

## AUSTRALIA'S REGIONAL SECURITY

Tabling Statement by Senator Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade,  
Ministerial Statement on Australia's Regional Security, The Senate, 6 December 1989.

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The Statement I table today is a substantial document covering not only an analysis of the global and regional security environment, but also the formulation, implementation and presentation of Australia's policy responses. In these introductory comments, I intend only to highlight the Statement's main themes, with particular emphasis on the multidimensional approach to security policy advocated in it.

I should say at the outset that this Statement was not motivated by any concern that Australia's strategic environment was deteriorating, or that we needed to revise the basic policy assumptions behind our regional security policies. Rather, it resulted from a prudent wish, at a time of rapid and fundamental change in the international and regional environment, to review our regional security interests and policies, and to set out in a comprehensive and integrated way our approach to the pursuit of those interests.

The overarching theme of the Statement is that the most effective regional security policy is a multidimensional policy: one in which all the components of Australia's network of relations in the region - military and politico-military capability; diplomacy; economic links; assistance with development and so-called "non-military threats"; and the exchange of people and ideas - work together to help shape a security environment which is favourable to Australia's interests.

The Statement acknowledges the very important contribution that an effective military capability makes to national security. But it also seeks to set defence policy in the wider context of Australia's regional relations, emphasising the way in which defence policy is both supportive of wider policy and in turn supported by it. Military capability is just one among many instruments of an effective security policy.

The geographical scope of the Statement encompasses the South Pacific, South East Asia (including Indo-China and Myanmar) and the eastern reaches of the Indian Ocean - essentially the same area described in the 1987 Defence White Paper as our region of "primary strategic interest".

The maintenance of a positive security environment in our region, so defined, is only one of our overall foreign policy priorities. Other priorities include pursuing trade, investment, and economic cooperation, where North East Asia, North America and Europe are of

major importance; contributing to global security, including through our alliance with the United States and our active involvement in multilateral disarmament negotiations; and playing our part as good international citizens in the resolution of global-scale problems from threats to the environment to human rights abuses.

Even within the field of security interests, the Statement's regional focus does not imply that developments outside the region are marginal to Australian security. The avoidance of nuclear war, the security of the Persian Gulf, the conventional balance in Europe and the military balance in North Asia all have implications for Australian security.

Moreover, in a world of extensive economic interdependence, the boundary lines between regions are increasingly blurred. South East Asia is becoming more and more integrated with the economies of North East Asia, vertically and horizontally, as the Asia Pacific chain of development is pushed south. Australia itself is already closely tied economically with the dynamic economies of North East Asia. These are all trends which will become more pronounced over the ten years-plus time span that the Statement covers, and it would be unrealistic to expect that the strategic map of the region will somehow be insulated from this changing economic map.

Yet currently, and for the foreseeable future, the broad South East Asia South Pacific region remains the one which most influences Australia's immediate strategic environment. It is also the region in which Australia can exert influence on strategic issues in ways which are not open to us elsewhere. Within this region, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea are of particular importance because of the inescapable geographical reality that any military threat to Australia - unlikely though that currently is - would almost certainly be posed from or through our north.

**Strategic Assessments.** The strategic analysis in the Statement is set against the background of a rapidly changing global and regional environment. The international order crafted in the aftermath of the Second World War and sustained through the Cold War is drawing to an end. The flow-on effects of this period of transition are, in South East Asia and the South Pacific as elsewhere, far from clear. What is clear is that the equations of power in Europe and the Pacific are changing as the roles and capabilities of the two superpowers change, and the United States and Soviet Union are joined by Japan, the European Community, China and India as major global influences.

All these trends - and others such as economic globalisation - are likely to have implications for regional security. In particular, the point is made that it would not be wise to assume that the United States will continue to maintain its present level of security activity in this part of the world. The United States will want to continue to protect its major strategic interests in maritime passage through the region, and its current interest both in renegotiating the Philippines Bases Agreement and in developing modest military

facilities in Singapore certainly shows that it wishes to maintain a presence in the region for the time being. But with the decline in ideological competition and other global and regional developments, United States attention on the region may well become over time increasingly less geo-political and more oriented to its major economic interests.

Overall, the Statement assesses the security picture in South East Asia as relatively favourable, with most of the countries in the region, for all their various internal problems, more likely than not to continue down the path of nation building based upon participation in the global economic system and a generally pro-Western foreign policy outlook. Indo-China appears to be the main exception, but even here there are signs evident of a more outward looking economic orientation.

