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Australia, the US, and the Vietnam and Iraq Wars: ‘Hound Dog, not Lapdog’

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The authors refute the portrayal of Australia as America’s pliant ally in the Vietnam and Iraq Wars, instead arguing that Australian leaders saw such involvement as strategic opportunities to strengthen the Australian–American alliance. In the case of the Vietnam War particularly, the Australian government also saw these conflicts as a way to draw America into greater military engagement in their region. The authors’ interpretation follows earlier revisionist scholarship on the Vietnam War, but is strengthened by new archival evidence. In the case of the 2003 Iraq War, their position is inevitably more provisional due to the lack of archival material. However, after interviewing senior government officials to better understand the Howard government’s motivations for military involvement in Iraq, they discern a similar pattern of strategic motivation. The article concludes with a discussion of the costs and benefits of using wars to strengthen the Australian–American alliance.

Keywords: Australian–American alliance; strategic culture; 2003 Iraq War; Vietnam War

Australian dependence has been a dominant motif in analyses of the alliance between Australia and the United States (US) (Bell 1988; Camilleri 1987; Kelton 2008). Given the asymmetries in power, wealth and influence this is hardly surprising. The warranted recognition of Australia’s dependence on the US, however, is often inflated into a more questionable claim that Australia is a pliant ally – a lapdog – that unthinkingly follows the US into foreign wars. At its crudest, this thesis assumes that Australia is a ‘little America’ or ‘51st state’ that simply follows America’s commands (Broinowski 2003; Paul 2006).

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Such a portrayal has been articulated with renewed vigour since 11 September 2001, and especially since 2003 when the Howard government committed support to America's invasion of Iraq. Alison Broinowski (2007) was representative of this tendency when she not only condemned Howard's support of the invasion, but also equated support and dependence with supplication and sycophancy. She linked the present war with the past in a supposedly unbroken chain of Australian servility towards the United States and before it, the United Kingdom: 'Having taken the drug of dependence at birth,' Broinowski (2007, 3) contended, 'Australia seems allied and addicted to it.' What is noteworthy here is the conflation of dependence with a slavish subordination of Australia to US foreign policy. They are not the same thing. We argue that one can accept the facts of Australian dependence on the US – strategic/security dependence and, until the 1970s, a degree of economic dependence – without assuming a sycophantic Australian foreign policy typified by uncritical support of the military adventures of the US.

The position taken by Broinowski and others is a contemporary iteration of a well-worn theme in Australian political commentary and historiography, which reached its apogee in the radical reception of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War (Camilleri 1980; McQueen 1984; Phillips 1988). The argument that was so often invoked on the radical left and, as David McLean (2001; 2006) has astutely observed, sometimes on the conservative right, was that Australia became militarily involved in Vietnam at the behest of the US. In so doing, the government subordinated Australian interests to US interests, and unnecessarily bore heavy financial, diplomatic and human costs.

Revisionist scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s cast serious doubt on this interpretation. Coral Bell (1988), Peter Edwards (Edwards 1997; Edwards with Pemberton 1992) and Michael Sexton (1981) all presented evidence that illuminated the Menzies and Holt governments' enthusiasm for a military rather than a diplomatic solution to the crisis in South Vietnam. This flowed from a long-held anxiety about abandonment in the face of real and perceived threats, and reflected an obsession with keeping the US militarily engaged in Australia's region (Pemberton 1987, 316). Far from being a reluctant partner dragooned into a war that it would otherwise have avoided, Australia and its officials were even more hawkish than their American counterparts, prompting President Johnson's National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy, to refer to Australia as 'trigger happy' (cited in Woodard 2004, 96). As Bell (1988, 75–6) concluded, '[t]he picture (popular with opponents of the alliance) of Australia pressed into involvement by an overweening ally does not at all match the actual events of the crucial period.' Twenty-three years later, with a more complete archival record available, our own research confirms and enriches this conclusion, and sheds light on Australia's military support for the US in Iraq.

