

Old Enemies, New Friends: Australia and the Impact of the Pacific War

Peter Dennis

The Second World War, and especially the Pacific War, was a profoundly disturbing experience for Australia. While for the metropolitan imperial centre, the United Kingdom, a ‘Germany first’ strategy against the three Axis powers made eminent sense, as indeed it did for its partners from mid to late 1941, the Soviet Union and the United States, for an outlying country such as Australia, the war posed fundamental questions about its priorities and interests. Well before the fall of Singapore exposed the hollowness of the overarching imperial defence policy centred on the naval base at Singapore, Australia had been increasingly concerned about the threat from Asia, and specifically the threat from Japan.

Fear of Asia generally, and, from the mid to late nineteenth century, of Japan specifically, had been a constant thread in Australian considerations of its security and place in the region. Even before the Japanese naval victory over Russia at Tsushima in 1905, Australia fears that its interests were of a lesser order in the minds of imperial policy makers were confirmed by the conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902. While this was regarded in British circles as a clever and timely answer to the emergence of Germany as the main threat to the United Kingdom, Australian leaders saw the withdrawal of British naval forces from the Pacific and the acknowledgment of Japan’s primacy in the region as an alarming development. Both the United Kingdom and Japan could point to tangible benefits that flowed from the alliance; Australia could see only a deterioration of its security position and, in the background, a questioning of its relationship with the ‘Mother Country.’¹

How could Australian security be assured? One answer, an answer that continues to have resonance in the Australia of the 21st century, was to rely on ‘great and powerful friends’ to come to Australia’s aid in times of crisis. Implicit in this approach to security was an Australian willingness to stand beside those friends in their time of crisis. The most obvious powerful friend was the United Kingdom, the centre of that great empire of which Australia was proud to be part. A sense of ‘Britishness’ was a fundamental element in the Australian outlook, but there was also a realization in some quarters that the interests of Australia and the United Kingdom were not always the same. The defence of Australia pre-1914 rested on the supremacy of the Royal Navy (and, in the Pacific, of its ally the Imperial Japanese Navy). As long as the Royal Navy controlled the seas, so the argument went, Australia would be free from the threat of invasion. It would need some forces to repel raids, but otherwise its manpower, and indeed its national wealth, would be available for deployment in wider imperial causes. The sense of security that British naval supremacy afforded Australia did not, however, prevent

¹ For Australian fears of Asia generally, and of Japan specifically, see David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1999).

some leaders from questioning whether it gave Australia an absolute guarantee. Certainly Prime Minister Alfred Deakin did not think so., and he became a vocal proponent of the development of an Australian navy, designed specifically to afford a measure of local defence. Deakin also pushed for a greater American involvement in the western Pacific, and personally orchestrated a visit to Australia in 1908 of President Theodore Roosevelt's 'Great White Fleet,' which, it is claimed, attracted the largest crowds of any event hitherto in the short life of the Commonwealth. Deakin's move caused considerable anger in British official circles where it was seen as an attempt to undermine imperial bonds. The following year Deakin sought to have the American Monroe Doctrine extended to the Pacific, thus giving Australia an added 'great and powerful friend,' and enhancing its own sense of security. This was not an 'either/or' proposal, namely that the United States should replace the United Kingdom as the major guarantor of Australia's security, for Deakin was a 'British race patriot,' but it did demonstrate that on vital matters the perspectives, let alone the interests, of the imperial centre and one of its south Pacific dominions were not necessarily identical. Shortly afterwards Deakin lost office, and his proposal, which had greatly exercised the Colonial and Foreign Offices in London, disappeared, much to the relief of British officials.²

When the Great War of 1914-18 broke out Australia willingly rallied to the imperial cause. Apart from a brief skirmish in German New Guinea in September 1914, and an encounter with the marauding German light cruiser Emden in the Indian Ocean in November 1914, there was no military action on or near Australian territory for the whole of the war. The supremacy of the Royal Navy, assisted by naval allies such as Japan, meant that Australia was free from the threat of invasion, and was thus able to dispatch some 330,000 troops to the battlefields of Gallipoli and the Middle East and the Western Front in France and Belgium. Fears of the possible intervention of the German East Asia Squadron were somewhat allayed by the Japanese government's loan of the battlecruiser Ibuki to escort the first convoy of Australian and New Zealand troops as it sailed from Western Australia across the Indian Ocean to Ceylon.

