Diplomacy in an asymmetric alliance: reconciling Sino-Australian relations with ANZUS, 1971–2007

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Abstract

There is an assumption in international relations literature that junior allies must choose between supporting a dominant global alliance partner and engaging with a rising power. Yet, Australian policy-makers have paradoxically managed to deepen Sino-Australian relations despite their bilateral alliance with the United States. They have developed a discrete China policy on the assumption that they could persuade Washington to accept it over time. They reasoned that this outcome was more likely if Australia used diplomacy to facilitate Sino-American cooperation and to develop an Australian China policy non-prejudicial to ANZUS. This article explores how this 'diplomatic formula' supported expansion of Sino-Australian relations under the Whitlam, Hawke, and Howard Governments. It explains Australia's intra-alliance influence and paradoxical foreign policy behavior and contributes to understanding the dynamics of asymmetric alliances during power transition.

1 Introduction

There is a dominant school of thought in international relations that, during power transition, 'junior allies' of a dominant global power will either intensify their support for their senior ally or, alternatively, realign with the rising challenger (Gilpin, 1981; Kugler *et al.*, 2004).[1] In the Asia-Pacific, China's rise has compelled American allies to adjust their foreign policies in ways contrary to this conventional wisdom. Most Asia-Pacific allies of the United States have been driven by political and economic imperatives to strengthen their ties with China, but have simultaneously retained alliance affinity with Washington. In Northeast Asia, Japan has strengthened its economic relations with China over the past four decades, while enhancing defense cooperation with the Americans. The Republic of Korea (ROK) forged a 'strategic cooperative partnership' with China in 2008, while simultaneously extending the US–ROK alliance beyond the defense of South Korea to 'contribute to peace and prosperity at the regional and global level' (The White House, 2008; Lee, 2010, p. 291).

This pattern of concurrently strengthening relationships with both China and the United States is perhaps most graphically illustrated by Australia. In 2004, Australian Prime Minister John Howard observed: '[O]ne of the great successes of this country's foreign relations is that we have simultaneously been able to strengthen our longstanding ties with the United States of America, yet at the same time continue to build a very close relationship with China' (Howard, 2004). This is surprising, given that international relations scholars typically postulate the polarizing effects of power transition on junior allies' policies toward dominant and rising powers (Organski, 1958; Ross, 2006). As a country often portrayed in the academic literature as a 'dependent' ally of the United States (Bell, 1988), Australia presents a hard case for re-examining these assumptions. Insights from this case may further illuminate the dynamics of other US bilateral alliances in the Asia-Pacific.

This article examines how three Australian governments reconciled the development of a deeper Sino-Australian relationship with the political obligations associated with alliance membership. Two critical factors

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1   The term 'junior ally' is commonly used in existing international relations literature to denote a materially weaker power in either a bilateral or a multilateral alliance (Okimoto, 1998; Dyson, 2007). It is adopted here in this context.

underpinned Australian policy-makers' confidence in developing a discrete China policy, shaped primarily by Australian interests rather than US preferences. First, successive Australian Governments recognized that non-adversarial Sino-American relations and a bilateral relationship with China that was non-prejudicial to ANZUS were essential to facilitating an autonomous Australian China policy. Yet, they never accepted these facilitative conditions as given.

Equally essential to a discrete China policy was Australia's confidence that it would be able to effectively use alliance diplomacy to *perpetuate* these conditions and *communicate* them to US policy-makers. To this end, Australian officials enlisted various diplomatic tactics, including 'information-sharing' and 'costly reassurance' (to be more fully explored later). In so doing, they hoped to develop or maintain positive US feedback loops. Positive feedback did not mean that US policy-makers necessarily endorsed Australia's position on China but nor did they strenuously object to it. Accordingly, Australian officials believed that they could negotiate scope within the alliance for a relatively autonomous and cooperative foreign policy toward China.

This article has been divided into five parts. The following section reviews assumptions in international relations literature regarding how junior allies respond to an international power shift. It focuses on power transition and alliance theory as two explanations that most clearly describe the effects of international power shifts on junior allies' foreign policies. The section explores limitations of these theories in understanding Australian foreign policy toward China and the United States. Section 3 suggests that these theoretical perspectives do not pay sufficient attention to the empowering effects of diplomacy – that a junior ally may skillfully use diplomacy to persuade its senior partner not to object to its policies or, at least, *perceives* that it has successfully persuaded its senior partner based on positive feedback loops. Such perceptions may underpin a more confident and autonomous junior-allied foreign policy than generally assumed.

Section 4 presents the empirical evidence from which these theoretical insights have been derived. It explores how three different Australian governments used alliance diplomacy to reconcile deeper Sino-Australian relations with US alliance membership. Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam pioneered using alliance diplomacy to manage prospective tension between the Sino-Australian and the US–Australian

relationships. The Hawke and Howard Governments also adopted a similar approach. Significantly, fluctuations in Sino-Australian relations during these periods resulted from factors relating to the bilateral relationship and not alliance considerations. The final section discusses the ramifications of these findings for understanding junior-allied foreign policy behavior during power transitions.

2 Alliance dynamics during international power shifts

Much of the literature on the 'rise' of China suggests that, as China emerges as a great power, alliances are likely to tighten and lead to a polarized Asia-Pacific regional order (Friedberg, 2005; Mearsheimer, 2006; Ross, 2006). Robert Ross, for example, highlights trends that point to continental Asian countries balancing with China and maritime equivalents balancing with the United States (Ross, 2006). The theme of whether American allies in the Asia-Pacific will have to 'choose' between the United States and China pervades the academic literature (Edwards, 2005; White, 2005; Shambaugh, 2006). That a potentially more adversarial Sino-American relationship would render Australia's strategic choices difficult in the future is not contested here. Nor does this study dismiss the growing complexity associated with Australia's management of the two relationships as the scale of China's rise has become more apparent and as Sino-American relations have become more competitive. Instead, this article explores why, as a junior ally of the United States, Australia has so confidently adopted a cooperative and relatively autonomous policy toward China over the past 40 years. As will be further explained in the following sections, Australian Prime Ministers began (presciently) to view China as a 'rising' power as early as the 1970s and have monitored competitive elements in Sino-American relations since that time.

