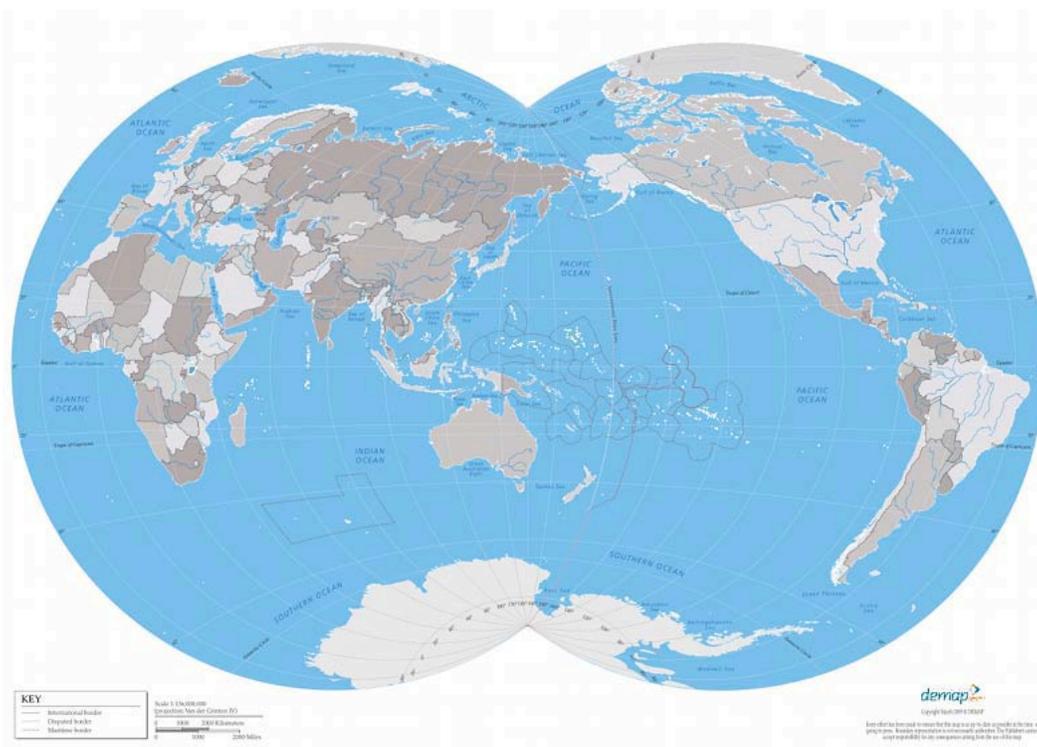


**The Odd Ally:
US Extended Deterrence and
Australian Strategic Policy**

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Introduction

Extended deterrence is a central element of all Alliance relationships, as any potential aggressor must face the prospect of resistance not only by the immediate victim, but also by its ally. Most of today's analysis of how this fundamental condition can be operationalized, demonstrated, supported and communicated is based on NATO's history of relying on US extended deterrence in general, and on nuclear extended deterrence in particular, in keeping Western Europe free from Soviet encroachment during the Cold War. In this context, the 'Healy Theorem', which states that 'it takes five percent credibility of US guarantees to deter the Soviets, but ninety-five percent to reassure the Europeans', highlights an important duality in the concept of extended nuclear deterrence, which consists of two, related but distinct relationships between deterrer and deterree, and deterrer and ally.¹

The distinction between these two aspects of extended deterrence is especially important for US alliance relationships in Asia, and perhaps nowhere more so than in the case of Australia. This may seem surprising since Australia has not, in recent decades, been under any major threat, let alone an existential threat it could not handle without recourse to US nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, careful reading of Australia's strategic situation and history suggests that Australia's relative inattention to the nuclear and immediate deterrence aspects of its alliance with the United States is primarily a consequence of its relatively benign strategic environment. Should this environment deteriorate significantly, reassurance of Australia may in fact be a most difficult proposition for any US extended deterrence posture.

As is often the case, close examination of the past is most revealing for future possibilities. This paper will therefore trace Australia's involvement in, and perspectives on, the deterrence and reassurance aspects of the US alliance through Australian strategic guidance papers from the mid-1950s to the present.² This will demonstrate several ways

¹ I am indebted to David Yost for bringing this theorem back to my attention during a recent visit to Canberra, which also led me to more precisely formulate several of the ideas contained in this paper.

² For background on the development of Australian strategic guidance, see Stephan Frühling, 'Australian Strategic Guidance since the Second World War', in Stephan Frühling (ed.), *Australian Strategic Policy*

in which the US-Australia alliance has, for a long time, been rather different in its extended deterrence aspects than NATO as well as America's Northeast Asian alliances.

Drifting from the Fold: 1950s and 1960s

When relations between the Soviet Union and the Western powers in Europe and North America deteriorated in the late 1940s, there was little question that Australia, a member of the British Commonwealth and victorious power of the Second World War, would not support its allies against what was seen as a new, global threat.

