



Australian foreign policy and systemic paradigm shift

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Abstract

The study analyze deep in to the 2017 Australian Foreign Policy White Paper published after 14 years during Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's tenure and it's adopted framework. The growing public sentiment about Australia's foreign policy is vague and hazy in nature. Public opinion is more towards that Australia's foreign policy behavior is dictated and determined by other states. Australia is directed by United States in relation to security concerns and in pursuing Australia's economic interests, China dictate terms on Australia's foreign policy. This "Dependence" perception and constant fear mongering by Australia's state and federal politicians has increasingly damaged Country's national interests.

Keywords: Australian foreign policy, international trade, national security, forecasting

1. Introduction

Initiating a new foreign policy narrative convokes a specified task for a Foreign Policy White Paper. It should be specific in a doctrinal sense and national interest perspective but loose in strategic nature to cater high volatility and changing global landscape, In this sense the white paper will be ill-suited for making future predictions and does not have an agenda with timescales and costs associated with actions. On the same level the white paper will use a tactical language explaining how, why, where and when Australia will act. Its scope is broader than allocating resources and monitoring progress (Carr, 2018) ^[3]. In that milieu while setting forth our national interest, we must leave party politics aside and adopt a strategy that is practical in nature and sustainable for the future and for the betterment of the Australian people. We must first clearly define our national objectives, describe the rapidly changing global and regional environment in which we operate, and detail the policies and programs that should be given priority implementation in order to secure our common future.

1.1. 2017 White Paper

The 2017 White paper adopted a 10- year horizon presenting Australia with new free trade, bi-lateral security co-operations and transnational connections (Halstead *et al.*, 2017) ^[9]. It also makes clear the globalized agenda has created new world with more unprecedented interconnections and interdependence (Adamson, 2017) ^[1] but these interdependences were tested suddenly with Donald Trump elected as the US president and Britain leaving Europe, these were acknowledged these changes saying "often we will be responding to unexpected events" (Gyngell, 2017, p.35) ^[7] but current challenges Australia embrace are more complicated and resources are not assigned sufficiently. Accordingly Gyngell (2017) ^[7] draw attention to three intertwined strands of every Australian government since World War II,

- i. Commitment to strong alliance
- ii. Get recognition as a country with global interests but with limited power
- iii. As a country Australia is always better off in a world

with agreed rules (Gyngell, 2017, p.35) ^[7] the core to Gyngell's ideas, the "contested world" notion. Australia's relationship with China and USA is a dubious paradox. The alliance to USA is central to sustaining the liberal character of the rules based society and the stability of the region. In the latter china's legitimacy in sharing responsibility is acknowledged. Gyngell (2017) ^[7] elaborates further, While Australia welcomes China's role to share responsibility for supporting regional and global security in the region it has to be dictated by "rules based order". Roggeveen (Roggeveen, 2017) ^[14] observed that, "the order" Australian politicians refers to dictated by the United States influence. Foreign Minister Julie Bishop adorned it stating "global order will flow from power and United States hard power will remain an essential underpinning of rules-based order. We have to stick with United States and play a long game. The way Australia deals with the world's most populous country and second-largest economy should be innocuous and safe. As Roggeveen (2017) ^[14] states, no other developed nation benefitted more from China's expanding wealth. According to statics China bought more than \$ 110 billion of Australian goods and services. The exact figures remain elusive as Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade apply country level restrictions ^[1] (*for commodities like Cane Sugar, Nickel Mattes, Nickel alloys unworked and Non-industrial diamonds*) like to Australian Bureau of Statics to number of commodities to maintain confidentiality ^[2]. Professor Laurenceson (2017) ^[12] from University of Technology, Sydney points out although Julie Bishop states China also benefited from the existing agreements Prof. Chengxin Pan (Pan, 2017) ^[13] from Deakin University is quick to react the obvious contradiction saying, "It is flawed logic to suggest that China once benefited from and undermine the same rules-based order". According to The Economist ^[3] (April, 2017) Chinese revisionism is about "expand influence within the system, It is neither a revolutionary power bent on overthrowing things, nor a usurper on grabbing global control". This paradox was clearly identified and stated with scorn on Sydney Morning Herald by International editor Peter Hartcher (2017) ^[8], "All great powers are selective about

breaking the international rules, the difference is that when the United States did it, United States was an Australian ally doing it. The Chinese actions in the South China Sea are more controversial and absurd to Australia as it is a hostile neighbor according to Australian standards. The so-called resilient democracy and robust economy of Australia is the bedrock current economic prosperity therefore power balance between the United States and China make Sino-American relations of great strategic importance. Halstead et.al, (2017) ^[9] illustrates that Australia has to encourage China and US to manage their economic divergences and to manage economic tension thus it “does not fuel strategic rivalry” or “damage the multilateral trading system” in the Asian region.