The difficulty in explaining Australia's foreign policy behavior is compounded by the limited applicability of international relations theory. Realists, liberals, and constructivists all touch on general issues of how states respond to international power shifts. The theoretical traditions that most clearly specify how *junior allies* will respond to such shifts (even if only perceived) are: (i) power transition theory and (ii) alliance theory.

Power transition theorists conceive of world politics as a hierarchical system (Kugler *et al.*, 2004). They argue that the differential economic growth enables a rising and dissatisfied power to challenge the dominant global power's leadership (Kugler and Tammen, 2004). Systemic change, and countries' perceptions of such change, is generated by shifts in the distribution of military and economic power, a country's relative prestige and in its ability to shape or influence rules that govern the system (Gilpin, 1981). Power transition theorists argue that weaker states' will either continue to support the dominant global power to reinforce the existing international order or realign with the rising power (Kugler *et al.*, 2004; Levy, 2009). Whether weaker states' support the dominant global power depends on their relative 'satisfaction' with the economic and security benefits that they derive and whether they support the norms of the international system (Kugler and Tammen, 2004). This view of dichotomous patterns of international alignment suggests little theoretical modification to power transition theory founder A.F.K Organski's original assertion that weaker states will find it difficult to concurrently conciliate a dominant global power and a rising power (Organski, 1958).

Emerging critiques of power transition theory have brought into question the assumption of a rigid international hierarchy. Liberal theorist G. John Ikenberry, for instance, has posited that the US-led international order is unique, with American democratic political values engendering an order 'organized around more reciprocal, consensual and institutionalized relations' (Ikenberry, 2009, p. 95). Ikenberry suggests that this provides greater leeway for junior allies to influence their dominant global partner (Ikenberry, 2009). Evelyn Goh similarly challenges the idea of a rigid hierarchy, adopting Southeast Asia as a case study. Goh observes that, in balancing relationships with China and the United States, Southeast Asian countries (including several US allies and partners) hope to maintain their autonomy by avoiding overdependence on a single power (Goh, 2007/2008). Ikenberry and Goh's studies are pathbreaking in their own right, but neither fully explores how junior allies reconcile their desire for autonomy with great power expectations of support. This dilemma is further compounded by what Ikenberry identifies as the compact between the United States and its allies: the United States will provide security benefits in return for allies' agreement to operate in a US-led Western order (Ikenberry, 2008). Gaps in the power

transition literature therefore persist regarding whether and how weaker states reconcile their support for a dominant global power with closer relations with a rising power. This article contributes to this body of work by illuminating the ways in which a junior ally reconciles its desire for autonomy with either real or *perceived* great power expectations of support during an international power shift.

Alliance theory is equally tested in explaining junior-allied engagement with rising powers. Most alliance theorists observe that, if a state wishes to maintain its reputation for loyalty and preserve its alliance, it will have to choose between supporting its partner and conciliating with an external power (Liska, 1962; Wolfers, 1962). In his theory of the 'alliance security dilemma', Glenn Snyder argues that allied states are constrained by competing fears of 'abandonment' and 'entrapment' (Snyder, 1997, p. 181). In the event that a state fears 'abandonment' or reduced support from its ally, it usually increases its support for that ally and refrains from conciliating with an external power. Conversely, a state will conciliate with an external power if it seeks to restrain its ally by casting doubt on its support (Snyder, 1997). Like power transition theorists, Snyder presents support for an ally and conciliation with an external power in antithetical terms. Although some states may seek to do both simultaneously, he argues that such strategies are tenuous and unlikely to be undertaken by states dependent on an alliance (Snyder, 1997).

This latter assumption is widely supported in alliance literature. Alliance theorists assert that the distribution of material power in an alliance determines the balance of political influence (Krause and Singer, 2001; Walt, 2009). Weaker states' limited military capabilities cause them to place a premium on an alliance with a stronger power. This restricted ability to materially contribute to shared alliance objectives underscores their dependence on the senior ally and mitigates their intra-alliance bargaining power (Labs, 1992; Walt, 2009). As James Morrow observes, 'the minor power will make autonomy concessions to the major power in return for the security the major power can provide' (Morrow, 1991, p. 914). By this logic, a senior partner's preferences will be the principal determinant of a junior ally's foreign policy toward a rising power.

International relations theorists have argued that, under some circumstances, junior allies may exercise greater intra-alliance influence and have greater autonomy than the balance of material capabilities suggest. For instance, a junior ally may enlist an asset that its senior partner

highly values, such as military bases or port access, as a bargaining chip to get its own way (Keohane, 1971). Alternatively, junior allies may form multilateral coalitions with other allies or like-minded states to lobby the senior partner on a given issue (Ikenberry, 2004). Yet, neither of these caveats explains why Australian policy-makers confidently forged a discrete China policy from within ANZUS.[2] Australia hosted intelligence facilities that it knew the United States highly valued but consciously refrained from enlisting them as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Washington. Moreover, Australian engagement with China took place from within an essentially bilateral, rather than multilateral, context. In view of Australia's continuing strategic dependence on ANZUS, how did this come about?

3 Diplomacy, persuasion, and Australian foreign policy

Diplomacy and negotiation theorists provide useful insights that could enhance our understanding of Australian foreign policy and, more generally, the effects of international power shifts on junior allies. They posit that, even in a *bilateral* negotiation context, weaker states are sometimes able to exercise greater influence than the distribution of material capabilities suggests (Habeeb, 1988; Pfetsch and Landau, 2000). This is because power is not simply a function of material capabilities. It is better conceived as 'the capacity to move somebody in a direction he would not have chosen without the interference of somebody else' (Pfetsch and Landau, 2000, p. 27). Although power is informed by material capabilities, it is also a function of an actor's ability to persuade or elicit cooperation (Zartman and Rubin, 2000).

