

Presentations

Race, nation, and Empire

Australian attitudes to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1902–23

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Introduction

The story of Australia's attitude to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance from 1902 to 1923 is one filled with uncertainty and contradiction. On the one hand, the alliance provided a guarantee of security for the new nation, as demonstrated, for instance, in the actions of the Japanese Navy as an alliance partner during the First World War. But for much of the period in question, many in the Australian government, the military, and the broader public considered their alliance partner to be the main threat to the future peace and freedom of the country. Compounding the uncertainty many in Australia felt with regard to Japanese intentions was the unflinching efforts of the Government to ensure the dominance of the British race in this far-flung corner of the Empire. This was nowhere more evident than in Australia's restrictive immigration practices – the so-called White Australia policy.

For this reason, this paper examines the history of Australia's attitudes to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance through the lens of the interconnected issues of race, nation and empire. On 1 January 1901, the separate colonies of New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, and Western Australia federated to form the Commonwealth of Australia. Assisted immigration policies that favoured the "mother country" over much of the previous century meant that the majority of Australians in 1901 had familial ties to the British Isles. An historian writing in the pre-World War II era noted that while Australians might have described themselves as 'independent Australian Britons ... among the Australians pride of race counted for more than love of country'.¹ Even with these imperial attachments to the mother country, Australians had realised by the turn of the Twentieth Century that they had a set of vital interests different to Britain. This was played out in the period leading up to and through Federation in debates over immigration, commerce, the Pacific Islands, and naval defence.²

Australia's response to the signing of the Anglo-Japanese treaty of commerce and navigation of 1894 provides a useful counterpoint to the signing of the military alliance in 1902. The British allowed the Australian colonies to determine if they would join, but the colonies in 1896 decided unanimously not to adhere to the treaty. While acclaimed in Japan as an end to the unequal treaties and the system of extra-territoriality, the response of the colonies was, ironically, to enact immigration restriction legislation to prevent "coloured" migration in order to protect Australian commercial interests. Japanese protests to the British over this slur led to pressure from London on the colonies. The result was the removal of reference to

¹ Cited in: Neville K. Meaney, *The search for security in the Pacific, 1901-14*, vol. 1, A history of Australian defence and foreign policy 1901-23, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1976, p. 5.

² Meaney, *The search for security in the Pacific, 1901-14*, vol. 1, A history of Australian defence and foreign policy 1901-23, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1976, p. 7.

“coloured” in the proposed legislation and the adoption of European language tests as a means to restrict Asian immigration. The first such legislation was passed by New South Wales in 1897.³ Queensland, however, reneged on the other states and decided to accept the commerce treaty, but negotiated directly with Tokyo that the number of Japanese labourers and artisans entering the colony would be limited to just over 3,000.⁴

The Federal Immigration Restriction Act came into effect on 1 January 1902, just weeks before the concluding of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Its purpose, in the words of future Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, was to “exclude alien Asiatics as well as the people of Japan against whom the measure is primarily aimed”.⁵ Nevertheless, the Japanese and Australian governments negotiated in 1904 an arrangement that granted Japanese merchants, tourists and students entry to Australia for up to a year on a passport, and thereafter up to three years with a Certificate of Exemption from the Dictation Test. While the law was fairly clear, its application was often complicated and the language tests often not applied, allowing many Japanese to have residence in Australia with their families.⁶ To put this in perspective, there were a total of 3,211 Japanese admitted to Australia during the period 1903 to 1909. During that period, only one Japanese was required to undergo the language test, and they passed.⁷

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 was imposed on Australia, but it was accepted as the only viable guarantee of Australian security. Nevertheless, attitudes towards the alliance reflected the interplay of race, nation and empire that characterised how Australia viewed its place in the world over the period the alliance was in effect. This argument is presented in three main sections. The first examines the period from the formation of the alliance in 1902 through its renewal in 1905 and 1911. These events will be viewed in the light of changing attitudes in Australia to the country’s defence and the perceived threat from Japan. The second section looks at the alliance in action, with an investigation of Australian attitudes towards Japanese involvement in the First World War, particularly attitudes to Japan’s occupation of the former German territories in the Pacific. The last section traces Australia’s conflicted attitudes towards the future of the alliance in the context of the post-war peace settlement.

Formation and renewal of the alliance: 1902 to 1914

An article in the Melbourne newspaper, *The Argus*, on 14 February 1902 noted that the “treaty of alliance concluded by Great Britain and Japan has everywhere come as a surprise.”⁸ This was certainly the case in Australia, whose government, like the other dominions, was not consulted in the negotiations leading to the conclusion of the alliance. Nevertheless, it was

³ Neville K. Meaney, *Towards a new vision: Australia and Japan through 100 years*, Kangaroo Press, East Roseville, 1999, pp. 17–18.

⁴ Meaney, *Towards a new vision*, Kangaroo Press, East Roseville, 1999, p. 18.

⁵ Cited in Meaney, *Towards a new vision*, Kangaroo Press, East Roseville, 1999, p. 18.

⁶ Pamela Oliver, *Raid on Australia: 1942 and Japan’s plans for Australia*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2010, pp. 62–64.

⁷ G.H. Knibbs, *Official yearbook of the Commonwealth of Australia, containing authoritative statistics for the period 1901–1909 and corrected statistics for the period 1788–1900: No. 3*, Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Melbourne, 1910, pp. 1103–4.

⁸ “England and Japan: the treaty of alliance”, *Argus*, 14 February 1902.

widely accepted in Australia and interpreted as increasing British prestige, protecting British commercial interests, and as a counter to Russian power in the Pacific.⁹ On hearing the news from London in 1902, Prime Minister Edmund Barton noted of the treaty that “there is no risk for any feeling of unrest on the part of Australians”, as it “does not increase or diminish the risk of ruptures with foreign powers’.¹⁰ Others saw commercial benefit for Australia, with Japanese naval power protecting Australian commerce in the region.¹¹

Nevertheless, the tone of Barton’s comments to the press reflected the main issue of concern for Australia in the alliance – the potential impact of the treaty on the Immigration Restriction Act, and the subsequent threat to the dominance of the British race in the country. Barton expressed the hope that the alliance would have little impact on either Japanese attitudes to Australia or on Australian immigration laws.¹² His concern, nevertheless, reflected the importance to Australia at that time of the purity of race and nation.