Australia's Participation in the Common Defence of Southeast Asia

By the mid-1950s, Australia had forces permanently stationed in Southeast Asia to support its major UK and US allies' presence in the region. As was the case in Europe, the allies in Southeast Asia also relied heavily on their quantitative and qualitative superiority in nuclear weapons over the Communist bloc. SEATO planned the first and extensive use of tactical nuclear weapons to repel a communist invasion especially of Thailand. The *Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy* of 1956, the core strategic guidance document for the Australian defence effort, made explicit that Australia expected UK or US nuclear support to its forces in Southeast Asia in the case of limited as well as global war, if not even the outright provision of nuclear munitions in the field.³

But although the posture of 'forward defence' responded to very significant threats to Southeast Asia and Australia was, ultimately, the ally to benefit most from the Western defence effort in the region, it was also the case that during the 1950s there was very little direct threat of communist forces to Australia itself. Australia was benefiting from, and participating in, the Western extended deterrence strategy of 'massive retaliation', without being either a direct provider or direct recipient of nuclear guarantees – a situation that it only shared with Canada among the Western allies at the time. Australia therefore also did not share much of the European anxiety about the practical effects of nuclear defence, which had been highlighted following exercises such as *Carte Blanche*

Since 1945 (Canberra: Defence Publishing Service, 2009), pp. 1-50. This book also includes the full text of the *Strategic Basis* papers quoted in this paper.

³ Defence Committee, *Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy*, 11 October 1956, para 22.

in Germany in 1955.⁴ Australia was relatively confident in the stability of nuclear deterrence between the major powers,⁵ and sought to support the UK nuclear program in particular, instead of procuring its own weapons.⁶

The 1959 Strategic Basis and Australia's Geostrategic Position

However, Australian confidence in allied nuclear guarantees hinged on the relative importance of Western interests in Southeast Asia for the United States and, to a lesser extent, United Kingdom. Confidence in the reliability of allied guarantees was shaken after the Suez crisis and refusals of US support for the Australian policy in Dutch West Papua, which was opposed to Indonesian annexation.⁷ But even in global war, the 1959 version of the *Strategic Basis* was much less confident in the credibility of a strategy based on early use of tactical nuclear weapons, now that the Communist bloc was gaining the capability of retaliating against the US homeland.⁸ Southeast Asia was a globally marginal theatre and Australia could not expect its allies to significantly strengthen regional defenses with conventional forces in the way that would become part of NATO's strategy of 'flexible response'. Instead, the reduced confidence in nuclear deterrence, as well as US guarantees with regards to Indonesia, led to a requirement for the increased capability for independent action.⁹

This included the possible requirement for nuclear weapons, which "[i]n the worst circumstances, viz. the inability of the United States and the United Kingdom to come to

⁴ See, for example, Lawrence Freedman, *The evolution of nuclear strategy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 104-105; Frederick Zilian Jr., 'The Shifting Military Balance in Central Europe', in Detlev Junker (ed.), *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1945-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 228.

⁵ Defence Committee, *Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy*, 1956, Strategic Review, para. 3-5.

⁶ Jacques E.C. Hymans, 'Isotopes and Identity: Australia and the Nuclear Weapons Option, 1949-1999', *The Nonproliferation Review*, vol. 7, no. 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 1-23.

⁷ Peter Edwards, *Crises and Commitments* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), pp. 182-207; J.A.C. Mackie, 'Australia and Indonesia, 1945-1960', in Gordon Greenwood and Norman Harper (eds.), *Australia in World Affairs 1956-1960* (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1963), pp. 296-304.

⁸ Defence Committee, *Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy*, 12 January 1959, paras 15, 18, 26, annex A.

⁹ *Ibid.*, paras 43-47, annex C.

our assistance, ... might well be essential to our national survival".¹⁰ It also included concerns about regional conventional contingencies following global nuclear war. Conventional operations after large-scale nuclear warfare remained a minor but real concern in Australian defence planning until the end of the Cold War, illustrating the extent to which the country's geostrategic situation differed fundamentally from that of its main allies in the Northern Hemisphere.¹¹

Confrontation with Indonesia and the Limits of US Assistance

During the early 1960s, Australia's strategic situation deteriorated rapidly with its growing involvement in the war in Vietnam, as well as growing tensions and conflict with Soekarno's Indonesia over Australian support to Malaysia during Konfrontasi. In this context, the prominence of the Vietnam War in popular recollection conceals the fact that in its capability procurement, Australia was already by the 1960s giving priority to the ability to deter and operate independently, without direct US support, against Indonesia.¹² The basic problem for Australia was that, despite the war in Vietnam, its primary strategic concern with regards to Indonesia arose outside the global communist threat that dominated US policy, and that there was not the close commonality of interests that ultimately had to support any US assistance or extended deterrence posture in relation to that country. The 1964 *Strategic Basis*, for example, commented that:

The United States gives a high priority to trying to avoid the transfer of power in Indonesia to a communist regime. ... In a situation, therefore, in which communist regimes have acquired control on the South East Asian mainland by processes short of overt aggression by China or North Vietnam, we should expect American political policy to be applied to persuading the Sukarno regime, or what follows it, to refrain from aligning itself with any of the communist powers. It is not to be assumed that Australian and United States assessments of the risks involved in conciliation of Indonesia in these circumstances would always coincide.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid., para. 54.