Diplomacy is central to persuasion. It provides an avenue of communication through which states can explain and clarify intentions, remedy misperceptions, or conduct negotiations (Bull, 1977). While most alliance theorists view diplomacy as *reflective of* the distribution of material capabilities, negotiation theorists observe that weaker states may use diplomacy to 'borrow power' and realize a better outcome than the balance

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2   'ANZUS' is the commonly used acronym for the Australia–New Zealand–United States security alliance. Although New Zealand was never formally extricated from ANZUS, its alliance participation has been suspended since it refused port access to US nuclear vessels in 1986.

of material capabilities suggests (Pfetsch and Landau, 2000, p. 25; Zartman and Rubin, 2000). They argue that weaker states can enlist several diplomatic tactics to persuade a stronger power. These include: drawing on aspects of the stronger power's position that support the weaker state's demands; enlisting specialized knowledge of a situation to support a position; and co-opting third parties to help persuade a stronger power of a particular demand (Zartman and Rubin, 2000). Through such persuasive techniques, a junior ally can reduce those risks of 'abandonment' that alliance theorists identify and thereby offset pressures to comply with a senior partner's preferences.

These insights have resonance in understanding why Australia was able to confidently manage its relationships with China and the United States during the period under review. Two conditions have been necessary for Australian engagement with China from within the American alliance: (i) a non-adversarial Sino-American relationship and (ii) a Sino-Australian relationship non-prejudicial to ANZUS. Within this context, broad parallels between Australian and the US engagement-based approaches toward China mitigated the likelihood of US opposition to Australia's policies and made it easier for Australian policy-makers to reconcile Sino-Australian relations with ANZUS. Yet, successive Australian Governments never accepted these facilitative conditions as given or permanent. Australian policy-makers recognized that Sino-American tensions over Taiwan or some other issue could precipitate a more adversarial relationship between China and the United States. They were also conscious that deeper Sino-Australian relations could give rise to misperceptions in Washington about Australia's alliance commitment.

Thus, equally central to Australian policy-makers' confidence in engaging with China was their belief alliance diplomacy could be used to reinforce these facilitative conditions. In so doing, they hoped to secure American acceptance of Australia's approach to China and to maintain positive American feedback loops. If Australian policy-makers did not receive American objections, they generally interpreted this silence as tacit support for Australia's China policy. They therefore confidently pursued a relatively discrete China policy, shaped primarily by Australian interests, without fear of alienating the United States.

To maintain positive American feedback loops, Australian policy-makers adopted diplomatic tactics similar to those identified above.

The first was 'information-sharing' – what William Zartman and Jeffrey Rubin characterize as a weaker state justifying its position in terms of specialized knowledge. Through 'information-sharing', Australian policy-makers provided their American counterparts with insights about China's nature and intentions. Although grounded in Australia's own strategic assessments, Australian policy-makers sought, in sharing these insights, to bolster a non-adversarial Sino-American relationship. Accordingly, they hoped to preserve an alliance that was not focused upon containing China and which provided scope for an independent Australian engagement strategy.

A second tactic Australian policy-makers enlisted to facilitate US acceptance of Australian engagement was 'costly reassurance' – a concept analogous to bargaining theorist James Fearon's notion of 'costly signals' (Fearon, 1997). Australian policy-makers hoped to reassure their American counterparts that expanding Sino-Australian relations would not occur at the expense of the Australian–American relationship. This reassurance was 'costly' because Australian policy-makers reiterated Australia's non-negotiable participation in ANZUS to China. Such 'public' reiteration involved two Australian 'costs'. First, it engaged Australia's international reputation, making it difficult for Australia to revoke this message in future. Secondly, it conditioned the development of Sino-Australian relations. Australian policy-makers hoped that these dual 'costs' would underscore the credibility of their assurances to an American audience. ANZUS thus emerged as a platform from which Australia could engage with China rather than inhibiting such engagement.

The next section more fully explores the interrelationship between alliance diplomacy and Australian policy-makers' confidence in engaging with China from within ANZUS. It examines three Australian Governments under which Sino-Australian relations significantly expanded: the Whitlam Government, the Hawke Government, and the Howard Government. To understand why these Governments acted differently to what international relations theorists predict, this study draws primarily on Australian archival sources and interviews with former Australian policy-makers. There are, of course, limitations attached to oral history, including the effects of time on human recollection (Kramer, 1990). Such limitations can be overcome, however, by corroborating accounts between interviewees or with primary or secondary

sources where possible. Key decision-makers' testimonies play an important role discerning the weight that should be assigned to particular causal factors. This account therefore provides a valuable first-cut assessment that can supplement additional research on Sino-Australian and the US–Australian relations once archive material is publicly released.

4 Reconciling Sino-Australian relations with ANZUS, 1971–2007

4.1 Gough Whitlam's 'Diplomatic Formula'

Australia first confronted the policy scenario of reconciling its interests in a 'rising' China with its alliance membership during Edward Gough Whitlam's term as the Australian Labor Party (ALP) Opposition Leader (1967–72) and later as Prime Minister (1972–75). Until then, successive Australian Governments believed that China was an intransigent, aggressive, power and that, through ANZUS, Australia needed to support a US-led containment posture against that country (Woodard, 2004). This position was particularly evident during the Vietnam War, when successive Liberal-Country Party (L-CP) Governments viewed the Australian troop commitment as an 'insurance policy' for American assistance in the event of a security threat to Australia (Edwards, 2005, p. 21). Such perceptions engendered Australian foreign policy behavior similar to what alliance theorists predict: an acutely insecure and dependent Australia which predicated its China policy on Washington in order to mitigate fears of abandonment.

