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The ANZUS Alliance in an Ascending Asia

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The Centre of Gravity series

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The *Centre of Gravity* series is the flagship publication of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre (SDSC) based at The Australian National University's College of Asia and the Pacific. The series aspires to provide high quality analysis and to generate debate on strategic policy issues of direct relevance to Australia. *Centre of Gravity* papers are 2,000-3,000 words in length and are written for a policy audience. Consistent with this, each *Centre of Gravity* paper includes at least one policy recommendation. Papers are commissioned by SDSC and appearance in the series is by invitation only. SDSC commissions up to 10 papers in any given year.

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The ANZUS Alliance in an Ascending Asia

Editor's Foreword

Welcome to a special edition of the *Centre of Gravity* series. This is a jointly published report with the Centre for Strategic & International Studies.

In 1942 it was said that Australia turned its back on tradition and kinship when it looked to the US. Yet in the early 21st century these words now embody the relationship between Canberra and Washington. The first line written in any Australian strategic policy is the link with the United States. And the US is often able to pencil in Australia's name at the top of any roll call of support when it looks to act around the world.

The map helps to explain some of this closeness. An ascending Asia compels both to look to the same waterways and common ground. Their ships sail to the same ports, their diplomats flock to the same airports. Yet for all that geography can tell us, it is the common values, ideas and culture that is the real foundation, and the true test of the alliance's health.

This Centre of Gravity paper brings together four leading experts on the ANZUS alliance and security in the Asia-Pacific. It outlines the view from Washington and the view from Canberra. It details the growth of the relationship, and new opportunities for cooperation. It also highlights the risk of 'expectation gaps' that suggest the lack of a common worldview for how to maintain balance during Asia's ascent.

The authors of *The ANZUS alliance in an Ascending Asia* are Michael J. Green, senior vice president for Asia and Japan Chair at CSIS, Peter Dean, Senior Fellow in the Strategic & Defence Studies Centre, ANU, Brendan Taylor, Head of the Strategic & Defence Studies Centre, ANU and Zack Cooper, fellow with the Japan Chair at CSIS. Their full biographies can be found inside.

The report offers a number of clear policy recommendations that reflect the different viewpoints of the authors as well as the varying concerns of their countries. That some of their suggestions might be challenging or push each country in ways they may not prefer speaks to the serious questions that have been raised by the authors as they attempt to ensure the ANZUS alliance continues to be foundational strategic policy for both the United States and Australia.

Following in the tradition of Coral Bell, a former fellow at the Strategic & Defence Studies Centre ANU, the authors have set to revive long form analysis of Australia's alliance relationship with the United States in a way that is both scholarly and designed to be read and engaged with by a policy audience.

The *Centre of Gravity* series is proud to produce this special edition. While somewhat longer than our normal format, it directly fits the series main purpose of providing policy relevant scholarship from world-class scholars and thinkers on the main strategic questions facing Australia and the Asia-Pacific.



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The ANZUS Alliance in an Ascending Asia

Executive Summary

- ✦ The Alliance between the United States and Australia (ANZUS) is currently thriving; but no alliance should ever be taken for granted, especially during periods of major structural change such as that now transpiring in Asia.
- ✦ This paper presents a candid audit of ANZUS, comparing and contrasting United States and Australian expectations of the Alliance.
- ✦ Particular attention is given to three core mission areas with the potential for alliance discord or deeper collaboration going forward: addressing security challenges outside the Asia-Pacific; shaping a new multilateral architecture in this region; and maintaining maritime security.
- ✦ US and Australian interests in all three areas are converging. Yet this convergence is also overshadowed by the larger question of whether US-China and Australia-China relations are diverging in an 'Ascending Asia.'
- ✦ On the first core mission area, the Alliance should maintain a predominantly Asia-Pacific focus, even while cooperating on out-of-area missions.
- ✦ On the second, the Alliance should serve as a central hub for Asian regional order and architecture.
- ✦ On the third, the Alliance should focus on leading in the management of shared maritime challenges.

Policy Recommendations

- ✦ The United States and Australia should ensure that their focus remains the Asia-Pacific even while cooperating on out-of-area missions;
- ✦ The Alliance should serve as a central hub for Asian regional order and architecture; and,
- ✦ The Alliance should focus on leading in the management of shared maritime challenges.

The locus of international power is returning to Asia, where it resided before the industrial revolution, America's emergence as a Pacific power and Australia's own federation. As resident powers on either side of the Pacific, the United States and Australia have much to gain from this new ascent of Asia – and as staunch defenders of the neoliberal order over the last century, much is at stake.

The benefits are clear. Since opening and reform began four decades ago, China has brought hundreds of millions out of poverty and joined Japan as an engine for regional growth and integration. China is Australia's top trading partner and the United States' second largest trading partner after Canada. Intra-regional trade is higher than North America's, and the pace of trade liberalisation agreements from the trans-Pacific Partnership to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership is outpacing other regions of the world.

However, the risks associated with Asia's ascent are also becoming more evident. Six of the world's nine nuclear-armed powers are in the Asia-Pacific (the United States, Russia, China, North Korea, India and Pakistan). China's defence expenditures have grown 15 per cent annually over the past two decades, positioning China second in the world overall.¹ Though not increasing defence spending as rapidly as China, neighbouring states are also focusing on modernising their militaries: Japan halted

The United States and Australia have much to gain from this new ascent of Asia.

the decline in its defence spending and announced more proactive foreign and defence policies; India is poised to overtake Japan as the fourth highest defence spender in the world;² and Southeast Asian militaries including Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam are all in the process of buying next-generation submarines.³ Meanwhile, the growth of economic interdependence has not dissuaded China from using its new military and economic weight to intimidate smaller states with competing territorial claims in the South China Sea or the Himalayan Mountains. What South Korean President Park Geun-hye calls the 'Asian paradox' is unmistakable. Somehow economic cooperation and historic enmity have grown in tandem with each other.

These trends are unprecedented for Australia and all the other states woven together by the series of bilateral security treaties negotiated with the United States in the early 1950s. Most US allies in the Pacific now trade more with China than with the United States (though reciprocal investment between the United States and its allies continues to dwarf the reciprocal flow of capital between those states and China). Yet at the same time surveys suggest that all states in the region much prefer a United States-led order to a Sino-centric order going forward.⁴ Reconciling this contradiction could prove even more challenging as economic relations with China grow and Sino-US competition intensifies.

Leading Australian political figures now debate whether this apparent divergence of security and economic interests presages a dilution of the United States-led alliance system in the region. These public debates by the United States' closest ally in the Pacific have some senior US officials quietly questioning whether Japan may in future replace Australia as the most trustworthy ally should US and regional tensions continue mounting with Beijing. Meanwhile, US expectations that Australia will help to maintain a stable military balance as US defence spending contracts in the wake of Iraq and Afghanistan are failing to move Australian politics. Australia's 2013 defence budget fell to its lowest levels since 1938 (when measured as a percentage of GDP), though the Abbott government has alleviated the situation somewhat since coming to power in September 2013.⁵ Finally, Australian officials worry that Washington has grown distracted by crises in Iraq, Iran and the Ukraine, allowing the much heralded 'pivot to Asia' to drift.

Do the complexities of Asia's ascent mean that the United States-Australia alliance is now entering its twilight years? Steve Walt argued in the first decade of the post-Cold War era that 'alliance[s] may be dead long before anyone notices, and the discovery of the corpse may come at a very inconvenient time'.⁶ In the second and third decades of the post-Cold War era, however, US alliances in the Pacific have not shown signs of decay – quite the opposite. In public opinion polls US allies in Asia consistently express strong support for their security relationship with the United States, and most states in Asia have sought to strengthen rather than dilute those ties. This is particularly true of Australia.