In an attempt to lessen the potential impact of the immigration and race question on Australia–Japan relations, and potentially the wider alliance and imperial policy, the first General Officer Commanding (GOC) the Australian military forces, Major General Sir Edward Hutton, sought assistance from the British ambassador in Tokyo and the Australian Governor General for a visit to Australia of the Japanese naval training squadron. Japanese naval vessels had visited Australian ports before – the first being the visit by *Tsukuba* in 1878¹³ – but the visit that was organised for May 1903 was the first time a Japanese admiral had flown his flag in Australian waters with a modern squadron. Commanded by Vice Admiral Kamimura Hikonojō, and comprising *Hashidate*, *Itsukushima*, and *Matsushima*, the squadron was treated to a 21-gun salute on entering Sydney Harbour, followed by formal calls and return calls paid between the Japanese officials and the Australian Governor General, State Governor, NSW Premier and other dignitaries.¹⁴

Such visits continued over subsequent years with great enthusiasm and interest from Australians, judging by the large crowds of spectators and official receptions at each port of call. Issues of race were, however, never far from the surface. The *Sydney Mail* newspaper noted of the review at Centennial Park in 1903 that “but for the darkness of their complexions ... in their alertness and discipline, the Japanese bluejackets were almost identical with our own naval representatives”. This was seen as a “tacit compliment” to the rising power of the Japanese navy by the newspaper, but was an explicit reminder to readers, if was required, of the racial difference between Australians and the Japanese.¹⁵

This underlying attitude to the new alliance partner was manifest in other ways.

⁹ Millar, *Australia in peace and war*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1978, pp. 91–94.

¹⁰ “Statement by Mr Barton: the treaty and ‘White Australia’”, *Argus*, 14 February 1902.

¹¹ For example, as cited in: “The Anglo-Japanese Alliance”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 February 1902.

¹² “Statement by Mr Barton: the treaty and ‘White Australia’”, *Argus*, 14 February 1902.

¹³ Tim Gellel, “Unlikely partners: the destruction of Emden and the paradox of Japanese naval cooperation with Australia during World War I,” in Stevens, David (ed), *Naval networks: the dominance of communications in maritime operations: 2007 King-Hall Naval History Conference proceedings*, Sea Power Centre - Australia, Canberra, 2012, p. 310.

¹⁴ “The Japanese Squadron in Sydney”, *Sydney Mail and NSW Advertiser*, 10 June 1903.

¹⁵ “The review”, *Sydney Mail and NSW Advertiser*, 10 June 1903.

In December 1903, the British War Office wrote to the Australian GOC Hutton asking if up to 4,000 mounted Australian troops might be available to fight with the Japanese should growing tensions with Russia lead to war. Hutton replied that while a force could be found for their alliance partner, he believed such a deployment would gain the support of the Australian Government and wider population only if the “general interests of the Empire” were threatened.¹⁶ In any case, the Australian *Defence Act* of 1903 precluded the deployment of Australia’s military outside of Australia at that time.

Australia’s attitude to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance at the time of its renewal in 1905 was influenced by several international developments. Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 – without the assistance of Australian mounted infantry – gave rise to fears of Japan as the undisputed military power in the region. Further, the concentration of British naval power in European waters from 1905 to counter fears of German ship-building led to concerns of isolation in Australia, despite the continuing assurances of security provided for by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.¹⁷ Allan McLean, then Minister for Customs in the Reid–McLean coalition government, noted that while Japan was presently “friendly with Great Britain ... such conditions may not always continue, and we must be prepared for what may happen.”¹⁸

Alfred Deakin, then in opposition but who had previously been prime minister, sought to make such preparations. In an interview for the Melbourne *Herald* in June 1905, Deakin noted that Australia’s present vulnerabilities, owing to the changing world situation, required Australian politicians to “review the whole situation” with regards to defence. Though stopping short of calling for a ship-building programme, owing to the cost and Australia’s inability to “emulate the marvellous cheapness with which the Japanese have accomplished their military and naval work” – another thinly-disguised racial slur – Deakin called for a full review and frank discussion of the defence question.¹⁹

Deakin took his plans for the defence question to the Imperial Conference in 1907 as Prime Minister, and in December that year, he made a major statement in Parliament announcing a new independent national defence strategy. This included cancelling the naval agreement with Britain (where from 1902 Australia had paid £200,000 annually to fund a squadron for the defence of Australia), building up an Australian navy, introducing a compulsory military training scheme, and establishing a defence industry to ensure self-sufficiency in material.²⁰

Not everyone welcomed Deakin’s proposed plans for a shake up of Australia’s defence posture. An editorial in the Brisbane *Telegraph* noted that: “when we imply danger, we must look for the enemy”, but “at present our external enemies exist only in imagination”.²¹

¹⁶ John Leonard Mordike, “*We should do this thing quietly*”: *Japan and the great deception in Australian defense policy 1911-1914*, RAAF Air Power Studies Centre, Fairbairn, 2002, p. 8.

¹⁷ Meaney, *The search for security in the Pacific, 1901-14*, vol. 1, A history of Australian defence and foreign policy 1901-23, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1976, pp. 124–25.

¹⁸ “The menace of Japan”, *Register* (Adelaide), 14 June 1905.

¹⁹ Cited in “The defence of Australia: important statement by Mr Deakin”, *Daily Telegraph* (Launceston), 15 June 1905.

²⁰ Speech to parliament on 13 December 1907, cited in: Mordike, *We should do this thing quietly*, RAAF Air Power Studies Centre, Fairbairn, 2002, pp. 14–15.

²¹ “Deakin on defence”, *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 14 December 1907.

