

2 Alliances and alignments in the twenty-first century

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More than 15 years since the end of the Cold War, the relevance of alliances remains a highly contentious issue in the study and conduct of international relations. Concerns over how alliances and coalitions relate to global terrorism as, arguably, the major security challenge of our time have intensified. The US Army War College recently published an assessment in its respected journal *Parameters* that concluded that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) time 'had come and gone' with the demise of the Soviet threat, the building of a viable European regional community and the widening gap between US and European security perceptions.¹ Others argue that postwar alliances in Northeast Asia will fail to withstand the pressures of nationalism that will generate a unified Korea and a more 'normal' Japan less in need of US security guarantees.² More expedient and short-term alignments, they insist, will supplant fixed, long-term, bilateral and multi-lateral alliances when there is a 'convergence of America's interests with those of other states over specific issues and challenges'.³ Critics of recent trends in US–Australia alliance relations insist that changing Australian interests, including its closer economic ties to China, could render the recent intimacy of the ANZUS alliance obsolete in future years.⁴

Most scholars and analysts of international relations, however, believe that alliances and long-term alignments and coalitions retain an important role in contemporary security politics. In a post-11 September 2001 environment, as John Ikenberry has observed, American unilateralists have often bristled at the constraints imposed on, and limited support extended by, allies for US initiatives to 'democratize' target regimes and eradicate terrorists, but 'the logic of multilateral and alliance-based tools' has nevertheless prevailed.⁵ They have proven preferable to *ad hoc* 'coalitions of the willing' because of traditional allies' experience in working with the United States compared to newer, less proven, security collaborators. Moreover, NATO and other traditional allied states' political values are generally more acceptable and reliable to US policy planners than the less stable polities that may be designated as key collaborators in the so-called 'Long War'.

The line between existing alliances which could contribute to an intensifying 'war on terror', and to 'coalitions shaped by missions' (to use the

oft-quoted axiom of former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld) is often a fine one. 'Reliable' allies as preferred coalition partners offer advantages: minimal intra-allied negotiations over mission purposes and constraints, maximum adaptability to addressing the scope of missions required and greater probability that the 'most involved' security partners in a specific, US-led operation would have high levels of force interoperability and greater 'staying power' due to more supportive publics. In the Asia-Pacific, Japan and Australia have emerged as the most conspicuous members of a new 'nuclear family' of a US global counterterrorism coalition that also includes Britain, Israel and parts of Eastern Europe (Poland and the Czech Republic).⁶ The Philippines and Thailand have developed into 'non-NATO strategic allies' that already had existing security ties with the United States, but found these to be strengthened in a post-11 September 2001 context (Pakistan and its rival India both represent special and more complicated cases along the peripheries of the Asia-Pacific).

What has united all these states, however, is a shared perception with Washington that the United States alone cannot prevail over those Islamic fundamentalist adversarial forces challenging the liberal values and geopolitical primacy of a US-led order. State-centric security dilemmas may still emerge to blunt this trend (a potential Sino-Japanese rivalry is illustrative), but such has not yet been the case for well over five years since the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks ushered in a new strategic age. Alliances, alignments and coalitions need to be reconsidered theoretically in terms of how they fit into this new environment. This chapter will provide such an evaluation focusing on three questions. First: How well do major postwar alliance theories relate to the rapidly changing security dynamics of the early twenty-first century? Second: What alliance and alignment/coalition perspectives might explain ongoing challenges to organizing security in the Asia-Pacific region? Third: How does the Australian–US alliance (most commonly known as ANZUS) fit into emerging regional and global security frameworks? The chapter's basic argument is that state-centric security partnerships continue to be germane to the 'Long War' but must be explained and validated quite differently from their Cold War predecessors.

Alliance theory in a post-11 September 2001 era

Writing about alliance theory at the end of the Cold War, Glenn Snyder observed that 'we have no theory about them [alliances] that remotely matches the richness of our theories about war, crisis, deterrence and other manifestations of conflict'. To some degree, he argued, this was due to their 'ubiquity' within the overall study of international relations: alliances and international relations are so intertwined as to be indecipherable. As well, parts of this subject have been studied without full consideration of its entire scope. Collective goods, sociological coalition theory, game theory,

structural balancing and rational choice are all components of alliance behaviour that have been investigated. However, they have not been consolidated in a way that any 'grand theory' of alliance and coalitions has emerged.⁷ This 'theoretical gap' has become even more pronounced in the post-11 September 2001 timeframe, where the notions of 'threat' and 'adversary' have become blurred by a meshing of state-centric and sub-state levels of conflict and where alliances are increasingly viewed as confidence building mechanisms as well as responses to perceived threats.