¹¹ See, for example Paul Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1986), pp. 31-32

¹² Defence Committee, *Australia's Strategic Position*, 4 February 1963, para 31; Defence Committee, *Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy*, 15 October 1964, para 67.

¹³ Defence Committee, *Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy*, 15 October 1964, para 43.

In fact, it was made very clear to the Australians that the United States would take a very narrow interpretation of its obligations to Australia under the ANZUS treaty:

The applicability of the ANZUS Treaty in the event of attack on our armed forces in respect of the Malaysian situation was confirmed in the Barwick/Kennedy conversations in 1963 as follows: “it is confirmed that the United States would act under Articles IV and V of the Treaty in the event of an armed attack by Indonesian armed forces on the armed forces, public vessels or aircraft of Australia in Malaysia”. In these conversations it was also understood that the treaty relates only to overt attack and not to subversion, guerrilla warfare or indirect aggression. The United States requires to be fully consulted before Australia enters into military commitments in Malaysia. At present the ANZUS treaty applies to the territory of Papua/New Guinea but it would not apply automatically if Papua/New Guinea were to become an independent country.¹⁴

The ANZUS Treaty does not cover mutual military assistance in the event of a covert situation such as could arise in Papua/New Guinea. The United States will expect Australia to handle any covert situation that could arise in Papua/New Guinea with its own resources. The ANZUS Treaty would still cover an overt attack on Australian forces in Papua/New Guinea, but would apply to Papua/New Guinea itself only whilst it remains an Australian territory.¹⁵

Although it strongly valued and supported the US global and regional role in the containment of communism, including by deploying forces to fight in Vietnam, Australia was thus also acutely aware of the limits regarding US assistance, let alone explicit deterrence guarantees. In many ways, the 1965 coup in Indonesia that edged Soekarno from power was thus not only a most fortunate development for Australia that very rapidly transformed its security environment for the better, but also for the United States, which avoided what would have been a very difficult choice if its guarantees to Australia had been seriously tested. As it was, the Cold War de-facto ended for Australia with Nixon’s visit to China, further emphasizing its status as the odd one out among America’s Anglo-Saxon allies.

¹⁴ Ibid., para 54.

¹⁵ Ibid., para 61.

Self-Reliance and the Joint Facilities: 1970s and 1980s

Over the early 1970s, Australia developed a new strategic policy to replace the old posture of ‘forward defence’ that had come to an end with the Vietnam War. This new policy was based on two closely related core tenets, which remain at the heart of Australian defence policy to this day: The priority of the defence of Australia, and defence self-reliance in combat forces in that and related tasks. In addition, the role of the US ‘Joint Facilities’ on Australian soil added another element to Australia’s engagement with extended deterrence that received growing attention in the strategic guidance documents of the 1970s and 1980s.

Self-Reliance: Acknowledging the Conditionality of US Assistance

Key to the longevity of the principles of the ‘Defence of Australia’ and ‘defence self-reliance’ after 1973 was that they responded to powerful political and strategic aspects of Australia’s situation. With the end of communism as a major threat in Southeast Asia and the growing stabilization of the region, Australia chose not to make the central balance in Europe the focus of its defence effort, in the manner that Canada, for example, did throughout the Cold War. Politically, this would have been impossible to sustain after the divisive effect of the deployment to Vietnam but, unlike Canada, Australia was also faced with the enduring possibility of regional conflict that would not directly concern the major interests of its allies. Hence, in the words of the 1975 *Strategic Basis*, “Australia’s obligations are first to itself”,¹⁶ or in the more diplomatic words of the public 1976 White Paper *Australian Defence*:

An alliance does not free a nation from the responsibility to make adequate provision for its own security, or to help support stability and security in its own neighbourhood, should this requirement arise.¹⁷

Behind the policy of self-reliance lay a nuanced and clear-headed appraisal of the value and limits of US commitments to Australia under the ANZUS alliance. Australian strategic guidance consistently acknowledged the US alliance as an important insurance

¹⁶ Defence Committee, *Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy*, 3 October 1975, para 275.

¹⁷ Defence Committee, *Australian Strategic Analysis and Defence Policy Objectives*, 2 September 1976, para 8.

in case of the development of an existential threat, and as a source of valuable technological, logistical and intelligence assistance that was (and is) key to the ability of the ADF to operate independently and with a margin of superiority over regional countries. But it was also recognized that many important Australian interests were of a much lesser importance to the United States: The link that was drawn between defence self-reliance and the US alliance in classified strategic guidance in 1976 was much closer than that in the public White Paper of the same year, and worth quoting at length because fundamentally similar considerations are still a basis of Australian defence policy today:

If Australia became involved in a dispute with potentiality for war, the US would not be indifferent because its own position as Australia's ally could be affected. The alliance also expresses a US interest in Australia's security. To protect this, and the credibility of its alliances with other countries, the US would be likely to take some action. It would do this even though there was no substantive US interest in the issue at stake between Australia and another party. But the US action could be less than Australia sought, or other than Australia preferred. The US might press both Australia and the other party for concession to allow settlement of their dispute. US support for Australia might be inhibited by a conflict in US interests; or its support could be affected by some situation elsewhere, reducing, for example, US military support, or even supply to Australia. US interests require that it avoid being dragged into war by allies on less than vital issues.