However, the challenge arises from the fact that China's expanding military capabilities and self-declared line of defence have created scenarios that could involve allies like Australia in direct conflict with their largest trading partner. Even as some Australian officials express concerns of abandonment because of American distraction in the Middle East and failure to implement the pivot, other Australian officials reveal a deep concern about entrapment by the United States in a conflict with China. Thus, as far back as August 2004, then Foreign Minister Alexander Downer controversially stated that Australia's obligations under the ANZUS Treaty would not extend to a Taiwan Strait contingency – much to the surprise and chagrin of Washington, which issued a public rebuke.⁷ In 2014, then Defence Minister David Johnston made an almost identical claim with reference to the possibility of Australian involvement via ANZUS in conflict in the East China Sea.⁸ In a January 2015 poll, 71 per cent of Australians said they would opt to stay out of an East China Sea conflict, even if the United States were to become involved militarily.⁹



For much of Australia's history, its leaders have been nervous about abandonment by its primary ally (initially Great Britain and subsequently the United States). Australia's record of fighting alongside US forces in every major conflict since the First World War is due in part to the desire to ensure that London and Washington would remember Australia's sacrifices abroad and come to its aid if needed. When facing hegemonic challenges from Japan and the Soviet Union, the United States has viewed Australia's support as indispensable, and Australia has viewed US pre-eminence as vital. Both allies embraced the risk of entrapment because they had no other choice. Both allies continue to have an abiding interest in the international order. In the midst of Asia's ascent today, however, it is Australians who worry about entrapment by Washington and Americans that worry about abandonment by Canberra.

The US has viewed Australia's support as indispensable.

In the view of the authors, the institutional and ideational foundations of the United States–Australia alliance are deep and enduring, but no alliance should be taken for granted – particularly during periods of major structural change such as that now transpiring in Asia. Fears of entrapment and abandonment have been a constant subtext to alliances since Thucydides and the Peloponnesian Wars. When those fears become the dominant narrative in an alliance, however, deterrence and rapid response to crises both suffer. It is in this context that this paper seeks to present a candid audit of the alliance. The paper begins by examining expectations of the alliance in both Washington and Canberra. The paper then focuses on the three core mission areas for the alliance going forward. The first area is the role of the alliance in addressing security challenges outside of the Asia-Pacific – this discussion goes to the core question of how the alliance should prioritise and divide responsibilities in the pursuit of a more stable global order. The second area is the role of the alliance in shaping a new multilateral architecture in the Asia Pacific region that upholds shared norms while reflecting new distributions of global and regional power – a challenge recently highlighted by disagreements between Washington and Canberra over the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The third and final subject is the alliance's role in maintaining maritime security – an issue that has been attracting increased attention as China attempts to assert control over the South China Sea.

In all three mission areas, US and Australian interests and capabilities are converging. Yet all three mission areas are also overshadowed by the larger question of whether United States–China and Australia–China relations themselves might be diverging. What the audit finds is that the character of these relations may indeed be different, but that this should not distract from the larger shared interests and values that inform the US and Australian approaches to China. Ultimately, US and Australian grand strategy must return to first principles: what is the regional and global order we seek; what are the ways and means we have to achieve and sustain that order; and how *then* does our strategic approach to China fit in?



ANZUS: The View from Washington

The United States and Australia have enjoyed a long and storied relationship, fighting together in every major conflict since the First World War. Over the last century, Australia has transformed from a distant friend into a vital ally. In recent years, the US rebalance to Asia has refocused policymakers in Washington on the importance of Australia to Asia-Pacific security. Although leaders in both Washington and Canberra have had to overcome obstacles in the relationship, the allies' interests are better aligned now than they have been for decades. Yet major debates are underway about the implications of a rapidly rising China for both the US and Australian positions in Asia.

From Friends to Allies

The US encounter with Australia began in the early nineteenth century as whalers from the United States followed their prey to the South Pacific, but Australia probably first entered the US strategic consciousness in 1907. That year, President Theodore Roosevelt's Great White Fleet steamed across the Pacific on a mission of goodwill and as a show of strength towards a rising Japan.¹⁰ Alfred Thayer Mahan, the great naval strategist and intellectual ally of Roosevelt, had argued that the Pacific would one day be safeguarded against continental hegemony by a maritime consortium consisting of the United States, Britain and Japan.¹¹ He was at least fifty years ahead of his time, but he was correct that the common interests of the United States and Britain now extended to the Dominion of Australia.

When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Theodore Roosevelt's cousin, Franklin, rebuffed the Congress and the Navy and decided to follow the pre-war Rainbow Plan to first defeat the Nazis and save Britain before turning to Japan.¹² Nevertheless, Franklin Roosevelt's highest priority in the Pacific was to prevent Australia from being isolated and invaded by the Japanese. In the Coral Sea, the US Navy and the Royal Australian Navy made certain at bloody cost that Australia would be secured as the southern flank for the US campaign up the Pacific Islands and Borneo to isolate and defeat Japan.

Australia was an essential element in US planning for a post-war military strategy in the Pacific, but different visions for the future of Northeast Asia also emerged. In the peace negotiations in San Francisco, John Foster Dulles sought to anchor US forward military presence on an independent but allied Japan.¹³ Initial occupation plans to demilitarise Japan gave way to new thinking in the wake of the sluggish Japanese recovery and the Korean War. Instead, US officials adopted the idea that Japan should have at least enough military power to maintain order on the Japanese archipelago.¹⁴ For Australians, however, the memories of the war were still too bitter, and Canberra insisted that any peace treaty ending the US occupation and ushering in a new United States–Japan alliance be balanced by a security commitment to Australia and New Zealand.¹⁵ This commitment eventually became the 1951 ANZUS Treaty.¹⁶

ANZUS ushered in a new era of cooperation between the United States and Australia. At first the US Joint Chiefs of Staff insisted that there be no combined command and no US forces deployed to Australia.¹⁷ Rather, the US military recommended that Australian troops be deployed to the Middle East to compensate for a diminished British presence. An exasperated Secretary of State Dean Acheson pleaded with the generals and admirals, reminding them that Australian troops were fighting and

dying alongside US troops in Korea. When Dien Bien Phu fell to the Viet Minh in 1954, the Joint Staff took an entirely different view, realising that Australian units might be the most reliable Allied forces in the region. Later in 1954, when the Eisenhower administration created the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), the Australian Embassy in Washington was the first to question whether the new formulation would actually stop communist advances in Indochina without requiring boots on the ground.¹⁸ Then in 1965, Australian troops were among the first to join the fight when the United States felt compelled to begin increasing troop levels in Indochina. When Richard Nixon suddenly announced the Guam Doctrine in 1969, calling

The allies' interests are better aligned now than they have been for decades.

on Asian allies to carry more of the burden for their own defence, Australians were understandably anxious about abandonment.¹⁹ Not only was the United States moving out of Southeast Asia militarily, there was a prospect that Japan would be unhinged from the alliance and begin building more offensive military capabilities (which in fact was briefly Tokyo's plan in 1970–72).²⁰

Overcoming Alliance Difficulties

Being a US ally in the Asia-Pacific has never been easy. US strategy towards the region is driven by factors that are distant considerations for Canberra. For the United States, Europe has until recently taken precedence over Asia. Even within Asia, Northeast Asia often took precedence over Southeast Asia and Australia's immediate neighbourhood. Moreover, the Congress could undercut US commitments in Asia without Australia getting a vote. Yet no ally has approached Australia's intimate relationship with the United States in terms of shaping US military and trade strategy in the Asia-Pacific. During the post-war era, only Japan has matched Australia's influence on overall US grand strategy toward this part of the world.



Australian sway on US policymakers has positively shaped US engagement not just in the Asia-Pacific but also around the world. It was Australian influence, after all, that ensured the United States had a hub-and-spokes system in Asia instead of a hub-and-spoke system focused on Japan alone. Australia took the lead in establishing APEC in 1989 and then pushed the Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations to take a larger role in strengthening Asia's regional architecture.²¹ Beyond the Asia-Pacific region, Australian forces have been deeply involved in efforts to eradicate terrorist groups due in part to Prime Minister John Howard's presence in Washington at the time of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks.²² Australian forces were also centrally involved in the opening engagements of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and beforehand Howard and British Prime Minister Tony Blair together ensured that the Bush administration presented the case for war to the United Nations.