Alliances have been traditionally understood as a security commitment between two or more states to support each other against a commonly understood external threat by aggregating their military and other relevant power capabilities.⁸ Alliances can also emerge, however, when rival states coalesce to manage their strategic interests, thus compelling them to move beyond capabilities aggregation and power balancing as the sole rationale for alliance. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 was illustrative of this form of alliance: a non-aggression alliance between natural rivals (Germany and the Soviet Union) that allowed them to demarcate Poland, Finland, Romania and the Baltic States into agreed bipolar spheres of influence. Power balancing, however, dominated the postwar security environment as the United States and the Soviet Union forged alliance networks in Europe and Asia to contain each other. With the demise of the Soviet Union, residual, US-led alliance networks are reconstituting their identity and purpose. Some analysts have argued, for example, that traditional Cold War alliances are shifting to become 'quasi-alliances': alliance behaviour which would not only emanate from threat perceptions but also from promises made by allies in the event specific contingencies unfold.⁹ Others assert that alliances are becoming increasingly subject to domestic cultural pressures.¹⁰ Beyond these, alliance politics appears to be yielding to the rise of more informal alignments and coalitions as predominant mechanisms for managing security issues.

Alignments are normally broader, more informal, arrangements than alliances. Coalitions, while also informal, are usually directed more toward achieving a short-term or narrow objective. Alignments are 'expectations' held by policymakers about who will defend whom in various contingencies and the extent to which such a defence will apply.¹¹ The alignment concept is a quasi-alliance, and threat perceptions may be supplemented by other motives for closer security collaboration such as 'two antagonistic powers being driven together by their shared concern about the behaviour of a common major-power ally'.¹² The probability of states aligning with or against each other varies across different international systems and is shaped by expectations of abandonment and entrapment. States will view security commitments extended by one of the two major powers in a bipolar international system as more credible because that major power's key interest is to prevent capability aggregation against itself from occurring if it abandoned a small power that it deemed significant in global power

competition. Alignments tend to be more fluid in a multipolar system, however, due to power being more ambiguous. These are not hard and fast 'rules of alignment' but rather illustrate how expectations can shape alignments in the absence of the formal strategic commitment which usually underwrites an alliance.

Coalitions are less structurally grounded and less predictable than alignments. Rather than being predicated on broad expectations about intentions and commitments of actual or potential security partners as with alignments, coalitions are designed for states to realize immediate security interests. A key objective is to share in the spoils that the strongest coalition power expects (or is expected) to extract over opposing parties or to reduce the risks posed by such parties. This constitutes a form of 'bandwagoning' where smaller states enjoy relative gains through their affiliation with a 'winning coalition', but where the strategic risks of such coalescing can be reduced or limited in an environment where such coalesced groups tend to gain or lose affiliates fairly rapidly. John Mearsheimer has observed, however, that such risks are greater in a multipolar environment 'because the shape of the international order tends to remain in flux', making the size and shape of opposing coalitions difficult to calculate.¹³

In the post-Cold War international security arena, *ad hoc* coalitions have risen to prominence at the expense of alliances and alignments. US-led coalitions have been employed to fight America's two great conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Through such arrangements, Washington has greater freedom to 'pick and choose' those security partners most supportive to the specific geopolitical cause at hand and most able to contribute capabilities that best fit with US military operations. This calculation is reflected in Donald Rumsfeld's now infamous observation that 'generally the mission will determine the coalition; the coalition should not determine the mission'.¹⁴ The exception to this rule appears to be the 'Anglophone' coalition of Australia, Britain and the United States, in which both the Australians and British appear to remain keen to 'punch above their own weight' as acolytes of US strategy.¹⁵ Both of them have converted long-standing bilateral alliances with the United States that were linchpins of Western deterrence strategy during the Cold War into instruments of strategic preemption in the 'Long War'. Both have avoided the pitfalls of alliance dissonance and alignment dissolution plaguing recent US security relations with other traditional NATO partners such as France and Germany and such non-NATO affiliates as Pakistan and South Korea. These partners and affiliates have felt that they acquire too few benefits in return for excessive costs when becoming involved in US-led military interventions, including that they become high-profile targets in their own right for hostile, asymmetrical forces as a result of such involvement. Reacting to such feelings, formal US allies have diminished the value of their relationships with the United States in the eyes of American policy planners, and have elevated the perceived utility of *ad hoc* coalitions involving

temporary partners who are willing to fight along with US forces and under US command.

Consumed with axioms of power balancing and other forms of straight-forward state-centric competition, traditional alliance theory could hardly have been expected to anticipate the stark deterioration in the appeal to conventional allies of affiliating with US hegemony, or the growing level of American frustration with managing formal alliance ties in the increasingly amorphous post-11 September 2001 international security milieu. Despite the Bush administration's disillusionment with traditional European (and perhaps South Korean) allies during its first term, however, it has never fully ascribed to the alleged 'primacy' or 'unilateralism' principles that many independent analysts have argued was the case.¹⁶ It has instead sought to identify and implement a judicious mix of alliance and coalition politics to serve what is fundamentally a dual global strategy: responding decisively to intensifying asymmetrical threats such as international terrorism while simultaneously balancing potential state-centric rivals in the three great regions of geopolitical competition: Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

As Rod Lyon has observed, the twenty-first century security environment presents challenges that require both the maintenance of long-term security partnerships (alliances) and informal short-term partnerships (coalitions). 'What is important in choosing the appropriate mechanism is its particular utility in a given instance.'¹⁷ Alliances provide formal guarantees and instruments for intelligence sharing, joint exercising and other aspects of military capacity building that work well against clearly structural threats with state-centric characteristics. Yet these same attributes are often too ponderous and too prone to bargaining between allies before they can be applied to rapidly developing contingencies where coalitions are better suited. The simplicity of coalition organization, and the ease with which they could be formed in response to religious or ethnic forces that show little discrimination in attacking the citizens and interests of diverse states, appeals to those states' elites who are under immense pressure to respond quickly and effectively to such contingencies.

