

AUSTRALIA'S APPROACH TO ASIA PACIFIC

REGIONAL SECURITY

Address by Senator the Hon Gareth Evans QC, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, to the Institute of Public Affairs and Heritage Foundation Conference 'Tomorrow's Pacific', Canberra, 15 July 1992

Since the pace of international change started to accelerate in 1989, the extraordinary has so much become the commonplace that we sometimes need to stop and pinch ourselves to fully appreciate the scale of the transformation. Following the abortive coup in Moscow last August we have seen nothing less than a massive historical earthquake, in which the USSR has vanished, communism has disappeared as a ruling force in all but four countries, and nearly twenty new states have emerged on the Eurasian landmass.

In short, we have seen in less than a year the total collapse of the bipolar global structure that has characterised and underpinned international affairs since 1945. On the positive side, this has meant not only that we need no longer fear a global nuclear holocaust, but that the sterile ideologies of the past no longer in themselves constitute stumbling blocks to the promotion of security measures through disarmament and arms control, to regional problem solving, and to the effective intervention of the United Nations in peace-keeping and peace enforcement.

On the other hand, the lifting of the heavy hand of Marxism-Leninism has seen a resurgence of nationalism and ethnic identification, with violence increasingly employed as the means of self-determination in the break-up of nation states - the appalling series of events in the former Yugoslavia being only the most obvious current case in point.

The fact is that the so-called new world order of the post-Cold War world is far more complex, diverse and unpredictable than the East-West polarity it has replaced. In the fluid situation we now confront, there are both opportunities and risks.

The Asia Pacific area has adjusted to the end of the Cold War much more effectively than many other parts of the world, and in the main, developments have been positive. These have included movement, albeit stalled at the moment, towards a settlement of the long and tragic Cambodian war, the reintegration of Vietnam and Laos into the region, and a modest reduction of tension on the Korean Peninsula. Greater regional economic integration, which is a fundamental objective of initiatives such as APEC, will also play its part in reducing regional tensions.

In a phase of world history that has seen a superpower vanish in a matter of weeks, nothing can be regarded as invulnerable to the forces at work in the current international environment. And problems and possible sources of tension do remain in our own region.

The economic success of some Asia-Pacific countries, for example, is bringing with it greater political power, and in time this will require some adjustments in regional attitudes if envy and competition are to be managed. The increased wealth and technological sophistication of some regional nations is also leading to increasing weapons imports. While this cannot yet be called an arms race, the situation will bear watching in the medium term.

Another potential source of tension is Japan's role in regional and global affairs. While there is growing regional acceptance of Japan playing a political role commensurate with its economic power, there remains considerable resistance to it assuming an enhanced security role, even in the very narrowly defined context of UN-sponsored peace-keeping operations.

The development of China's response to the new international environment has been complicated by the approaching leadership transition, and while China has been playing a very cooperative role within the Security Council, especially on Cambodia, we have seen signs that it could adopt increasingly hardline positions on many international issues, not least on some long-standing territorial claims.

Residual territorial disputes do continue to trouble parts of the region, most obviously in the South China Sea. In the most volatile single area of the region, the Korean Peninsula, the North Korean nuclear program and its possible weapons application continues to loom as a spectre. And there are a significant number of transnational issues - particularly so-called "police" issues like refugees, piracy, and drugs - which are likely to continue for some time causing low-level but irritating problems.

Quite apart from these potential sources of difficulty, the end of the Cold War has also set in motion a quite different process, namely a reshaping of the United States role in the region. Claims of a US intention to withdraw totally are misinformed, but are themselves tending to contribute to regional uncertainty.

In responding to the changing circumstances around us, the starting point of the Australian Government's national security policy has been very clearly defence self-reliance, as articulated in the 1987 Defence White Paper and in the process of implementation subsequently.

But when we talk about security policy we are, of course, referring to something much

broader than just defence policy in the military sense. As I hope I explained very clearly in my Regional Security Statement of December 1989, the Foreign Affairs complement to the 1987 Defence White Paper, we in Australia do not just look to military means - important though they are - to protect our interests. Rather, we have adopted a multi-dimensional approach which looks to other policy instruments as well. Political cooperation through traditional bilateral diplomacy and in the emerging trans-national problem solving agenda; economic and trade relations; development assistance; the promotion of people-to-people contacts - all these enhance Australia's security. The development of a sense of real interdependence in all these respects will be tremendously helpful in creating the kind of regional environment in which resort to aggression becomes a less and less palatable policy option.

