# MURDOCH

## U N I V E R S I T Y

**MURDOCH RESEARCH REPOSITORY**

http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au

*This is the author's final version of the work, as accepted for publication following peer review but without the publisher's layout or pagination.*

**Makinda, S.M. (2014) National Interests and Global Norms in Australia's Policies towards the Asia-Pacific. Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs, 1 (1). pp. 25-40.**

http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/25158

# National Interests and Global Norms in Australia's Policies Towards the Asia-Pacific

**Abstract:**

Australia's foreign policy towards the Asia-Pacific region is primarily driven by self-interest. Australian prime ministers, foreign ministers, diplomats and other political leaders have asserted on various occasions that their goal in the region has always been to promote Australia's national interests while at the same time helping some of the states in the region to meet some of their needs. However, Australia has not pursued self-interests to the exclusion of global values and norms. This article examines Australia's policy towards the Asia-Pacific region and explains how governments have tried to align national interests with global values in the region since the Cold War ended.

**Biographical Note**:

Samuel M. Makinda is the Professor of International Relations and Security Studies in the School of Management and Governance at Murdoch University. He was a member of the Australian Foreign Minister's National Consultative Committee for International Security Issues from 2001 to 2008. He has been a Guest Scholar in Foreign Policy Program at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC; a Research Associate at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London; a Visiting Fellow in the Global Security Programme at the University of Cambridge; a Senior Associate Member of St. Antony's College at the University of Oxford; and a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta.

# National Interests and Global Norms in Australia's Policies Towards the Asia-Pacific

*Geographically, Australia is next door to Asia and our destiny as a nation is irrevocably conditioned by what takes place in Asia. This means that our future depends to an ever increasing degree upon the political stability of our Asian neighbours, upon the economic well-being of Asian peoples, and upon the development of understanding and friendly relations between Australia and Asia. Whilst it remains true that peace is indivisible and that what takes place in any part of the world may affect us, our vital interests are closer to home. It is therefore in Asia and the Pacific that Australia should make its primary effort in the field of foreign relations* (Minister for External Affairs, Percy C. Spender, 2 January 1950).[1]

*Success in the Asian century requires a whole-of-Australia effort, with businesses, unions, communities and governments being partners in a transformation as profound as any that have defined Australia throughout our history* (Australia in the Asian Century, White Paper, October 2012).[2]

## Introduction

Within one week of becoming Australia's first female Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop flew to New York where she presided over a United Nations Security Council session.[3] Her party, the Liberal Party of Australia, in coalition with the National Party, had won the election on 7 September 2013, shortly after Australia had assumed the presidency of the UN Security Council seven days earlier. This was the first time that Australia had held this position since 1986.[4] While the Foreign Minister's first visit was to the UN, the newly elected Prime Minister, Tony Abbott's first visit, which took place two weeks after taking office, was to Jakarta, Indonesia.[5] This visit was designed to signal that his government's foreign policy would pay more attention to the Asia-Pacific region than to the United Nations or other non-Asia global issues. The Prime Minister returned to Indonesia to attend the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Bali a week later. Abbott, whose third foreign trip as Prime Minister was to Sri Lanka in November

2013, has claimed repeatedly that Australia's security and economic interests and the nation's future lie in Asia, but there is nothing new in such a claim.[6] Various Australia's governments since World War II have reiterated this claim.[7] Abbott's predecessor, Kevin Rudd, spoke Mandarin and placed a strong emphasis on Asia, although he also reached out to other areas, including Africa.[8] Moreover, Julia Gillard, Australia's first female Prime Minister who held office from June 2010 to June 2013, helped to establish in April 2013 a regular annual dialogue between the Chinese and Australian leaders.[9] On Australia's part, the dialogue is expected to involve the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and the Foreign Minister. Gillard not only focused on Asia, but she also issued a White Paper on the Asian Century, which provides Australia's comprehensive view of Asia's prospects and Australia's role in them to 2025.[10]

Australia's foreign policy towards the Asia-Pacific region appears to be driven primarily by self-interest. Australian prime ministers, foreign ministers, diplomats and other political leaders have asserted on various occasions that their goal in the region is, and has always been, to promote Australia's national interests while at the same time helping some of the states in the region meet some of their security, political, economic, and social needs.[11]

There is no scientific or universally accepted definition of the national interest. Hans Morgenthau described it in terms of power, but he pointed out that its meaning was not "fixed once and for all".[12] He claimed that "the kind of interest" that determined "political action in a particular period of history" depended upon "the political and cultural context within which foreign policy [was] formulated".[13] The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) defined the national interest in a 2003 White Paper as "the security and prosperity of Australia and Australians".[14] DFAT further claimed that the national interest could be understood broadly to include humanitarian assistance as well as the promotion of "good governance, human rights and development".[15] According to the 2003 DFAT White Paper, the Australian government believes that the "improvement of governance around the world can help create an environment that contributes to the security and prosperity of Australia".[16] In other words, at least for Australia, the meaning of the national interest is fluid and flexible.

