

CORAL BELL LECTURE 2008

**THINKING SECURITY: INFLUENCING
NATIONAL STRATEGY FROM THE ACADEMY;
AN AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE**

THE HONOURABLE KIM BEAZLEY

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Recently, Democratic Party partisans Bruce Reed and Rahm Emanuel described the contemporary generation of United States international relations scholars as “hacks and wonks”.¹ I know what they are driving at, even if I think better of the subjects of their scorn.

Over the last eighteen months, as I have sought to read myself back into the discipline following my purging from political life, I have had occasion to browse the bookshelves in the US and UK to pick up the best of contemporary opinion. One thing has struck me. As I have flicked over the dust jackets to the authors’ career blurbs on the back, involvement in government, as well as in the university and the think tank, is ubiquitous, particularly in the US.

That symbiotic relationship between policy-making and action and academic writing produces a certain style. The writing is often very good, but it is redolent of a position paper for the Secretary, warmed-over work from the last encounter with government. Not really ‘hacks and wonks’, just lacking the magisterial.

Influencing national strategies from the academy is very much a phenomenon of the last sixty years in the Anglophone world. Early on the character of the thinking and presentation was certainly magisterial. Coral Bell’s work transits through contemporary writing like a permanently open time capsule. This is a lecture series in her honour. None of us will be able to match the classical erudition of her lecture to launch it: “The end of the Vasco Da Gama era”.

You have to have been around for a long time to have the confidence to commence;

“But I will look initially at the proposition that this patch of history has turned the moment of unchallenged US paramountcy (the “unipolar” moment which existed briefly from the collapse of the Soviet Union at end of 1991 until September 2001)

back into the historically more familiar shape of a multipolar world, a world moreover in which power is more widely distributed than it has been for the past two centuries. An ambiguous new world but not necessarily an unhopeful one, or one without precedent. Most importantly it is a world that differs markedly not only from the mere decade long world of the unipolar moment, but also from the 43 year span of the Cold War. In the context of history, that change may prove far less important than the current changes which also signal the end of Western ascendancy over the non-Western world, but for the time being, it presents some complex near-term choices for policy makers.”²

The Australian cricket authorities have worked this out in recent times but it's not the propositions here that interest me but the scope. That grand-scale, confident, geopolitical analysis is of an earlier time when the academy first started to impact in a routine way on the strategic perspectives of policy-makers.

It was the Cold War which did it. Another magisterial writer George Kennan laid down the paradigm for Western understanding of the Soviet Union, the threat it posed and the strengths the West could marshal to contain it and see it wither.

Writing in *Foreign Affairs* Kennan advocated “vigilant containment”. Demeanour was important. “It is important however that such a policy has nothing to do with outward histrionics; with threats or blustering or superfluous gestures of outward toughness.” Allies were too: “It would be an exaggeration to say American behaviour unassisted and alone could exercise a power of life or death over the communist movement and bring about the early fall of Soviet power in Russia. But the US has in its power to increase enormously the strains under which Soviet policy must operate.”³

Kennan was talking about what we would now call ‘soft power’, cultural, philosophical, exemplary systems, good intelligence, psychological toughness. Successive administrations balked at such prescriptions. From Truman’s NSC 68 onwards containment was militarised. Further attempts were made at breaking out of the containment paradigm altogether but over 43 years, bruised and battered, Western leaders returned to Kennan’s position and then it was all over.

The point about the Cold War was that it was an ideological and societal clash with its military component dominated by nuclear weapons. The latter raised complex strategic and tactical questions outside the experience of past military campaigns. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the academy seized the ground hitherto dominated by the military professionals.

As one academic strategic theoretician, Herman Khan, out of the air force sponsored and first think thank the RAND Corporation, asked when criticised by an officer on his lack of military experience: “How many nuclear wars have you fought recently?” When silence was the response: “OK, then we start out even.”⁴

On nuclear issues the academy rapidly split into two contending, if not wholly mutually exclusive, positions. The debates in the academy were reflected among the decision-makers often with interchangeable personnel. On the one hand was a viewpoint around the proposition that a nuclear war should, could or might be fought. Therefore systems should be expanded, perfected, made invulnerable; populations, particularly decision-makers, protected. Varieties of war including limited war were strategised, enemy developments minutely comprehended and countered, and pre-emption and first strike firmly on the agenda.

Apart from its seamless connection with a hard-line anti-communist stance in the broader societal fight, the political advantage of this tendency was the possibility that nuclear superiority might present advantages in pressure in Cold War struggles at the core and even periphery of the global contest. Through the forty-odd years of the Cold War this perspective repeatedly came back onto the agenda, sometimes exploited by US Presidents for weight in arguing with their Soviet counterparts, even though invariably Administrations stepped back from the brink. It has to be remembered that in every struggle deemed important to the Superpowers from Korea, even including recent discussions on Iran (outside the Cold War framework), some senior policy-makers have argued pre-emption or contemplation of a nuclear contingency

John F Kennedy had to put up with more of this than most. On one of a number of occasions he was urged by his Strategic Air Commander, General Tommy Power, in one of the interminable Berlin crises. “The time of our greatest danger of a Soviet surprise attack is now.....If a general atomic war is inevitable the US should strike first.”⁵ That was repeated in the Cuban missile crisis and seriously argued when no immediate crises loomed.

The problem for this school was that its consequence was likely devastation of the human species. Nuclear war was not so unknowable as to be unable to work that one out. That was the strength of a second tendency which advocated a stable balance, confidence-building measures, crisis management, diplomacy, caution with any expansion or enhancement of nuclear capabilities, civil defence as futile and destabilising, broadly arms control. Central to this view was a belief that the superpowers held each other *in terrorum* – a doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction.

