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The Informal Diplomacy of

the Australian-American Leadership Dialogue[1]

Introduction

For over two decades, the Australian-American Leadership Dialogue has played a role – behind the scenes of Australian policy-making – as a venue for informal diplomacy. Informal diplomacy is a mode of unofficial or semi-official diplomatic activity or discussion. It involves academics and intellectuals, journalists, business elites and others as well as government officials and political leaders 'acting in their private capacity' (Jones, 2008: 2). Policy research institutes, business dialogues and think tanks have often provided the 'neutral territory' outside the architecture of the state for the conduct of informal diplomacy. The Australian-American Leadership Dialogue (hereafter the AALD or the Dialogue) has played a proactive and sometimes influential role in Australian (and occasionally regional) debates on economic and security cooperation. "The mission of the Leadership Dialogue is to broaden and deepen mutual understanding between Australian and American leaders." The Dialogue and its directors sought to define common interests, to build shared perceptions, indeed, to promote social learning and help create a sense of partnership at an elite level amongst national decision making groups. This contribution to identity construction was through a 'repeated cycle of interaction, interpretation and internalization' (Johnstone, 2005: 189) conducted via intensive networking and informal diplomacy.

The role of the Australian-American Leadership Dialogue is at earlier consensus-building stages of decision making. Rather than addressing the tangible features of treaty negotiations and bilateral agreements, this article focuses on prior efforts of agenda setting undertaken through the advocacy and networking of Dialogue fellows with political elites. Through interaction at conferences or in workshops, as well as social events, shared experiences have helped forge strong links between individuals. The informal discussions, exchanges of visitors and the conferences contribute to enhanced political understanding in Australia about the possible benefits of cooperation and the value of American Alliance. An 'interpretative community' was nurtured (Johnstone, 2005) in the belief that a generation of Australians had lost sight of the value of the Australian-US bilateral relationship. Examination of not only the substantive content of debates on economic and security cooperation, but also *the venues*, drives analytical attention to policy entrepreneurs, business activists and a range of opinion leaders from Australian media, academia and think tanks who were engaged in a long term activity to inform foreign policy agendas through 'relationship maintenance'.

In the language of discourse institutionalism, the AALD is primarily a generator of a coordinative policy discourse through its informal diplomacy; and to a lesser extent, a 'communicative discourse' in its public education role (Schmidt, 2008). This article highlights three discursive functions: First, it pays attention to the organisational and individual actors (the interpretive community) who generated and advocated ideas on strengthening the bi-lateral relationship in the context of regional economic and security cooperation. Second, the article draws attention to the mechanisms of the interpretive community − the dialogues sustained over the long term through, in this case, the 'soft leadership' of the AALD bi-national network. Third, through the 'informal diplomacy' that gradually became institutionalised, AALD opinion leaders and policy entrepreneurs gained or

consolidated access to government, business and other political elites and their decision making forums. Where informal diplomacy is traditionally associated with conflict resolution and crisis situations, our case is symptomatic of coalition building and inter-state cooperation in times of stability. The Dialogue has become one cog in the 'hub-and-spoke' security alliance structure led by the United States.

In International Relations scholarship, it is social constructivism that has highlighted the role of ideas and norms in shaping policy. The role of interpersonal relations, consensus building and the development of shared identities are considered not only as worthy of analysis but also an important dynamic of policy change, but also as we suggest, the equally important dynamic of policy continuity. Relationship building can become recursive, sustaining common identities. The greater the degree of conflict in the international system, the more likely states will fear each other and defend their 'egoistic identities' (Wendt 1994). Alternatively, in situations of positive shared understandings and mutual recognition, there is potential for collective identity formation. Rather than 'identity formation' we use the term 'relationship maintenance' to reflect the relatively stable nature of the ideas and values surrounding the Alliance but which nonetheless require continuing renewal and sustenance.

In the maintenance of the idea of Alliance in Australian political culture, the Australian-American Leadership Dialogue can be regarded as an important node of the interpretative community developing a strong and consistent coordinative discourse. An interpretive community rests upon 'professional interpreters' who contribute to the tangible signs of community in the form of the web-sites, meetings, publications and policy commentary (briefs, speech writing, etc). The 'community' is constituted through informal diplomacy and personal networks that also articulate the meanings of alliance among the policy elite. The AALD was founded as a means of sustaining an existing historical narrative of alliance. It identified a trans-generational purpose from the outset, a sharing of a historical narrative that

was perceived to be at risk of being forgotten: "The intergenerational imperative demands that the leadership Dialogue be regularly renewed and nourished ..." (Scanlan, 2012).