1.2 Challenges in balancing the existing & emerging global powers

As per professor James Cotton (2017) ^[5], A foreign policy white paper is bound to focus on change, risk and opportunity. Should be able to gauge the success mix of measures containing alliances, (whether bilateral, regional or global) co-operations were advocated. Nevertheless there are ambiguities and silences in the current white foreign policy white paper. According to professor Cotton, the term “rules-based order” occurs more than 80 times in the text, but the partial synonym “International Law”, is used much less frequently (Cotton, 2017) ^[5] but on average these two occur at least once in every page. Although the terms like rules and law were used frequently the administering aspect and adjudicating aspect was not clearly described. The only option given and the avenues to administer law was the important “World Trade Organization” stating “Australia will continue to press all members to comply with WTO rules and obligations”. But in that sense how sure are we as a nation to trust only in WTO and with America’s decision to seek WTO’s demise by atrophy by neither nominating members nor supporting other nominations, Australia’s rules based trade is an allegory of despair presented to the public (Cotton, 2017) ^[5].

On the other hand WTO was largely American invention and used to serve an American - centered trading regime for many decades. United States refused to join the International Criminal Court - The White paper mentions only once in the text but in all ambiguity the manifestation of US leadership is not clear. The percentage of pressure exerted by US leadership on Australia is unclear and the form it manifest is uncertain. While such ambiguity is politically unremarkable it is imperative to defining core priorities in the future (Cotton, 2017) ^[5]. In setting our national interest, we must set aside politics and adopt a strategy that is practical, sustainable and better suited for the Australian public. In order to do so we must first clearly define our national objectives, describe the rapidly changing global and regional environment in which we operate and detail the policies and programs that should be given priority implementation in order to secure our common future. Our main objective is to adopt a clear bipartisan approach in shaping our domestic agenda, which obviously affects Australia’s international relations. In defining the national interests that shape Australia’s national policy, we should address the real issues and must not dilute the fundamentals in foreign policy objectives. If not, this will affect Australia’s future in an unpredictable and unprecedented manner. Therefore setting our domestic

agenda and by proxy our foreign policy is of paramount importance if Australia needs to be abreast in ever changing world.

2. Materials and methods

Design methodology / approach – The study focused on the myriad factors associated with the relative successful application of foreign policy perspective and a large number of studies in foreign policy arena has also adopted a positivistic approach and have used quantitative designs to attempt or test models on policy frame of reference. The study adopts a secondary data, qualitative research design unlike the dominant quantitative designs in studying Australian foreign policy narrative.

2.1 Main themes discussed

According to DFAT Secretary Adamson (Adamson, 2017) ^[1], The Australian government has set five clear priorities in the White paper,

- Regional stability in Indo-Pacific region at a time of change
- Maximizing opportunities for Australian businesses by keeping markets open and trade & investment flowing.
- Provide security for Australians from local & global terrorist threats.
- Cooperation with political allies to tackle challenges from other states.
- Stepping up support for a more resilient Pacific.

Australian dilemma on converging the trade policy in to security policy delineated profoundly by Dr. Giovanni Di Lieto (2017) ^[6], the core pillar of Australian national interest is the market openness and global growth in business and the very notion goes against protectionism in global trade agenda. In numerous references through out the paper (74 in total) underscore Australia’s strategic move from multipolar Asia-pacific region to US-led Indo-Pacific rim. The Indo-Pacific terminology stems from renowned strategist Nicholas Spykmans, “Rimland Concept” during World War II, this shows Australia is an early adopter of the US administration’s plan to embed trade tactics to security strategies (Di Lieto, 2017) ^[6]. In 2003 White paper term “Indo-Pacific” was not used and instead used the term “Asia-Pacific” was used for twenty six (26) times, this was reduced for four (04) in 2017 document (Di Lieto, 2017) ^[6]. Further the crossing from “trade” to “security” is observable with significant drop of 365 mentions in the body of the 2003 version to 182 mentions in the 2017 paper. The relinquishing of the term “Trade” for “Security” is observable in the subtitle and in the main title.