This 'hybridization' of state-centric and asymmetrical security challenges will very likely yield future mechanisms that may not fit the theoretical explanations and rationales for those alliance, alignment or coalition models which are most familiar to us. Such arrangements will be partially shaped by the prioritization of emerging threats to those great powers having the capabilities required to neutralize them. However, they will also be the product of those exercising policy leadership most successfully within both developed and developing polities at intra-state, state-centric, regional and global levels. Theories explaining the future of security partnerships will need to clarify such complexities more effectively than is now the case if the evolution of alliance, alignment and coalition politics is to be adequately understood and applied.

The Asia-Pacific dimension

As has been true for global international security, patterns of security organization in the Asia-Pacific are undergoing a fundamental transformation. The 'San Francisco system' of security alliances has shifted from a containment-based network predicated on the logic of a US 'hub' managing allied 'spokes' in Asia to a more complex web of enduring bilateral and emerging trilateral associations geared toward advancing confidence building, preventative diplomacy and other forms of 'positive security' in the region. The old Soviet alliances with China, North Korea, Vietnam and India are either defunct or diluted beyond recognition. As is the case with Europe, the tight bipolar geopolitical competition that largely dominated the region throughout the Cold War has passed into history. Unlike Europe, however, there is no equivalent of NATO or a European Community in place to shape the Asia-Pacific's future collective security environment.

To be sure, speculation about a 'New Cold War' between the United States and China intensified during the late 1990s and early 2000s, but any 'China threat' that may be evolving cannot be viewed in the same context as the old Soviet-US rivalry. For example, China maintains a formal alliance with North Korea but its commitment to defend Kim Jong II's regime is, at best, ambiguous. Beijing has, instead and illustratively, orchestrated a series of low-key bilateral 'friendship agreements' with Russia, Pakistan and most of the ASEAN states that could be characterized as 'conditional alignments' based on finding common interests around which mutual policy expectations can be shaped.

Beijing has also become a more active multilateral player in the region, differentiating itself from the Soviet Union that was incapable of separating multilateralism in the region from the hierarchical thinking that prompted its ill-fated 'Asian collective security' campaigns of the 1970s—campaigns which were designed to isolate both China and the United States from much of Asia. China has spearheaded a 'new security concept' based on a vision of all Asia-Pacific states attaining politico-economic equality and thus positioning them in opposition to traditional US asymmetrical bilateral security relationships in the region.¹⁸ It has also co-founded with Russia and several Central Asian states the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)—a coalition that the Chinese regard as an alternative to NATO's expansion of military power into Afghanistan and Central Asia.

US policy analysts who are pessimistic about Chinese intentions argue that Beijing is thus adopting a long-term strategy to organize Asia in a way that positions it in the centre of a new regional order that will marginalize US power.¹⁹ Optimists counter that Chinese leaders were receptive to US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick's address delivered in September 2005 that invited their country to become a 'responsible stakeholder' in the *existing* international order and developing regional order. Sino-US collaboration on the Six Party Talks regarding North Korea's nuclear weapons

capability, and increasing dialogue and cooperation on energy issues, also presage the possible development of a bilateral relationship (between China and the United States in Asia) that is something other than an exclusively competitive one.

In the absence of a 'purely realist' regional security environment that features unmitigated hegemonic competition or unqualified power balancing (which would require the reconstitution of US bilateral alliances back into a containment mode against China) or a complete Sino-US *modus vivendi* leading to a regional security community, what types of alliances, alignments or coalitions might emerge in the Asia-Pacific over the next few decades? How might any such emerging typologies, moreover, relate to Australia's own security priorities?

It is unlikely that the US bilateral alliance system will unravel completely over the short term, but it could be substantially modified. South Korea and the ASEAN states who maintain formal or *de facto* security partnerships with Washington (Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore) are likely to pursue 'hedging' strategies designed to extract benefits from their relations with both China and the United States without falling completely into either powers' sphere of influence for as long as they can.²⁰ Hedging cannot be pursued credibly, however, without a residual US offshore regional presence sufficiently large to balance China's size, economy and growing military power. If US commitments in the Middle East and Persian Gulf continue to stretch US military power to the limit, then the Philippines, Thailand and even Singapore are more likely to 'bandwagon' toward the Chinese orbit in the absence of an alternative balancer. Neither Japan nor Australia can fulfill the alternative balancer role but, as two of the region's most developed powers, they will remain squarely in the US geopolitical orbit, barring a complete American strategic retraction from the region. So too will Taiwan for it has virtually no other way to turn than towards continued alignment with Washington. US-Indian security relations are strengthening as well. Washington cannot move too close to a self-acclaimed Indian regional power, however, as long as New Delhi remains disposed to challenge China's geopolitical aspirations and hostile to a Pakistan that the US deems to be a critical player in the 'Long War' against global terrorism.