But Deakin, and many of his contemporaries over this period, in the words of historian Neville Meaney, came “to distrust the comforting assurances of security” coming from the British, and considered that Australia needed, at the least, to have more of a say over imperial policy related to the Pacific or even to develop its own independent strategies to counter increasing fears of some form of attack emanating from Asia.²²

To press his claims, perhaps by showing his fellow Australians the power and prestige of a great fleet, and perhaps also to send a message to London that Australians were feeling neglected, Deakin invited US President Roosevelt’s Great White Fleet to visit Australia during its 1907-09 voyage around the world. The Australian response was unprecedented, with an estimated 500,000 people lining Sydney Harbour to see the entry of the Fleet on 20 August 1908.²³ The enthusiasm of Australians for the visit of the Americans was in many ways similar to that for the visits of the Japanese squadrons, though the crowds in the former were larger, but the tone in speeches and reports was unity of race with the Americans, rather than the patronising attitude that permeated descriptions of the Japanese. The Victorian Governor, for instance, farewelled the Americans with “affection” because of “common ties of blood” with their Anglo-Saxon and Celtic brethren “that cannot be broken”.²⁴

Over subsequent years, Deakin’s plans for an Australian defence force and strategy took form. Compulsory military training was introduced for 12 to 18 year olds, and annual training with citizen forces for 18 to 20 year olds, later expanded for those up to 25 years of age.²⁵ A Royal Military College was established in the capital, Canberra, to provide a professional military officer class to run the expanded army.²⁶ After encouragement from the British Admiralty, Australia also set to work on developing a fleet unit based on a battle-cruiser and three light cruisers, with the associated support, administration and organisation required to maintain the fleet.²⁷ These efforts culminated in the entry into Sydney Harbour of the Australian fleet unit on 4 October 1913, led by the 22,000 ton battle-cruiser HMAS *Australia*, the largest ship to enter the harbour to that time, and followed by the cruisers *Sydney*, *Melbourne*, and *Encounter*, and three torpedo-boat destroyers.²⁸

By this time, Australia increasingly saw Japan as a threat to Australian interests. The alliance provided Britain, as historian Ian Nish put it, “security with economy”, but Australia’s

²² Meaney, *The search for security in the Pacific, 1901-14*, vol. 1, A history of Australian defence and foreign policy 1901-23, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1976, p. 125.

²³ David Stevens, ‘The Great White Fleet’s 1908 visit to Australia’, Navy website <www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/great-white-fleet’s-1908-visit-australia>, viewed 31 July 2016.

²⁴ “End of fleet week”, *Argus*, 5 September 1908.

²⁵ Michael McKernan and Margaret Browne, *Australia, two centuries of war & peace*, Australian War Memorial in association with Allen & Unwin Australia, Canberra, 1988, p. 128.

²⁶ Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, 3rd ed., Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, 2008, p. 79.

²⁷ David Stevens, *In all respects ready: Australia’s Navy in World War One*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2014, pp. 9–11.

²⁸ Stevens, *In all respects ready: Australia’s Navy in World War One*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2014, pp. 5–7.

isolation gave it a very different perspective on this security.²⁹ A review of Australian defences undertaken by Lord Kitchener and released in February 1910 provided the appraisal that Australia might be subject to a large-scale invasion before the Royal Navy could respond, thus justifying the development of local defence to a level to deter such action.³⁰ But in December that year, the Colonial Defence Committee (a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence) produced an official review of Australia's strategic situation, the first since 1906, that tempered the appraisal of Kitchener. The review dismissed France, Germany and the United States as potential aggressors against Australia for lack of capability or motive. With regards to Japan, the Committee considered the presence of the alliance to be a check on any possible Japanese moves on Australia, but noted that even if the alliance were broken and Japan attacked Australia, Japan could only mobilise a limited force prior to the arrival of reinforcements of the Royal Navy.³¹

Such was the strategic context facing Australia as its leaders approached the Imperial Conference of 1911 and discussions regarding the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Britain had determined to renew the alliance, but unlike 1902 and 1905, sought Dominion "approval", albeit in token form, this time around. By way of preparation, a report produced by the Committee of Imperial Defence and distributed prior to the conference sought to educate Australia and New Zealand "to what extent the comparative immunity from the danger of attack at present enjoyed by them is due to the existence of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and our close relations with the United States."³² This argument held sway, and the dominion prime ministers, including Australian Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher, agreed to the ten-year renewal of the alliance in a secret meeting held during the Imperial Conference on 26 May 1911.³³

Despite their "approval" for the ten-year renewal of the alliance, Australia remained convinced of the need to continue to develop its defence forces. During the 26 May meeting, Australian Minister for Defence, George Pearce, noting the high level of anti-Japanese feeling in Australia at the time, opined that Australia would need to begin preparations for defence now (in 1911) in the case the alliance was not renewed in 1921. Prime Minister Fisher spelled out the problem for Australia in a comment to his Canadian counterpart, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, with regard to Canada's proximity to the United States: "You have 100,000,000 of white people there and are in quite close touch with Europe." "Where are we? We are very close to them [Asians] with a great country and a good country not populated very much, and which we want to keep for people of European descent if we can". Fisher outlined that circumstances in the future could not be foreseen, continuing: "and that is the reason why we as a people desiring peace at all costs are preparing in our own way for the defence of the country".³⁴

²⁹ Ian Hill Nish, *Alliance in decline: a study in Anglo-Japanese relations 1908-23*, Athlone press, London, 1972, pp. 45-46.

³⁰ The report of Kitchener's review was released in February 1910.

³¹ Discussed in: Mordike, *"We should do this thing quietly": Japan and the great deception in Australian defense policy 1911-1914*, RAAF Air Power Studies Centre, Fairbairn, 2002, pp. 38-40.

³² Nish, *Alliance in decline*, Athlone press, London, 1972, pp. 60-61.

³³ Nish, *Alliance in decline*, Athlone press, London, 1972, pp. 62-63.

³⁴ Cited in: Mordike, *We should do this thing quietly*, RAAF Air Power Studies Centre, Fairbairn, 2002, p. 60.