It cannot be said in clear-cut terms that, for example, Australia should expect to have to look after itself in "low-level" situations, but could count on US support in "high-level" situations. US interests, and the Congressional view of them, would be the decisive factor.

Conceivably, the US might react quite strongly to some militarily "low-level" situation, which, however, exposed its own interests – such as small-scale harassment of Australia by the USSR or some dispute involving Law of the Sea. But it might well prefer to let Australia carry the military brunt of a more substantial situation, such as trouble with Indonesia about PNG. [Elsewhere in the document] we gave reasons why the threshold of US military intervention against Indonesia could be quite high. In circumstances such as Australian military intervention against secession by Bougainville, US military help could not be expected. In the case of politico-military harassment, Australia could face difficult defence problems. But its essential security would not be threatened. The US in such circumstances might well confine any support to non-military measures.

In summary, there are, therefore, significant areas of defence contingency for Australia, about which at this time we can only conjecture, in which US support, and particularly military support, would appear uncertain. Regarding developments fundamentally affecting Australia's security or the strategic

interests of the US itself, however, the reliability of US support appears not to be in doubt.¹⁸

Therefore,

Australian defence planning should ensure a substantial capability for independence in military operations regarding issues assessed as likely to be of lesser consequence to US interests.¹⁹

In this situation, Australia explicitly did not seek detailed understanding about US support. The lack of any specific extended deterrence aspect to the ANZUS alliance was not only a reflection of the benign Australian strategic situation, but also a conscious Australian decision:

Australian policy has for many years deliberately avoided attempts to reach understandings with US governments defining the circumstances in which the US would come to Australia's support, and the nature of that support. It has been considered that the US would not be responsive to such attempts. Moreover, such attempts could result in a more limited US commitment than would serve Australia's interests. The extent to which the US accepts a commitment will always depend upon US judgements regarding its own interests at the time. Much would depend on the circumstances of the day.²⁰

Joint Facilities and Soviet Nuclear Attacks on Australia

But while Australia essentially disengaged militarily from the Cold War following the withdrawal from Vietnam, it cooperated with the United States in the establishment of several 'Joint Facilities' on Australian territory that played central roles in US global communications and intelligence networks. These included a submarine communications station at North West Cape opened in 1963, intelligence satellite download and analysis facilities at Pine Gap from 1966, and a ground station for US early warning satellites in Nurrungar from 1969.²¹ The very strict classification of any aspect of these facilities during the 1960s prevented them from being discussed in detail even in the *Strategic Basis* papers. However, it was acknowledged that the facilities would condition the

¹⁸ Ibid., paras 319-322.

¹⁹ Ibid., para 324.

²⁰ Ibid., para 316.

²¹ Desmond Ball, 'The strategic essence', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 55, no. 2 (2001), pp. 235-248.

general assessment that Australia itself would be an unlikely target even in global nuclear war. For example, the 1968 *Strategic Basis* stated that ...

In the improbable event of general war, it is unlikely that Australia would be a target of a nuclear attack, though the United States communication station at North West Cape would be under threat and might be attacked.²²

... and the 1976 version that:

Australia is not now or prospectively under direct military threat from the USSR (although there is always the possibility that US defence-related facilities in Australia might be targeted by Soviet nuclear weapons).²³

By the early 1980s, academic studies of the consequences of nuclear attacks on the joint facilities were available in the public domain,²⁴ and the Dibb Review of Australian defence capabilities of 1986 commented that:

Nuclear war is a very remote possibility, and Australia would not be a major theatre in the event of a nuclear conflict. The level of risk is not sufficient to justify substantial investment in protective measures for the Australian population. ...

There is, however, one point regarding the risks of nuclear attack which needs consideration. In recent years Government has acknowledged—more explicitly than in the past—that in the event of superpower conflict there would be a specific risk of attack on the joint facilities at North West Cape, Nurrungar and Pine Gap. This raises the issue of whether protective measures for nearby population centres are necessary. While accepting the general unlikelihood of nuclear conflict, this Review judges that a comprehensive survey of the towns of Exmouth, Woomera and Alice Springs should be undertaken with a view to developing contingency civil defence plans for these centres.²⁵

²² Defence Committee, *Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy*, 19 August 1968, para 159. Interestingly, the Defence Committee chose to present the issue from a rather a different angle to the new Whitlam Labor government: “In the remote contingency of a general war, Australia may come under threat for various reasons, including the presence of defence facilities. However, only in the highly improbable event of general nuclear exchange would it seem likely that the significant US defence facilities in Australia might be attacked.” Defence Committee, *Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy*, 1 June 1973, para 10.

²³ Defence Committee, *Australian Strategic Analysis and Defence Policy Objectives*, 2 September 1976, para 37.

²⁴ Desmond Ball, ‘Limiting Damage from Nuclear Attack’, in Desmond Ball and J.O. Langtry (eds.), *Civil Defence and Australia’s Security in the Nuclear Age* (Sydney and Canberra: George Allen & Unwin and Australian National University, 1983), pp. 143-181.

²⁵ Dibb, *Review of Australia’s Defence Capabilities*, pp. 98-99.