Given this context, recent developments in Northeast Asia are particularly disturbing. China has been unable to prevent the North Koreans from conducting highly provocative missile and nuclear tests. Japanese and South Korean positions over North Korea are sharply divided and, if left unresolved, could permanently erode the US alliance with South Korean political elites that increasingly look to China as a natural economic and security partner. Bilateral tensions between China and Japan have intensified into a major security dilemma, largely fuelled by Chinese fears that unbridled Japanese nationalism is emerging more than sixty years after its wartime defeat in 1945. The December 2005 East Asian Summit in Kuala

Lumpur, originally called to establish greater regional cohesion through financial and institutional collaboration, was thoroughly jettisoned by contending Chinese and Japanese visions of how any such collaborative framework should be organized.

Under these circumstances, prospects for the coexistence of bilateral and multilateral security forums in the Asia-Pacific have at least temporarily declined. This does not mean, however, that the United States and its security allies can revert to the traditional 'hub and spokes' system of alliance management. The benefits of enmeshing China in future regional order building are sufficiently great to avoid, if at all possible, the Chinese reaching the conclusion that a 'containment revisited' posture directed against themselves is being applied by the United States and Japan. In this sense, the February 2005 joint statement of the US-Japan Consultative Committee labelling Taiwan a 'security challenge of concern' was arguably misguided alliance politics.²¹ Other approaches to pursuing alliance politics in the region may need to be considered as more appropriately subtle and compatible with the Asia-Pacific's strategically fluid environment.

Both 'virtual alliances' and 'quasi-alliances' have been proposed as intermediate steps to stabilize Northeast Asia's security dilemmas or flashpoints. A virtual alliance is an informal process involving two or more smaller allies who normally do not conduct extensive or formal security relations with each other to upgrade such relations through the coordinative efforts of a common senior ally. The idea is to 'deepen the weakest links' within an existing inter-alliance framework. Ralph Cossa, the key proponent of this concept, delineates three basic characteristics of a virtual alliance: (1) the formation of security consultative mechanisms reflecting common interests and values; (2) the lack of formal treaty or legislative obligations underwriting the parties who are collaborating; and (3) the tendency for such collaborators to diversify their avenues of security cooperation into different regional and global institutions or forums so as to mitigate suspicions by other states that a containment posture is being formulated.²² The US-Japan-South Korea Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) was originally formed in 1999 to monitor North Korean nuclear developments; it could be regarded as an example of a 'virtual' alliance. However, apart from running afoul over differences between South Korea and the United States and Japan over how to manage the North Korean threat, the TCOG failed to meet Cossa's third criterion—the associate states diversifying their avenues of security cooperation into different regional and global institutions. Instead, South Korea has gravitated toward China's approach of adopting a softer line toward Pyongyang as the best means to avoid a new war on the Korean Peninsula. Nor has there been visible progress in strengthening the 'weakest link' of the US-Japan-South Korea triad; South Korea's hostility toward Japan actually intensified during the Koizumi government's tenure of office, involving territorial disputes, interpretations of history and the perceived rise of Japanese nationalism. It remains to be seen

to what extent a change of governments in Seoul and Tokyo will modify these bilateral tensions.

Victor Cha's quasi-alliance theory has already been cited above but warrants greater discussion. The quasi-alliance explanation acknowledges that inherited animosities can exist between two, unallied, smaller states sharing security guarantees from their common larger ally. However, so long as the larger ally can overcome its smaller partners' mutual fears of strategic abandonment, the antagonisms of the two smaller allies can be subordinated or managed. Both Japan and South Korea have projected their strongest commitment to their respective alliances with the United States when they have individually feared abandonment by Washington to be more probable and have shown less alliance affinity when they have most feared entrapment by Washington's policies. 'The optimal strategy in the alliance game is to maximize one's security from the alliance while minimizing one's obligations to it.'²³ Quasi-alliance ensues because while Japan and South Korea have asymmetrical fears of abandonment and entrapment in regard to each other, US strategic primacy causes those perceptions to be subsumed within the larger framework of each state's ties with the United States.²⁴

Consequently, South Korea may resent what it believes to be US lack of respect toward it, relative to what the United States extends to Japan, and may also suffer different types of strain in its relationship with Washington on such issues as nuclear arms control, defence burden-sharing responsibilities and other alliance related issues. From Seoul's perspective, however, the United States must remain engaged in Northeast Asia to 'cap the bottle' of Japanese militarism and to balance Chinese power in addition to deterring the North Korean military threat. Japan continues to view the US alliance as the best hope for avoiding conflict against China, with both Koreas growing more hostile to Japan, and as a legitimizing instrument that should allow it to be part of the world's most prestigious economic and security councils. Such countervailing South Korean and Japanese interests hardly constitute the stuff of converging interests upon which traditional alliance politics is based.

