An Assessment of the Impact of the United States’ Approach to the War on Terror in the Asia-Pacific

David Mulhall

Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies
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Abstract
This paper assesses the impact of what has become known as the ‘Global War on Terror’ in the Asia-Pacific region. The paper assesses how the United States’ approach to the War on Terror has impacted on the Asia-Pacific region in order to determine the security implications this has for Australia over the next decade. It argues that the US is using its current pre-occupation with the War on Terror to gain leverage over countries in the Asia-Pacific in pursuit of its longer-term strategic security objectives. These are not necessarily in concert with the concerns or interests of countries in this region. Australia is thus compelled to balance carefully its support for the War on Terror and broader US strategic agenda, against its other responsibilities as a medium power in the Asia-Pacific region.

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About the author

Colonel David Mulhall serves with the Australian Army. He graduated from the Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies in 2008 with a Graduate Diploma in Strategic Studies. His other academic qualifications include a Master of Engineering, Master of Defence Studies, Graduate Diploma of Transportation Planning & Management and a Bachelor of Professional Studies. His career experience includes command, logistics and personnel appointments. He gained operational experience as the Chief of Plans (Logistics), Multi National Force – Iraq in 2006. Colonel Mulhall was appointed a Member of the Military Division of the Order of Australia in 2007 and was awarded the US Army Bronze Star Medal for his service on Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (Operation CATALYST).
Throughout Asia, the talk is of declining U.S. influence. No one in Asia doubts that the United States is the world’s biggest military power, the world’s biggest economy, and the world’s greatest cultural influence, but it is seen as declining because it is preoccupied elsewhere, has weakened its relationships with key quasi-allies, has lost its image as a partner in nation-building, has tarnished its moral standing by its actions in Iraq, and has allowed its leverage through regional organizations other than the U.S.-Japan alliance to wither.1

Introduction

The epigraph above provides a strong critique of the effect that current United States’ (US) security and diplomatic policies have had in the Asia-Pacific region. Hardening of world opinion against US-led combat operations in Iraq has been central to a general waning of international support for the US. Popular hostility towards the Iraq War only partly explains this downturn. There has been wide criticism that a global war on terrorism is neither intellectually nor politically sustainable, with US counterterrorism policy having ‘drifted off course by pursuing Saddam Hussein and by confusing the war on terror with other priorities such as promoting democracy.’2 This mixing of strategic objectives is consistent with evidence of the US exploiting what is commonly termed the ‘War on Terror’ to pressure key allies and other countries to support broader US strategic objectives, such as the containment of China.

Within the Asia-Pacific region3 the US approach to the War on Terror has polarised debate and created uncertainty as to US strategic intentions. Whereas US power has been critical for stabilising North Asia since the end of the Second World War, with the consequent security and economic benefits for the broader Asia-Pacific region, an inadequate initial response to the Asian financial crisis, prosecution of the Iraq War and reluctance to engage fully in regional multilateral security forums have undermined US standing and influence, especially in South-East Asia. This has highlighted ‘a perception held by many Southeast Asians that the United States is increasingly indifferent to their area of the world, except for counterterrorism,’ while also creating opportunities for China to enhance its ‘geopolitical appeal’ among a number of Asia-Pacific states.4

These issues are vital to Australia as it seeks to balance its commitments to the US alliance with its other responsibilities as a medium power within the Asia-Pacific region. Australia’s view that US hegemony is essential for maintaining the region’s balance of

