

Australia's foreign policy in the aftermath of 9/11

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Australia's diplomatic support for, and military involvement in, the US-led 'war on terror' has unquestionably been the most important and controversial issue in Australian foreign policy in the period following al-Qaeda's traumatic attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC, on 11 September 2001. Since then, John Howard's Coalition government has been grappling not only with the serious threat posed by Islamic terrorism, but also with the manner in which the Bush Administration has framed its response to such a threat. So acutely has the menace of Islamic terrorism been perceived in Australia and so swift and overwhelming has the American response to such a threat been that it is hardly surprising that in the period under review Australian foreign policy has been significantly shaped by the dramatic terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 (henceforth 9/11).

Rather than attempting to provide a comprehensive review of Australian foreign policy, then, this article will specifically examine the Howard government's response to the challenges posed by 9/11. In this context, the article focuses on Australia's involvement in the US-led military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. In doing so, the article discusses Australia's partnership with the United States while also seeking to assess the repercussions of 9/11 on Canberra's relations with its Asian neighbours.

The Howard Government in the wake of 9/11

When the airplanes hijacked by al-Qaeda crashed into the World Trade Centre in the early morning of 11 September, John Howard had just returned to his hotel from a morning walk in central Washington DC where he was on an official visit to the United States.¹ On the previous day, Howard had met President George W. Bush and both leaders had celebrated the 50th anniversary of the ANZUS Treaty.² Following the attack on the Pentagon later in the morning, Howard and his party were evacuated to the Australian Embassy.³ With the American nation in shock, Howard's visit was cut short.⁴ The al-Qaeda attacks made a strong impression on Howard. Admitting his distress, he told to the press in Washington that 'those pictures of the World Trade Center would stay with him for the rest of his life'.⁵ On returning to Australia, he announced his Cabinet's decision to extend the reach of article VI of the ANZUS Treaty to include mainland US territory, thus enabling the application of the treaty to

¹ 'Howard scraps US trip but stranded in Washington', *Australian Associated Press* [henceforth AAP], 14.9.2001.

² 'PM aims to focus Bush on the region', *Age*, 11.9.2001.

³ 'Howard scraps US trip'; 'Stranded PM calls off visit', *Cairns Post*, 13.9.2001.

⁴ 'Howard expects to be flown home today', *Australian Financial Review* [henceforth AFR], 13.9.2001.

⁵ Transcript of the Prime Minister Press Conference, Australian Embassy, Washington DC, 11.9.2001, <<http://www.pm.gov.au/news/interviews/2001/interview1236.htm>>.

the terrorist attacks against the United States.⁶ In doing so, Howard signalled Australia's readiness to offer diplomatic and military support to the United States in time of need.⁷ NATO countries had similarly agreed on 12 September to invoke article 5 of the Washington Treaty and to provide the United States with the military assistance it required after deciding that the terrorist attacks against American targets amounted to an armed attack against the alliance.⁸

Australia's willingness to play an active role in what was soon to become known as the 'war on terror' became evident in October when the Howard government agreed to commit troops to *Enduring Freedom*, the US-led military campaign against the Taliban regime and Osama bin Laden's supporters in Afghanistan.⁹ Having established the role of al-Qaeda in the 9/11 attacks and recognising that these attacks had been made possible by the Taliban decision to allow al-Qaeda to use areas of Afghanistan as a base for its terrorist operations, the Bush Administration decided to attack Afghanistan on 7 October in accordance with article 51 of the United Nations Charter.¹⁰ Sharing the American view that Islamic terrorism posed a serious threat to world security and determined to support the US-led coalition's efforts to undermine al-Qaeda's capacity to do further harm, the Howard government announced on 5 October that it would commit 1,000 troops to Afghanistan, including a 150-strong Special Air Service [SAS] squadron, along with two Boeing 707 air-to-air refuelling aircraft, some P-3C Orion long-range surveillance aircraft and a warship.¹¹ On 16 October, Canberra raised the Australian military commitment to 1,550 troops and added to the task force an amphibious command ship with helicopter support and a frigate escort, a frigate with helicopter capability and four F/A-18 aircraft.¹² The

⁶ See Transcript of the Prime Minister Press Conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 14.9.2001, <<http://www.pm.gov.au/news/speeches/2001/speech1240.htm>>. See also Application of the ANZUS Treaty to the Attacks against the United States, <http://www.pm.gov.au/news/media_releases/2001/media_release1241.htm>. Article V of the ANZUS Treaty states that 'an armed attack in the Pacific area on any of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes'. For the text of the ANZUS Treaty see <http://www.austemb.org/PDFS/Anzus.pdf>.