Virtual alliance theory has been criticized because it is focused too narrowly on how changing notions of insecurity over time affect balancing calculations within alliance politics. It has little to say about how disparate alliances involving a major power (for example, the United States) could morph into more enduring mechanisms for cooperative security and regional stability. It appears to some that virtual alliance may be nothing more than coalition theory in different trappings with no logical endgame in sight. Quasi-alliance theory, as Cha has developed it, seems to underplay the economic and technological dimensions of security that have been critical to shaping the strategic perceptions of both Japan and South Korea over recent decades. Such perceptions have engendered collaboration in establishing the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization

(KEDO) following the 1994 US-North Korea Agreed Framework, the aforementioned TCOG initiative, and cooperation within the ASEAN-plus-three grouping. Accordingly, as Melvin Gurtov has concluded, quasi-alliance theory, guided by the calculus of 'realpolitik' and the entrapment-abandonment alliance security dilemma, apparently does not provide us with an adequate explanation of Japanese and South Korean policy motives.²⁵

If the evolving character of alliances in contemporary Asia-Pacific security politics remains contested, alignment and coalition appear more promising for explaining current patterns of security partnership. If alignment is understood to be expectations of a state about whether it will be supported or opposed by another state (short of a formal alliance commitment) in future interactions related to security behaviour, a thickening web of such understandings is evident in the region.

In the maritime security arena, the trilateral Malaysia-Singapore-Indonesia (Malsindo) program of maritime patrolling commenced in 2004, and has been expanded to include other arrangements such as 'Eyes in the Sky' and has been linked to traditional maritime patrolling alignments such as the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA). Although operating without a formal security treaty, the US-Singapore bilateral relationship has become the most extensive informal security alignment in Southeast Asia. The annual US Naval Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) series involves all six 'core' ASEAN navies (minus the Indochinese states and Myanmar). Japan, India and South Korea have all likewise raised their maritime profiles in peninsular Southeast Asia over the past few years.²⁶ China has instigated its own maritime network, often referred to as the 'string of pearls' infrastructure, building up its access to port facilities in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and the South China Sea that will one day give it greater capabilities to protect its energy supplies transiting from the Persian Gulf.²⁷

In the antiterrorism policy sector, the United States has designated Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand as 'non-NATO allies' to facilitate its military assistance programs (largely counterterrorist in nature) to these countries. The SCO binds Russian and Chinese concerns about Islamic radicalism in Central Asia into institutional collaboration, even as US forces remain deployed in Afghanistan and other Central Asian countries to wage asymmetrical warfare against the same threat. Asia-Pacific anti-terrorism alignments, therefore, are not necessarily evolving in a 'zero-sum' fashion as they are cross-cutting in nature (Thailand relies more on its US treaty ally than on China to support its own maritime security interests, while Pakistan is proving quite capable of separating its antiterrorism cooperation with the United States from its strategic cooperation with China in those geopolitical areas that will maximize its position of strength relative to India). Expectations that underpin both alignments and coalitions are subject to adjustment and change; neither need be sealed by formal accords suggesting eternal strategic fealty.

In the economic security sector, three causal relationships warrant attention. As the economies of Asia-Pacific states have grown, their capacity to support larger national defence budgets and purchase state-of-the-art weapons systems has increased. The 1997 Asian financial crisis partially checked this trend and most Asian states peg their military expenditures to their economic growth. However, defence spending in larger Asian economies such as China, Japan and India has continued to increase, raising the spectre of future arms racing and the intensification of regional security dilemmas. A second factor is the increasing demand for natural resources generated by national economic growth. Safeguarding energy security through source diversification, protection of transit routes and investment in extra-regional fossil fuel exploitation are aspects underwriting intra-regional commercial alignments that can and do spill over into strategic politics. China's deepening ties with Russia in the energy sector, for example, cannot be disassociated from those two countries' recently expanded strategic relations, bilaterally (through the military exercises and intelligence collaboration generated by their Treaty for Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation signed in Moscow in July 2001) and multilaterally (through the SCO). A third economic dimension affecting regional security politics is the desire of countries like China and India to pursue national wealth and build national infrastructure in a basically conflict-free environment (a posture that has been labelled by Chinese leaders as 'peaceful rise'). To the extent that alignments between Russia and China, China and ASEAN, and the United States and India infuse greater predictability into the region's strategic landscape, the more probable it will be that they will continue to be an important feature within that environment.

Because they have usually formed rapidly in response to specific and often unanticipated contingencies, security coalitions in the Asia-Pacific lack the foundation or durability of formal alliance structures or the pliability of alliances to adjust strategic expectations over long periods of time. Coalitions are theoretically transitory and issue specific: temporary 'force multipliers' that seal transient marriages of convenience to extract immediate gains for their participants in a strategic situation.