3 In this paper, the term “Asia-Pacific” applies to the major Asian countries near the Pacific Ocean – including littoral East Asia, North Asia and South-East Asia – the United States of America and Australasia. It is acknowledged that Asia-Pacific can, by some definitions, also include the western coast of the Americas, India, the Russian Federation and Oceania. However, this paper will not specifically examine this impact of the War of Terror within those latter countries or sub-regions.
power is articulated in the *Defence Update 2007* assessment that the US ‘will remain the dominant global economic, technological and military power at least for some decades ... [and] will remain the major shaper of international security, including in the Asia-Pacific.’\(^5\) This paper will assess how the US approach to the War on Terror has impacted on the Asia-Pacific region in order to determine the security implications this has for Australia over the next decade. It will argue that US prosecution of the War on Terror cannot be viewed in isolation, with strong evidence that the US is exploiting the War on Terror to gain leverage over other countries in pursuit of its longer-term strategic security objectives. Australia is thus compelled to carefully balance its support for the War on Terror and broader US strategic agenda, against its other responsibilities as a medium power in the Asia-Pacific region. The paper concludes that Australia must remain closely engaged in issues of strategic importance to the US, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, in order to retain some level of influence over how the US exercises its power into the future.

**Influence of the War on Terror on US Security Policy**

*Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated ... Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.*\(^6\)

President Bush’s declaration of a global war on terrorism in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on US cities on 11 September 2001, and his ultimatum to those suspected of supporting terrorism, has reshaped US national security policy and altered the manner in which the US exercises its power within the international system. So fundamental has been the shift in US security policy that one analyst argued recently that the Bush Administration has ‘profoundly altered American grand strategy, reshuffling the alliance system that had served as the foundation of US foreign policy since 1945 and making the defeat of terrorism the chief object of American power.’\(^7\) This clearly has important ramifications for Australia and the Asia-Pacific region. Before an analysis of these consequences can commence, it is essential to review current US security policy to understand the declared US position.

The *2006 National Strategy for Combating Terrorism (2006 NSCT)* sets the ‘course for

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winning the War on Terror,'8 directly building on the 2006 National Security Strategy (2006 NSS) and previous counterterrorism strategies. The strategy argues that the War on Terror is both a battle of arms and ideas, with the ‘advancement of freedom and human dignity through effective democracy’10 identified as the long-term ideological condition essential for winning the war. Within this context the document attempts to debunk popular notions for the rise in violent extremism, arguing that terrorism is not the inevitable by-product of poverty, a result of hostility to US policy in Iraq, a result of Israeli-Palestinian issues, nor simply a result of efforts to prevent terror attacks.11 President Bush’s provocative statement that there is no distinction between those who commit acts of terror and those nations that support terrorists is reiterated, reinforcing that a core strategy of the US is to reduce the geopolitics of the War on Terror to a simplistic dualism between democratic liberalism and terrorism.12

This paradigm is also evident in the strategy’s rationale for strengthening coalitions and partnerships, in which it argues that the US must ‘work to ensure that each country is both willing and able to meet its counterterrorist responsibilities’, based on the premise that most of the ‘important successes against al-Qaida and other terrorist organizations have been made possible through effective partnerships [and that continued] success depends on the actions of a powerful coalition of nations maintaining a united front against terror.’13 The strategy then, albeit unconvincingly, speaks of the importance of developing multilateral regional bodies – specifically the Asia-Pacific Economic Forum (APEC) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) – as a means of strengthening international cooperation and counterterrorist capacity. However, as this paper will argue, there has been criticism that the US has been reluctant to engage fully in some Asia-Pacific multilateral security forums, leading to accusations that the US is placing a narrow counterterrorism agenda ahead of its broader commitment to the region.

While the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review14 (2006 QDR) was released several months before the 2006 NSCT, there is strong continuity between the two documents. The 2006 QDR is the key policy document shaping the US military response to the War on Terror and thus provides detail as to how the US Department of Defense plans to operationalise its component of the national counterterrorist strategy. Importantly, the 2006 QDR is considered to be the first iteration to ‘fully reflect the department’s

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10 President of the United States of America, National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, pp. 7-9.
11 President of the United States of America, National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, pp. 7-9.
13 President of the United States of America, National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, p. 19.
post-9/11 innovations and the first to encapsulate the putative lessons of the Iraq war.15