The fluidity of the concept of national interest has been acknowledged widely.[17] The mutability of this concept was also reflected in the 1997 Australian debate on foreign aid. A government report in that year entitled *One Clear Objective: Poverty Reduction Through Sustainable Development* (also called the Simons Report, after Paul Simons, the

committee chair) declared: "The objective of the Australian aid program should be to assist developing countries to reduce poverty through sustained economic and social development".[18] However, in response to the Simons report, the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) suggested that the aim of the aid was: "To advance Australia's national interest by assisting developing countries reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development".[19]

Thus, it would appear that in Australia, the national interest basically means what the government of the day says it is. This approach to the national interest has been criticized by several academics. For example, Joseph Camilleri argues that the "national interest" rhetoric assumes many things, which should not be accepted at face value.[20]

The definition of the national interest given above implies that Australia has not pursued its self-interest to the exclusion of global values and norms. The concept of "good international citizenship", which former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans popularized in the 1990s, suggested that Australia's foreign policy needed to take seriously global rules, norms and institutions.[21] This is borne out by the fact that Australian government officials have declared frequently that part of their purpose in the Asia-Pacific region, as elsewhere in the developing world, has been to help various states enhance their political and economic stability and to realize several Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The overriding objective of Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) is to assist some Southeast Asian and Western Pacific countries in their efforts to meet some of their MDGs and to tackle other problems in sectors in which Australia is said to have expertise and experience, and in which it is best able to make a difference.[22]

Based on Australia's concrete actions in the Asia-Pacific region since the Cold War ended, it is plausible to argue that the Australian government's aim is to try to align national interests with global values. If I may paraphrase Anthony Bubalo, Australia strives to balance values and principle in its policy towards the Asia-Pacific.[23] It is generally assumed that the pursuit of principle requires a focus on the preservation and promotion of self-interests, while the pursuit of global values requires adequate attention to the respect for global norms, rules and institutions as well as the promotion of other matters, such as human development, gender and racial equality, in addition to ecological sustainability. However, such an argument gives rise to several questions, which this article does not wish to go into.

The aim of this article is to examine the rhetoric about national interests and how they relate to global values in Australia's policies towards the Asia-Pacific region since the

Cold War ended. Its main claim is that while Australia has interacted with the Asia-Pacific states for many years, its foreign policy in this region remains a work-in-progress. This is a function of the fact that Australia's definition of the national interest is fluid and evolving. A referee of this journal has argued that this claim "does not leave the reader with a real sense of argument".

Given the fact that Australia's foreign policy across the board appears to have been shaped by three broad "national interest" considerations, namely identity, security and economic/commercial interests, which are not fixed, the policy must remain a work-in-progress. It is national identity, security and commercial factors that underpinned Australia's involvement in the Cambodian peace process in the late 1980s and early 1990s, its leadership of the international intervention force in East Timor in 1999 and 2000, its role in the Asian financial crises in the late 1990s, its reaction to the 2004 tsunami, its policies on refugees, and the leadership dialogue with China. Therefore, Australia's engagement with the Asia-Pacific has to be understood in the context of these three considerations. As the policy makers' interpretations of these considerations have remained fluid and flexible, foreign policy has been similarly fluid and flexible.

The remaining part of this article is divided into four sections. The first section examines the way identity has played a role in Australia's engagement with the Asia-Pacific region. The second section explains how strategic and security interests have shaped Australia's policy in the region. The third looks at the roles of commercial and economic interests in the policy. And the fourth section is the conclusion.

**National Identity Considerations**

There is no universally accepted meaning of the term "identity". However, many analysts agree that identity is socially constructed and, therefore, historically contingent.[24] Identity revolves around a person's current status, interests, sense of history, sense of belonging, an idea of fulfillment and future aspirations.

At the level of states, national identity reflects and determines the nature of domestic policies and external alignments. In this respect, national identity is presumed to revolve around a state's interpretation of its history and perception of its role in the world. This assumes, often wrongly, that the state's people, history, and boundaries are fixed or settled and, therefore, can be taken for granted at all times. A state's identity can also be delineated in terms of its allies, friends, competitors and enemies. Over the years, it is

ideology, resources, geographical location and history that have determined national identity. Whichever way one delineates a state's identity, it need not be taken for granted.

The 2003 DFAT White paper underlined Australia's identity and its relationship to security and the economy in the following terms:

> Australia is a liberal democracy with a proud commitment to political and economic freedom. That freedom is the foundation of our security and prosperity. We have a long tradition of working with other liberal democracies around the world to defend and promote it, thus helping to build a more prosperous and secure world for Australia.[25]

The paper went on to elaborate Australia's commitment to the rule of law and equality of opportunity, which, it claimed, were "at the root of [Australia's] attempts to improve human rights and prosperity throughout the world".[26] It is important to note the difference between rhetoric and actual policies, especially on the promotion of democracy and human rights.