The four-year struggle against the Central Powers exacted a fearful toll on Australia. With a population of only 4.8 million, it suffered 61,000 battle and battle-related deaths and a further 155,000 wounded. Of all the members of the British Empire, Australia's casualty rate of 64.98% was the highest (although as a percentage of total population, Australia's 6.67% was outstripped by New Zealand's 9.11%). That brought with it a determination that while Australia continued to see its future as a member of the Empire, it was not automatically willing to accept direction from the metropolitan centre. A heightened sense of national awareness was evident at the Paris Peace Conference, where the Australian Prime Minister, W.H. 'Billy' Hughes, was determined to push the case for Australian interests, even when they clashed with the preferred plans of the Great Powers. In a memorable exchange with President Woodrow Wilson over the postwar disposition of German colonies in the Pacific, Hughes pointedly

² See Ruth Megaw, 'Australia and the Great White Fleet, 1908,' *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 65: 2 (June 1970), 121-33; Neville Meaney, "'A Proposition of the Highest Importance': Alfred Deakin's Pacific Agreement Proposal and its Significance for Australian-Imperial Relations,' *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies* 5:3 (1967), 200-13.

referred to the 60,000 Australian war dead; left unsaid, but well understood by everyone, was the comparable American death toll of 53,000 from a vastly larger population.

Notwithstanding the exemplary conduct of Japan as an alliance member in the First World War, Australian suspicions of Japanese intentions remained strong throughout the interwar period. Indeed a fear of Asia and its teeming masses, a fear based on both racial arguments and the perceived threat of cheap Asian labour that would undercut hard-won Australian working conditions, had long underpinned Australia attitudes. Hughes argued successfully in Paris against the Japanese proposal for a racial equality clause to be inserted in the proposed covenant of the League of Nations, and Australia stuck rigidly to the White Australia policy in terms of immigration.³ Australians saw themselves as a distant outpost of white settlement, a member of the greatest empire the world had ever seen; loyal but also confident as equal partners in the great imperial enterprise. In terms of defence Australia's security rested on the 'Singapore strategy,' centred on the great naval base at Sembawang. Time after time British authorities assured Australia and New Zealand that in the event of a war in the Pacific against Japan, Britain would dispatch a fleet to Singapore to protect the Antipodes. These promises were accepted by Australia's political leaders largely without question, with one Prime Minister, Stanley Bruce, confessing at the Imperial Conference in 1923 that the precise reasoning behind the strategy escaped him but that he was nevertheless content to accept British assurances as to its soundness. Thus in the interwar period Australian political leaders could rely on the Singapore strategy to ensure Australia's security while avoiding the need to spend large sums on its own defence (and, unlike New Zealand, declining to contribute to the cost of building the naval base). And when war against Germany broke out in 1939, Australia could rely on that promised security while sending the 2nd Australian Imperial Force to England and the Middle East.⁴

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 changed everything. The gravity of the situation impelled the Australian Prime Minister, John Curtin, to write in a Melbourne newspaper:

The Australian Government therefore regards the Pacific struggle as primarily one in which the United States and Australia must have the fullest say in the direction of the Democracies' fighting plan. Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.⁵

³ On Hughes at the Paris Peace Conference see L.F. Fitzhardinge, *William Morris Hughes: A Political Biography*, Volume II, *The Little Digger, 1914-1952* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1979), chapter XVI, and, more recently, Carl Bridge, *William Hughes, Australia*, chapters 6 & 7, in the series *Makers of the Modern World: The Peace Conferences of 1919-23 and their aftermath* (London: Haus, 2011).

⁴ Peter Dennis, 'Australia and the Singapore Strategy,' in Brian P. Farrell and Sandy Hunter, *A Great Betrayal?: The Fall of Singapore Revisited* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2010), 20-31.

⁵ *Melbourne Herald*, 27 December 1941. See also Albert Palazzo, 'Australia and the Neglect of Defence: Echoes of 1942 in the Formulation of Present Security Policy,' *Australian Army Journal* IX: 2 (Winter 2012), 15-31.

Churchill was furious because Curtin had explicitly undermined the British-American emphasis on a 'Germany first' strategy. Yet Churchill had made exactly the same point in 1914: 'If the power of Great Britain were shattered on the sea, the only course for the five millions of white men in the Pacific would be to seek the protection of the United States.'⁶ Roosevelt too was unhappy, but Curtin was clear that Australia had to look to its own survival, and if that meant turning to the United States, then so be it. As the situation in the Asia-Pacific region rapidly deteriorated following Pearl Harbor, Curtin wrote to Churchill in early 1942 that 'the evacuation of Singapore would be regarded as an inexcusable betrayal.' The theme of betrayal was echoed for decades afterwards, most notably by the Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating in 1992, but the charge was always based on a flawed understanding of Australia's stance: the Singapore strategy represented for Australia 'defence on the cheap,' a willingness to accept glib assurances rather than face the costs of sound defence policies. Rather than being 'armed and ready,' as one historian has characterized Australia's pre-Pearl Harbor defence capability, Australia was woefully underprepared in every area that counted.⁷