In the 1987 *Defence of Australia* White Paper, the government laid out the rationale for hosting the Joint Facilities as lying in their major contribution to reducing the likelihood of global nuclear war, through verification of arms control treaties and strengthening of US nuclear deterrence. While the government acknowledged the risk that the facilities may be attacked, it was seen as acceptable given the importance of the facilities for maintaining the global balance, and only cause for “basic civil defence planning for the protection of the population in the areas concerned”.²⁶

Like US allies in the Northern Hemisphere, Australia was thus a potential nuclear target in the case of a global war between Soviet Union and United States. Remarkably, however, if one considers the experience of US allies elsewhere, also in this case Australia did not seek specific extended deterrence commitments from its main ally. Partly, this is explicable by the geographic consideration that, following the evacuation of the relatively few civilians living in the areas concerned (Alice Springs had a population of 16,000, Exmouth and Woomera of about 3000 each), Australia could probably have absorbed nuclear strikes on the facilities with few, if any, civilian casualties. More important, however, was the nature of the targets as integral parts of the US global early warning, intelligence and communication system. Nuclear strikes on the facilities would have been an attack on the United States which, by geographical accident, happened on Australian soil, rather than a Soviet attempt of intentional harm against Australia, or of coercion of the Australian polity. In that sense, considerations of extended deterrence never arose even with regards to the Joint Facilities, and Australia never sought, and the United States never made, any publicly known deterrence commitments towards the Soviet Union that specifically related to Australia.

Shifting Perspectives on Extended Deterrence after the Cold War

In Australia as well as in Europe and Northeast Asia, one of the consequences of the end of the Cold War was a change in the perception of the importance and role of US extended deterrence. However, unlike for most other allies, the importance of extended deterrence did not decline but arguably increased for Australia, as it was positioned in a

²⁶ Department of Defence, *The Defence of Australia* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1987), p. 12.

much wider regional and global context than was the case when the country was focused on its immediate neighbourhood after the early 1970s.

Nuclear Proliferation and US Extended Nuclear Deterrence Guarantees

Because the potential nuclear threat to the Joint Facilities during the Cold War posed itself in a peculiarly indirect manner, Australia was unusual among most US allies in that the threat of nuclear weapons elicited a more explicit response after the end of the Cold War than before. This is not to say that a nuclear threat was or is seen as an issue of overriding importance—Australia’s geographic isolation and long distance from proliferation hotspots is still working very much in the country’s favour, and unlike Japan and now NATO, Australia still does not have plans for a territorial missile defence system. However, the globally shared concerns about the robustness of the nuclear non-proliferation regime after the discovery of the Iraqi nuclear program following the 1991 Gulf War, and even more so after the nuclear crisis in North Korea in 1994, were also shared in Australia.

In a passage discussing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the 1993 *Strategic Review* remarked, for the first time, that “Australia continues to depend on the United States for security against any future nuclear threat”.²⁷ In the 1994 Defence White Paper *Defending Australia*, the government included a longer passage outlining its position on extended nuclear deterrence, again in the context of a discussion of global proliferation trends:

The Government does not accept nuclear deterrence as a permanent condition. It is an interim measure until a total ban on nuclear weapons ... can be achieved. In this interim period, although it is hard to envisage the circumstances in which Australia could be threatened by nuclear weapons, we cannot rule out that possibility. We will continue to rely on the extended deterrence of the US nuclear capability to deter any nuclear threat or attack on Australia. Consequently, we will continue to support the maintenance by the United States of a nuclear capability adequate to ensure that it can deter nuclear threats against allies like Australia.²⁸

²⁷ Department of Defence, *Strategic Review 1993* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1993), p. 7.

²⁸ Department of Defence, *Defending Australia* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1994), p. 96.

Both the 1997 *Australian Strategic Policy* document and the 2000 White Paper similarly pointed to US extended nuclear deterrence of nuclear attack as an explicit exception to Australia's policy of defence self-reliance.²⁹ However, none of these passages can point to explicit US nuclear guarantees. Instead, the language to be included in official Australian documents was cleared beforehand with senior officials in Washington.³⁰

US Extended Deterrence and Asian Regional Order

In Asia, the end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union removed a significant factor of geostrategic uncertainty. At the same time, however, it also led to the end of the Sino-US alignment, the bedrock for the relative stability of the Asian regional order since the early 1970s. In the early 1990s, Australian strategic guidance thus began to emphasize the role of the US alliance as a support to US engagement in Asia more broadly, and in this context also showed a growing appreciation for the role of extended deterrence in the US strategic position in the region.³¹

The 1994 White Paper, for example, noted strategic changes in Asia from economic growth and the changing US role in the region. In this context, there were uncertainties about Japan's reaction and possible rearmament, but the country's future policy would depend "especially on Japan's confidence in its security alliance with the United States".³² The ANZUS alliance

strongly supports the United States' continued strategic presence in the Western Pacific, which is of major strategic interest both for the United States and for Australia, and for others in the region.³³

The 1997 *Australian Strategic Policy* paper also identified great power relations in Asia as major determinant of the strategic future of the region, and in this context explicitly

²⁹ Department of Defence, *Australia's Strategic Policy* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1997), p. 18; Department of Defence, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2000), p. 36.

