

THE 2000 SIR EDWARD 'WEARY' DUNLOP ASIALINK LECTURE

AUSTRALIA, ASIA & THE UNITED STATES.

by *The RT HON MALCOM FRASER AC CH*

**HOTEL SOFITEL
MELBOURNE - 24 NOVEMBER 2000**

In August of 1997 I spoke of Australian foreign policy and defence at an Asialink Forum. I was principally concerned that there seemed to be no comprehensive analysis of the needs of Australia's future security as a consequence of the end of the Cold War. Three years on, there is little more sign that such a debate has taken place.

There is recognition that our own region is undergoing "profound strategic change". I see people writing that "it is crucial that in this uncertain situation the United States is kept involved in the region". In too many quarters this basic assumption is asserted as though it were a self-evident truth, the considerations surrounding it are not mentioned. There has to be a basic underlying assumption that the United States interest would in important ways be the same as the Australian interest. I suggest that that assumption from Australia's point of view is highly dangerous. We need to ask the questions. We need to examine the past, to see how much the United States has supported us and how much it has not. We need to make an objective assessment of our shared or disparate interest in the future.

Nobody can challenge that the United States as the world's one super-power and major economic power, will have a continuing influence on every country in the world. What one can legitimately ask, however, is whether that interest will coincide sufficiently with Australia's interest to make a close "partnership" the sole determinant of Australian security.

In any relationship between a country as large as the United States and a country like Australia, there will be a major imbalance. The United States is all-powerful; our power is obviously strictly limited.

Any country in international fora will want to get its own way if that is possible. Only the U.S. has the power to achieve it. The extent of American influence is open and pervasive. This has been increasingly so since the end of the Cold War. Where defeat in Vietnam left America without spirit, without confidence, the end of the Cold War left America feeling victorious on every front. American democracy, American military and strategic power and American financial power, had all proved supreme. The recent years of dramatic growth in the United States have underscored American confidence. All the more reason therefore for America to persuade other states that her way is the right way.

There have been some suggestions that in this feeling of supremacy, the United States may again become isolationist and withdraw from the world. I see no sign of that. I do see signs, however, of America more and more determining unilaterally what must happen.

Against this background, there is all the more need for Australia to re-assess her relationships and to look with unemotional eyes at the options that may be opened to us in the future.

Because of language and because of historic and cultural associations, it is natural that many people should look to the United States for security. But, as I concluded at the Asialink Seminar three years ago, we may have to come to terms with the fact that our future security depends more on relationships with countries of our own region than it does on the United States. This is a large chasm for many people to jump but it is the reality that faces us.

Let me address the arguments..

We should recall at the outset that the words of the ANZUS Treaty are far less committing, far less binding, than the terms used in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. There the parties agree that an armed attack on one or more of them in Europe or in North America will be considered an attack against them all. Article 4 of the ANZUS Treaty which still sets the terms of our co-operation with the United States, declares that "an attack in the Pacific area on any of the parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it will act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional process." Article 3 talks of the commitment to consult together in the face of danger.

Whatever one may wish to read into the interpretation of the ANZUS Treaty, the words are far less committing than the words of the North Atlantic Treaty.

It is also worth noting that, at the time the Treaty was negotiated, the United States wanted to proceed with the peace settlement with Japan. The Australian government of the day had some leverage because it would not sign the peace treaty until the ANZUS arrangement was negotiated and agreed.

The Cold War was well and flourishing and the Communist regime had taken over in China. ANZUS, in Australian eyes, became much more a protection against Communist attack than a protection against a resurgent Japan.

I have never doubted that, during the time of the Cold War, Australia was right to give precedence to ANZUS and the strategic relationship with the United States. There were a number of leaders throughout Asia that believed that ANZUS helped re-enforce American involvement in the region. While they would not want to say so openly or publicly, they believed that this provided some assurance of American support in times of crisis.

In retrospect however, how much support did we get?

