 White Paper:

The US-Australia alliance will continue to be founded on our mutual undertakings to support each other in time of need. These undertakings are stated clearly in the ANZUS Treaty, which does not commit either of us in advance to specific types of action, but which does provide clear expectations of support.²²

Australia's undertakings in the ANZUS Treaty to support the United States are as important as US undertakings to support Australia. Those undertakings reflect Australia's strong interests in sustaining a strong US presence in the Asia Pacific region.²³

It would be a mistake to conclude that the potential for Australia to contribute to US-led coalitions had been excluded from Government thinking until the time of the 2000 White Paper. It is clear from the other White Papers, both in their general discussion of how the force structure would allow such options (see *The Heartland of Australia's Defence Policies* by the author)²⁴, and from explicit mention, that this was not the case. For example, the 1976 White Paper comments that 'Australian self-reliance would enable us to contribute effectively to any combined future operations with the US'²⁵, and the 1987 White Paper observes that 'our guided missile frigates ... are capable of effective participation in a US carrier battle group well distant from Australia's shores'.²⁶

Nevertheless, it would also be a mistake to regard this change of sentiment (no matter how subtle), expressed before the terrorist incidents in September 2001, as being merely the consequence of a difference in drafting style. It is more significant than that.

Bilateral Co-operation

All four White Papers cover similar ground with respect to the considerable—some say irreplaceable—bilateral benefit that Australia receives from the alliance. The 1976 White Paper provides a useful summary and reference point:

Many important practical advantages flow to Australia from its defence relations with the United States. These include assistance to Australia—unique in comprehensiveness and quality—in intelligence, defence science and technology, military staff contacts regarding tactical doctrine and operational procedures, and military exercising with forces using high technology which is not otherwise available.²⁷

The 1987 White Paper builds on this by commenting that the arrangements enhance self-reliance (the 1994 White Paper makes a similar point)²⁸, and by including regular high level consultations, and communications and logistics co-operation among the benefits.²⁹

The 2000 White Paper goes yet further, commenting that 'The kind of ADF [Australian Defence Force] that we need is not achievable without the technology access provided by the US alliance', and expressing the expectation that practical co-operation will continue to grow, not least because of the opportunities and imperatives associated with new technology on the modern battlefield.³⁰

US Engagement in the Region

The treatment of US engagement in the region reflects—not surprisingly—the passage from the certainties of the Cold War to the more fluid situation of today. Yet at one level, many of the issues remained constant over this period and are with us still—an enduring consequence of strategic geography, historical cultural and nationalistic rivalries, and competition for influence and hegemony.

The 1976 White Paper provides an important point of reference. First, it draws an important and cautionary conclusion from the defeat of the United States in Vietnam: ‘There must be large questions about the circumstances that could move the US Administration and Congress to agree to become militarily involved [in Southeast Asia] again, particularly with ground forces’.³¹

Second, the 1976 White Paper describes and makes judgements on the state of international relationships and interests in North East Asia. Many of the concerns and cautions remain relevant today.

US involvement [in North East Asia] is related principally to Japan and the Republic of South Korea. Hostilities between China and the USSR, or hostilities in Korea or regarding Taiwan could disrupt the equilibrium between the US, USSR and China, and stimulate changes in the defence policy of Japan.³²

Renewed war in Korea would carry serious risk of escalation and nuclear conflict. All powers involved in the region have major interests in avoidance of this. China is at present pursuing its claim to Taiwan by political means. ... Japan appears most unlikely to change its long-standing policy of limiting its military development. We expect this policy to continue, so long, at least, as regional developments do not risk Japan’s security, and the security alliance with the US continues to command Japan’s confidence and support.³³

In contrast, the treatment of these issues in the 1987 White Paper is almost parenthetical:

It should not be thought that the Government is indifferent to military developments elsewhere in the Indian Ocean and Pacific areas [that is, beyond our immediate region]. The situation of major trading partners such as Japan, an understanding of all the interests pursued by the United States in the Pacific and our own developing relations with China are all of substantial interest to the Government.³⁴

The end of the Cold War gave rise to the need for the 1994 White Paper to discuss the changing strategic landscape of Asia and the Pacific more extensively, and to speculate on the possible consequences.

- It comments that China’s economic growth would likely have a dominant effect on the strategic framework of Asia and the Pacific, and that this growth had already allowed China to increase its military capabilities; much would depend on how other nations perceived China and on how China itself chose to behave.³⁵
- Whether more of Japan’s already huge strategic potential would translate into military power, or whether its defence posture would change in other ways, would depend on how it perceived the capabilities and dispositions of its neighbours, and especially on its confidence in its security alliance with the United States.³⁶

- Developments on the Korean Peninsula could include re-unification and the North Korean nuclear issue; these would have significant impact on the wider region, including with respect to the policies and posture of the United States, which in turn could affect the posture of such countries as Japan.³⁷

The 1994 White Paper concludes that, as a result of the post-Cold War changes, the strategic affairs of Asia would be increasingly determined by the countries of the region themselves, and that the stability that the Cold War imposed would be replaced by a more fluid and complex environment. A number of factors suggested that a new strategic balance would emerge to underpin peace and security, including through the development of new regional security processes. However, ethnic and national tensions, economic rivalry, disappointed aspirations for prosperity, religious or racial conflict, or other problems, could lead to an unstable and dangerous strategic situation.³⁸

What does this mean for judgements on the United States? The 1994 White Paper comments to the effect that, with its strong military presence in the Western Pacific, the United States 'will remain strategically engaged in Asia for as far ahead as we can see'³⁹; nevertheless, while the United States would continue to make a major contribution to the security of Asia and the Pacific, its engagement was changing; although the United States would remain the strongest global power, the relative military strength of others in Asia would grow over time; and the United States would neither seek nor accept primary responsibility for maintaining peace and stability in the region.⁴⁰

With respect to Australia's alliance with the United States, the 1994 White Paper observes that the alliance helped to sustain the US engagement in the region, which supported our interests and those of the region as a whole.⁴¹ But it also cautions that 'Our defence relationship will require careful management. With the passing of Cold War certainties, we will need to work hard to make sure that the alliance continues to meet the needs of both parties'.⁴²

The 2000 White Paper is forthright in stating the importance to Australia of the US commitment to regional stability:

One of the main benefits we seek from the alliance is the support it gives to sustained US engagement in the Asia Pacific region. The alliance is important to the United States as one of the key elements of its network of Asia Pacific bilateral alliances that also includes Japan, Korea, Thailand and the Philippines, as well as close defence relationships with other important regional powers such as Singapore. This network of alliances and close strategic relationships is at the heart of the US strategic posture in Asia, and is thus central to regional stability. This serves key Australian interests and objectives.⁴³