Clearly there are challenges to comparing two wars fought in different historical periods, encompassing divergent political and military contexts and emerging out of very different geo-strategic circumstances. Nevertheless, *prima facie* there are some striking similarities. In both cases Australia was:

- an early and enthusiastic advocate of armed intervention;
- a vocal sceptic of possible diplomatic and multilateral solutions to the crises;

- one of a relatively small number of nations to offer military support to the US, in a context where other allies were urging caution;
- frequently seen as a pliant ally blindly following the US;
- committed to war, but in a way and to a degree that posed considerably less risk for Australia than for the Americans, in terms of the number of troops committed per capita and the type of military missions undertaken.

To expand on the canine metaphor, therefore, Australia barked loudly about the need for war but then made relatively modest commitments to the military cause. We argue that this makes Australia more of a hound dog than the obsequious lapdog often portrayed by commentators, and that this approach is strategic and enduring rather than contingent and opportunistic. We begin by reconsidering the decision to go to war in Vietnam, drawing upon both the secondary literature and our more recent research in US and Australian archives, before shifting our focus to Iraq.

Australia's Road to War in Vietnam

In an oral history interview in November 1969, former Prime Minister Robert Menzies remarked about Vietnam that 'Australia had *exactly* the same interests on a much smaller scale as the United States of America' (LBJ Library AC 74–219, 8). Therefore, he continued, 'it took us not five minutes to decide that when this thing came to the point of action, we would be in it, if invited by the government of South Vietnam'. While there is a degree of bravado and exaggeration in Menzies' words, they nonetheless express his government's enthusiastic support for the escalation of US military involvement in Vietnam.

The background to the Australian government's decision on 15 May 1962 to send military advisors to South Vietnam extended far beyond that small and, until then, relatively marginal country. Indeed, in the late 1950s and early 1960s the weight of bureaucratic communications within and between Australia's Department of External Affairs (DEA), Department of Defence (DOD) and Cabinet, suggests that other strategic issues in Southeast Asia were perceived to be of greater importance than Vietnam. The political crises in Laos in 1959 and 1961, Indonesia's coveting of Netherlands New Guinea, and political developments within and between Indonesia and Malaya, all preoccupied Australian officials and politicians in a way that Vietnam would only begin to do from 1962 (see Edwards with Pemberton 1992, 182–228). In all of these cases, the anxiety-promoting question that exercised the minds of Australian officials and politicians was: would the US interpose itself between Australia and alleged threats emanating from the north?

At the ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand and the United States) Council in Canberra in May 1962, the Australian Minister of External Affairs, Garfield Barwick, exemplified this concern in his response to American Secretary of State Dean Rusk's request for Australian military advisors. Barwick suggested that 'a matter of great concern was the degree of resolution underlying American policies in South Vietnam'. He continued by prompting the Secretary of State to offer Australia some reassurance, asking if the US intended to defend South Vietnam 'come hell or high water', even if that meant escalating to a point where China was drawn into counter-action (National Archives of

Australia [NAA] A1838/280 3004/11/7/1). The Secretary, while stating that the answer of the US was closer to 'yes' in Vietnam than in any other country, declined to unequivocally give that assurance. He declined even though it is clear from modern scholarship that the hawks in the Johnson administration, including Rusk himself, were gaining the upper hand in the intense bureaucratic struggle over America's South Vietnam policy (Kaiser 2000, 312–40; Logevall 1999, 108–33; Mann 2001, 303–41).

Despite these doubts about US resolve, or perhaps because of them, on 15 May 1962 the Australian Cabinet agreed to Rusk's request, setting in train a military involvement that would ultimately see 46,852 Australians serving in Vietnam, 494 of whom would die (Maddox 1987, 1). The modest initial Australian commitment – 30 advisors from the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (ATTVN) deployed in July and August of 1962 – makes it clear that Australia's acceptance was principally political rather than military. Over the coming 2½ years numbers were increased and in May 1964 the team's mandate changed to include combat missions (Ham 2007, 102). This partly reflected the deteriorating military and political environment in South Vietnam – thoroughly documented in Australia's Saigon Embassy reports to the DEA, now declassified by the National Archives of Australia – which was punctuated by the coup against Nho Dinh Diem on the first two days of November 1963, and by subsequent coups during 1964. But it also expressed a more hawkish view from Canberra, and a determination to keep the US militarily engaged in Vietnam, free of any temptation to pursue a negotiated settlement for a neutral South Vietnam as advocated by French President Charles de Gaulle.