Whitlam adopted a fundamentally differing view than his Liberal counterparts of China and how a more cooperative China relationship would affect ANZUS. During the early 1960s, Whitlam expressed concern that an alienated China, which did not have access to normal diplomatic channels, was more likely to resort to aggression (Whitlam, 1963). On that basis, Whitlam advocated Australian diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC or 'China') but did not envisage a close political relationship with that country. By the 1970s, however, Whitlam viewed China as one of Asia's rising powers. This was evident in its admission to the UN General Assembly and Security Council in October 1971 and in its pivotal effects on the global balance between the United States and the Soviet Union (FitzGerald, 1977).

Whitlam and his colleagues also recognized China's ambitions to overcome its economic weakness and emerge as a 'prosperous and dignified nation' (Whitlam, 1973a, p. 7). They predicted that China could emerge as one of the world's advanced industrialized countries by the end of the century (FitzGerald, 1977). Although China was not an immediate contender for leadership of the Asia-Pacific, Whitlam and his colleagues were conscious of longer term changes in the distribution of economic power and China's growing international prestige that could affect power relativities in future. Whitlam observed that, within 20 years, '[t]he relative status of China [would] be greater' and that there '[would not] be such a big gap between … China and Russia' (Whitlam, 1973b).

If Australia was to effectively integrate itself into Asia in the wake of Britain's withdrawal from east of the Suez, Whitlam reasoned it needed to forge an enduring and cooperative relationship with the region's largest and most populous country (Viviani, 1997). China was also an increasingly important market for Australian wheat and wool exports. Beijing's termination of an Australian wheat contract after the McMahon Government refused to extend diplomatic relations alerted the ALP to the growing inextricability of the Sino-Australian economic and political relationships (FitzGerald, 1972).

Whitlam thus sought, whilst in Opposition and Government, a firmer foundation for Sino-Australian political relations. In July 1971, he led an ALP delegation visit to Beijing without knowing that US National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger would travel to Beijing three days later (Freudenberg, 1987). During his visit, Whitlam explained the terms under which Australia would recognize the PRC if Labor were to win the 1972 Federal Election. Following the election, his Government recognized the PRC as one of its first initiatives in December 1972. This was followed by a Prime Ministerial visit to China in October 1973, during which the Australian and Chinese Governments signed a three-year bilateral trade agreement, signed an agreement on technological exchange and established a joint trade committee. Given that the United States did not recognize the PRC until 1979, these milestones were hallmarks of an emerging Australian China policy that was less calibrated with Washington.

Yet, even during this period – when China's great power status was more anticipated than apparent – Whitlam was acutely conscious that Sino-Australian relations should not develop at the expense of Australia's

core strategic relationship with the United States. Although Whitlam is popularly represented as the harbinger of a more independent Australian foreign policy (Andrews, 1986; Evans and Grant, 1995), he was acutely aware of Australia's strategic dependence on the American alliance. In the wake of the US retraction from the region as part of the 1969 Guam Doctrine, Whitlam viewed ANZUS as a critical anchor for a subsequent US strategic presence in Southeast Asia. This presence would reassure Australia and Southeast Asian countries as they developed their own regional security associations and provide 'insurance' in the event of a fundamental threat to Australian security (Beazley, 1974). The alliance also provided critical defense assets to Australia, including an extended nuclear guarantee, intelligence, and access to classified defense technology (Australia Department of Defence, 1973). Whitlam and Deputy Prime Minister Lance Barnard were conscious that maintaining these alliance benefits imposed political obligations on Australia (Green, 1973).

A series of events during the late 1960s suggested a fundamental shift in US foreign policy and subsequent redefinition of ANZUS as an instrument geared toward supporting a US presence in Asia rather than containing China. Whitlam paid particular attention to then US Presidential candidate Richard Nixon's 1967 *Foreign Affairs* article, in which the future President advocated the United States 'urgently come to grips with the reality of China' (Nixon, 1967, p. 121; Interview with Graham Freudenberg). Relaxation of American trade and travel restrictions to China, the visit of the American ping-pong team to China in 1971, and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger's and President Richard Nixon's visits to China in 1971 and 1972, respectively, all signified such change. Whitlam's speechwriter, Graham Freudenberg, and his advisor, Stephen FitzGerald, recall that these trends toward Sino-American rapprochement mitigated the risk that establishing closer Sino-Australian relations posed to the alliance (Interview with Stephen FitzGerald; Interview with Graham Freudenberg). Non-adversarial Sino-American relations critically facilitated deeper Sino-Australian relations from within ANZUS.

Yet, Whitlam was still uncertain how the Sino-Australian relationship would be accommodated in the alliance over the long term. During a meeting, as Opposition Leader, with US Secretary of State William Rogers in July 1970, Whitlam declared that he 'found attraction' in the Canadian and Italian approaches to Communist China but said, 'he

would not wish to proceed in such a way as to embarrass or affront the US'. The Secretary of State endorsed Whitlam's (and correspondingly a future Labor Government's) approach to engaging Communist China in dialogue ('Visit of Gough Whitlam: Memorandum of Conversation', 1970). However, Whitlam remained concerned that the thaw in Sino-American relations was only temporary (Whitlam, 1971). The evolution of deeper Sino-Australian relations was further complicated by Chinese ideological opposition to alliances. In his conversation with Whitlam in July 1971, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai expressed concerns about alliances generally and noted that the US alliance system was established as a means of 'encircling' China (Barnett, 1971, p. 4). These sentiments suggested that Sino-Australian relations needed to be carefully managed as long as Australia wished to sustain ANZUS.

Whitlam viewed alliance diplomacy as central to this management. In abstract terms, he developed a 'diplomatic formula' directed at sustaining positive American feedback for Australian engagement with China. This entailed encouraging Sino-American cooperation, whilst reassuring American policy-makers that a closer Sino-Australian relationship would not develop at the expense of ANZUS. Accordingly, Whitlam and his ALP colleagues adopted 'information-sharing' and 'costly reassurance' tactics.