Australian agreement for the renewal of the alliance was contingent on the understanding that it did not affect the freedom of Australia to determine its own immigration policy. This was reflected in the public reaction to the news of the renewal in July 1911. “No event could be more welcome”, one news pundit proclaimed, but continued that “hostility to the alliance would almost certainly have arisen had there been the possibility of the national policy [of White Australia] being endangered”.³⁵ Acting Prime Minister Billy Hughes noted that “no single factor in the defence problem, not merely of Australia, but of the Empire, is so significant as the Anglo-Japanese Alliance”. But with regard to reports of concessions to the “status of Japanese subjects throughout the empire”, Hughes noted that on this point there “could be no surrender”.³⁶

For some, like the acting premier of New South Wales, William Holman, the renewal of the alliance “disposed of” the fear of Japanese aggression, which he dismissed as “so much bunkum”.³⁷ But the fear of the “yellow peril” was deeply ingrained in Australian society. This was illustrated starkly in a speech by Prime Minister Fisher the following year, 1912. He claimed Japan was arming and building its military for the future, and that his countrymen must be prepared “to fight for a white Australia”, as “no white man worthy of that name could refrain from defending his country and his womenfolk against the Asiatic.”³⁸

The Alliance in action: 1914 to 1918

Britain’s need to concentrate its naval power in European waters in the years leading up to the outbreak of the First World War led to a reliance on Japan to maintain naval superiority in the Pacific. Despite fears of Japanese expansion, Australia’s development of a nascent naval capability and desires for independent military strategy were nevertheless undertaken within the broad rubric of Imperial strategy. When Britain declared war on Germany, there was no debate among Australian leaders whether or not to ‘join’ the war, as there was no sense of being outside of Empire. Prime Minister Joseph Cook declared on the outbreak of war: “All our resources are in the Empire and for the Empire, and for the preservation and security of the Empire.” Former Prime Minister Andrew Fisher added of the plight of the mother country that: “Australians will stand by our own to help and defend her to our last man and our last shilling.”³⁹

Even so, there was a tension inherent in the reality that Australian security relied on the alliance between Britain and Japan, but that Japanese expansion into the south Pacific was seen to be checked only by Japan’s “good faith” in maintaining that same alliance.⁴⁰ With the outbreak of war, Japanese good faith was displayed by its joining the war on the British side, and Britain soon found itself in need of calling on its alliance partner.

³⁵ “The Anglo-Japanese alliance”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 July 1911.

³⁶ Cited in “Effect on Australia”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 July 1911.

³⁷ “Yellow scare disposed of”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 July 1911.

³⁸ Cited in Mordike, *We should do this thing quietly*, RAAF Air Power Studies Centre, Fairbairn, 2002, pp. 86–87.

³⁹ Both cited in: “Crisis of our fate: Australia’s call”, *Argus* (Melbourne), 3 August 1914.

⁴⁰ Nish, *Alliance in decline: a study in Anglo-Japanese relations 1908-23*, Athlone press, London, 1972, p. 97.

The presence of German ships in the Indian and Pacific Oceans posed a problem to the British owing to their concentration of ships in Europe. The British Foreign Office subsequently approached Japan to help provide a naval escort for convoys of expeditionary forces sent from Australia and New Zealand to Europe. The battle cruiser HIJMS *Ibuki* sailed with the light cruiser HMS *Minataur* to Wellington harbour in New Zealand, and subsequently escorted the New Zealand expeditionary force to Albany in Western Australia. From there, and joined by the Australia light cruisers HMAS *Sydney* and *Melbourne*, *Ibuki* formed part of the escort force for 38 transport ships carrying almost 30,000 Australian and New Zealand troops and 8,000 horses across the Indian Ocean to Aden.⁴¹

Ibuki's role in escorting the first Anzac (Australia and New Zealand Army Corps) convoy to the battlefields of Europe and the Middle East is widely known. A model of the ship was presented to officials of the Australian War Memorial by the Japanese consul in 1925, and it has been displayed almost continuously in the Memorial's galleries ever since.⁴² But over the course of the war, Japanese ships provided other valuable escort and patrolling duties in the waters of Australia and the region, a brief summary of which follows.

After the departure of the first convoy, the cruisers *Chikuma* and *Yahagi* patrolled off northern Queensland in December 1914 and January 1915; the cruiser *Nisshin* visited Rabaul in April 1915; the training ships *Aso* and *Soya* visited Australian ports in May and July 1915; Japanese warships regularly patrolled the Malay Archipelago in cooperation with the British China Squadron during 1915; and the cruisers *Azuma* and *Iwate* visited Australian ports in May and July 1916.⁴³

The reported presence of a German raider in the Atlantic (*Wolf*) in early 1917 and the threat of unrestricted submarine warfare led to the reintroduction of escorts for transport convoys to Europe. At that time (March 1917), *Australia*, *Sydney* and *Brisbane* were in European waters, and HMAS *Psyche* and *Fantome* were in the Dutch East Indies, leaving only *Encounter* and three destroyers patrolling the south-east coast of Australia. The Admiralty subsequently advised the Australian Naval Board that arrangements has been made for Japanese ships to patrol off the coast of Queensland and to once again provide a convoy escort across the Indian Ocean from Fremantle to Colombo. In April 1917, *Chikuma* was deployed for the Fremantle–Colombo route and *Hirado* was deployed to Australia. By May and June 1917, *Izumo*, *Nisshin* and *Kasuga* were escorting cargo ships across the Indian Ocean, and *Hirado* and *Chikuma* remained in the waters of Australia and the south Pacific for the remainder of 1917. By early 1918, the Japanese warships withdrew to the north of the equator, with Australian ships guarding the waters around the continent, but *Yahagi* visited Fremantle again in March, and *Nisshin* patrolled off Fremantle from August to September 1918.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Stevens, *In all respects ready: Australia's Navy in World War One*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2014, p. 72.

⁴² Steven Bullard, "A model gift," *Wartime*, no 41, 2008, pp. 28–31.

⁴³ Arthur W. Jose, *The Royal Australian Navy 1914–1918*, vol. IX, The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1941, p. 340.

⁴⁴ Jose, *The Royal Australian Navy 1914–1918*, vol. IX, The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1941, pp. 336–41.