The 2006 QDR opens by stating that the US is ‘a nation engaged in what will be a long war’16 and describes how the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks were a powerful catalyst to transform the US military. It cites significant changes in force design, force disposition and advances in technology and provides justification for a strengthening of US special and conventional forces to counter irregular and asymmetric threats. It is therefore clear that the defeat of global terrorism is now a core force structure determinant for the US military. There is criticism, however, that the 2006 QDR is leading the US military down ‘a high-risk and costly road’ through its posturing of military responses to Islamic extremism in ‘an unusually broad and open-ended wartime framework.’17 This warfighting paradigm, developed in response to complex global insurgency, is therefore contributing to the ‘widespread perception that US military power is declining as the “long war” against international terrorism intensifies.’18

The 2006 QDR is also significant for its counter-proliferation strategies and for posturing forces as a ‘hedge against strategic uncertainty.’19 The US is seeking to prevent extremist groups from staging catastrophic terrorist acts with Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and to counter the destabilising potential of nation-states acquiring WMD. This is of direct concern to the Asia-Pacific region, as highlighted recently by US Secretary of Defense Gates with his assessment that ‘the Northeast corner of the Pacific remains one of the last places on earth with the potential for a nuclear confrontation.’20 The need to ‘hedge against strategic uncertainty’, on the other hand, is a clear reference to the rise of China. China’s economic development and strategic intentions are of paramount concern to the US, with the 2006 QDR identifying China as possessing ‘the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States.’21 The Asia-Pacific region is therefore ‘shaping up as the most important in the world for the United States’ evolving strategic interests and force posture [with] the US-China relationship … the world’s most critical bilateral relationship.’22

US security policy can therefore be seen as designed to confront three intertwined strategic challenges: defeating Islamist extremist insurgencies, countering WMD

19 The 2006 QDR describes a hedging strategy as ‘Shaping the choices of major and emerging powers requires a balanced approach, one that seeks cooperation but also creates prudent hedges against the possibility that cooperative approaches by themselves may fail to preclude future conflict. A successful hedging strategy requires improving the capacity of partner states and reducing their vulnerabilities. In this regard, the United States will work to achieve greater integration of defensive systems among its international partners in ways that would complicate any adversary’s efforts to decouple them.’ US Department of Defense, 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, p. 30.
proliferation and shaping China’s strategic ambitions. It stresses the importance of developing alliances, although emphasis is placed on strengthening bilateral alliances with traditional security partners rather than enhancing multilateral forums as proposed by the 2006 NSCT. Upgrading bilateral security cooperation with key allies is now considered critical to US interests as this is core to enabling the reorientation of the US global defence posture. The intent is to reduce ‘the forward footprint of US forces through a careful mix of sea basing, overseas presence, enhanced long-range strike, reach back, and surge and prepositioned capabilities.’ To achieve this, however, the US recognises that it must develop the military capacity of its key allies to enable coalition responses to a broader spectrum of threats, and perhaps of greater importance, to guarantee regional access for the forward deployment of strategic capabilities and bases. These requirements provide a rationale for the US pressuring allies and other countries, in the name of the War on Terror, to pursue not only counterterrorism objectives but also broader strategic outcomes. Examination of the impact of the War on Terror within the Asia-Pacific region must therefore be undertaken in this broader strategic context.

**Impact of the War on Terror in the Asia-Pacific Region**

While most Asia-Pacific countries were supportive initially of US counterterrorist aims, there is now broad consensus that the US approach to the War on Terror has diminished its standing and influence within the region. Acharya and Tan’s assessment is typical:

> The resolute unilateralism that marked George W. Bush’s first term in office had increasingly rendered the United States odious in the eyes of many nations … Southeast Asian governments generally view the Iraq war as a distraction from fighting against terrorism in Southeast Asia. Moreover, the resulting anti-American feelings at the popular level have increased the political risks for the Southeast Asian governments from cooperating too closely with the United States in the war on terror.