It observes further that the nature of the relationships between China, Japan, India, Russia and the United States is the most critical issue for the security of the Asia Pacific region, and that the United States is likely to face tough issues in its relationship with China. The United States and China recognise the need to manage their relationship effectively, not least because of the consequences of getting it wrong, and notwithstanding continuing tensions over Taiwan.⁴⁴ Australia's strategic dialogue with China provides an opportunity to discuss

such hard issues as 'different perceptions of the value and importance of the US role in the region'.⁴⁵

Overall, the 2000 White Paper concludes that the role of the United States 'will be critical in maintaining security' in the Asia Pacific region over the coming decades.⁴⁶ But it also cautions that 'we should not take the health of our alliance with the United States for granted. We will need to work hard with the United States to ensure its continuing viability and relevance in a period of change'.⁴⁷

In summary, there was both change and continuity in the Asia Pacific region over the period under analysis. The most obvious changes relate to the ending of the Cold War and the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the rise of China, and a reduction in the relative strength and authority of the United States. Arguably, some of the latter was due to reduced levels of authoritarianism in such countries as South Korea and Taiwan and the associated strengthening of democratic processes and economic activity. In terms of Australian policy, the two most recent White Papers make strong points about the need for Australia to work hard to keep the alliance in good shape in these changed and more fluid circumstances.⁴⁸

Yet there are also some persistent themes; primary amongst these is Australia's recognition that US engagement is central to continuing stability in the Asia Pacific—and hence a key Australian interest. On a particular matter, the White Papers back to 1976 have all expressed the view that Japan would be less inclined to restrain its military potential should its confidence in its security alliance with the United States suffer serious erosion.

And while the prospect of hostilities between China and the Soviet Union or Russia is no longer a central concern, the other potential hot spots of North Korea, with its worsening nuclear dimension, and Taiwan are with us still. Whether the new regional security mechanisms that the 1994 White Paper posited would emerge will prove able to contribute to the peaceful resolution of these and other sources of tension is yet to be seen.

Strategic Stability and the Nuclear Balance

The 1976 White Paper reminds the reader of the threat of communism and the Soviet Union in particular. On the one hand, 'the USSR has long ceased to command the undisputed political pre-eminence and leadership it enjoyed in earlier years'.⁴⁹ And the communist movement 'is not the monolith that so concerned western leaders in the earlier post-war era'.⁵⁰ On the other hand, 'A most significant event has been the massive build-up undertaken by the USSR in both its nuclear and conventional armaments. The USSR has achieved essential nuclear strategic equivalence with the US and competes with the US as a global power'.⁵¹ And increases on this scale 'leave questions about Soviet motivation unanswered'.⁵²

Given the judgement that 'Military conflict between [the US and USSR] would risk widespread devastation by nuclear weapons.'⁵³, it is not surprising that the 1976 White Paper observes that 'All nations' interests, including Australia's, are served by relations between the US and the USSR which offer mutual advantage and in which neither exploits the other's difficulties.'⁵⁴

Expressing further concern, the 1976 White Paper comments that '[if continuing] large scale Soviet military development ... cannot be slowed down or stabilised it must be countered'.⁵⁵ The paper concludes that 'The ability of the US to match the USSR [in the Indian Ocean littoral] and establish a restraining influence is important. For this reason, we support the present US program for modest development of the facilities at Diego Garcia.'⁵⁶

Consistent with the spirit of the times, the 1976 White Paper makes but fleeting reference to the Joint Facilities, where it comments that Australia's co-operation with the United States 'includes the joint maintenance of defence-related facilities on Australian soil'.⁵⁷

The 1987 White Paper continues the theme of the need to balance the power of the Soviet Union:

Australia is part of the Western community of nations. Australia therefore supports the ability of the United States to retain an effective strategic balance of power with the Soviet Union. A redistribution of power in favour of the Soviet Union in the central balance, or an extension of Soviet influence in our region at the expense of the United States, would be a matter of fundamental concern to Australia, and would be contrary to our national interests.⁵⁸

The 1987 White Paper goes to some lengths to set out the importance of the Joint Australian-US Facilities to the stability of the strategic balance between the United States and the Soviet Union.* It comments that 'Australia's security, like that of all nations, ultimately depends on preserving stability in the superpower relationship and avoiding war between them, above all nuclear war.'⁵⁹ It then elaborates on the importance of highly reliable systems to communicate with US nuclear submarines (as part of the US deterrent force), to provide early warning and intelligence, and to verify arms limitation measures, with all these systems contributing to stability.⁶⁰

The paper expresses the firm view that the benefits of the Joint Facilities outweigh the costs, including the associated risk that, in the remote event of nuclear conflict between the superpowers, the facilities could themselves come under attack—the first time that this had been stated in public.⁶¹

* At the time, the Joint Facilities consisted of Pine Gap near Alice Springs, used for intelligence collection including for arms control verification, Nurrungar near Woomera, then a ground station for the Defense Support Program which used infra-red satellite detection to give early warning of the launch of ballistic missiles, and the North West Cape Communication Station used for radio transmissions to submarines. In 1999, North West Cape became an Australian defence facility to which the United States was given continued access, and Nurrungar closed, with its function being replaced by a relay ground station collocated at Pine Gap. The 1994 White Paper provides a useful summary.⁶²

By the time of the 1994 White Paper, the Soviet Union had disappeared, and the Cold War had ended.⁶³ There was nevertheless a continuing concern about the possibility of nuclear war, no matter how distant or unlikely:

Our alliance with the United States retains a more specific significance in relation to the remote prospect of a nuclear threat to Australia. The end of the Cold War has reduced the danger of global nuclear war, and concern that US-Australian Joint Defence Facilities in Australia might have become nuclear targets in a global war has receded. Nevertheless, the use of nuclear weapons remains possible, especially if they continue to proliferate. ... Consequently, we will continue to support the maintenance by the United States of a nuclear capability adequate to ensure that it can deter nuclear threats against allies like Australia.⁶⁴

Consistent with this concern, the 1994 White Paper mentions the value of the Joint Defence Facilities to the interests of both Australia and the United States and their contribution to global security. A specific point is that the Defense Support Program, for which Nurrungar was then a ground station, had value both to provide reassurance against the residual possibility of major Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile attack, but increasingly also to detect and defend against shorter range tactical missiles of the kind used in the Gulf War.⁶⁵

Russia gets mentioned in effect only in passing; while remaining strategically important in North-East Asia, it was likely to be more preoccupied with its internal affairs and problems in other former Soviet republics than with affecting the strategic balance in Asia and the Pacific.⁶⁶

The 2000 White Paper continues the theme of nuclear deterrence:

[The one important exception to self reliance is that] Australia relies on the extended nuclear deterrence provided by US nuclear forces to deter the remote possibility of any nuclear attack on Australia.⁶⁷

And while the Joint Facilities get no mention, there is acknowledgement of the central role of intelligence co-operation and sharing.⁶⁸

The 2000 White Paper reminds the reader that Russia has significant interests in the Asia Pacific region, particularly in Northeast Asia, and that how it develops its improving relationships with China and India will be important to the future strategic dynamics of the Asia Pacific region.⁶⁹ It comments further that, in 1998, Australia established strategic dialogue with Russia, and welcomed the opportunity to compare notes on a range of topics relating to security issues, especially in Northeast Asia.⁷⁰

Thus, from having been a cause for acute concern in 1976, Russia had moved by 2000 to being a welcomed dialogue partner with shared interests in the stability of Asia-Pacific.