The non-profit and non-partisan structure and motivations of the Dialogue creates an informal diplomatic space for bilateral discussions where it 'match-makes' relevant individuals from the American and Australian policy communities. The Dialogues and the individual business, political and academic elites it convenes help create, synthesize, legitimate, and disseminate useful policy knowledge and signal shifts in political opinion. The interlocutory role complicates the picture of the Dialogue as a non-state actor and exposes both the organisation and informal diplomacy as resting on unclear distinctions between 'public' and 'private'. AALD deliberations are not 'independent' or 'autonomous', created in a civil society domain separate from policy and politics. Instead, AALD is imbricated in governance but in a manner where participants observe the 'polite fiction' that it is not. Indeed, the AALD stresses that: 'Management of official relations is the exclusive responsibility of our elected governments' (Scanlan, 2012: 1). Nevertheless, the discussions hosted by the Dialogue are at the interpretative end of policy-makingwhereas officials and politicians are at the decision making end. From this stance, policy discourses are essential to the on-going construction and sustenance of the bilateral relationship.

The remainder of the article proceeds in four steps: The next section outlines the practice of informal diplomacy within the analytical framework of discursive institutionalism. The following section focuses on the Australian policy landscape addressing AALD activity in the context of other interpretative actors and institutions sustaining the Alliance. The penultimate section addresses questions of discursive influence (drawing on criteria developed by Amitav Acharya, 2011, for assessing informal diplomacy) and issues of organizational renewal before heading to our concluding comment on the uncertainties inherent in informal diplomacy.

AALD Informal Diplomacy

Informal diplomacy incorporates a wider range of actors than bureaucrats and politicians in international negotiations. Track One (or T1) diplomacy refers to the diplomatic efforts of bureaucrats to resolve conflicts through the official channels of government (Kaye, 2007: 5; Stone, 2013). Diplomats in Track One increasingly share the international stage with a growing cast of non-state actors on the world stage. Track Two (T2) is symptomatic of the breakdown of traditional distinctions between foreign policy making and domestic policies. Track Two is also symptomatic of the powerful role played by corporations who are often the agents of major investment and trade relationships upon which domestic economies depend. Track Three (T3) diplomacy occurs among civil society groups and is more strictly non-governmental.

In 1982, Joseph Montville, coined the term Track Two as: 'an unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations that aims to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help to resolve their conflict' (1987). This definition focuses on situations of conflict. However, we address Track Two in the absence of conflict and stress long-term consensus building and friendship engagement. Accordingly, we adopt a broader understanding of T2 as: 'unofficial dialogues often facilitated by an impartial Third Party and involving individuals with some connections to their respective official communities, focused on co-operative efforts to explore new ways to resolve differences over, or discuss new approaches to, policy-relevant issues' (Jones, 2008:4).

Track One-and-a-Half (T1½) is another term used to identify discussions between T2 and official diplomacy (Nan, Druckman and El Hor 2009). 'The Track 1.5 diplomat (is) an

ex-official who meets on behalf of his country with other nations' officials' (Homans, 2011). Thus T1, T1½, T2 and T3 are points on spectrum from state exclusive and often secret processes at one end to non-state public processes at the other. Given that T2 can transform into T1, the preference in this article is for the term 'informal diplomacy'.

AALD activities cannot be exclusively considered T2, especially as over time its T1½ capacity strengthened. Arguably, the Dialogue has been swinging between T1½ to T3 in its operations. It is clearly private in its ownership structure and operates from civil society. However, from inception it has involved very senior Government representatives and party figures from both countries, and both major parties in both countries. It liaised closely with the State Department in the US and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Australia. Both sitting Governments at the time of its inception agreed to send senior representation,[2] and the administrations of both countries agreed to bind their parties to the bipartisan spirit of the initiative, and to nominate ongoing senior figures to support its continuation.

In addition to the principle of bi-partisanship, the remaining five principles of the Dialogue include broad ambitions of *inter alia* creating a 'new intellectual, cultural, educational, institutional, social and policy space' for Australian and American citizens, 'relationship management between current and likely future leaders from both countries', as well as 'mitigating the asymmetrical nature of the bilateral relationship through frank and open exchanges among equals'.