Despite their different perspectives, the United States and Australia have always stood side-by-side when exigencies demanded it. Continuing a century-long tradition beginning with US infantrymen serving under Australian General Sir John Monash on the Western Front, US and Australian soldiers have continued to fight under each other's command.²³ US soldiers and airmen today report to an Australian Deputy Commander of US Army Pacific and US Air Forces Pacific on matters of planning and operations for partnership building and cooperation with third countries. US Marines now rotate regularly to Darwin as part of the US strategy to disperse forward presence in the Pacific. In short, the Australian-US alliance has been bonded by a century of shared sacrifices in combat and common values.

Addressing 21st Century Challenges

As the United States rebalances its capabilities towards the Asia-Pacific region, Washington's and Canberra's interests are again closely aligned. Both nations seek an open Asia-Pacific community – a phrase that rolls so easily off the tongue that in 2008 Prime Minister Kevin Rudd may have forgotten that President Bill Clinton conceived the phrase fifteen years earlier.²⁴ The Abbott and Obama administrations are working together to expand security cooperation with Tokyo and to build new patterns of cooperation with New Delhi.²⁵ A recent Center for Strategic and International Studies survey of experts across the region found that the 'Indo-Pacific' is a highly salient concept among Americans and Australians.²⁶ The same survey indicated that Americans and Australians were aligned in seeing a United States-led regional order as most favourable for their interests, as opposed to a Chinese-led order, a balance of power or a multilateral community.²⁷ Thus, shared interests have encouraged alignment of our national security objectives and strategies.

Being a US ally in the Asia-Pacific has never been easy.

Security experts in Washington also worry about some aspects of the Australian strategic debate.

Yet there is also recognition in Washington that Canberra worries about both the commitment of the United States, and the possibility that Australia could be dragged into a larger regional conflict. Australian officials have publicly commented on the paucity of senior officials conversant in Asian affairs.²⁸ Meanwhile, US defence budget cuts have raised questions not only about the ability of the United States to maintain its military position in Asia but also about its willingness to do so. The dysfunctional relationship between the Congress and the administration on crucial issues such as trade further exacerbates these concerns.²⁹ Disputes between the US and Australian governments on the wisdom of and cost-sharing arrangements for rotating US forces through Australia have also been a recent issue. Moreover, inconsistencies in US policy towards China have left some Asian observers confused about overarching US strategy.³⁰

Security experts in Washington also worry about some aspects of the Australian strategic debate, as was noted in the introduction. The Abbott government has managed to make modest increases in defence spending, but only after deep cuts by the previous Labor government.³¹ The public discourse on United States–China relations in Australia commands considerable attention in Washington. Americans are thankful for the bipartisan support for the alliance, which does not shift when governments in Canberra change. The Australian government tries to downplay suggestions that Australians must choose between China and the United States along the lines suggested by former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser.³² Yet in no other US-allied capital do former leaders engage in such blatant questioning of the alliance with the United States. What are Americans to make of such statements, and how can Washington and Canberra align their China strategies?

Incoherent China Strategy

The reality is that neither Washington nor Canberra has a clear or consistent China policy. The Obama administration's policies have shifted, particularly in the president's second term.³³ Initially, the White House tried expressing respect for China's core interests in a joint communique issued by Presidents Obama and Hu Jintao in Beijing in November 2009.³⁴ Yet US leaders recoiled in 2010 when Chinese fishermen clashed with Japanese Coast Guard vessels and when Beijing stood on the sidelines after North Korea sank a South Korean corvette and shelled its civilians. A new hard line from Washington was evident when the administration announced its pivot to Asia in November 2011 and issued its Defense Strategic Guidance in January 2012 listing China's anti-access capabilities as a threat to US interests.³⁵ Then in 2013, the administration turned its focus back towards cooperation and began embracing Chinese President Xi Jinping's proposal for a 'New Model of Great Power Relations' between the United States and China that would avoid conflict by accommodating China's interests.³⁶ Finally, the administration struggled to find appropriate tools of dissuasion after China announced its East China Sea Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ), asserted itself in maritime disputes and pursued land reclamation activities in the South China Sea.³⁷ The administration did well revising its Defence Guidelines with Japan, but did little in terms of assisting smaller states under pressure in the South China Sea. In the case of Beijing's proposal for an AIIB, the administration probably overreacted, forcing close allies like Australia and Korea to choose between Washington and Beijing until the British suddenly broke ranks and joined in April 2015.³⁸

Until the United States and Australia establish coherent and sustainable China strategies, muddled US responses to the AIIB and the accommodational utterings of public figures will unfortunately cast Washington and Canberra as diverging on the major issue of the day. There will always be differences, of course. The United States has a solemn security commitment to Japan and the Taiwan Relations Act with Taiwan; Australia does not.³⁹ The US economy is as intertwined with China's as Australia's is, but US firms face more significant threats to intellectual property while Australia is primarily a resource provider.⁴⁰ On the diplomatic side, the allies interact with China in a number of shared forums, such as the East Asia Summit and the APEC process. Yet Australia also interacts with China in separate forums, such as the Regional Cooperative Economic Partnership, to which the United States is not party. And the United States encounters China constantly on issues before the United Nations Security Council

and in the bilateral US–China Strategic and Economic Dialogue. Australia’s China policy covers a more focused set of issues, but also retains a greater focus on China’s role within Southeast Asia.⁴¹ While no alliance in history has been without such asymmetrical priorities, it is vital that the alliance aggregate these priorities into a collective security arrangement that provides maximum benefit for both partners.

These diverse and sometimes divergent interactions with China can be a strength for the US–Australian alliance. The breadth of the challenges and opportunities presented by China’s rise requires that we take multiple parallel approaches to achieve shared objectives. Despite different perspectives on specific issues, there is no essential incompatibility between the US and Australian aims for their respective long-term relationships with China. Robert Zoellick’s vision of China becoming a ‘responsible stakeholder’ in the international community provoked little dissent in Australia.⁴² And Kevin Rudd’s recent framework for shaping China’s bilateral relationship with the United States is broadly supported within Washington’s foreign policy community.⁴³ The question now is how the United States and Australia can accomplish their shared objectives by maximising strategic cooperation.

The key will be arriving at a core understanding of how the United States–Australia alliance can shape China’s expectations. Put another way, our objective should be for China to view the United States and Australia as rejecting zero-sum diplomacy in Asia but resolutely defending norms of behaviour that are essential to peace and prosperity in the region.⁴⁴ Thus, Beijing should expect that Canberra and Washington will support ASEAN states in terms of diplomacy, capacity building and military requirements in the face of Chinese coercion. Beijing should expect that Australia and the United States will be unified in demanding transparency and high standards of governance in new institutions. On the other hand, Chinese leaders should be reassured that the United States and Australia are committed to integrating Beijing into an international order that permits it to take a larger leadership role, as long as doing so does not undermine regional security or weaken rules and norms vital to a peaceful order.

US Hopes for and Expectations of Australia

Australia’s importance to US national security is growing, and so are Washington’s hopes and expectations for the contributions that the alliance can make to regional security. From a military perspective, the alliance has a number of core competencies ranging from the conduct of combined expeditionary operations to space situational awareness. From the US perspective, three areas of alliance cooperation will be particularly vital in the years ahead:

- diversifying US posture through access to Australian facilities;
- developing Australia’s own maritime security capabilities; and,
- building Australia into a regional hub for cooperation with other allies and partners.⁴⁵

Diversifying US posture: Australia’s geographic location is more important to the United States today than it has been at any time since the Second World War. Australia serves both as a link between the Indian and Pacific Oceans and as a sanctuary from China’s anti-access/area denial capabilities. US officials have therefore focused on expanding US military access and joint training in Australia and gaining access to additional facilities for joint training and operations.⁴⁶ The most visible example of US rotational forces in Australia is the presence of US Marines in Darwin. Darwin can serve not only as an important operating location but also as a hub for training with other amphibious forces, such as those from Canada, South Korea, Japan and New Zealand. Such capabilities are particularly critical in humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief operations. In higher intensity regional crises, access to air and naval bases, particularly the northern air bases and the southern port of Perth,

Rudd’s recent framework for shaping China’s bilateral relationship with the United States is broadly supported within Washington’s foreign policy community.