An Overall Perspective

From a policy perspective, there is little from the last thirty years that does not continue to command relevance for today and for well into the foreseeable future.

The strength of Australia's relationship with the United States lies in shared values, interests and outlook, supported by common sacrifice and endeavour over many decades. This is the enduring foundation of the ANZUS Treaty and for which ANZUS has become the emblem. Of course, such shared values, interests and outlooks underpin Australia's relationships with many other countries as well, and these too will endure.

The economic and military strength of the United States continues to keep it in a class different from all other contenders, even though over the very long term it would be rash to say that this position will remain unassailable. Yet for all its strengths, there are limits to what the United States is able to achieve, and its interests are many. And both the Australian and US governments have ultimately to have regard to what their respective publics would be prepared to bear. Australia and the United States will not always agree on issues or priorities, and it remains a critical policy conclusion that Australia should have the independence of means to advance or protect its own interests.

Nowhere is this argument for independence of action more compelling than in the ideas wrapped up in the concept of 'self-reliance in the Defence of Australia'. In spite of some public questioning of this policy in recent years, the arguments in its favour have a coherence and cogency that have yet to be matched by any alternative set of propositions, and the current Government has made clear its continuing commitment to the policy principles of its 2000 White Paper.*

This means that the approach analysed earlier in this paper under the heading of *Mutual Support* will continue to be relevant: Australia would not rely on combat support from the United States, but would welcome it if offered, and this possibility—even likelihood—would complicate the calculus of any rational potential adversary.

* In a wide-ranging and widely-reported address in June 2002 at the Australian Defence College, the then Defence Minister Senator Robert Hill said 'It probably never made sense to conceptualise our security interests as a series of diminishing concentric circles around our coastline, but it certainly does not do so now' (*Beyond the White Paper: Strategic Directions for Defence*, 18 June 2002). Whatever Senator Hill might have intended by this statement, it served to set a lot of hares running. In particular, those who had never accepted governments' policies focusing on the 'Defence of Australia' appeared to believe that they now had a champion who would support their cause. But the Government appears still to stand by the policy principles set out in *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*. For example, at the launch of the *2005 Defence Update* in December 2005, Prime Minister John Howard made it clear that the Update did not represent a major departure from the White Paper, although it did provide some sharper precision and sharper definition (Prime Ministerial transcript from 15 December 2005). Nevertheless, some ambiguities remain and the revisionist hares continue to run. See also Richard Brabin-Smith, *The Heartland of Australia's Defence Policies*, Working Paper 396, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, April 2005.

It was prescient of the 2000 White Paper to give emphasis to the *mutuality* of obligation under the ANZUS Treaty; less than a year after the White Paper's publication, the Australian Government invoked the Treaty and offered its support to the United States as a consequence of the terrorist attacks in Washington and New York in September 2001. Behind the symbolism of this action lay acknowledgement of shared values and a common danger to our shared interests, and recognition that the capacity of the United States to take the lead in response to such circumstances is unmatched. In spite of the debate as to how transient the US 'unipolar moment' might prove, or how soon or in what way it might become eclipsed, it remains the case that the United States will retain more military capacity, and the political will to use it, than other contenders for a long time yet.

And it will continue to be important for Australia to retain a capacity to contribute to US-led coalitions when it is in our interests to do so.*

The benefits associated with Australia's privileged and extensive access to the security machinery of the United States are also likely to retain their importance—across the wide spectrum of defence and security policy, science and technology, intelligence, logistics, doctrine and operations. Perhaps these benefits will grow, as the battlefield becomes increasingly complex (especially with the increasingly-large number of areas driven by modern electronics and information technology), and as the United States continues to outpace all others with its high levels of investment in defence Research and Development.

With respect to Asia Pacific, it will continue to be strongly in Australia's interest for the United States to remain committed to the region's security. Political nature would abhor the vacuum that would be created were the United States to change its policies and cause other players to doubt its commitment to the region. Many—but not all—countries recognise this, and that instabilities would ensue, even though they do not always make this acknowledgement publicly. It is difficult to see how the consequences would be of other than major concern for Australia, especially if the changes were abrupt.

But there are challenges even with a strong and continuing commitment by the United States. As the 1994 White Paper cautioned, there is the continued risk—and reality in some cases—of serious tensions that have their origin in ethnic, national, religious or racial differences or aspirations. These include a variety of flash points in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. But it is in North Asia that there is the greatest potential for conflict, with specific concerns over North Korea and Taiwan. And there are grounds for more general concerns that have their origin in the re-surfacing of some deep-seated nationalistic antagonisms towards Japan, including from elements within China and South Korea. Above all, however, there are uncertainties and ambiguities over how China will manage its increasing political, economic and military power, and what this will mean for its attitudes towards and relationships with other countries.

* It follows, of course, that it will also remain important for Australia to have the ability to make independent assessments of when it is, and when it is not, in Australia's interests to make such commitments.

Change, however, is inevitable—on a massive scale and with China at its epicentre. The policy issue for Australia—and for the many others players—is not how to stop this change but rather how best to manage it in a way that helps reduce the prospects for armed confrontation.

On the one hand, we need to make it clear that our alignment with the United States and other major market-driven democracies is not for negotiation; on the other hand, we need to recognise, and to help others to come to recognise, China's strategic legitimacy, in spite of significant differences in political philosophy and the difficulties that these can cause. This will indeed require sustained hard work: an active approach to our foreign policy interests that both seizes and creates opportunities.

Finally, although the spectre of nuclear warfare is now much reduced, there are still many ballistic missiles and nuclear warheads in existence, and nuclear proliferation continues in spite of efforts to halt it. For the indefinite future, therefore, it will remain important for Australia to continue to contribute to the stability of the nuclear balance through the arrangements with the United States. And, as it were in parallel, there remain compelling arguments for Australia to continue to rely on the extended nuclear deterrence provided by US nuclear forces.

Indonesia

The complexities that characterise Australia's general relationship with Indonesia are, of course, also present in the defence element of the relationship. At times these complexities can introduce elements of tension. On the one hand, it is important for the two neighbours to get on as well as circumstances might allow, and to identify shared interests and build on them. On the other hand, the substance of the relationship needs also to acknowledge points of difference, and to recognise that there can be difficulties from time to time arising from such differences.

It is important, therefore, to see the evolution of the defence relationship with Indonesia within the context provided by political events and developments.