None of the Japanese warships deployed to the Pacific or Indian Oceans for the defence of Australia during the war were involved in direct actions against the enemy, and the only casualties were the deaths of members of the crew of *Yahagi* from the Spanish Flu.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the presence of the Imperial Japanese Navy contributed to Australian defence in significant ways, by allowing the release of Australian ships to European waters, by providing escort protection for convoys between Australia and Europe, and by providing a psychological boost to the residents of Australia.⁴⁶ In the words of the Australian official history of naval operations: “The most cordial relations prevailed between the visiting Japanese squadrons or ships and the naval authorities in Australia.”⁴⁷

Nevertheless, there were frictions in the relationship, and not all Japanese actions during the war were free of suspicion in Australian eyes. A lack of coordination and communication between the captain of *Ibuki*, Captain Katō Kanji, and the Australian commander of *Melbourne*, Captain Mortimer Silver RN, in the lead up to the destruction of *Emden* in November 1914 during the escort of the first convoy, to take one example, led to characterisations of Captain Katō as impatient and in need of restraint, and also potentially delayed the rescue of sailors from *Emden* after the battle.⁴⁸

Another incident occurred on 20 November 1917, when a shore battery fired a warning round across the bow of *Yahagi* when the ship was entering Fremantle, in Western Australia. The commander of the local naval district claimed *Yahagi* had not flown the prearranged signal flag, and the shot was simply a warning to the pilot. While the incident prompted a full apology from the Australian Governor General, Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, it is hard to imagine the shore battery firing on a British ship in the same way.⁴⁹ The incident did not, however, seem to affect the long-term prospects of friendship that were often in evidence between the visiting ships and Australians. During a visit to Sydney the following October, for example, *Yahagi*'s captain entertained Australian dignitaries on the ship, including the NSW Governor, the Premier, the Chief Justice and their wives, providing a display of jujitsu, wrestling and fencing by members of the ship's company.⁵⁰

But perhaps the main point of discontent on Australia's part concerned Japanese occupation of the former German territories in the Pacific. After the outbreak of war, Australian

⁴⁵ Yoichi Hirama, “Japanese naval assistance and its effect on Australian–Japanese alliance,” in O'Brien, Phillips Payson (ed), *The Anglo-Japanese alliance, 1902-1922*, 17, Routledge Curzon, London and New York, 2004, p. 140.

⁴⁶ Hirama, “Japanese naval assistance and its effect on Australian–Japanese alliance,” in O'Brien, Phillips Payson (ed), *The Anglo-Japanese alliance, 1902-1922*, 17, Routledge Curzon, London and New York, 2004, pp. 144–45.

⁴⁷ Jose, *The Royal Australian Navy 1914–1918*, vol. IX, The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1941, p. 341.

⁴⁸ See a discussion of these issues in Gellel, “Unlikely partners: the destruction of *Emden* and the paradox of Japanese naval cooperation with Australia during World War I,” in Stevens, David (ed), *Naval networks: the dominance of communications in maritime operations: 2007 King-Hall Naval History Conference proceedings*, Sea Power Centre - Australia, Canberra, 2012, pp. 309–29.

⁴⁹ Hirama, “Japanese naval assistance and its effect on Australian–Japanese alliance,” in O'Brien, Phillips Payson (ed), *The Anglo-Japanese alliance, 1902-1922*, 17, Routledge Curzon, London and New York, 2004, p. 147.

⁵⁰ ‘Sydney week by week’, *Table Talk* (Melbourne), 24 October 1918.

and New Zealand naval forces occupied Samoa and German New Guinea in August and September 1914, and Japanese forces occupied the German territories north of the equator in September and October 1914. Japan initially agreed to hand over Yap in the Caroline Islands to Australia, but delays on Australia's part, opposition to the transfer in Tokyo, and the continuing need for assistance from the Japanese led to Britain agreeing that Japan retain possession of the former German territories up to the end of the war.⁵¹ By early 1917, Britain agreed to support Japan's claim for permanent possession of the islands after the war, with agreement from Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes.⁵²

Various attempts by the Australian government to gather intelligence on Japanese intentions during the war were a further indication of the general distrust of Japan in official circles. In 1915, for instance, the government asked the British Ambassador in Tokyo and the NSW Trade Commissioner in Kobe to send information related to Japan's attitude towards Australia and the Pacific.⁵³ Australia's newly formed intelligence agencies were also concerned about Japanese nationals spying in Australia. The Special Intelligence Bureau, founded in 1915 and headed by the Secretary to the Australian Governor General in Melbourne, George Steward, held "grave concern" over reports of "swarms of Japanese" entering the country during the war, but at that time there were no intelligence officers in the country who could speak Japanese.⁵⁴

The Defence Department subsequently sponsored James Murdoch, a British born academic who had taught for many years in Japan, to a position at Sydney University. A condition of Murdoch's appointment was that he also teach the Japanese language to Australian Army officers at Duntroon military college, that he travel regularly to Japan to gather information on current conditions, and that he be available to translate intercepted Japanese documents.⁵⁵ Ironically, the appointment of Murdoch at Sydney University was interpreted by the Japanese Consul-General as a sign of the good and friendly relations between Australia and Japan, and not seen overtly as the response to a threat.⁵⁶

Australia's Director of Military Intelligence, E.L. Piesse, also produced several reports in the latter part of the war warning of Japanese expansionism and future pressures on Australian immigration policies.⁵⁷ This view was supported by several wartime reports from Australia's Army and Navy that reflected fears of potential Japanese expansionism. Both services emphasised the importance of Australia maintaining control over the former German

⁵¹ Henry Frei, *Japan's southward advance and Australia: from the sixteenth century to World War II*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1991, pp. 96–98; and Neville K. Meaney, *Australia and world crisis, 1914–1923*, vol. 2, A history of Australian defence and foreign policy, 1901–23, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1976, pp. 64–75.

⁵² Nish, *Alliance in decline: a study in Anglo-Japanese relations 1908–23*, Athlone press, London, 1972, p. 207.

⁵³ Neville K. Meaney, *Fears and Phobias*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1996, p. 7.