How great was the common interest between ourselves and the United States? The first test of our relationship with the United States came over what was West New Guinea, what is now West Irian. Before 1949 the Labor Government had been sympathetic to the cause of Indonesia. It had assisted in achieving an early settlement of independence by agreement between the Dutch and Indonesia. After the change of government in 1949, the Menzies government adopted a more pro-Dutch stance. It is worth noting that, even at that time in relation to West New Guinea, Australia's press was very much opposed to Indonesia's claims, and the general public would also have been opposed. There were a number of reasons for this. There was a common view that New Guinea as a whole was important for Australia's own strategic security. This had clearly been re-enforced by the war-time battles which had left New Guinea as the last bastion standing in the way of an invasion of Australia .

The Australian government tried to gain American support and sympathy. For a range of reasons, the United States took little notice of the Australian Government's view. Australian foreign policy during the fifties continued to support the Dutch, rather than Indonesia, even though increasingly it was clear that such views would have no support from the United States or Britain. It took a new foreign minister, Barwick, to recognise the reality of the situation. He managed to end Australia's unrealistic policy in relation to what was certain to become West Irian. Indonesia's policy achieved success most speedily after Indonesia gave indications that she may be prepared to launch an invasion of the territory. The success of that approach may have encouraged President Sukharno later to embark upon confrontation with the newly emerging Malaysia.

Australia gave strong military support to Malaya during the Communist insurgency and later to Malaysia during confrontation. Largely due to the expertise of our Ambassador in Jakarta during this uneasy time, Australia was able to maintain good access to the Indonesian Government at the highest levels. Since Britain was regarded as the architect of Malaysia, her relationship deteriorated and was almost non-existent.

Sir Garfield Barwick, Foreign Minister at the time, had wanted to put one or two shots across Indonesia's bows and had suggested in an airport interview that Australian forces in Borneo would be covered under ANZUS. This assurance unfortunately was fairly short-lived and was effectively repudiated by Prime Minister Menzies in the Parliament.

After the Opposition leader, Arthur Calwell, had said that America does not believe that its commitment does include the protection of Australia troops already in Malaya, Prime Minister Menzies suggested that: "The United States of America did not ever withdraw its support for Malaysia. It has approved of Malaysia, and it wants Malaysia to be maintained. But I very well remember America saying to us 'I took no exception to it; I thought it was pretty sensible' and that when it came to the immediate defence of Malaysia this was perhaps primarily a Commonwealth responsibility."

During this period, the United States kept herself aloof from Australia's concerns and pursued a broader agenda with Indonesia.

The lesson to be drawn from these events over about 15 years is quite simply that the United States did not agree with Australia and gave very little weight to Australia's views. They were, if you like, the first test of whether or not ANZUS would carry with it practical support from the United States. The lesson to be learnt was that that would occur only if the issue coincided with America's own analysis of America's own interests .

Events in Vietnam were unfolding at the same time as confrontation was being waged against Malaysia. The essential decisions to support South Vietnam were taken before I joined Harold Holt's government as Minister for the Army. The question we need to ask ourselves is the extent to which this involvement was influenced by the relatively unhappy state of relations between Washington and Canberra. Events over West New Guinea in particular had disturbed Australia and there is no doubt that the government sought to do all it could to cement American interest in the region.

If there is merit in this analysis, it would seem clear that involvement in Vietnam was derived from two directions. One concerned the perceived merits of the case. The other being designed to lock the U.S. into Asia through South Vietnam.

Up to the end of the Cold War, however rough the road may have been, governments were right to conclude that the ANZUS Treaty be given primacy in our relationship with the United States. There was a deterrent effect, there wasn't a Communist attack on Australia. In today's world, talking of a Communist threat can be regarded as paranoia. We need to remember that the early post war years, the fifties and sixties affairs were quite different.

