



Summary: Over the years, Australia has made numerous adjustments to its defense planning in an attempt to positively position itself in the fluid regional security environment. The Australian Defence Force is highly capable, and the alliance with the United States, established in the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS), remains strong. Nonetheless a number of issues still exist.

To remedy these problems, ANZUS should consider establishing a multilateral security arrangement with select Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states. Singapore, in particular, would be an ideal and realistic partner for both Australia and the United States. Singapore's military capability and dynamic foreign relations network would prove invaluable to ANZUS, and a trilateral alliance of this nature would serve to enhance stability in the Southeast Asia region, Oceania, and Indian Ocean.

Prospects for Establishing a U.S.-Australia-Singapore Security Arrangement: The Australian Perspective

by Ryo Hinata-Yamaguchi

Introduction

It has been 60 years since the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS Treaty) came into force.¹ Since its signing in 1951, Australia and the United States have fought together in the Korean War, Vietnam War, the First Gulf War, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.² Recently, the alliance has been strengthened further when in November 2011, Prime Minister Julia Gillard agreed to station a U.S. Marine Corps task force in Darwin, Australia,³ and again in March 2012, when Canberra and Washington revealed plans to establish a joint airbase on the Australian-controlled Cocos Islands in the Indian Ocean. However positive these recent developments are, future progress may be slowed by the issues Australia faces, both with its defense planning and because of less-than-

ideal relations with its Asian neighbors.

Australia's Strategic Concerns

While it is clear that Australia and the United States share a very entrenched and intimate security relationship, Canberra faces two glaring concerns that directly impact its commitment to the alliance with Washington.

The first dilemma emanates from Australia's defense planning. Canberra's plans to adjust and strengthen the Australian Defence Force's (ADF) capabilities to conform to the 2009 Defence White Paper and Defence Capability Plan have been hampered, largely due to fiscal constraints.⁴ Canberra's planned acquisitions outlined in the 2009 Defence White Paper, which includes 100 F-35s, Canberra-class Landing Helicopter Dock (LHD) vessels, and 12 new submarines, seems too ambitious. Not only do these acquisitions stretch the already-tight defense budget, but it

¹ The ANZUS Treaty was signed on September 1, 1951, and came into force on April 29, 1952. However, New Zealand's defense obligations have been suspended since 1986.

² Immediately after the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, the then Australian Prime Minister John Howard invoked the ANZUS treaty for the first time to fight alongside the United States.

³ The first batch of 200 infantry Marines arrived in Darwin on April 2, 2012.

⁴ Alan Dupont, "Inflection Point: The Australian Defence Force after Afghanistan," *Policy Brief* (March 2012). Pp 9-10

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is also questionable whether they truly fit with Australia's security environment and strategy.⁵

One may argue that ANZUS lightens Australia's defense outlays. Indeed, the U.S. Marine Corp's presence in Darwin and the planned drone base in the Cocos Islands would further strengthen the alliance's capabilities. However, the capabilities stationed (or planned to be stationed) in Australia do not substitute for the platforms Canberra plans to acquire. Hence Australia's defense planning burden would remain more or less unchanged unless Canberra adjusts its defense proposals.

Second, due to its location, Australia is fixed to engage with its neighbors not only in Southeast Asia and Oceania, but also in Northeast Asia. Australia, however, faces numerous issues in its relations with the Asian states.⁶ Canberra has had an awkward relationship with Jakarta since the early post-WWII period, but especially since the secession of Timor Leste in 1999 and the Bali bombings in 2002. So although the United States has been building close relations with Indonesia in recent years, a lot remains to be done in order for Canberra and Jakarta to form a solid security relationship.

Perhaps the most controversial and serious dilemma for Canberra is its relationship with Beijing. China is Australia's biggest trading partner and many prominent defense analysts, including Hugh White, have expressed their concerns about this, arguing that if ANZUS attempts to contain or boldly deter China, this could incur severe economic consequences for Australia.⁷ Robert Ayson notes that, "Australia's problem is that its robust stance towards the changing balance of military power in Asia is not integrated with its huge economic reliance on China."⁸ Given China's increasingly assertive behavior and military build-up in the region, Canberra may soon be forced to take a

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firm stance against Beijing in spite of its economic reliance on China.

Strengthening the Australia-United States Alliance

ANZUS needs to be fine-tuned in order to maximize and sustain its effectiveness. Above all, Australia has to do its part to realign its own defense capabilities as opposed to simply relying on the United States to fill in the gaps. Three questions need to be answered regarding Australia's future capabilities and strategies: *For what? For when? And Of what?* Additionally, both Australia and the United States must think about the alliance's relations with the regional states — particularly ASEAN.

Preparedness for What?

For ANZUS, the answer to the "*for what?*" question is fairly straight forward — stability in the Asia-Pacific. Historically, Australia's defense planning has been less threat-based and more scenario/mission-based. In other words, rather than designating a specific state or actor, Canberra focuses on contingencies within a strategic periphery (i.e. territories, off-shore resources and Sea Lines of Communication in Southeast Asia, Oceania and the Indian Ocean). This requires the Australian Defence Forces (ADF) to be prepared to deal with a wide variety of instabilities and irregular wars in a geographically vast strategic environment.⁹

Preparedness for When?