would be strategically important to overall US strategy. While cost-sharing arrangements will need to be negotiated, some in Washington hope that the United States can either rotationally deploy or home station surface combatants and/or submarines in Perth to increase the presence of US forces in the Indian Ocean, South China Sea and the southern Pacific.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, aircraft could be located outside the range of most Chinese conventionally armed ballistic missiles if they were able to operate from RAAF Tindal or bare bases such as RAAF Scherger.⁴⁸ Although the addition of stealth aircraft has reportedly been under discussion, other assets such as refuelling tankers and high-altitude long-endurance aircraft would also be beneficial. These deployments would add to the relatively new rotational deployment of US Marines to Darwin and the existing intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance facilities at Pine Gap and elsewhere.⁴⁹

Developing Australia's own capabilities: In addition to rotating more US forces through Australia, Washington wants to see Australia's own capabilities improve, particularly for maritime security. Australia's new Air Warfare Destroyers, Wedgetail airborne early warning and control aircraft, and Joint Strike Fighters with aerial refuelling from KC-30A tankers will provide a necessary long-range counter-air capability.⁵⁰ The most concerning scenarios for Australia involve not only aircraft but also threats from hostile naval vessels or long-range missiles. From a US perspective, to manage the maritime

challenge Australia will need to augment its aerial and space-based intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities with an expanded strike capability. The Royal Australian Navy's development of a Collins-class submarine replacement will provide a vital capability in this regard, although the technological hurdles remain substantial.⁵¹ Acquisition of long-range anti-ship cruise missiles could also prove valuable by deterring incursions by hostile surface ships. In addition, joint development of missile defences could help both allies to defend critical assets while doing so at a manageable cost. Looking ahead, Australia's need for systems that can sustain operations at long range is likely to require greater investments in unmanned systems, many of which could be co-developed with or acquired from the United States.

Washington wants to see Australia's capabilities improve, particularly for maritime security.

Making Australia a regional hub: A final hope among experts in Washington is that Australia will help to network US allies and partners in Asia. Canberra's ties with Southeast Asia have long helped to bridge the gap between ASEAN and the United States and helped to guide US interactions in the region.⁵² But recently Australia has deepened ties with more distant states, in particular Japan and India. Australia and Japan share longstanding alliances with the United States as well as common interests and democratic values, which form the basis for their expanding relationship.⁵³ Both countries also have similar security priorities, which have enabled Japan to discuss the possibility of lending its expertise in submarine design for the Collins-class replacement. India too has common regional interests and values, and shares Australia's interest in Indian Ocean security. India's 'Act East' policy fits well with Australia's commitment to enhancing regional security, particularly in Southeast Asia. Helping to build such networks is vital if the United States is going to spread the burden for upholding the rules and norms that undergird the existing international order. In short, rather than serving as a spoke, Australia could be an increasingly important hub.



Washington's expectations of Canberra are growing as Australia's own influence expands and as Australia's geopolitical position becomes more central in US regional strategy.⁵⁴ By deploying more US forces to Australia, expanding joint development and production, and networking regional relationships, Washington hopes that the two allies can better manage regional security challenges. As the nation in which President Obama announced the US rebalance to Asia, it is only natural that the United States pushes to deepen and expand its relationship with Australia in the years ahead. No doubt, challenges will remain, but the future for the alliance is bright.

ANZUS: The View from Canberra

Gazing out from The Lodge in Canberra there is much to suggest that the Australian prime minister would be exceptionally confident with the current state of the Australia–United States strategic partnership. By almost all accounts the strong foundations that have been developed since the signing of the ANZUS Treaty have, in recent times, been enhanced in new and critically important ways. Especially reassuring for the prime minister is the strong support that 'the Alliance' (as it is known in Australia),⁵⁵ garners from both sides of mainstream politics and the Australian public.

Strong Domestic Foundations

Australian public opinion is traditionally pro-Alliance. This has been particularly evident in recent years with the Lowy Institute for International Policy's 2015 poll putting public support for the Alliance at 80 per cent, while The Australian National University's 2014 polling recording 81 per cent support in the previous year. These are exceptionally strong numbers, and they are part of a long-standing trend that has seen robust support for the Alliance since the early 1990s.⁵⁶ This public support is reflected in the high levels of bipartisan political support for the Alliance from the both the conservative Liberal–National coalition and the Labor Party. This type of across-the-aisle support is remarkable, especially given the increasingly combative style of Australian politics.⁵⁷

The Alliance has also long held a central place in Australian strategic and security policymaking, and this looks set to continue into the future. The 2013 Australian National Security Strategy noted that Australia's 'alliance with the United States is as strong as ever', that it remains 'critical to [Australia's] ability to deter and defeat adversaries' and is

**The future for the
alliance is bright.**

Australia currently has hundreds of ADF personnel on exchange or embedded into the US military.

regarded as one of the eight 'pillars' of Australia's approach to national security.⁵⁸ The fundamental importance of the Alliance to Australia is also reiterated in defence policy with the 2013 Defence White Paper noting that it is far and away Australia's 'most important defence relationship'.⁵⁹ Current Defence Minister Kevin Andrews reaffirmed this position in a foreshadowing of the 2015 Australian Defence White Paper, he noted 'our Alliance with the United States will continue to be a central feature of Australia's defence and security arrangements'.⁶⁰

New Depths of Cooperation

The depth of the relationship and the rising importance of the Alliance to Australia in recent years have been reflected in a number of key developments. This includes the deepening institutionalisation of the relationship and the emergence of new areas of cooperation. Consultations to

set the foundations for a significant expansion in the breadth and depth of cooperation between the two nations began with the 2010 Australia–United States Ministerial (AUSMIN) meeting in Melbourne. This was followed by the announcement by President Barack Obama of a major shift in US policy to the Asia-Pacific during a visit to Australian parliament in November 2011.⁶¹

The recent moves to accelerate the Alliance are built on a platform of enhanced cooperation that dates back to the end of the Cold War. From this point in time the Alliance became much more global in focus, a shift which was operationalised through the high tempo of operations in the Middle East. However, despite the focus on this distant region over the last twenty-five years, President Obama's decision to announce the US emphasis on the Asia-Pacific in Canberra was no accident. As Coral Bell, one of Australia's most astute strategic thinkers, once observed, the real depth of US interest in Australia is always 'a by-product of [US] interests in Asia'.⁶²



One of the most significant outcomes of President Obama's November 2011 visit to Australia was the announcement of the establishment of the US Marine Corps Rotational Force, Darwin.⁶³ In coming years this force will grow to 2500 Marines organised as a Marine Expeditionary Unit. Of potentially greater strategic significance, the 2014 Force Posture Agreement between the United States and Australia enabled not only the expansion of the US Marine Force, but also the rotation of a US Air Force presence in northern Australia including B-52 (and potentially B-1B) bombers, fighter jets and air-to-air refuelling aircraft.⁶⁴ The next element for the enhancement of the US presence in Australia and the region involves the US Navy. Studies are currently underway between the US Navy and the Royal Australian Navy for increased access for the US Navy to Australian ports for surface combatants, submarines and amphibious ships.⁶⁵

In addition to the US presence in Australia, recent AUSMIN meetings have broadened the relationship in areas such as cyber security, ballistic missile defence, space cooperation and increased measures to combat terrorism. Furthermore, recent major Australian defence capability acquisitions have included US C-17 and C-27 transport aircraft, the F-35 Lightning II and EA-18G Growler electronic warfare aircraft. The Australian Defence Force (ADF) is also operating US combat systems in its Collins-class submarines and will have the Aegis combat system fitted to the Hobart-class air warfare destroyers that are currently under construction.

Operational Intimacy

Such close cooperation has also been manifested at the operational level. Australia currently has hundreds of ADF personnel on exchange or embedded into the US military, and with the acquisition of new capabilities outlined above this is set to grow substantially in the next few years. In addition, the Australian frigate HMAS *Sydney* was embedded with the USS *George Washington* Carrier Strike Group, based in Yokosuka, Japan, for three months in 2013.⁶⁶ The same year Australian Major-General Rick Burr was appointed Deputy Commanding General – Operations, US Army Pacific. Burr's appointment was regarded as a sign of the 'unprecedented closeness' of the relationship, as this was 'the first time a non-American has served in such a high-ranking position'.⁶⁷

Building on Burr's appointment, at the 2014 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) naval exercises Australian officers took leading roles with Rear Admiral Simon Cullen serving as Deputy Commander of the Combined Task Force, Air Commodore Chris Westwood as Combined Forces Air Component Commander and Commodore Peter Leavy as Expeditionary Strike Group Commander.⁶⁸ Such interoperability is symptomatic of enhanced military-to-military cooperation that has been in place between the two countries, especially through combined operations in the Middle East since the end of the Cold War.