When Curtin wrote that 'Australia looks to America,' probably no one foresaw the extent to which Australia willingly entered into an American embrace. Curtin virtually handed over the running of Australia's war to General Douglas MacArthur, who was greeted as a hero and deliverer upon his arrival in Australia from the Philippines. Even though Australian forces inflicted the first defeat upon the Japanese in New Guinea, they were progressively sidelined by MacArthur, both in actual operations and in publicity. American successes were described as American victories, whereas Australian successes were attributed to Allied forces. When it came for the final push to Japan through the Philippines, MacArthur was determined that these campaigns would be fought by American troops alone, so that Australian forces were diverted to operations in Borneo that were of questionable value in terms of bringing about the final victory.⁸

The fall of Singapore resulted in the capture and imprisonment of the 8th Division of the 2nd AIF. It was not until the end of the war with the return of the survivors that the full story of their imprisonment became known. Changi Prison in Singapore, the Thai-Burma Railway, and perhaps most infamous, the Sandakan death march on Borneo, in which only six Australians out of a combined force of 2500 Australian and British prisoners survived a forced march: these became symbols of Japan's cruel treatment of POWs. When the Australian Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Thomas Blamey, accepted the Japanese surrender on Morotai, he said to the Japanese delegation: 'In receiving your surrender I do not recognize you as an honourable and gallant foe ...'⁹ These were sentiments widely shared by the Australian community. During the war racial stereotypes were used to engender popular feeling against not only the Japanese

⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, LXIX, col. 1933 (18 March 1914).

⁷ Andrew Ross, *Armed and Ready: The Industrial Development & Defence of Australia, 1900-1945* (Sydney: Turton & Armstrong, 1994). For a concise analysis of the 'betrayal' argument, and for a refutation of Ross's thesis, see Augustine Meaher IV, *The Road to Singapore: The Myth of British Betrayal* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2010).

⁸ See Peter Charlton, *The Unnecessary War: Island Campaigns of the South-West Pacific 1944-45* (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1983).

⁹ Quoted in D.M. Horner, *Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998), p. 555.

military but against the Japanese people as a whole, but it seems that there were limits beyond which the community would not go. When the Department of Information launched a ‘hate’ campaign in 1942, boldly proclaiming ‘We’ve always despised them—now we must smash them!’ and promising to ‘clear such loathsome creeping creatures from the face of the earth,’ a Gallup Poll found that 54 per cent of those surveyed opposed such rhetoric.¹⁰ The ‘race war,’ as John Dower has described it,¹¹ was merciless on both sides, at least on the battlefield, fuelled in Australian minds by the fear of invasion. Thus Kokoda (and to a lesser extent, bemoaned by its surviving veterans, Milne Bay) and the Battle of the Coral Sea, have become synonymous with the ‘Battle for Australia’. We now know that the Japanese military did not plan to invade Australia, but this has not prevented a vocal lobby from declaring that Australia was on the brink of invasion in 1942; in 2008 the Federal Government announced that henceforth the first Wednesday in September each year would be celebrated as the ‘Battle for Australia’ Day (though not, significantly, gazetted as a public holiday).¹² This was intended to acknowledge ‘the service and sacrifice of all those who served in defence of Australia in 1942 and 1943,’ which implies that Australia was under threat of invasion. While the Kokoda Track now attracts each year thousands of Australian of all ages who undertake the gruelling cross-country march, the ‘Battle for Australia’ Day passes largely unheralded in the community at large. Indeed there was much derision directed at Baz Lurmann’s 2008 film *Australia* for depicting the landing of Japanese troops in the Northern Territory and attacks on the civilian population, such critics failing to notice (a curious oversight given the sprawling and epic nature of the film) that Lurmann had described it as a melodrama, thus freeing him from the constraints of historical accuracy.

For a decade or so after the war, POW literature featured prominently on Australian reading lists. Books such as Rohan Rivett’s *Behind Bamboo* (1946) and Russell Braddon’s *The Naked Island* (1952) were best-sellers in Australia, Rivett’s account, one of the first POW narratives to emerge from the war against Japan, being reprinted eight times and selling over 100,000 copies, while *The Naked Island* was an international success, selling well over a million copies by the mid-1970s. While such books kept alive images of Japanese cruelty, time gradually softened this view in the public at large, especially in the postwar ‘baby boomer’ generation who had not experienced first-hand the anxieties of the war years, although in many veterans’ circles a fierce anti-Japanese feeling persisted for decades. When the peace treaty with Japan was being finalized in 1951, for example, an ex-servicemen’s association urged the prime minister to impose a special duty on all Japanese goods entering Australia for a

¹⁰ See Prue Torney-Parlicki, ‘“Fighting on this front is coldly animal”: Australian press representations of Japan during the Pacific War,’ in Paul Jones & Vera Mackie (eds), *Relationships: Japan and Australia 1870s-1950s* (Melbourne: Department of History, University of Melbourne, 2001), 163-88.