In Europe, Czechoslovakia and Hungary had been attacked. There was a blockade of Berlin that sought to force Berlin into the Communist zone. In south-East Asia there was a Communist insurrection in Malaya which took ten or twelve years to overcome. Then, in the early/middle sixties there was an attempted Communist PKI coup in Indonesia. If the attempts to assassinate General Nasution had been successful, the Indonesian army may not have had the leadership and the stamina to overcome that coup. It was a serious matter in a serious time and clearly affected the attitudes, not just of Indonesia but of other countries in the region. These concerns have now slipped into the background.

During these years Australian Defence and Foreign Policy establishments developed very close bilateral relationships with the U.S. We believe we share in information that is not generally made available to others. The facilities at Pine Gap give us a continuous entrée into the highest levels of American intelligence. Military exercises take place between our armed forces. One of the reasons for the forthcoming Defence White Paper is to upgrade our defence equipment so it will continue to be compatible with the latest American equipment. This alone makes joint exercises and joint operations possible.

There is no doubt that these relationships have advantages for Australia. Even here, however, we need a note of caution. In intelligence matters, we are generally told what others believe it is good for us to know. It is not a complete open book. That is the way great powers operate. In earlier times when we may have relied more heavily on Britain, there would also have been an assessment, within their intelligence machinery, of what we should or should not be told .

Do recent events, however, justify us in saying that ANZUS remains the best deterrence against attack on Australia and that America's policies within the theatre are likely to coincide with our national interests? It is becoming more important than ever to analyse the consequences of our American relationship and to measure the costs as well as the benefits.

Everyone would want a constructive American engagement throughout Asia. In his last term of office, President Clinton has sought to promote, as have others, improved relations between North and South Korea. That this is starting to unfold must be regarded as a benefit for the whole region. While the process will be slow, in today's world, we can have some confidence that it will continue. It is too early yet to speak of the end of the Korean problem but at least we can hope that the peninsula is now on track to so improve relationships that the strategic issue will one day be taken off the political agenda .

We can also be thankful that President Clinton managed to take the annual Most Favoured Nation question off the American political agenda and make a permanent decision in relation to China. Now China looks set to achieve full membership of the WTO. This should be a significant benefit for all of us. American Presidential and administrative actions that have helped to make this possible can all be welcomed and applauded. President Clinton's recent initiatives in Vietnam are also very much to be welcomed.

There are other issues, however, that will become urgent and important. At this point it is important to assess how the Cold War itself altered our strategic circumstances?

With the end of the Cold War, the primary need for ANZUS has been taken off the table. There should be more flexibility in Australian policy. We do not need to be quite so close to the United States. We need to assess other options. We can still make some kind of judgment about the effectiveness of the Treaty by turning to particular issues.

During the Asian economic crisis the United States seemed distant. At a critical time the United States Congress was holding up funds for an International Monetary Fund replenishment. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this was in part the reason for the toughness of IMF conditions in relation to Indonesia. One has only to look at the restraints that the United States Congress seeks to impose on IMF actions. Delay in coming to the assistance of Indonesia swiftly and effectively made the crisis in that country very much worse .

During the Asian economic crisis there was a suggestion from Japan that an Asian Monetary Fund should be established. There would be sufficient resources in the region to make it effective. America made it plain she opposed the proposal. There have been further discussions of this idea in more recent times and I hope Asian countries and Australia ultimately adopt such a proposal.

American influence at the time of the economic crisis was detrimental in the region because of Indonesia and because of delays in providing support .

At the outset, China made it plain that she would maintain the value of her currency. There were many market forecasters who predicted that this would not be possible but the stability and strength of the Chinese currency stabilised the region and may well have been the single most important factor in limiting damage from the crisis. Certainly the United States did not play a major role in the recovery as she would have if South America or Mexico had been involved.

We cannot divorce the economic crisis from events that occurred in Timor. Here again, so far as the United States was concerned, the issues were left to others. America was remote and appeared to be standing back from the difficulties. It was better that the problem was largely handled by countries from within the region but that has its own message for the future .

Events since the end of the Cold War have not created any strong argument for giving the strategic relationship with the United States primacy over other policy objectives. There are, however, events lurking in the background which are likely to bring Australia into direct conflict with American interests.