A seminal work that publicly provoked serious argument around this was Herman Khan's *On Thernuclear War*. All sides sought some comfort in his scenarios of nuclear war, but those who sought a nuclear option most. James Newman in the *Scientific American* wrote probably the most brutal review on any member of the academy. He asked:

“Is there really a Herman Khan? It is hard to believe. Doubts cross ones mind almost from the first page of this deplorable book...Perhaps the whole thing is a staff hoax in bad taste.....The style of the book certainly suggests teamwork. It is by turns waggish, pompous, chummy, coy, brutal, archrude, man-to-man, Air Force crisp, energetic, tongue-tied, pretentious, ingenuous, spastic ironical, malapropos, square-bashing and moralistic. Solecisms, pleonasm and jargon abound; the clichés and fused participles are spectacular; there are many sad examples of what Fowler calls cannibalism - words devouring their own kind. How could a single pen produce such a caricature?”⁶

It was the Kennedy Administration which marched the academy in serried ranks into the bureaucracy. This was particularly the case in the Pentagon where the RAND Corporation moved en bloc into a new office for Systems Analysis. Though all tendencies in the debate on the Cold War and nuclear strategy found a place among his advisers, Kennedy came down for restraint and arms control. That did not stop MacNamara's Pentagon cementing in place what was pretty much the final structure of the US nuclear order of battle based, on a triad of bombers, submarines and ballistic missiles, and driving an enormous improvement in early warning surveillance and communications technologies. Under Eisenhower and Truman the brakes had been on military spending. A habit of worst-case assessments of Soviet capabilities as a driver of the structure of American forces set in; sad, when it is contemplated that in 1961 the Soviet Union had only four operational ICBMs.

The significance of the academy, universities and think tanks, to both the public debate in the US and to the staffing of Administrations, influenced a pattern in the rest of the English-speaking world, in principle if not in dimension. The open nature of access to membership of the US national security bureaucracy existed nowhere else. The trends in thinking on strategy were mulled about the world over. Generally speaking, it was approaches more deeply cautious about the consequences of nuclear war that held sway elsewhere.

The era produced a number of brilliant Australian scholars. Two stood out. One was Hedley Bull. He was close to the centres of scholarship in the United States. Close enough to send Herman Khan a cheer-up letter after Newman's review: *"It is fascinating, I think to see the variety of things...reviewers will say about the same book to such an extent that one begins to ask not Newman's question does Herman Khan exist, but how many Herman Khans can there be?"*⁷

As a public servant and scholar Hedley Bull was firmly in the camp which favoured arms control. He was for enhancing deterrence and against improving confidence to use nuclear weapons. His early work was done in Britain, but his coming to the ANU in the 1960s, bringing with him others who had been involved in British public service and academic life, provided a powerful injection of intellectual firepower into Australian political debate at a critical time.

The other was the person we celebrate tonight: Coral Bell. Coral Bell's important writing at this point of time focussed on diplomacy, negotiations and crisis management. It was a belief in human intelligence and skill and not mathematically quantifiable interactions that would determine the peace of the world to her mind. Much more a classical historian than a theorist, her friend and colleague, Jim Richardson, said recently of her realistic approach: *"It is a realism that highlights the scope for political and diplomatic choices not only in the case of a superpower such as the United States but also with respect to Australia."*⁸

Whatever might be said about the value of theory, it is when scholars write in traditional, historically based terms that their influence is most felt outside the academy. I've never heard much game theory discussed by delegates to ALP National Conference but I heard, particularly in the 1980s, the more traditional writing of many here discussed ad nauseum.

I mentioned the 1960s as a critical time. Indeed it was, for it was during the time of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations that the US put its Australian ally in play. In the short term, Kennedy's strategy of confronting communist power on the periphery of the international system drew the US back into Australia's region. MacNamara's quantum change in the posture of US strategic systems drew Australia into the structure of the US nuclear deterrent with the development of three major joint facilities. This change was symbolised when Secretary of State Dean Rusk visited Australia in May 1962 for the first meeting of the ANZUS Council held outside the US. Rusk was seeking a contribution by his partners to the US military training teams in South Vietnam. He received a lecture from Foreign Minister Garfield Barwick on the need for the US to directly confront China if escalation produced their intervention.⁹

Curtin's 1941 'turning to America' and Spender's 1951 ANZUS Treaty are commonly used as the start dates of the American Alliance. I think not. Australia hankered after the British presence even after 1941. The US Joint Chiefs resolutely opposed any serious military component to ANZUS. The Vietnam commitment and the joint facilities were a different order of collaboration. Australia was forced to think through the implications of the relationship in a more mature and complex way than at any point since World War II. Retreat from Vietnam and the Nixon Doctrine were necessary to break a logjam in Australian official thinking on the need for a self-reliant defence strategy, as indeed was British withdrawal east of Suez. Australian politicians were not going to arrive there on our own.

Just as the Kennedy Administration drew the academy to the forefront of American strategic thinking, I would argue that it was the Hawke and Keating governments which saw the academy at its most influential in Australian experience. That is not to say that it was irrelevant beforehand. Particular circumstances, however, in regard to the history and *modus operandi* of the Australian Labor Party drove the case in Australia. Motivations were somewhat more prosaic in the case of Australia than Kennedy's reaching out to new frontiers with the 'best and the brightest'. Our changes were somewhat more reflective of an Australian pragmatism.

The ALP of the 1960s, 70s and 80s was hungry for ideas and analysis on international politics. It is difficult to imagine now but different attitudes on national security and foreign policy matters defined fundamental factional positions in the Party. Even though changes in the structure of the Party and election to office tended to shift authority within the party

structure from the machine to caucus then to the leadership, Leaders continued to walk on eggshells as American alliance issues and affairs in our region fractured party consensus.