⁷ Transcript of the Prime Minister Press Conference, 14.9.2001.

⁸ 'NATO to provide military assistance', *Financial Times*, 12.9.2001. See also Statement by the North Atlantic Council, <<http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2001/p01-124e.htm>>.

⁹ Operation *Enduring Freedom* began on 7 October 2001.

¹⁰ Article 51 stipulates that 'nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations ... Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council ... to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security'. See <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/chapter7.htm>.

¹¹ 'SAS troops to head token force', *AFR*, 5.10.2001. 'Australia must be ready for casualties, says Howard', *Western Australian*, 6.10.2001; 'Government says troops awaiting call to join U.S.-led attacks in Afghanistan', *Associated Press* [henceforth AP], 9.10.2001.

¹² 'Force Deployment', Media Release, 17.10.2001, <http://www.pm.gov.au/news/media_releases/2001/media_release1342.htm>; 'US troops on the move: Australian SAS poised for battle', *Australian*, 18.10.2001.

commitment enjoyed bipartisan support and was broadly welcomed by a large majority of Australians, according to an *Adelaide Advertiser* poll in early October.¹³

Yet, the Howard government's decision to join *Enduring Freedom* did not escape censure. In the months following the US-led attack on Afghanistan, a number of academic commentators criticised what they regarded as Canberra's misguided and excessive alignment with Washington in the war on terror. Tony Kevin, a former Australian diplomat, was stinging in his condemnation of Howard's readiness to 'yoke the ANZUS treaty so closely to the chariot of Bush's promised war on terror' and to sign up to 'the bombastic excesses of the war on terror'.¹⁴ In surmising that 'the American-led destruction of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was a first step in a new world in which the United States would act as global sheriff, if not emperor', M.C. Ricklefs claimed that 'Canberra was shifting in the same direction, ready to act as deputy'.¹⁵ For his part, Mark Beeson questioned whether Australia's national security was directly at stake in Afghanistan and wondered whether Canberra's 'continuing and unswerving loyalty to the US' was still in Australia's best interest. He cast doubts on the appropriateness of the American response to post-9/11 terrorist threats and suggested that, while unlikely to pay political and economic dividends in Washington, the Howard government's 'automatic and uncritical' support for the United States would only risk jeopardising Australia's long-term security as well as the country's engagement with the Asian region.¹⁶ Alison Broinowski, another former Australian diplomat, held similar views but was more extreme in her criticism. She argued that, following its involvement in Afghanistan, 'Australia was widely and correctly perceived in the region to have told the United States that [it] would go with them to war—anywhere'.¹⁷ On the question of Australia's relations with its Asian neighbours, however, it is interesting to note that, as Mark Beeson himself had to concede, far from undermining Australia's engagement with Asia, the US-led campaign in Afghanistan appeared in the short term to have had the effect 'of aligning a number of disparate countries behind it, and at least temporarily nullifying earlier perceptions in the region that Australia was simply an American puppet'.¹⁸ A number of countries in the region offered in fact support to the US-led operations in Afghanistan. South Korea offered field medical support, air and naval logistic support and pledged to share intelligence. Japan deployed four warships from its Maritime Self Defence Forces (MSDF) with the task of providing intelligence-sharing, medical services, transportation, fuel and other supplies (but no weapons and ammunition). India offered operational assistance, including use of its facilities. The Philippines authorised the use of its airspace and

¹³ 'Australian troops to join war on terrorism in mid November', *Agence France-Presse* [henceforth AFP], 17.10.2001; 'Strong support to send troops', *Adelaide Advertiser*, 6.10.2001.

¹⁴ Tony Kevin, 'Foreign Policy', in Robert Manne (ed.), *The Howard Years* (Melbourne: Schwartz Publishing, 2004) p. 306.

¹⁵ M.C. Ricklefs, 'Australia and Indonesia', in *ibid.*, p. 282.

¹⁶ Mark Beeson, 'Issues in Australian Foreign Policy: July to December 2001', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* [henceforth *AJPH*], vol. 48, no.2, 2002, pp. 232-236.