Informal diplomacy usually includes officials 'acting in their private capacity' (Ball, Milner and Taylor, 2006: 175). This capacity is 'a principle that supposedly allows for free discussion and flexibility' (Acharya, 2011: 13). Accordingly, discussions usually take place in an off-the-record setting. Official and non-governmental participation in seminars,

conferences and organizations is 'mixed' or 'blended' indicating that the demarcation between official and unofficial involvement is unclear. Some processes can be closed and secretive such as the Oslo Process (Kelman, 1995). In the AALD case, activities have been more public albeit remaining an exclusive process. Portrayed as an independent organisation, the Dialogue can create neutral territory in the form of closed meetings or private dialogues.

More generally, the institutions and processes of informal diplomacy provide 'a middle ground' where new forms of cooperation or controversial approaches to conflicts can be explored by politicians and public figures without fear of public exposure. Such activity is useful to governments if the facilitator is a prominent organisation of which foreigners have heard, and more importantly, if it can draw upon a network of distinguished states-people, business leaders, diplomats, military officers, and scholars. That is, the 'relationship management' that is core to AALD principles. Informal dialogues are also valuable at times when official dialogues have stalled.

Yet, governments can also use informal diplomacy for the purposes of public symbolism. Non-officials are given the illusory impression that their advice is useful. Sceptical assessments prevail among policy practitioners who see few if any concrete results from such unofficial endeavours (Kaye, 2007: 3).

Nevertheless, informal dialogues have accelerated throughout Asia with think tank initiatives such as the Shangri-La Dialogue and ASEAN-ISIS meetings.[3] No less so within Australia, according to the Lowy institute, such initiatives do things that are impossible for governments: 'They can float ideas that are too risky for governments; they can more easily bring together groups with different interests to work through problems ...' (Gyngell, 2008: 5). Likewise at the Australian Institute of International Affairs, the benefits of second track dialogue are to 'set the agenda and pave the way for official negotiations; helping build

structures for formal cooperation; creating common perceptions and sense of identity' (Conley 2012b). In this context, the AALD represents a distinctive kind of leadership over the long durée to instill a common faith in the Alliance among new generations of policy leaders. The task is consensus building, norm construction, the filtering and re-assemblage of ideas, the socialization of elites.

AALD generates both 'coordinative' and 'communicative' discourses. Coordinative discourse refers to the creation, elaboration and justification of policy and programmatic ideas among transnational or national policy communities. By contrast, communicative discourse is concerned with the relationship between policy makers and the public (Schmidt, 2008: 310). Investment in communicative discourses usually comes after coordinative policy processes become established. In Australia, AALD creates a coordinative policy discourse for national policy makers, business elites and other opinion leaders. Via its public meetings, commentary, publications and web-site, it performs a communicative dialogue for the educated lay public.

A focus on informal diplomacy is to focus on the processes by which policy orthodoxies of the Alliance are (re-)created, moulded, elaborated, disseminated, expounded and adjusted to the geo-political realities of China's rise in the Asia Pacific region. Insufficient analytical attention has been directed to the *mechanisms* of ideational impact and the agency of actors in spreading ideas. For this reason, we focus on the Australian-American Leadership Dialogue as it was established specifically as a dialogue mechanism. It makes a worthwhile case study of informal diplomacy as it is overt in its mission to bring 'together Australian and American leaders to help review and refine the parameters of the bilateral relationship'.[4] Three other features make the Dialogue an ideal case: First, the Australian media gives regular coverage to Dialogue events, with the Sydney Morning Herald referring to AALD as 'softly, softly diplomats' (Macdonald, 2011) and the Foreign Editor of *The*

Australian, Greg Sheridan, referring to the body as "the most significant exercise of private diplomacy ever undertaken in Australia".[5] Second, AALD is in its twenty-second year providing an adequate time frame to assess its ambition to leverage Australian interests 'into real influence on matters of respective and designated mutual interest'. Third, the founder, Phil Scanlan, has acquired 'office' as Australian Consul General in New York. It consolidated his position as a 'policy entrepreneur' in this domain.