The particular dimension of regional security policy which has tended to attract most attention in recent times is the politico-military or "pol-mil" one: at the interface between diplomacy and traditional defence policy. What is primarily involved here, in this context, is the fostering of patterns of multilateral security cooperation, in which countries come to see that they are all best served by building their security with, rather than against, each other.

This does not presuppose the establishment of any new military bloc, nor that countries should combine against some external threat. What is envisaged is a variety of programs that can involve all countries of the region in activities that boost the confidence of each one and at the same time weave a web of security cooperation relationships. These activities would not be a substitute for existing security links; rather they would complement them.

In building more intense patterns of regional security cooperation it is important not to ignore the increasingly important contribution to this process of what in the past would have been classified as global cooperation strategies. Global security mechanisms such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and the impending Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) are all essential foundations for consolidating regional security. This is one of the reasons we have worked so hard, for example, in the chemical weapons context, not only in trying to reach a concluded text in Geneva, but also in building a regional technical expertise and political consensus to ensure that the Convention will be embraced and applied in the region as soon as it is capable of implementation.

As so much of the United Nations's activity in the post-Cold War world is demonstrating - right across its repertoire from arms control negotiations, to peace-making to peace-keeping to peace-enforcing - there is an increasingly fuzzy borderline these days between global and regional (and in some cases even internal) matters, and certainly security measures in each of these realms can and should be regarded as complementing each other in a mutually reinforcing way.

While this is not the occasion for partisan posturing - indeed, I have always believed that partisanship should be avoided as far as possible in external policy - there has recently been published an advance account of an allegedly wholly new Opposition defence policy which puts all these regional security matters into very interesting relief, and which gives me a useful opportunity to highlight just what the present Australian Government's policy is.

As described in an interview with Opposition spokesman Alexander Downer in the Weekend Australian of 4 July (the date, as will be seen, is a nice irony), the new Opposition policy seems to be built on three basic propositions. First, that present Australian defence policy is wholly premised upon the alliance relationship with the United States; secondly, that the United States is withdrawing from the region, leaving our policy denuded as a result; and thirdly, that what is necessary is a new policy of "cooperative regional deterrence", the creation of a credible regional deterrent to would-be aggressors through a web of closer military links with Australia's Asian and Pacific neighbours. Each of these propositions is, however, quite seriously flawed.

The criticism that our present policy is over-reliant on the US is rather a startling one to hear from the other side of Australian politics! When the Government released the Dibb Review - the basis for our current defence policy - in 1986, the Opposition said this was "a preamble to isolationism". They accused the Government of leading a "military retreat from ANZUS". Now we hear the opposite - that we have been overly reliant on our great and powerful friend. The reality is we have got the balance right. Kim Beazley and Robert Ray have put in place a policy based on a capacity to defend ourselves, effective cooperation with our regional neighbours and continued strong alliances. We derive technological, intelligence, training and logistic benefit from our alliance with the United States, and we want to maintain it, but self-reliance means what it says.

As to the post-Cold War United States role in the region, it is of course the case that we have to anticipate a lesser presence but it is not a matter of having to build arrangements that provide for security in the absence of any significant US engagement. The disappearance of the Soviet threat has removed the rationale for a very large US military presence, of the kind there has been in Asia since the end of World War II, and the absence of this rationale will lead to a less all-pervasive role, simply because American perceptions of its interests are changing.

But the US is not vanishing, rather going through what is best understood as a reconfiguration of its regional presence. The US has to decide what its real interests are, determine those which are most important to it in the contemporary post-Cold-War world, and devise how to defend them. This process of redefinition is very important for the region: it is probably the case that only when US activities in the region are clearly

derived from demonstrable American interests will the countries of the region really be convinced that the US presence is reliable and for keeps.

The most important US interests in the region are in fact fairly self-evident. In geographical terms alone, the United States is a Pacific country. An extensive western coastline, Alaska, Hawaii, Samoa and Guam give the US more of an Asia Pacific identity than any perceived European connection.

Even more importantly, US trade with the region is already outstripping that with Europe. The measure of these growing US economic and commercial links across the Pacific gives the United States a major stake in the continuing prosperity of the region, a prosperity that would be hard to maintain without a high level of regional security.