³⁰ Hugh White, *pers. comm.*

³¹ See also Robyn Lim, *Australia and the Future of Nuclear Deterrence*, Issue Analysis, no. 82 (St Leonards, NSW: Centre for Independent Studies, 2007).

³² Department of Defence, *Defending Australia*, pp. 8-10.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

highlighted the importance of reassuring US allies in Northeast Asia through US extended deterrence:

America's strategic engagement in the region provides significant reassurance to all countries that armed aggression would be resisted. More specifically, America's strategic commitment to Japan and South Korea is very important in minimizing tensions in Northeast Asia.³⁴

The 2000 White Paper stated that

one of the main benefits we seek from the alliance is the support it gives to sustained US engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. ... [The US] network of alliances ... is at the heart of the US strategic posture in Asia, and is thus central to regional stability.³⁵

For example, "[w]ithout the reassurance provided by the US relationship, Japan would face difficult strategic choices with security consequences for other countries in the region."³⁶ Where the 2000 White Paper went further than earlier documents, however, was in that it explicitly identified Australian military support to regional security as a core task for the ADF: In Southeast Asia,

Australia would want to be in a position, if asked and if we concluded that the scale of our interests and the seriousness of the situation warranted such action, to help our neighbours defend themselves.³⁷

Forces for such operations would be drawn from the air and maritime capabilities developed for the defence of Australia, but support to regional countries was not made conditional on US participation. "[M]aintaining strategic stability in the Asia Pacific Region as a whole" was a further strategic objective, where Australia "would expect our forces to operate closely with US forces."³⁸ As was the case in the early 1950s, Australia was beginning to, again, consider the United States' role in reassuring allies and deterring adversaries in the Asia Pacific as also being an Australian task.

³⁴ Department of Defence, *Australia's Strategic Policy*, p. 14.

³⁵ Department of Defence, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, p. 35.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.p. 48-49.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 51.

Loose Ends: The 2009 White Paper and US Extended Deterrence

After the 2000 White Paper, Australian strategic guidance entered a period of deep confusion about global and regional roles and priorities. Despite ostensibly focussing on the threat from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, for example, *Defence Updates* or 2003, 2005, and 2007 did not make any mention of US nuclear extended deterrence for Australia.³⁹ In 2009, however, a new White Paper provided the new government's strategic guidance, with several elements of continuity and change in its views on extended deterrence and the US alliance that do not, however, always easily sit next to one another.⁴⁰

Extended Nuclear Deterrence and the US Position in Asia

The White Paper confidently states that

It is the Government's judgement that stable nuclear deterrence will continue to be a feature of the international system for the foreseeable future, and in this context extended deterrence will continue to be viable.⁴¹

In a remarkably confident yet frank comment, it goes on to state that

for so long as nuclear weapons exist, we are able to rely on the nuclear forces of the United States to deter nuclear attack on Australia. Australian defence policy under successive governments has acknowledged the value to Australia of the protection afforded by extended nuclear deterrence under the US alliance. That protection provides a stable and reliable sense of assurance and has over the years removed the need for Australia to consider more significant and expensive defence options.⁴²

As earlier documents had done, the 2009 White Paper also highlights the importance of US engagement for stability in Asia, and the importance of reassurance through US forward deployed forces:

³⁹ Department of Defence, *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2003* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2003); Department of Defence, *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2005* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2005); Department of Defence, *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2007* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2007).

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the White Paper, see the articles in the special edition of *Security Challenges*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Winter 2009).

⁴¹ Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia-Pacific Century: Force 2030* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), para. 4.59.

⁴² *Ibid.*, para. 6.34.

While the United States will maintain the capability to project force globally from its own territory, it will likely continue to judge that its forward deployed forces, including in the Western Pacific, provide reassurance to allies ... as well as providing operational flexibility in crises.⁴³

Were Japan, for example, unable to rely on the US alliance, its strategic outlook would be dramatically different, “and it would be compelled to re-examine its strategic posture and capabilities.”⁴⁴

However, despite the confidence expressed in these judgments, the White Paper is more equivocal on the conditions that ultimately underpin the US position in Asia. On the one hand, it states that the “United States will remain the most powerful and influential strategic actor over the period to 2030—politically, economically and militarily”,⁴⁵ and that

Within the timeframe of this White Paper, the United States will continue to rely on its nuclear deterrence capability to underpin US strategic power, deter attack or coercion by other nuclear powers, and sustain allied confidence in US security commitments by way of extended deterrence.⁴⁶

On the other hand, the White Paper also remarks that “[a]s other powers rise, and the primacy of the United States is increasingly tested, power relations will inevitably change”,⁴⁷ and it makes a number of comments that highlight the conditionality of Australian strategic planning on the assumption of US primacy, or state that “of particular concern would be any diminution in the willingness or capacity of the United States to act as a stabilising force”.⁴⁸ The consequences of these concerns for the reliability of US extended deterrence, however, are not spelled out.

Deterring Major Power Attacks on Australia?

The 2009 White Paper introduced an important new consideration to Australian strategic guidance that has direct implications for considerations about US extended

⁴³ Ibid., para 4.15.

