

STJEPAN BOSNJAK DFAT WHITE PAPER SUBMISSION

01 AUSTRALIA'S FOREIGN POLICY NEEDS TO BE GROUNDED IN A CLEAR-EYED ASSESSMENT OF OUR NATIONAL INTERESTS. → How should we define Australia's national interests in a changing world? How should our values underpin Australia's foreign policy? What should we do differently? How can we do better?

“National interest is a term used to denote the objectives pursued by a state”¹ Interests themselves do not exist in an indisputable way, and when people argue that something is in the national interest, they mean their interpretation of the national interest. The term ‘interest’ is usually related to the realist view of international politics. Hans Morgenthau, one of the intellectual founding fathers on realism stated “The main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power”² and “The statesman must think in terms of the national interest, conceived as power among other powers.”³ ‘National interest’ is commonly used in association with foreign policy, the equivalent terms regarding domestic policy are ‘public interest’ or ‘common good’.

What matters is the definition of the national interest, as defining the national interest is integral to a nation's peace and prosperity. The “National interest may be the most complicated element of international relations to calculate precisely. Most wars result as a combination of misjudgement of the power relationship and domestic pressures”⁴ “It is a time honoured cliché of Australian policy white papers and political speeches to claim that the strategic environment we face is more fluid and complicated than ever before.”⁵

The primary objective of most states is the defence of its own territorial integrity and the second most important objective of most states is the economic well-being of some or all of its citizens and corporate interests. The national interest at its most abstract therefore can be

¹ Derek McDougall, *Studies in International Relations: The Asia-Pacific, The Nuclear Age, Australia*, Second Edition, Hodder Education, Rydalmere, 1997, p23

² Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Alfred A. Knopf. New York, 1967, p5

³ Ibid, p165

⁴ Henry Kissinger, *On China*, Second Edition, The Penguin Group, New York, 2012, p426

⁵ Allan Gyngell, *Parallel Worlds*, Lowy Institute Perspectives, The Lowy Institute, Sept. 2003, p3
[http://www.lowyinstitute.org/files/pubfiles/Gyngell%2C Parallel worlds A4 NEW.pdf](http://www.lowyinstitute.org/files/pubfiles/Gyngell%2C%20Parallel%20worlds%20A4%20NEW.pdf) (accessed 15 Feb. 2014)

defined as the security and welfare of the state and people. The foreign policy of any state is determined and executed in the pursuit of the 'national interest'. "Leaders define the national interest and conduct foreign policy based upon their assessment of relative power and their states' intentions, but always subject to domestic constraints."⁶

Every state has two fundamental national interests – security and economic prosperity. Despite this, each state has its own set of defined national interests, based on its geography, its history, its political system and its economy, and also its own methods of achieving their defined national interests. For a combination of these reasons, Australia's interests are not only unique, but uniquely challenging. Some of these interests we share with other countries, but with no country, nor with any group of countries, do we share all of our interests. Australia's foreign policy endeavours reflect these interests. The national interest not only "encompasses the integrity of the nation's territory"⁷ but also "its political institutions and of its culture."⁸ This is important, as the decisions of those who define the national interest, do so as a result of their own worldview.

To understand Australia's national interest objectives, we must comprehend Australia's sense of isolation and subliminal fear of invasion. Australians comprise less than one-third of one per cent of the world's population. This tiny fraction of humanity lives on an island continent, comprising just over 5 per cent of the earth's land surface. This continent contains unique flora and fauna, not found anywhere else in the world and is abundant in primary resources. It does not have a land border with any other country. Its east and west coasts face nothing but ocean. To the south are the frozen expanses of the Antarctic. To the north are cultures and civilisations which seem alien and exotic to most Australians. Australia's geostrategic environment is the South Pacific and South East Asia. "Its major ally is in North America, 12,000km away. Its major trading partners lie in North East Asia, 8000km away. The historical and cultural roots of the majority of its population lie in Europe, on the other side of the world."⁹ Throughout its history, Australia has looked towards bigger powers to protect it from the outside world.