Further, Acharya and Tan argue that the US has had an historical and on-going ambivalence towards South-East Asia and its regional multilateral security institutions. While acknowledging that US power is fundamental to the continued security and prosperity of South-East Asia, they argue that this continued ambivalence of the US towards South-East Asia and its multilateral security mechanisms is not feasible.

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in the post-9/11 strategic environment. William Tow supports this view, with his observation that the US ‘has yet to demonstrate the will and capacity to interact with Asia-Pacific states in ways that allow it to be widely viewed as a valued and engaged security partner in an institutional context.’

The primary reason for this criticism is the US focus on developing its hub-and-spoke system of bilateral ties at the expense of committing effort to fostering regional multilateral institutions. The Six Party Talks on North Korea’s nuclear program are an obvious exception. This reveals a schism between the US and various South-East Asian governments, which tend to operate as a regional bloc and argue that multilateral forums such as ASEAN provide the best means to guarantee regional security. An explanation for the US approach can be found in the 2006 NSS, which notes the ‘vital role’ that multilateral institutions can play, but then argues that such institutional frameworks ‘must be built upon a foundation of sound bilateral relations with key states in the region’, before identifying Japan, Australia and the Republic of Korea as its key allies in the Asia-Pacific region. South-East Asia features only on the periphery of US security interests in the region, with the US remaining focused on North-East Asian security challenges. This leaves South-East Asian countries uncertain as to US intentions, and to some extent perplexed given their belief that South-East Asia is the ‘second front’ on the War on Terror.

There is also a strong perception in South-East Asia that the ‘highly militarized approach of the U.S. counterterrorism strategy…may not be at all adequate in neutralizing the terror threat within Southeast Asia,’ with the US counter-terrorist strategy criticised as being one-dimensional and subordinate to other ideological and security agendas. As a consequence, the War on Terror is believed to be faltering due to a failure to address the root causes of Islamist extremism and anti-American sentiment, and through US reluctance to tailor its counter-terrorist strategies to regional and national conditions. This has caused a diminishing of support for US counterterrorist efforts in the region, with ‘American distraction with Iraq [giving] China an opportunity to extend its “charm offensive” into Southeast Asia…the post-9/11 period has seen an intensification of such efforts [by China], which cannot be entirely a coincidence.’

It would be unreasonable, however, to focus solely on perceived flaws in US strategy. There exists a view that ‘beneath the rhetoric of amity among member nations of
the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), there, in fact, has been a “disturbing picture of non-cooperation between ASEAN intelligence services”, with doubts ‘raised about the extent to which the United States can rely on Southeast Asian governments to do their part in the war on terror.’ Moreover, the hoped for revitalisation of ASEAN, with counterterrorism cooperation among member states being the catalyst, has not eventuated, and therefore not arrested a general decline in ASEAN’s authority. ASEAN member-states have quite different and unresolved views about the US conduct of the War on Terror, which has created a fault-line within the organisation. Tanya Ogilvie-White argues for example, that whereas ‘Singapore and Thailand have welcomed US-led initiatives within this context, officials from Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam have openly expressed reservations, arguing that they do not wish to be associated with the US “War on Terror”.’ It is undeniable that there has been progress in counterterrorism efforts in South-East Asia – improvement in intra-ASEAN intelligence cooperation and the recent capture of key militants in Indonesia are two examples. However, it remains the case that a number of South-East Asian countries are developing economies with porous borders and weaknesses in governance and security structures, thus making them ill-equipped to deal with modern terrorist threats without external assistance. The 2006 series of US security policies reflect these realities.

Whereas South-East Asian governments view the War on Terror in terms of the terrorist or insurgency threats that they face within their borders or immediate region, North-East Asian governments have tended to regard the War on Terror in a much broader context. Given the threat of great power rivalry, and with a history of conflict among the major regional states, North-East Asian governments are most concerned with the ramifications of US actions for the region’s balance of power. In the case of China, for example, the early Sino-US cooperation in sponsoring a global response to Islamic extremism has cooled to the extent that:

The Iraq war [has] caused many Chinese politicians to become worried about US intentions. No longer the pacificist and stable hegemon, the United States is becoming more unpredictable...the unpredictability of US actions and intentions may cause China to become nervous about the US response in North Korea.