We focus on the Australian context and the *Australian*-American Leadership Dialogue. By contrast, the *American*-Australian Leadership Dialogue has a separate Board and operates with different (but overlapping personalities) and a within considerably different socio-political context. Indeed, where the AALD events are regularly reported in the Australian press, the same cannot be said of US political commentary. To address US foreign policy would require recognition of a plethora of other dialogues and T2 initiatives in which the US foreign policy elite are involved in and in which they may invest more political interest. Written by Americans, an article such as ours may not give as great credence to the impact and importance of the Dialogue as in the Australian context. It is an asymmetric relationship where AALD plays a 'soft leadership' role in Australia, not the USA. By the same token, AALD is but one small example of American 'soft power'. From an Asian or regional perspective, the AALD is more likely to be viewed as willing camp follower in the US "hub-and-spoke alliance structure" that is deployed "as a hedge against an undesirable multilateral order emerging in the region" (Park, 2012)

Australian Entrepreneurship to "define the bilateral relationship"?

Unlike the USA, Australia does not have an extensive think tank industry. Among those, few are specialist foreign policy research organisations. Nor are private policy groups

and dialogue associations as extensive as in US associational life. Yet, there are some bodies which focus on international affairs including the privately funded Lowy Institute (Gyngell, 2008), the long standing Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) supported by membership and government subvention, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) founded by Government, and the privately funded Australian America Association (AAA) and Foreign Directions International.

There are also university based centres including the Australian APEC Study Centre at Monash, or Asia Link, which occasionally include aspects of the bilateral relationship in their work. DFAT has funded a number of bilateral study centres particularly for South East Asian studies, which sometimes dwell on the Alliance. Finally, there are forms of cultural diplomacy like the Fulbright Foundation program which has sponsored various exchanges such as, for example, the former Australian Foreign Minister, Bob Carr, recipient of the Fulbright Distinguished Fellow Award Scholarship as well as Honorary Scholar of the Australian American Leadership Dialogue.

In 2004 the Howard Government announced the establishment of the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney. With a broader mandate than AALD, its early focus was on understanding the causes and consequences of anti-Americanism. Founded and funded in the wake of the Iraq War, (with Rupert Murdoch a lead donor to it), the Centre has launched a two-year policy project through to 2014, *Alliance 21*, to "re-examine the relationship" and "develop policies to further improve the strong bonds" that very much treads on the same territory of the AALD albeit in a more academic style. Launched by US Secretary of state, Hilary Clinton, in 2012, the affiliated Perth USAsia Centre is designed to strengthen the Australia-Asia-US strategic and economic relationship via teaching, research and policy analysis. US support to the Centre is reflective of its 'pivot to Asia' policy and expanding engagement in the region (Clinton, 2012). In different ways, all these

organisations are institutional points in the interpretative community that address the knowledge needs of government and provide public platforms, dialogues and networking opportunities.

Some of these organisations might be considered competitor organisations to the AALD given the small size of the policy pond in Australia. The AIIA could conceivably have performed the informal diplomacy roles of AALD, and has aspirations to facilitate T2 dialogues. For instance, the AIIA organised for DFAT the inaugural Indonesia Australia Dialogue (Conley, 2012a). Likewise the Business Council of Australia (BCA) has put itself in the frame as a business agent of informal diplomacy seeking to embed the bilateral relationship (Denton, 2010). However these organisations are to a much greater extent in the public eye than AALD and they have a wider organisational remit than the Dialogue to work on a range of policy issues. The AAA in particular, is more involved in 'communicative discourses' via scholarships, 'black tie' benefit dinners or various social and cultural events to further its goal of promoting relations between the American and Australian communities. For reasons of public legitimacy it is not viable for membership bodies to adopt the elite, exclusive and 'invitation-only' style of Dialogue activity. The Dialogue is an issue specific enterprise focused on 'leaders'. Nonetheless, it is important to note that while AALD is a key actor in the interpretive community, it is not the only one.

AALD Origins and Mission: The Dialogue was established two decades ago on the initiative of Phil Scanlan. This was directly after his meeting with George Bush during his 1992 visit to Australia. During that visit, Scanlan discussed with the President the importance of sustaining the relationship forged during World War 2, particularly in the Pacific theatre. Scanlan proposed that in the absence of attention and effort, the next generation may not maintain the centrality of the alliance: 'the notion that American support cannot be taken for granted was the premise of the Australian American Leadership Dialogue' (Wolpe, 2000:

13). In a letter from George Bush to Scanlan to mark the first Dialogue in Washington in June 1993, the President wrote:

> The ties between the United States and Australia resulting from our shared experiences in the Pacific War were and are real. ...You have correctly identified the challenge before us – to engineer a smooth passing of the baton in American/Australian relations from the generation which forged the alliance in the presence of war to the generations which must work together for a permanent, productive, and prosperous peace (Bush, 1993).