¹⁷ Alison Broinowski, *Howard's War* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2003), p. 36.

¹⁸ Beeson, 'Issues in Australian Foreign Policy', p. 234.

military bases. Thailand and Indonesia promised unspecified help. China agreed to share intelligence with the United States.¹⁹

To prove far more contentious than Australia's involvement in Afghanistan, was the Howard government's response to the Iraq crisis in the period mid-2002 to 2003. As speculation continued to mount throughout 2002 about possible US military action against the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein, the Howard government showed steadfast support for the Bush Administration's policy on Iraq.²⁰ On 16 July 2002 Foreign Minister Alexander Downer warned that 'a policy of appeasement—a policy of just turning our back on Saddam Hussein and saying "it doesn't matter, let's just hope weapons of mass destruction go away"—is a policy for which the international community would ultimately pay a very high price'.²¹ In September Howard made a similar point by arguing that 'we cannot leave the problem of Iraq with her weapons of mass destruction unaddressed'. 'We are dealing', he added, 'with a deadly serious challenge'.²² In accordance with these pronouncements, the Howard government welcomed resolution 1441 of the United Nations Security Council calling on Saddam Hussein to allow unconditional weapons inspections, but avoided indicating what Australia would do if the United States in the end decided to act unilaterally.²³ In late November, however, Howard indicated that Australian defence personnel had 'had contingency discussions with the United States as a matter of prudent military planning' and that, during these talks, the issue of a possible Australian military contribution to the Iraq theatre had been raised.²⁴ While Howard's remarks did not amount to an unconditional endorsement of Washington's Iraq policy, it was nonetheless evident that Australia was prepared to consider sympathetically any American request for military assistance. Equally evident was the fact that, given the Bush Administration's unbending resolve to hold Saddam to account, and given the great importance attached by Canberra to close Australian-US relations, the Australian government would find it increasingly difficult to distance itself from Washington should the latter embark on a course of action not consistent with Australia's foreign policy aims.

In these circumstances, domestic uneasiness about Howard's support for US policy towards Iraq was hardly surprising. Australians had hitherto remained unconvinced

¹⁹ For a breakdown of foreign military and intelligence contribution to Afghanistan see David Gerleman and Steven Hildreth, *Operation Enduring Freedom: Foreign Pledges of Military and Intelligence Support*, see Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report, 17.10.2001, <<http://pc.state.gov/documents/organization/6207.pdf>>.

²⁰ For a detailed account of the Bush Administration's Iraq policy see Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

²¹ Transcript of Interview of Minister for Foreign Affairs Alexander Downer, Melbourne, 16.7.2002, <http://www.dfat.gov.au/media/transcripts/2002/020716_fa_iraq.html>.

²² Transcript of Radio Interview of Prime Minister John Howard with Matt Peacock, ABC, 26.9.2002, <<http://www.pm.gov.au/news/interviews/2002/interview1880.htm>>.

²³ Meg Gurry, 'Issues in Australian Foreign Policy: July to December 2002', *AJPH*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2003, pp. 228 and 230.

²⁴ Address to the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia, Sydney 20.11.2002, <<http://www.pm.gov.au/news/speeches/2002/speech1996.htm>>.

that a strong case for war against Iraq existed.²⁵ Polls in September had indicated that a majority of Australians opposed Australian participation in a unilateral US attack against Iraq.²⁶ Also in September, a number of eminent personalities, including former prime ministers Gough Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser and Bob Hawke, former Governor-General Bill Hayden and former Liberal Party leader John Hewson had urged the government not to back a US military intervention in Iraq without an explicit UN mandate.²⁷ Taking heed of the public's mood, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) refused to express unqualified support for the US stance on Iraq. Mark Latham, a prominent ALP front-bencher and future party leader, went so far as to describe Howard as an American 'arse-licker'.²⁸