Powerful lessons had been learned during the 1960s on the potential, particularly of alliance-related issues, to damage the party electorally. It is one of the great ironies of Australian politics that a decision in 1963 accepting the North West Cape communications facility and superseding a neutralist-leaning 1955 post-split policy in favour of an alliance commitment, could nevertheless be exploited by the Liberal Party to suggest the ALP was unreliable on security. Even though the Labor Party came out ahead in the end in its opposition to the Vietnam War, national security, particularly alliance issues, continued to see Labor governments and oppositions potentially wrong-footed in public opinion by our opponents.

Nevertheless, peace, human rights, arms control and disarmament, and national sovereignty were perceived by many Party members as at their ideological core. While acknowledging the electoral saliency of alternative perspectives, ground was often given very slowly. Though, generally speaking, Labor governments were assigned great trust and latitude by members, breakouts could occur.

An example of this was the so-called MX missile crisis of early 1985. It is illuminating from several points of view. Firstly, the debate represented by then a quite sophisticated comprehension of nuclear strategy. Opponents of the government's approval of Australian assistance to the tests argued the potentially destabilising effects of enhancing American counter-force capabilities. Hawke moved to cauterise the wound, pulling off an astonishing agreement with his friend George Schultz for an American withdrawal of the request. At the time the US was trying to lever Pershing and cruise missiles into Europe, face down New Zealand's opposition to ship visits and generally brace allies on burden-sharing.

While he had not fully absorbed the potential for trouble in a missile system upgrade, Hawke thoroughly understood the significance of the joint facilities to the US, and the value of Australian broader military collaboration and the room for manoeuvre it gave him. This was despite the contrary advice of his Defence and Foreign Ministers, who argued the commitment having been given the test, meant the tests should proceed. He argued that while it might be an abstract argument now about destabilising the balance of terror it would likely, certainly more broadly and maybe in the ALP, become an argument about the alliance and the facilities – not worth it – for a test conducted easily elsewhere.¹⁰

Finally, Hawke was not the least bit embarrassed about the picture of a government listening to angst within the Party and the broader labour movement. Hawke was like Curtin. He believed debate in the ALP and on the left was a legitimate part of the total national debate – integral not alien to it. Sorting it out in order to keep major security objectives intact was easily accommodated in his definition of the national interest. Hawke, socialised in the milieu of the ACTU, took Party Conferences very seriously. Indeed the most significant forum of foreign policy debate in the 1980s was arguably the ALP national conference. Such was his self-confidence that at the same time as he received the good news on MX in Washington he launched into a criticism of the strategic defence initiative in his meetings with President Reagan and Secretary Schultz.

What this reflected was that within the ALP various forces had coalesced around a set of propositions which underpinned major elements of both foreign and national security policy. The first was that the alliance was important both for Australia and what it contributed to Western interests globally. As Bob Hawke said in his memoirs, *“I was a vocal opponent of the war and of United States policy in Vietnam, but my attitude towards America remained positive. To me the overriding importance of Australia’s alliance with the US was clear. The US whatever its mistakes, was the bulwark of the free world....”*¹¹

The second was that Australia’s contribution to the alliance was substantial and while it benefited Australian security it also consumed it by making us a potential nuclear target. This view meant Australia had considerable latitude to pursue its own interests even where these occasionally rubbed at the edges of American tolerance. The third was that Labor saw Australia as a middle-power good citizen with opportunities to use its strengths to advance goals on global and regional arms control and disarmament and for stability in its immediate region, even if as in Indo-China this could annoy friends.

This self-confidence was an informed self-confidence and it came in no small measure from the advance in understanding contributed by the academy. I am only going to deal in the rest of this paper with matters within my experience as a Minister. But I know my colleagues in foreign affairs, Bill Hayden and Gareth Evans, valued academic input. This was cemented early after Bill Hayden released an eight-point plan in November 1983 on arms control and disarmament. The specifics included a South Pacific nuclear-free zone, an agreement to ban chemical weapons, promoting a comprehensive nuclear test ban and holding an international

conference on an Indian Ocean zone of peace. More generally, he committed Australia to promoting measures to reverse the nuclear arms race, supporting a nuclear non-proliferation treaty, and playing a role in the international verification of arms control arrangements. To support this Bill Hayden tipped his hat to the academy by investing in peace studies at the ANU.

For me the crucial issues were the American alliance and a self-reliant defence policy within that framework based on the defence of Australia. Central to the American alliance was the role of the joint facilities. On these matters the role of the academy in providing the information base and the direction of argument was critical. Official presentation of facts was spare. However, Australian universities boasted a number of academics who knew a great deal from official experience, work in the United States and Britain, and a diligent search of the public literature. Bob O'Neill, Hedley Bull, Des Ball, Geoffrey Jukes, James Richardson, JDB Miller come to mind and there were others.