⁴⁴ Ibid., para 4.21.

⁴⁵ Ibid., para 4.14.

⁴⁶ Ibid., para 4.16.

⁴⁷ Ibid., para 4.19.

⁴⁸ Ibid., paras 3.17, 3.18, 4.12, 4.17.

deterrence: The possibility that Australia may have to defend itself directly against attacks by an Asian major power. The White Paper states that

It is conceivable that, over the long period covered by this White Paper, we might have to contend with major power adversaries operating in our approaches - in the most drastic circumstance, as a consequence of a wider conflict in the Asia-Pacific region. In such a circumstance, it is not a current defence planning assumption that Australia would be involved in such a conflict on its own. But we do assume that, except in the case of nuclear attack, Australia has to provide for its own local defence needs without relying on the combat forces of other countries.⁴⁹

It goes on to imply that Australia's military strategy would in this case, at least partly, rely on considerations of deterrence—a departure from earlier tenets of Australian strategic guidance, which had usually rejected deterrence as a direct principle on which to base Australian planning.⁵⁰

the force the Government intends to build gives us an acceptable margin of confidence that hostile military operations in our primary operational environment can be contested effectively by the ADF. This includes circumstances where we have to attend to our local defence needs against a major power adversary in the event of our being involved in a wider conflict, *and that substantial costs will be imposed on our adversaries.*⁵¹

Unfortunately, the White Paper does not further examine the consequences of this proposition, for example whether Australian forces would really be capable of meeting this challenge without direct US combat assistance. This is all the more disappointing since in the lead up to the paper's publication, a small debate had already emerged in the Australian strategic community about making Asian major powers the focus of Australia's defence effort, and whether such a focus would not ultimately lead to a requirement for Australian nuclear weapons.⁵²

The White Paper does, however, make interesting observations on the operational challenges that could be posed by conflict with a major power. It comments that if

⁴⁹ Ibid., para 8.45.

⁵⁰ See for example: Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities*, pp. 35-36.

⁵¹ Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia-Pacific Century: Force 2030*, para 8.46. Emphasis added.

⁵² See Ross Babbage, 'Learning to Walk Amongst Giants: The New Defence White Paper', *Security Challenges*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Autumn 2008), pp. 13-20; and the replies by Rory Medcalf and Robert Ayson, 'On 'Ripping an Arm Off'', *Security Challenges*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Winter 2008), pp. 147-164.

Australia was to contribute to high-intensity coalition operations to support regional stability, Australian planning

will need to take into account its local defence needs in the event of retaliatory action being taken against us, which could not be ruled out if we are engaged in combat operations or if we are providing basing, sustainment and other support for allies and partners. This remote scenario could entail aggressive intelligence collection operations being conducted against us; missile strike, air attack, or special forces raids against Australian territory or offshore facilities; mining of our ports and maritime choke points; threats to or harassment of critical shipping between Australia and its trade partners; hostile submarine operations in our approaches and our waters; and cyber attacks on our defence, government and possibly civil information networks, among other threats.⁵³

Notable by its absence is any mention of a major power's nuclear capabilities, how nuclear coercion could undercut the 'self-reliant' Australian defence or deterrence of major power attacks on the country, or how US extended nuclear deterrence credibility in such a situation could be combined with the Australian strategic posture that consciously eschews a direct role for conventional US forces in the defence of Australia: after all Australia's posture is exactly the opposite of that taken by all other US allies that rely on US nuclear deterrence against major power threats, and which lay great store by the presence of forward deployed US forces. Ironically enough, Australia was a grateful recipient of direct and visible US extended deterrence to Australia in the context of the 1999 Timor crisis, when a US Marine Expeditionary Force provided logistics support to Australian forces but otherwise stayed offshore during the INTERFET operation. And although the 2009 White Paper includes a short section on the Joint Facilities, it does not at all address the question whether these facilities may not become subject to nuclear attack in the conflict with a major power that is addressed elsewhere in the document.⁵⁴

Conclusions: Can Australia Be Reassured?

Over the past 60 years, Australia's position in regards to US extended deterrence has thus developed in idiosyncratic ways that have little parallel among US allies in the Northern Hemisphere. Ultimately, it is riddled with paradoxes that reflect the wider

⁵³ Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia-Pacific Century: Force 2030*, para 7.18

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

paradoxes of Australia's geostrategic position, which makes the country dependent on the support of major allies, but also unable to fully rely on them at the same time. A central question for the development of Australia's strategic guidance and defence posture will be whether the inherent contradictions in its position will be sustainable as great power balances in the Asia-Pacific continue to shift towards China and India.⁵⁵

Australia has been a consistent supporter of US engagement in the Asia-Pacific. During the 1950s, it forward deployed forces into Southeast Asia and directly participated in US extended deterrence in the region, including through the prospective use of nuclear weapons. But although it was a main, if indirect, beneficiary of the US extended deterrence posture, even for Australia the effort of 'forward defence' was 'extended' deterrence, in the sense that it was focused on the entryways to maritime Southeast Asia, rather than on Australia itself.