¹¹ John Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

¹² The arguments supporting the ‘Battle for Australia’ proposal have been decisively rebutted by Peter Stanley, ‘Dramatic Myth and Dull Truth: Invasion by Japan in 1942,’ chapter 7 in Craig Stockings (ed.), *Zombie Myths of Australian Military History* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010). The support of the Federal Government, and in particular the Commemorations Branch of the Department of Veterans’ Affairs, for the celebration of Australian military exploits, has been savagely attacked by Henry Reynolds and Marilyn Lake (eds), *What’s Wrong with ANZAC: The Militarisation of Australian History* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010).

period of three years: 'After such a duty had run its course, we could settle down to the task of cooperating with our former enemies, feeling that they had at least made some material efforts to expiate their crimes.'¹³ Increasingly, however, the focus has tended to be on Australian resilience in the face of adversity, rather than the individual or collective acts of the Japanese. Thus the surgeon (one of many, though the only one to have any public recognition) Edward 'Weary' Dunlop is venerated in Australian circles and is one of only two men individually commemorated by a statue in the grounds of the Australian War Memorial.¹⁴

Australian policy towards Japan in the immediate postwar period was governed not so much by a desire for retribution (although the public at large undoubtedly would have endorsed such a policy) but by a sober appreciation of the situation that the war had produced and by fear of a resurgent Japan. Australia was determined to participate in the occupation of Japan, preferably in an independent role. Given the size of the commitment that the Australian Government was willing to make (which at some 10,000 troops was not insubstantial but still tiny compared with the American presence in Japan), this was an unrealistic expectation, and British authorities were much more perceptive and realistic in understanding that only a combined British Commonwealth force would give it any measure of standing within what was overwhelmingly an American enterprise.

In terms of territorial adjustments, Australian policy echoed the push that Prime Minister Hughes had made at the Paris Peace Conference, namely that Japan should lose all island possessions in the Pacific, but this policy, perhaps reasonable enough in the immediate aftermath of a long and bloody war, was not acceptable to the United States which was infuriated by Australia's claim to all island territories south of the equator, even though almost all of these had been captured by American forces at great cost. Nor was the United States impressed by Australian attempts to retain an American presence in areas adjacent to Australia: manoeuvrings by the Australian Minister for External Affairs, H.V. Evatt, to persuade the US to stay in the naval base at Manus Island, just north of New Guinea, which had been developed at great cost by the Americans, was a spectacular fiasco: not only did the US decline Evatt's crude overtures but they shut down the base and sold much of its equipment to the Nationalist Chinese government.¹⁵ Even before the end of the Pacific war, US representatives

¹³ See <http://www.info.dfat.gov.au/info/historical/HistDocs.nsf/vVolume/0D0A888421204CAECA256D96000B72C9>, accessed 5 September 2012.

¹⁴ The other is John Kirkpatrick Simpson, a First World War soldier who used a donkey to transport wounded men to the beach at Gallipoli, and who is now the subject of a vociferous and misguided campaign to confer on him a posthumous Victoria Cross. For an examination of the specious nature of the claims made in support of the 'VC for Simpson' campaign, see Graham Wilson, *Dust, Donkeys and Delusions: The Myth of Simpson and his Donkey Exposed* (Newport, NSW: Big Sky Publishing, 2012). There is a similar push to award posthumous VCs to a number of Pacific War veterans, in particular members of the Royal Australian Navy, but these have not generated anything like a similar level of public interest.