From the Australian perspective these moves are all built on the back of an enduring strategic approach which includes an emphasis on regional stability, maintenance of the US-led rules-based global order, open and free trade, maritime security and open sea lines of communication, and the settling of disputes peacefully and in accordance with international law.⁶⁹ Support for these measures and for the US pivot/rebalance has been apparent under the current Australian Liberal–National coalition government through its response to China's November 2013 announcement of an ADIZ over the East China Sea and in its more recent strong statements with respect to Chinese land reclamation activities in the South China Sea.⁷⁰

Alliance Challenges

Despite the very evident deepening that has taken place in the United States–Australia Alliance over recent years under both Coalition and Labor Governments, the Alliance is not without its challenges from Canberra's perspective. These challenges are evident across a diverse range of issues, yet each issue relates in some way to the changing dynamics of an ascending Asia and each involves the opening up of what might be termed an 'expectations gap' between Canberra and Washington.

The clearest and perhaps the earliest manifestation of this 'expectations gap' occurred around Australia's declining defence budget. As noted above, by 2012 this had fallen



Australia and Japan have emerged as something of a poster child for spoke-to-spoke collaboration.

to its lowest level since 1938 as a proportion of GDP. While consistently offering strong political support for the Alliance, Canberra has also behaved fairly openly as a free-rider in the relationship. Mark Thomson of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute explains this behaviour as a function of how junior allies traditionally and quite logically behave in any asymmetrical alliance. However, as Thomson goes on to note, this dynamic has also become an increasing point of tension between Canberra and Washington, particularly as it deeply offends Americans 'to think that a friend such as Australia would deliberately take advantage of them'.⁷¹

Canberra is certainly sensitive to these perceptions, and a conscious effort has evidently been made by the Abbott government to begin to address this particular expectations

gap. As one gap is closed, however, another may open elsewhere. One such area concerns perceived US expectations of how Canberra ought to respond to growing Chinese influence and assertiveness in an ascending Asia. As discussed above, the quite vigorous although largely abstract public debate about whether it is possible for Canberra to strike a balance in its relations between China and the United States, particularly should Sino-US relations become more contested, continues unabated in Australia.⁷²

In recent months, however, there have been some more practical indications of an expectations gap appearing between Canberra and Washington, particularly in relation to Australia's April 2015 decision to apply for membership of the AIIB and in the Abbott government's May 2015 denial in response to spontaneous statements by a senior US official that B-1 bombers would be coming to Australia to deter Chinese coercion in the South China Sea.⁷³ Australian commentators have provided contrasting interpretations of this latter episode. Some took Washington's statements at face value that US Assistant Secretary of Defence David Shear simply misspoke when he made these remarks.⁷⁴ Others suggested that either the Abbott government had privately agreed to such an arrangement and that the Prime Minister's denials were intended to mislead the Australian public or, alternatively, that Abbott's statements suggesting that the United States–Australia Alliance 'is not directed against anyone' points to the existence of some daylight between Washington and Canberra when it comes to responding to China's rise.⁷⁵ In the absence of any compelling evidence to suggest otherwise, this latter interpretation pointing to a US–Australian 'expectations gap' in relation to dealing with China's rise is by no means implausible.

As noted above, in recent years Washington has also made clear its desire for its various alliance partners to cooperate more effectively with each other in a so-called 'spoke-to-spoke' capacity.⁷⁶ Having deepened their security ties since the early 1990s and having significantly accelerated that process during the first term of the Abbott government, Australia and Japan have emerged as something of a poster child for this concept of spoke-to-spoke security collaboration. As their cooperation has deepened and intensified, however, so too has debate in Australia as to how much further this process should advance. In recent months, this debate has centred on whether Australia's future submarine should be a program based upon a Japanese-designed vessel. While that outcome is certainly thought to be Washington's clear preference, voices of dissent have grown louder both in and out of government on the grounds that the so-called 'Option J' will be unduly provocative to Beijing, detrimental to the Australian defence industry and poorly suited to Australia's unique operational requirements.⁷⁷ Reportedly in an attempt to save his prime ministership which was subject to political wrangling within his own Liberal Party, Abbott partially bowed – ostensibly at least – to some of the arguments being made against Option J when his government in February 2015 announced the establishment of a 'competitive evaluation process' that would also allow competing bids for Australia's future submarine project from France and Germany.⁷⁸

From an Australian perspective, there is potential for similar divisions to open up between Canberra and Washington in the face of Indonesia's rise. There are a number of ways that such a rift could emerge in the future. As Michael Wesley has argued, for instance, a stronger Indonesia is one that is likely to attract greater interest from Washington, thus potentially becoming a competitor of sorts with Canberra for US attention. Under such a scenario, US expectations of Australia might actually diminish. As Wesley goes on to note, should the United States seek to actively build Indonesian strength as a

potential bulwark against a fully risen China – through, for instance, arms sales or technology transfers – this could also conceivably generate Australian resentment towards the United States.⁷⁹

Conversely, history suggests that there is no guarantee that Washington will side with Canberra in times of crisis involving Indonesia – particularly an Indonesia whose geostrategic importance is perceived to be on the rise. During the late 1960s, for instance, the United States refused to back Australian opposition to Indonesia’s annexation of West Papua for fear of driving Jakarta straight into the arms of Beijing. Again in 1999, calls from Canberra for the provision of US ‘boots on the ground’ during the crisis in East Timor went unheeded.⁸⁰ Most recently, comments made by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey that Canberra needed to work harder to improve ties with Jakarta were read in some Australian quarters as a form of public criticism of the current approach of the Abbott government and as a clear indication that it was not meeting US expectations of its junior ally.⁸¹

Perhaps the most serious ‘expectations gap’ that has the potential to open up in the Alliance is that between Australian policy elites and their broader public. As noted earlier, the Alliance has enjoyed consistently strong support from the Australian public over several decades. Yet the aforementioned polling on Australian attitudes towards the Alliance in the context of the East China Sea dispute suggests that there may be limits to that support. Moreover, those limits have the potential to intensify further in the coming decades as Australia’s demographic profile changes. Polling conducted by the Lowy Institute for International Policy in 2014, for instance, found that only 27 per cent of Australians in the 18–29 year old bracket felt that Canberra would be able to rely upon the Alliance in twenty years’ time. This was almost half the number of Australians over sixty years of age who expressed confidence in the Alliance going forward.⁸² Moreover, as the Australian population continues to diversify culturally over this timeframe and beyond – yet another clear manifestation of an ascending Asia, one could argue – the impact of such trends upon public perceptions and expectation of the Alliance could also shift quite markedly. To be sure, a case can be made that alliance relationships generally tend to be managed at the elite level and that public attitudes are thus largely inconsequential. The strains which public pressure has caused historically in the United States’ alliances with New Zealand, the Philippines, Japan and South Korea at various junctures, however, serves as a powerful counter to that particular line of argument.⁸³

Mind the Gap

In the final analysis, it is worth making the point that none of the above-mentioned potential friction points in the Alliance is as yet anywhere near the terminal stage. Moreover, there is every prospect that many if not most of them will never get to that point. That said, Walt’s warning that every alliance relationship, no matter how strong, requires careful tending and management bears reiterating in relation to each of them.

A key element of Australia’s strategic culture is its support for great and powerful friends.