Commercial considerations aside, the mere presence of two of the world's great powers, namely China and Japan, in the Asia Pacific region inevitably generates interests for the US as the sole remaining superpower. The US security arrangement with Japan is widely viewed as vital to regional stability. Beyond its past effectiveness in providing a check on Soviet aspirations in the area, it has also provided reassurance to the region with respect to Japanese intentions. Memories of Japanese imperialism linger, and although Japan's growing military capabilities are not a present concern, there is more chance of them becoming seen as such if, in turn, they are seen as supporting an independent military role outside the parameters of the US-Japan security pact. Without the glue of a common threat, and in the absence of a wiser management of the US-Japan relationship, the competition between the two economic superpowers could lead to increased friction and added incentive for Japan to go its own way. Such a major change in the complexion of the region would have serious implications for the US as well as for other regional countries.

Taken together, these various factors argue cogently for not only a continuing, but a significant, US engagement in the region for the foreseeable future. I think we can take statements of intention to remain thus engaged, of the kind made by President Bush and Secretary Cheney, at their face value in this respect.

Overall, we believe that the United States will re-engineer its presence in the region, rather than retreat out of sight. In pursuing its interests in this new environment the United States will have a trimmer military presence, one in which there will be less emphasis on being able to solve problems single-handedly, and more on multilateralism and coalition building. Certainly we see the regional security environment as continuing necessarily to involve both the US presence and the kind of positive US role that has been played in the past.

As to the third and most self-consciously adventurous leg of the new Opposition policy -

"cooperative regional deterrence" - there are several things that need to be said. The first is that the description is unlikely to be appealing to anyone in the region: it implies that there is a threat to be deterred, risks antagonising major countries, and generally seems more likely to add to tension than alleviate it. The ASEAN countries have repeatedly foresworn becoming involved in formal defence pacts, partly because of the perception that this would if anything tend to attract threats. What the region needs more than simplistic prescriptions is a subtle understanding of its history and dynamics.

The second thing to be said is that even if the Opposition has in mind not so much a formal mutual defence pact as more formalised cooperation in specific areas like training, exercises, procurement and defence industry, there seems to have been a conspicuous underestimation of the degree of difficulty involved in negotiating such arrangements. The region is moving towards more formalised cooperative arrangements, but the process is slow, cautious and evolutionary: it is not easy, and it cannot be rushed.

The third point to make is that we of course fully understand the desirability of achieving more comprehensive and far-reaching patterns of mutual defence cooperation - that is the point at which I began this address - but we believe that we have already been doing everything a country like Australia could reasonably do to advance the process, building on the long history we have had of involvement in both bilateral and regional defence cooperation arrangements. So to the extent that there is any legitimate substance in what is being proposed by the Opposition, there is simply nothing new.

It needs to be appreciated - and let me make this my concluding theme - that the countries of the region are already now very much engaged in post-Cold War regional security policy formulation, and they are becoming ever more so with each passing month. In developments barely conceivable four or five years ago, regional security has now become firmly and centrally established on the agenda of the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference, the region's premiere political dialogue forum, and the ASEAN Heads of Government at their recent Summit themselves formally agreed for the first time to regularly and systematically address security issues.

Indonesia has sponsored a very constructive series of workshops on the conflicting territorial claims in the South-China Sea and more are to follow. And several major seminars and conferences on regional security, involving both officials and non-government experts, have already been held in Manila, Bangkok and Bali. They have been valuable in getting the debate going and in beginning to identify the range of issues that need to be addressed, even if they have yet only begun to scratch the surface of some of the fundamental conceptual issues thrown up for debate by the end of the Cold War - including, for example, the applicability of the concept of balance of power in the new era, the place of the theory of deterrence, implications of the changes that are occurring to the concept of sovereignty, and the consequences of embracing "common security" as an underlying policy approach.

Suggestions for further accelerating this process have also been coming forward from regional states. Malaysian Defence Minister Najib has proposed a meeting of Asia-Pacific security officials, which I understand will take place around the middle of next year. Japanese Prime Minister Miyazawa, in a recent speech in Washington, floated the idea of a 'dual track' approach whereby an Asia Pacific security dialogue would complement the sub-regional management of specific problems like Cambodia and Korea.

Australia has been centrally involved from the outset in this process of generating and exchanging ideas. I will be going next week to the 1992 ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference and making some suggestions there about exchanging maritime information and developing strategic planning discussions. I will not be proposing anything especially dramatic, but this is deliberate: while there is a case for floating larger concepts from time to time, I believe that real progress on regional security will only be achieved in practice by gradual, incremental measures in which the confidence of each relevant country is won and consolidated step by step along the way.

The overall task, after all, is not so much to define threats and mobilise resources against them, either unilaterally or cooperatively, but rather to build the kind of relationships of mutual respect, cooperation and interdependence in the wider region which will ensure that those threats will never materialise.