¹⁵ Manus Island again features in Australian political discourse, and to some extent in the public mind, as the Labor Government seeks to use it as a holding base for what the shrill tabloid press and radio 'shock jocks' refer to as the 'waves of illegal immigrants and refugees.' It is another variation on the 'teeming masses' argument, but given the small numbers involved, especially when compared with the corresponding situation in Europe, the argument would be laughable if it were not so revealing of a darker side of the Australian psyche.

at the Potsdam conference in July 1945 insisted that the boundary between MacArthur's South West Pacific Area and Lord Louis Mountbatten's South East Asia Command be redrawn without reference to Mountbatten: excised from MacArthur's area of responsibility were Java, Borneo and the archipelago of the East Indies; together with the southern half of Indo-China, these were added to Mountbatten's existing territories of Burma, Siam and the Malay Peninsula including Singapore. The Philippines, of special interest to MacArthur, were retained under American control, but the focus of US attention was on northeast Asia, Japan in particular. Increasingly Australia seemed peripheral to America's central interests. It was clear, or so it seemed, that the US had no intention of becoming involved in the postwar upheavals on the Asian and Southeast Asian mainland, where the European colonial powers were struggling to reassert their control.¹⁶

The allied (or really, the American) occupation of Japan proceeded remarkably peacefully, and perhaps against most expectations MacArthur proved to be a wise and farsighted ruler. By 1948 fears of a resurgent Japan were replaced, at least in American thinking, by the emergence of much greater, and global, threat, the communist spectre. The outbreak of the Cold War most obviously was centred on Europe, and led in 1949 to the creation of NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In Asia, French, Dutch and British authorities wrestled with indigenous movements dedicated to resisting the return of imperial power. In the case of Indochina and the Netherlands East Indies these were predominantly nationalist uprisings, but with a communist element of varying strength. In Malaya there was no doubt: the Malayan Emergency was caused by the Malayan Communist Party within sections of the Chinese community, aimed at ending British rule and imposing a communist system.

The United Kingdom was determined to crush the uprising in Malaya, as much for economic as for broader political reasons. At a time when Britain was struggling with massive wartime debts, especially to the United States, Malaya was the greatest single earner of dollars, thanks to its booming rubber and tin industries. Given its wartime experience, it might have seemed obvious that Australia would commit substantial forces to Malaya to prevent a communist takeover, but that was not the case. Domestic political pressures meant that Australia quickly demobilized its forces after the end of the Pacific War (indeed it had begun to do so in late 1943), and its small postwar army was fully stretched to maintain its commitment in Japan and, from 1950, in Korea. Australian participation in the Malayan Emergency was limited to the provision of a squadron of bombers from 1950 onwards (a decision taken by the new Liberal Government, its Labor predecessor having declined to commit any Australian forces to Malaya), and to the rotation of a battalion of infantry from 1955 until 1960. It was hardly much more than a token commitment: whether the bombing achieved anything other than providing useful practice is debatable, and by the time Australian ground forces arrived in 1955, the outcome was no longer in doubt, although a long and tedious clean-up

¹⁶ See Peter Dennis, 'Major and Minor: The Defense of Southeast Asia and the Cold War,' in Keith Neilson and Ronald G. Haycock (eds), *The Cold War and Defense* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 137-51.

campaign remained.¹⁷ Nevertheless, by the time Malaya became independent in 1957, the new Government, and the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, could be confident that the communist challenge had been successfully rebuffed.

A new threat to the stability of the region immediately to Australia's north emerged in 1962 when President Sukarno of Indonesia launched his campaign of 'confrontation' against Malaysia, arguing that its creation was merely a cover to disguise continuing British colonial rule. Conscious of the dangers of direct Australian-Indonesian conflict along the border of West Irian/Papua New Guinea, the Australian Government at first declined to send troops to Borneo, where most of the Indonesian incursions were taking place, arguing that its troops were only to be used for the defence of peninsular Malaya, but after several attacks on the mainland the Government reversed its position, fearful of a major escalation of what had hitherto been a low-level affair.¹⁸

With the election of a Liberal Government in 1949, Australian policy was increasingly concerned with the construction of a security arrangement that would cement the wartime Australian-American co-operation in a formal way. The Minister for External Affairs in the new Liberal Government, Percy Spender, was determined to sign an alliance with the United States that would require each signatory to act to assist the others in the event of an attack on one of them. He was prepared to use the vehicle of the proposed peace treaty with Japan to get his way. It had become clear that in the face of a deteriorating security environment in northeast Asia, the United States wanted a relatively moderate treaty with Japan, whereas Australia was urging a more severe treaty, one that would ensure the demilitarisation of Japan for decades to come, in part through the dismantling of its industrial base. Spender was willing to accept the American proposal, but only on condition that the United States would enter into a formal defence pact with Australia. This approach had its dangers, of course, because the United States might well have decided—as MacArthur had done throughout the war and since—that in the final analysis Australia could well be ignored. However Australian support for the United States in the Korean War—both military and diplomatic—stood it in good stead, and the ANZUS Treaty between the United States, Australia and New Zealand came into effect on 29 April 1952, six months before the signing of the peace treaty with Japan in September 1952.¹⁹

Australia's ultimately successful quest for what Prime Minister Menzies called 'great and powerful friends' has been variously interpreted in Australian circles. The traditional view holds that Australia persuaded, perhaps even pushed, a reluctant United States into ANZUS by using the threat of withholding its agreement to the peace treaty with Japan. Certainly US reluctance to engage in military planning with Australia and New Zealand at the highest level was clear enough, and the treaty did not commit any of the parties to overt action beyond 'consulting.' Others have argued that in the face of a rising threat from international

¹⁷ See Peter Dennis & Jeffrey Grey, *Emergency and Confrontation: Australian Military Operations in Malaya and Borneo 1950-1966* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1996), Part I, *The Malayan Emergency*.