The Political Context and its Evolution

Australian support for Indonesia's independence at the end of the Second World War put the relationship on a sound footing, notwithstanding the profound differences between the two countries in terms of economic and political development. Matters, however, deteriorated as the rule of President Soekarno became increasingly erratic. Indonesia expressed strident opposition to the newly-independent nation of Malaysia (of which Singapore was then part), there were high levels of communal violence within Indonesia together with an apparent drift towards anarchy, and pro-communist sympathies and policies started to appear.

Indonesia's hostility towards Malaysia, fed by an ambition to re-establish a regional hegemonial status that it had enjoyed in pre-colonial times, led Indonesia to adopt a policy of armed 'Confrontation' against that country and those who were supporting its newly-acquired independence—the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. While being far short of a 'war', Confrontation was nevertheless to see Australian forces in action against Indonesian forces on the Malayan Peninsula and in Borneo, and a heightened state of alert in northern Australia.

The rise to power of Major General Soeharto in 1965 saw Confrontation wind down and, in 1966, come to a formal end. The consequent New Order government, with Soeharto now as President, was to follow pro-Western policies of economic growth, national cohesion, and the ruthless suppression of communism. The prospect of a Marxist government in East Timor, following the disorder of Portugal's withdrawal from its former colony, was an important factor in Jakarta's decision in 1975 to annex East Timor.

With all this as background, it is with some understatement that the 1976 White Paper comments that

friendly relations between Australia and its major neighbour Indonesia have prevailed for thirty years and have successfully weathered occasional sharp differences. The substantial considerations sustaining basic accord between the two countries have long been understood and acknowledged in Australian policy.⁷¹

It might be noted that there is no direct mention here of Indonesia's annexation of East Timor in the previous year, or of Confrontation. Rather, the White Paper moves quickly to allude to the common ground between the two countries.

The 1987 White Paper does not comment directly on political developments in Indonesia. It is worthwhile to note, however, that it does *not* include reference to Indonesia in its brief list of matters of concern in Southeast Asia. The latter comprise uncertainties relating to economic and political problems in the Philippines, unresolved political issues in Cambodia, and the Soviet military presence at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam, but there is no mention here of Indonesia.⁷²

In contrast, the 1994 White Paper makes a point of registering the benefits to Australia that were a consequence of the policies followed by Indonesia's New Order regime under President Soeharto, then still in office:

During the turbulent 1950s and early 1960s, Australia was concerned about the direction Indonesia seemed to be taking. The stability, cohesion, economic growth and positive approach which have characterised Indonesia since 1965 have contributed much to the stable and generally benign strategic environment which has prevailed in South-East Asia since the end of the Vietnam War. This, in turn, has done much to ensure that the demands on Australia's defence planning have remained manageable.⁷³

The candour that acknowledges the problems which emerged under Soekarno is welcome, even if its principal purpose is to give a counterpoint to the subsequent stability that came with Soeharto's era.

The 2000 White Paper has two separate issues to acknowledge: the strong move towards a more democratic form of government that came with the end of Soeharto's long period as President, but also the problems arising from events concerning East Timor's independence. On the first of these, the paper is optimistic while also being mindful of the difficulties:

Indonesia is at a critical point in its history. The political evolution of the past few years has seen a vibrant democracy emerge with unexpected speed. The successful conduct of elections throughout the country in June 1999 and the subsequent installation of a democratic government have been an historic achievement for the people of Indonesia. Since May 1998, they have shown a determination to make democracy work. This is a major cause for optimism about Indonesia's future.⁷⁴

With respect to the difficulties, the 2000 White Paper mentions three particular matters: the challenge of political evolution through democratisation and decentralisation; the need for wide-ranging economic reforms; and the need to resolve the religious, separatist and other challenges to Indonesia's cohesion and stability.⁷⁵

With respect to East Timor, the 2000 White Paper has to acknowledge that Australia's part in the events that led to East Timor's independence caused problems in the bilateral relationship. It comments that 'the tumultuous events following the East Timor ballot last year [1999], culminating in the deployment of INTERFET, caused understandable tensions between Australia and Indonesia, which resulted in the suspension of most areas of defence contact.'⁷⁶

The 2000 White Paper puts down a subtle but important marker about the importance for Indonesia to recognise that the problems it met in East Timor were of its own, not Australia's, making, but also emphasises the importance of getting over this, and other, difficulties in the relationship.

Lingering misunderstandings in Indonesia about Australia's recent role in East Timor have so far made it hard to build on the opportunities offered by Indonesia's democratising achievements to establish the foundations of a new defence relationship. But Australia's fundamental interests and objectives in having a good defence relationship with Indonesia remain as important as ever. The Government is committed to working with the Indonesian Government to establish over time a new defence relationship that will serve our enduring strategic interests.⁷⁷

In summary, the White Papers' discussions of the political situation leave much unstated about how sharp or awkward some of the differences could be. Rather, they show instead a preference to give more prominence to the positive. The next sections explore further how the White Papers treat the interests that Australia and Indonesia share, and the benefits that Australia gains from positive developments in Indonesia.

Shared Interests

A frequent aspect of the White Papers is to emphasise what Australia and Indonesia have in common, despite their differences. A recurring theme is one of *shared strategic interests*.

Thus the 1976 White Paper comments that:

For its part, there would appear to be substantial advantages for Indonesia in having to its south a friendly neighbour, sharing its basic strategic interests and able to make a significant military contribution to deterrence or containment of any threat that might possibly develop at some future time.⁷⁸

(This reference to possible 'third party' threats is examined in the next section.)

For its part, the 1987 White Paper, going only some of the way in this direction and alluding to political and social differences, maintains nevertheless a positive position:

Australia seeks to maintain a sound and constructive defence relationship with Indonesia. The Australian Government considers that such a relationship should recognise fundamental features of our respective political and social systems.⁷⁹

The 1994 White Paper more than compensates for any reticence in its predecessor. While acknowledging differences between the two countries, it gives particular prominence to shared strategic interests:

Our defence relationship with Indonesia is our most important in the region and a key element in Australia's approach to regional defence engagement. It is underpinned by an increasing awareness of our shared strategic interests and perceptions.⁸⁰

There are differences in the roles of our defence forces and in our political systems. Yet our defence relationship with Indonesia is underpinned by shared strategic interests and perceptions and mutual advantage in stronger co-operation. Both countries are clearly committed to developing a strong bilateral relationship in which defence has an important part.⁸¹

The 2000 White Paper takes a similar line, giving prominence to shared interests but also alluding to the policy problems that could arise for Australia from the behaviour of elements of Indonesia's armed forces:

Our biggest and most important near neighbour is Indonesia. Over the past 30 years, both Australia and Indonesia have worked hard to establish and nurture a close defence relationship based on a strong sense of shared strategic interests. We have made significant progress despite differences in approach to some issues—for example the role of the military in society.⁸²

In part in the context of needing to mend bridges following the events in East Timor, the 2000 White Paper gives yet further emphasis to shared interests, including with respect to the importance of Indonesia's territorial integrity:

It is important that we convey effectively our understanding of the problems that Indonesia faces, our respect for the efforts they are making, and our deep support for Indonesia's national cohesion and territorial integrity. In particular, we should continue to affirm the strength of the strategic interests we share in the security of our two countries.⁸³

The significance of this language is its recognition that influential elements of Indonesian society had strong—but unfounded—concerns that Australia, having as they saw it been instrumental in detaching East Timor from Indonesia, would next turn its attention to detaching [West] Papua and to destabilising other areas of the Republic. The text also alludes to the separatist and communal problems that Indonesia was facing in such areas as Aceh, Ambon and Kalimantan, as well as in Papua.