In a speech to Parliament on 11 March 1964, Barwick rejected the French position, arguing that calls for neutralisation 'have to be seen in the perspective of a country fighting for its survival against a ruthless, terrorist campaign of internal Communist subversion which receives great external aid, and in relation to the importance of South East Asia as a whole to the free world' (*Hansard* 1964, 475; Woodard 2004, 128). This was very much in keeping with the advice that Barwick was receiving from his department at the time and, notwithstanding differences of tone and form, reflected a relative consensus of opinion within the DEA and DOD. A briefing paper on neutralisation, in preparation for Barwick's participation in the SEATO (South-East Asia Treaty Organisation) Council in Manila in early 1964, argued that: 'We must join in resisting pressure for a non-military "solution".' It suggested that Australia's immediate objective was 'to continue to help the South Vietnamese Government to deal with and overcome Communist insurgency', and that this necessitated 'our full backing of the United States position' (NAA A1838/280 3004/12/9/1 pt 1).

Barwick's replacement as Minister of External Affairs from late April 1964, Paul Hasluck, was even more assertive about the importance of South Vietnam when he returned from a visit to that country in mid-1964:

South Vietnam is absolutely vital for the peace and security of the whole of the Southeast Asian region... If there were any weakening in our determination to defend South Vietnam, this could have dramatic and dangerous repercussions far beyond South-East Asia (Woodard 2004, 110).

Hasluck and new Minister for Defence Shane Paltridge visited Washington in November 1964, in the wake of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in August. They left the Americans in no doubt that 'Australia favoured the US escalating the war against the North Vietnamese' (Woodard 2004, 188). Naturally, Australia accepted that there would be a price to pay for escalation. Although formally rejecting an American request of December 1964 for a further 200 military advisors and additional logistics support, a summary report of a Cabinet discussion makes it clear that Australia was prepared to send a battalion of combat troops, on the conditions that (1) the South Vietnamese requested it, and (2) the Australian military high brass could confirm that a battalion was available (NAA A4940/1 C3811). In other words, Australia rejected increasing the number of military advisors, only to substitute it for an in-principle undertaking that was far more onerous and politically demanding. The crux of this decision was duly communicated by Menzies to Johnson, although the formal and final decision would not be made until 7 April 1965. It was not communicated to the Australian public until 28 April, just days before the actual deployment.

In the period between the in-principle decision of 17 December to send a battalion and the public disclosure of the decision in late April, a flurry of bureaucratic activity within and between different arms of the state reveals Australia's belligerent stance on Vietnam and its anxiety about US resolve. Australian officials worried about perceived US prevarications. On 22 December the Australian Ambassador to the US, Keith Waller, wrote to Paul Hasluck complaining that 'the somewhat irresolute American attitude gives cause for increasing uneasiness' (NAA A1838/379 TS3014/2/1 pt 3). Hasluck was of a similar mind, 'fear[ing] above all the likelihood of slipping into negotiation by default'. He suggested that a forthright, unequivocal statement of Australia's preference for strong military intervention could galvanise the Americans and give Australia 'possession of American thinking'. Similarly, Defence Minister Paltridge agreed that 'our purpose is to remove any hesitation on the part of the Americans and, within our limited resources, to go with them but not to rush out in front' (NAA A1838/276 TS3014/2/1 pt 6). Deputy Prime Minister Harold Holt concurred that 'Australia had to give the Americans all possible support to induce them to remain in South Vietnam' (NAA A4940/1 C4643 pt 2). In settling the matter once and for all, Menzies suggested in the same meeting that:

We would be prepared to put in a battalion and were *looking for a way in and not a way out*. With this approach, *the psychological effect on the United States would be phenomenally valuable*, including in Australia's interests [italics added] (NAA A4940/1 C4643 pt 2).

In other words, the Australian government enthusiastically endorsed and even demanded a military rather than a diplomatic solution in Vietnam.