When we turn to the future, there are two issues which will be on the agenda where America's interests and Australia's will diverge strongly and sharply. One of these is the American search for an Anti Missile Defence System. If this is pursued, it will seriously upset the current nuclear balance. That balance is dependent on the Non Proliferation Treaty. It was meant to be re-enforced by the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. It is also dependent upon bilateral negotiations leading to agreements concerning arms reductions between the United States and Russia. This has created a balance. An Anti Missile Defence System for North America would upset that balance .

If the American Secretary of Defence is right in saying the Australia has already agreed to co-operate with Anti-Missile Defence, then a serious disservice has been done to Australia's strategic interests. It is surprising that this announcement of an alleged Australian commitment by the United States Secretary of Defence, in the United States, has attracted so little comment or debate in Australia. Such participation would put us at the front line, not of Australian but of American defence. It would involve much greater danger to Australia than the current use of facilities at Pine Gap or for that matter the North West Cape. If North America, because for effectiveness Canada could not be excluded from the proposal, were to pursue that track, Russia and China would embark on the acquisition and enhancement of their current nuclear arsenals. Indeed, the consequence of the world's one super-power making herself impregnable from any attack and thus creating an even more unequal status for herself, has caused concern amongst most of America's allies, with the possible exception of this country. In Australia, if United States statements are correct, facilities at Pine Gap would be involved. There is in Europe a great deal of unease at these unilateral American tendencies. Europe foresees serious consequences in upsetting whatever equilibrium has been reached at the present time .

The European Union decision to establish her own ready reaction force is in reality a decision to remove the European Union from its total dependence on NATO, largely dominated by the United States.

The fact that the United States Senate has already rejected the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty will only compound the problems raised by the pursuit of Anti Missile Defence.

Pursuit of Anti-Missile Defence and rejection of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty are both symptomatic of a preparedness to place America's judgement over all the rest. I am sure both cause great concern .

There is another major fault with current nuclear policy. The Non Proliferation Treaty from its outset has been seriously flawed. There is a vague mention of nuclear disarmament within it but it is clear the current nuclear states do not take such references seriously. Efforts to prevent additional countries acquiring nuclear weapons should have been complemented by deliberate steps leading to nuclear disarmament. Because of this omission, it was unrealistic to expect the most populous country in the world, the largest democracy in the world, with substantial scientific and technical capacities to commit itself in strategic terms to a second class status. Any actions by India were also bound to be mirrored by Pakistan. The failure of non-proliferation in respect to South Asia is a direct consequence of inadequacies in the original Non Proliferation Treaty.

Against this background, if Australia were to allow facilities at Pine Gap to be used as part of the establishment of the forward echelon of Anti-Missile Defence for the United States, it would clearly become, not a tenth-rate target but a first-rate target in the event of hostilities between America and some other country. When we have no control over the policy that might involve America in conflict with other countries, we should be wary of tying ourselves so completely to United States actions. We would have no control and no influence over circumstances that might put us into extreme danger .

The United States already has the capacity to wage war against any part of the world from American territory. If America, or any country, as "the one super-power" could wage war world-wide, and be immune from attack, for that is what the Anti Missile Defence Proposal

seeks to achieve, then we could expect that super-power to become more assertive, more dogmatic, more sure that its own way is the right way. We should not go further down that track.

This is one policy and one strategic question in which Australia's own interest would diverge totally from that of the United States. We should not make ourselves hostage to American policy.

There is another issue which may give more than a little reality to these fears Ð Taiwan .

President Clinton, to his credit, has sought to reassert the balance of the Taiwan Relations Act, albeit in slightly different terms. President Clinton said: "We don't support independence for Taiwan, or two Chinas, or one Taiwan-one China. And we don't believe that Taiwan should be a member in any organization for which statehood is a requirement."

The United States's role, through the Taiwan Relations Act, has been to give Taiwan enough confidence so that she will not be attacked militarily by China but not so much confidence that she would refuse to negotiate with the ultimate objective of re-establishing One China.

