
Defence 2000: Southeast Asian Perspectives

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Introduction

1. In early December 2002 Prime Minister John Howard provoked a storm of criticism from Southeast Asian leaders when he suggested that Australia would consider launching pre-emptive strikes against terrorist groups threatening Australia from overseas.¹ This apparent over-reaction to a qualified statement made in the wake of the Bali bombings highlights the ideological divide between Australia and many of its neighbours on security and foreign policy, and the sensitivity of regional leaders to the threat of Western military intervention.

2. Australia's declared defence policy is set out in *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force (D2000)*.² *D2000* asserts Australia's continued intent to build security 'with and not from'³ the region, based on shared strategic interests⁴ and respect for each others' sovereignty.⁵ However, *D2000* also re-affirms, in the minds of many Southeast Asian leaders, aspects of Australian political culture, and military strategy, that undermine Australia's efforts to promote a cooperative security culture between Australia and the Southeast Asian region.

3. This paper will identify those aspects of *D2000* that most detract from Australia's efforts to build a cooperative security relationship with Southeast Asia, and examine why this is the case. This will be achieved by, firstly, identifying some common themes in security thinking in Southeast Asia. This paper will then examine three areas of Australian policy and practice, evidenced in *D2000* and broader contexts, that provoke concern in Southeast Asia: Australia's association with Western values, its close alliance with the United States, and its increasingly pro-active military strategy.

Security culture in Southeast Asia

4. Although Southeast Asia is a diverse region in terms of politics,⁶ religion⁷ and colonial experience,⁸ it does have a number of common security concerns derived from its strategic geography, historical experience and the challenges of economic development.

5. The first of these is the absolute priority accorded to the maintenance of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Southeast Asia's history of resisting and accommodating cultural and military challenges from India and China, the Western colonial powers⁹ and the various Cold War protagonists has led to a heightened sensitivity to external interference. The threat of major power intervention,¹⁰ plus complicated and often disputed borders,¹¹ longstanding insurrections¹² and limited conventional military capabilities, have all conspired to encourage the armed forces of Southeast Asia to assume defensive postures.¹³ Singapore stands out as the one exception, with its entrepot economy giving it a vested interest in accommodating major external powers, and its lack of strategic depth forcing it to adopt a doctrine of forward defence backed by the best trained and equipped forces in Southeast Asia.

6. The second observation that can be made about Southeast Asian security thinking is its breadth of scope. As developing states without sure political and economic foundations upon which to build a security posture, Southeast Asian states must cater for political, economic and socio-cultural threats, in addition to military threats.¹⁴ On the political front this has led to a direct identification of ideology and regime survival with national sovereignty in authoritarian,¹⁵ and praetorian,¹⁶ states such as

Vietnam and Burma/Myanmar,¹⁷ and past regimes in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. On the economic and socio-cultural front, globalisation, refugee flows¹⁸ and cultural change¹⁹ are also seen as threats to national sovereignty in more stark terms than in the West.

7. Thirdly, almost all Southeast Asian states have had to struggle with internal threats from religious or ethnic separatists, communist rebels or Islamic revivalists.²⁰ These insurrections have their roots in economic inequality and the suppression of minority interests by nation-building elites. However, they persist and continue to threaten the unity of states such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Burma/Myanmar owing to systemic failures in state legitimacy.²¹ These internal threats further enhance the defensive posture of Southeast Asia's armed forces, and amplify sensitivities to external interference in internal conflicts.

8. Finally, although Southeast Asia has sought to build a range of cooperative security mechanisms to guard against external threats, it continues to adopt a realist approach of investing in defence self-reliance, and alliances within a balance of power framework. The end of the colonial and Cold War eras prompted many Southeast Asian states to invest in a range of international organisations and cooperative security mechanisms, including the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement and the ASEAN²² Regional Forum (ARF). Support for multilateral institutions is an effective way for Southeast Asian states to amplify their limited political power. However, lack of faith in the effectiveness of these institutions, and long traditions of *realpolitik*, in both the Indic and Sinic political systems,²³ has led Southeast Asian states to primarily rely on bilateral security arrangements,²⁴ and investments in defence self-reliance.