2.1.1 Security

The 2017 White paper identifies several trigger points that may prompt regional conflict (Halstead *et al.*, 2017) ^[9]. South China sea, North Korea topped the list and under ANZUS commitment that the United States’ involvement within the region should be supported by Australia’s military assets. At the same time Australia should take necessary actions to combat international terrorism, both domestically and abroad. The notable increase of threats form Southern Philippines. Regional cooperation importance to Australia s due to it’s strong commitment to combatting people smuggling and irregular migration patterns in the region (Halstead *et al.*, 2017) ^[9]. An

important aspect that first emerged in 2016 paper and remained high in Australian Foreign policy agenda is reiterated again. The “Cyber Security Strategy” will be further strengthened and will play a pivotal part in ensuring national security and citizen’s safety. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will play an important role to curb foreign government influences in cyber sphere. It will also work collaboratively with social media companies to strengthen cyber defense and pursue global influence in cyber sphere.

2.1.2 Trade

As mentioned earlier in the paper, Australia’s economic interests are closely and deliberately intertwined with security interests. This conundrum engulfs the entire Foreign Policy white paper. Australian public will reap greater benefits through increased trade and inclusivity. Reducing trade barriers and rejecting protectionism is of paramount importance to this cause. According to Professor Laurenceson (Laurenceson, 2017) [12], Australian government forecasted between now and 2030 China is set to add \$ 21 trillion to it’s economy. In purchasing parity terms this is greater than combined growth of the United States (\$ 5.4 trillion), India (\$ 12.2 trillion), Japan (\$0.7 trillion) and Australia (\$0.5 trillion). Chinese economy will get doubled in 13 years surpassing United States. Australian first ambassador to the People’s Republic of China, Stephen FitzGerald (1973-76) iterated Australia’s 21st Prime Minister Gough Whitlam words a the Whitlam Oration at Western Sydney University,

“Now, more than at any time in our history, we need a relationship with China [that in former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam’s words is] ‘comparable with that which we have, or seek, with other major powers.’ Why? Because, we are living in a Chinese world. But we don’t have a relationship to match it.”

To mitigate strategic rivalry and power dynamics in the region, Australia intends to initiate partnerships, involving ASEAN with Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea and New Zealand (Halstead *et al.*, 2017) [9]. The regional and bi-lateral integration was categorically explained. The current paper outlines free trade agreements with European union and with United Kingdom post -Brexit. According to Frances Adamson, the paper underlines very important points referring to China.

- China clearly plays a major role in Geo-politics and virtually influences Australia’s interests.
- China is Australia’s largest trading partner, major investor and a centre for science, innovation and research.
- Chinese and Australian societies are well connected through migration, i.e -spouses, students and visitors.

Considering the above Australian government pursue active and positive engagement. Closer the engagement, more frictions arise due to the complex nature of customs, practices and many differences among us (Adamson, 2017) [1]. The White paper advocates for openness in trade at the same time argue national security agenda with Chinese inferences. Therefore to have a coherent consistent and cogent foreign policy, dealings with Chinese government should be analyzed and evaluated strategically and critically.

2.1.3 Aid and development

Australian commitment to human rights, regional and international development assistance us established with a clear commitment in the paper. The foundation to this emphasis is based on the notion of “economic opportunity and poverty reduction” in the region to mitigate challenges to Australia with irregular migration and extremism. This is the extended strategy from 2003 White paper, which emphasized mature institutions and accountable systems were objective to the success of Australian national security (Halstead *et al.*, 2017) [9].

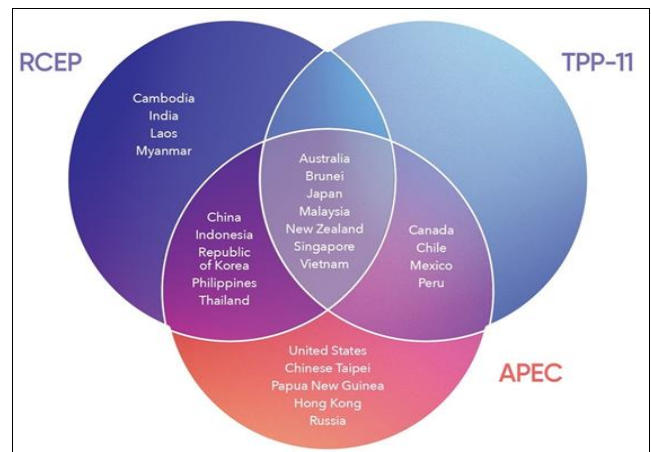
According to DFAT data, Pacific region received \$ 1,097.8 Mn in funding during the 2017-18 period and Papua New Guinea alone received \$ 550 Mn in assistance. Australian immigration detention facilities are based on Manus Island in PNG. It was closed in February 2008 and subsequently re-opened on 22 November 2012. It was re-closed on 23rd November 2017. In a broader perspective Australia aims to enhance relationships with Pacific countries such as, Timor Leste, Solomon Islands, Fiji as well.