The US’ prosecution of the War on Terror should therefore not be viewed in isolation, but rather considered in the broader context of the US responding to the three intertwined strategic challenges; the War on Terror, countering nuclear proliferation and shaping China’s strategic ambitions. These strategic challenges are dynamic,
highly complex and also critical to shaping the balance of power in North-East Asia. An examination of the consequences of the War on Terror for the US-Japan alliance will further evidence this point.

The US has long regarded Japan as its key ally in North-East Asia, with Japan considered as the ‘lyncupin’ state for the US hedging strategy to shape China’s strategic ambitions. Moreover, the US-Japan alliance is essential for enabling the forward deployment of US military and strategic capabilities within the region, which have been essential for stabilising North-East Asia. This is especially so in providing a deterrent against nuclear proliferation and constraining Chinese intentions for reunification with Taiwan. The alliance has also meant that Japan has remained under the strategic protection of the US and has not re-emerged as an independent military power, which has been vital to regional stability given the history of enmity between Japan and its neighbours.

During the 1991 Gulf War, however, Japan was ‘severely criticized by Washington for not having contributed anything to the liberation of Kuwait other than financial assistance...[this] was regarded as particularly insufficient since Japan is heavily dependent on the free flow of oil out of the Persian Gulf.’ Stung by this criticism and concerned with the possibility of further damage to the US-Japan alliance, then Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi’s reaction to the 9/11 terrorist attacks was ‘uncharacteristically swift’ in enacting the International Peace Cooperation Law, which authorised very strictly controlled international deployments of the Japanese Self Defense Force. Nonetheless, serious doubts have remained in the US as to Japan’s reliability as an alliance partner and the speed in which it can react to security threats. These doubts stem largely from Japanese reluctance to revise Article IX of its constitution and also to pass laws enabling executive authority for the deployment of military forces. Article IX has been interpreted to place very tight constraints over the international deployment of Japanese military forces, and when such deployments are contemplated, the enabling parliamentary processes are extremely convoluted. Japanese reluctance to amend Article IX is largely due to a deeply held pacifist conviction by Japan’s population, but also due to political concern that amending the constitution would expose Japan to even greater US pressure to use its military in support of shared strategic objectives.

Within this context, the US placed considerable diplomatic pressure on Japan to provide military capabilities in support of the War on Terror. While intelligence sharing has existed for some time, tangible military support was initially provided through

the deployment of five warships into the Indian Ocean – ‘the first time that Japanese warships had been deployed for naval operations outside of Japanese territorial waters since World War II.’ A more dramatic step was taken, however, when Japan backed the US intervention in Iraq and then subsequently deployed a ground force to conduct humanitarian and reconstruction operations in Iraq. While the value of these deployments in military terms was limited – the US or other coalition partners had sufficient capacity to undertake these tasks – the significance of these deployments was in the political and public debates within Japan that these deployments catalysed. Natsuyo Ishibashi observed that:

as far as security policies were concerned, attention was split between the threat from North Korea and the situation in the Middle East. These two issues pulled public opinion and the vote in opposite directions. Though a majority opposed Japan’s involvement in Iraq, the North Korean issue underscored the value of the U.S.-Japan alliance, causing a good number of Japanese to acquiesce in the SDF’s dispatch to Iraq to meet the country’s “international obligations” to the alliance.

Through the guise of gaining military support for the War on Terror, the US successfully precipitated a debate on constitutional amendment that Japanese policy makers and the general public were predisposed to reject. While Article IX has yet to be amended, and ultimately may not be amended, the US has nonetheless successfully leveraged Japan’s commitment to the War on Terror as a means to advance its broader North-East Asian strategic objectives.