Australia and the threat from the West

9. *D2000* identifies Australia as an outpost of Western political thinking in Southeast Asia, which makes it a convenient focus for grievances against the West,²⁵ impeding Australia's capacity to build cooperative security relationships in the region. Southeast Asia's primary concerns with the West can be grouped into three categories: the consequences of globalisation, the operation of the international law of the sea, and the development of international Human Rights law and the principle of humanitarian intervention. All of these factors challenge the primacy accorded to national sovereignty by Southeast Asia's post-colonial elites.

10. *D2000* asserts that globalisation is 'likely to be good for security'²⁶ as it builds dependence on the international system, and enhances stability through increased flows of trade, investment and technology.²⁷ However, many Southeast Asian states regard the economic and political challenges of globalisation as genuinely threatening. After decades of nation building aimed at establishing cohesive societies that defend traditional values Southeast Asian leaders have been asked to make a difficult choice: either develop open societies with high growth but considerable instability and cultural change, or apply barriers that protect cultural values but pay a long-term price in terms of growth²⁸ and security.²⁹ These leaders find themselves pressured by international markets to abandon cherished indigenous and/or socialist ideals, while stronger polities, such as Japan and France, are seen to benefit from a restrictive approach to the international economy in favour of social equity³⁰ and traditional practices.³¹ In addition to these economic pressures is the worldwide trend towards liberal democracy,³² which has seen dramatic changes in Thailand and Indonesia, and threatens regimes in Vietnam, Laos and Burma/Myanmar.

11. Australia and the West also clash with Indonesian and Filipino aspirations to assert full sovereign control over their 'archipelagic waters' as if they were 'internal waters', to facilitate national

security.³³ *D2000* expresses an Australian interest in common with Japan for the ‘freedom and security of navigation and trade.’³⁴ Australia and the US expressed its opposition to the Philippines’ position on archipelagic waters as part of a Western bloc in 1989.³⁵ Although, Indonesia and the Philippines have gradually resiled from their original position, full control of archipelagic waters remains a reasonable desire from the perspective of vulnerable archipelagic states, that has been defeated by Western economic interests.

12. Finally, *D2000* provides qualified Australian support for the principle of humanitarian intervention.³⁶ Since the end of the Cold War the United Nations (UN) has authorised a range of humanitarian intervention operations on the basis that events within a state are such a threat to peace that operations can be authorised under Article 39 of the UN Charter.³⁷ However, such interventions usually rely on the capacity of Western states to rapidly deploy large armed forces, and are, hence, dependent on the Western-led drive to internationalise Human Rights in the aftermath of World War II,³⁸ and the reduced constraints on Western military intervention in the wake of the Cold War. The increasing effectiveness of international Human Rights law and humanitarian interventions does have some support in Southeast Asia. However, the increasing level of pressure applied to Southeast Asian states on Human Rights issues,³⁹ coupled with the trend towards armed intervention, both work to enhance fears that the sovereignty that guarantees Southeast Asian independence is being steadily eroded.

13. Samuel Huntington famously claimed that the West’s ‘universalist pretensions increasingly bring it into conflict with other civilisations, most seriously with Islam and China’.⁴⁰ Although Western political actors are not responsible for globalisation, they do act as major agents of economic change and are, historically, the prime architects of international law. The assertion of Western values and self-interest in these fields often impinges on the sovereignty of Southeast Asian states and harms perceptions of Australia.

Australia as Deputy Sheriff

14. The most powerful image that illustrates Australia’s membership of the West is its close relationship with the foremost Western military power, the United States (US). *D2000* asserts that the US now wields a ‘preponderance of military capability and strategic influence’⁴¹ that allows the US to enhance stability in the region and promote developments that accord with the shared values and interests of Australia and the US.⁴² Although the ANZUS Treaty has largely undisputed military advantages for Australia, and receives some support in Southeast Asia, the US relationship carries some negative implications for Australia’s capacity to build cooperative defence relationships in Southeast Asia. These implications can be addressed in three parts: the cultural and economic influence of the US, Southeast Asian perceptions of the US security role in Asia and the apparent resurgence of US military adventurism.