Based on rhetoric, one could argue that Australian policy makers believe there is an Australian national identity that guides them in the decisions they take towards the Asia-Pacific region and other parts of the world. However, an examination of the record shows that even the policy makers assume that national identity is historically contingent and that the promotion of democracy and human rights is often conditional. If one were to examine, for example, Prime Minister Tony Abbott's visit to Sri Lanka in November 2013 and his donation of patrol boats to the Sri Lankan navy to tackle people smugglers, one might draw the conclusion that his actions could undermine Australia's core values. In the absence of the terms of reference under which the boats were transferred to Sri Lanka, one can assume that the Australian boats might be used to prevent people fleeing persecution, thereby undermining the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. If this happened, it would also undermine Australia's identity, especially in relation to its commitment to promote human rights.

At another level, it is plausible to argue that a perception of national identity has been behind Australia's claim that it is a middle power or a good international citizen. National identity also has provided the framework through which Australia has undertaken many initiatives, including major aid efforts and its participation in regional military alliances, including ANZUS. Australia's accession to various international treaties, such as the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights, the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and the 1992 Chemical Weapons

Convention was determined by its identity, but these treaties, and others like them, have also helped to re-shape Australia's evolving national identity.

Similarly, Australia's fear of communism and its subsequent decisions to participate in the Malayan emergency, the Korean War and the Vietnam War were driven by identity, but these wars also contributed to the enrichment of its identity. In the past six decades, Australia's aid policy has largely reflected its identity, but the provision and administration of aid have also played a role in reconstructing Australia's identity. For example, Australia's first major aid initiative, the Colombo Plan for Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia (hereafter the Colombo Plan), which was an outcome of the Commonwealth Foreign Minister's meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1950, was shaped by national identity. In the course of the 1950s, the Colombo Plan expanded to include non-Commonwealth donors, such as the US, and non-Commonwealth recipients, such as Indonesia, Thailand and South Vietnam.[27] This particular aid program had two components. There was the economic development part, involving "financial support for development projects" such as dams and roads; and the technical assistance part, involving "the promotion of technical expertise, education and training".[28] As a result, Australia provided more than 20,000 scholarships to Asian students between 1951 and 1980. The significance of this was that Australia trained many of Asia's future political leaders and policy makers. The Colombo Plan continues and has about 26 member countries, including Australia, but its program has been extensively revised in the past three decades.

An important dimension of the Colombo Plan is that Australia and its fellow donors used the aid program to try to shape the post-World War II regional order in South and Southeast Asia to suit their national interests. As a former Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, has acknowledged, Australia's participation in the Colombo Plan was underpinned by "economic, political and cultural motivations".[29] The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has observed that Australia hoped to use "the aid program to involve the United States in regional affairs, cultivate diplomatic and commercial relations, assist the rehabilitation of Japan and play a part in the Cold War".[30] Thus, through its first international aid program, Australia ensured that aid served the national interest. Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has promised to establish something similar to the Colombo Plan.[31]

In the post-Cold War period, Australia's identity, whether looked at in terms of its people, its boundaries, its allies or threats to its security, has been much more fluid than it was during the Cold War. This fluidity has been revealed in debates regarding Australia's intake of asylum seekers, its promotion of universally accepted norms and values, and its

engagement with the Asia-Pacific region. A good example of this is Australia's relations with China. After more than a decade of trying to build good relations with China, Australia condemned the Chinese government following the rough treatment of pro-democracy protesters in Beijing in June 1989. Australia criticized China, then considered a totalitarian state, for the lack of tolerance towards those who disagreed with the government. The then Australian Prime Minister, Robert Hawke, shed tears in public when describing what had happened in Beijing. Most Australian commentators at the time believed the Australian government should view its relations with China and other Asian countries in terms of how much they respect all categories of human rights.

However, the same people are reticent when the Australian government treats asylum seekers who arrive by boat harshly. In other words, the majority of Australians empathize with Asian people when they are perceived to be treated badly by their governments, but they do not have the same empathy for asylum seekers when they are incarcerated for long periods or treated badly by the Australian government. The asylum seekers who arrive by boat have compelled the Australian government to excise part of its territory, thus effectively altering its national boundaries, for purposes of migration. The boats that arrive on Australian islands, such as Christmas Island, are deemed not to have landed on Australian territory and the people on them cannot, therefore, access Australian courts to seek redress. Moreover, senior politicians have sought to redefine universally accepted norms and concepts in order to vilify the asylum seekers. For example, former Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, implied in September 2013 that the asylum seekers who arrived by boat via Indonesia violated Australian sovereignty.[32] As a signatory to the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Australia has permitted asylum seekers to enter its territory in search of protection. The convention defines a refugee, sets out the rights of the individuals who may be granted asylum, and outlines the responsibilities of the states that provide asylum. Under this system, asylum seekers would not violate the sovereignty of Australia or any other state that is party to the convention.