The tenuous nature of Sino-American rapprochement led Whitlam to view what is labeled here as information-sharing as particularly important. The ALP leader envisaged an important role for Australia and other US junior allies in consolidating Sino-American détente. He assured Chinese officials that the US was not an aggressor nation and was withdrawing from Vietnam (FitzGerald, 1972). Similarly, he reassured American officials that China was not a hostile power (Rice, 1971). Following the ALP delegation visit to Beijing, he met with American officials in Tokyo and shared the details of his conversation with Zhou Enlai. He noted the prospects of a Chinese commitment to withhold military support for Indochina and the improbability of a Chinese attack on Taiwan in the near future. In relaying these insights, Whitlam hoped to be a 'pathfinder' for cordial Sino-American relations (Rice, 1971). In so doing, he might help to perpetuate the non-adversarial Sino-American relationship that had engendered Washington's acceptance of Australia's engagement strategy.

Whitlam simultaneously adopted 'costly reassurance' tactics to convey that Australia's China policy would not be prejudicial to ANZUS. This entailed a number of public statements that, in pursuing new relationships, Australia did 'not seek them at the expense of old firm ones' such as that with the United States (Whitlam cited in Meaney, 1980, p. 189). Whitlam reiterated this message in his public dialogues with Zhou Enlai and Acting Chinese Foreign Minister Chi Peng-fei. He was careful to emphasize the enduring importance of ANZUS to Australia, whichever Australian Government was in power (Barnett, 1971; FitzGerald, 1972). While Whitlam genuinely deemed this proviso to be in Australia's interests, there is evidence to suggest it was also directed at assuaging an American audience. Freudenberg recalls that, during the ALP delegation visit, Whitlam was careful that the ALP should neither be perceived as 'bad mouthing' the United States or in any way 'opting out' of the alliance (Interview with Graham Freudenberg). This could have had both negative Australian domestic repercussions and damaging consequences for ANZUS.

Whitlam's 'diplomatic' formula for securing American acceptance underpinned his confidence in reconciling closer Sino-Australian relations with Australia's alliance membership. This confidence was buttressed by the United States' general silence on the issue – a silence interpreted by Whitlam and his colleagues as US acceptance of, if not active endorsement of, Australia's evolving China policy. Although some American officials were concerned about Whitlam's zeal to secure a relationship with the PRC without obtaining reciprocal concessions, the United States acquiesced to ALP policy in 1971–72 on the basis that it did not affect the US efforts to secure dual representation of the PRC and Taiwan in the United Nations ('Visit of Gough Whitlam: Memorandum of Conversation', 1970; Appling, 1971). Whitlam was therefore able to carve out an element of discretion for Australia's China policy within the alliance, which has persisted despite China's growing power and emerging Sino-American strategic competition.

4.2 Hawke and the Sino-Australian partnership

The evolution of an increasingly discrete Australian China policy was evident in both the Hawke Government's efforts to develop a Sino-Australian partnership during the 1980s and in its policy response

to the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown.[3] Power transition and alliance theory suggest that, in response to Australian policy-makers' perceptions of a 'rising' China, the US policy preferences should have featured strongly in Australian decision-making toward China and significantly influenced the Australian policy shift in 1989. Surprisingly, however, the alliance had minimal impact on Australian policy-makers' calculations.

The Hawke Government's initial resolve to deepen Sino-Australian relations was underpinned by increasingly congruent interests between the two countries. The Hawke Government already viewed China as a 'major political and economic power' (Hawke, 1988, p. 19). China's economic growth had averaged 9% per year since Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping instigated the 1978 'Open Door' policy (Garnaut, 1989). So long as Chinese economic reform continued, Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke and then Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Stuart Harris, projected that China would emerge as a great power – if not the predominant power – in Asia (Interview with Stuart Harris). Although China was not yet capable of strategically challenging US pre-eminence in Asia, Hawke and his Ministers were mindful that 'China's economic reinvigoration [would] have important strategic consequences … [and that] even modest success would change the balance of power among the states of Asia … ' (Beazley, 1988, p. 231). Increasingly, Australian policy-makers *perceived* China as both an economic and, potentially, as a strategic rising power in Asia.

The Hawke Government viewed China's growing power and its strongly entrenched policies of economic modernization and openness as a reason to further deepen Sino-Australian relations. Hawke believed that closer Sino-Australian relations were integral to Australia's political and economic enmeshment in the Asia-Pacific region (Interview with Bob Hawke; Interview with John Bowan). Establishing a strong political relationship was also economically important for Australia. As China's economy developed, its demand for Australian raw materials, manufactured goods, and services would increase (Bucknall, 1991). Although the total volume of trade remained small, it doubled in value between 1983 and 1985 (Garnaut, 1996). China and Australia also established two

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3   On 4 June 1989, the Chinese People's Liberation Army killed hundreds of student protestors who had gathered around Tiananmen Square calling for political reform.

large joint venture projects as part of a long-term strategy to integrate the Australian and Chinese iron and steel industries, effectively linking Australian natural resources to China's industrialization (Interview with David Ambrose).

Significantly, the Hawke Government's China policy was shaped almost exclusively by political and economic factors relating to the bilateral Sino-Australian relationship rather than alliance considerations. The Hawke Government viewed Australia's China policy as largely falling outside the ambit of the alliance (Interview with Sandy Hollway). The decision-making that underpinned Australia's policy shift following the Tiananmen Square crackdown is indicative. Following Tiananmen, the Hawke Government implemented a two-track policy: political sanctions to punish the Chinese leadership whilst preserving the institutional infrastructure that underpinned a cooperative long-term relationship. What is significant is that the Hawke Government devised this response before consulting with the United States in mid-June. Hawke's former Chief of Staff Sandy Hollway notes that Australia would have still probably followed this policy course had the Australian and American responses to Tiananmen differed (Interview with Sandy Hollway). Indeed, the Hawke Government's China policy review in July 1991 only further consolidated the dual-track approach that the Government had originally instigated in the immediate aftermath of Tiananmen.