¹⁸ See Dennis & Grey, *Emergency and Confrontation*, Part II, *Confrontation*.

¹⁹ See Roger Holdich, Vivianne Johnson, Pamela Andre (eds), *The 1951 ANZUS Treaty* (Documents in Australian Foreign Policy, Vol. 17) (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2001).

communism, both in Europe and in Asia, the United States wanted to strengthen Japan's ties with the West and to include the smaller nations such as Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines into a Pacific-wide security arrangement.²⁰

For the two major political parties—Liberal and Labor—belief in the ANZUS Treaty as the bedrock of Australian security is an article of faith. ANZUS, it is claimed, gives Australia high-level access to the American political process, to its massive intelligence-gathering capability, and to advanced American military technology, while regular joint exercises mean that Australian forces can work effectively with a great and powerful friend. Thus, immediately following the 9/11 attacks on the US Prime Minister John Howard convened a Cabinet meeting which invoked the ANZUS Treaty to declare support for the United States. The commitment of Australian forces to Iraq and then Afghanistan duly followed, with Australia gaining the unflattering soubriquet as America's 'deputy sheriff' in southeast Asia. Successive Australian leaders have been at pains to stress the close bonds between Australia and the United States, but not always to approval at home: Julia Gillard's March 2010 address to Congress was widely condemned in the Australian media as mawkish and cringe-making, while being almost completely ignored in the US. President Obama's announcement when briefly visiting Australia in November 2011 that henceforth 2500 Marines would rotate through Darwin to utilize training facilities in the Northern Territory did not meet with universal approval, and Australian government sources were at pains to point out that this did not amount to the establishment of an American base on Australian soil. Great and powerful friends, it seems, could not be embraced too closely.²¹

Much as the ANZUS Treaty was hailed as a triumph for Australian diplomacy, it did not satisfy the perceived urgent need for stronger defence ties. After all, it only committed the signatories to consult. Greater assurance came in 1954 with the creation of the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), which required the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, The Philippines, New Zealand, Thailand and Pakistan to 'act to meet the common danger.' The United States, however, declined to commit specific forces to SEATO and placed careful restrictions on the interpretation of the 'common danger.' It insisted that the treaty could only be invoked in response to a communist attack, and subsequently declared that the obligations of member states were individual as well as collective. As ineffective as SEATO ultimately proved to be, its unwieldy and disparate membership being not the least of its problems, it provided a sense of security to Australia, however illusory.²²

Less well-known and publicized was the creation in 1950 of the ANZAM region, a

²⁰ See Robert O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950-53*, Volume I, *Strategy and Diplomacy* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial/Australian Government Publishing Service, 1981); David Lowe, *Australia between Empires*, *Empires in Perspective* No. 12 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010).

²¹ For an overview of public attitudes towards ANZUS, see Ian McAllister, *Attitude Matters: Public opinion in Australia towards defence and security* (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2004). For a much more sceptical analysis of Australia's security relationship with the United States, see Michael McKinley, 'Critical Reflections on the Australian-US Alliance,' in Craig Stockings (ed.), *Anzac's Dirty Dozen: 12 Myths of Australian Military History* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2012), 235-59.

²² The frustrations of military planning that involved such a disparate group of members are well illustrated in a recent study: Damien Fenton, *To Cage the Red Dragon: SEATO and the Defence of Southeast Asia, 1955-1965* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012).

working relationship between Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom to coordinate functions for the protection of maritime trade in the area centred on Malaya. This was a practical arrangement, and underscored Menzies' insistence on the need for 'great and powerful *friends*,' rather than relying on a single protective power, a policy that had proved so disastrous in 1942. As this overlapped with American interests in the Pacific, it virtually forced the US to abandon its claim to absolute control of the Pacific region and to enter into a working relationship with the ANZAM powers. This resulted in the Collins-Radford Agreement in 1951 between the United States Navy (not the US Government as such) and the Royal Navy, the Royal Australian Navy and the Royal New Zealand Navy, which set out common procedures in the event of all parties engaging a common enemy. The importance of ANZAM and the Radford-Collins agreement was less in their practical significance (important though that was) than in their adding to the network of arrangements that was gradually emerging in Australia's post-1945 search for security.