In Asia, however, coalitions have proven to be more enduring and to involve far larger numbers of states than is anticipated by traditional coalition theory. Global and regional concerns overlap as rationales for their formation. In Operation *Enduring Freedom*, 27 countries (including all of the US formal treaty allies in the Asia-Pacific) either contributed forces or provided critical offshore logistical support for that US counterterrorist campaign against al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Four Party Talks and Six Party Talks involving the United States and China brokering the North Korean unification issue and nuclear disputes with the two Koreas, and (subsequently) with both Russia and Japan, have functioned for nearly a decade. The multinational combined support force of military units that coordinated massive rescue efforts in the aftermath of the

December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, however, exemplifies the classic modern Asia-Pacific security coalition reacting to a specific critical issue and contingency.

Nuclear non-proliferation and continuing disaster relief and humanitarian intervention all have worldwide ramifications that go far beyond the application of temporary issue-directed coalitions in the Asia-Pacific. In addressing the advantages of a 'broader tent' at the 2006 Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore, Donald Rumsfeld levelled what might be considered the ultimate *coup de grâce* to traditional coalition politics, portraying it as too parochial and too narrow for the times:

Individual countries or groups of countries can arrange themselves anyway they see appropriate ... [but] ... the kinds of problems we face today, it strikes me, are in many instances, not the kinds of problems that can be dealt with by one country—any country—or even with relatively small numbers of countries. The problems we face today are in large measure global.²⁸

The Australian dimension

Reconciling the 'global/regional nexus' in alliance politics has been a major challenge for Australian policymakers over the past two decades. Prime Minister John Howard ascended to power in early 1996 arguing that his Labor government predecessors had neglected the alliance by assigning too much weight to linking with regional economies and politics in ways that belied Australia's geography, culture and history.²⁹ In his quest to resuscitate ANZUS, Howard pushed for a reaffirmation of alliance purpose and principles. With the Sydney Declaration in July 1996, he moved Australia's defence posture from one emphasizing the so-called 'Defence of Australia' to a more global or 'expeditionary' orientation. He has deployed Australian forces to distant, US-led interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Alliance loyalty has clearly paid dividends. By early 2003, one of Australia's pre-eminent defence analysts asserted with high credibility that the United States viewed Australia as its second most important ally (after Britain), creating a dichotomy in Australian foreign policy. Australia's weight as a regional security actor increased by its close affinity with Washington, but that same intimacy worked against Australian diplomacy in the region as the US policies of strategic preemption and other aspects of the 'Bush Doctrine' became increasingly unpopular throughout much of Asia.³⁰

Australia has, however, been able to enjoy 'the best of both worlds' during the Howard government's tenure: successfully building closer alliance affiliation by deftly calibrating symbolic deployments of niche military capabilities in support of US global security operations, while solidifying its regional economic and security ties in ways that have overcome previous

Asian propensities to condemn Australia as an American 'deputy sheriff' and as a regional outsider. It has orchestrated this balancing act by pursuing at least key four strategies: (1) capitalizing on its abundant natural resources by exporting its natural gas, coal, iron ore, beef and other commodities to a booming 'China market' (uranium is about to be added to this itinerary), thereby fully integrating itself into the region's economic growth cycle; (2) projecting a clearly independent diplomacy into the region by recognizing North Korea (the United States and Japan do not), engaging in a more 'pragmatic' human-rights relationship with China (devoid of the ideological trappings that impede Sino-US relations in this policy area); (3) fostering a wide array of political-military and military-to-military bilateral dialogues with nearly every state in the region; and (4) sustaining a commitment to confront an emerging 'arc of instability' in various parts of the South and Southwest Pacific by intervening selectively and appropriately in East Timor, in the Solomon Islands and in other subregional flashpoints, thus precluding the possible exploitation of the fragile micro-states that comprise it by rival external powers.

In cultivating these strategic policies, Australia has successfully pursued a strategy of regional alignment, creating positive expectations amongst its neighbours that it will be a reliable and constructive partner in regional order building. It has complemented this posture with one of building closer alliance ties with the United States, by identifying niche areas where it could contribute symbolically and substantively to its superpower partner's global postures as they have evolved since the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. Its February 2003 White Paper on foreign policy, *Advancing the National Interest*, clearly designates Australia's foreign policy as global in scope and concludes that 'the security and prosperity of the Australian people depend vitally on the quality and strength of the political, defence and intelligence partnerships and the economic links that we are able to maintain around the world'.³¹ Australia continues to sustain an overt alliance relationship with the United States and an intimate, enduring alignment with Britain—a former alliance that became an alignment when Australia and the United States jointly chose not to include the United Kingdom as a formal ANZUS partner at the outset of the Cold War. In this context, the US annual Ministerial Meetings involving foreign affairs and defence officials (commonly known as AUSMIN) have recently been supplemented by the initiation in late March 2006 of an Australian-UK Ministerial Meeting (AUKMIN) process.³²

