

YOUNG AUSTRALIANS in
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



DEFENCE BEYOND THE MILITARY

DEFENSIVE PARTNERSHIPS BASED ON VALUES, NOT GEOGRAPHY

POLICY BRIEF - CONOR MCLAUGHLIN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With Australia's security environment becoming more uncertain and tensions escalating on our doorstep, the current strategic approach to defence through bilateral relationships is becoming obsolete in the 21st century. The South Pacific is starting to acutely experience the effects of climate change, the South China sea is a vacuum for global geopolitical struggle and the Indian Ocean is being reshaped in the wake of Indian economic growth. As both technology and global threats like climate change continue to render geography increasingly irrelevant, the global security threats have left traditional security apparatus, namely the military, in the defensive position.

Australia has also accepted the fast-paced reality of the security environment and the government has considered a new targeted focus on strengthening modes of defensive strategy. The 2016 Defence White Paper captures this by considering the strategic outlook of Australia's security environment to encompass new and increased threats such as cybersecurity, military modernisation, and the rules-based global order. [1]

This policy brief suggests that engaging with security apparatus in a more direct manner can be achieved through existing frameworks and as such, Australia can engage in a more targeted approach on issues of concern:

1. Reforming internal defence structures

Establishment of an inter-agency body to better coordinate national security policy.

2. Reinvigorate CANZUK

A military alliance between Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom in areas of industry and innovation.

3. Establish a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

An informal security dialogue between the United States, India, Japan and Australia in areas of navigational control and climate change.

BACKGROUND

As the Australia-United States Ministerial (AUSMIN) Consultations concluded in Sydney in August 2019, the main topic of concern was the future of the alliance under the Presidency of Donald Trump. [2] Given that the US alliance is the bedrock of Australia's security apparatus, the actions under the current US administration, through negative comments towards multilateral security groupings, has entrenched the perception that Australia should constructively engage with other. The pertinent issue is that bilateral security arrangements do not incorporate the agility that is inherent within a multilateral security grouping. The reality of modern defence planning marked by increasing complexity means that we are often facing an invisible enemy.

Innovative countries such as Japan, South Korea and Germany have shifted their attention to developing an interconnected security agency. Japan, which faces similar conditions to Australia, has engaged with this idea in a prompt manner. [3]

Japan has implemented a coordinated effort in education and industry, and the military has legitimised its strategy as one that embeds national interests within a regional and globalised context.

Recognising that regional challenges will need to engage regional actors and institutions and global challenges will merit a global response, Australia will need to strengthen its self-defence capability, agility and potent future forces to tackle the challenges of the 21st century.

THE PROBLEM

The changing security environment and the emergence of non-traditional security threats has illuminated the fragility and limitations of Australia's existing security arrangements. The 2019 Christchurch Mosque shootings demonstrated that Australasia is not immune to threats facing the rest of the Indo-Pacific. Cyber-attacks on the Australian Department of Defence have further shown the evolving nature of security threats.

Although bilateral security agreements have and continue to provide a foundation of Australia's security apparatus, incorporating multilateral organisations into this will diversify the scope of issues tackled beyond the traditional modes of military action.

Currently, only 0.5 per cent of the Defence budget is spent on innovation programs. [4] This is insufficient in keeping pace with the changing technologies. The rise of the internet age has increased concerns over cybersecurity and non-traditional domains of defence. The complex strategic outlook will force Australia to adopt a stronger defence posture or risk playing catch up. Australia's current security apparatus is in many ways suffering from conditions of administrative bureaucratic inefficiencies and a lack of coordination between government agencies.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Reforming internal defence structures

The Australian Government should seek to reform its security apparatus in the form of an inter-agency council to coordinate the national security policy of Australia. The main function of the council is to advise and assist the Prime Minister on national security and foreign policy. The council should serve as the Government's principal arm in coordinating policies in various government agencies. The purpose of the council is to encompass non-traditional aspects of government agencies into the interrelated nature of security concerns.

Traditionally Australia has witnessed a security focus from the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Home Affairs. By increasing integration processes amongst government agencies, the council would serve to adopt narratives of cyber safety, energy and the treasury into these discussions. Australia is no stranger to security evolution. This change will need to incorporate dynamics of interoperability, with a more coordinated approach on defence. An Australian National Security Council would represent a centralisation of Australia's Security policies under the Prime Minister.

2 **Reinvigorate CANZUK**

The Australian Federal Government should seek to secure a strategic partnership with Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (formally known as CANZUK). CANZUK is a natural evolution of bilateral relations between the member-states, given the histories of the members are intrinsically linked.

Under a CANZUK-style arrangement, the respective Ministries of Defence would continue their normal operations, but expand Armed Forces integration to aim for the most comprehensive conduct of meetings, training regimes, and annual visits by a multilateral organisation.

This integration should primarily be focused on new domains of security, primarily cyber, given the transition to online modes of communication, the vulnerability of vital infrastructure is increasingly at risk.

This should expand to a joint forum for international policymakers and scholars within CANZUK to share information and expertise through research papers, situation reports, and academic publications to be freely distributed amongst the four states.

The consequence of this would be the ambition to create the largest public domain research database on the internet, encompassing global threats to statistical reports, which has already been adopted by New Zealand. [6] Without the integration of research and higher education facilities, understanding new domains of security will be far harder to manage and as such, elements of hawkish behaviour could be utilised to decrease the threats.

3 Establish a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

The Australian Government should seek to establish a formal military alliance with India, Japan, and the United States, also known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Under the Quad, Australia can enhance its support of the Hague Tribunal's decision to declare the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean as international water.

The Quad can complement Australia's participation in CANZUK, as CANZUK pertains to contemporary issues such as cyber security and climate change at the global level, whereas the Quad will focus on maintaining peace and security within the Indo-Pacific region. The Quad has not realised its full potential due to diplomatic concerns as being perceived as anti-China.

The Quad should serve to increase strategic relations concerning freedom of navigation and navigational control. This can be achieved by conducting an annual 'group sail' across the Indo-Pacific to promote the core of the democratic rule of international freedom of navigation.

CONCLUSION

Australia is in a unique position, both geographically and defensively. We attain great strategic importance from our alliance with the United States, our continued status in the South Pacific, and our increasing involvement in Southeast Asia. However, Australia must make a decision as to whether we lead or lose this influence. Currently, Australia is losing to an influx of new challenges that it cannot keep up with, in turn to tackle these challenges head-on, the Australian Government should look towards Japan, South Korea and Germany to emulate the agility and adaption to the security challenges of the 21st century.

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