⁵⁴ D. M. Horner, *The spy catchers*, vol. I, The Official History of ASIO, 1949–1963, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2014, p. 15.

⁵⁵ Meaney, *Fears and Phobias*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1996, pp. 7–8.

⁵⁶ See comments in: 'Japanese: university class', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 July 1917.

⁵⁷ Neville K. Meaney, "E.L. Piesse and the problem of Japan," in Bridge, Carl, and Attard, Bernard (eds), *Between empire and nation: Australia's external relations from Federation to the Second World War*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2000, pp. 76–77.

territories of the South Pacific, with the Navy also pressing Prime Minister Hughes to assert a claim over the German islands to the north of the equator then held by Japan.⁵⁸

Overall, there was a mixed expression of support for Japan in Australia during the First World War. In the pre-war period, a commonly heard voice of intolerance claimed the alliance would provide Japan a safeguard to build its strength and reorganise, enabling the country to bide its time to “rise against the West”.⁵⁹ The occupation of the German territories north of the equator, pressure by Japan for Australia to adhere to the Anglo-Japan commercial agreement, and its demands on China during the war were interpreted by many as a realisation of these fears.⁶⁰ Others railed against such “propaganda”, noting that the “mischief” created by frequent criticisms of Japan in the press led to an “atmosphere of suspicion”, and that: “It is only fair that Japan should be judged by her actions ... if we do that, we see that the yellow peril is only a nightmare.”⁶¹ This conciliatory attitude was supported by John Gibbs, managing director at the outbreak of war of the Merchants and Traders’ Association, who while previously sharing the popular notion that the yellow peril was real, was convinced after a tour of the East that “it was quite imaginary”.⁶²

Conflicted attitudes: 1918 to 1923

In the aftermath of the First World War, Australian attention focussed on these fears of Japan. Prime Minister Hughes in 1919 said: ‘Whatever else the people of Australia differed on, they were united on two things: firstly, their attitude towards Japan and the White Australia policy and secondly, the retention of the Pacific islands that they had seized from the Germans’.⁶³ These two points became key issues in official Australian attitudes in the post war period and impacted on how Australia positioned itself with regard to debates over the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance.

Hughes took his particular prejudices to the Paris peace negotiations, initially intimating a desire to renege on the 1917 agreement for Australia to support Japan’s claims for the northern German territories. He was convinced by Lloyd George to back down and honour the commitment, and thereafter pressed for outright annexation of the islands to the south of the equator, but this would open up a similar claim for Japan. The compromise of declaring the islands on both sides of the equator as C-class mandates under the ultimate authority of the League of Nations removed the possibility of fortifications for either mandatory power, but allowed each to retain control over commerce, and importantly for Australia would extend its policy of restrictive immigration north to the equator.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Meaney, *Fears and Phobias*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1996, p. 8.

⁵⁹ See, for example: Maj H.P. Young, “The yellow peril”, *Narrogin Observer and Williams District Representative* (Western Australia), 11 January 1913.

⁶⁰ See, for example: Meaney, *Fears and Phobias*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1996, p. 7.

⁶¹ ‘The yellow peril’, *Benalla Standard* (Victoria), 9 August 1918.

⁶² ‘Is the yellow peril imaginary?’, *Tweed Daily* (Murwillumbah), 13 June 1914.

⁶³ Cited in: Meaney, *Australia and world crisis, 1914–1923*, vol. 2, A history of Australian defence and foreign policy, 1901-23, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1976, p. 317.

⁶⁴ Nish, *Alliance in decline: a study in Anglo-Japanese relations 1908-23*, Athlone press, London, 1972, pp. 258–59, 267–69.

The issue of racial equality came to the fore during the peace conference. Hughes famously was one of the most strident opponents of Japan's efforts to include a statement of the principle of equality of nations in the preamble of the League of Nations.⁶⁵ This lay at the heart of the matter for Hughes, who saw any declaration of equality of races, even if the word race was not mentioned, as an attack on the foundations of Australian freedom. For him, victory over the question of racial equality at the conference represented an affirmation by the international community of the principle of White Australia – in short, the principle that “five millions of people should be given the right to hold a country capable of settling a hundred million”.⁶⁶ In a speech on returning to Australia, he spontaneously declared to a noisy and appreciative audience that he had returned to find the country “still a free Australia – a White Australia”, and that “those islands necessary to our national existence are yours”.⁶⁷ The Federal Treasurer, William Watt, elevated the deeds of the Prime Minister in obtaining “acceptance of the doctrine of White Australia” at the conference, and that “Australia would always look with honour and gratitude to her soldiers and her representatives at the close of the war at Versailles.”⁶⁸

Australia's defence strategies in the immediate post-war period also focussed on Japan as the remaining threat to Australian security. Lord Jellicoe, after his tour of imperial naval defences in 1919 and 1920, reported to the Australian government that Japan was “the nation with which trouble might conceivably arise in the future”⁶⁹ and recommended the building of a Pacific fleet based at Singapore, with costs shared between Britain, Australia and New Zealand.⁷⁰ This proposal was disowned by the Admiralty, but Prime Minister Hughes was initially inclined to accept Jellicoe's advice to strengthen the Australian navy. Such a move, however, would garner little support with the Australian public, as the long period of war, the losses suffered, and the general revulsion of war in the post-war period led to little wider enthusiasm for an increase in defence spending.⁷¹ It was noted that the attitude of Hughes to the Anglo-Japanese alliance at that time was “naturally very cool”, and “the great services rendered by the Japanese navy” during the war were “almost forgotten”.⁷²

This position of Hughes naturally met with a deal of opposition and criticism in Japan, with the Japanese foreign minister famously referring to Hughes as a “peasant”.⁷³ During the peace negotiations, a growing awareness within Australia of the level of Japanese opposition led to several conciliatory recommendations designed to tone down Australia's immigration policies, but they were not adopted. E.L. Piesse, the wartime Director of Military Intelligence,

⁶⁵ Meaney, *Australia and world crisis, 1914–1923*, vol. 2, A history of Australian defence and foreign policy, 1901–23, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1976, pp. 363–79.