The experience of the Whitlam government with the joint facilities was not good and Gough himself had his doubts. This was reflected in debate on the agreement on Nurrungar while Labor was still in Opposition. The agreement was not opposed but ALP speakers showed a new sophistication in handling the issues. Apart from criticism about the level of detail in official explanations and fears for Australian sovereignty, speakers were anxious about the possibility of Australia being a target in a general exchange and possibly one for exemplary effect in a limited exchange. They were alert to argument in the United States that sought a possible first use of weapons.¹²

In office Whitlam was surprised by the use of North West Cape during the October War. A subsequent agreement with the US resolved some of the issues of forewarning but placed no constraint on American use. Whitlam extended the Pine Gap agreement. He did this in seeming contradiction of his own expressed view as Prime Minister when he said "The Australian Government takes the attitude that there should not be foreign military bases, stations, installations in Australia. We honour agreements covering existing stations. We do not favour the extension or prolongation of any of those existing ones."¹³

The facilities were viewed defensively. The electoral and alliance implications of their removal were understood. However, there was no wholehearted inclusion of them in what the ALP considered the basic components of the American alliance. The appointment of

Marshall Green as Ambassador was seen by some as the entry of an enforcer in a troubled relationship. A timely contribution to the quality of the debate was a comprehensive conference organised by the ANU, subsequently published under Bob O'Neill's editorship: *The Strategic Nuclear Balance, an Australian Perspective*. Many in the ALP would have been in sympathy with Peter King's contribution, which sought a process for the facilities' removal.

The overthrow of the Whitlam government produced a plethora of conspiracy theories. One of them was the view that the CIA, worried about the facilities, played a role: the Governor General's security background was cited.

This view troubled me greatly. When I became Defence Minister I tasked two senior Defence officials I knew to be party members to examine the record. They came back with the view, attached to a very thick file, that not only was there no evidence for it, but that the CIA was not involved. That agreed with my reading of the file. I showed it to only one other Minister, Gareth Evans. He came back with a Scottish verdict "not proven". Nevertheless I believe those involved in the dismissal were perfectly capable of doing what they did without external encouragement. We were left in 1975 in Opposition with many unresolved questions that needed resolution if we were to have a coherent national security policy on resuming office.

A position which was an apologetic tipping of the hat to legacy agreements, combined with nervous blinks at American opinion and hand-wringing at the thought of electoral defeat, was not sustainable. Confronting the long term we were, to coin someone else's phrase, at a fork in the road. Either the facilities, and the generality of the alliance, were an unacceptable risk to Australia, or they were essential and needed to be incorporated wholeheartedly into national strategy.

Consciously the Labor Party leadership in the 1980s took the latter direction. It was based on an appreciation of how truly significant the facilities were to the United States and that we were not a non-aligned nation in the core struggle at the centre of the Cold War. My own view was that the United States, having been prepared to render its own population hostage in the defence of its allies, was entitled to a bit of burden-sharing.

Arriving at that conclusion was not enough on its own. The Labor leadership was just as conscious of the fact that it inherited an activist middle power tradition in international

politics which included its own view on what would produce stability in the international system and what offered the best chance of avoiding nuclear holocaust.

The three major facilities were incorporated into a logic which ran roughly as follows: North West Cape communicating with SSBN assisted an invulnerable American second strike capacity and therefore aided deterrence : Nurrungar's early warning function was essential for crisis stability as it enabled correction of false alarms elsewhere in the system and gave a US President time to think in the event of a Soviet attack : Pine Gap was crucial for arms control verification and any hope of arms reductions. Whatever other purposes the facilities served, these purposes were robust enough to sustain an argument for their presence.

That was not the end of the matter however. If Australia was actively engaged in the US system it needed to have a view on what potential uses of the facilities might produce outcomes inimical to these agreed purposes. Australia was now obliged to have a view on key features of US strategy. Further, we had an international obligation to pursue arms control arrangements that lessened the consequences and possibility of war involving weapons of mass destruction, limited their extension to other powers and which led in time to the reduction of superpower arsenals. Further issues of Australian sovereignty were engaged and Australia needed to be in a position of full knowledge and consent around activities in the joint facilities. We also needed a calculation on the likelihood of nuclear war, having accepted its risks. Gradually these perspectives were incorporated into party policy.

Where did all this come from? Here the academy was critical. Part of the contribution was from publications. Notable was Des Ball's 1980 book, *A Suitable Piece of Real Estate*. Those for and against these perspectives took comfort from Des's book. But the weight of it underpinned the leadership approach. There was some question over whether the mass of detail in Des' book actually represented the technical capabilities of the facilities. They were secret but the generality and the argument raised the strategic debate to a new level. Both the book and the general argument among strategic studies scholars exposed the reluctance of those of us in politics to detail a sophisticated argument to the public and provide an information base on which a democratic judgement could be exercised.

It is lost in the mists of time now, but the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence in 1981 made, on the ALP members' initiative, one attempt to remedy the situation with a report on threats to Australia's security. The report was important both in its

addressing of nuclear issues and its compendium of the types of contingencies Australia needed to calculate as it implemented a strategy of defence self-reliance. It is unique in my experience as, apart from technical materials, it was written by members not staffers – in this case Liberal Member Jim Carlton and me. For us on the Labor side it laid to rest one last argument about whether or not the level of risk entailed in a nuclear conflict was acceptable enough for it not to be a primary factor in the debate.

Here academic input was decisive. Eighty-odd witnesses appeared, mostly civilian and military officials. There were five academics, Des Ball, Tom Millar, Bob O' Neill, Max Teichmann and Andy Mack but they punched above their weight. To conclude the nuclear debate the committee quoted Des Ball's evidence at length:

*"I have no doubt in my mind whatsoever that those three installations would be targeted by the Soviet Union. However, that should not be the whole point of the question. At least three other issues should be addressed. One is that whilst they would be targets in the event of a nuclear war, I do not see a nuclear war as very likely. One could argue that the existence of these installations deters the outbreak of war. But one still has to come to the conclusion that if a nuclear war does come, those stations are to be targeted. A second point is that the consequences of them being targets really are not so great. I do not like the idea of nuclear bombs falling on Australia, but the vision that some people have of what it would involve seems to be quite exaggerated. I cannot imagine any scenarios involving nuclear bombs falling on Australian cities. It seems that one draws the line at those three installations..."*¹⁴

I doubt whether my Liberal colleagues were aware, but much of this report was aimed at an internal ALP debate. Effectively the argument was: live with the facilities; recognise their value to the Americans and the leverage it might bring; focus on enhancing Australian sovereignty and information; concentrate on arms control and disarmament issues and on a self-reliant defence strategy. Strange it was that the first piece of leverage the facilities gave the Labor government was to get off the hook of the MX tests, but they were helpful in securing American tolerance on a wide range of independent Australian initiatives on arms control, Southeast Asian regional diplomacy, self-reliant defence strategy and ducking involvement in policies like the Strategic Defence Initiative. In a period when the Reagan Administration was far more assertive in protecting information than their predecessors had

been they were prepared for Australia to say the facilities were not involved directly in research on SDI.