Yet, in the charged atmosphere of late 2002 two important points were often overlooked by those who criticised the Howard government's policy towards the United States. First, that Australia's alignment with the United States, far from being uncritical and subservient, has traditionally been based on a rational assessment of the advantages that the bilateral relationship brings to Australia. Second, that together with benefits the maintenance of strong and close relations with Washington also carries costs. In regard to the former point, it is worth remembering that given its geo-strategic position at the periphery of the Asian region, 'Australia has a vested interest in secure sea and air lanes, which requires relative region-wide security'.²⁹ Yet, with its small population, Australia has never been able to afford armed forces of a sufficient size to enable the country to make a significant contribution to its territorial security, let alone regional security, on its own. In addition, it has traditionally been unwilling to run large defence budgets. In 2002 Australia devoted only about 2% of its GDP to defence.³⁰ Hence, Australia's close alliance with the United States has given Australia a sense of security in a largely insecure part of the world and has accorded Canberra considerable access to US intelligence and technology, ultimately enabling the country to project military power beyond its shores.³¹ In regard to the latter point, it should be noted that, in the light of the heightened sense of vulnerability and insecurity with which both the Bush Administration and the American people have tended to view the world since 9/11, affirmations of friendship on the part of US allies would not be taken at face value in Washington. They would have to be demonstr-

²⁵ 'PM yet to convince us that fighting Iraq is right', *Age*, 18.9.2002; 'UN ready to issue Iraq ultimatum', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 16.9.2002; 'Benefit of an olive branch outweigh war', *Sunday Tasmanian*, 22.09.2002.

²⁶ Australians, however, were willing to support intervention in Iraq under the aegis of the United Nations. See Daniel Flitton, 'Perspectives on Australian Foreign Policy, 2002', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* [henceforth AJIA], vol. 57, no. 1, 2003, p. 45. See also 'PM yet to convince us that fighting Iraq is right'.

²⁷ Gurry, 'Issues in Australian Foreign Policy', p. 231.

²⁸ Flitton, 'Perspectives on Australian Foreign Policy', p. 46.

²⁹ International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), *Strategic Survey 2003-04: An Evaluation and Forecast in World Affairs* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 280.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

³¹ For a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of Australia-US alliance see William Tow, 'Deputy Sheriff or Independent Ally? Evolving Australian-American Ties in an Ambiguous World', *Pacific Review*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2004, pp. 275-277.

ated.³² Unsurprisingly, therefore, the US Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, made it clear in mid-December 2002 that the American Administration expected Australia to make a contribution to any given US military effort against Iraq.³³

In the closing months of 2002, as they were pondering the merits of the Australia-US alliance and contemplating the possibility of a US-military strike against Iraq, Australians were shocked by the news that 88 Australian holiday-makers had been killed, and many more badly injured, in a bomb blast on the Indonesian island of Bali.³⁴ The terrorist attack—for which Jemaah Islamiah, a radical Islamic terrorist group with alleged links to al-Qaeda, was held responsible—awakened Australians to the fact that they, too, were exposed to the threat of terrorism. Clearly referring to such a threat, Howard in early December told the Channel Nine television network that he would be prepared to consider a pre-emptive strike against a terrorist group operating in a neighbouring country should the latter plan an attack against Australia.³⁵ Howard's clumsy remarks—he failed, in fact, to make it clear that any pre-emptive action against any terrorist threats to Australian security arising from the region could only be undertaken in cooperation with and, with the consent of, Australia's neighbours—drew considerable criticism from within the region.³⁶ Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahatir Mohammed, described Howard's attitude as 'arrogant' and condemned the Australian Prime Minister for behaving like 'a white-man sheriff in some black country'.³⁷ The Malaysian government also threatened to rescind its newly signed anti-terrorism agreement with Australia.³⁸ For its part, the Filipino government warned that it might break off negotiations on a new anti-terrorism agreement with Australia.³⁹ In Thailand, while Prime Minister Taksin Shinawatra appeared to be unconcerned by Howard remarks, Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai reminded the Australian government that in the fight against international terrorism cooperation needed to be based on respect for international law.⁴⁰ To dispel Asian misapprehensions, Foreign Minister Downer was forced to call a meeting of ASEAN ambassadors in Canberra in which he reassured them that Howard's comments were intended for a domestic audience and that Australia had no plans to launch pre-emptive strikes against regional countries.⁴¹

In Australia, Howard's comments were taken as a further example of the Coalition government's inability to engage effectively with the Asian region. Since assuming office in 1996 Howard had been frequently criticised for his apparent eagerness to depart from the previous Labour government's policy on enmeshment with Asia in

³² John Keegan, *The Iraq War* (London: Random House, 2004), p. 89.

