

Submission to Foreign Affairs White Paper

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TPP and Trade

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ICC etc

ANZUS:

The ANZUS treaty although straightforward and relatively robust has served Australia poorly primarily because of a lack of political maturity on the Australian side that has seen Australia unquestioningly keen to make additional, non-treaty, offerings to its treaty partner in the form of military involvement in wars of the partner's choosing and a host of supporting activities in the vague, unrealised, unfocussed, and essentially sycophantic, hope that somehow we would ingratiate ourselves or improve potential treaty benefits that may accrue.

Vietnam and Gulf War II are but two egregious examples of this.

It does need to be noted that one of the aims of the ANZUS treaty is foster self-reliance amongst treaty members, and in this respect the treaty has been a success as Australia's military capabilities have grown over the last 50 years to a point of self-reliance.

Also the permanent presence of foreign troops on Australian soil, aside from exercises and manoeuvres, is a constant insult and a blight to Australian sovereignty. So while recognising the debt owed to the USA during WW II in helping to vanquish an temporary existential threat, the ANZUS treaty and its unwanted baggage, and its multiple intrusions on Australian sovereignty need to be rejected.

This will enable Australia to be considered its own country, not as a 'deputy' as a former prime minister described Australia. And this will allow us to interact with other countries and regional partners, including the USA, as an independent country not as a vassal or sychophant.

Foreign Languages:

Trite as it may seem I think an excellent way to catalyse engagement at all levels with our neighbours is to learn their languages: Tetun, Indonesian, Thai, Tagalog, Tok Pisin, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Japanese etc. and even European Languages.

In the past schemes to catalyse the study of foreign languages at schools in Australia have largely failed – so alas I think it is necessary to make competency in a language other than English mandatory for admission or graduation (or both) from all universities.

This would not be new imposition – it has existed earlier, and the potential long-term benefits if managed properly, and possibly with assistance from our neighbours, are immense.

Regional interaction:

The focus of Australian Foreign Affairs activity should be, though not exclusively, on our immediate neighbours, our region, and our major trading partners.

These concentric circles largely expand across the Pacific and Indian oceans reflecting the geography of Australia.

Our immediate neighbours include: Indonesia, East Timor, PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, New Zealand, Samoa.

The next orbit would include the ASEAN nations and the subsequent level would include our trading partners in western and particularly northern Asia as well as the USA and Pacific Rim nations.

Australia champions recognition and acceptance of the rule of law (except when international decisions sometimes go against us) and we would do well to continue to pursue this cause in regions in our neighbourhood where extrajudicial killings are commonplace (West Papua, Myanmar, the Philippines) and unsubstantiated land grabs in the face of International Court rulings are implemented by force and bullying.

It should also be noted that Australia has sometimes worked to weaken the rule of law by seeking to create classes of people with differing rights when appearing before courts.

In any case dealing with a Chinese government that does not accept nor respect the rule of law either in domestic or international situations is a major challenge to Australian diplomacy, and a serious impediment to some types of investment and business activities being conducted in China.

Australia has an excellent reputation of helping neighbours in situations of natural calamity.

Indonesia:

Our relationship with Indonesia has been poorly handled by both sides of politics within Australia over many years despite a base of goodwill in both Indonesia and Australia.

Emphasis needs to be placed on enhanced cultural interaction and diversified business contacts between the two countries – at all levels.

The refugee situation with Indonesia needs a complete reboot – please see notes on refugees.

Australia needs to recognize that the focus of TNI activities since independence has been almost exclusively internal, and that innumerable human rights violations are involved. It also needs to be recognized that the TNI operates as both an unfettered corporation and as a rarely checked militia – not an uncommon situation in a third-world country.

Witness the multiple recent skirmishes between TNI and the Indonesian police over drugs and criminal syndicates.

The genocide of 1965/66 continues to rent all levels of Indonesian society.

Unfortunately this puts military contact between Australia and Indonesia in a very difficult position – massive human rights abuses remain commonplace in West Papua and the Jakarta government is unable or unwilling to change what is a default modus operadi (similar to that used in East Timor). Consequently Australia needs to cancel all military cooperation with Indonesia, while at the same time enhancing trade, cultural and all manner of civil contacts – very difficult tasks that cannot nonetheless be shirked.

West Papua:

East Timor:

Australia should accept the international court ruling on the seabed boundary between East Timor and Australia.

Aid to East Timor from Australia in both cash and kind should be significantly increased.

East Timor exports should receive assistance in entering the Australian market.

PNG:

Aid to PNG in both cash and kind should be significantly increases though distribution mechanisms that seek to bypass the institutional corruption of most MPs – difficult situation.

The pacific island migrant worker scheme should also be considered for PNG

Foreign Worker Schemes:

Australia operates two worthy and viable foreign worker schemes that unfortunately seem to conflict rather than complement each other.