Australia's identity as an ally of the USA appears to have distorted both its approach to other countries and the other states' perception of Australia. For this reason, it is not surprising that relations between Australia and some Asia-Pacific states have sometimes been unpredictable. For example, Australia considers China a valuable trading partner, which has also invested heavily in the Australian economy in the past decade. Indeed, thanks to China's desire to important large quantities of resources from Australia, the Australian economy avoided a major down turn during the 2008-2009 global financial

crisis. Moreover, the Lowy Institute's 2013 annual poll, "Australia and the World: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy", suggested the majority of Australians supported close relations with both China and the USA, but in different areas. The report authors argue that "87 percent of Australians think it is possible for Australia to have a good relationship with China and the US".[33]

However, China is often over-sensitive to Australia's defence moves. For example, when the Australian Defence White Paper of 2009 suggested that China should be less opaque in its defence modernization programs, the Chinese government was furious. There was nothing new or offensive in what the Defence White Paper stated. The White Paper argued:

> China will also be the strongest Asian military power, by a considerable margin. Its military modernisation will be increasingly characterised by the development of power projection capabilities. A major power of China's stature can be expected to develop a globally significant military capability befitting its size. But the pace, scope and structure of China's military modernisation have the potential to give its neighbours cause for concern if not carefully explained, and if China does not reach out to others to build confidence regarding its military plans.[34]

China's fury over this statement was hard to understand, but it might have influenced the language of the 2013 Defence White Paper, which did not contain anything that Beijing objected to. However, China's concerns about the Foreign Investment Review process regarding the Chinese ventures in Australia might have been influenced partly by the reservations that some Australian politicians and other public figures have expressed. Barnaby Joyce, who was appointed Minister for Agriculture in September 2013, has frequently expressed hostility to any idea of China's corporations buying land in Australia.

While it is generally acknowledged that national identity has played an important role in shaping Australia's relations with countries in the Asia-Pacific and elsewhere, the contours of this identity continue to evolve. Australia's people and territory as well as the government's commitment to liberal values, including human rights, often shift. Moreover, as a part of the national interest, Australia's identity is intimately connected with perceptions of security, whose interpretation also shifts.

## Strategic and Security Considerations

By the far the most important consideration in Australia's relations with the Asia-Pacific region has been security. As Anthony Burke argued in 2001, "security has been a potent, driving imperative throughout Australian history, a fact which ought to give us pause when we look backwards with an eye to what we are, and forwards with an eye to what we might become".[35] His claim illustrates the link between identity and security. However, neither research analysts nor governments have come up with a single and universally acceptable definition of security. Indeed, strategic analysts differ over the meanings of security and over what objects are to be secured: individuals, ethnic communities, states or international society as a whole. They also disagree about how much emphasis is to be attached to external as opposed to internal causes of threats to security. Others differ over the terms "national", "international" and "global" security.[36] In the twenty-first century, it has become customary for analysts and policy makers to refer to various types of security, such as "food security", "cyber security" and bio-security. But, how do these different perceptions of security relate to Australia's relations with Asia-Pacific states? And, has Australia pursued security interests in a manner that is consistent with its commitment to global values?

There have been several transitions in Australia's relations with Asian states over the past century: from fear to confidence; from isolation to engagement; and from enemy to partner and ally. During the Cold War, Australia's security decisions appeared primarily concerned with survival in a world of superpower confrontation. In addition, as an ally of the USA, Australia's security calculations were designed to demonstrate that it was a good and dependable ally. In the post-Cold War period, the accent in Australian policies towards the region has been on confidence, engagement and partnership. Moreover, Australia's conceptualization of security has included a variety of threats and activities: terrorism and counter-terrorism; the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; state collapse and state-building; peacekeeping operations; health pandemics; food security; cyber threats and cyber-security; and problems posed by the proliferation of small arms. These phases have reflected both Australia's evolving identity and its perceptions of security. While some of these activities reflected Australia's consideration of global values, others were undertaken purely for purposes of survival or to show allegiance to an ally. Ultimately, Australia's security relations with Asian states have, in different ways, reflected its determination to ensure that Asia does not become a source of insecurity.

