

*CHAPTER VII*

CHAPTER VII: ASEAN and Australia

Given the rapid changes in global and regional affairs, Australia has reassess her strategic relationship with Asia. Australia acknowledged that it does have a role in helping to build a more secure regional future. Part of that role is simply to encourage broader acceptance of the idea that the best security is multi-dimensional, not just pursued militarily.

Former Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke had described Australia's contribution to developing a new regional security system in terms of laying four corner-stones. Firstly, support for the United Nations as the supreme international guarantor of peace and security. Secondly, support for the continued engagement of the United States in the security affairs of the western Pacific. Thirdly, support for the development of regional cooperation and dialogue on security matters. Fourthly, continued development of Australia's defence force both as the final guarantor of Australia's security and also as a contributor through the FPDA and other cooperative programs to the security of the region as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Garath Evans and Bruce Grant, Australia's Foreign Policy Relations (Burwood, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1991), p. 110.

Australia is perfectly aware that the former Soviet Union has abandoned its attempt to compete with the United States for global influence. Its energies are now, and are likely to remain, absorbed instead in an attempt to contain and repair the damage inflicted on its own political and economic structures by the strain of that unequal competition, and by the system of government which drove it.

Australia's view is that a key to maintaining a stable security system in Asia, and providing the foundation of security as the region evolves, is the continued strategic engagement of the United States in the Western Pacific.<sup>6</sup> U.S. engagement in the region is, and will remain, important to Australia's strategic and security interests, and important to the security interests of the region as a whole.

There is no doubt that for the past 45 years the U.S. has seen its commitment to the security of the Asia-Pacific region primarily as a contribution to its global containment of communism and of Soviet military power. Although Russia now remain a significant Pacific

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<sup>6</sup>Bob Hawke, "Australia's Security in Asia," in Australian Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Monthly Record, May 1991, p. 202.

military power, the likelihood that power will be used aggressively is no greater in Asia than it is in Europe. That may seem to provide an argument for the U.S. to pull out, and Australia felt that some U.S. voters and their representatives in the Congress will put that argument vigorously. With the decline in ideological competition, United States attention to the region may become increasingly less concerned with geopolitical security and more focused on economic differences with some of its Asian partners. It is likely that congressional pressure on the military budget will, over time, force additional cuts in the United States presence in Asia.

The Clinton Administration has been careful to plan necessary reductions in U.S. military deployments so that they have the minimum effect on America's ability to play a broader role. They have been vigorous in arguing, both in the region and in Washington, that such a role should be maintained. Elsewhere, U.S. allies recognise the important role that the U.S. must play in the security of the Asia-Pacific region, and enthusiasm for the U.S. presence continue to grow. In this case, Australia took note, for instance, Singapore's offer of support to U.S. ships and aircraft.

Australia recognises that Russia is a Pacific power and Australia have welcomed the prospect of

constructive Russian participation in the economic affairs of the region. Australia also acknowledged that the Spratlys issues has the potential to become a major regional dispute. In this regards, Australia hopes that fruitful results would entail from the series of workshops and seminars on the Spratlys, initiated by the Indonesians.<sup>7</sup>

Australian security links with her Asian neighbours have a long history, and are reflected in a network of strong bilateral relations and in some important formal arrangements. With the size of her economy and technical expertise, means that Australia will continue to maintain significant military capabilities, especially maritime capabilities, which will allow her to make a valuable contribution to the military dimension of regional security in Southeast Asia.

An important element of those relationships is the encouragement and assistance Australia gives to her regional neighbours to develop their own defence capabilities, including their maritime capabilities, in ways which will help to enhance regional security.

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<sup>7</sup>Garath Evans, "Australia's regional security environment," in Australian Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Monthly Record, July 1991, p. 403.

In this context, Australia values the defence cooperation between herself and the members of ASEAN. Australia has good defence links with Singapore and Malaysia through the Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA). Australia's involvement in the FPDA is one that manifestly brings benefits to all participants: it is an involvement which might overtime evolve to embrace other regional participants, or be capable of at least partial replication elsewhere. In parallel Australia have growing bilateral defence programmes with Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and Brunei.

ASEAN has remained loosely cooperative and consultative in character, its members equally pursuing bilateral links with each other and with the outside world. It thus reflects that concept of mutual commitment within a network of linkages that is the heart of Australia's own approach to the region.

Presently, Australia's formal dialogue with ASEAN is concentrated on three levels. Firstly, there is the foreign minister's annual participation at the ASEAN-Post Ministerial Conference (PMC). Secondly, the annual meetings of the senior officials' level ASEAN-Australia Forum, and thirdly, the ASEAN-Australia Consultative Meeting (AACM), comprising Australian officials and the Canberra-based ASEAN haeds of mission.