Undoubtedly, Phil Scanlan has been central to the establishment and rise to prominence in policy circles of the Dialogue. His commitment in supporting the bilateral relationship has won him avid admiration (Sheridan, 2006: 311-18). In 2009, in recognition of his services and his commitment, he acquired public office as Australian Consul General in New York.

From the outset, the AALD's mode of operation was to facilitate elite discussion and debate. One of the directors of the foundation that sponsors the Dialogue, speaks directly of the informal diplomacy aspirations:

> For the Australians, drawn from politics, business and the wider community, the dialogue provides a close-up look at the attitudes of some of those who make Washington move and shake. For the Americans, it is a reliable and secure window through which to assess bilateral and regional issues. The proceedings are private and off the record. (Wolpe, 2000: 13)

Maintaining the conversation is the central activity, but one that is behind closed doors.

There are other activities but AALD programmes are not extensive. The key activity in the public eye, are the conferences. The conferences attract high profile speakers. The 2011 Perth Dialogue meeting is a case in point. Robert Zoellick, then President of the World Bank, was the 'Honoree' of the year, (following Dick Woolcott from the previous year, with

Zoellick's award presented by former Australian Treasurer, Peter Costello). The keynote address was presented by the Prime Minister Julia Gillard. The Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Kurt M. Campbell, lead the US delegation to AALD. The Dialogue's convening power is significant relative to other Australian policy institutions. The 2013 Sydney meeting similarly attracted high level attendance including then Opposition Leader Tony Abbott and Shadow Foreign Minister, Julia Bishop.

One activity, the 'Leadership Dialogue Scholar' lends a veneer of academic credibility. To-date, recipients have been a mix of academics or retiring politicians. For instance, Bob Carr was the recipient 2005-07. He was followed in 2008 by David Kennedy from Stanford University, Larry Smarr from the University of California, San Diego and in 2010, John G. Roberts, Jr., Chief Justice of the United States. Their role is to deliver public lectures in Australia and the United States on contemporary and anticipatory issues rather than the scholarly product or policy analysis produced by universities or think tanks.

Whilst the Dialogue is bilateral in structure and operation, nevertheless, the Alliance is also regarded as essential to regional affairs. That is, "to enhance the framework for regional security in a manner that underwrites economic and cultural prosperity for Australian and US citizens" Indeed at the 2012 Dialogue, Australian Minister for Trade and Competitiveness saw no conflict in the current US penchant for bilateral agreements and the development of the Trans Pacific Partnership.[6] Reflecting on the 2005 US-Australia free trade agreement, former US trade representative, Robert Zoellick, has said publicly that it would not have happened without the Dialogue. In another instance of AALD influence, the Clinton Administration initially refused to support the Australian led UN-mandated force into East Timor to help secure its independence from Indonesia. Within three days this position was reversed with the aid of AALD 'back-channels' (Hartcher, 2014). .

Not all activity associated with the Dialogue can be considered T2 diplomacy. The AALD's 'Young Leadership Dialogue' for participants up to the age of 34 is, at best, a form of track-three diplomacy. It is civil society engagement and a way of ensuring that there is a greater inter-generational sharing of the access to AALD activities and personalities as well as communicative diffusion of norms and conduct that may yield fruit in the careers of the attendees later down the track. The visit of Zoellick to the University of Western Australia to meet AALD young leaders was a public relations exercise, and communicative discourse, sharing access to a leading figure more widely than the closed chamber of the Dialogue.

Informal Diplomatic Influence

Does the 'coordinative discourse' of the Dialogue have an impact on policy? We discuss this question by adopting and modifying four analytical criteria developed by Amitav Acharya (2011: 13) to assess informal diplomacy. The first potential role of AALD is policy innovation and generation of new policy ideas. A second role is 'constitutive localization': a process whereby local actors proactively build congruence between pre-existing local ideas and practices with American norms. That is, AALD may serve as a socialization mechanism for approaches to bilateral cooperation. Third, T2 dialogues also serve as platforms for validation and legitimization of the ideas and policies of governments. Fourth, AALD can host and generate dissent which may not be welcomed by policymakers but is crucial in alerting them to alternative ideas and critiques and against which their own preferences are benchmarked and assessed.