This discrete Australian response is surprising given Australia's continuing asymmetric dependence on ANZUS. The 1987 Defence White Paper outlined a force structure for a self-reliant Australian defense capability, but self-reliance was only ever conceived within an alliance context (Australia Department of Defence, 1987). Australia continued to rely on the United States for intelligence, logistic resupply, defense technology, and assistance in large-scale contingencies (Australia Department of Defence, 1992). The political implications of this reliance were not lost on Australian policy-makers. As former Defence Minister Kim Beazley has observed, the US alliance was a 'reference point' for many of the Hawke Government's foreign policy and defense initiatives (Beazley, 2003, p. 350). If such was the case, why did the alliance not weigh more heavily in the Hawke Government's formulation of its China policy?

Hawke's advisors recall that similarities between the Australian and American China policies – both before and after Tiananmen – made it easier to reconcile Australia's China policy with ANZUS (Interview with

Stuart Harris; Interview with Sandy Hollway). At the same time, Australia was deepening its relationship with China, the US viewed China as a useful partner in balancing against the Soviet Union (Saunders, 2000). The Americans also began to recognize the Sino-American relationship as important in its own right. China was rapidly emerging as the principal power in Asia and it was in American interests to develop a positive and productive relationship with that country in order to preserve the United States' strategic position in Asia over the long term (Ross, 2001; Interview with Brent Scowcroft). This non-adversarial Sino-American relationship facilitated Sino-Australian engagement and, later, Australian efforts to preserve the institutional architecture of Sino-Australian relations after Tiananmen.

Nevertheless, Hawke and his advisors were uncertain about the long-term future of the United States' China policy. Some American policy-makers were suspicious of China on ideological grounds (Interview with Stuart Harris). Hawke recalls there were 'elements within the United States military and defense establishment [that] still harbored illusions about a covert alliance between the two great communist powers' (Hawke, 1996, p. 341). American policy-makers were also concerned about the extent to which economic reform (and the more predictable Chinese foreign policy behavior it engendered) would continue (Interview with Stuart Harris). These American concerns intensified in the wake of Tiananmen Square (Suettinger, 2003; Interview with Sandy Hollway). Although the Bush Administration recognized the importance of implementing political sanctions against Chinese human rights violations whilst maintaining a long-term cooperative relationship with China, Congress wished to adopt harsher measures. From 1990 onwards, the Bush Administration was perennially engaged in mustering sufficient Congressional support to veto a bill revoking China's Most-Favored-Nation status.

Against this backdrop, the Hawke Government continued to view alliance diplomacy as central to a discrete Australian China policy within ANZUS. Like Whitlam, the Hawke Government sought to help maintain a non-adversarial Sino-American relationship by adopting 'information-sharing' tactics. Hawke viewed Australia as a valuable interlocutor between the Chinese and American Governments (Hawke, 1996). Partly as a result of his extensive personal conversations with Chinese Communist Party Secretary Hu Yaobang and Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang, Hawke developed extensive knowledge of China-related matters.

Based on this knowledge, his government believed Australia could help maintain stable Sino-American relations by providing each of these powers with insights about the other (Interview with Stuart Harris). It sought to assuage the Americans that the Chinese were unlikely to enter into any covert alliance with the Soviet Union (Hawke, 1996). In his visit to Washington in mid-June 1989, Prime Minister Hawke explained to US President George H. Bush that he did not think there would be a re-occurrence of the Tiananmen events and that Chinese economic reform was likely to continue (Interview with Bob Hawke). In issuing such an assurance, the Hawke Government supported the Bush Administration's moderate approach toward China (Bush, 1989) to help preserve the non-adversarial Sino-American relationship which had thus far facilitated a discrete Australian China policy.

The Hawke Government's confidence in reconciling its China policy with alliance membership was also predicated on 'costly reassurance'. In contrast to Whitlam's experience, the Hawke Government was less concerned with establishing parameters for the Sino-Australian relationship vis-à-vis the American alliance. It sought merely to uphold the long-standing principle that Sino-Australian relations would not operate prejudicially to ANZUS. Accordingly, the Hawke Government adopted costly reassurance tactics. In discussions with Chinese interlocutors, Hawke and other Australian officials reiterated that Australia was aligned with the United States and that the alliance was central to Australia's defense policy (Hawke, 1996; Garnaut, n.d.). Harris recalls that this message was primarily directed at ensuring the Chinese understood Australia's position. However, it was also likely to be noted by, and would reassure, Washington (Interview with Stuart Harris). This message signified, to both the Chinese and Americans, that deeper Sino-Australian relations were still predicated on Beijing's acceptance of Australian participation in ANZUS. There was no inherent contradiction between Australia's evolving relationship with China and its alliance membership.

This diplomatic approach to reconciling the relationships was validated by what Hawke and his advisors interpreted as tacit US support for Australia's China policy. Harris asserts that the Americans seemed genuinely interested in the insights that Australia had to offer on China (Interview with Stuart Harris). Uncertainty and division in US policy circles about what sort of strategic actor China would become also provided US allies with leeway in developing and pursuing their own

independent policies toward that country. There was no consensus in Washington on US policy toward China, let alone how American allies should respond to that power (Interview with James Przystup). What Australian policymakers interpreted as positive American feedback to Australian engagement with China underscored their belief that Australia could develop separate, positive relationships with both countries.

What distinguishes the Whitlam and Hawke periods is the *extent* to which Australian leaders relied on diplomacy to maintain positive American feedback loops. Australia's history of engaging with China meant that the Hawke Government was less concerned than Whitlam and his colleagues about the implications of engagement for ANZUS. Alliance diplomacy was therefore not as prominent. Nevertheless, the Hawke Government's assurance in executing a discrete Australian China policy was still underwritten by a belief that, over the long term, diplomacy could reinforce American support for Australian engagement. It was not until China emerged as a strategic power after the Cold War that Australia's alliance diplomacy was seriously put to the test.