In the *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*, the Australian government states: "Australia's future is irrevocably tied to the stability and sustainable security of our diverse region… We will work to build trust and cooperation, bilaterally and through existing regional mechanisms."[37] Based on the unusual public vocal exchanges in November 2013 between Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono over claims that Yudhoyono's mobile phone and that of his wife were tapped by Australian intelligence, it might take some time before the Indonesian leadership restores trust in Australia.[38]

Since the Cold War ended, Australia's security relations with the Asia-Pacific states have covered a number of areas, including UN peacekeeping in Cambodia in the 1990s, international intervention in East Timor in the late 1990s, transnational terrorism since 2001, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the phenomenon of failing or collapsed states, drug trafficking and money laundering, as well as cyber security threats. The Australian government regards Asia-Pacific states as key partners in the pursuit of security threats and the maintenance of peace and order. Its international aid agency, AUSAID, has also taken into account the broader definition of security, which includes poverty alleviation, capacity building, and environmental management. For example, the 2003 DFAT White Paper argued: "Securing the independence of East Timor and playing an important role in the war against terrorism are only the most recent examples of Australia's defence of its values in the world".[39] Most of the security measures Australia has undertaken in the Asia-Pacific region have been designed to ensure that the region does not become a breeding ground for forces that could undermine Australia's identity and prosperity.

While some security measures have undoubtedly enhanced Australia's security and its international image, other measures have undermined Australia's commitment to its global values and damaged its international reputation. For example, the adoption of rhetoric that describes asylum seekers coming by boat in terms of "border protection", "territorial integrity" and "national security" by both the Labor party and the Liberal-National coalition since 2001 has reflected poor political leadership and undermined Australia's adherence to international treaties. Instead of portraying refugees as helpless people who need Australia's protection, the government treats them as a threat to the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Moreover, the Abbott government's decision in 2013 to further securitize refugees arriving by boat, the adoption of "Operation Sovereign Borders" headed by a three-star general, and its pursuit of a policy that is aimed

at "turning back the boats", are not likely to enhance Australia's security. This approach could damage Australia's international image, undermine the country's identity as a liberal and tolerant society, and possibly complicate Australia's relations with Indonesia and other countries in the region.

On the other hand, the Australian-led international intervention in East Timor in September 1999 was consistent with international law and Australia's long-held values on human rights, it saved lives, and it helped establish institutions and structures that would anchor a new government in Dili by mid-2002. Given the fact that various Australian governments had supported Indonesia's occupation of East Timor in late 1975, following the departure of the Portuguese colonial authorities, it must have been a difficult decision for the Howard government. However, on the basis of the fact that the United Nations did not recognize Indonesia's rule over East Timor for more than 24 years, the intervention in support of the East Timorese seeking self-determination was a legitimate move. East Timor was neither a Portuguese colony, nor a fully integrated Indonesian province, nor a UN trust territory. Australia's decision to lead an international intervention force was made easier by the fact that on 5 May 1999, Portugal, Indonesia and the UN had signed agreements that allowed the UN to conduct a referendum in East Timor. This agreement significantly weakened Indonesia's claim over East Timor.

Under UN Security Council resolution 1246 of 11 June 1999, the UN Mission in East Timor (UNAMET), which was an electoral assistance group without a mandate for peacekeeping, was to "ascertain whether the East Timorese people" would accept a special autonomy within Indonesia or choose separation from Indonesia. On 30 August 1999, more than 78 percent of the 450,000 East Timorese voters rejected Indonesian autonomy, and, therefore, by default expressed their desire for independence. However, within hours of the referendum result being announced, the pro-Jakarta militias, supported by Indonesian troops, rampaged through cities, towns, and villages, shooting, raping, burning and looting. The systematic, widespread, and flagrant violations of human rights and international humanitarian law required urgent intervention by an outside force. It was under these circumstances that UN Security Council resolution 1264 of 15 September 1999 authorized the Australian-led International Force for East Timor (INTERFET). This was a peace enforcement operation that was deployed temporarily to end atrocities committed by the pro-Jakarta militia and Indonesian troops. INTERFET, which lasted from September 1999 to February 2000, undertook responsibilities that were consistent with Australian values and enhanced Australia's international image.

Similarly, Australia's involvement in counter-terrorism efforts in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia and the Philippines, has provided much needed support to address a continuing problem. Following the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US by Al Qaeda operatives, Australia joined the US and other states to try to destroy their bases in Afghanistan. However, a year later, in October 2002, there were bomb attacks in Bali, Indonesia, which left 202 dead, including 88 Australians. There were several terrorist attacks in Indonesia between 2003 and 2005, one of which targeted the Australian embassy in Jakarta. It was for this reason that the Australian government decided to work with governments in the Asia-Pacific region to combat terrorism. After the Middle East, Southeast Asia was regarded as the second front in the fight against terrorism. The 2003 DFAT White Paper stated:

> Southeast Asia is where the threat of terrorism to Australian interests is most acute. The Bali attacks signalled a resolve and level of ambition and coordination among regional extremists that threaten directly the more than 45,000 Australians living in Southeast Asia and many thousands of Australians who visit the region each year. Terrorism is jeopardizing Southeast Asia's stability and Australian interests in this. Southeast Asia is where Australia, drawing on its strong ties with the region, can make a significant contribution to the war against terrorism.[40]