³³ 'Australia is noncommittal on scope of any role in Iraq', *New York Times*, 14 December 2002.

³⁴ Flitton, 'Perspectives on Australian Foreign Policy', p. 48.

³⁵ Transcript of the Prime Minister Interview with Laurie Oaks, Channel 9, 1.12.2004, <<http://www.pm.gov.au/news/interviews/2002/interview2015.htm>>.

³⁶ 'Howard runs the gauntlet in Asia', *Australian*, 2.12.2002.

³⁷ 'Northern Exposure', *Age*, 7.12.2002.

³⁸ *Ibid.*; 'Downer bid to clam Asia fury', *Age*, 5.12.2002.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ 'Northern Exposure'.

⁴¹ 'Downer bid to clam Asia fury'.

favour of closer ties with North America and Western Europe.⁴² Despite the government's repeated claims that Australia's relations with the Asian region continued to be of primary importance to Australia, perceptions that Howard was intent on shifting Australia's foreign policy away from Asia lingered. These perceptions were inevitably reinforced by Australia's continuing support for Washington's Iraq policy. As the crisis deepened in the early months of 2003 and the Bush Administration appeared increasingly determined to take military action against Iraq, even without a clear UN mandate, the Howard government abandoned its earlier caution and offered military support to the United States and Britain. On 10 January 2003 Howard made it known that 'if Australia were to join some international military operation against Iraq ... the sort of contribution that Australia would make in that event would be broadly comparable to the contribution that we made in Afghanistan quite recently'.⁴³ The Australian contribution, Howard indicated, would include the SAS with support units, naval vessels, some FA-18 fighters and the Orion long-range surveillance aircraft.⁴⁴ On 22 January Australian Defence Minister David Hill confirmed that the Australian government would pre-deploy elements of SAS, the amphibious and support ship *Kanimbla* and an air force reconnaissance group to the Middle Eastern theatre.⁴⁵ In the government's view pre-deployment served the function of not only enabling Australian forces to be fully prepared should Canberra decide to be part of an armed response to the weapons problem from Iraq, but also of putting Saddam Hussein under pressure to comply with UN resolution 1441.⁴⁶

As was to be expected, the Howard government's decision to pre-deploy Australian forces to the Middle East attracted criticism. Critics at home, among which the ALP figured prominently, pointed out that pre-deployment, far from merely prejudging Australia's final position on the Iraq question, would in fact have the effect of drawing Australia into a serious international conflict, the consequences of which were difficult to gauge. Although the government's denials that pre-deployment meant that Australian military forces would automatically become involved in a conflict in Iraq, critics remained unconvinced. They could point to the fact that other US allies, while broadly backing US policy towards Iraq, had hitherto been very careful to avoid indicating what commitment they would make—in the event of a US-led military action in Iraq.⁴⁷ On this point, their fears were well founded. Unhappy at the apparent lack of progress made by the UN inspectors in Iraq and persuaded that Saddam

⁴² See for instance Anthony Milner, 'Balancing "Asia" against Australian values', in James Cotton and John Ravenhill, *The National Interest in a Global Era: Australia in World Affairs 1996-2000* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 44-47.

⁴³ Transcript of the Prime Minister Press Conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 10.1.2003, <<http://www.pm.gov.au/news/interviews/Interview163.html>>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Transcript of a Doorstop Interview with Senator Robert Hill, Commonwealth Parliamentary Offices, Adelaide, 22.1.2003, <<http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/HillTranscriptpl.cfm?CurrentId=2258>>.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ The question of the pre-deployment of Australian Defence Forces (ADF) to the Middle East is fully discussed in Andrew O'Neill, 'Issues in Australian Foreign Policy: January to June 2003', *AJPH*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2003, p. 542.