William Tow argues that such US behaviour is justifiable and urgently required within the Asia-Pacific region to ‘pursue interregional geopolitical alignments that are beneficial for all parties involved.’ Maintaining the US forward presence and developing robust regional alliances are unquestionably critical components for the longer-term stability of the Asia-Pacific region, hence the priority that the US is attaching to North-East Asia and its preparedness to leverage the War on Terror in pursuit of its longer-term, traditional security agenda. Notwithstanding US concern over the rise of China, however, there is strong evidence that the US preoccupation with War on Terror objectives in the Middle East has afforded China with a significant opportunity to expand its sphere of influence within the Asia-Pacific region. From the analysis presented earlier, it is also clear that the hub-and-spoke alliance system has inherent limitations. This approach is contributing to an alienation of a number of South-East Asian governments away from the US, with the real risk that the regional fight against Islamist extremism could be compromised. These are each vitally important issues for

Australia.

40 Purnendra Jain and John Bruni, ‘Japan, Australia and the United States,’ p. 278.
The Security Implications for Australia

The United States places great value on its unique relationships with the United Kingdom and Australia, whose forces stand with the U.S. military in Iraq, Afghanistan and many other operations. These close military relations are models for the breadth and depth of cooperation that the United States seeks to foster with other allies and partners around the world.43

As this quote from the 2006 QDR makes plain, the US-Australia alliance is important to the US. The invocation of the ANZUS Treaty immediately after the September 11 terrorist attacks, followed by staunch Australian diplomatic and military support for the War on Terror has raised the importance of the alliance to such a level that the US now considers Australia to be a key ally in the furthering of shared security interests throughout the globe. This is complemented by Australia and the US successfully concluding ‘major economic and military deals that that [sic] made Australia the only treaty ally in the Asia-Pacific to have a free trade agreement (FTA) with the US that reinforces a 55-year old mutual defense pact.’44

Notwithstanding the benefit of upgraded security and economic ties, there are a number of challenges that Australia must manage carefully over the next decade as a consequence of the War on Terror and other demands of the US alliance. Australia is now closely identified with, and engaged in, the pursuit of US security objectives, with the US ‘no longer [favouring] unilateral actions, now preferring to act multilaterally with allies and partners.’45 This will place growing demands on Australia to act in global alliances and increasingly challenge Australia to balance its alliance commitments with its other responsibilities as a medium power within the Asia-Pacific region. This is evident in the current campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, where great strategic importance for Australia lies in how the outcomes of those campaigns influences the way in which the US exercises its power into the future.46 This view is supported by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, which argues that ‘the way the US chooses to wage this long-duration conflict will have global ramifications and is inescapable, especially for close US allies.’47

Since the start of the War on Terror, Australia has managed the US alliance in a way that has enabled it to achieve its own national security objectives without the substantial commitment of combat forces. There is nevertheless a US expectation for ‘Australia to provide meaningful military support to the United States in order to carry out “dirty, hard, and dangerous” work.’48 What is perhaps most significant about

44 Mohan Malik, ‘Perspectives: Australia, America and Asia,’ p. 587.
48 Richard Armitage made these comments at an Australian-American Dialogue session in August 1999, just prior to his appointment as US
these comments is that they were made in 1999 in the context of Australia’s warming relationship with China, with the US seeking to shore up Australian support in the event of a confrontation over Taiwan. While Australia’s military commitment to the War on Terror has undoubtedly won favour in Washington, this perception illustrates the US expectation for Australia to assist in the War on Terror and in the achievement of other strategic interests. ‘In general, the US would prefer its alliance partners to adopt a broad perspective, and contribute to resolving identified global issues rather than just solely focusing on narrow local problems.’

This will necessarily demand greater military commitments of the Australian Defence Force by the Australian government, with continuing deployments in support of global counterterrorist campaigns, such as Afghanistan, but also in stabilisation operations to contain terrorism, transnational crime and violent conflict in fragile states in the South West Pacific and East Timor.