The 2000 White Paper wraps up the concept of shared interests in language setting out Australia's second strategic priority (the first being the defence of Australian territory from direct military attack):

Our second strategic priority is to help foster the stability, integrity and cohesion of our immediate neighbourhood, which we share with Indonesia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the island countries of the Southwest Pacific.⁸⁴

It is interesting to reflect that, in spite of the prominence given to shared strategic interests, the White Papers put little effort in making explicit what these shared interests are. The closest comes in the 2000 White Paper, as quoted in the preceding paragraph. (The public versions of the Strategic Reviews are also reticent, although the short-lived (1996–1999) Agreement between Australia and Indonesia on Maintaining Security is a little better.)

Similarly, the White Papers say little about the practical consequences of the role of the military in Indonesian society for Australian policymaking. This working paper explores this issue in the section on defence co-operation.

Indonesia's Importance for Australia's Security

The second positive theme that recurs in the White Papers is that there are benefits to Australia from Indonesia's stability and resilience. There are two aspects to this. The first is that such attributes would make any attack on Australia by a third party so much more difficult. The second is the importance of Indonesia's not reverting to a state of internal anarchy or expansionist authoritarianism. The sensitivities that accompany this mean that some of the discussion can be oblique.

The 1976 White Paper offers a focus on potential third parties:

The Indonesian archipelago, together with Papua New Guinea, would be an important factor in any offensive military strategy against Australia. This consideration alone gives Australia an enduring interest in the security and integrity of the Indonesian Republic from external influence.⁸⁵

The 1987 White Paper takes a similar line, although with different points of emphasis, including a more direct reference than in the 1976 White Paper to the importance of stability in Indonesia:

Developments in the archipelagic states, and especially Indonesia, are of great strategic significance to us. Australia sees a stable Indonesia as an important factor in its own security. Not only does Indonesia cover the majority of the northern archipelagic chain, which is the most likely route through which any major assault could be launched against Australia, it also lies across important air and sea routes to Europe and the North Pacific.⁸⁶

The 1994 White Paper notes the importance of Indonesia to the security of Australia and Southeast Asia more generally, and comments that as its economy grows, it will become more influential in Asia and the Pacific.⁸⁷ It too develops the twin themes of the benefits to Australia (and the region) of Indonesian stability and its resilience:

Indonesia's archipelago reaches across a large part of the northern sea and air approaches to Australia. Consequently, Australia looks for stability in Indonesia and an Indonesian Government which continues to take a responsible view of its role in South-East Asia and a constructive approach to its relationship with Australia.⁸⁸

Australia's security is enhanced as Indonesia develops its capacity to defend its own territory, because this makes it less likely that in the future any hostile third power could mount attacks from or through the archipelago across our sea and air approaches.⁸⁹

The approach that the 2000 White Paper takes is different in two ways. First, it does not discuss the importance of Indonesia in helping to protect Australia from an attack by a third party. Rather, it talks—briefly—of the problems that could arise in the unlikely event of severe problems in Indonesia itself. Second, it talks of the consequences that would arise for the region as a whole, not just for Australia:

Indonesia's size, its huge potential, and its traditional leadership role in Southeast Asia mean that adverse developments there could affect the security of the whole of our nearer region, and beyond. While not regarding developments of such seriousness as likely, Australia needs to recognise the possibility that, were they to occur, Australia's security would be affected.⁹⁰

But the 2000 White Paper also goes out of its way to emphasise the benefits that the region—and Indonesia itself—would gain from positive developments in that country:

The Government believes the interests of Indonesia's neighbours, and of the Indonesian people themselves, will best be served by a country that is united, stable and democratic; well-governed and prosperous; cohesive and peaceful at home; and responsible and respected abroad.⁹¹

It is important to note that any suggestion that Indonesia was or would become a 'threat' to Australia is at most oblique. In effect, the closest that the White Papers provide in this regard is to be found in their references to the importance of continuing stability in Indonesia. Given the sensitivity that would attach to such a concern, the absence of its public discussion is not a surprise. Nevertheless, an overall sentiment is that, in spite of being aware of the problems that a hostile regime in Indonesia could cause, Australia took the view that the political landscape in Indonesia would have had to have changed almost beyond recognition for such a turn of events to come about.

Defence Co-operation

Much of the defence relationship between Australia and Indonesia is given substance in the form of defence co-operation. The 1976 and 1994 White Papers give some visibility to this.

The 1976 White Paper comments to the effect that Australia can, in a limited way, help Indonesia maintain and develop skills in support of its national resilience.⁹² It goes on to say that the program of defence co-operation includes

such projects as the mapping of some parts of Indonesia; the development of Indonesia's capability for maritime surveillance; occasional combined exercising, and regular consultations about strategic developments and defence matters of common interest.⁹³

There is little that is remarkable—or exceptionable—in the modest ambitions outlined here.

The 1994 White Paper is more expansive. It gives attention to developing the capabilities of the two countries' armed forces, giving prominence to combined exercising and training:

Combined exercises involving Indonesian and Australian forces are likely to become more frequent, covering naval, land and air forces, including special forces. These exercises, both in Australia and Indonesia, enhance the capabilities and professional standards of each country's forces and make it easier for us to operate together, for example in UN peacekeeping missions. Australia's training assistance will be an important element in this process. In recent years, the number of Indonesian service personnel participating in training with Australia has risen rapidly, and this is expected to remain a prominent factor in our defence relationship.⁹⁴

The 1994 White Paper also mentions the potential to explore co-operation in defence industry, logistics and defence science, a fashionable ambition at that time.⁹⁵

It is in exercising and training that there can arise practical issues relating to the military in Indonesian society—if not from their role then, more sharply, from some of their practices. Put briefly, there can be elements of Indonesia's Armed Forces which operate outside the command structure, or which operate extra-judicially in other ways. With some individuals, Australia has had concerns about criminal behaviour and abuses of human rights, in particular in the Indonesian Army, and in their special forces (KOPASSUS). The practical challenge has been to develop the defence relationship in ways which are in the interests of both countries—for example in special force co-operation to counter aircraft hi-jacking or other acts of terrorism—while not compromising Australia's standards with respect to human rights and the rule of law.