There are many who would argue that the balance of the Taiwan Relations Act needs reasserting and that it has moved too far towards giving Taiwan sophisticated weapons which give Taiwan too much confidence. Unofficial Presidential visits from Taiwan to the United States have given encouragement to those in Taiwan who would prefer independence. The Taiwan lobby in the United States is extraordinarily strong, as indeed it is in Australia. The religious right of the Republican Party for their own reasons, would be likely to approve of independence for Taiwan if that is what Taiwan wanted. For quite different reasons, the Democratic Left would be likely to come to the same conclusion. If the issue were to be seriously debated in the United States, it would be a powerful debate, with no certainty as to the outcome .

If American policy ever were to support an independent Taiwan, the outcome would be war between China and America. America would forget her defeat by Vietnam. America would forget that China would have the intrinsic capacity to sustain casualties of an order which the United States could not match. Unless nuclear weapons were used, it is doubtful if America would win such a war. If nuclear weapons were used, everyone would be the loser.

Ultimately, whatever the course or outcome of a war with China, America would withdraw to the United States, to her own hemisphere. If we had supported her, we would be here as an exposed and isolated ex-ally. Any government that took any action that could lead to that outcome would be guilty of a grave dereliction of duty to the Australian people.

We should not seek to overturn the view that Taiwan is part of China. They are two parts of one country. We have all exchanged diplomatic relations with China on that basis. When we did so I believe we had some understanding of the history which led to that being the only practical and possible option .

The Shanghai Communique, signed in President Nixon's time, set out the situation quite clearly. Both parties wanted to reach a conclusion to the problems of separation between the mainland and Taiwan by negotiation. America said that she was opposed to the matter being resolved by force. China, for its part, could not rule out the use of force. If she were to do so,

Taiwan would have no incentive to negotiate. China is in the same situation as Mandela was over the use of force by the ANC. If he had renounced force, there would never have been a successful negotiation with the Apartheid Government.

There is a danger that strong human rights advocates might say that because Taiwan is a democracy they have a right to be independent. There is no such right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The other side of the coin, however, is that governments around the world have come to solemn agreements with China in relation to Taiwan and those agreements should not be overturned.

We need to understand that there some countries who have had such a history that it becomes a part of their mindset in unshakeable ways. China was humiliated by former great powers on a number of occasions – by Palmerston over the Opium Wars in the middle of the 19th century; by Britain, France, Germany and the United States in the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, China has determined that such humiliations will never occur again.

I suspect that China would allow Taiwan, on reunification, to keep her Parliament, her judicial system, to keep her police and even to keep her military forces. The only thing which Taiwan would certainly have to give up is the right to independent membership of international bodies for which statehood is a requirement. Taiwan does not have that right now.

What then is the problem in all of this?

Unfortunately there are movements within Taiwan that seek de jure independence. The current President seemed to be of that mind but as a result of reactions since his election, seems to have backtracked to a certain extent.

A while ago I monitored the east coast press in the United States in relation to reporting of matters affecting China. I came to the conclusion that many people in the foreign policy establishment had already made up their mind that China would be the next enemy. That is re-enforced by American criticism of President Clinton's speech at Shanghai University at the end of his last visit. Think tanks and right wing groups were merciless in their criticism of the President.

In addition to that, there was an interesting article in The Bulletin when Maxine McKew was interviewing Paul Dibb, who is recognised as an established Defence Analyst. The article made it plain that he thought that America was looking for a new enemy. The same article spoke of alliances with South Korea, Japan, Australia and the United States – NATO in Asia, Dibb is reported as saying. If such an alliance occurred it would be aimed at China. We should have no part of it .