Within a few years of the 2002 Bali bombing, Australia signed counter-terrorism cooperation agreements with many countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The Australian government has provided training for regional security and intelligence agencies with a view to enhancing their capacity to disrupt terrorist activities. It has also provided anti-money laundering training and workshops with a view to strengthening the regional countries' capacity to control the flow of funds to terrorists. The Australian government has also provided resources to help combat religious extremism and the radicalization of the youth. While Australia's efforts to enhance the capacity of security agencies and customs officials within the region have been successful, human rights advocates have argued that little attention has been given to strengthening good governance. If governance institutions are not enhanced, the law enforcement agencies trained by Australia may be responsible for harassment of the public, which could lead to the disenchantment and radicalization of the youth. Australia's security interests, or its national interest, would be served more

effectively if the policy makers consistently took a broader view of security, especially as it affects the people in regional countries.

In some countries, Australia's promotion of human rights, development and good governance has been pursued side by side with the pursuit of liberal market policies. These have, in turn, involved the promotion of Australia's economic and commercial interests.


## Economic and Commercial Considerations

The *Australia in the Asian Century* White Paper of October 2012 argues that "Australia's success in the region requires that highly innovative, competitive Australian firms and institutions develop collaborative relationships with others in the region". It goes on to suggest that Australia "will work to make the region more open and integrated, encouraging trade, investment and partnerships".[41]

Like security concerns, economic and commercial factors play a significant role in shaping and driving Australia's foreign policy not just in the Asia-Pacific region but in other regions as well. The Australian government believes that a large part of the country's wealth is based on international trade and investment, and especially in areas such as mining and agriculture. The need to encourage investments in these areas compels the country to seek strong international economic links in the region. It is assumed that the Australian government's decision in the late 1980s to add the label "Trade" to the name of the Department of Foreign Affairs illustrated the important functions that trade and commerce played in shaping the national interest at the time. In this sense, economic and commercial interests are pursued because they are considered crucial for the prosperity, stability and survival of the nation.

At the same time, the Australian government pursues economic and commercial interests at the regional and global levels partly because of its interest in promoting or enhancing global norms, rules and institutions. As a middle power, Australia believes it can justify its status mainly by a certain level of global activism. According to John Ravenhill, middle power status can be encapsulated in five attributes: diplomatic capacity; concentration in areas perceived as most likely to produce the desired result; intellectual leadership and creativity; credibility and consistency in the policies advocated; and coalition-building.[42] While Australia, especially under the Labor leadership (1983-1996 and 2007-2013), frequently claimed to be a middle power, it has not met all the five

attributes all of the time. However, it could be argued the Australian government supports international organizations, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, because of its commitment to global norms and rules. At the regional level, Australia was one of the architects of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in the late 1980s. This was an important result of Australia's middle power activism as the Cold War was coming an end.

Another example of regional trade initiatives is the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), which has been described by DFAT as "a viable pathway for realising the vision of a free trade area of the Asia-Pacific." This arrangement is designed to build on the 2006 Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement, also called the P4, which was signed by Brunei Darussalam, Chile, New Zealand and Singapore. As currently configured, the TPP includes the P4 as well as Australia, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, the USA and Vietnam. This is currently a work-in-progress.

The Australian government's preference since the Cold War ended has been to encourage multilateral trade liberalization. However, this has not prevented it from pursuing bilateral trade deals, including bilateral free trade agreements. The Australian government has signed bilateral free trade agreements with several countries in the Asia-Pacific region. While bilateral arrangements have the potential to undermine major regional and global deals, the Australian government appears to believe that bilateral and regional trade deals are likely to compete with, and stimulate, multilateral liberalization.

However, away from economic diplomacy, which is monopolized by government functionaries, the major actors in economic and commercial matters are private profit-maximizing businesses. Thus, while traditional diplomatic activities often involve trade-offs that do no carry clear monetary values, trade activities are dominated by subnational actors that are in the game to make profits. It is these private actors, especially large mining corporations, such as BHP and Rio Tinto, that contribute to the generation of Australia's wealth. Australia's mining and agricultural sectors were built, and still depend, on access to international markets. They also rely on imported labour. While many Australian firms respect the Australian law, some of them, especially when operating in foreign countries, engage in practices that would be considered illegal by Australian standards. Such practices are likely to undermine Australia's promotion of good governance if left unchecked.

Moreover, globalization has ensured that Australia has had to reform its economic institutions rapidly to deal with the speed and scale of cross-border flows of information and finance. Globalization also raises important questions about how global cooperation

could be expanded or enhanced to deal with issues that affect Australia's interests. Even the retail sector and the hospitality industry would suffer without considerable inputs from outside the country. And since the 1990s, Australia's higher education sector has also come to depend on big enrolments from foreign students, most of whom are from the Asia-Pacific region.