None of this implies that Australia played a determining role in US decisions around military escalation in Vietnam between 1962 and 1965. Such an imputation would read too much into Australia's modest place in the calculations of policy makers in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. The foregoing evidence, however, clearly shows that Australian

officials were at least as enthusiastic about escalating military involvement in South Vietnam as were their US counterparts. Australia was not the servile partner to the US often portrayed by radicals and, at times, conservatives. Instead, the Australian position is perhaps best exemplified by an 11 May 1964 recommendation by Alan Renouf, the *chargé d'affaires* of Australia's Washington Embassy. Australia's objective should be, he suggested:

to achieve such an habitual closeness of relations with the United States and sense of mutual alliance that in our time of need, after we have shown all reasonable restraint and good sense, the United States would have little option but to respond as we would want (NAA A1838/276 TS 696/8/4 pt 4).

By making a modest commitment to Vietnam, Renouf continued, 'we could without an [*sic*] disproportionate expenditure pick up a lot of credit'. It was this perception of disproportionate benefits at relatively modest costs that was at the heart of Australia's military commitment to Vietnam and, more importantly, to the US.

The perception of disproportionate benefits relative to the costs of military support for the US also had an important domestic political dimension. In the oral history interview cited previously, Menzies suggested that his government's Vietnam policy was 'very popular'. He claimed that this was reflected in Harold Holt's overwhelming election victory in November 1966 against a Labor opposition that had attempted to profit from the Vietnam policy and conscription (LBJ Library AC 74-219, 6-7). Menzies' interpretation is, broadly speaking, in line with the evidence. Murray Goot and Rod Tiffen's (1983) comprehensive discussion of survey data on Australian public opinion around the Vietnam War confirms that sizeable majorities of Australians supported both the initial ATTVN deployment and the May 1965 combat troop deployment.¹ As late as July 1966, 64 per cent agreed with Harold Holt's statement that 'we would go all the way with America in the defence of South Vietnam and South East Asia' (Goot and Tiffen 1983, 135).

Such public support magnified the political pressure on the barely concealed fracture lines in the parliamentary opposition. These tensions began to fully reveal themselves after the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964 (Edwards with Pemberton 1992, 311). On the Labor right, deputy Labor leader Gough Whitlam continued to give the Americans unequivocal support, while the left of Labor, represented most forcefully by Jim Cairns, argued for a recalibration of Australian policy. The left aimed at a ceasefire, a reconvening of the Geneva Conference and an immediate negotiated settlement. The centrist space that

¹Morgan Gallup polling found that 61 per cent of Australians approved of the government's deployment of the ATTVN to Vietnam in mid-1962 (Goot and Tiffen 1983, 134). Similarly, in the context of the 1963 federal election, 64 per cent said that Australia should maintain its military commitment in Vietnam, while only 16 per cent demurred. This support remained relatively stable through 1964 and 1965, and was at least partly reflected in a slightly increased vote for the Coalition in the November 1964 half-Senate election and, as we have already noted, in Labor's heavy defeat in the 1966 general election.

Australian Labor Party (ALP) leader Arthur Calwell had attempted to occupy for the previous three years finally evaporated with Menzies' announcement on 28 April 1965 that Australian combat troops would be deployed to Vietnam. A week later Calwell offered a resolute critique of both Australia's and America's Vietnam venture.

In a parliamentary speech that appears remarkably prescient, Calwell denounced the deployment in political and moral terms, arguing that the policy of building a democratic South Vietnam had failed and that Australia's security would be compromised by deepening military involvement. He pointed out that the domino theory obscured the real nature of the conflict, and the political means by which it could be resolved. Instead, it 'lends support and encouragement to those who would see the problem in purely military terms, and whose policies would, if ever adopted, lead to disaster' (cited in Meany 1985, 680–86). Calwell concluded by appealing for a negotiated settlement via the United Nations, and by asserting that those who opposed the government's Vietnam policy would ultimately be vindicated. For all its prescience, Calwell's speech and the divisions within the ALP allowed the government to further wedge the opposition. The government could press its political advantage by painting the ALP as weak on security and dangerous to the health of the Australia–US alliance.