Given the tension that exists between the US and some South-East Asian governments over the War on Terror, the area in which Australia must make a significant contribution over the next decade is in facilitating an improvement of security relations between the US and regional states. Australia is in a strong position to do so because of its close alliance with the US, its advocacy for and commitment to multilateral regional institutions, and also because Australia’s interests are undeniably threatened by terrorist activities and instability in South-East Asia. Rather than being a disadvantage, Australia’s close bind with the US would ‘significantly lessen the complications involved in trying unilaterally to reopen robust diplomacy with Asian capitals. Safe under America’s military and economic [by virtue of the Australia-US FTA] umbrella, Australia would no longer have to fear isolation from its regional neighbours.’

It is perhaps for these reasons that Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has proposed the creation of an Asia-Pacific community forum, which he has described as ‘a regional institution which spans the entire Asia-Pacific region – including the United States, Japan, China, India, Indonesia and the other states of the region …which is able to engage in the full spectrum of dialogue, cooperation and action on economic and political matters and future challenges related to security.’ While this proposal has not received wide support from other Asia-Pacific countries, it shows the Australian government’s commitment to developing greater levels of confidence and consultation on regional security matters. Whatever form this improved dialogue takes, it is clear that Australia must work to bridge the current unilateralist tendency of the US, and the cultural particularities of South-East Asia, with ‘greater recognition to states that feel threatened and undermined by global insititutions and Western security agendas.’

Deputy Director of State, as cited in Scobell, ‘The Alliance and the Asia-Pacific Region: An American Perspective,’ p. 86.
52 Tanya Ogilvie-White, ‘Non-proliferation and Counter-terrorism Cooperation in Southeast Asia,’ p. 20.
Aside from the obvious benefits to the US in pursuing counterterrorism and non-proliferation objectives, there would be a renewed opportunity for the US to engage in multilateral forums that have become vital to China’s regional engagement strategy. Therefore Australia must be engaged in issues of strategic importance to the US, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, in order to retain some level of influence over how the US exercises its power. This will inevitably lead to tensions with other regional governments from time to time. There is mixed opinion as to the consequences of Australia linking itself so closely to the US. Craig Snyder argues that ‘Many states in Southeast Asia value the US presence as a stabilizing element in the region and see Australia as an important link with the United States’, whereas Owen Harries argues that ‘any moral suasion that Australia feels that it can exercise on the United States because of the credits it has accumulated through its participation in recent US-led wars is illusionary.’53 Given the critical influence that US power has in stabilising the Asia-Pacific region, with no other country able to assume the status of global or regional hegemon for some decades, Australia has no option but to remain closely engaged with the US.

Conclusion

The US approach to the War on Terror has polarised opinion and created uncertainty as to broader US strategic intentions in the Asia-Pacific, especially with some South East Asian countries. In part this is due to the US military adopting a warfighting paradigm to confront a complex global insurgency, which a number of analysts have argued does not adequately treat the root causes of Islamist extremism. There is also concern that the US counterterrorism strategy has fallen subordinate to longer term ideological and strategic objectives. This has led to criticism, especially in South East Asia, that the US has attached higher priority to upgrading key bilateral alliances, seemingly at the expense of its commitment to multilateral security forums.

In comparison, in North East Asia there are three intertwined strategic challenges. Not only the execution of the War on Terror but also constraining the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and dealing effectively with a rising China. This compels the US to commit much greater effort to North-East Asia.

Australia has no option but to balance its commitments to the US alliance with its other responsibilities as a medium power within the Asia-Pacific region. Notwithstanding the benefits to Australia of upgraded security and economic ties with the US, those ties have placed a greater onus onto Australia to assist the US in the pursuit of shared security interests. This will necessitate sustained and increasingly demanding

commitments of Australian military forces in support of mutual global and regional security objectives. Australia therefore should play a constructive role over the next decade to broker an improvement of relations between the US and regional states, particularly between the US and a number of ASEAN states. This paper has argued that Australia is in a strong position to do so, and that is must do so because of the critical importance of these strategic relationships to Australia’s security interests.
Bibliography