ANZUS: Collaboration Going Forward

Having canvassed in relatively broad terms the respective outlooks from Washington and Canberra on ANZUS, the paper will now zero in on three specific issues areas that exhibit the potential for either Alliance discord or deeper collaboration going forward. These areas highlight the importance of efforts to pursue shared interests while managing both the emerging abandonment concerns in Washington and the entrapment anxieties in Canberra. The main recommendations are threefold:


1. The United States and Australia should ensure that their focus remains the Asia-Pacific even while cooperating on out-of-area missions;
2. The Alliance should serve as a central hub for Asian regional order and architecture; and,
3. The Alliance should focus on leading in the management of shared maritime challenges.

Each of these initiatives is discussed in greater detail below. Although many of these efforts are already underway, prioritisation along these lines is more important now than at any time in the Alliance's recent history. A renewed focus on Asia, and on the important role that the United States and Australia can play on regional architecture and maritime challenges, is vital to both the strength of the Alliance and to reinforcing regional prosperity and security.

Rebalancing ANZUS towards the Asia-Pacific

The most important strategic decision from an Alliance perspective is where ANZUS should focus its energies geographically. Do developments in an ascending Asia dictate that this region be the primary focus of the Alliance and its basic *raison d'être*, or will ANZUS continue to split its energies further afield, particularly in the Middle East?

Expeditionary military deployments to the Middle East are a long ingrained part of Australia's strategic culture.⁸⁴ Australian deployments to the region stretch back as far as the First World War where its military forces were engaged in Egypt, Gallipoli, Palestine and Syria. Just over two decades later during the Second World War, Australia's forces were back participating in operations in Egypt, Cyrenaica (Libya) and Syria. With the onset of the Cold War in the 1950s, the Australian government planned for possible deployments to the region to support its interests and allies in the event of the onset of a global war against communism.⁸⁵ Australia's long involvement in the region means that 'since 1948 there has been no year in which Australian military forces haven't been serving in some capacity in the Middle East'.⁸⁶ In more recent decades Australia has committed forces to the Persian Gulf where they have been continuously since 1990. After the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States, then Australian Prime Minister John Howard invoked the ANZUS Treaty for the first and only time in its history.⁸⁷ Thereafter the ADF was committed to operations inside both Afghanistan (2002–) and Iraq (2003, 2005, 2009, 2014–). At present ADF personnel remain deployed inside both countries.⁸⁸



ANZUS needs to 'pivot' and refocus its attention on responding to the realities of an ascending Asia.

These commitments have largely come about because a key element of Australia's strategic culture is its support for great and powerful friends.⁸⁹ This has been particularly evident in the most recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Here, given the relatively small size of its military commitments, Australia's support has been most effective at the political level. Australia demonstrated its importance by joining the 'coalition of the willing' in Iraq in 2003 and being one of only three countries that supported the United States with military forces in the initial military operations. While operations in Iraq generated considerable controversy in both Australia and the United States, in terms of its involvement Australia's primary motivation was the strategic objective of forming a closer partnership with the United States.⁹⁰

Australia has also committed forces to Europe and the Middle East as part of a liberal internationalist approach to international affairs in an effort to support a rules-based global order based on shared norms and values buttressed by US power.⁹¹ However, given Australia's geographical isolation, its involvement has always been predicated by another key element of its relationship with its great and powerful friends: a stable Asia-Pacific region. Australia has relied on its major power ally to ensure regional security by providing maritime dominance or, preferably for Australia, uncontested naval supremacy in the Asia-Pacific.⁹²

There is no question that US interests in Europe and the Middle East are on a wholly different scale to those of Australia. Emerging as the leader of the Western world after the Second World War, the United States has been deeply involved in multiple regions through close relations with partners and allies from NATO to Israel to the Persian Gulf. Developments in other regions have often mimicked those in Asia, as they did during the 1960s and 1970s, when both Australia and the Gulf States were transitioning from Great Britain to the United States as their main security patron. US involvement in Europe and the Middle East remains extensive and critical to meet threats from Russia, Iran, ISIS and others, but Australia's primary missions are increasingly in its own neighbourhood.⁹³ The differing role of the United States and Australia outside the Asia-Pacific is where the asymmetric nature of ANZUS is most apparent. This goes to the fact that the United States is a global power with ingrained strategic interests and longstanding security commitments in multiple regions, while Australia is a middle/regional power in the Asia-Pacific with strategic concerns elsewhere. As such, while Australia has had an ongoing military presence in the Middle East since 1990, the limited size of this commitment is reflective of the fundamental difference in interests, military capabilities and geography.

The key factor for the future of ANZUS outside Asia is the changing strategic dynamic within an ascending Asia itself. The Asia-Pacific today is radically different from that of the 1990s, when the United States and Australia first engaged in combined military operations in the Middle East. The Asia-Pacific in 2015 is, as Australia's Secretary of the Department of Defence Dennis Richardson has recently

The United States should also continue to look to Australia to do more in its own region in support of the Alliance.





noted, the 'decisive shaper' of the 'ADF's force structure'.⁹⁴ Most significantly, the era of regional stability backed by uncontested US maritime supremacy that underwrote ANZUS's extra-regional focus after the end of the Cold War seems to be coming to a close. Just as the United States is 'rebalancing', so too ANZUS needs to 'pivot' and refocus its attention on responding to the realities of an ascending Asia.⁹⁵ This is a reflection of the importance of the Asia-Pacific to both countries. The text of the ANZUS Treaty has always centred the relationship on a fundamental 'Pacific Pact'.⁹⁶ It is this refocusing on an ascending Asia which has driven observers to note that 'Australia figures more prominently in US foreign policy than at any time since Australian combat troops served under General Douglas MacArthur in World War II'.⁹⁷

While the future of ANZUS lies primarily in the Asia-Pacific, the Alliance also needs to remain cognisant of abiding US strategic interests and Australian strategic concerns in Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere. For example, in order to achieve this balance, Australia should work with the government of the United Arab Emirates to establish a long-term agreement to secure access to its Middle East operating hub at the Al Minhad Air Base. The United States and Australia also need to have detailed and frank discussions over the levels of military force and effort that should be expected from Australia over the next decade extra-regionally, given the fundamental focus of both countries on the Asia-Pacific. Australia's commitment should be in the order of tailored and limited maritime, air and land forces to promote regional stability; to contribute to regional partner capacity building; and to provide for humanitarian assistance.

Combined operations in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom raised alliance interoperability to an unprecedented level. The operations stressed the Alliance in terms of intelligence fusion, special operations, logistics and air campaigns, among other areas. The result was a much stronger alliance. Indeed, US and Australian forces had not conducted such sophisticated operations together since 1945. These operations abroad enhanced deterrence in Asia, but the operational focus in the Middle East at times detracted from the needed geopolitical focus on challenges in the Asia-Pacific. In this way, operations in Afghanistan and Iraq strengthened the capabilities of the alliance but focused on strategic problems outside of Asia.

In order for the alliance to be successful in Asia, a renewed strategic focus on the region will be necessary. Not only should Australia expect the United States to remain committed to the principles that led to the pivot to the Asia-Pacific region, but the United States should also continue to look to Australia to do more in its own region in support of the Alliance, especially in Southeast Asia.⁹⁸ This requires both that Australia maintains a regional focus and the United States displays a high degree of discipline in balancing requests for Australian support outside of Asia. As John Blaxland has noted, 'United States policy makers should consider the significance and utility of Australia's military commitment in the Middle East compared to its ability to help foster regional security and stability in Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific: it cannot readily do both well'.⁹⁹

Australia has been a loyal ally to the United States across the globe, and thus it remains tempting for both governments to periodically leverage this history for short-term expediency. However, such approaches must be overcome in order to foster a more focused and sustainable long-term Alliance. The key to such an approach is setting up a framework for the extra-regional role of Australia's forces and having frank discussions of forces levels for these missions given other priorities. Maintaining a disciplined approach will enable high levels of continuity and the ability to maximise the mutual interests of the Alliance while maintaining the focus on its primary operational area – the Asia Pacific. In an era of growing security challenges in Asia and increasing budgetary restrictions in both Canberra and Washington, this sort of prioritisation is absolutely vital.

Existing multilateral structures are proving too cumbersome.