While economic and commercial forces have contributed to the shaping of Australia's national interest, they have also thrown up some challenges. Some of Australia's close allies, including the USA, are competitors when it comes to agricultural trade. At the same time, some of the largest consumers of Australia's mineral and agricultural exports, including China, are not necessarily Australia's allies. These challenges have ensured that the national interest continues to be negotiated and cannot be taken for granted.

### Conclusions

At the time of this writing in mid-November 2013, the new Australian government had been in office for about 11 weeks, during which the Prime Minister made three foreign trips, two of them to Indonesia and the third to Sri Lanka. The Indonesian trips focused on governance, trade and security matters, including people smugglers and refugees reaching Australia by boats. The Sri Lankan trip was ostensibly about the biennial CHOGM conference, but Tony Abbott focused on people smugglers and publicly paid no attention to human rights issues. It was also a time during which several Asian states raised questions relating to claims that Australia, in cooperation with the USA, has been eavesdropping on their leaders. Indonesia was especially exasperated by allegations that the Australian Signals Directorate had tapped the President's mobile phone as well as that of his wife.[43] At the same time, the Australian government reiterated its position not to permit Huawei, a Chinese telecommunications company, to participate in the National Broadband Network, allegedly due to fears of intelligence gathering.[44] The heightened concern over Huawei illustrates the view that Australia takes cyber security threats as seriously as it takes threats from traditional sources of insecurity. These initial developments suggested that Australia's national interests continue to rest on three pillars, which are themselves evolving: identity, security and economic/commercial interests. However, they also suggested that, in pursuit of its national interests, Australia pays attention to global values only when there is a happy coincidence between principle and values.

When Tony Abbott was accompanied by a large number of business people on his first trip to Jakarta in October 2013, he was demonstrating the economic and commercial dimensions of the Australian national interest. When he claimed in parliament on 11 November 2013 that all states gathered information about each other, he was not only re-emphasising Australia's identity, but also suggesting that security matters were paramount. When the Australian Prime Minister donated two patrol boats to Sri Lanka to use in the fight against people smugglers, he was underlining the way that Australia has securitized the refugee issue. Moreover, his decision to focus on deterring people smugglers while ignoring the human rights abuses that partly accounted for the rise in the number of refugees suggested that a narrow and self-interested view of security had been given priority over global values.

When the Australian government claims that it is committed to humanitarian objectives and would like to help states in the region meet some of their MDGs, it is right. However, this commitment is about projecting Australia's identity beyond its borders. Similarly, when the Australian government claims that it is committed to a stable and prosperous Asia-Pacific region, it suggests that it would like the people of the region to live in good conditions. However, a stable and prosperous region is a necessary condition for Australia's security and economic well-being. Therefore, it should not be surprising for anyone to discover that at certain times, Australia clearly aligns global values with its wider security, commercial and diplomatic interests. Thus, while Australia's policy towards the Asia-Pacific has the potential to have a positive impact on the economic, political and social conditions in the region, its presence there is as much about the Asia-Pacific as it is about Australia. And to the extent that identity, security and economic issues evolve, Australia's national interests remain a work-in-progress.

**Footnotes**

---

[1] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Cablegram From Department of External Affairs to All Posts", 2 January 1950 http://www.info.dfat.gov.au/info/historical/HistDocs.nsf/vVolume/A40A3B33B653EF8ECA256CD90074E2EB. Accessed on 21 November 2013.

[2] Australian Government, *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2012), p. 3.

[3] See Ellen Connolly, "Julie Bishop takes UN Security Council reins", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 September 2013.

[4] For a succinct analysis of Australia's participation in the UN Security Council up to the 1980s, see Samuel M. Makinda, "Why Good Citizen Australia Lost the Global Power Play", *Current Affairs Bulletin*, Volume 73, Number 1 (1996), pp. 22-26.

[5] Greg Sheridan, "Abbott in Jakarta: Adventure begins", *The Australian*, 3 October 2013.

[6] For one perspective on Tony Abbott's visit to Sri Lanka for CHOGM, see Amanda Hodge, "'Difficult things happen': Tony Abbott defends Sri Lanka", *The Australian*, 16 November 2013, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/difficult-things-happen-tony-abbott-defends-sri-lanka/story-fn59niix-1226761423014#. Accessed on 18 November 2013.

[7] See, for example, Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, *Australia's Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995), especially chapters 12-15.

[8] Alexander Downer, Australia's longest serving Foreign Minister from 1996 to 2007, occasionally criticized Rudd for paying more attention, than Downer did, to issues outside the Asia-Pacific region. See, for example, Lanai Vasek, "Kevin Rudd used foreign affairs portfolio as media vehicle: Alexander Downer", *The Australian*, 7 March 2012, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/policy/kevin-rudd-used-foreign-affairs-portfolio-as-media-vehicle-alexander-downer/story-fn59nm2j-1226291648763. Accessed on 18 November 2013.