4.3 Howard and China as a strategic power

China's rise as a strategic power challenged the previous context in which Australia had adopted a discrete China policy. It engendered a more competitive, but not necessarily adversarial, Sino-American relationship. Between 1990 and 1997, China's real GDP growth rate averaged 11.9% per year with predictions emerging that China could eventually possess the world's largest economy (Saunders, 2000). China also began to invest its growing economic wealth into defense modernization. The availability of Russian military technology assisted Chinese expansion of its surface, submarine, and aircraft capabilities. Chinese defense modernization was hastened following the 1996 Taiwan Straits Crisis, during which the United States responded to Chinese missile launches over Taiwan by deploying two aircraft carriers into the East China Sea (Shambaugh, 2000). Although Australian Prime Ministers had long viewed China as a rising economic and diplomatic power, China's growing strategic power, and its implications for Sino-American power relativities, was becoming increasingly apparent.

The Sino-American relationship was not adversarial – in 1997 and 1998 the US President Bill Clinton and Chinese leader Jiang Zemin

declared an aspiration to work toward a 'constructive strategic partnership' and cooperation intensified following the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre. Still, however, American and Australian policy-makers anticipated a future in which China could potentially challenge US strategic primacy in Asia. As early as 1997, the Australian defense review signaled this recognition, noting that, 'It would not be in Australia's interests for China's growing power to result in a diminution of US strategic influence ... ' (Australia Department of Defence, 1997, p. 14).

What is surprising is that intensifying Sino-American competition did not axiomatically engender a strengthening of ANZUS, to the detriment of Sino-Australian relations, as most power transition and alliance theorists would suggest. Instead, the Sino-Australian relationship flourished under the Howard Government. Like his predecessors, Prime Minister John Howard was acutely conscious that as China's power grew, Australia would need to forge a constructive relationship with that country. He envisaged an opportunity to establish a framework for Sino-Australian relations that accommodated core Australian interests and values. Howard recalls that it was in Australia's interests to develop early-on a relationship with China 'based on mutual respect, our [Australia's] democratic system, and our alliance' (Interview with John Howard). He also recognized the inextricability of Sino-Australian political and economic relationships. Howard developed the notion of a Sino-Australian 'strategic economic partnership'. Through this partnership, he envisioned Australia as a reliable supplier of commodities that would fuel China's future economic modernization and growth (Interview with Michael Thawley). Between 1998 and 2007, two-way trade tripled and, by 2007, China had become Australia's largest trading partner (Manicom and O'Neill, 2010). As the relationship with China became deeper and more multifaceted, Australia adopted positions on China-related issues that did not always correspond with the United States. Key examples included Australia's early support for China's admission to the World Trade Organization and its preference for bilateral, rather than US-led multilateral, approaches to China on human rights issues.

The Howard Government was careful to ensure, however, that flourishing Sino-Australian relations did not develop at the *expense* of what it considered Australia's 'vital relationship' with the United States

(Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2003, p. xvi). Despite Australia's self-reliant defense capability in low-level contingencies, the country still derived important benefits from ANZUS. These included US intelligence, logistical support, defense technology, and possible assistance in the event of Australian involvement in a higher level conflict (Australia Department of Defence, 1997). Australia also relied on the alliance as an instrument through which to maintain a stabilizing US presence in the Asia-Pacific at a time of profound change in the regional balance of power (Australia Department of Defence, 2000). The Howard Government was conscious that Australia needed to contribute to shared regional and global objectives to ensure a continuing US commitment to Australia and the broader region (Howard, 1997b). Yet, in interviews with the author, Howard and his former advisors cited factors relating to Australia's strategic and economic interests, rather than the US alliance, as the primary determinant of the Government's policies toward China (Interview with Ric Smith; Interview with John Howard; Interview with Michael Thawley).

Amidst uncertainty about the long-term trajectory of Sino-American relations, Australian alliance diplomacy again supported the Howard Government's efforts to reconcile a discrete China policy with alliance membership. Information-sharing, in particular, was a prominent Australian diplomatic tactic. Howard and his advisors recall that Australia's engagement strategy toward China was predicated on a non-conflictual or non-zero-sum Sino-US relationship. If China and the United States had been at odds with one another, it would have been far more difficult for the Howard Government to reconcile engagement diplomacy with its alliance commitment (Interview with John Howard; Interview with Michael Thawley). Howard envisaged a role for his Government in helping to shape Washington's preferences in such a way that preserved a non-zero-sum Sino-US relationship. His Government endeavored to do so by providing the United States with insights about China that would assist to maintain stable Sino-US relations (Interview with John Howard). As Howard observed in a 2004 address:

It is self-evident that the relationship between the United States and China will be extremely important to the stability of our region. Our aim is to see calm and constructive dialogue between the United

States and China … [A]s a nation which has different but nonetheless close relationships with both countries, Australia is well placed to promote that constructive dialogue' (Howard, 2004).

By sharing Australian insights, and supporting proponents of a moderate US approach toward China, Canberra was more likely to facilitate positive American feedback to Australia's own engagement with China over the longer term.

The Howard Government also presented Australia's China policy as non-prejudicial to ANZUS through 'costly reassurance'. Like Whitlam and Hawke, Howard explicitly predicated the expansion of Sino-Australian relations on Beijing's acceptance of Australia's continuing participation in ANZUS (Kelly, 2006). This was significant at a time when Beijing sought to more prominently shape the development of regional architectures and made use of the region's nascent multilateral fora to project its 'new security concept'. The 'new security concept' advocated an end to all military alliances in Asia. During his initial meeting with Chinese leader Jiang Zemin at the 1996 APEC Summit, Howard reiterated to Jiang that while ANZUS was not directed against China, Australia would remain a close US ally and that this was non-negotiable. Howard recalls that Jiang accepted that position (Interview with John Howard; Howard, 1997a). While eliciting China's acceptance of ANZUS was in Australia's national interest, the Howard Government also recognized the important role it played in reassuring Washington. Howard believed that his engagement strategy was compatible with US strategic interests because it was premised on China accepting Australia's close and non-negotiable alliance relationship with the United States (Interview with John Howard; Interview with Michael Thawley). 'Costly reassurance', as earlier defined, was integral to the Howard Government's reconciliation of deeper Sino-Australian relations with the political obligations associated with ANZUS.