15. As the world’s chief proponent of political and economic liberalism, and most influential social culture through the mass media, the US is the primary agent of many of the broad security threats perceived by Southeast Asia. The post-Cold War decline of the importance of balance of power geopolitics has seen a greater US emphasis on contentious economic and Human Rights issues, which were previously overlooked.⁴³ Although, the Hawke–Keating and Howard governments have adopted different positions on regional engagement,⁴⁴ the bipartisan nature of Australia’s close cultural alignment with the US has made it impossible for Australia to genuinely distinguish itself on critical issues⁴⁵ such as intervention in East Timor, globalisation and freedom of navigation.

16. Most of Southeast Asia sees the ongoing US military presence in the region as a stabilising factor,⁴⁶ and that Australia plays a valuable role in securing this commitment.⁴⁷ This view is based on an analysis that Southeast Asian states value the US presence as a counter to growing Chinese military and economic power, and to make up for the weakness of regional multilateral security institutions.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, Southeast Asia's economic and political dynamism creates considerable potential for different states to revise their stance on the US presence as relationships with China develop, multilateral institutions evolve and Southeast Asian states gradually aspire to assert growing national power. Even close friends of the US such as the Philippines and Thailand balance their relationship with the US against evolving regional interests.⁴⁹ Australia's support for multilateral security institutions, such as the ARF, puts it in a good position to accommodate changes in this field. However, other political developments inconsistent with US interests are likely to complicate Southeast Asian relations with both Australia and the US.

17. A significant factor in any Southeast Asian assessment of the value of the US role in the region is the extent to which the US is seen as a threat to the aspirations of individual states. US interventions in Indochina under containment policy reassured the old ASEAN five⁵⁰ in the context of the communist threat. However, the range of US interventions, with and without UN support, from the Gulf War onwards, coupled with the post-9/11 policy of praetorian unilateralism,⁵¹ is being seen as a threat by authoritarian states such as Burma/Myanmar, and grass roots leftist, nationalist and Islamic movements, throughout Southeast Asia. Australia has identified with this trend through deployments in the Gulf, Somalia and East Timor, and with public statements positioning Australia as a regional peacekeeper of choice⁵² and echoing US unilateralism with a controversial statement on pre-emptive strikes.⁵³ By doing so, Australia is attracting considerably more suspicion in Southeast Asia than it would ever be able to generate on its own.

18. Australia's efforts to appear as an independent defence player that can act as a bridge between the US and the region is seriously inhibited by heightened fears of the overwhelming national power of the US, and Australia's regularly demonstrated association with the values and interests of the US.

Australia's proactive military strategy

19. *D2000* illustrates Australia's move to a more proactive military strategy that is capable of controlling its maritime approaches,⁵⁴ attacking 'hostile forces as far from our shores as possible',⁵⁵ deploying preponderant force into Australia's immediate neighbourhood,⁵⁶ and making a substantial contribution to any coalition in Southeast Asia.⁵⁷ These statements are a signal to Southeast Asia of an increasing propensity for Australia to project armed force into the region. Although this would be welcomed by some regional players,⁵⁸ Australia's lack of a comprehensive defence regional engagement program,⁵⁹ coupled with Southeast Asia's perception of broad security threats posed by the West (already discussed), leaves room for Australia's proactive strategy to be seen as a threat. The Australian Defence Force's (ADF) public doctrine, force structure and geo-strategic posture further illustrate the nature of this possible threat.

