Australia’s Geostrategic Position in 2018

Professor John Blaxland
Strategic & Defence Studies Centre
@JohnBlaxland1
john.blaxland@anu.edu.au
A Geostrategic SWOT Analysis for Australia

**Strengths (internal)**
- natural resources
- Strong economy
- Educated workforce
- Boutique, honed & hi-tech ADF
- Leverage from US hi-tech, Intel & interoperability

**Weaknesses (internal)**
- Complacency about security & our place in the world
- Uneven pop’n distribution - SE-Aust coastal fringe & big cities
- Oil Refinery fuel dependency
- Power vulnerabilities & Underdeveloped solar/nuclear power
- Cyber dependence & vulnerabilities

**Opportunities (external)**
- **SWP:** climate, resource & social challenges provide opening for greater Australian leadership
- **ASEAN:** regional and sub-regional appetite for closer Australian engagement & investment
- **NE-Asia:** trade growth opportunities
- **Indian Ocean:** Growing ties to India and beyond
- **ROW:** UK, France etc interest in Australia

**Threats (external)**
- foreign interference
- Cyber attack – industrial, military state & non-state actors
- US transactional retreat from ideational leadership
- Politically & religiously motivated violence at home & near abroad
- US-China rivalry turns violent
- Conventional +/-or thermonuclear war - Korean Peninsula, SCS, ECS, Taiwan, Iran, etc
The Indo-Pacific, Centrality of Australia & SE Asia as the ‘maritime fulcrum’
US Alliance Prospects

• US National Defence Strategy
  • Russia & China at the forefront
  • Countering Terrorism secondary
  • “America First but not America Alone”
  • Expectations of Australian support
  • DPRK ...

• Without America?
  • “America will lose, and China will win”
America’s Enduring Asia-Pacific Presence

Australia’s American Alliance
Edited by Peter J. Dean, Stephan Frühling & Brendan Taylor

No book I know comes closer to illuminating the mysteries and identifying the challenges of Australia’s most important external relationship.

Alan Gynell

Australia National University
But Growing PRC Assertiveness
China’s Tiny EEZ c.f. Australia & the Pacific (& why SCS matters so much to China)

Australia - territory: 7.69km²; EEZ: 10m km²
China - territory: 9.3m km²; EEZ: 877k km² / 3.87m km² claimed
Arbitral Tribunal Ruling July 2016

- None can lay claim to a 200 nautical mile EEZ or a continental shelf
- **Rocks** for the purposes of Article 121 (entitled to a 12 nautical mile territorial sea at best)
  - Scarborough Shoal,
  - Cuarteron Reef,
  - Fiery Cross Reef,
  - Gaven Reef (North),
  - McKennan Reef,
  - Itu Aba,
  - West York,
  - Spratly Island,
  - South-West Cay and
  - North-East Cay
- **Low-tide elevations** that generate no maritime zone
  - Hughes Reef,
  - Gaven Reef (South),
  - Subi Reef,
  - Mischief Reef and
  - Second Thomas Shoal
But China ignores it and Duterte’s complicit

- **Maritime Law Enforcement**
- **White Painted Ships**
- **Fisheries Militia**
- **Might is Right**
Figure 1
SE Asia Perceptions of Influence over time

Median ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nineteenth C</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 20thc</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-20thc</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold War</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Cold War</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GFC until Today</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Median ratings based on perceptions of influence.
Plan B: The Australian Foreign Policy White Paper

- “Indo-Pacific” & US Alliance, but emphasis on ...
- Regional multilateral forums
- Quad: US-Japan-India-Aust
- ASEAN
Quad or Not?

- Bilateral ties already strong
- India realignment dependent on Modi?
- Japan enhanced strategic partnership (tbc)
Quad or Not?

- Whither NZ?
- Wither SE-Asia?

• ASEAN: Fulcrum of the Indo-Pacific
Indonesia
Key to understanding Australia’s outlook

- 250m people
- 17K+ islands
- 3rd largest democracy
- Largest Muslim popn
- Contentious relations with Australia
- “Maritime Fulcrum”
Indonesians: wary of Australia

- History of disagreements:
  - *Konfrontasi* – 1963-66
  - Papuan sovereignty - 1969
  - East Timor -1975 & 1999
Snakes & Ladders

- Mended fences after Timor:
  - Silver lining to Bali bombings & Indian Ocean Tsunami
- But problems persist:
  - Timor, beef, boats, spies, clemency, Papua
- Yet Australia’s security inextricably linked with Indonesia
Complexity of ASEAN today
(unity in diversity?)

Differences:
• ethnic
• religious
• economic
• historical
• geographic
• political
• strategic
• cultural
• linguistic
Growing Trade Links with ASEAN

- 10 countries
- 637m people
- GDP USD2.5 trillion
- $93.2 Billion trade with Australia
- 3rd largest trading partner
- AANZFTA/TAFTA/MAFTA/SAFTA
Growing links to ASEAN: Education, Tourism Migration

- 1 million visitors
- 110K students enrolled
- 896K Australian residents with SE-Asian heritage
ASEAN’S ASPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE?