Further Assistance is allocated to support natural calamities and climate change according to the Foreign policy white paper. Australia’s investment in “Regional disaster preparedness” is supported by investments of more than \$ 1 billion over the next five years. This aid and development agenda’s support Australia’s agenda to become a “regional power with global interests.

3. Results & Discussion

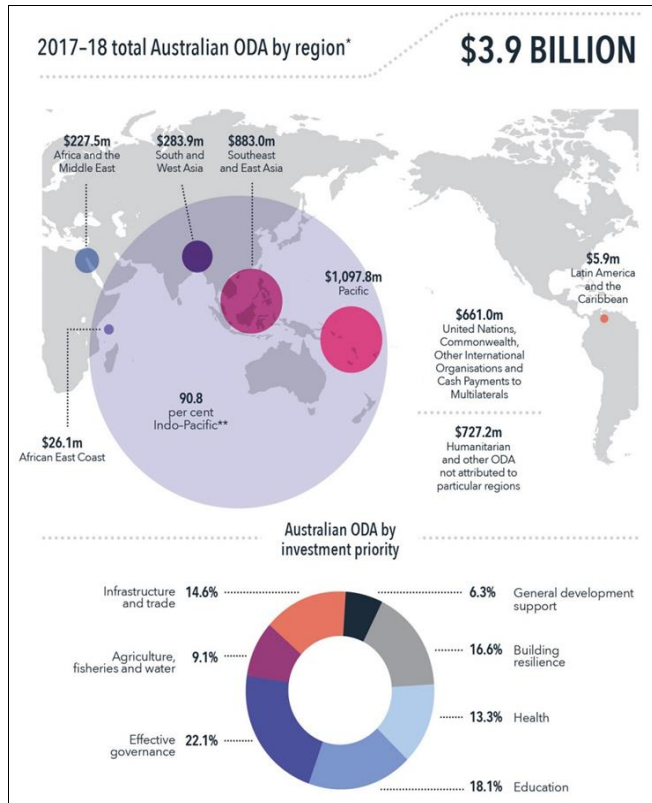
Much has changed since the adoption of 2003 policy paper and subsequent 2017 policy paper on foreign policy and trade. The position defended on 2003 paper, relying United States of America, as a strategic partner was questionable during the Trump presidency in United States. In this case Australia needs a new narrative replacing the “USA dependence” and/or “China Choice” frameworks. The new narrative should explain the modus-operandi of its new framework and ultimately how it is going to serve the national interests. This new narrative should be simple, direct and easily relayed to the stakeholders. The success of the new narrative can be calibrated by its contribution to the stability of the region and its support to the domestic resilience in the face of calamities.

4. Tables and Figures



Source: Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade

Fig 1: Australia’s Trade Negotiations



Source: department of Foreign Affairs & Trade

Fig 2: Aid & Development

5. Conclusions

Globally, We have entered an era where security and economic prosperity cannot be taken for granted. The rules based society is declining and global powers are using vested interests to dictate terms on other sovereign countries. Australian foreign policy is more ambitious in paper than in real world trends and with the ascension of Scott Morrison and the ousted Malcolm Turnbull’s aspirations worded in the White paper holds less water in terms of International relationships. It is interesting to see how the Australian values take center stage considering the commitment to individual freedoms, liberal democracy, rule of law, equality and mutual respect in global context. There is a certain rigidity in White paper’s expression of Australian values and it is not clearly expressed how Australia might navigate through complex policy areas and with key alias as US.

Australia’s Foreign Policy White Paper is not an end in it self, It is the beginning to a series of intellectual discussion and collaborations with key agencies to deliver right perspective. The real challenge lies with delivery of policy and working in harmony in an ambiguous and contested world stage.

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