20. ADF doctrine has flourished since the commencement of Australia's policy of defence self-reliance in 1976, to enhance Paul Dibb's defensive strategy of 'denial' with a basis for proactive operations that fulfils Labor's preference for a broader strategy of 'defence-in-depth', and the Coalition's interest in a more interventionist role for the ADF.⁶⁰ The importance assigned to 'Manoeuvre Warfare' in ADF doctrine⁶¹ has seen the Australian Army produce a series of papers arguing that defence of the air-sea gap requires joint forces capable of amphibious operations in the

littoral environment to Australia's north.⁶² This view appears to have gained acceptance in Navy⁶³ and Army doctrine.⁶⁴ ADF thinking about intervention in the region received a further boost from its experience in East Timor, which raised the profile of the potential for coalition operations in the near region.⁶⁵ Australia's increased interest in littoral manoeuvre in the defence of Australia, and regional coalitions, reinforce Southeast Asia's perceptions of Australia as an interventionist military power.

21. The development of capabilities and the rebasing and deployment of forces, for the defence of Australia and support of coalition operations, have complemented this view. *D2000* heralded an increase in the Army combat force from four to six high readiness infantry battalions, and provided a greater focus on air and naval forces that can deploy and protect land forces into our region.⁶⁶ This emphasis on high readiness and mobility has been expanded since 9/11.⁶⁷ Furthermore, articles calling for an additional two infantry battalions,⁶⁸ and alleging that Australia is considering significantly expanding its sealift capacity under an expeditionary force concept,⁶⁹ are creating the impression that Australia is considering even more fundamental shifts in capability.

22. The relevance of these changes in capability are brought home to Southeast Asia by the constant comparisons made with regional forces, from the time of the Dobb Review⁷⁰ through to the present day,⁷¹ and the ADF's changing geo-strategic posture. Ironically, the move from forward defence to the defence of Australia saw Australia move a large part of its land and air power to the north.⁷² These changes facilitated the ADF's rapid deployment into East Timor in 1999, and now complement a potentially long-term Australian commitment to the defence of East Timor. This combination of rebasings and deployments, together with Australia's continued presence in Malaysia, create an image of a forward-based ADF looking to offensive operations.

Conclusion

23. This paper has examined those aspects of *D2000* that impede Australia's efforts to build a cooperative security relationship with Southeast Asia. These efforts are complicated by a Southeast Asian security culture that is concerned with a broad range of security threats, and is sensitive to any perceived challenges to national sovereignty.

24. Australia's ambitions to build a cooperative security relationship with Southeast Asia is impeded by its association with Western values, its close alliance with the United States, and its increasingly pro-active military strategy. Australia's unique position as a Western polity and close US ally on the edge of Southeast Asia has made it a convenient focus for Southeast Asian fears of Western and US economic, cultural and military threats to their sovereignty, and developing aspirations. Furthermore, defence self-reliance, and support for US and UN operations, have led to an ADF doctrine, force structure and posture that further enhances Southeast Asian fears of Western military intervention.

25. Although many aspects of Southeast Asian society are dynamic, the substantial divide between Australian and Southeast Asian interests and values will continue to inhibit Australia's capacity to build cooperative defence relations in the region.