Hussein was intent on defying the Security Council, the United States and Britain attempted in February and March 2003 to secure a second UN resolution authorising military action against Iraq. However, as it became clear that the resolution would fail to gather enough support, owing to strong objections from France and other members of the UN Security Council, the Bush Administration with the support of the British government on 18 March (Australian time) issued a tough ultimatum to Saddam, demanding he leave Iraq within 48 hours or face an invasion.⁴⁸ On the same day, Howard told the House of Representatives that his government would give a green light to the participation of Australian defence forces in the US-led military campaign (*Operation Iraqi Freedom*) in Iraq. The Australian commitment to the war, he specified, was to be 'limited to the period of the conflict and to those elements already deployed'.⁴⁹ In total, Australia would deploy about 2,000 troops. This decision, which Howard described as 'right' and 'legal', was strongly opposed by the ALP, the Greens and the Democrats.⁵⁰ Labour leader Simon Crean dubbed it as a 'reckless and unnecessary act' on the grounds that Australia's involvement would not only be illegal without a clear UN mandate, but would also increase the risk of terrorist attacks against Australian targets.⁵¹ Public opinion was also at odds with the government decision to commit troops to Iraq. A Newspoll survey revealed that only 22 per cent of Australians supported action while 71 per cent of them remained opposed to an Australian involvement without a clear UN mandate.⁵²

Allied operations in Iraq began on 20 March. Following a swift military campaign, allied forces seized Basra and Baghdad in early April. Tikrit fell on 14 April. With the fall of Saddam's stronghold, the conflict was basically over despite strong pockets of resistance remaining. Australian troops had made a valuable contribution to the successful outcome of allied operations. The SAS had performed important long-range reconnaissance tasks and other duties in western Iraq. Navy divers had undertaken clearance operations in the southern port of Umm Qasr. F/A-18 aircraft had carried out various air support missions for allied ground forces in their advance towards Baghdad.⁵³

Table 1. The Australian military commitment to Iraq

| ARMY | NAVY | AIRFORCE |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| SAS squadron detachment (150 troops) | HMAS <i>Kanimbla</i> | 3 130 Hercules transport aircraft |
| Combat support elements—including a nuclear and chemical defence detachment | HMAS <i>Anzac</i> | 14 F/A-18 aircraft |

⁴⁸ Bush's ultimatum was issued in an address to the nation at 8 pm (US Eastern Standard Time). See <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030317-7.html>>.

⁴⁹ Transcript of the Prime Minister Address to the House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra, 18.3.2003, <<http://www.pm.gov.au/news/speeches/speech78.html>>.

⁵⁰ 'Australia to contribute 2,000 troops', *Financial Times*, 19.3.2003; 'A nation divided as PM commits to war', *Age*, 19.3.2003; 'Parties unites against Howard's "immoral stand"', *Age*, 18.3.2003.

⁵¹ '48 hours to war', *Age*, 19.3.2003.

⁵² 'Australia commits troops to fight in Iraq', *FT.com*, 18.3.2003;

⁵³ O'Neill, 'Issues in Australian Foreign Policy', p. 544; IISS, *Strategic Survey*, p. 279.

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|--|------------------------------|--|
| of specialist troops from the Incident Response Regiment | | |
| A quick reaction force drawn from the 4RAR Commando Unit | HMAS Darwin | 2 P-3C Orion long-range surveillance aircraft |
| | 1 Navy clearance diving team | 3 CH-47 Chinook helicopters Air Forward Command element responsible for coordinating air operations with coalition partners |

Source: 'Australia commits troops to fight in Iraq', *FT.com*, 18.3.2003; Transcript of John Howard address to the House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra, 18.3.2003; 'Australia: Rising regional power or US proxy?', p. 279.

Having defeated Saddam Hussein, the US and Britain took on the complex task of stabilising and rebuilding Iraq. To this end, even prior to the final collapse of the Iraqi regime, Washington and London urged their closest allies to make contributions towards the reconstruction of Iraq. However, contrary to American and British wishes, the Howard government ruled out the possibility of Australia playing a significant role in Iraq's post-war reconstruction and announced in mid-April that it would withdraw half of its 2,000 strong military contingent in Iraq, including the SAS squadron, the 14 F/A-18 aircraft and the warships HMAS Anzac, Kanimbla and Darwin.⁵⁴ In explaining his government's refusal to play a major role in the stabilization of Iraq, Howard emphasized the fact that it would not be feasible for Australia to deploy a large peace-keeping force in Iraq while still carrying out peace-keeping responsibilities in East Timor and Bougainville.⁵⁵ He added:

I am not saying that anything is going to happen in the region that will require a similar contribution, but one never knows and it is one thing to contribute a highly professional niche special capability for an operation in a country like Iraq over a short period of time ... it's another thing to have a very large number of regulars deployed there indefinitely.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ 'Half of Australian troops in Iraq expected to head home from the end of May', *AFP*, 17.4.2003; 'Hill to visit Middle East next week', *AAP*, 18.4.2003. The Australian government decided to leave behind an army commando supported by CH-47 Chinook helicopters, a nuclear and chemical defence detachment of specialist troops, three 130 Hercules transport aircraft, two P-3C Orion aircraft. See 'Australian troop to start coming home', media release, 17.4.2003, <<http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/Hilltpl.cfm?CurrentId=2637>>; 'Forces to stay on', *Western Australian*, 19.4.2003.