⁶ Steven Lobell, Norrin Ripsman & Jeffrey Taliaferro (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, The State, and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, p25-26

⁷ Hans Morgenthau, in David Uren, 2015, *Takeover: Foreign Investment and the Australian Psyche*, Black Books, Collingwood, p193

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Allan Gyngell & Michael Wesley, *Making Australian Foreign Policy*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, 2003, p10

One of the world's great geo-cultural anomalies is that a country that lies just to the south of Indonesia has an overwhelmingly white majority and has long been considered a Western country.¹⁰ “[Australia] is not, and has not for 60 million years, been part of Asia geographically. Australia is not, culturally or ethnically, part of Asia...[Australia was] founded as a Pacific outpost of Europe. It is still an outpost of Europe, a true Hesperia, a land looking west”¹¹

Due to the massive size of their landmass and small population, Australians have considered themselves vulnerable to invasion from the very beginning. The would be threat to Australia's physical and political sovereignty, or racial and cultural homogeneity, has shifted constantly, from the French, Germans, Russians Chinese, Japanese, the Chinese again, Vietnamese and Indonesians. The form that the invasion would take has ranged from physical attack to uncontrolled immigration, ideological subversion and economic competition. Prior to Federation, the colonies were concerned about invasion from French, Russian and German powers, and placed pressure the motherland to prevent one of those powers acquiring territory in the South Pacific, preferring a ‘British Lake’.

The alleged motives for foreign territorial acquisition of Australia have been equally numerous. It has been held that the countries to the north have looked upon Australia's vast lands and agricultural and mineral resources as a means of alleviating poverty and over population. At other moments, Australia has been considered attractive for its strategic location. This list of potential aggressors, their assumed motives and means of invasion adds force to the suggestion that fear of invasion has never been isolation and static, but has developed into most enduring of all our national anxieties. Australia even built Canberra inland to protect it from naval attack.¹² Due to our isolation, and fear of vulnerability the one constant in the history of Australian foreign policy is that Australian government has taken to depending on ‘great and powerful friends’ and no government has ever “seriously considered emerging completely from under the comforting wing of a Great Protector...depending on

¹⁰ Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World*, Second Edition, The Penguin Group, New York, 2012, p367-68

¹¹ Frank K Crowley, in Timothy Kendall, 2005, *Ways of Seeing China, From Yellow Peril to ShangriLa*, Curtin University Books, Fremantle, p161

¹² George Megalogenis, *The Australian Moment: How we were made for these times*, Penguin Group, Camberwell, 2012, p175

‘great and powerful friends’ is unavoidable for a small population in a big country”¹³

Historically, a larger population is not popular with the public.

However, Australia have not been passive partners. Australians have died in their tens of thousands fighting enemies not of their choosing, through their involvement in distant overseas conflicts linked to the national interest of its great and powerful friends.

The government formulates policies to maximise the national interest, as “State leaders are more likely than average citizens to be concerned with the long-term security of the nation.”¹⁴ The state must guard the national interest sometimes against the will of petty, parochial domestic interests. As such, the national interest is very political in nature. The overarching foreign policy aim for both the ALP and Coalition is serving Australia’s national interest. Historically, the ALP’s and Coalition’s definition of the national interest have four common goals: maintaining the territorial integrity of Australia, including the safety and security of its society and economy; ensuring regional stability and preserving the existing regional balance of power; the sea lanes that make up the arteries of international trade remain open; and responding to new security threats.¹⁵ Included in the last goal are terrorism, international crime, unregulated population movement, and quarantine. These four goals incorporate the physical and economic wellbeing of all citizens, giving them an incentive to maintain a stake in the national interest.

Stjepan Bosnjak is in the final year of a Masters (Research) Degree at Victoria University. In addition, he is a member of the Army Reserve and has served overseas on deployment.

¹³ Stewart Firth, *Australia in International Politics: An Introduction to Australian Foreign Policy*, Second Edition, Allen & Unwin, 2005, p43

¹⁴ Thomas Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino American Conflict, 1947-1958*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996 ,p18

¹⁵ Nick Bisley, ‘Never having to choose: China’s rise and Australian Security’ in James Reilly & Jingdong Yuan (eds.), *Australia and China at 40*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2012, p67-68