Endnotes

1. US Department of State, Office of Research, 2002, 'Australia Pre-Emptive Policy: PM Howard's Remarks "Provocative"', Washington, 6 Dec.
2. Department of Defence 2000, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, Defence Publishing Service, Canberra.
3. G Dobell, 2000, *Australia Finds Home*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sydney, p. 249.
4. Department of Defence, op. cit., p. 33.
5. Department of Defence, op. cit., p. 30.
6. Three constitutional monarchies (Thailand, Malaysia and Cambodia), four constitutional democracies (The Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia and East Timor), two communist states (Vietnam and Laos), one monarchy (Brunei) and one military government (Burma/Myanmar).
7. Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Confucian morality and varieties of Animist belief.
8. Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, British, French, American and independent.
9. M Alagappa, 1998, 'International Politics in Asia', *Asian Security Practice*, ed. M Alagappa, Stanford University Press, California, p. 111.
10. WT Tow, 1999, 'Strategic Culture in Comparative Perspective', *Strategic Cultures in the Asia-Pacific Region*, eds K Booth and R Trood, MacMillan Press, London, p. 332.
11. WA Herrman, 1996, 'Security in Southeast Asia', *Asian Security Handbook*, eds CM Carpenter and DG Wiencek, ME Sharpe, New York, p. 34.
12. A Tan, 2000, *Armed Rebellion in the ASEAN States*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 135, ANU, Canberra, p. 1.
13. The only examples of Southeast Asian states unilaterally projecting force in the modern era (Vietnam's 1978–79 invasion of Kampuchea, and Indonesia's more limited campaigns against Malaysia, West Papua and East Timor) involved perceived critical issues of sovereignty.
14. M Alagappa, 1998, 'Asian Practice of Security', *Asian Security Practice*, ed. M Alagappa, Stanford University Press, California, pp. 624–625.
15. Alagappa, op. cit., p. 614.
16. Tow, op. cit., p. 326.
17. Although Australian practice is to refer to 'Burma/Myanmar' as 'Burma', I will use both names.
18. WM Carpenter and DG Wiencek, (eds) 1996, *Asian Security Handbook*, ME Sharpe, New York, p. 262.
19. Tow, op. cit., p. 335.
20. FR von der Mehden, 1996, 'Religion and Security in Southeast Asia', *Asian Security Handbook*, eds WM Carpenter and DG Wiencek, ME Sharpe, New York, p. 101.
21. Tan, op. cit., pp. 1–2, 117
22. Association of South East Asian Nations.
23. Alagappa, op. cit., p. 642.
24. Particularly with external powers: the United States, Soviet Union, China and the British Commonwealth.
25. E Paul, 1998, *Australia in Southeast Asia*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen, p. 84.
26. Department of Defence, op. cit., p. 15.
27. Further statements indicate Australia's stake in globalisation by identifying Australia as an 'outward looking ... major trading nation', (ibid., p. 29) and asserting the Australian Government's belief in democracy as an appropriate form of government in states such as Indonesia (ibid., p. 20).

28. NG Owen, 1999, 'Economic and Social Change', *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Vol. 2, Part 2, ed. Nicholas Tarling, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, p. 197.
29. F Fukuyama, 1992, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Penguin Books, London, p. xiv. The contrast between these two choices is starkly illustrated by Thailand and Burma/Myanmar. Thailand's more open society has enjoyed high economic growth accompanied by political and social transformation, while Burma/Myanmar's more closed society has been able to retain certain national institutions at the expense of the economy and overall national power.
30. LC Thurow, 1996, *The Future of Capitalism*, Allen & Unwin, New York, p. 201.
31. E Luttwak, 1998, *Turbo Capitalism*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, p. 183.
32. Fukuyama, op. cit., p. xiii.
33. RR Churchill and AV Lowe, 1999, *The Law of the Sea*, Juris Publishing, Manchester, p. 119.
34. Department of Defence, op. cit., p. 37. More recent Australian defence doctrine also asserts an interest in 'unimpeded free use' of sea lines of communication—Department of Defence 2002, *The Australian Approach to Warfare*, Public Affairs & Corporate Communications, Canberra, p. 11.
35. Churchill and Lowe, op. cit., p. 129.
36. Department of Defence 2000, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, Defence Publishing Service, Canberra, p. 17.
37. R Wolfrum, 2002, 'The UN Experience in Modern Intervention', *International Intervention*, eds Michael Keren and Donald Sylvan, Frank Cass & Co, London, p. 96.
38. J Hutcheson, 2001, *Wars of Conscience*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 140, ANU, Canberra, p. 51.
39. Paul, op. cit., p. 77.
40. SP Huntington, 1996, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York, p. 20. Huntington defines the West as including those societies that once made up Western Christendom and now include Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand (op. cit., p. 46.)
41. Department of Defence, op. cit., p. 16.
42. *ibid.*, pp. 16–17, 34–36.
43. P Dibb, 1993, *The Future of Australia's Defence Relationship with the United States*, The Australian Centre for American Studies, Sydney, pp. 59–60.
44. B Singh, 2002, *Defence Relations Between Australia and Indonesia in the Post-Cold War Era*, Contributions in Military Studies No. 220, Greenwood Press, Connecticut, pp. 103–107.
45. Huntington, op. cit., pp. 151–154.
46. Tow, op. cit., p. 336.
47. D Ball, 'The US–Australian Alliance', *US Allies in a Changing World*, ACSC Exercise Cassandra Readings, p. 269; R Huisken, *ANZUS: Life After 50*, Working Paper No 362, ACSC Exercise Cassandra Readings, p. 20.
48. WM Carpenter and DG Wiencek, (eds) 1996, *Asian Security Handbook*, ME Sharpe, New York, p. 263.
49. Alagappa, op. cit., p. 634.
50. Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore.
51. K Ramakrishna, 2002, 911, *American Praetorian Unilateralism and the Impact on State–Society Relations in Southeast Asia*, Working Paper No 26, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore, p. 22.
52. R Smith, 2000, 'The Unwieldy Sword of Justice', *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 31, no. 4, Dec, pp. 463–474, at p. 463; F Brenchley, 1999, 'The Howard Defence Doctrine', *The Bulletin*, 28 Sep, pp. 22–24.
53. US Department of State, Office of Research. 2002, 'Australia Pre-Emptive Policy: PM Howard's Remarks "Provocative"', Washington, 6 Dec.
54. Department of Defence, op. cit., p. 47.
55. *ibid.*, p. 48.