In the same vein, Tim Fischer wrote in the Australian in June this year. He talked of the increasingly shrill edicts issuing from elements of the military and academic establishment, most notably on the East Coast of the United States. Tim Fischer wrote: "late last year and again during May, Australia was told that it must automatically jump onto the US side in any conflict with China over Taiwan. Furthermore we should mould our defence force in preparation for this and not hesitate in doing so." Later in the same article he wrote: "Finally to the ugly, and I refer to those elements in the United States who demand Australia's commitment over the Taiwan issue. Defence Adviser in Washington, Dick Armitage, said in

September last year that "the United States would expect Australia to help out with the dirty work in a conflict with China over Taiwan." In the article it is very clear that Tim Fischer, who was Deputy Prime Minister at the time, disagreed with such views. The fact that he has written in such a way has not had the publicity or the attention that it needs in the Australian environment. It is one of those aspects that those with a cosy defence or strategic relationship at an academic and bureaucratic level seem determined to ignore.

Only this week the U.S. Commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet wrote in our press what we should do for our security. We are not yet a U.S. province. That a U.S. Commander-in-Chief felt able or obliged to make such comments is indicative of the inequality of the relationship.

We need to make sure that when our own Defence Review is being implemented that it is designed to maximise Australia's capacity to meet our own strategic objectives and that it is not designed merely to complement something that may be required of us by the United States. It would be an act of lunacy for Australia to participate in a conflict between China and America over Taiwan. If those demands have been made of us, as Tim Fischer has so clearly enunciated, they have presumably also been made of Japan. I could imagine no venture more foolhardy for either country.

We ought to be persuading America that she must persuade Taiwan that independence can never be an outcome for her future. No matter how long a negotiation takes, they must not believe that America would ever support an independent and separate Taiwan.

We have then two issues running just beneath the surface which could expose the raw nerve of Australian/American differences. Going the American way would be much too high a price to pay for what is left of ANZUS .

ANZUS was meant to provide a country, small in resources, with support in the event of an attack, support from a great power. As I have shown, it is more likely that the United States would call on us to support her in her policies under ANZUS than it would be that we would call on the United States to help protect the territorial integrity of this country. What a perverse outcome that would be. The instrument designed for our protection could lead to our destruction.

The last issue that I would like to mention is a simple one. Can any of us today envisage a situation in which America would respond to a call for help under the terms of the ANZUS Treaty? I say under the terms of the ANZUS Treaty because technically that Treaty, with New Zealand's withdrawal or expulsion is over. The sentiment is meant to continue.

When there have been concerns in our region, the United States has made it plain they didn't really want to be involved, and that includes East Timor. But going back over the years, whether in relation to West Irian, whether in relation to attitudes to Indonesia itself, or to the spread of Communism in Malaya or to confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia, the United States adopted a studied policy of distance and of relative disinterest. ANZUS was a deterrent to Communist attack but that is not on the cards.

There is one other factor which we should remember. In the World War, Britain and Commonwealth countries fought for two years and five months alone against the Axis powers. If Japan had not attacked Pearl Harbour, would America ever have come into the war? There are many who believe that, without that provocation, America would have

preserved her neutrality. To leave Britain and her close Commonwealth partners alone for that period against the Axis powers provides a significant warning about too great a reliance on the United States .

I propose we should do three things. We should do what we can to keep the relationship with the United States but we should not depend upon it as though that absolves Australia from responsibility for her own defence. We should not allow the American relationship to blind ourselves to the degree of security which it provides. In particular we should not allow the relationship to drag us into United States arguments over which we have no influence or control.

I saw a comment by a leading academic a while ago who suggested that without ANZUS we would need to double expense expenditure. Even with ANZUS we need to double our defence expenditure because of the uncertainties in our own immediate region, uncertainties in which the United States has little interest.

We and the countries of East and South East Asia all belong to this part of the world. We are all committed. Ultimately, it is our inter-relationships that will provide security. It is the confidence that we have in each other. It will be our capacity to work together to promote peace and harmony within the region. Closer regional relationships should provide the main thrust of our search for security through this century. We all need to work at it. If growing confidence in ourselves causes us to let the American relationship slip into disuse, we will have succeeded .

(Malcolm Fraser 24/11/00)