Given the nature of the threats it faces, Australia focuses primarily on conflicts that require short warning/expansion time. The issue is that Australia covers an extremely vast region, and the characteristics of the theaters vary significantly (viz. Indonesian archipelago, Malay Peninsula,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For Australia's foreign relations in recent years, see *Trading on Alliance Security: Australia in World Affairs, 2001-2005*, ed. James Cotton and John Ravenhill (South Melbourne, Vic. Oxford University Press, 2007) and *Middle Power Dreaming: Australia in World Affairs 2006-2010*, ed. James Cotton, John Ravenhill, and Australian Institute of International Affairs (South Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press in association with the Australian Institute of International Affairs, 2011).

⁷ Hugh White, "Between America and China: Australia's Strategic Choices in the Asian Century," *Jakarta Globe*, February 12, 2012.

⁸ Robert Ayson, "Robert Ayson: Rise of Chinese dragon could divide Australia and NZ," *nzherald.co.nz* (April 20, 2011).

⁹ Dupont, "Inflection Point: The Australian Defence Force after Afghanistan." p. 4

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Malacca Straits, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands). Plans to boost the ADF's amphibious capabilities would indeed enhance Australia's physical preparedness for short-warning conflicts. However, it remains unclear whether Canberra has established suitable protocols and strategies in order to successfully deploy its new capabilities.

ADF's ability to respond to threats with little warning time rests in the competence of its intelligence agencies.¹⁰ So far the intelligence sharing agreement between Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and the United States has operated free of any significant interruptions. ANZUS would need to ensure that this seamless coordination and intelligence sharing is maintained. In order to do so, Australia would not only need to enhance the capabilities of its own intelligence agencies, but also ensure that the Foreign Intelligence Coordination Committee maximizes its intelligence relations with the United States.

Preparedness of What?

Then we face the "preparedness of what?" question. Given that the alliance would primarily focus on engagements in irregular and off-shore conflicts, flexible, and speedy capabilities would be pivotal. The 2009 Defence White Paper addressed this specific issue by focusing on strengthening the power projection aspects of the ADF's amphibious capabilities, as well as enhancing the Special Forces' strike capabilities and adaptability to cyber-warfare.

The problem is the limitations of what Australia *can* contribute to the ANZUS alliance outside of its own periphery. In particular, issues may arise should Australia ever need to commit to contingencies that involve direct conflict with China. Even if Australia manages to acquire all the capabilities proposed in the 2009 Defence White Paper, it is questionable whether the ADF will have the sufficient power projection capability to penetrate China's Anti-Access/Area Denial strategy. In his article, *U.S.-Australia Alliance Relations: an Australian View*, famed Australian defence policy and regional security professor Paul Dobb

¹⁰ Australia's main intelligence organs include the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO); the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS); Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO); Defence Imagery and Geospatial Organisation (DIGO); Defence Signals Directorate (DSD); and the Office of National Assessments (ONA). Also see Philip Flood, "Report of the Inquiry into Australian Intelligence Agencies," in *Parliamentary Paper (Australia. Parliament); 2004, no. 197*, ed. Minister Australia. Dept. of the Prime and Cabinet (Canberra: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2004).

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writes, "The realistic military contributions that Australia *can* make to alliance operations are...niche contributions."¹¹ Hence, given Australia's specific capabilities and strategies, Australia should stay focused on its own periphery rather than pushing for capabilities that may be beyond its defense planning capacity.

Rationalizing the Alliance's Capabilities and Strategies to ASEAN Neighbors and China

It is in the interests of both Australia and the United States to prioritize the maximization of the alliance's capabilities. However, Canberra's dilemma over its capabilities and personal regional relations must also be taken into account — particularly regarding China. But like Japan, Australia must deal with its strategic interests separately from its trade interests.¹² Australia does not necessarily need to boldly contain China, but Canberra should focus on how it can counter Beijing's excuses for exercising over-assertive actions in the region.

¹¹ Paul Dobb, *U.S.-Australia Alliance Relations: An Australian View*, ed. Studies National Defense University. Institute for National Strategic, Strategic forum ; no. 216 (Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, 2005). p. 2

¹² In an interview, Australia's Ambassador to the United States, Kim Beazley argued, "China trades with Australia because it's in their interest to do so and vice-versa. We don't need to be anything other than straightforward and direct in the reasons for our strategic relations." See Eddie Walsh, "How Australia Sees America," *The Diplomat New Leaders Forum* (April 14, 2012).

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As for the Southeast Asia region, both Canberra and Washington must convince the ASEAN states that ANZUS' strategy is not threat-based but scenario/mission-based, and one that aims to ensure regional stability. Australia should devote more effort to strengthening relations with the ASEAN states by establishing a multilateral security dialogue or even expanding ANZUS membership to include selected ASEAN states. If this is achieved, ANZUS would benefit from the ASEAN states' crucial geostrategic capabilities, while at the same time providing the ASEAN states with security assurances.