Really until after Reykjavik, the joint facilities remained a hot topic in Australian debate and target of large demonstrations but the government did not falter in its line. The story does not end there. The academic community had put forward a challenge: provide information on these facilities, justify their presence, protect Australian sovereignty. Through the eighties and nineties more was put on the public record by the Prime Minister and Ministers. For myself, who had carriage of them, I wanted to be able to stand up at Labor conferences and be able to say Party policy was being implemented. When I arrived in office it could not be said this was the case.

When I was first briefed, the public servants made clear that there was little documentation on the facilities in the Department and little discussion about their function when American and Australian Ministers met. To help resolve the first problem I requested a briefing note on activities at the facilities on my desk every month. To resolve the latter we made sure they were included in my discussion notes at subsequent ministerial meetings. Paradoxically the creation of AUSMIN to replace the ANZUS ministerials in 1986 made this easier.

Further, the timeline on agreements enabled the renegotiation of Australian participation. Technological change made the provisions of leisurely advice to government impossible. The facilities had a real time function. The only way to ensure Australian knowledge and consent was to significantly upgrade Australian participation moving to ensure Australians on every shift at Pine Gap and Nurrungar and in operational control. I can remember new Defence Secretary Dick Cheney on his first trip to Pine Gap, being briefed by the shift commander, turning to me and saying in amazement, "She's an Aussie". Chances were, had a nuclear strike been launched on the United States in the last phases of the Cold War, it would have been an Australian Squadron Leader at Nurrungar commanding a shift who would inform NORAD at Cheyenne Mountain who would in turn tell the President.

As we became aware of the value and functions of the facilities it was clear to us that they were of potential value to Australia's defence. The new agreements gave Australia tasking rights at Pine Gap. Nurrungar appeared so valuable that when my successor Robert Ray saw that as the DSP satellites were phased out and an Australian location was redundant, a relay ground station serving the new system was put into Pine Gap. We also established a direct

line between Nurrungar and Canberra, which created some interesting moments for Bob Hawke's Security Committee during the Gulf War. Further, as the Polaris SSBN were phased out in 1981 it became evident that North West Cape was at least as valuable to Australian submarines as Americans. So 27 years after Labor turned itself in knots over the initial agreement my last act as Defence Minister was to agree an Australian takeover with Defence Secretary Cheney. By then 25 percent of the use of the facility was by Australian submarines and American communication was with attack submarines not SSBN.¹⁵

The joint facilities scarified political nerves and were the hot-button issue at the heart of political debate in Australia in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Less controversial, but more of an intellectual challenge and with vastly greater budget implications, was putting flesh on the bones of the Australian political consensus around a national strategy of defence self-reliance focussed on a defence of Australia.

We can point to a peak of the influence of the academy when one of its members (albeit an ex-public servant), Paul Dibb, accepted the job of reviewing Australia's defence capabilities subsequent to the production of a White Paper, in the drafting of which he also played a substantial role. This external review of basic policy represents a high-water mark of the academy's influence. It hasn't been replicated since and certainly had not applied before. His appointment did not reflect disagreement about principles but instead a logjam in implementation.

The notion of self-reliance in defence with a focus on the defence of Australia was not a Hawke government original. At the time I thought it had originated with the Whitlam government and Defence Minister Lance Barnard, picked up then by Malcolm Fraser in the 1976 White Paper. I now know I was wrong. Officials had battled for it in private throughout the 1960s, frustrated by a Government who refused to move away from a strategy of 'forward defence' which provided them such political saliency. Or did they? Once Malcolm Fraser cancelled the aircraft carrier there was little of Bob Menzies' equipment buy in the 1960s that was irrelevant to the force structure Paul Dibb recommended. Menzies' buy had been conceived in the context of a possible threat from Indonesia. Whatever was the case, Nixon's Guam doctrine forced the political class in Australia to rethink. Those that did not, like Prime Minister William McMahon, found themselves badly burned when Nixon ignored his allies as he launched his China initiative.

For those of us on the Labor side it was less the contesting officials than the academy who influenced our thinking. The literature in papers and articles was massive. Two books stood out. One, again the product of a conference, again edited by Bob O'Neill: *The Defence of Australia: fundamental new aspects*, the other written by a contributor Ross Babbage: *Rethinking Australia's Defence*. Earlier, Lance Barnard had repaid his debt to the Australian academy by funding two places at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre.

The work was excellent in teasing out the problems of alliance and regional relationships, types of threats that needed to be countered, warning time, core force versus expansion issues, mobilisation doctrine for the forces and society, and Australian geography. Ross came closest to putting it all together.

Whitlam's truncated government missed the chance that was given me. Lance Barnard and Bill Morrison were totally preoccupied by the massive task of bedding down reforms recommended by General Morshead years before, and Arthur Tange more recently, abolishing service and supply departments for one defence ministry. Without it, devising structure and doctrine around a joint force arrangement to defend Australia's approaches and the continent was impossible. Shortly before it left office the Liberal Government had launched the Five Year Defence Programme as the essential rationalising tool but it was useless without the reform.