56. *ibid.*, pp. 49–50.
57. *ibid.*, p. 51.
58. M O'Connor, 2001, 'Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force', *Defender*, Vol. 18, no. 1, Autumn, p. 6.
59. S Woodman, 2001, 'Not quite the full Monty?: analysing Australia's 2000 Defence White Paper', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 55, No. 1, pp. 33–34; The Hon. DF Quigley, 2001, 'A Considered View', *Australian Defence Force Journal*, No. 147, March/April, p. 42.
60. S Woodman, 1999, 'Strategies and Concepts', *Australian Security in the 21st Century*, ed. J Mohan Malik, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, pp. 38, 49.
61. Department of Defence 2002, *The Australian Approach to Warfare*, Public Affairs & Corporate Communications, Canberra, p. 24.
62. R Parkin, 2002, *A Capability of First Resort*, Working Paper No 117, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Canberra, p. 40; M Evans, 2000, *Developing Australia's Maritime Concept of Strategy*, Study Paper No 303, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Canberra, p. 73; M Evans, 1998, *The Role of the Army in a Maritime Concept of Strategy*, Working Paper No 101, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Canberra, p. 47.
63. Royal Australian Navy, 2000, *Australian Maritime Doctrine*, Sea Power Centre, Jervis Bay, pp. 99–100.
64. Australian Army, 2002, *The Fundamentals of Land Warfare*, Land Warfare Development Centre, Puckapunyal, p. 57. Also Bostock claims that the Royal Australian Air Force doctrine seems less focused on offshore operations (I Bostock, 2003, 'Expeditionary objectives', *Jane's International Defence Review*, 17 Jan). However, RAAF doctrine does outline a range of strike, offensive air support and airlift roles, in addition to the need to deploy to forward operating bases, that would support operations in the littoral environment (Royal Australian Air Force, 2002, *Fundamentals of Australian Aerospace Power*, Aerospace Centre, Canberra, pp. 172–190, 219–220).
65. Australian Army, *loc. cit.*; A Ryan, 2000, *From Desert Storm to East Timor*, Study Paper No 302, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Canberra, p. 94.
66. Department of Defence 2000, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, Defence Publishing Service, Canberra, pp. 53–54, 80.
67. Department of Defence 2003, *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2003*, p. 23–24. Available from Internet:<URL:<http://www.defence.gov.au/ans2003/qa.htm>>.
68. Australian Strategic Policy Institute 2002, *Beyond Bali – ASPI's Strategic Assessment 2002*, Canberra, p. 36.
69. Bostock, *loc. cit.*
70. Woodman, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
71. Department of Defence 2000, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, Defence Publishing Service, Canberra, pp. 24–26.
72. With the movement of 1 Brigade to Darwin and the establishment of RAAF Tindal, with a Tactical Fighter Group element, and three RAAF bare bases.

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