Seizing Opportunities for Cooperation with ASEAN States

Singapore would be the most realistic and reliable option to form a trilateral alliance with. Singapore's capabilities and characteristics make it an invaluable partner. Three points underpin this rationale.

First, Singapore already has close defense relations and Free Trade Agreements with both Australia and the United States.¹³ Singapore's history of joint exercises with Australia and the United States indicates that there is a high level of inter-operability between the three countries' armed forces. Australia's well-entrenched defense relations with Singapore stems from the Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA).¹⁴ Within the FPDA, Australia and Singapore hold a number of bilateral joint training exercises such as Exercise Wallaby and Exercise Singaroo, and participate in other multilateral exercises such as Exercise Kakadu, Exercise Pitch Black, Exercise Bersama Shield, Bersama Lima, Bersama Padu Padu, and Suman Protector. Additionally, in 2005, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the Australian Federal Police and Singapore Police Force to step up cooperation in combating transnational crime. The United States also enjoys close defense relations with Singapore. Since the mid-1970s, Singapore and the United States have held regular exercises, and in 1990 they signed a MOU that provides U.S. military aircraft and vessels access to Singaporean military facilities. The signing of the Strategic Framework Agreement in July 2005, and the agreement in

¹³ Singapore-Australia Free Trade Agreement entered into force on July 28, 2003, and the U.S.-Singapore Free Trade Agreement came into force on January 1, 2004.

¹⁴ The FPDA comprises of Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore, and the United Kingdom. However, the FPDA has functioned more as architecture to facilitate defense dialogues and occasionally hold modest joint exercises.

April 2012 further stepped up their bilateral military cooperation.

Second, a trilateral alliance with Singapore will essentially work as a force multiplier. The force structure of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) is well modernized and has a high level of operational preparedness. In its efforts to achieve the "Third Generation SAF" status, the SAF has gone through significant transformations, such as enhancing its amphibious and air capabilities, as well as establishing the "C4I Community."¹⁵ Moreover, Singapore's strategic location, as well as its key military facilities in Changi (Southeast) and Sembawang (Johor Straits) will not only be beneficial in terms of logistics, but also allow rapid mobilization of amphibious and airborne capabilities into the Malacca Straits or the South China Sea. Hence by including Singapore into the ANZUS alliance, the three countries' capabilities will be significantly strengthened both in terms of force structural and operational readiness.

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Third, Singapore's foreign relations network is an invaluable asset. Forming a trilateral defense alliance with Singapore serves as a vehicle to lure other ASEAN states such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam into a multilateral security dialogue or framework. Forming and institutionalizing a multilateral security framework between Australia, the United States, and the ASEAN states would not only be effective in enhancing cooperation, but also restrain ASEAN states from taking unilateral actions that may undermine regional stability. In addition, given its close relations with Beijing, Singapore could also facilitate dialogues between ANZUS and China.

¹⁵ Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence (C4I) Community was officiated on April 3 to integrate the C4I capabilities in the Air Force, Army, and Navy.

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Prospects for ANZUS

Without a doubt, ANZUS is pivotal for regional stability. However, it is clear that the ANZUS security alliance needs adjustment and reorientation. In 2005, Paul Dibb wrote that, “Given its preoccupation with the Middle East, the United States will look to Australia to take the lead in emerging regional security challenges in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.”¹⁶ Dibb’s argument remains true today. Although the Obama administration has increased the United States’ strategic focus on Asia, there is no reason why Australia should not take a more authoritative stance to ensure that its own interests are well reflected in ANZUS’ strategies.

While ANZUS does not require a major revision, there is little doubt that Australia needs to realign its own capabilities and interests. Failure to do so would constrain Australia’s ability to keep pace with the fast developments in the ANZUS alliance, consequently leading to deterioration in the credibility of the alliance itself.

Australia and the United States would certainly benefit from expanding the alliance to include Singapore. However, any newly formed trilateral framework will need to have equal benefits as well as burden sharing for all three parties. Singapore will be a force-multiplier for ANZUS, while a trilateral alliance would provide capabilities that reinforce Singapore’s national security. A trilateral alliance would not only enhance ANZUS’ capabilities but also work as a diplomatic force in the region. Finally, a trilateral alliance would serve to lessen some of the problems in Canberra’s Defence Capability Plan. Over the years, both Australia and the United States have developed strong military relations with Singapore. Hence, there is no reason why these nexuses cannot be taken to the trilateral level, creating an alliance capable of dealing with regional instabilities and combating terrorism and transnational crime.

¹⁶ Dibb, *U.S.-Australia Alliance Relations: An Australian View*.

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About the Young Strategists Forum

The Young Strategists Forum aims to develop a new generation of strategic thinkers in the United States, Europe, and Asia through a combination of seminars, simulations, and study tours. The project is led by transatlantic fellow Daniel M. Kliman with non-resident senior fellow Aaron Friedberg serving as faculty. The first Young Strategists Forum was convened in Japan with the support of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. This initiative is part of GMF’s Asia Program, which addresses the implications of Asia’s rise for the West through a combination of convening, writing, strategic grants, study tours, fellowships, and partnerships with other institutions. For more information, see <http://www.gmfus.org/asia>.

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