There is also the question: influence with whom? Assessment is best made against stated intentions: The AALD has aspired only to influence elite opinion and thought leaders. It has not taken on the challenge of influencing broader Australian attitudes, but those of 'the

next generation of leaders' in Australia: political leaders on both sides of Australian politics, foreign affairs commentators in the mainstream press, foreign affairs specialists and influential business people in Australia.

Thought Leadership: Regarding the first role of idea generation and policy innovation, what evidence is there of 'thought leadership'? The AALD has not had a discernible impact on issues of anti-Americanism in the broader population however strong its influence on thought leaders. Other organisations have set themselves this task – notably the United States Studies Centre. The AALD web site is poor in presentation terms and limited in content. Publications under the AALD banner are woefully few. However, this lack of product may point to the intangible character of its activities. The organisation is about building relationships for the longue durée: 'sustainable relationships demand hard work and constant nurturing' according to AALD's web-site.[7] Instead of 'innovation' the *raison d' étre* of the Dialogue is 'relationship maintenance'. Sustenance of policy continuity is rather more difficult to demonstrate than policy change.

According to one observer, there has been innovation in the very creation of the Dialogue structure. One AALD participant, John Denton, (who chaired the BCA's Global Engagements Taskforce), attributes AALD success in informal diplomacy to it being "led by a private sector team" (2010: 7). The founders eschewed the traditional 'bookish' *modus operandi* of think tanks or academic centres to create a leaner, single issue entity dispensing with the usual activities associated with intellectual authority.

A further sign of success could include imitators. The Australian-Israel Leadership Forum was established in 2009. The Lowy Institute is sponsoring a dialogue which it hopes will become the Indian version of the AALD (Sheridan, 2011). Also in operation is the Australia-Korea Leadership Forum. The Australian Government has pressed for an Australia-

China forum, designed on the AALD template, for 'an informal, high-level dialogue that will bring together senior figures from government, business and academia to consider the entirety of the bilateral relationship and generate ideas that will help guide relations into the future' (Callick, 2011). Whilst 'cool' on this initiative China is not necessarily averse to such initiatives having been a prime mover behind the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation.[8]

There is a long historical tradition of dialogue groups: Established in 1954, the Bilderberg Group hosts a private annual meeting of leading figures from politics and government (around one-third) complemented by leaders from finance, industry, labour, education, and communications who discuss matters in an off-the-record setting. Not unlike the rationale for AALD, the Bilderberg Group 'grew out of the concern expressed by leading citizens on both sides of the Atlantic that Western Europe and North America were not working together as closely as they should on common problems of critical importance'.[9] Its influence is its ability to attract the world's power brokers to share ideas, reach consensus, and create social cohesion within a 'power elite' (Domhoff, 2005). By comparison, the World Economic Forum in Davos is more public and transparent in its numerous activities and events. AALD operates on neither the same scale nor world stage as these two other dialogue structures, but it is nevertheless in the same mould.

Localisation: On the second role of 'socialisation', the Dialogue functions through exclusivity. One of the founding principles was to conduct "closed sessions to facilitate frank exchanges on matters of designated mutual interest". The closed nature of the dialogues creates an environment where trust can be built without fear or media exposure and misrepresentation that can occur in the public domain of politicking. It is elite in seeking to "broaden and deepen mutual understanding between leaders of Australia and the United States".[10] Likewise the *Sydney Morning Herald* depicts AALD as "an annual closed-door gathering of influential and rising figures in government, media, business and academia"

(Macdonald, 2011). The Dialogue's socialisation role is cross-generational. In the words of former US President, George Bush (2012: 1) the challenge is: 'to engineer a smooth passing of the baton in American/Australian relations from the generation which forged the alliance in the presence of war to the generation which must now work together for permanent, productive and prosperous peace'.