Based on the historical record, we maintain that Australia was not press-ganged into military involvement in Vietnam by the United States. In fact, successive Coalition governments energetically strove to encourage an escalation of US military action in South Vietnam. A modest commitment of Australian troops was viewed as necessary to secure this end, but the benefits of that commitment were thought, rightly or wrongly, to far outweigh the costs. These supposed benefits included improved security through lessening the threat of communist gains in Southeast Asia, closer engagement of the US in Australia's region, greater alliance intimacy with the US, and political advantage over the parliamentary opposition. Much of this would have a clear echo in the lead-up to the second Gulf War nearly 40 years later.

Australia's Road to War in Iraq

Clearly, it would be wrong to present Australia's support of the US in Iraq as a straightforward historical analogue of the earlier Vietnam conflict. Each conflict had a markedly different strategic significance for Australia. The geographical proximity of Vietnam, its relations with Australia's near neighbours, and the militancy of its mass anti-colonial communist movement, could be more credibly construed as a threat to Australia's security and interests in 1965 than could Iraq in 2003. Moreover, any conclusions about the forces shaping Australia's military support for the US in the second Gulf War are necessarily more tentative than in the case of Vietnam, given the lack of supporting archival evidence. Nonetheless, the available evidence points to the Howard government seeing an opportunity to strengthen the US–Australia alliance.

The one area where hard evidence is available for both conflicts, and which therefore provides a useful point of comparison for our discussion, is the domain of public opinion. Unlike the lead-up to and early years of the

Vietnam War, public support for Australia's involvement in the 2003 invasion of Iraq was more ambiguous. In a number of important works that exhaustively analyse public opinion polling around the war, Murray Goot (2004; 2007a; 2007b) has shown that the answers Australians gave to questions about possible Australian military involvement depended on the wording of the question asked. When asked if they would support Australia's military involvement in Iraq if such action was sanctioned by the UN, a clear majority responded yes. Where respondents were asked if they supported Australian armed forces participating in a US-led attack on Iraq in the absence of a UN sanction, a consistent majority answered no. In a dozen polls between August 2002 and March 2003, an average of 54 per cent answered in the negative, with more than twice as many being strongly opposed than strongly in favour (Goot and Goldsmith 2011). Figures such as these, along with large anti-war demonstrations in February and March 2003 (Lawson 2003; Priest 2003), led many commentators to assume that Howard's apparent eagerness to support the invasion was yet another instance of Australian servility in the face of pressure from a great and powerful friend (Broinowski 2003; 2007; Paul 2006).

As with Vietnam, we argue that this position is mistaken, but not because it is critical of the decision to support war – we too maintain that opposition was the principled position to take given the paucity of evidence of any real threat to Australia or its allies from Iraq. It is mistaken because it wrongly assumes that Australia's political leaders knowingly abandoned Australia's interests, as they perceived them, for the sake of satisfying the wishes of the Bush government. In the 2005 Menzies Lecture, Australia's ambassador to the US Michael Thawley articulated a different position: 'Whether or not you agree with that decision – as I happen to – it was a conscious, independent decision taken by an Australian government after much deliberation over our national interest' (Thawley 2005, 5). That is, as with Vietnam, the enthusiasm to go to war in Iraq was an autonomous political choice made in order to strengthen ties with the US. This was viewed as a strategic priority, the longer term benefits of which outweighed the shorter term risks.

Far from being coerced into the war by an overbearing US administration short of coalition partners, the Australian government manifested an uncommon enthusiasm for war. Its energetic support of the US in the United Nations, its many hawkish public statements on the need to confront Iraq, and its pre-deployment of armed forces to the Persian Gulf despite the absence of any formal request from Washington, all bespoke a resolute commitment to militarily support a US invasion, rather than being 'committed to a peaceful solution' as Defence Minister Hill artfully put it (O'Neil 2003, 541–42). Indeed, it was not implausible to suggest, as critics did, that the Australian government 'seemed even more determined than the United States in their intent to confront Saddam Hussein over his alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction' (Gurry 2002, 228).