None of these perceived threats to Australian security, let alone memories of the recent Pacific War, were sufficient to persuade either the Labor or Liberal governments of the need for substantial defence expenditure. After six years of war, following on from the ravages of the Great Depression, there was little enthusiasm for defence matters: the reconstruction of the civilian economy and all that that meant for the population as a whole, was foremost in the minds of the Government and the electorate. Nevertheless, military matters could not be completely ignored, and significant changes in the Australian military structure, especially as concerned the Army, were introduced. The Defence Act of 1903 prohibited the compulsory deployment overseas of men who had enlisted for home service, so that in both world wars Australia raised special expeditionary forces, the First and Second Australian Imperial Forces. Special legislation was introduced in 1943 to enable the use of home forces in New Guinea, but the resultant mix of AIF and militia men was an unnecessary complication. In 1947 the Australian Regular Army was established, consisting of long-service volunteers who could be sent anywhere at government direction. The Regular Army was backed by the part-time volunteers of the Citizen Military Forces, which especially struggled to attain its allotted strength in the years of the postwar boom. Small though the overall Army was, it entrenched a long-term professionalism that has endured into the current century.²³

A new compulsory military service scheme was introduced by the Liberal Government in 1951. This was in part a response to the deterioration in the international security scene: the outbreak of the Malayan Emergency, the intensification of the Cold War in Europe, the triumph of Communist forces in China in 1949, and the outbreak of the Korean War. In these circumstances, and given the commitment of Australian forces to the occupation of Japan and soon to operations in Korea, the Government could hardly ignore the fact that Australia's military capability had been massively run down since the end of the Second World War. The National Service scheme was designed to produce a large number of partially-trained men who,

²³ See Jeffrey Grey, *The Australian Army*, Vol. 1 of *The Australian Centenary History of Defence* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), chapter 7; and Graeme Sligo 'The Development of the Australian Regular Army, 1944-1952,' in Peter Dennis & Jeffrey Grey (eds), *The Second Fifty Years: The Australian Army 1947-1997* (Canberra: School of History, UNSW-ADFA, 1997), 22-47.

on the outbreak of war, could be brought rapidly to operational efficiency without the need for further prolonged training. The value of the scheme in military terms was circumscribed by the fact that young men who chose to fulfil their military obligation in the Army could not be compelled to serve outside Australia (whereas those—a much smaller number—who joined the Navy or Air Force were required to accept an overseas obligation). In addition, the annual intake of about 33,000 imposed a severe strain on the training capacity of the small Regular Army. The scheme was also designed to enhance the physical fitness and discipline of modern youth, the latter continuing to be a catchcry for those who argue for the reintroduction of compulsory military service. Not until the mid-1960s, when tensions with Indonesia were reaching a critical point, with fears of direct military clashes on the West Irian/Papua New Guinea border, did the Liberal Government introduce a scheme of highly selective national service (the term ‘conscription’ being avoided because of its controversial associations with the First World War) that included an obligation to serve overseas if required. This coincided with the Government’s decision to commit ground forces to Vietnam, which largely blurred public understanding of the original reason for the scheme’s introduction. Thus conscription became inextricably associated with the war in Vietnam, which in time became a matter of bitter public debate. (That association was never as strong as opponents of the war liked to claim: once the decision to end conscription was announced, the so-called Moratorium marches largely ended, suggesting that the objectors were more interested in the matter of conscription than in the fate of South Vietnam.)

The announcement in April 1965 that Australian ground troops would be committed to South Vietnam was seen by critics at the time as evidence of Australia’s buckling under US pressure to respond to the plea for ‘more flags,’ a response seated in the perceived need to show that Australia was willing to support its great and powerful friend. Almost fifty years on, this view continues to be maintained in the circles of the unreconstructed Left in Australia. The documentary record, however, is quite clear. Australian policy makers had become pessimistic about the situation in South Vietnam and, indeed, about the strength of American resolve. Far from being cajoled, if not bullied, into directly supporting the US effort in Vietnam, Australia virtually invited itself into the conflict, not out of an overwhelming sense that it needed to demonstrate its reliability as an ally with the context of SEATO and especially ANZUS, but because Australian policy makers had independently determined that the defence of South Vietnam was vital to Australia’s interests in holding the line against the further expansion of communism in southeast Asia.²⁴

Australia’s long-running preoccupation with the ‘search for security’ had dimensions other than simply military. In the aftermath of the Pacific war demography became as important in Australian political thinking as military strength. Indeed it could be said that

²⁴ Australian policy in this period is the subject of detailed analysis in the first volume of the ‘Official History of Australia’s Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1975’: Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia’s Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1992). See also Coral Bell, *Dependent Ally: A Study of Australia’s Relations with the United States and the United Kingdom since the Fall of Singapore* (Canberra: Department of International Relations, The Australian National University, 1984).