Without a doubt, the AALD has club-like qualities, inducting rising politicians on the nuances of the bilateral relationship. Reflecting his enthusiasm for foreign affairs, Kevin Rudd was a founding member and regular attendee of AALD meetings well before he shot to prominence as leader of the ALP and Prime Minister. However, even politicians known for their self-acknowledged low interest level in foreign affairs, such as Julia Gillard have attended Australian American Leadership Dialogues (Hartcher, 2009). The Dialogue makes a point of ensuring that potential leadership candidates of both major parties attend at least once, before assuming the Prime Ministership or Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Validation: AALD delegations are venues for validation of the ongoing value and worth of the Alliance. AALD conferences are part of the communicative discourses, a public platform for the re-affirmation of shared values and interests between the two countries. The convening function – drawing together business, political, military elites with other opinion leaders – has an intangible recursive impact. AALD provides a focal point for visiting dignitaries as well as a reference point for re-statement of common interests.

On the creation of the Dialogue President George Bush wrote to endorse the initiative. While the end of the Cold War had changed but not diminished the risks to security in the Asia Pacific, he noted the bilateral relationship was no less important: "Our shared perspectives on Asia Pacific security are important to the development and evolution of strategies for peace" (Bush, 1993). AUSMIN – annual meetings of US Secretary of State and

Secretary of Defense with Australian counterparts – that lead to agreement on the rotational deployment of US marines in Darwin and improved joint naval interoperability to "safeguard commerce and respond to natural disasters in the sea lanes connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans" (Clinton, 2012) also provided opportunity for the Dialogue to stage ancillary public events for Australian and visiting dignitaries.

Dissent Diffusion: Closed-door discussions are difficult to assess in terms of their impact. However, as noted earlier the AALD is credited with "being vital to the completion of the free trade agreement between Australia and the US in 2005, a diplomatic breakthrough many thought impossible" (Anon, 2011). This was a fraught area of policy for the relationship.

Another sign of success is the extent of media attention, generally of a favourable nature, that the Dialogue attracts (particularly Greg Sheridan at *The Australian*, who is often a participant at the invite-only events). There is also criticism in the press. AALD has been portrayed as a vehicle for 'duchess diplomacy'; a term borrowed from the British who were once adept at having Imperial interests accepted as Australian interests:

> One of the main ways of doing so was by "duchessing" Australian politicians when they visited London. This often involved feeding their sense of self-importance by inviting them to a country house for a weekend of informal mingling with British politicians and minor royalty. Hence the term "duchessing", whether it was being entertained by a duchess or being treated like a duchess (Day, 2012).

Media exposure is one indirect way of diffusing dissent by subjecting private and elite associations to criticism and deflecting attention away from official processes. Governments

can at the same time argue that by engaging with civil society groups they are consulting stakeholders and expert opinion.

None of the above discussion represents evidence of policy impact. Briefings for AALD delegations at the White House could amount to no more than an insider's version of a private tour. Letters from past and current American Presidents demonstrate amity and support, but not necessarily anything more. For President Bill Clinton to indicate the Dialogue is a good measure against the 'special relationship' being "taken for grante" is well and good, but the US has numerous other special relationships. However successful AALD may have been over the past twenty years, one of the final tests of success is durability.

AALD Challenges of Renewal

Associational life 'waxes and wanes' depending on political developments, the availability of (financial) resources as well as the drive and commitment of founders, leaders and members. Initiatives like AALD may have a 'shelf-life'. Passing its twenty year mark, questions about leadership, inter-generational renewal, and institutional growth come to the fore. Other associations have disappeared over time or have fallen into obscurity. It can be difficult for organisations to thrive in the absence of the energy, commitment and charisma of the founder. This phenomenon is well-known in business and non-government organisations: few managers have the same motivation to see a creation succeed as does the founder.

The positive spin on AALD founder Phil Scanlan is that he is a T2 policy entrepreneur from the business world (in the mould of Schwab at Davos) who moved to being a T1 diplomat (as consul in New York). He might be en route to T1½ roles when he steps down from the position. The negative spin is that the AALD served as a 'vanity tank'; a platform to pursue personal ambitions. Following in the footsteps of Scanlan, the next leader will never be able to say they 'created the Dialogue in conversation with the US President'. An

employed manager is unlikely to achieve the same level of authority. The future success of the Dialogue rests in the capability of transitioning to a next generation of leadership sustaining the intensity of relationships with the authority of the prior generation. While the Dialogue maintained its insider ties from Bush 1 and through the Clinton years to Bush 2, its ability to penetrate into the new generation of foreign policy advisors under Obama is less apparent. The 2013 Sydney Dialogue was attended more so by elder Republican and Democrat stalwarts of the AALD.