An Overall Perspective

Events since the 2000 White Paper have served to bring the two countries closer together. These include the tragedies of the Bali Bombings of 2002, the bombing outside the Australian embassy in Jakarta in 2004, and the tsunami in Aceh in late 2004, but also the direct election of a new President, and good progress in resolving the separatist rebellion in Aceh. The levels of co-operation between the police forces of Australia and Indonesia in responding to people-smuggling and to terrorism have been exceptional.

Australia's principal security-related interests in Indonesia will probably most remain in non-defence areas: good governance, human rights and development, economic growth, respect for justice and the law, and the countering of terrorism and international crime. But there will also remain the need and the scope for a good defence relationship; professional development individually and collectively, maritime surveillance, counter-terrorism, disaster relief, UN operations, and defence management, are just some examples. Australia has much to offer here. Provided that Indonesia's political and economic development continues in its current direction, there will be more potential to pick up such opportunities.

In any event, Australia's strategic geography demands that we continue to build on our common interests and perspectives with Indonesia and to manage any differences.

New Zealand

In many respects, the defence and security relationship between Australia and New Zealand is positive and straightforward. This happy state of affairs reflects the two countries' common background, their shared experiences over many decades, and their shared interests in the stability of the region of which they are part.

But over the past twenty years there have also been differences that have arisen and which continue to cause complications in the relationship. The most significant of these is New Zealand's policy with respect to nuclear weapons and nuclear-powered warships. This policy has had consequences for New Zealand's relationship with the United States and therefore for its relationships with US allies such as Australia. And differences have also opened up on defence policy more generally, including on the rationale for force structure development.

Common yet Shaky Ground

At the time of the 1976 White Paper, there appeared to be no cloud on the Australia-New Zealand horizon; there was only the positive to acknowledge and an implied expectation that the defence relationship would be as rock-solid in the future as in the past. In keeping with its drafting style in which few words were wasted, the 1976 discussion is almost perfunctory:

Our long historical association with New Zealand and the many common interests that sustain our co-operation as neighbours, partners and allies, need no elaboration here. Defence co-operation with New Zealand is fundamental to our interests and policy, and covers a very wide range. It includes bilateral consultation, maritime surveillance, combined exercises and training programs, exchanges of technical and operational information, and co-operation in intelligence, defence science and supply. We will devote continuing effort to sustain and further develop these programs.⁹⁶

By the time of the 1987 White Paper, however, New Zealand had gone down a different path on nuclear matters (discussed later), and there were starting to be indications that its views on other aspects of defence and security were changing too.

Nevertheless, the 1987 White Paper starts by reaffirming the common ground:

Australia and New Zealand share a defence relationship which is of basic importance to the security of both countries, because of our common history and traditions, our proximity, and our shared strategic concerns.⁹⁷

It goes on to comment that 'New Zealand has an important role in the South-West Pacific, where it has strong political, economic and military ties—in some cases more substantial than our own' and that Australian defence co-operation with New Zealand includes assistance to the island states.⁹⁸

Other areas of co-operation are listed as 'maritime surveillance, combined exercises and training programs, exchanges of technical and operational information, and co-operation in intelligence, defence science and logistics'.⁹⁹

But perhaps assisted by hindsight, the reader is compelled to look between the lines of what otherwise would be just bland statements of the obvious on interoperability and policy co-ordination:

It is important that Australian and New Zealand forces maintain and develop their ability to operate together. We will continue to promote defence co-operation and operational compatibility with New Zealand, reflecting the considerable potential for strengthening our defence relationship.¹⁰⁰

The extent to which this potential can be realized will depend, amongst other things, on the compatibility of the equipment and capabilities of the two forces. Priority must therefore be given to co-ordinating our policies on these matters.¹⁰¹

What the text implies here is that matters relating to interoperability and forward planning were drifting, and, if not corrected, would compromise the ability of the two countries' armed forces to work together. The text therefore foreshadows a commitment to try to arrest any such decline and to get more substance back into the relationship. Part of this commitment was to be Australia's attempt to engender New Zealand's interest in taking part in Australia's ANZAC frigate project. In the event, New Zealand was to acquire two ANZACs out of the up-to-four in which it had expressed an interest.

As the 1994 White Paper reminds the reader, another part of this commitment was the initiative, in 1991, to establish Closer Defence Relations (CDR) between Australia and New Zealand. The thrust of CDR was to seek the benefits of 'co-operative programs', including acquisition, training and logistics, and to 'develop habits and procedures of co-operation which [would] allow us to work together effectively in a crisis'.¹⁰² The 1994 White Paper reports progress on this:

Since 1991, under Closer Defence Relations, closer consultation on defence planning and management issues has improved co-operation and coordination with New Zealand on the development of our respective defence forces.¹⁰³

And it anticipates further progress:

We expect that Closer Defence Relations will continue to provide important benefits to both sides. With appropriate commitment, we see the potential to increase substantially the mutually supporting activities which both countries have undertaken in recent years.¹⁰⁴

Yet here again, doubts are implied as to whether the level of 'appropriate commitment' necessary for a substantial increase in trans-Tasman co-operation might not prove too elusive. These doubts are reinforced by the observation that 'increased co-operation ... will depend on sustaining modern capabilities and ensuring a high degree of inter-operability',¹⁰⁵ and that achieving this 'will require sustained effort'.¹⁰⁶

Such a concern was not new: in the public version of *Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s*, Australia had already concluded that 'The New Zealand Defence Forces are declining in capability'.¹⁰⁷ In effect therefore, sustaining this effort might in practice prove all too difficult, in spite of Australian attempts to persuade New Zealand to sustain 'defence capabilities ... which can contribute to our shared strategic interests'.¹⁰⁸

These reservations are consistent with the author's experience with CDR in the early 1990s, when, at least from an Australian perspective, the reasons for New Zealand's reluctance to accept offers of Australian assistance or co-operation were not consistent with what the policy of CDR was intended to achieve. A case in point is New Zealand's decision not to accept Australia's offer to help with pilot training.