Selected regional alignments and coalitions complement Australia's two 'global' security partnerships. They do so in ways that provide Australia with an interlocking web of defence associations that allow it to simultaneously play a role as a global 'niche' player in the international security arena while remaining pertinent to burgeoning regional security arrangements. Evolving relations with Japan are illustrative. In a speech delivered to the Japan Press Club in early August 2006, Foreign Minister Alexander

Downer argued that while Japan and Australia were both 'liberal democratic American allies in the Asia-Pacific', both faced common 'global security challenges' that demanded closer bilateral security cooperation.³³ Later that month, Australia and Japan reportedly moved to explore a more formal bilateral defence relationship in which Japanese and Australian military forces could, according to Downer, 'play an effective role in the region and cooperate in relief emergencies or in peacekeeping'.³⁴ Underlying this rhetoric is Australia's recognition that assimilating Japan's accelerated normalization as a strategic actor in the region will be a critical challenge for Australian foreign policy—especially since North Korea's nuclear policy has become increasingly aggressive and China's concern about the recently formed Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD), as a possible Australian-US-Japanese coalition directed towards containing its own rising power, remains potentially acute. How well Australia can manage its security relationship with Japan as a mutual US ally while persisting with its cultivation of deeper economic and political ties with China will be one of the key tests for its foreign policy architects over the next decade and beyond.

The 'global/regional nexus' is also a factor in emerging alignments that Australia is maintaining or contemplating. For example, Singapore has been characterized by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as 'one of the Australian Defence Force's most valuable combined exercise partners' and the two countries maintain an extensive set of bilateral arrangements that includes combined training, intelligence sharing and personnel exchanges.³⁵ Both countries are members of the FPDA and work with the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Malaysia to strengthen collaboration on counterterrorism measures throughout maritime Southeast Asia. The 'global dimension' of this type of coordination relates to combined antiterrorism and anti-piracy exercises that Singapore and other ASEAN maritime states conduct not only with the United Kingdom but, beyond the strictly FPDA context, with American and other NATO European maritime components. Also, illustratively, after a seven-year hiatus following the increase of Australian-Indonesian tensions during the 1999 East Timor crisis, Canberra and Jakarta recently concluded a bilateral Framework Agreement for Security Cooperation to replace the Agreement for Maintaining Security that was jettisoned by Indonesia following that crisis. Australian-Philippines defence ties have also increased markedly since 11 September 2001, with Canberra offering millions of dollars in counterterrorism assistance to that country and establishing in August 2005 an inter-agency counterterrorism mechanism at the senior officials level. Australia is also now an observer at the annual joint US-Philippines *Balikatan* annual counterterrorism exercises.

The relationships with Southeast Asia and the South Pacific represent perhaps the most formidable instance of Australian policymakers being

required to reconcile countervailing policy imperatives when managing their country's alignment policies. In 2003, the Howard government developed the doctrine of 'cooperative intervention' to justify the deployment of Australian forces to restore order in the Solomon Islands and to rationalize a permanent Australian security role of maintaining 'law and order and good governance' throughout the South Pacific to preclude it from either becoming more susceptible to terrorist activities or to external powers' geopolitical rivalries. Growing concerns that China and Taiwan were vying for political influence in Papua New Guinea, Fiji and in other Pacific Island states supplemented already strong Australian apprehensions that terrorist sanctuaries could be easily established in fragile or 'failed state' micro-state policies. The 1987 Declaration of Principles between Australia and PNG is the key alignment relationship underpinning this Australian strategy. It stipulates that in the event PNG were attacked by an outside party, there would be an 'expectation that Australia would be prepared to commit forces to resist external aggression'.³⁶ In August 2006, reports surfaced that a border clash occurred between PNG troops and Indonesian 'fishermen' who may have been Indonesian military (*Kopassus*) agents in disguise conducting surveillance of West Papuan resistance forces taking refuge in PNG border villages.³⁷ Australian policy-makers may soon confront a major policy dilemma: how to pursue stronger strategic relations with Indonesia without compromising Australia's prerogative to ensure the security of countries such as PNG that are positioned directly in Australia's own 'northern approaches'. Under such circumstances, the politics of alignment may become increasingly difficult to orchestrate.

None of Australia's security relationships with the ASEAN states or with its South Pacific neighbours, however, are intended by Canberra or its Southeast Asian collaborators to mature into formal bilateral alliances. Nor is the TSD with Japan designed to evolve into a mini-NATO for Asia. They are instead responses to specific issue areas. In the ASEAN region, they are predominantly mechanisms for pursuing counterterrorism, but are also targeted at achieving greater coordination in combatting regional and international drug trade, illegal or forced movement of peoples and other non-traditional security concerns. Regarding Northeast Asia, the TSD is primarily targeted toward forging collective strategies against North Korean proliferation, and toward maintaining ties with an increasingly powerful China. These alignments are viewed by their instigators as policy means for responding to the mid-to-long-term mutual security challenges confronting Australia and those states associating with it. They therefore fall in between security coalitions and true alignments. Like coalitions, they focus on specific issue-areas. As with alignments, however, they can be seen as the instruments needed to develop enduring collaborative security relationships without formal, specific, and potentially provocative, threat identification.