The South Pacific faces rather more problems. A number of the island nations confront economic, environmental, cultural and demographic pressures which will place increasing strain on their political systems. In view of its crucial strategic location for us, the course of Papua New Guinea's development will have particular significance for Australia's security, requiring a sustained and sensitive Australian policy response in the months and years ahead.

None of this is to suggest that the South Pacific region as a whole is likely to pose major strategic problems for Australia over the next ten years or so. But there is certainly the possibility that we will see over this period in some of the island nations a renewal or a continuation of many of the political tensions which have been evident over the last few years .

I should perhaps make the point that while New Zealand is geographically very much part of the South Pacific region, our diverse and close relationship with that country is not dealt with in any detail in the Statement. New Zealand has a very special status for us, as an ally and CER partner, and in terms of the way in which we conduct our bilateral business and consult on wider issues. Thus, in the context of what is essentially an outward-looking Statement, the discussion of the South Pacific focuses primarily not on New Zealand but the other Forum countries.

**Policy Response.** The Statement identifies seven areas around which Australia should build its multidimensional approach to regional security.

First, there is the acquisition and maintenance - in line with current defence policy - of a military capability designed to deter, and if necessary defeat, aggression against our territory or maritime jurisdiction. This capability, based on the principles of self-reliance and defence in depth, should be seen as relevant not only to the defence of Australia, but

also to the security of the region as a whole. Australia's possession of significant but non-aggressive military power contributes to the strategic stability of our neighbouring regions by providing a "secure south" for South East Asian countries, and a "secure west" for South Pacific nations.

Secondly, Australia should use its military assets and presence in the region to help foster the gradual development of a regional security community based on a sense of shared security interests: this is described in the Statement as the exercise of politico-military capability. We should not be embarrassed about using the military capability we possess, with prudence and sensitivity, to advance both Australia's and the common security of the region.

The Statement also addresses the sensitive and difficult question of the extent to which we should be able, and prepared, to use military force in pursuit of security interests going beyond the defence of Australian territory, noting that this is an issue which arises more in the South Pacific than the South East Asian context. It makes the point that the use of military force may conceivably be appropriate in unusual and extreme circumstances, and that any such decision can only be made on a case-by-case basis bearing in mind certain cumulative criteria which are canvassed. The Statement explicitly rejects any notion of Australia claiming the role of regional arbiter of political legitimacy or moral acceptability.

Thirdly, we should use traditional diplomatic skills of persuasion to manage tensions and frictions, to ensure that small problems stay small, and to achieve accommodations of interests with mutual benefit. Diplomacy should also extend beyond the region itself to dialogue on regional security issues with those external actors capable of exercising influence within the region. The Statement, here as elsewhere, carries some important implications for departmental resources, which I will be addressing within the context of our overall needs and priorities in the lead-up to next year's Budget.

Fourthly, the Statement emphasises the importance of trade and investment in creating more substantial and mutually beneficial links, especially in South East Asia where economic complementarities offer a great deal of scope for expansion. We must devote a level of effort and resources to our economic relationship with the region greater than its current relative economic importance might otherwise justify, bearing in mind that, in this region as elsewhere, our success will depend primarily on the success of our efforts to restructure the Australian economy into a strong and internationally competitive entity.

We do not pretend that nations which trade together always stay together. But extensive economic linkages create mutual interests which can work to restrain any resort to military conflict. The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation process, notwithstanding its exclusively economic focus and broader membership, is an excellent example of how new connections can be built up in the region. The Timor Gap Treaty with Indonesia, to be

signed next week, is another example of a non-military solution to a problem that historically has often led to conflict - a disputed boundary involving prized resources.

Fifthly, development assistance programs can contribute to our national security interests in the region in a variety of ways: promoting economic and social development; reducing the political disaffection caused by economic deprivation; creating further economic linkages with Australia; and encouraging perceptions of Australia as a sensitive, practical and technologically competent neighbour.

Sixthly, Australia can further demonstrate its neighbourly credentials by assisting regional countries with so-called "non-military threats" such as environmental degradation, AIDS, narcotics trafficking and unregulated population flows, including the problem of refugees.

Finally, there is scope for a great deal more to be done in the area of exchanges of people and ideas to reduce the cultural distance between Australia and the region, and to overcome the significant image problem we still tend to have in South East Asia and the South Pacific. Mutual understanding, like all of the other strands in this multidimensional approach, is no guarantee of peace. But mutual ignorance is a greater risk, and so called "second track" diplomacy - seeking to get our message across through various non-governmental channels - has an important role to play in countering it.