⁵⁵ Transcript of the Prime Minister Interview with Paul Murray, Radio 6PR, 17.4.2003, <<http://www.pm.gov.au/news/interviews/Interview312.html>>. See also 'Half of Australian troops in Iraq expected to head home from the end of May', *AFP*, 17.4.2003; 'Hill to visit Middle East next week', *AAP*, 18.4.2003. In April 2003 Australia still deployed 990 personnel, helicopters and a health facility in East Timor as part of the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISSET). In Bougainville, the Australian Defence Forces (ADF) provided support to the United Nations Peace Monitoring Group. Support included 35 ADF personnel and a RAN landing craft supported by a weekly RAAF C-130 air logistic support service and commercial shipping from Townsville. The Peace Monitoring Group in Bougainville ceased operations on 30 June 2003. See Department of Defence, *Annual Report 2002-03*, <http://www.defence.gov.au/budget/02-03/dar/02_02_04adfops.htm>.

⁵⁶ Transcript of the Prime Minister Interview with Paul Murray, Radio 6PR, 17.4.2003.

Howard's remarks could not have been more judicious. With hindsight, Australia's decision to play a minor role in the reconstruction of Iraq was to prove far-sighted not only because of the growing difficulties encountered by the US-led coalition forces in trying to pacify Iraq, but also in the light of the growing anarchy into which the neighbouring Solomon Islands appeared to be sliding. The Howard government was concerned that, while not posing a direct threat to Australia, the country's instability could not only jeopardise Australia's maritime security but also lend momentum to a similar crisis in Papua New Guinea—Australia's closest neighbour.⁵⁷ Also conscious of the potential risk, that following 9/11, terrorist groups could use failing states as recruitment grounds or to plan and stage terrorist attacks, the Howard government decided to act. In concert with Australia's Pacific neighbours and at the invitation of the local government, the Howard government decided in July 2003 to despatch 1,500 troops and a 155-strong police force to restore order in the Pacific country, thereby showing its willingness to fulfil a broad regional security role by bolstering the Solomon Islands.⁵⁸ The operation was widely regarded as a success.⁵⁹ In the first month, nearly 3,000 weapons were seized by the assistance force.⁶⁰ By January 2004, 3,700 weapons had been requisitioned and several criminals had been arrested.⁶¹

Conclusion

In seeking to survey Australian foreign policy in the period following 9/11, this paper has shown how the Howard government reacted to the threat posed by Islamic terrorism and how it dealt with the Bush Administration's response to this threat. There is no doubt that Australia's foreign policy after 9/11 has not only been affected by the serious security implications raised by the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon—in other words, by the chilling prospect of al-Qaeda (or its affiliates) carrying out devastating attacks with weapons of mass destruction—but also by the manner in which Washington has chosen to wage its war on terror. The combination of these factors has had the effect of drawing Australia closer to the United States. The strengthening of Australia-US relations has however attracted strong criticism in Australia. Critics of the Howard government have taken exception to the strong support given to the Bush Administration's war on terror on the ground that the Administration's approach was not only misguided and aggressive, but also liable to draw Australia into dangerous international conflicts. In their view, Australian interests would be best served by a more, not less, independent stance towards the United States. This, of course, is easier said than done. In an international environment in which the United States suddenly feels vulnerable to the threat of terrorism, it would have been difficult, as well as impracticable, for the Howard government to distance itself from Washington unless Canberra was prepared to pay a significant price in terms of alliance politics. Australia, after all, has heavily relied on

⁵⁷ IISS, *Strategic Survey*, p. 282.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*; 'Daniel Flitton, 'Issues in Australian Foreign Policy, July to December 2003', *AJPH*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2004, pp. 229-246.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ IISS, *Strategic Survey*, p. 282.

the American security umbrella since the end of World War II. Yet, the question remains of how the Howard government has perceived the terrorist threat and how it believes the international community should respond to it. In this respect, Australian views have not been dissimilar to those of the Bush Administration. Hence, the argument can be made that Australian interests are best served by closer relations with the United States.