Conclusion

Two concurrent and noteworthy trends are emerging in Australian, regional and international security partnerships. On the one hand, alliance politics remains central to the management of global security politics. Contrary to traditional alliance theory, many alliances, including NATO and the US bilateral network in the Asia-Pacific, have adapted to the new conditions and challenges rather than dissolving when the 'general threat' that instigated their creation—a seemingly unified worldwide communist movement—disappeared from the scene. NATO has transformed from a collective defence arrangement to a region-wide and even 'extra-regional' collective security arrangement. ANZUS remains central to Asia's ongoing geopolitics, a complex mix of balancing and institutionalism that is buying time for that region's states and key external players to collaborate in reshaping a stable post-Cold War order.

Yet alliance politics is too cumbersome to effectively respond to an array of short-term crises that are better met through coalition, alignment or a combination of both approaches. A pattern is emerging in which coalitions are initially formed in response to short-term imperatives: removing terrorist elements from weak or failing states; controlling flashpoints of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferation; and achieving short-term maritime security objectives. As the rationales for creating them become more protracted than originally expected, these coalitions are transformed to longer-term alignments, sustained by the knowledge that the interests underlying their existence are still shared, but are reinforced by common expectations that defection of key parties to these arrangements can be avoided without the imposition of formal treaty obligations.

How these three converging trends—alliances, alignments and coalitions—are reconciled with alliance politics (or integrated in a world of asymmetrical threats and ever broadening security challenges) will constitute a large part of the international security story for our times. Australia is projecting a complex and somewhat controversial security posture by allying or coalescing with great powers that could easily become rivals, and by simultaneously aligning with an emerging Asia-Pacific community. To what extent this balancing act will succeed will hinge largely on the ability of Australian policymakers to translate this complex equation into viable regional and international leadership.

Notes

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- 3 B. Tertrais, 'The changing nature of military alliances', *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 2, Spring 2004, pp. 135-50, insists that there are deep 'historical

- forces at work that are forcing permanent alliances to increasingly give way to *ad hoc* coalitions', p. 135.
- 4 See the recent comments of former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser reflecting his concern that Australia has become too subservient to US interests relative to its own national interests. 'Just a vassal of the US', *The Age*, 26 July 2006.
 - 5 G.J. Ikenberry, 'American grand strategy in the age of terror', *Survival*, vol. 43, no. 4, Winter 2001–2, p. 28.
 - 6 The term 'nuclear family' of allies was coined by Kurt Campbell in 'The end of alliances? Not so fast', *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 2, Spring 2004, pp. 158–9.
 - 7 G.H. Snyder, 'Alliances, balance and stability', *International Organization*, vol. 45, no. 1, Winter 1991, pp. 121–3. Efforts to construct an alliance grand theory, of course, have been made. See, in particular, G. Liska, *Nations in Alliance: The Limits of Interdependence*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962; and S.M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987.
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 - 13 J. Mearsheimer, 'Why we will soon miss the Cold War', *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 266, no. 2, August 1990, p. 37.
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 - 15 P. Bowring, 'What is it about anglophones?' *International Herald Tribune*, 27 March 2003; and Tertrais, 'The changing nature of military alliances', p. 138.
 - 16 See, for example, S. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to US Primacy*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.
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 - 19 See, for example, F. Fukuyama, 'All quiet on the Eastern Front?', *Wall Street Journal*, 1 March 2005.
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 - 21 See Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, 'Joint Statement—US–Japan Security Consultative Committee', 19 February 2005; and a critical Chinese response, 'FM: US–Japan statement on Taiwan wrong', *China Daily*, 21 February 2005.
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 - 23 Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, p. 45.
 - 24 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
 - 25 M. Gurtov, 'Review of *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States–Korea–Japan Security Triangle*', in *American Political Science Review*, vol. 94, no. 2, June 2000, pp. 504–5.
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- 27 S. Ramachandran, 'China's pearl in Pakistan's waters', *Asia Times Online*, 4 March 2005.
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- 29 Conservative Australian columnist Gerard Henderson subsequently described this approach: 'In his early years as prime minister, Howard gave the impression he was too focused on rejecting the policy adopted towards the Asian region by his predecessors Bob Hawke and, especially, Paul Keating. The implication was that Labor had been obsessed with Asia and that, consequently, the Coalition would be less engaged.' See G. Henderson, 'How John Howard has matured as a foreign policy statesman', *The Age*, 5 August 2003.
- 30 P. Dibb, 'The downside of being too close to the US', *The Age*, 4 April 2003. Also see H. White, 'Australian strategic policy', in A.J. Tellis and M. Wills (eds) *Strategic Asia 2005–06: Military Modernization in an Era of Uncertainty*, Seattle and Washington, DC: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2005, pp. 305–31 for an in-depth assessment of how these factors played into the evolution of Australia's defence strategy from 1996 onward.
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