

Exploiting multilateralism in support of Australia's bilateral interests.

Axioms:

- A) The economic and social development of Australia's S.E. Asian neighbours -especially Indonesia - is very much in Australia's interest.
- B) Good relations and cooperative networking with Australia's S.E. Asian neighbours -especially Indonesia - is very much in Australia's interest.
- C) In addition, both of the above are very much in the interest of the United States – and several other countries – so that advancing our national interests in these areas increases our value to the US and others. Which is another of our interests.

Recommendations for no cost/ low-cost steps to advance these interests:

- 1) Our missions and delegations to international organisations and conferences should have as one of their objectives the direction of as much multilateral activity as possible to supporting this region and especially Indonesia - except in cases where this clashes with overriding other Australian foreign policy priorities.
- 2) There should also be tasked to consult closely with colleagues from these countries to coordinate our activity with theirs (where interests coincide), ensure that they know of our activity in support of their objectives and concern for their views and with the long-term aim of building up networks, habits of cooperation and positive perceptions between Australia and these neighbours.

Additional explanations:

As Australia's ambassador to the UN in first Geneva and then Vienna 1988 – 96, I did a little of both out of personal conviction but they were not in my instructions or mission statements and looking back it now seems to me that they deserved a high priority. Both multilateral posts and bilateral ones that have coverage of one or two organisations or occasional conferences would benefit from standing instructions in line with the above recommendations.

Contributions to building the relationship with Indonesia are especially important, given both the significance of that country for Australia and the fact that episodic strains on the relationship are inevitable but measures to broaden and deepen the relationship can add to its resilience.

All of the above axioms apply also to South Pacific island countries but I see these as a lower priority. Australia's relationship with each of the PICs is already far more intense than that we have with Southeast Asian countries. In addition New Zealand has already shouldered part of the load of helping the PICs in multilateral instances.