What the Howard Government generally interpreted as positive American feedback to Australia's engagement strategy reinforced the perceived efficacy of this approach. The United States had not abandoned an engagement-based approach toward China. This meant that, for the time being, alliance considerations could play a secondary role in Australian policy formation toward China (Interview with Hugh White).

As during the 1980s, the lack of consensus within Washington as to what sort of strategic actor China would become over the longer term, and how the United States should respond, provided US allies with leeway in developing their autonomous policies toward China (Interview with James Przystup). A key exception was US concern that allies not develop a security relationship with China or engage in weapon technology transfer with the Chinese military (Interview with James Przystup; Interview with Randall Schriver). The Howard Government's approach complemented these concerns in that Australian engagement with China focused primarily on the politico-economic dimensions of the relationship.

Significantly, the Howard Government modified its position when it received negative US feedback. In 2004, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer noted that Australia would not necessarily feel bound by its alliance obligations to support the United States in a Taiwan contingency. After strenuous objections from Washington, Howard publicly noted 'we have to consult and come to each other's aid when we're under attack or involved in conflict'. (Downer and Howard (2004) cited in Manicom and O'Neill, 2010, pp. 34–35). Far from signifying growing Australian accommodation of China (Manicom and O'Neill, 2010), this incident highlighted the extent to which Australia's relatively discrete China policy was predicated on positive American feedback deriving from a non-adversarial Sino-American relationship and Sino-Australian relations that were non-prejudicial to ANZUS.

The Howard Government effectively used alliance diplomacy in a way that perpetuated these conditions and communicated Australia's adherence to them. Whether American policy-makers actually endorsed Australia's China policy is a subject for further research. Washington's response to the Foreign Minister's comments in 2004 suggests that American support for Australian engagement was not always unqualified. What was important, however, was that Australian policy-makers generally *interpreted* positive American feedback to Australian engagement with China. Australian policy-makers believed that, on this basis, Australia did not necessarily have to calibrate its China policy with Washington in order to retain the benefits of alliance membership. In contrast to what alliance theorists suggest, material asymmetry in the alliance did not necessitate Australian compliance with US policies.

5 Conclusions

Australia's paradoxical foreign policy behavior of deepening relations with a rising China from within ANZUS was grounded in what Australian policy-makers historically viewed as scope for discretion within the alliance. During the period under review, Australian policy-makers pursued a China policy that was dictated primarily by Australia's politico-economic interests rather than US preferences. This perceived scope for discretion was greater than what international relations scholars typically envisage and challenges assertions of an inherent trade-off between security and autonomy in asymmetric alliances. The Australian experience suggests that, under some circumstances, a junior ally can pursue a relatively autonomous foreign policy whilst preserving the security benefits it derives from alliance membership.

The case studies of Sino-Australian engagement examined here suggest that specific facilitative conditions, coupled with alliance diplomacy, played an important role in mediating between alliance asymmetry and Australia's discrete China policy. Australian policy-makers recognized that a non-adversarial Sino-American relationship and the evolution of Sino-Australian relations in ways non-prejudicial to ANZUS made positive American feedback to Australian engagement more likely. These circumstances reduced the likelihood of American 'abandonment' (or decreased US support for the alliance) over China matters and offset pressures for compliance with US policies.

This helps to explain the fundamental shift that occurred in Australia's China policy in 1971–72. In contrast to earlier Liberal Governments, Whitlam's confidence in developing a discrete Australian China policy was underwritten by expectations of positive American feedback fuelled by what he perceived as Sino-American rapprochement and Beijing's acquiescence to ANZUS. Such expectations, deriving from these facilitative conditions, persisted under the Hawke and Howard Governments. Thus Australian engagement with China generally reflected Australia's political and economic interests as they related to Beijing rather than alliance considerations.

Each Government understood, however, that these facilitative conditions were not innate and needed to be maintained and encouraged through skilful alliance diplomacy. To this end, Australian engagement with China was usually accompanied by diplomatic tactics bearing

striking similarity to those that negotiation theorists identify weaker states as using to persuade a stronger counterpart. Australian policy-makers adopted 'information-sharing' tactics to encourage a cooperative Sino-American relationship; they used 'costly reassurance' tactics to present Australia's China policy as non-prejudicial to ANZUS. Australian policy-makers enlisted this diplomatic formula to help consolidate the facilitative conditions noted above and to perpetuate positive American feedback to Australian engagement with China over the longer term.

These findings are significant for what they suggest regarding both Australian foreign policy and the impact of power transition on intra-alliance dynamics. In regard to Australian foreign policy, this article supports the findings of analysts who, contrary to most Australian foreign policy scholars, argue that Australia's strategic dependence on a senior ally has not equated to foreign policy conformity (Bridge, 1991; Leaver, 1997). Australian policy-makers have often developed policies based on what they interpreted as Australia's national interests and pursued them even if they did not fully conform to US policies. The facilitative conditions noted above acted as self-imposed limitations on Australia's capacity to pursue an autonomous engagement strategy toward China. Within these parameters, however, Australian policy-makers anticipated positive American feedback and pursued a more discrete foreign policy toward China than what most scholarship would suggest.

Australia's development of its China policy may also have implications for understanding how power transition, more generally, impacts on asymmetric alliances. It points to the application of negotiation theorists' insights in understanding how these alliances operate. A junior ally's intra-alliance influence and foreign policy autonomy may not simply be determined by the relative distribution of material capabilities. They may also derive from the junior ally's confidence and skill in using bilateral alliance diplomacy to minimize the likelihood of negative allied feedback. A junior ally can thus take proactive steps to mitigate the risk of abandonment and execute a more discrete foreign policy than alliance theorists generally assume. Determining the broader viability of this argument requires further testing in the context of other alliances. Nevertheless, it provides one potential explanation for why junior allies, such as Australia, have paradoxically managed to reconcile a deeper relationship with a 'rising China' with the political obligations associated with their alliance to the United States.

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