Bill Morrison was the first ex-Defence Minister to seek an academic bolt-hole on leaving office. His chapter in *The Defence of Australia: fundamental new aspects* is worth reading if you want to see what was really preoccupying ministers in Whitlam's government.¹⁶ Given a short period in office it was not possible to get a plausible force structure in place to allow a credible package with proper funding projections to be put before Cabinet. So frustrated did Secretary Arthur Tange become with spending delays that he allegedly said, "We've got to spend some money go out and buy a building!" If there is such a thing as political osmosis, the focus of the academy and now government penetrated public opinion, which was ready for the necessary moves.

The problem with the state of thinking by the time that we assumed office was that it was insufficiently honed for policy. Overwhelmingly, the preoccupation was mobilisation, warning time and threats – important issues largely unresolvable. The implications of worst-case contingencies were simply unaffordable when it came to force structure. When you

recollect the battering that Lance Barnard got when he said Australia faced no direct threat for fifteen years, it is easy to see why hard conclusions were difficult. Thirty-plus years on, we can now ask why was Lance so pessimistic!

Paul Dibb and Hugh White have superbly covered all this in a book launched last month, *History as Policy*. That obviates the need for me to go into too much detail. Several points need to be made.

Firstly, the Department could not resolve the issue. Bill Cole came to me, admitting his embarrassment, to advise me the Department and the Services were stalemated. He told me CDF and he were agreed that I should seek an outside consultant whom they would fully support and staff. It was not my idea or preference, but as I learned of the extraordinary difficulties the services, particularly army, were having with contingencies, I had to agree. It was impossible for the army to see a force of less than 80,000 in being with an expansion of up to 200,000 in fairly short order.¹⁷ We were lucky Paul was available.

Secondly, the key to turning a national strategy of defence self-reliance into a relevant force structure required an appropriate military strategy. Paul Dibb's report suggested defence in depth with a layered approach in a specific geographic area covering Australia's approaches. This made it much easier to quantify requirements for surveillance and interdiction both in the approaches and on the continent. This approach is sneered at now, but there would not be a country in the Asia-Pacific region which would not think in similar terms for their force planning, as recent acquisitions makes clear.

Even more important, nothing was resolvable until the team hit on the idea of focussing on regional capabilities as heavily as threats, warning-time and contingencies. It is interesting that former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's Quadrennial Defense Review made the same point in its effort to get to grips with the post-Cold War world. This perspective remains as relevant today as it was then, but like self-reliance we have largely forgotten it.

Thirdly, a force structure built around the defence of Australia's approaches with an operational zone covering 25 percent of the earth's surface really does supply capabilities that can meet Australia's obligations further afield. In the period since a massive number of war and peace-keeping contingencies, albeit with strains, have been met. The toughest in numbers

terms was Timor, but the job was done. In a well-funded environment the best solution come up with yet is for just two extra battalions.

Fourthly, the solutions were affordable – just. It required massive reforms of Australian defence factories to produce from the Defence budget the equivalent of about three percent real growth which then had to be concealed from the fiscal fiends. It was critical, however, that procurement decisions could be made in a timely fashion. There was no point in not being able to meet credible contingencies because something was missing. Interestingly we were spending about 2.3 percent of our GDP on defence. Were we doing that now we would be spending \$3 billion a year more on defence. There would be fewer arguments and the new White Paper would be a breeze.

Paul had to put up with a fair bit. In the absence of a White Paper covering the strategic settings and establishing a relationship with our foreign policy obligations, our main ally was not pleased. Before a very difficult meeting to thrash out the replacement for ANZUS I received a cable from Washington telling me I had a bit to explain.

They regarded the strategy proposed by Dobb – none had been – could be interpreted as weakening the rationale for ANZUS and Australia's membership of the Western alliance. They felt it removed the rationale for the Five Power Defence Arrangement and Australian military action outside its area of primary interest: could remove cooperation with the United States on sea-lane defence; failed to recognise the vulnerability of Southeast Asia to Soviet intimidation and in emphasising northern defence would strain Indonesian relations. It was altogether too insular. CINCPAC was worried that in questioning the prospects of general conventional war and a further nuclear war, Australia's doctrine would undermine the rationale for the very large investment in CINCPAC's capabilities.

It produced in the Presideo in San Francisco one of the two most memorable meetings of my career as Defence Minister. For two hours, Cap Weinberger and Richard Armitage on the one side, and myself and Ross Cottrell on the other, had a two-hour knock-down drag-out during which Ross rose to his feet and shook his fist under the Secretary's nose saying, "You Americans have got to understand that after Vietnam we'll never give you a blank cheque again."

Things settled when the US side was reassured that these essentially strategic and foreign policy issues would be favourably addressed in the White Paper. Interestingly they liked the force structure. For a little nation they thought it produced quite a powerful force.¹⁸

The US deliberately tested our claims to be prepared to commit our forces further afield when alliance issues or broader concerns were at stake almost immediately in the so-called “tanker war” phase of the Iran-Iraq war. To prevent global oil supplies choking up as each side attacked the other’s oil exports, the US ‘flagged’ tankers operating out of Kuwait and committed military forces to protect them. They sought some burden-sharing and approached us.

I pointed out to Cabinet that the Gulf was beyond the area of strategic interest which we declared only a few months earlier. Nevertheless, we had also indicated a preparedness to operate further afield in defence of alliance or broader interests. Bill Hayden had recently drawn attention to the freedom of sea lanes as an Australian interest providing a further rationale. We were prepared to commit navy clearance divers as a counter-mining measure, which was acceptable to the United States though they were to be placed on British ships.¹⁹

Two things are noteworthy from this. This was the first step in the process by which the Gulf became a focal point in Australian-American relations, despite the fact it was outside our area of immediate strategic interest, and the ANZUS zone for that matter.