Critics of Australia's deepening alignment with the United States have had a further reason to castigate the Howard government's foreign policy. They have argued that closer relations with Washington have damaged Australia's standing in Asia and have made the country's engagement with the region more difficult to attain. In their view, Australia's 'special relationship' with the United States has sent out the wrong signal that Canberra is not serious about engaging with the region. It has also helped create an image of Australia as a country subservient to American interests. The problem here is that Howard's critics have not only displayed a tendency to look at Asia as virtually a single geographical entity, grossly overlooking the fact that the region consists of an incredibly diverse range of countries. They have also assumed that Australia's close ties with Washington are incompatible with strong and amicable relations with its Asian neighbours. This is a surprising claim to make. Australia is not the only country in the region to have close ties with the United States. Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore have strong links with Washington. Nor is Australia the only country in the region to have supported the American actions in Afghanistan and Iraq. As seen above, Japan, South Korea, India, the Philippines all offered support to the US-led operation in Afghanistan. As for the war in Iraq, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Singapore backed American policy.⁶² Even Malaysia, a country very often critical of Australia's foreign policy, has maintained good relations with Australia despite criticism of Australia's role in Iraq. In July 2004 Malaysia and Australia agreed to preliminary talks on a free trade agreement, having signed an anti-terrorism and intelligence-sharing bilateral agreement in August 2002.⁶³

In conclusion, Canberra's stance on Afghanistan and Iraq does not seem to have damaged Australia's political and economic ties with its neighbours. On the contrary, 'Australia has made important progress in its relations with a number of Asian nations in recent times'.⁶⁴ Apart from the above-mentioned agreements with Malaysia, Australia signed free trade agreements with Singapore (SATA) in July 2003 and Thailand (TAFTA) in July 2004.⁶⁵ In 2004 Australia and Thailand successfully negotiated a treaty-level agreement providing the framework for closer cooperation

⁶² 'Singapore member of "willing coalition"', *Straits Times Interactive* (Singapore), undated, <<http://www.straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/iraqwar/story/0,4395,178373,00.html>>.

⁶³ 'Malaysia signs on free trade', *The Australian*, 27.7.2004; 'Australia and Malaysia sign counterterrorism pact', *AP*, 2.8.2002.

⁶⁴ Brendon O'Connor, 'Perspectives on Australian Foreign Policy', *AJIA*, vol. 58, no. 2, 2004, p. 215.

⁶⁵ On SATA see http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/singapore/singapore_country_brief.html#safta. On TAFTA see <http://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/negotiations/aust-thai/guide.html>.

across a full range of issues, including security.⁶⁶ In July 2003 Australia and Japan concluded the so-called Australia-Japan Trade and Economic Framework with the view to deepening their already close economic ties.⁶⁷ In January 2004 Australia also began talks with China to examine the feasibility of a possible free trade agreement (FTA).⁶⁸ In 2003 Australia signed a memorandum of understanding with the Philippines to combat international terrorism.⁶⁹ Similar agreements have also been signed by Australia with Indonesia, India and Cambodia.⁷⁰ These agreements, far from denoting an alleged reluctance on the part of the Howard government to engage with Asia, have been evidence of Canberra's willingness to deepen its ties with its regional partners. Interestingly, these agreements have also signalled readiness on the part of Australia's neighbours to work more closely with Canberra.

⁶⁶ For the Agreement on Bilateral Cooperation between the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand and the Government of Australia see http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/thailand/thai_bilat_agreement.html.

⁶⁷ For the text of the Australia-Japan Trade and Economic Framework see <http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/japan/trade/framework.html>.

⁶⁸ See 'China talks start well', *Adelaide Advertiser*, 71.1.2004; 'Good start for Australia-China joint study on FTA', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Media Release, 16.1.2004, <http://www.trademinister.gov.au/releases/2004/mvt002_04.html>.

⁶⁹ On this agreement see http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/philippines/philippines_brief.html#rel.

⁷⁰ DFAT, *Transnational Terrorism: the Threat to Australia* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2004), <<http://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/terrorism>>.