**Policy Themes.** The concluding section of the Statement identifies some broad themes which should govern our approach to the formulation, implementation and presentation of all the different policy strands I have just outlined. We should recognise the impact on our wider security interests that a number of apparently non-security-related policies have, and give them greater emphasis, as a result, than they might otherwise get; we should develop policy responses with creativity, alert to opportunities for new agenda-setting, and pursue them with discipline and persistence; and we should be sensitive to regional perceptions of us, and behave accordingly.

In this last respect, the Statement develops the point that we need to be aware of the extent of Australia's perceived "otherness" - our unique character and position as seen by our neighbours. Australia's history, cultural affiliations, values and traditions, ethnic makeup and the like do make us distinctly different from the countries of our immediate region other than New Zealand. Our "otherness" is not a constraint on our freedom of action, but does affect how we should exercise it. Thus, we should be conscious that in some contexts public and formal initiatives will be appropriate, but that in others the emphasis should be on informal and incremental activity. Particularly where there are political sensitivities involved, other governments may prefer discreet and gradual movement. And while ambiguity and imprecision may not be viewed positively in the Australian cultural context, in other settings these attributes can usefully clothe initiatives and activities which would provoke opposition if starkly delineated: this point is particularly applicable

to South East Asia.

Pulling all these policy responses and themes together, the Statement suggests that our long term goal in South East Asia could best be described as "comprehensive engagement" with the countries of the region, while in the South Pacific we should continue with the policy of "constructive commitment" which I announced in September 1988 soon after assuming the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio.

In South East Asia our approach should be "comprehensive" in that there should be many elements in the relationship, and one of "engagement" because it implies a mutual commitment among equals. Security threats requiring a military response arise when there is a motivation, an intention to do something about it, and the capability to do it. If we develop a substantial and mutually beneficial range of linkages with our regional neighbours, then the motivation and intention to threaten us will simply not arise. Moreover, the linkages will do more than save us from threats: they will become networks of connective tissue, binding together us and our neighbours in a strong regional partnership, with a sense of regional commonality of interest.

The essential elements of "comprehensive engagement" are described as:

- . building a more diverse and substantive array of linkages with the countries of South East Asia, so that they have an important national interest in the maintenance of a positive relationship with Australia;
- . continuing to support the major existing regional association, ASEAN, and working with the countries of the region to shape additional regional organisations or arrangements, such as APEC, which can contribute to the social and economic evolution of the region;
- . participating actively in the gradual development of a regional security community based on a sense of shared security interests;
- . working for the involvement of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar in the cooperative framework of regional affairs; and
- . recognising that Australia, in vigorously pursuing its national interests in the region, should do so as a confident and natural partner in a common neighbourhood of remarkable diversity, rather than as a cultural misfit trapped by geography.

In the South Pacific we are already pursuing a policy of "constructive commitment". By this we mean essentially that, notwithstanding our greater size and economic capacity, we

want to approach the region within a framework of regional partnership, not dominance - not regarding the South Pacific as our sphere of influence, but a region of mutually reinforcing opportunity.

The essential elements of "constructive commitment" are described as:

- . promotion of close, confident and broadly based relations with all Pacific island countries on a basis which recognises their individual differences;
- . fostering effective regional cooperation, through the South Pacific Forum and its agencies, and the South Pacific Commission;
- . recognition that, for the island countries, security hinges on economic and social development, and offering assistance to help them achieve both;
- . respect for the full sovereignty of the island states in relation both to their internal and external affairs; but, at the same time
- . promotion of shared perceptions of the region's strategic and security interests, laying the basis for a regional approach to situations, internal or external, which put regional stability at risk.

The overall prospects for our regional security environment are positive, but there are also many uncertainties, and undoubtedly many surprises, in store for us. We cannot assume that, in the next ten years or so, states in the region or outside it will not use military power and influence to achieve goals contrary to our security interests. For Australia, the essential fact is that we are dealing with a more fluid and complex region, and that in doing so we will be required to be much more the master of our own fate than we have been prepared to accept until recently.

In the 1950s and 60s, and during some of the 70s, Australia tended to perceive the relevance of South East Asia and the South Pacific to our security largely in military terms. We now have the capacity to reinforce our national security by utilising the many dimensions of our external policies in an informed, coordinated and vigorous way to participate in the shaping of the regional environment.

It is very much in our interests to be seen as a significant partner to the region, an accepted and natural participant in regional affairs. Effectively implemented and properly explained, the multidimensional approach to regional security advocated in the Statement is the best way of maintaining our national security into the next century.

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