- Proto-Great Power
- But Consensus basis ...
- & China’s influence precludes one voice
  - insistence on bilateral talks
- So, limits to utility, but ties important
SWP Security Challenges

- Surge in Great Power Interest & Competition
  - Lucrative EEZs
- Environmental challenges (fisheries/sea level)
- Governance challenges (corruption/narcotics/violence)
- Time for Grand Bargain for shared governance?
Responding to DPRK Threats & => wrt PRC

- US force posture optimized for action
- Brinkmanship – breakthrough or precipice?
- Expectations of ADF role in conflict?
- BMD
  - Aegis / SM3 THAAD
Missile Defence Options:

Source: Federation of American Scientists Special Report No 1 2011
Kim Trump Summit Implications

- USFK?
- UN Command
- Japan
- Taiwan,
- ASEAN
- Australia
- India
- Iran
Transnational Security Concerns:

- Networked extremists
- Rise of “Islamic State” (Daesh)
  - Philippines – Mindanao - Marawi
  - Malaysia – Bangsamoro /Sultanate of Sulu
  - Indonesia – Jemaah Islamiya?
  - Thailand - BRN
  - Singapore
  - Cambodia?
- Bali bombing repeat?
- Transnational Crime
- Piracy
Rohingya Crisis

• Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army - ARSA
  • Pakistani Jihadist links
• Tatmadaw brutality
• UN impotence
• Bangladesh impoverished
• Next wave of Boat People?
• Next Stop: Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Australia?
• Regional Solution?
  Japan, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia
Irregular/Unregulated People Movement
Sweeter and broader ties

- A MANIS regional maritime cooperation forum should be established to address a range of shared concerns
- drawing in expertise from participating ministries
  - foreign affairs,
  - defence,
  - border protection,
  - police forces,
  - environmental authorities,
  - universities,
  - think tanks
Philippines/Malaysia/Indonesia - form maritime pact to curb IS

• Aug 2016: DefMins Ryamizard Ryacudu, Delfin N. Lorenzana (right) & Dato Seri Hishamuddin

• Aim: to secure Sulu Sea from piracy, terrorism, human trafficking and drug smuggling.

• Options for added respectful Australian cooperation
“Our Eyes” Sub-Regional CT & Intelligence Network 2018

- Unprecedented regional CT collaboration
- Indonesia’s Def-Min, Ryamizard Ryacudu, instrumental
Australia-Singapore Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

• Ties akin to NZ CER & security ties
• Growing range of shared security & economic interests
• But Singapore under pressure from China ...
What This Means

- Sound relations with Indonesia fundamental
- Recognise ASEAN significance but fragility
- Continue engaging China constructively, encouraging mutual restraint
  - OBOR/BRI, AIIB, SCS, ECS, DPRK
- Recognise China’s gains as undo-able short of war
- Closer regional traditional & NTS ties
- “Middle Power” engagement, bolsters ties:
  - ASEAN/FPDA/MANIS/”Our Eyes”/Japan/India
### Strengths (internal)
- Natural resources
- Strong economy
- Educated workforce
- Boutique, honed & hi-tech ADF
- Leverage from US hi-tech, Intel & interoperability

### Weaknesses (internal)
- Complacency about security & our place in the world
- Uneven pop’n distribution - SE-Aust coastal fringe & big cities
- Oil Refinery fuel dependency
- Power vulnerabilities & Underdeveloped solar/nuclear power
- Cyber dependence & vulnerabilities

### Opportunities (external)
- **SWP:** climate, resource & social challenges provide opening for greater Australian leadership
- **ASEAN:** regional and sub-regional appetite for closer Australian engagement & investment
- **NE-Asia:** trade growth opportunities
- **Indian Ocean:** Growing ties to India and beyond
- **ROW:** UK, France etc interest in Australia

### Threats (external)
- Foreign interference
- Cyber attack – industrial, military state & non-state actors
- US transactional retreat from ideational leadership
- Politically & religiously motivated violence at home & near abroad
- **US-China rivalry** turns violent
- Conventional +/or thermonuclear war - Korean Peninsula, SCS, ECS, Taiwan, Iran, etc
Averting Catastrophe
Rethinking Ties Between Economics, Security, Stability, Prosperity & Prospective Existential Threats

Grand Challenges:
• Critical review of the spectrum of global security challenges
• Economic security
• Environmental challenges
• Political and human security
• Cyber security
• Maritime, territorial & homeland security

• DFAT role?
Australia’s
Geostrategic Position
in 2018

Professor John Blaxland
Twitter: @JohnBlaxland1