This determination had, in part, been shaped by events in 1999 when the US showed initial reluctance to provide military support for Australia's upcoming peacekeeper role in East Timor. This anxiety-invoking experience echoed the period in the late 1950s and early 1960s when Australia had felt

out of step with certain US policies in its region. The small nation's resounding vote for independence from Indonesia was accompanied by an explosion of violence by pro-Indonesian, TNI-backed militias. Outraged opinion within Australia and internationally prompted an Australian peace-keeping operation. Expectations of strong American support, however, were not initially realised, much to the disappointment of Prime Minister Howard and his Foreign Minister Alexander Downer. In September 1999, President Clinton, preoccupied at the time with events in Kosovo, ruled out sending US ground troops to support Australian troops. This created unexpected uncertainty about the level of US engagement. In Howard's 2010 memoir he wrote of this decision:

Clinton was not unsympathetic and offered plenty of logistic support and other help, but it took me back a lot when he said that America would not be able to provide any troops or 'boots on the ground' as it was depicted at the time (Howard 2010, 346).

Paul Kelly (2009, 508) offered a very similar version of events: 'Howard rang Clinton to ask for a commitment of combat troops, only to be turned down. "We're heavily stretched. We can't offer troops", Clinton said. Howard was caught out. He said: "I was taken aback"'. As Kelly sums up, for Howard, 'this was a violation of the alliance's spirit. He felt that Australia was being dumped, given its unbroken military support for the United States.' But Australia did not fatalistically accept the initial reluctance of the United States to play a role in East Timor. In an interview we conducted with Thomas Pickering, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs from 1997 to 2001, he reiterated that Clinton was concerned that Congress would oppose US military involvement in East Timor. According to Pickering, Clinton's response saw Australian Embassy staff and their supporters in Washington DC go into overdrive to elicit congressional support. These sturdy efforts helped garner increased American military and diplomatic involvement, and reassured Clinton administration officials that Congress would not object to the support offered. This history partly explains Howard's and Downer's near obsession with strengthening Australia's relationship with the next US president and his administration.

The election of George W. Bush in 2000 was welcomed by Australia's conservative government. The Democratic nominee, Al Gore, had not enamoured himself to Australian conservatives. So 'when Bush was finally confirmed as the next president, Howard and Downer sat down in the prime minister's office and had a glass of champagne to celebrate' (Wright 2004; see also Sheridan 2007, 32). Howard and Downer saw Bush's election as a new opportunity to create much closer ties to the US. The events of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent 'war on terror' brought Howard into the Bush administration's inner circle. On 23 October 2001, in a speech on border protection, Howard remarked of 9/11 that 'of all of the events that I have been in any way touched by in the twenty-seven years that I've been in public life, none has had a more profound impact on me than has this' (cited in Wesley 2002, 60). In response, the Howard government invoked Article IV of the ANZUS treaty on 14 September 2001. In Paul Kelly's assessment: 'Howard chose to become a

100 per cent US ally. It was fatuous to think he would support the United States in Afghanistan but avoid Iraq – that would have been a violation of Howard's history, character and faiths' (Kelly 2009, 580).²

At the same time, the new security situation prompted by 9/11, and then later the Bali bombing and the controversy around Iraq and weapons of mass destruction, presented the Coalition with a political opportunity to portray the Labor opposition as less resolute than the Coalition on matters of national security. Labor had offered bi-partisan support for the war in Afghanistan and the general heightening of Australia's security posture, but was much less comfortable with the possibilities of invading Iraq without a Security Council Mandate. In the end, Labor leader Simon Crean argued that Labor would only support the US in Iraq if such action was approved by the Security Council, as had been the case in 1991. As with Calwell before him, Crean (2002) was questioning the case for war, without questioning the alliance to the US. Undoubtedly this dissenting view on the war was easier to hold from opposition. Nevertheless, it was a decision the conservative government used to paint the ALP as being insufficiently resolute in promoting the alliance with the United States, a position they had taken against Labor for generations, including around military support for the US in Vietnam.