These are the 'Working Holiday' visa scheme and the 'Pacific Islander Worker'

Both have excellent long-term potential to work in Australia's benefit but the schemes need to be managed and coordinated better.

Foreign Aid:

Australia should increase foreign aid (in cash and kind) to >1% of GDP (or GNI).

This a simple obligation we owe to our fellow humans - and in the long-term it will be very beneficial to Australia in terms of reciprocity, goodwill, and improving our neighbourhood.

(Without wishing to sound to parable like I think we are better served by helping our neighbours than building a high fence.)

To do any less shames us as a nation.

TPP:

The now discredited 'Trans Pacific Partnership' needs to be thoroughly abandoned.

Any attempts, such as those of the TPP, to give corporations extra-national powers, and concomitantly compromise the sovereignty of nations, need to be thoroughly discredited.

The TPP may be well and truly dead (and good riddance) but the area of its focus is not – Asia and the Pacific rim and the area within that orbit should form the primary focus of Australia's foreign affairs efforts.

Radio Australia:

Having spent time in remote villages in PNG, The Solomons, The Philippines, and Indonesia my view is that Radio Australia was an excellent and universally respected source of information that has been wantonly trashed. Its re-establishment should be a matter of national urgency.

Refugees:

Australia's treatment of refugees over the last 16 years or so has been unquestionably abominable and clearly at odds with our international obligations.

This behaviour from both sides of politics has seriously harmed our international standing and regional reputation.

Even for those without a conscience it does not take long on the ground outside Australia to realise the depth of contempt in which Australia is held on this issue.

Clearly the Manus and Naru Gulags are serious failures.

It is simple abuse of poorer neighbours to dump on them obligation that are clearly ours (and which we choose not to honour) with straight-out bribes. This behaviour shames us and demeans them – there are no winners.

And yet it need not be so – the refugees themselves are a tremendous potential resource of talent ingenuity and effort, and aside from our obligations under the refugee convention (that are miniscule in size compared with most other countries) the unrealized upside is huge.

Australia could and should, hopefully with the assistance of the UNHCR and Indonesia itself, expand the existing centre for refugees centre in Indonesia, and agree (subject to security issues) to accepting 30,000 or more per year. This would be not just a gesture of goodwill, regional cooperation and humanitarian assistance, it would be a boon for Australia as the refugees would make a contribution out of all proportion to their numbers.

Changing Australia's role from regional trouble maker to regional cooperative problem solver, and at the same time stimulating our economy has to be a WIN - WIN situation.

Middle East:

Iraq – reparations war crimes etc

Australia's participation in the 2003 invasion of Iraq stands as a low point in our military and diplomatic history.

The resulting massive direct and indirect civilian deaths, and the ill-managed post-invasion schmozzle many of the pieces of which are still in play, is in part unquestionably our responsibility. Australia should recognize our guilt and make an effort to pay reparations however inadequate they may be. Perhaps these reparations could be in the form of several million tons of grain per year for the next 10 or 20 years.

As invading another state, without even a UN sanction, is the most extreme form of foreign affairs in action, the use of the ADF in this manner demands proper consideration and where possible reasoned debate – neither of which happened in 2003.

Can policy prevent political incompetence ? Perhaps. Considering the down side as seen in Australia's disastrous Iraqi folly it is certainly worth trying. Ideally this should be a bi-partisan position so that whenever possible use of the ADF in foreign conflicts is considered those matters should be thoroughly debated in Parliament.

Israel – Palestine etc apartheid

Many of the threads of real and potential instability in Middle East flow from or are coloured by the dysfunctional Israel-Palestine relationship. So Australia's attitude to these matters albeit at some remove is an important part of our Foreign Affairs stance.

I think Australia has been right in rejecting any attempts to call into question the existence of Israel, such as statements by the former Iranian president. The existence of Israel should be non-negotiable.

However Israel's disregard for international law , its colonisation of territories occupied during the 1967 war, and its establishment of a brutal apartheid system for Palestinians, effectively renders the much touted 'two state solution' as close to unviable.

Nonetheless I think Australia should join 137 other countries in granting full diplomatic recognition to the state of Palestine, conscious of the fact that Israel's destabilization of Palestine may mean that in the longer view only one joint state is viable.

Terrorism:

All of Australia's anti-terror activities are focussed on non-state actors that constitute a minority of terrorist activity.

The bulk of terrorist activities are state based. Yet Australia is happy to largely ignore the iceberg below the water line and focus on the tip above water.

For example, Michael Kirby's UN report on North Korea makes it plain it is a terrorist state. As is Assad's Syria. As is the behaviour of the TNI in West Papua. As is the Kadyrov regime

in Chechnya, As are parts of Mexico and central America. As are the CIA network of black prisons and rendition etc with which Australia has been involved.

Australia's so-called anti-terror activities both military and diplomatic need to be on a realistic basis that considers terrorism from all sources which up to now has not been the case.