Australia sought security in numbers. ‘Populate or perish,’ a slogan used by the Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell (though coined by Prime Minister Hughes during the First World War), was the rather crude response to a government enquiry that argued that Australia needed a massive increase in its population for the twin purposes of defence and economic development. An annual increase of 1% per year was the agreed target, a policy that was adhered to for some 27 years. The White Australia policy remained in place, but its rigidity was gradually undermined by a series of concessions: in 1949 Japanese war brides were allowed to migrate to Australia and there was an easing of restrictions on Asian businessmen. In the immediate postwar period Government policy was to give preference to British migrants, but the lack of British shipping made it impossible to bring the required numbers to Australia. US offers of shipping for Displaced Persons (mainly from eastern and central Europe) enabled Australia to attract some 182,000 refugees. Without this influx such massive postwar undertakings such as the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme, the largest engineering project ever undertaken in Australia (and by a workforce that was about two-thirds postwar migrants) could never have been completed. The Scheme was critical to the postwar industrial development of Australia and to the expansion of Australian agriculture. Equally important was the social impact of the migration scheme, which changed Australia from an insular, largely British society to one that that has become multi-cultural and much more open to new ideas and influences.

The White Australia policy was gradually weakened, until it was finally abolished by the Labor government in 1973. Already thousands of students from Asian countries had come temporarily to Australia as part of the Colombo Plan to study in Australian universities; now in 2012 Australian universities are heavily dependent on foreign students for the cash flow that they bring, although the severe contraction of that market in the past two years has caused new problems for the tertiary sector. With the end of the Vietnam War Australia gave refuge to scores of thousands of Vietnamese migrants; following the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, the Australian Government offered four-year asylum to Chinese students studying in Australia.

At the same time that Australia was seeking to boost its postwar population, preferably from British or northern European sources, it was drawing closer economically to Asia, Japan in particular. Before the war, Japan had been a major trading partner with Australia, but in the immediate postwar period hostility towards Japan and concern over the links between Japanese industry and militarized nationalism hindered any resumption of significant economic ties. However, a decade later, and following the signing of the peace treaty with Japan, Australian concerns were much more focused on the threat of communism in Asia. In 1957, after protracted negotiations, the Australia-Japan Agreement on Commerce was signed, ushering in a new relationship—both economic and political—between the two countries.²⁵ By the late 1960s Japan had become Australia’s most important trading partner, and remained so until the emergence of China at the end of the twentieth century.

To conclude. What impact can we determine that the Pacific War has had on Australia?

²⁵ See *The Australia-Japan Agreement on Commerce 1957* (Document on Australian Foreign Policy Vol. 17) (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1997).

From an insular country—politically, economically and culturally—Australia has become much more regionally and globally conscious and engaged. As the passage of time takes its toll on the wartime generation, the bitter feelings that the Pacific War evoked in Australia have given way to a much more materialistic view. Some critics would argue that younger generations lack any historical consciousness, or that, where it does exist, it is skewed towards an interest in the First World War. Gallipoli resonates far more deeply in the Australian consciousness than Kokoda, and over many years Turkey has proved a far more attractive proposition for ‘pilgrim-tourists’ than New Guinea. Yet, in the absence of readily identifiable battle/war sites in Australia itself, with the notable exception of Darwin, one of the most visited places with a tragic connection with the Pacific War is the small town of Cowra in central New South Wales. The prisoner of war camp there, which held mainly Japanese POWs, was in 1944 the site of the largest breakout in the whole of the Second World War. Several hundred Japanese were killed and many committed suicide rather than face the disgrace of capture. Today virtually nothing remains of the camp, apart from a small information plaque, but Cowra has turned from that dark experience to become the site of a large Japanese garden and cemetery: the ‘town of peace,’ now visited by thousands of Australians and scores of Japanese each year, is testament to the capacity of old enemies to become new friends.²⁶

Old hostilities and fears have faded, and there are new imperatives at work. After an unbroken run of 15 years as Australia’s top-selling car, the General Motors Australian-designed and-built Holden Commodore has been succeeded by the fully-imported Mazda 3. Truly we have come a long way from September 1945.

²⁶ See Roger Pulvers, ‘Whatever fanatics say, a nice cup of tea together beats a fight to the death,’ *Japan Times*, 30 September 2012.