Going to War to Create Alliance Intimacy

In June 2001 the conservative American think tank the Heritage Foundation released a paper which stated: 'Australia has been America's most reliable ally and most valuable security partner in the Pacific basin for many years. Australia fought beside the United States in every war during the past century, including the less popular conflicts such as Vietnam when many of its people objected to its involvement' (Dillon, Froning and O'Driscoll 2001, 1). This reputation for supporting the US in wartime has brought Australia special recognition in the US. However, it has also placed a burden of expectation on Australia not to break this chain of loyal support. In defending Australian support for the US-led war in Iraq Howard articulated this expectation frankly:

The Americans have helped us in the past and the United States is very important to Australia's long-term security. It is critical that we maintain the involvement of the United States in our own region ... The relationship between our two countries will grow more rather than less important as the years go by. A key element of our close friendship with the US and indeed with the British is our full and intimate sharing of intelligence material. (Howard 2010, 447; see also Howard 2003c).

When it came to the US–Australia alliance and to the bonds formed in war (Howard 2002 as cited in Gurry 2002, 229; Howard 2003a), Howard attached a

²Does this history of supporting the US lock Australia into not breaking its 'perfect record'? On this issue Howard's memoirs are interesting to consider: 'During a cabinet meeting in late 2002, Warren Truss had said that some staunch National Party supporters were uneasy, and one of them had said to him, "Can't we just this once not go along with the Americans?"' (Howard 2010, 446).

great deal of weight to cultural affinity. This belief was outlined in interviews as well as speeches throughout 2002 and 2003. In his address to the US Congress in 2002 and his speech welcoming George W. Bush to the Australian Parliament in 2003, Howard emphasised the ‘shared values’ of the two nations (Howard 2003a). Similarly, in a 2003 speech to the Australian American Association, he concluded that shared values can create stronger bonds between allies:

We need to remind ourselves that it is certainly a relationship steeped in history, but it’s also a relationship that is built upon common values. And relationships built on values are always stronger and more enduring than relationships built on a fleeting coincidence of economic or strategic interest (Howard 2003b).

This history of Americans and Australians fighting together was memorialised by Howard and his ministers in speech after speech. George W. Bush was also a believer in this ‘shared values’ thesis, as suggested by his comments about the alliance during the 2007 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit: ‘It’s a relationship based upon values, common values. It’s also a relationship – it’s enforced during tough times. When we fought fascism we learned a lot about each other’ (Bush 2007a). Two days later he repeated these themes in a prepared speech where he stated:

Australia’s response after 9/11 was swift and resolute – and this comes as no surprise to the American people. Our two nations have fought together in every major conflict of the past century ... The United States and Australia are separated by geography – and a lot of it – but we’re united by common values (Bush 2007b).

Howard’s commitment of troops to Iraq in 2003 fits within a pattern of behaviour that goes beyond simple support for the Bush administration. Howard consistently sought to strengthen the US–Australia alliance by strengthening personal, institutional and trade ties as well as military and intelligence relations. Military commitments are the most noticeable sign and ultimate symbol of support for an ally, but it could be argued that Howard overused this sign of loyalty, particularly in the case of Iraq. As Kelly (2009, 443) has written:

In early 1998 the Howard government pledged a ground forces military commitment to join US President Bill Clinton in an attack on Iraq – a decision that stunned the Defence department and terminated the ‘peace culture’ of Australia’s strategic community. It was the first sign of John Howard’s mettle on the US alliance.

This pattern of behaviour and commentary provides strong evidence that Howard saw wars with no direct threat to Australia as opportunities to strengthen alliance relations with the US. As stated above, the Howard government aimed to tighten military ties with the US (particularly in intelligence sharing) and draw the US into the Asian region. The Bush administration granted Australia an intelligence upgrade in July 2004

(Sheridan 2007, 97). Here was at least one tangible outcome of Australia's support for the United States' invasion of Iraq.