In spite of these doubts, the 1994 White Paper does acknowledge the common ground between Australia and New Zealand, especially the strength of the cultural ties and shared strategic interests:

Both Australia and New Zealand expect that if either country were threatened, the other would come to its aid. That expectation reflects both the strong personal, economic, cultural and historic ties between us, and the shared strategic interests which result from each country's security being bound closely to the other's.¹⁰⁹

The 1994 White Paper elaborates on these shared interests, emphasising the continuing importance to Australia of the defence alliance with New Zealand. It reinforces the expectation of mutual support under the ANZUS Treaty, notwithstanding 'the United States suspension of security obligations to New Zealand';¹¹⁰ it welcomes New Zealand's engagement on Southeast Asia, including its membership of the Five Power Defence Arrangements; it notes New Zealand's significant contributions to the Southwest Pacific; and mentions the United Nations as providing opportunities for Australia and New Zealand to work together in support of their shared commitment to global security.¹¹¹

Commenting that there are both strong similarities between Australia and New Zealand but also sometimes surprising differences, the 2000 White Paper also gives emphasis to shared strategic interests:

The similarities start with our strategic interests, which are closely aligned. We both assume that as a matter of course we would come to each other's help in time of trouble. That assumption is given formal expression in the undertakings of the ANZUS Treaty, which remains in force between Australia and New Zealand, notwithstanding the suspension of its United States-New Zealand element.¹¹²

The 2000 White Paper also makes a point of acknowledging the value of New Zealand's help with the INTERFET operation in East Timor, and how New Zealand's decisions to modernise its land forces would make it more able to contribute to lower-level contingencies. Moreover, like the 1994 White Paper,¹¹³ it acknowledges the high professional standards of New Zealand's defence force:

The high quality of New Zealand's forces is beyond question. They made an outstanding contribution to INTERFET, and Australia is grateful for the speed and generosity with which they were committed and supported. We appreciate New Zealand's recent decisions to ensure that its land forces will be equipped adequately for a range of more likely contingencies, and we know that the men and women of the New Zealand Defence Force will continue to constitute a highly professional force. New Zealand will remain a very valued defence partner for Australia.¹¹⁴

But the 2000 White Paper also feels obliged to comment that, even given their shared strategic interests, Australia and New Zealand were drawing different conclusions for the development of their respective force structures:

But New Zealand's strategic perception and outlook differ from Australia's in significant ways. New Zealand's view that its strategic circumstances may not require the maintenance of capable air and naval forces differs from Australia's view of our own needs. We would regret any decision by New Zealand not to maintain at least some capable air and naval combat capabilities. Such forces would allow a more significant contribution to be made to protecting our shared strategic interests, especially in view of the essentially maritime nature of our strategic environment.¹¹⁵

Behind this careful language lies an evident concern that New Zealand's ability to contribute in a militarily-significant way to either bilateral security interests or to more general security interests in the broader region was eroding and was at risk of eroding further.

In the event and with a change of government, New Zealand decided not to proceed with the lease of F-16 fighter aircraft to replace its ageing A-4 fighters. The latter were withdrawn from service and the Royal New Zealand Air Force's fighter capability came to an end. (This provides another illustration of how fragile the spirit of CDR could be in practice. Many of the RNZAF's A-4s were based at the Naval Air Station at Nowra in New South Wales, where the pilots kept their flying skills current and used their aircraft to provide air defence training for HMA ships. The abruptness of the notice to withdraw the aircraft caused considerable inconvenience for Royal Australian Navy training.)

ANZUS

The decision by New Zealand's government in effect to prohibit visits to New Zealand ports by nuclear-powered vessels, or by those platforms regarded as being capable of using nuclear weapons, was a watershed. It marked a sharp divergence between Australia and New Zealand in their respective policies towards the United States. And it posed new challenges to Australia for alliance management.

The 1987 White Paper makes it clear that Australia's sympathy for New Zealand's position was strictly limited:

The dispute between New Zealand and the United States over visits by ships and aircraft has seriously damaged the defence relationship between our two allies. Australia is not a party to the dispute. It accepts, however, that access within reasonable environmental constraints for ships and aircraft is a normal part of an alliance relationship. Australia regrets that New Zealand policy detracts from that relationship.¹¹⁶

The 1987 White Paper comments further that Australia had nevertheless been successful in keeping both the Australia-US link and the Australia-New Zealand link of the ANZUS Treaty in place.¹¹⁷

The 1994 White Paper refers to the ANZUS dispute only briefly. Its reticence reflects an apparent belief that, while progress on the issue would be helpful, it was unlikely to happen, and that there was little point in expecting otherwise:

We continue to regret the dispute arising from New Zealand policy between the United States and New Zealand over ship visits. We believe it is an issue for the two nations themselves. The dispute has not prevented the development of our defence relations with either party, but valuable additional opportunities for co-operation with New Zealand would arise from progress on the issue.¹¹⁸

The 2000 White Paper chooses to make no reference to it at all, reflecting resignation that the cause is most likely lost and that, in practice, there were more pressing matters to be addressed, such as the more general decline in New Zealand's defence capabilities discussed earlier.

An Overall Perspective

In spite of the strength of cross-Tasman sentiment, it is a strategic fact that its alliance with the United States is more important to Australia than its alliance with New Zealand. This is not a surprise. To the extent therefore that Australia might need to choose between its two allies, it will usually put the US relationship first. This is not just a matter of the benefits that Australia gets from its US alliance, compelling as they are, but also the matter of differing national outlooks on the world.

In practice, however, any difficulties that might be associated with the need to choose have proved manageable. This is in large part a consequence of the different military and geographic areas that, for the most part, the two alliances focus on: the alliance with the United States has a global perspective at the higher end of the operational spectrum; the alliance with New Zealand focuses more on regional and lesser contingencies.

Of course there have been difficulties, especially with respect to the limits on New Zealand's access to US-sourced intelligence, but there have been ways to manage this problem and they have not stopped the show. Further, while New Zealand is no longer an ally in US eyes, it does remain 'a friend' of the United States and benefits accordingly. Even so, the

intelligence issue does complicate, and inhibit, some operational aspects of Australia's defence relationship with New Zealand.

A moment's reflection on why Australia and New Zealand have chosen different paths repays the effort. Many factors contribute to this. While Australia's security gains much from the country's geographical remoteness, it is not so remote for it to be able to avoid concern about developments, actual or potential, in neighbouring countries. In contrast, New Zealand is yet more remote than Australia, and in that sense is more secure.

The size and strength of Australia's economy has meant that Australia has had the national wealth available to meet the demands of policies that focus on the defence of Australia and operations in the region. With the clear strength of governments' commitment to 'defence of Australia' policies over the period examined here, this has meant that the development of the ADF has tended to be determined much more by defence than by foreign policy concerns. In the case of New Zealand, there has been neither the geographic imperative nor the economic strength to have an equivalent focus on the 'Defence of New Zealand'; rather, the development of the New Zealand Defence Force has been driven much more by foreign policy considerations.

There are also elements of national psyche to consider. Australians have a long tradition of fearing that their hold on the continent could prove at best tenuous: 'never forget Australia's strategic paranoia' (comment during the drafting of the 2000 White Paper by Hugh White to the author). And Australia, in its post-war migration program, took more people than New Zealand from countries over-run and occupied, often brutally, in that conflict.

Perhaps there is also a natural affinity between peoples who live in wide-open countries—the size of Australia and the continental United States are much the same. Further, over the decades of the Cold War, generations of those Australian ministers who were responsible for defence and foreign policy became committed to the contribution that Australia was able to make to nuclear stability in the Cold War through its hosting of the Joint Facilities.