ANZUS and Regional Architecture

As the Alliance turns back to the Asia-Pacific, leaders in both capitals should seek to broaden ANZUS's role and turn the Alliance from a bilateral tie to a central hub for regional cooperation. Somewhat ironically, multilateral initiatives have sometimes been a source of tension between Washington and Canberra over the past quarter century. When multilateral structures with a more explicit security focus began to emerge in Asia in the early 1990s, US policymakers openly opposed such initiatives fearing that they could potentially undercut US alliances in this part of the world.¹⁰⁰ Among these initiatives was a proposal put forward by Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans in July 1990, which called for a new 'Conference for Security Cooperation in Asia' drawing inspiration from the European experience.¹⁰¹ Washington was among a number of countries opposing this initiative. Canberra's decision to join the East Asia Summit in 2005 also generated strains in the bilateral relationship, coming as it did at a time when there was concern among US policymakers that Australia was 'going soft' on the Alliance.¹⁰² The Australian government was ultimately able to assuage these fears by signing an additional agreement with ASEAN clarifying that Canberra's signing of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation – a prerequisite for East Asia Summit membership – would not compromise Australia's alliance obligations. Yet any sense of US assurance seems to have been short-lived, as US policymakers were again scathing on Prime Minister Rudd's ill-fated 'Asia-Pacific community' proposal of June 2008.¹⁰³

Tensions between Australia's multilateral engagement and the ANZUS alliance have re-emerged most recently in relation to Canberra's March 2015 decision to apply for membership in the AIIB. The Australian government itself was openly divided on this issue. Its decision to join came at the eleventh hour and only after others such as Britain, France, Germany and Italy had also announced their intention to sign up. Perhaps most significantly from a United States–Australia Alliance perspective, however, Canberra's decision came after the Obama administration had voiced its strong opposition to the AIIB and to its allies joining. Publicly at least, this opposition was made on the grounds that the AIIB threatens to degrade existing financial institutions because it will likely have lower standards of governance and adopt less transparent decision-making processes.

In reality, however, Washington's greatest concern regarding the AIIB most likely stemmed from the view that it is yet another attempt on Beijing's part to compete for influence in Asia. While Congress was never likely to support the United States joining the AIIB, the Obama administration's poor handling of this issue needlessly opened a rift in the Alliance (and several others), and risked making the United States appear unnecessarily confrontational and reactionary. US opposition on other Chinese architectural initiatives has certainly intensified of late – including Beijing's new 'Asia for Asians' security concept, its New Silk Road land belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiatives, and its BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) new development bank. US opposition to these initiatives is understandable. As the 'Asia for Asians' security concept makes particularly clear, these are undoubtedly part of a larger, concerted effort on Beijing's part to create an international environment more conducive to Chinese interests.

Importantly, Washington must show Beijing that it is willing to integrate China into the regional and international order and allow Beijing more say in determining the international architecture. That said, it is important that Washington not overestimate China's capacity to successfully implement its preferred architectural vision in the highly diverse and often politically difficult Asia-Pacific region. From Australia's perspective as a country that has sought to advance its own architectural initiatives (not always successfully), Canberra is acutely aware of how challenging the region can be in this regard. As regards the AIIB, the United States should have realised that its friends and allies would want to shape the bank, China would spend the money and Washington ultimately wouldn't stop either. In addition, the infrastructure needs in Asia are real. A better approach would have been for the United States and like-minded states to agree on a set of conditions – like those proposed by Australia – and then use those guidelines to shape participation. Unfortunately, Washington's approach made the Alliance appear divided. Yet, observers should remember that AIIB does not represent a more attractive regional architecture. To date, Beijing is not offering a broader rules-based trade, finance and security architecture that is superior to the existing system.



**India too has
recognised
Canberra's growing
importance.**

The time may also be ripe for the establishment of a new trilateral security process involving Australia, Indonesia and the United States.

Indeed, one of the most consistent features across this highly variegated Asia-Pacific is that existing multilateral structures are proving too cumbersome to address many of this region's most pressing security challenges, particularly traditional challenges such as territorial disputes, military competition and arms racing behaviour. As a consequence, so-called 'minilateral' modes of security cooperation are becoming more prevalent and more promising.

The Trilateral Strategic Dialogue involving the United States, Japan and Australia has emerged as something of a poster child in this regard. Initiated as a senior-level Trilateral Security Dialogue in 2002, an inaugural meeting of foreign ministers occurred in 2006. In addition, when Japanese reconstruction teams went to Samawah, Iraq, Australian troops provided their protection. While the US military helped to reopen the Sendai Airport days after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, an Australian C-17A was the first aircraft on the ground to help provide search-and-rescue support, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.¹⁰⁴ The United States played a central role in each effort. The 2014 meeting of Prime Minister Abbott, Prime Minister

Abe and President Obama on the sidelines of the G20 Leaders' Summit was an important step toward deeper cooperation on a trilateral basis.¹⁰⁵ Most recently, the trilateral defence ministers meeting in May 2015 resulted in a strong statement on 'strong opposition to the use of coercion or force to alter the status quo in the East China and South China Seas unilaterally'.¹⁰⁶ To this end, Japan is scheduled to participate for the first time in the Talisman Sabre exercises with Australian and US forces later this year.¹⁰⁷

Japan is not the only major player that has reached out to Australia in recent years. India too has recognised Canberra's growing importance and has sought to strengthen bilateral ties.¹⁰⁸ India's Act East policy makes cooperation with Australia a natural fit, as both states are looking to play similar roles by helping Southeast Asia deal with regional security challenges. Moreover, as New Delhi is one of the most important and fastest growing major powers in the world, Canberra and Washington have much to gain from working together to engage India in new forms of cooperation. Trilateral cooperation between India, Australia and the United States is tempered by the fact that each state has a very different, but productive, relationship with China.¹⁰⁹ As a result, each partner can help to convey similar messages to Beijing in different ways, helping to reinforce shared expectations of China's role and responsibilities in the regional and international order. Furthermore, these three partners share many common security interests, particularly in terms of Indian Ocean security.



Because different threat assessments, political systems and geography will prevent any kind of fixed, overarching regional security architecture, any minilateralisation of security relationships on the part of Washington and Canberra must be agile. Security cooperation efforts should at times include China, in order to help demonstrate that our nations have a shared interest in transparency, confidence-building measures and contributions to public goods. One example is the recently agreed upon Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea, but this is only the beginning.¹¹⁰

Consistent with the above trend towards security minilateralism and in light of the worrying difficulties that Australia–Indonesia relations have undergone in recent years, the time may also be ripe for the establishment of a new trilateral security process involving Australia, Indonesia and the United States. Such a grouping would certainly serve the interests of each of the participants. For Washington, it would be consistent with its larger goal of broadening and deepening its strategic partnerships in the Asia-Pacific while also providing a mechanism for more directly stabilising the sometimes-shaky Australia–Indonesia bilateral relationship. For Jakarta, it would afford the possibility of playing a more prominent role on the international stage consistent with its growing economic weight, while also remaining true to its traditionally non-aligned posture given that the grouping would not constitute a formal alliance relationship. For Canberra, the grouping would serve as an additional means of supporting its longstanding objective of ensuring close and consistent US engagement in the Asia-Pacific, while also providing an additional avenue for deepening security cooperation with Indonesia. As Indonesia's economic and strategic importance continues to grow over the coming decades such a deepening in cooperation seems likely to become increasingly desirable for Canberra as an alternative to a more difficult and competitive relationship with Jakarta. Finally, as with the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue, Australia, Indonesia and the United States each confront increasingly complex bilateral relationships with a rising China, which could also be discussed within this grouping.


As Australia and the United States work to establish stronger minilateral arrangements with regional powers, Canberra will increasingly become a hub for regional cooperation. This shift is good not only for Australia, but also for the United States and the Asia-Pacific more broadly. Given its geographic proximity to Asia, Australia's perspective can help shape US policies in constructive ways. Meanwhile, the United States can enable Australia to leverage substantial resources in the pursuit of shared objectives. Reshaping the United States–Australia Alliance into a regional hub should therefore be a principal objective of both governments.