It would be mistaken to view Australia's support for the United States exclusively, or even mainly, in terms of either the personal preferences of John Howard or his relationship with George W. Bush. Howard is important for understanding the dynamics of Australia's military support for the US in Iraq, but his decisions fell within the parameters of a well-defined pattern of behaviour for Australian statesmen in the second half of the twentieth century. This pattern manifests a strategic culture that has seen Australia repeatedly support the US militarily and diplomatically. The times when Australia has chosen not to offer military support for US interventions (for example, Panama, Haiti and Kosovo) are not meaningful exceptions to the pattern, as in these cases both the American and Australian governments had mutually agreed that Australia's direct support was unnecessary and unwarranted.

Conclusions

We have argued that the Australian government saw both the Vietnam and the 2003 Iraq wars as opportunities to strengthen its alliance with the US. Rather than being coerced into these conflicts by the US, Australia was an enthusiastic participant. The costs and benefits of this strategy are difficult to measure precisely, and will always be the subject of speculation; nonetheless they are crucial to consider.

In the case of the Vietnam War, Australian military involvement led to greater leader-to-leader intimacy, reflected by Johnson's visit to Australia in 1966, the first visit of a sitting president. Military cooperation increased until the withdrawal of Australian troops in 1972. Thereafter, Australia–US alliance relations in the 1970s weakened (Curran and Ward 2010). In Australia, the Whitlam era brought forth regrets about involvement in Vietnam and the search for new beginnings in many areas including foreign policy, while American policy under Nixon had bigger fish to fry. Australian combat troop commitments in Iraq from 2003 to 2009 (coupled with the Afghanistan commitment) have to date strengthened the alliance. This is indicated by the relatively high level of leader-to-leader (and senior-level government) interactions, the upgrading of military intelligence from the US, and the recent announcement that in the near future up to 2,500 American troops will be based in Darwin, with many more US air force visits also planned. This strengthening of the alliance is not axiomatically a positive development. Australia's strategy of strengthening bonds with America by involving its troops in external conflicts has obvious risks, both directly to Australian military personnel and indirectly to Australia's global reputation. This reputation could well be tarnished, particularly where the war is not sanctioned by the UN and does not adhere to international law.

The evidence presented above suggests that in both Vietnam and Iraq, Australian leaders were of a mind that the benefits of military support for the US would, ultimately, far outweigh the costs. In Iraq, Australia's commitments were indeed relatively modest, with little more than two thousand military personnel deployed at any one time, and with Australia suffering only two

fatalities, one self-inflicted and the other resulting from a vehicle accident. If Australian casualties had been equal to those of the British (179 dead) on a per capita basis, 65 Australian military personnel would have died, which would have undoubtedly led to significant political pressure being placed on the Howard government. The fact that this was avoided can be partly explained by the political protection that Bush extended to the Howard government. A senior official in Washington told us that Britain had requested both a larger troop commitment from Australia and more Australian involvement in the riskier kinds of military engagements undertaken by the British. We were told that the White House quashed this request. Although further evidence is required to verify this, the claim that the Howard government and the Bush administration struck a deal to avoid an increased or overly dangerous Australian commitment certainly seems plausible.

In Vietnam, by contrast, what began as a modest commitment grew into something much more substantial and much more tragic in its consequences for Australia. Nonetheless, they were consequences for which Australian leaders only had themselves to blame. In Vietnam, as in Iraq, Australia was not an unwilling junior partner coerced into war, but an enthusiastic participant that encouraged a military rather than a diplomatic solution. In both instances, Australia used war as a means of cultivating its relationship with the US, in the expectation that national benefits would outweigh costs. Australia's military involvement at the side of the US was in both cases the manifestation of a broader strategic culture. Its essential feature was, and is, cultivating the support of, and intimacy with, a great and powerful friend – not as an end in itself, but with the aim of increasing Australian security and attempting to ensure that friend's engagement in the Asian region. The extent to which this has been successful is debatable. It has arguably tied Australia closer to the US than was and is prudent. This proximity to the US has created obstacles to Australia developing regional security and economic arrangements with other Asian countries. But as the cases presented here show, it would be wrong to conclude from this that Australia is the lapdog of the United States. On the contrary, both Vietnam and Iraq show that Australia as hound dog – beseeching, urging, encouraging US military adventurism – is the more apposite metaphor.

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