Secondly, it was a clear demonstration that useful niche contributions were quite acceptable to our ally as an indication of global resolve. We did not then, and need not now, tie our force structure in knots when so much in it, fashioned around the defence of Australia, is useable further afield.

We made one mistake. Having settled on a capacity to deploy in the region as part of our force structure, we did not recommend the means. This was fixed up by my successor and the 1994 White Paper with the purchase of *Manoora* and *Kanimbla*.

The Dibb Report left one question hanging: the role of strategic strike in this force structure, particularly F1-11s and submarines. It was my view that the armed forces needed the capacity for strategic effect. We needed to be able to deter as well as defend.²⁰ I had been encouraged in this thought by my Indonesian counterpart, the late Beni Moerdani, who told

me that whenever his colleagues got stropky about Australia he would remind them that Australia had an aircraft that could project a bomb through the window onto the table in front of them!

In time, Gareth Evans would attest that Australia's defence posture was of great help to him in the region. It conveyed the impression of a power in regional terms able to stand up for itself and a useful friend to have. It might be added a useful friend for our main ally too. Evans wrote at the time: "The new confidence in our defence capability liberated Australian foreign policy. Australian foreign ministers are freer to think about their responsibilities more systematically and more intricately than ever before."²¹

Looking back, these events represent the coming of age for those in the relevant part of the Australian academy for influential interaction with decision-makers. With the creation of ASPI, the Howard Government also acknowledged the advantage of well-read and well-researched individuals standing outside the formal process, but speaking into it. A further vital addition to our academy's intellectual firepower has come from the creation of the Lowy Institute, our most substantial private national security think tank. The United States Studies Centre at Sydney University is another potential contributor. The value of what is provided can be seen by the serried ranks of public servants marching into masters programmes all over the country.

I am afraid to say, however, that the disciplines we were taught have to a large degree been lost. Self-reliance and a disciplined focus on regional capabilities have become honoured in the breach not the observation. Awareness of financial concerns and their relationship to strategy and a disciplined force structure have gone out the window as short-term political arguments are quietened by daft decisions acquiring barely useable expensive capabilities. Vast gaps have opened up in our fundamental air defence capabilities. Our ability to protect our sea lanes from now ubiquitous submarines in our region is dimming. The technologies we need to conduct effective network-centric warfare are honoured as platitude not programmes. The cost of the new capabilities has become the enemy of those we need. The irony of it all is that those commitments that will suffer most are those we may need to make in the regions we have to care about most. Those problems will occur long before we have to defend our homeland though our capacity there is increasingly in doubt. As my old friend Hugh White has said, we have lost 'strategic weight'.

Putting it on again. Now that's a challenge for the academy. I am reminded of my only encounter with Hedley Bull. I was researching my masters thesis, taking advantage of the then magnificent clipping collection at the Centre. Short of money I worked long hours. The usual occupants seemed to keep public service hours. He noticed me scribbling away and said, "I have always believed in the research value of an intelligent, well-informed person simply engaging in pure thought." I look forward to the quiet reflection of the academy over the next few years.

NOTES

1. Mead, W R, "Recent books, the United States", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 86, No 6, Nov/Dec 2007, p 190.
2. Bell, Coral, *The end of the Vasco Da Gama era*, Lowy Institute, Sydney, 2007, Lowy Institute Paper No. 21, p 2.
3. Kennan, George, "The source of Soviet conduct", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 25, No 5, July 1947, p 566-582.
4. Ghamari-Tabrizi, Sharon, *The world of Herman Kahn*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2005, p 49.
5. Ibid, p 123.
6. Ibid, p 283.
7. Ibid, p.22
8. Richardson, J L, "Coral Bell and the classical realist tradition", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 59, No 3, September 2005, p 267.
9. Ham, Paul, *Vietnam: the Australian war*, Harper Collins, Sydney, 2007, p 87.
10. Beazley, Kim, "The Hawke years: foreign affairs and defence", in Ryan, Susan and Bramston, Troy (eds), *The Hawke government: a critical retrospective*, Pluto Press, Melbourne, 2003, p 358.
11. Hawke, R J L, *The Hawke memoirs*, William Heinemann Australia, Melbourne, 1994, p 288.
12. Greater detail on all these debates in the 1960s and 1970s can be found in Beazley, K C, "Federal Labor and the American installations: prelude to government", *Australian Outlook*, Vol 33, No 2, 1979, pp 166-187.

13. Cited in King, Peter, "Credibility and other gaps: the Labor Government and the bases" in O'Neill, Robert (ed), *The strategic nuclear balance, an Australian perspective*, ANU, 1975, P 119.

14. Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Threats to Australia's security: their nature and probability*, AGPS, Canberra, 1981, p 18.

For the sake of completeness some officials did contemplate the possibility of an attack on Australian cities. A former JIO officer R H Mathams' evidence reflected the fact that JIO had isolated particular Soviet missiles that might be targeted on Sydney in the late 1970s. This did not change the thrust of the argument on the likelihood of nuclear war or the desirability of the facilities, but it was uncomfortable speculation.

15. This is dealt with in some detail in my chapter in *The Hawke government*, op cit, pp 362-363.

16. Morrison, W L, "The role of the Minister in the making of Australian defence policy since the reorganisation of the Department of Defence, in O'Neill, Robert, *The defence of Australia: fundamental new aspects*, ANU, 1977, pp 71-98

17. This was not unreasonable when one looked at scenario driven plans and Papua New Guinea contingencies. Courtesy of national service and the citizens' military forces, Australia had over 500,000 men still of military age who could be called on. It was obvious however that recruitment of 80,000 men into the regular army was not doable or affordable.