⁶⁶ “Mr Hughes: trans-Australian journey”, *Age*, 27 August 1919.

⁶⁷ Cited in: “Mr Hughes responds”, *Daily News* (Perth), 23 August 1919.

⁶⁸ “Mr Hughes: trans-Australian journey”, *Age*, 27 August 1919.

⁶⁹ Nish, *Alliance in decline*, Athlone press, London, 1972, p. 285.

⁷⁰ John McCarthy, *Australia and imperial defence, 1918–39: a study in air and sea power*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Queensland, 1976, p. 8.

⁷¹ Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, 3rd ed., Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, 2008, p. 123.

⁷² Memo, E.L. Piesse, ‘Mr Hughes's speeches on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance – Japanese press comments, May and June, 1921’, 1 August 1921, NAA: A981, JAP96, pp. 26–31.

⁷³ Cited in: Nish, *Alliance in decline*, Athlone press, London, 1972, p. 271.

was the author of several of the proposals, but he viewed the outcome in very different terms to the triumphal declarations of Hughes and Watt cited above. Piesse considered Hughes to have been the chief factor that had inflamed Japan behind militarist and imperialist elements intent on expansion. He gloomily summed up the situation: “I withdraw all my optimism about our future relations with Japan”.⁷⁴

Piesse subsequently argued for the establishment of an office to gather and analyse independent information and intelligence regarding the affairs of Japan and other countries in the Far East and the Pacific. The Australian Cabinet subsequently appointed Piesse in May 1919 as Director of the Pacific Branch within the Prime Minister’s Department, the first precursor of an independent Australian foreign affairs department. Piesse’s first major report was delivered to government after an extensive fact-finding tour of the region from October 1919 to March 1920, which included five weeks in Japan. In a remarkable turnabout, Piesse concluded that a thorough examination of the evidence and discussions with well informed people revealed that Japan had no designs on Australia, and that there was absolutely no justification for maintaining any alarm with regard to Japan.⁷⁵

Piesse, not surprisingly, subsequently fell out of favour with Hughes, as the former’s new views did not sit well with the Prime Minister. This was exacerbated by several papers prepared by Piesse at the end of 1920 for the Australian delegation to the first meeting of the League of Nations Assembly, in which he proposed an abandonment of key elements of the White Australia policy. Hughes’s reaction was to ignore the papers and effectively cut off Piesse from public debate.⁷⁶ This was clearly evident in the priorities of Australia’s delegate to the League, Senator E.D. Millen, who declared prior to leaving that: ‘The White Australia policy is as vital and as essential as the Monroe Doctrine is to the United States or Freedom of the Seas to Great Britain. I will endeavour to maintain the stand taken by Mr Hughes at Versailles. We must fill Australia with white men.’⁷⁷

Given this environment, it was not surprising that Britain and Japan felt that Australia would oppose the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, just as they had thought Australia would oppose its renewal in 1911.⁷⁸ This was exacerbated by speeches from various Australian military leaders and politicians, including Hughes, containing anti-Japanese sentiments that were reported in the Japanese media, and the perception in Japan that the appointment of Lord Jellicoe to the position of New Zealand Governor General meant his proposals for a Pacific fleet to counter Japan would be enacted.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Neville Meaney, “E.L. Piesse and the problem of Japan,” in Bridge, Carl, and Attard, Bernard (eds), *Between empire and nation: Australia’s external relations from Federation to the Second World War*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2000, pp. 79–80.

⁷⁵ Meaney, *Fears and Phobias*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1996, pp. 24–25.

⁷⁶ Meaney, “E.L. Piesse and the problem of Japan,” in Bridge, Carl, and Attard, Bernard (eds), *Between empire and nation: Australia’s external relations from Federation to the Second World War*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2000, pp. 86–87.

⁷⁷ Cited in: Meaney, *Australia and world crisis, 1914–1923*, vol. 2, A history of Australian defence and foreign policy, 1901–23, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1976, p. 474.

⁷⁸ Nish, *Alliance in decline*, Athlone press, London, 1972, p. 324.

⁷⁹ Minute, E.L. Piesse (Director, Pacific Branch) to Secretary, Prime Minister’s Department, ‘The Anglo-Japanese alliance – Japanese comment on the attitude of Australia’, 24 July 1920, NAA: A981, JAP 96.

By early 1921, however, Hughes was preparing to face discussion of the renewal at the upcoming Imperial Conference and made a major statement to parliament on 7 April in support of renewal of the alliance. He set out the argument that Australian freedoms were dependent on British sea power, but that since the war, Britain was not in a position to maintain sufficient naval strength in the region and that the Dominions needed to do their share. If they did not, he argued, the overpopulated peoples of Asia would be attracted to Australia. Hughes therefore supported the renewal of the Alliance because of the danger to Australia if it lapsed. He also referred to complaints in Japan regarding the White Australia policy, explaining that immigration laws did not mean that Australia considered the Japanese to be inferior. The disingenuous analogy he used was: “while we considered them the equal to ourselves, we do not always invite all our friends into our home”.⁸⁰ It is inconceivable that he would have used such an analogy with regard to other Anglo-Saxon races.

Piesse, though increasingly isolated from public policy, considered that increasing defence costs if the alliance was not renewed was the main reason for what he described a “revival of rational policy” by Hughes.⁸¹ Deputy Prime Minister William Watt agreed that the renewal was essential for Australian security, but stated that it could only be achieved through ‘the most tactful handling’ – the implication being that with Hughes at the helm, such an outcome was uncertain at best.⁸² Watt also feared for Australian security if the alliance was not renewed, stating that: “as surely as God made the sun, Japan would then be driven to cement herself with other nations alien or hostile to ourselves”.⁸³

Such qualified support for the renewal was not, however, universal. The All-Australian Congress of Trade Unions, for example, argued against the renewal of the treaty in June 1921. They opposed a purely military and naval treaty in favour of wide-ranging treaties “for the purposes of social, political and economic amenities”.⁸⁴ As they had made clear during the war, the unions had opposed the alliance and claimed that their opposition to immigration was not based on race, but because the Japanese would be willing to work for lower wages and this would undercut the Australian standard of living. As one unionist remarked, “for the loan of a couple of gunboats to convoy the Australian troops to Egypt ... Australia is to sacrifice her only safeguard to the working-class – the White Australia policy”.⁸⁵

The Imperial Conference of 1921 did not come to a resolution regarding the renewal, largely because of the opposing positions of Australia and Canada. The latter were concerned with the impact of a continuation of the alliance on relations with the United States and the right of the dominions to have a say on the matter, while Hughes pressed for continuation owing to the threat to Australia if Japanese expansionist trends were not contained by the

⁸⁰ Speech, W.M. Hughes, *Parliamentary Debates: House of Representatives*, 7 April 1921.