[9] Stephen McDonnell, "Australia locks in annual leadership talks with China", ABC News, 10 April 2013: < http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-04-09/australia-locks-in-annual-leadership-talks-with-china/4619230>. Accessed on 12 October 2013.

[10] See Australian Government, *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2012).

[11] See, for example, Stephen Smith, Minister of Foreign Affairs, "Australia and the Asia-Pacific Century", Paper presented to the South Australian branch of the Australian Institute of International Affairs, 12 April 2010.

[12] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 4th edn, p. 8.

[13] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 8-9.

[14] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Advancing the National Interest: Australia's Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2003), p. vii.

[15] DFAT, *Advancing the National Interest*, p. xviii.

[16] DFAT, *Advancing the National Interest*, p. xviii.

[17] See, for instance, Alexander L. George, "Domestic Constraints on Regime Change in US Foreign Policy: The need for policy legitimacy", in O. R. Holsti, R. M. Siverson and A. L. George (eds), *Change in the International System* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980), pp. 233-62.

[18] Paul H. Simons, Gaye Hart and Cliff Walsh, *One Clear Objective: Poverty Reduction through Sustainable Development*, Report of the Committee to Review Australia's Foreign Aid (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1997), p. 12.

[19] AusAID, *Better Aid for a Better Future*, Report to Parliament on Australia's Development Cooperation Program and the Government's Response to the Committee of Review of Australia's Overseas Aid Program (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1991), p. 16.

[20] Joseph A. Camilleri, "A Leap into the Past – In the Name of 'National Interest'", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 2003, pp. 431-53.

[21] See, for instance, Andrew Linklater, "What is a good international citizen?", in Paul Keal (ed), *Ethics and Foreign Policy* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), pp. 21-43.

[22] See, for example, Sandy Hollway, Bill Farmer, Margaret Reid, John Denton, and Stephen Howes, *Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness* (2011). www.aidreview.gov.au/publications/aidreview.pdf (accessed on 30 May 2012).

[23] See Anthony Bubalo's interview with Margaret Throsby on "Syria and the Arab Spring" on ABC Radio, 2 August 2012.

[24] For an interesting discussion of this issue in relation to Australia's security, see, for example, Jan Jindy Pettman, "National Identity and Security" in Gary Smith and St. John Kettle (eds), *Threats Without Enemies* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1992), chapter 2.

[25] DFAT, *Advancing the National Interest*, p. 2.

[26] DFAT, *Advancing the National Interest*, p. 3.

[27] David Lowe and Daniel Oakman, *Australia and the Colombo Plan 1949-1957* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2004).

[28] Lowe and Oakman, *Australia and the Colombo Plan 1949-1957*, p. xxv.

[29] Lowe and Oakman, *Australia and the Colombo Plan 1949-1957*, p. v.

[30] DFAT website: accessed on 6 July 2012.

[31] Simon Marginson, "New Colombo Plan a step forward", *The Australian*, 4 September 2013 < http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/opinion/new-colombo-plan-a-step-forward/story-e6frgcko-1226709964228 >. Accessed on 20 November 2013.

[32] See David Barbeler and Lisa Martin, "Downer slams Indonesian foreign minister", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 September 2013 < http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-national/downer-slams-indonesian-foreign-minister-20130926-2ufpv.html>. Accessed on 20 November 2013.

[33] Michael Fullilove and Alex Oliver, "We see China and US as central to our future", *The Australian*, 24 June 2013, p. 10.

[34] Australian Government, Department of Defence: *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century – Force 2030* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), p. 34.

[35] Anthony Burke, *Fear of Security: Australia's Invasion Anxiety* (Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press, 2001), p. xi.

[36] Helga Haftendorn, "The Security Puzzle: Theory-Building and Discipline-Building in International Security", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 1, (1991), pp. 3-17.

[37] Australian Government, *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2012), p. 3.

[38] Adam Gartrell, "SBY slams Abbott's handling of spy drama", *The Australian*, 19 November 2013.

[39] DFAT, *Advancing the National Interest*, pp. 2-3.

[40] DFAT, *Advancing the National Interest*, p. 38.

[41] Australian Government, *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2012), p. 2.

[42] John Ravenhill, "Cycles of Middle Power Activism: Constraint and Choice in Australian and Canadian Foreign Policies", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 52, No. 3, 1998, pp. 309-327.

[43] See Adam Gartrell, "SBY slams Abbott's handling of spy drama", *The Australian*, 19 November 2013.

[44] See Peter Cai, "Huawei 'extremely disappointed' with NBN ban", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 November 2013 < http://www.smh.com.au/business/huawei-extremely-disappointed-with-nbn-ban-20131101-2wrkd.html >. Accessed on 20 November 2013.