After the Cold War, Australia remained very sensitive to the importance of US guarantees in maintaining the strategic balance in Northeast Asia in general, and in reassuring Japan, which could otherwise emerge as a strategic free agent, in particular. A failure of the United States to reassure Japan would be seen as a major failure of US extended deterrence for Australia. But this expansive view of extended deterrence also sits next to a very limited concept of extended deterrence as it relates to Australia itself, which is narrowly conceived as US nuclear deterrence against nuclear threats. And while the latter view suggest that Australia could be very comfortable with a US 'sole purpose' or even 'no first use' doctrine, the former argues against such a step as long as Northeast Asian allies are not also supportive.

The direct military support of the United States in a war in Asia re-emerged as a priority in Australian strategic guidance in the late 1990s. But despite its in-principle support for the United States, Australia's reluctance to push the Asian 'quadrilateral' dialogue also demonstrates that it is careful not to visibly commit to any formal

⁵⁵ See also Rod Lyon, 'Australia: Back to the Future?', in Alagappa (ed.), *The Long Shadow: Nuclear Weapons and Security in 21st Century Asia*, pp. 429-450; Raoul Heinrichs, 'Australia's Nuclear Dilemma: Dependence, Deterrence or Denial?', *Security Challenges*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Autumn 2008), pp. 55-67.

arrangements that may be seen as directed against China.⁵⁶ Today, Australia is trying to balance its uncomfortable position between its major economic partner, China, and its major security partner, the United States. However, the inherent contradiction in its current position would ultimately have to collapse into a more direct and visible support to US extended deterrence, along the lines of its engagement in the 1950s, if Australia itself is to maintain the benefits of US extended deterrence in a more contested Asia. In this context, it will be interesting to observe how Australia will react, should the US military posture in the Western Pacific become more clearly organized around an integrated ‘AirSeaBattle’ concept for war with China, with specific assumptions about Australian support.⁵⁷

Overall, Australia’s experience with US extended deterrence is thus remarkably limited. With the exception of informal arrangements in the mid-1950s (which, in any case, involved the British as much as the Americans), Australia has never had the experience of close operational cooperation with US forces in an extended deterrence context that European, Japanese or South Korean allies have by virtue of US forces stationed in their countries. The nuclear threat to the Joint Facilities in Australia was acknowledged during the Cold War, but, again for rather idiosyncratic reasons, it did not pose a direct extended deterrence problem for Australia. Compared to NATO or Northeast Asian allies, discussion of US extended deterrence in Australia is thus usually conflated with general considerations regarding US strategic engagement in the Asia-Pacific, and completely lacks very detailed operational, technical and institutional aspects that characterize the debate elsewhere, especially in the NATO context.

Ultimately, this raises the question of whether Australia could be successfully reassured by US extended deterrence guarantees, should a major threat develop to the country. Ever since the late 1950s, Australia has been very conscious of the fact that US regional interests would not always coincide with those of Australia, and that the country should therefore be self-reliant in operations in its immediate neighbourhood to avoid

⁵⁶ See Rory Medcalf, ‘Squaring the Triangle: An Australian Perspective on Asian Security Minilateralism’, in *Assessing the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue*, Special Report (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2008).

⁵⁷ See Jan van Tol with Mark Gunzinger, Andrew Krepinevich, and Jim Thomas, *AirSea Battle: A Point-of-Departure Concept* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010).

having to rely on United States guarantees—a position that it only shares with US partners Israel and Singapore. But Australia has not faced an existential threat since 1942, and US guarantees have in that sense never been tested. However, Australia's very real concerns about the extent to which the United States would assist it against Indonesia in the 1960s, and the powerful strategic reasoning behind its enduring posture of self-reliance, suggest that should its strategic circumstances deteriorate, the United States may find it very difficult to successfully reassure Australia: If a threat was primarily directed against Australia, US considerations would most likely be guided by wider regional concerns. But if the threat was directed against both countries alike, as was the case in 1941-1945, the United States would naturally concentrate its effort on areas closer to its own vital interests.

It is thus no accident that more or less oblique references to an indigenous nuclear capability have always been a minor but persistent element in the Australian strategic debate,⁵⁸ and that no Federal Cabinet from 1959 to 1979 raised any objections to comments in *Strategic Basis* papers that the defence of Australia against a major threat may ultimately require the country to acquire its own nuclear weapons. Whether Australia would do so may depend, *inter alia*, on the position of Indonesia and the continued access to US and allied defence assistance.⁵⁹ But although Australians sometimes like to think of themselves as a (better) Britain in the South Pacific, if the going gets tough, they may in fact find their closest correspondence in the France of de Gaulle.

⁵⁸ See Rod Lyon and Christine Leah, 'Three visions of the bomb: Australian thinking about nuclear weapons and strategy', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* (2010), forthcoming; Richard Tanter, *The Re-emergence of an Australian nuclear weapons option?*, Austral Policy Forum 07-10A, 29 October 2007, < <http://www.globalcollab.org/Nautilus/australia/apsnet/policy-forum/2007/the-re-emergence-of-australian-nuclear-weapons-option>> (accessed 2 June 2010).

⁵⁹ See Stephan Frühling, 'Never Say Never: Considerations about the Possibilities of Australia Acquiring Nuclear Weapons', *Asian Security*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2010), pp. 146-169