What might the future now hold? There seems to be little prospect that New Zealand will change its policies either on nuclear matters or with respect to the level of capability planned for its defence force—a level much reduced from that of, say, thirty years ago. Popular opposition on the former would prove formidable. On the latter, New Zealand can claim that its strategic circumstances do not merit higher levels of defence expenditure. It can argue that its defence force gives it a sufficient set of options for making contributions to the immediate needs of regional security, at least in the South Pacific, and for contributing to coalition operations in more distant areas, especially peace-keeping operations sanctioned by the United Nations. (It must be said that New Zealand is quite adroit in how it uses its defence force to support the United Nations, despite its small size and the limits to its capabilities.) And it can reassure itself, at least privately, that, in the event of a serious deterioration in its strategic circumstances, Australia would be there to help.

From a US perspective, the *military* advantage of having New Zealand back as ‘an ally’ would be negligible; rather, the benefit would come from the politics of having another evident supporter in the Asia-Pacific region. However, New Zealand, especially under a Labour government, would still feel at liberty to express public criticism of US policies should the need or occasion arise. And it seems unlikely that the magnitude of any potential benefit to the United States would be enough to compensate for the compromise of its well-established policies on nuclear power and nuclear weapons. (Even though the Cold War has ended, continuing US concerns over stability in the Pacific would help reinforce a reluctance to change these policies, even for New Zealand, and even though the United States Navy does not routinely carry nuclear weapons except on its ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs).)

For its part, Australia would want the United States to continue its policy of ‘commensurate differentiation’—that is, to the extent that New Zealand does not pay its club dues as an alliance member, it should not get the benefits of full club membership.

With respect to trans-Tasman co-operation, Australia would want to continue to work to achieve good levels of policy coordination with New Zealand and to ensure that the two countries’ defence forces were well capable of working together on the more credible types of lesser contingency in the South Pacific and elsewhere, especially in the region. But if history be a guide, Australia should expect some sharp disappointments along the way.

Postscript

With subject matter as broad and diverse as that covered in this paper, it is not sensible to attempt an overall summary. The conclusions of the three separate sections do, however, support an important observation on the nature of strategic policy.

There is a good argument which says that, if governments have set strategic policy correctly (at the level, that is, of policy principle), then this policy will have many enduring characteristics. To achieve this might also require a share of good fortune with respect to changes in the external environment, but even here good policymaking in many cases should be able to anticipate such change or otherwise be invariant to it.

Within the period examined in this paper, the external changes have been radical: the end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union; the rise of China; the rise of democracy in Indonesia; and, less radically, a change of defence perspective in New Zealand. Yet, as this paper has argued, there have been many consistent themes in what is in Australia’s interests, and these themes seem likely to endure. Perhaps underlying this is the least-changing factor of all: the enduring nature of Australia’s strategic geography.¹¹⁹

Notes

- 1 *Australian Defence*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1976, p. 2.
- 2 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1987, p. 1.
- 3 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 5
- 4 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1994, p. 16.
- 5 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 95.
- 6 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 95.
- 7 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2000, p. 34.
- 8 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 34.
- 9 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 95.
- 10 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 16.
- 11 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 16.
- 12 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 36.
- 13 *Australian Defence*, p. 10
- 14 *Australian Defence*, p. 10
- 15 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 4.
- 16 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 96
- 17 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 35
- 18 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 5.
- 19 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 96.
- 20 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 3.
- 21 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 13.
- 22 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 35.
- 23 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 36.
- 24 Richard Brabin-Smith, *The Heartland of Australia's Defence Policies*, Working Paper 396, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, April 2005.
- 25 *Australian Defence*, p. 11.
- 26 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 3.
- 27 *Australian Defence*, p. 11.
- 28 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 96.
- 29 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, pp. 3 and 4.
- 30 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 35.
- 31 *Australian Defence*, p. 2.
- 32 *Australian Defence*, p. 4.
- 33 *Australian Defence*, p. 4.
- 34 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 13.
- 35 Paraphrased from *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, pp. 8 and 9.
- 36 Paraphrased from *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 9
- 37 Paraphrased from *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, pp. 8, 9, 10, and 91.
- 38 Paraphrased from *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 8.
- 39 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 8.
- 40 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 8.
- 41 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 99.
- 42 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 96.
- 43 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 35.
- 44 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, pp. 17 and 18.
- 45 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 38.
- 46 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 18.
- 47 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 36.
- 48 As *The Defence of Australia 1987* said little of substance on the issues summarised in these paragraphs, there is no reference to it in the discussion here.
- 49 *Australian Defence*, p. 1.
- 50 *Australian Defence*, p. 1.
- 51 *Australian Defence*, p. 2.
- 52 *Australian Defence*, p. 2.
- 53 *Australian Defence*, p. 3.
- 54 *Australian Defence*, p. 3.
- 55 *Australian Defence*, p. 3.
- 56 *Australian Defence*, p. 5.

- 57 *Australian Defence*, p. 11.
- 58 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 3.
- 59 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 10.
- 60 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 11.
- 61 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 12.
- 62 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, pp. 98 and 99.
- 63 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 95.
- 64 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 96.
- 65 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 98.
- 66 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 7.
- 67 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 36.
- 68 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 35.
- 69 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 18.
- 70 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 38.
- 71 *Australian Defence*, p. 7.
- 72 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 14.
- 73 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 87.
- 74 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 20.
- 75 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 20.
- 76 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, pp. 41–42.
- 77 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 42.
- 78 *Australian Defence*, p. 7.
- 79 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 16.
- 80 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 87.
- 81 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 88.
- 82 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 41.
- 83 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 20.
- 84 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, pp. 30–31.
- 85 *Australian Defence*, p. 7.
- 86 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 15.
- 87 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 86.
- 88 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 87.
- 89 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, pp. 87–88.
- 90 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, pp. 20–21.
- 91 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 20.
- 92 *Australian Defence*, paragraph p. 8.
- 93 *Australian Defence*, paragraph p. 8.
- 94 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, pp. 87–88.
- 95 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 88.
- 96 *Australian Defence*, p. 9.
- 97 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 5.
- 98 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 5.
- 99 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 5.
- 100 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 5.
- 101 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 5.
- 102 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 101.
- 103 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 101.
- 104 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 101.
- 105 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 101.
- 106 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 101.
- 107 *Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s*, Department of Defence (DPUBS 113/92), Canberra, 1989, p. 9.
- 108 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 101.
- 109 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 100.
- 110 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 100.
- 111 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 100.
- 112 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 42.
- 113 *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 101.
- 114 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 42.
- 115 *Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force*, p. 42.
- 116 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, pp. 5–6.

¹¹⁷ *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 6.

¹¹⁸ *Defending Australia—Defence White Paper 1994*, p. 101.

¹¹⁹ Dibb, Paul, 'Is strategic geography relevant to Australia's current defence policy?', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 60, no. 2, 2006, pp. 247–264.