There is also the phenomenon of 'entrapment' that can result from close engagement. This has been noted in the context of Asian informal diplomacy:

> Entrapment occurs when scholars, after having offered consequential intellectual input at an early stage of policymaking (for example institution-building), remain beholden to the choices made by officials and thereby unwilling or incapable of challenging officially sanctioned pathways and approaches for the fear of losing their access and influence. (Acharya, 2011:).

AALD might have escaped this tendency. First, there is the more open and plural public debate processes of both the liberal democratic systems of the USA and Australia compared to the Southeast Asian nations. Second, there is greater turn-over of participants in the Dialogue reflecting the electoral spills in both countries as well as the political appointee system notable in the US but also seen in lesser degree in Australia – hence a need for continuous relationship building. Third, as noted earlier the Dialogue has dispensed with the usual trappings of intellectual authority, and is not composed primarily of scholars or think tank researchers. It is a more mixed gathering where epistemic co-option is not a concern among participants who are drawn from business, politics and military.

To map and gauge the impact of informal diplomacy can be elusive. It is not a phenomenon suitable for quantitative assessment. Instead, there is a muddy causal path between intention and effect as a result of numerous actors interacting in an opaque community over a long time period. As the BCA Director indicates: "second-track diplomacy is a long term endeavour and the benefits will not come in the short term" (Denton, 2010: 5).

Conclusion

The networking of AALD informs our conceptual understanding on the ideas-policy nexus on three fronts: First, analysis of bodies like AALD directs attention to the discursive coordination of individual advocates and policy entrepreneurs. That is, what they said and wrote, the web-sites established, the conferences organised, as well as the personal relationships and professional ties built. Second, their views were not allowed to simply diffuse randomly into the policy realm, but were actively propelled into policy circles through an active network of established and emerging leaders in Australian politics and policy. Third, the non-governmental Dialogue shadowed and reinforced official processes and deliberations via informal diplomacy. Organisational entrepreneurship was required in addition to individual action in the interpretative community orbiting the Alliance. This is not to say that the consensus on the value of Australian-American Alliance is imbibed automatically through the reflection of experience and social engagements brought about by informal diplomacy. Shared policy understanding and relationship maintenance is a much more variable process, prone to set-backs, and at this point in time, is limited to policy elites rather than wider society. Nevertheless, the twenty-year durability of the Dialogue shows

how non-state bodies like AALD can be central to the discursive sustenance of bilateral

relationships.

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[1] The authors began this paper after attending the August 2011 AALD Annual Dinner and wrapped up their revisions at the April 2014 AAA Benefit Dinner. We would like to thank our hosts for giving us food for thought. Any errors or misinterpretations remain ours.

[2] US delegates to the initial dialogue included from the Democrat side, Joe Duffey, Winston Lord, Bruce Reed, Phil Lader, Larry Irving and Tom Schneider and from the GOP Brent Snowcroft, Dick Cheney, Bob Zoellick, Jim Leach, Richard Armitage and Karl Rove. In Australia this role was played, inter alia, by Kim Beazley, Peter Cook and Nick Bolkus—all Federal Labor Cabinet Ministers, and Liberals including Federal MPs David Kemp, John Moore and Warwick Smith plus Nick Greiner from NSW. Other Australian 'opinion leaders' or public servants included Dick Woolcott, Ross Garnaut, Kevin Rudd, Greg Sheridan, Irene Kwong Moss and Pat Turner.

[3] Association of South East Asian Nations-Institutes of Strategic and International Studies: http://www.csis.or.id/institutional-partnership/asean-isis

⁴ AALD Home Page: http://www.aald.org/

⁵ AALD Home Page: http://www.aald.org/

⁶ Emerson, Craig. (2012) 'Address to the American Australian Leadership Dialogue', 16 July, http://trademinister.gov.au/speeches/2012/ce_sp_120716.html,

⁷ AALD History, http://www.aald.org/index/index/page/history, accessed 18 December 2012.

⁸ FOCAC: http://www.focac.org/eng/

⁹ Bilderberg Group: http://www.bilderbergmeetings.org/index.php

¹⁰ AALD History: http://www.aald.org/index/index/page/history