⁸¹ Memo, E.L. Piesse, ‘Mr Hughes’s speeches on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance – Japanese press comments, May and June, 1921’, 1 August 1921, NAA: A981, JAP 96, pp. 26–31.

⁸² ‘Anglo-Japanese Alliance: Mr Hughes as a diplomat’, *Argus*, 8 June 1921.

⁸³ From article in *Argus*, cited in note on file, ‘Mr Watt on Japanese Alliance’, NAA, A981, JAP 96, p. 57.

⁸⁴ ‘Anglo-Japanese Treaty: the Australian Labor Party’, *Age*, 23 June 1921.

⁸⁵ ‘The Yellow Peril: here they come!’, *Labor Call* (Melbourne), 18 November 1915.

alliance.⁸⁶ Discussion continued through the Washington Disarmament Conference in 1921 and 1922, with the resultant Four Power Treaty effectively ending the Anglo-Japan Alliance. Neither side had consciously “abrogated” the alliance, but rather both sides prioritised the disarmament deal over the alliance, allowing it, in the words of Ian Nish, to “almost slip away unnoticed”.⁸⁷

The Four Power Treaty effectively provided Australia the assurances that Hughes had sought from the renewal of the alliance.⁸⁸ After ratification, Hughes praised his defence minister, George Pearce, who had represented Australia at the Washington discussions, and declared that the treaty had replaced the Anglo-Japanese Alliance to ‘establish equilibrium in the Pacific’ and was ‘an end to naval rivalry for ever’.⁸⁹ E.L. Piesse, who had accompanied Pearce to Washington, felt ‘reassured’ by the treaty. He subsequently proposed an end to the close study of Japan and resigned from his government position.⁹⁰ Australia’s defence budgets were also substantially reduced in line with popular opinion and the assurances of peace in the Pacific that were provided by the Washington treaties.

Perhaps the most visible symbol of these strategic assurances was the fate of HMAS *Australia*, which had entered Sydney harbour in 1913 as the flagship of the new fleet unit and the pride of the Australian Navy. Placed in reserve as a training ship after the war in 1921, the ship was scuttled off Sydney in April 1924 in order to comply with the terms of the Washington Naval Treaty.

Conclusion

Australia supported and benefited from the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, but official and public attitudes to it were coloured by issues of race and immigration. Australia became a newly federated nation just before the alliance came into being, and the period in which the alliance was in force coincided with the first decades of the new Commonwealth. During this period, Australia wrestled with issues of defence and security as an independent nation within Empire, compounded by the view of its leaders that Australia was an isolated British outpost surrounded and outnumbered by peoples of Asia. The notion that Australian survival depended on maintaining strict control over immigration became deeply ingrained in the Australian psyche, and was seen as fundamental to Australian freedoms. The resultant restrictive immigration practices were not unique to Australia, as many nations at that time saw their identity in terms of race, but the manner in which the White Australia policy was trumpeted to the world caused considerable international offence.

⁸⁶ Meaney, *Australia and world crisis, 1914–1923*, vol. 2, A history of Australian defence and foreign policy, 1901–23, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1976, pp. 481–83.

⁸⁷ Nish, *Alliance in decline: a study in Anglo-Japanese relations 1908–23*, Athlone press, London, 1972, pp. 380–81.

⁸⁸ Meaney, *Australia and world crisis, 1914–1923*, vol. 2, A history of Australian defence and foreign policy, 1901–23, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1976, p. 495.

⁸⁹ Cited in: ‘Federal Parliament: Washington Treaties’, *Argus*, 27 July 1922.

⁹⁰ Neville K. Meaney, ‘Piesse, Edmund Leolin (1880–1947)’, *Australian dictionary of biography* (online), <adb.anu.edu.au>, viewed 17 August 2016.

The decline of British naval power in the Pacific, and the corresponding rise of Japanese naval power, led to the situation where Australian security relied on Japan, which was, ironically, the target of much of Australia's "megaphone diplomacy" over immigration and race.⁹¹ The uneasy alliance was accepted, even welcomed by Australian leaders, but only on the condition that Australia retained the White Australia policy, a condition leaders enthusiastically championed at home and abroad. When tested during the First World War, Japanese naval assistance provided added protection for Australian convoys to Europe and extra security in Australian waters, but Australian leaders retained suspicions of Japanese intentions, particularly with regard to China and the former German colonies in the Pacific. That Billy Hughes argued for the continuation of the alliance after the war is on the surface surprising, given his very public attitudes, but it is indicative of the nature of the threat felt by Hughes. An alliance with Japan was seen as the only viable means to hold Japan in check and maintain Australian freedom, so the argument went. Only the Four Power Treaty agreed at Washington put paid to these fears.

Despite the vocal support of the White Australia policy and fears of Japanese expansionism over this period, there were nevertheless significant concessions to rules with regard to immigration and residency of Japanese citizens, and the often-heard fears of Asian hordes sweeping over the continent were rightly dismissed as baseless propaganda by many in Australia over this period. These voices of reason were too often, however, drowned out by politicians, defence officials, and other public figures.

⁹¹ This term was used in the context of Australian diplomacy towards Indonesia in the late 1990s, cited in: Woolcott, Richard, 'Foreign policy priorities for the Howard government's fourth term: Australia, Asia and America in the post-11th September world', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 59, no 2, 2005, pp. 144-45.