ANZUS and Maritime Security

Although the United States and Australia must address numerous military challenges, the Alliance's greatest threats relate to maritime security. Maritime security concerns range from state-based threats, most notably China's more assertive naval operations, to non-state challenges such as piracy and human trafficking. The US military and the ADF have made maritime security a top priority, but the severity and complexity of the threats facing Washington and Canberra have proven that there is a need for deeper collaboration.

Over the last five years, the United States and Australia have become increasingly concerned about China's behaviour in maritime disputes. In Northeast Asia, Taiwan's status has been a longstanding Alliance issue, but the focus has increasingly shifted to the East China Seas (a Democratic Progressive Party win in Taiwan's upcoming elections, however, could once again place Taiwan high on the list of Alliance concerns).¹¹¹ In the East China Sea, Beijing has stepped up its assertiveness, particularly since 2012. Chinese Coast Guard ships now regularly patrol near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and periodically enter the contiguous zone around the islands.¹¹² People's Liberation Army Navy vessels typically remain over the horizon, but their presence is intended as a warning to both the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the US Navy.

In Southeast Asia, Beijing's insistence on sovereignty claims based on its so-called 'nine-dashed line' continues to cause instability. China's May 2015 White Paper specifically identifies the importance of efforts to 'safeguard the



**Australian Defense
Force operations
out of RMAF
Butterworth in
Malaysia provides
a model.**

Australia's participation in such shaping activities need not occur within disputed regions.

sovereignty and security of China's territorial land, air and sea'.¹¹³ Outside observers cannot be certain of how far China would be willing to go to safeguard its claims, but the trajectory of its increased risk tolerance is clear.¹¹⁴ The Pentagon's 2015 report on China's military finds: 'Chinese leaders in 2014 demonstrated a willingness to tolerate a higher level of regional tension as China sought to advance its interests, such as in competing territorial claims in the East China Sea and South China Sea'.¹¹⁵ China's recent land reclamation activities are a major source of concern, particularly for other claimants of the Paracel and Spratly Islands.¹¹⁶ In addition to its construction efforts, China has used coast guard and fisheries enforcement vessels to coerce its smaller neighbours, placing an oil rig within waters claimed by Vietnam and challenging Filipino resupply operations in the Spratly Islands. These types of 'cabbage peeling' approaches have been effective in strengthening

China's position in territorial disputes. Washington and Canberra are growing concerned that Xi Jinping's consolidation of power might encourage him to take risks in the South China Sea, such as announcing a new Air Defence Identification Zone covering some or all of the nine-dashed line.¹¹⁷

Beijing's activities in the South China Sea have been designed to alter the decisions of regional states without prompting a military response from the United States. By using coast guard and fisheries vessels rather than navy ships, Beijing has made it difficult for the US military to respond without appearing to escalate crises. In addition, by pressuring states in the South China Sea that either don't have a security treaty with the United States (such as Vietnam) or have ambiguity in their security commitment from Washington (such as the Philippines), Beijing has been able to alter the status quo while avoiding a strong US response.

In Washington, a growing number of government officials, elected leaders and regional experts are calling for a more muscular US response to Chinese assertiveness.¹¹⁸ In particular, the perception that some members of the Obama administration have been reluctant to accept risk to deter coercion has led some experts to advocate clearer demonstrations of US resolve. The recent decision by the US Department of Defense to permit a camera crew on a P-8 flight near China's reclamation activities and to release images of Chinese vessels trailing the USS *Fort Worth* in the South China Sea may signal a changing US strategy.¹¹⁹ Australian government officials have indicated deep concern about Chinese activities, and some have suggested that the ADF might conduct joint patrols with the US military, but no decision has yet been made public.



Chinese operations in the Indian Ocean are also a growing concern, particularly for Australia. China's more frequent transits through the Indian Ocean indicate that Beijing may slowly be shifting from anti-access and area denial into a more power-projection focused force. Australia's geographic isolation has long been one of its strongest defences, as has been the case for the United States.¹²⁰ Yet, China's growing blue water navy and its long-range missile forces threaten to put Canberra within range of the People's Liberation Army.¹²¹ Beijing certainly has the legal right to undertake operations in the Indian Ocean, and cooperation between China and other states on counter-piracy and illicit trafficking can be productive. Nevertheless, China's concern about protecting its vulnerable sea lines of communication will likely bring its ships into closer contact with Australian maritime assets.



The number and diversity of maritime challenges require that Washington work closely with allies and partners to increase shared maritime security capabilities. Maximising the time on station of these maritime platforms should be a top priority. The main US operating locations in the Asia-Pacific are largely in Northeast Asia. US forces in Japan and South Korea are well positioned to deal with threats to the Korean Peninsula and the Ryukyu Islands, but these locations are far from emerging potential crisis zones in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. Although Diego Garcia and Guam are farther south, the gap between them leaves the United States with few reliable operating locations for an increasingly important part of the world. Moreover, the United States has only a very limited presence in the South Pacific. Australia and New Zealand are therefore ideally placed to provide badly needed strategic operating locations. Both countries retain close partnerships with many Pacific island states due to their long-term economic and security relationships. For these reasons, ANZUS occupies a vital role as a hub of US regional security operations and partnerships.¹²²

Southeast Asian partners are increasingly looking for assistance to help manage regional challenges, often turning to Australia and the United States for support. Canberra's expertise with advanced radars and remote sensing will be vital for ASEAN partners who lack airborne monitoring and maritime domain awareness capabilities, as evidenced by the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 over the South China Sea. Coordinating Australian and US security assistance, such as contributions of patrol vessels, is another way that the allies can underwrite regional security.¹²³ Too often, regional states are left not only with too few or too antiquated systems but also with limited training and maintenance capabilities. Working together to provide life-cycle support will be vital to expanding the maritime capabilities of regional partners.¹²⁴ In addition, Australia and the United States may be able to provide valuable intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance information to regional partners, which might not otherwise be available.

Leveraging Australia's own military capabilities is also likely to be vital to regional states in the years ahead.¹²⁵ The Australian Defense Force operations out of RMAF Butterworth in Malaysia provide a model for how advanced Australian capabilities can benefit regional states and enhance shared security. As the United States seeks operating locations within Southeast Asia, coordination with Australia will be increasingly important and advantageous. In addition, combined operations and plans will increasingly be required to counter coercion. The US military is already adopting measures to ensure freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, such as sailing US Navy ships through disputed international waters and flying maritime patrol aircraft in international airspace. Integrating other allies and partners into these operations is critical to demonstrate that the United States represents not just its own parochial interests but also those of the international community in seeking to reinforce the existing rules-based system.¹²⁶ Australia's participation in such shaping activities need not occur within disputed regions of the South China Sea but could instead begin with multilateral operations in the Coral Sea or the eastern Indian Ocean.

Beijing certainly has the legal right to undertake operations in the Indian Ocean.

As democracies, we should not fear an open debate.

Australia's ability to police the maritime approaches to its northern shores will also be increasingly important as China's military operations shift outward. Chinese projection of power through the Indian Ocean along the Maritime Silk Road must necessarily pass through the Indonesian archipelago.¹²⁷ As a result, close cooperation with Indonesia, Singapore and others may be required to monitor the movements of regional militaries. If ASEAN's concerns about Chinese ambitions and the People's Liberation Army's power projection capabilities continue to grow, regional maritime security requirements will rise. Even operating from locations

in Australia—which could potentially include facilities such as Cocos or Christmas Islands which are close to critical chokepoints—the United States will not be able to provide constant overwatch of key areas.¹²⁸ Therefore, the US-Australian alliance will be called upon to deliver not only needed maritime security capabilities, but additional capacity as well.

Conclusion

The United States and Australia have a long history and a bright future. Over seven decades, the ANZUS Alliance has persevered through numerous tests. Alliances are not without tensions, and the entrapment/abandonment dynamics emerging in the United States–Australia relationship will require careful attention. Nevertheless, our common interests and values provide a strong foundation and form the basis for overcoming these barriers. As democracies, we should not fear an open debate – we should relish the opportunity to debunk theories of strategic divergence. By refocusing the Alliance on strategic planning for Asia, developing ANZUS into a regional hub with its own spokes, and improving US and Australian maritime security cooperation, leaders in Canberra and Washington can drive the Alliance forward to meet the emerging challenges of an ascending Asia.



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