

**Submission to Foreign Policy White Paper from Associate Professor Kirsty Foster,
Associate Dean International and Head, Office for Global Health, Sydney Medical School,
The University of Sydney**

- 1. Australia's Foreign Policy needs to be grounded in a clear-eyed assessment of our national interests. How should we define Australia's national interest in a changing world? How should our values underpin Australia's foreign policy? What should we do differently? How can we do it better?**

Australia's interests are primarily to ensure the wellbeing of its people. In the 21st century this involves maintaining clean air, safe water, food security and a peaceful, productive, economically viable society. This cannot be achieved in isolation and therefore working collaboratively internationally especially with our near neighbours is essential in tackling the major environmental and geopolitical issues facing all of us. Australia is well positioned, as a high-income country with enormous resources of all sorts, to be a leader in the region.

Demonstration of consistency and maturity in this role is needed to build truly collaborative relationships and trust. This means that our foreign policy would be best to encourage longer-term relationships than those forged by frequent short term 'projects'. Focusing on regional needs and prosperity over a nationalistic approach is more likely to build trust and cooperation. Respect for cultural differences and avoiding a judgmental stance is essential to success.

Clarity on Australia's values both internally and externally would be helpful in aligning foreign policy across all sectors. Currently policy and values can, at times, appear to be at odds e.g. treatment of refugees and asylum seekers and professing caring attitudes towards business relationships.

Australian values: for example: diversity as a strength; working together for the common good; having a fair go; etc. – once agreed should be stated proudly and loudly

- 2. Australia has diverse interests that span the globe. Which countries will matter most to Australia over the next 10 years? Why and in what ways? How should we deepen and diversify key relationships? Which global trends are likely to affect Australia's security and prosperity? How should Australia respond?**

In maintaining stability in the region the countries of Asia and Southeast Asia will matter most. This depends on building and maintaining people to people relationships at all levels. China is undoubtedly a rising global power and India, soon to be the most populous country in the world, is another important player. Indonesia as our nearest neighbour is key in security and in national pandemics. Vietnam rapidly developing and another key location for collaboration.

As these countries grow economically the relationship with Australia moves from one of aid to true collaboration. There is much scope for Australia to support capacity building in research and education and in doing so further building Australia's reputation for excellence and maintaining a position as a provider. The significant growth in numbers of Chinese students to Australian Universities is currently of great importance to the higher education sector. There is an opportunity to build numbers from other Asian countries as they move to middle income status.

This opportunity is enhanced by current trends in UK/Europe and the United States which may make these destinations less attractive. However, in the longer term, as these countries develop their own world class education systems they will be able to provide the necessary tertiary education themselves. Innovative thinking and strong relationships to find new ways of working together will be needed. Foreign policy, which fosters strong relationships working together for mutual benefit, will position Australia well especially against those who adopt a more adversarial stance.

Maintaining links with traditional allies will be important as will diversity in relationships. Signalling more independence from the US at least in the short term may be wise.

Global trends:

- a) Environmental factors such as climate change, natural disasters and the movement of people will continue to be significant. A multinational approach would be a mature one if possible to broker – this will need strong leadership.
- b) Growing inequity between rich and poor is a global trend, which, if unchecked, has the potential to adversely affect Australia. Growing numbers of disenfranchised citizens risk destabilising social fabric and present a potential risk. Foreign policy focusing on supporting regional economic development rather than simply Australia's own economic development minimises the risk.

3. Australia is an influential player in regional and international organisations. Which regional and global organisations matter most to us? How should we support and shape them? How can we maximise our influence?

Organisations promoting a collaborative effort in tackling major global challenges: such as WHO, UN, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, Asian Development Bank, leading (and rapidly emerging) Universities in our region, the C9 league of universities in China, Indian Council of Medical Research, Public Health Foundation of India etc. We can maximise our influence by building a reputation for productive collaboration, reliability and long term engagement.

4. Australia needs to be ambitious in grasping economic opportunities. What steps should be taken to maximise our trade and investment and expand commercial opportunities for Australian business? How can we ensure Australia is positioned to take advantage of opportunities in the global economy? What are the key risks to Australia's future prosperity and how should we respond?

Building our reputation for research and education excellence through collaboration and support as our regional neighbours continue is one long term strategy to ensure continued and growing interest from other countries in the region to encourage students to come to Australia – in preference to European or North American universities. Australian organisations working together to promote 'brand Australia' is more likely to achieve benefit for all than a competitive approach. As new University departments emerge within the overseas universities, opportunities will be available to form strong relationships with research and education staff. The resulting collaboration will form the foundation of ongoing research relationships to solve shared problems.

Promoting Australian expertise as a resource to assist development especially as a leader within our region. In the health arena we have expertise in many areas from laboratory to clinical medicine, health governance and delivery, prevention and policymaking. Working in a multidisciplinary way to combat the wider aspects of planetary health encompassing human and zoonotic diseases, pandemics, environmental health, non-communicable diseases, food security etc. will become increasingly important as this century progresses. A transnational approach for these challenges would be of benefit.

5. **Australia confronts a range of strategic security and transnational challenges. How can Australia best deal with instability beyond our borders? How can our foreign policy including our overseas development assistance program support a more prosperous peaceful and stable region? How should our international engagement work to protect Australia against transnational security threats such as terrorism?** “Their health is our health, our health is their health”. Working together with our neighbours to present a firm strategy on terrorism but a compassionate response to asylum seekers and refugees is needed. Encouraging public hysteria about border threats while downplaying domestic threats is unhelpful. Education and engaging the domestic public in a relevant way with foreign policy is a necessary part of the process if success is to be achieved.
6. **Australia uses a range of assets and capabilities to pursue our international interests. What assets will we need to advance our foreign policy interests in future years? How can we best use our people and our assets to advance Australia’s economic, security and other interests and respond to external events? How can government work more effectively with N-G sectors including business, universities and NGOs, to advance Australia’s interests?**

Knowledge, skills and personnel are Australia’s best assets in advancing foreign policy in future years. The government can work more effectively in this space by blurring the boundaries between ministerial portfolios and recognising that more than one portfolio may need to engage with some of the complex international issues facing the country. E.G Valuing language skills, cultural sensitivity and cultural competence as part of a deliberate educational policy in Australian schools will enhance engagement across a number of sectors in future.

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