18. See Beazley, Kim, *The Hawke years: foreign affairs and defence*, op cit, pp 359-361.

19. Steketee, M, "Divers cleared for role in Gulf", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 December 1987.

20. To be fair to Paul, he did recommend keeping the F1-11s with a minimum update till the mid-1990s and six new submarines with a very tough financial ceiling. He anticipated a bounce back from those who supported strike options, but wanted to keep us at financial levels which would not derail the rest of the force structure. See Dibb, Paul, *Review of Australia's defence capabilities*, AGPS, Canberra, 1986, p 19.

21. Evans, G and Grant, B, *Australia's foreign relations*, MUP, Melbourne, 1991, p 30.

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Vote of Thanks to Kim Beazley

Hugh White

Coral Bell Lecture, 19 March 2008

Well what a wonderful evening. I might start by thanking, on behalf of you all, our hosts at the Lowy Institute; the Lowy Family, the Board represented by Mark Ryan here tonight, and the Lowy team headed by Allan. One of the great pleasures of my role at Lowy as a Visiting Fellow is the sheer professionalism with which things happen, and tonight's superbly organised event is no exception. Special thanks to Orietta Melfi for that.

My main job however is to thank our speaker. No task could be more congenial to me than this one, and I'm going to interpret my task a little broadly, for we are here not simply to hear Kim, but to honour him, and to honour him especially for his long and distinguished career in politics and government. He has been subjected to many farewells as he has left active politics, but not I think one that focuses specifically on his contribution to the issues that are the interest of the Lowy Institute, and that bring us together here tonight – Australia's strategic policy and its place in the world. Kim did many jobs in politics, and made immense contributions in all of them, but no one could doubt – and certainly not after hearing him speak tonight – that in a long political career in which he has engaged with every aspect of Australia's national life, the area closest to his heart is strategic and defence policy.

He was of course Defence Minister for seven long years, but his contribution is much greater even than that – in truth a lifetime, from a very early age, of intense thought, debate, advocacy and action. And this will be the mainspring too of his future career as an academic.

I need to declare an interest here. As many of you know, Kim's time as defence minister was the hinge of my career – as it was for some others amongst us too. In my case, Kim took a young journalist and turned him into a staffer, taught him something of the arts of government and politics, and by his example also taught him something of what his late father – a truly

remarkable man – would have called ‘character’. Kim’s conduct as minister has been for me, as for many others who worked with him, an example of integrity, generosity, grace and good humour. And besides all that, of course, he taught me strategy. In his office we began a perpetual dialogue on defence policy that has continued literally to this day, and which has been one of the great intellectual influences of my life.

It was also all great fun. This is not always the case with Defence Ministers. It is a rather toxic portfolio. Fifteen people have held the job in the last forty years. Of those, only two have ever gone on to hold another ministerial office – Malcolm Fraser and Kim. The same is true in other countries. After the disaster of the Boer War, Arthur Balfour – quite a canny man for a philosopher – approached George Curzon to take on the task of reforming the Army as Secretary of State for War. Curzon declined. “My answer would be No, No and a thousand times No. There is no reason why one should sacrifice the whole of the best years of one’s life for work for which you get no gratitude and are, on the contrary, overwhelmed with ignorant calumny and malignant scorn”, he said. Many of Kim’s successors would agree with that. But not Kim: he made the job look easy, and he achieved great things. It is easy to forget for example, that he completely revolutionised Defence Industry. When he took over, Defence was the largest industrial employer in the country – larger than BHP. When he left, all the factories were out of Defence and on the way to efficient private operation, or closure. It was the biggest defence efficiency reform of our time.

But all that was in a sense subordinate to his real work on high policy. War is meant to be organised violence with a purpose, and the key to good defence policy is to see and understand the purpose behind the violence, and make sure it guides the policy. Kim did this with more clarity, rigour, energy, discipline and sheer intellectual engagement than any defence minister we have ever had, and in doing so provided the quality of leadership that the Defence Organisation so badly needs, and so seldom receives.

In many ways, of course, Kim resembles that other great figure we honour tonight, Coral Bell. His clarity, his rigour, his willingness to follow where the argument leads and his openness to new ideas are all very much Coral’s trademarks too. In one respect he is very different; Coral is a great optimist, Kim is ultimately a deep pessimist, which, along with his intense sense of nationhood, provides the profoundest sources of his strategic sense. But above all they both have an immense respect for the place of ideas in shaping the world of government.

Which brings us of course to Kim's lecture tonight. There is a lot in it, and Kim has given us much to think about. He touched on the delicate subject of the balance between history and theory in the study of international relations – one he will find contentious among his new academic colleagues. He explored some very interesting new ideas – for example his view that the modern alliance was born in the early to mid 1960s – a very compelling hypothesis. His account emphasised the intimate interplay between policy and politics, and presented a compelling account of politics as a battle of ideas, not just of personalities. Above all, he reminded us that the central task of defence policy is to forge and sustain an alignment between strategic objectives, capability priorities and funding realities. His ending, I thought, was rather dark, true to his pessimistic nature, but I would venture to say that I am more pessimistic still on the one point on which I might disagree with him. I think that even if we were spending 2.3% of GDP on defence, the new White Paper is going to be very hard to get right.

Well, all this provides much grist for Kim's new career in the empires of pure reason. Those many of us here who have already made that transition welcome you to it; we all thank you for the service you have done your country, and we thank you for your marvellous speech to us tonight.