

## CHAPTER 2

# DEFENCE, SECURITY AND THE IRAQ WAR

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## INTRODUCTION

For most of the past century, with the exception of World Wars I and II, defence has rarely been a major political issue in Australia. As a consequence, the public has had few firm views on defence policy and possessed limited knowledge about the strategic options available. This situation was sustained by a partisan consensus on defence policies that, effectively, excluded everyday political discussion about defence. The principal post-war exception to this pattern is, of course, the Vietnam War, when political divisions over Australia's support for the US-led action produced unprecedented protests and eventually resulted in the withdrawal of troops in 1972.

The period since 2001 has seen a fundamental change both in the public's views of defence, and in how defence and security is debated by political elites. This has come about as a result of three changes. First, the 11 September 2001 ('9/11') attacks in the United States, followed shortly afterwards in October 2002 by the Bali bombings, when 202 people were killed — 88 of them Australian — resulted in a new form of physical threat, terrorism, appearing on the public's agenda. While terrorist attacks have been a commonplace occurrence in many European countries since the late 1960s, except for the Sydney Hilton Hotel bombing in February 1978, terrorism has not been a political consideration in Australia. In short, terrorism has brought security issues 'home' for many Australians.

A second factor prompting increasing public focus on security is Australia's commitment to the Iraq War and the growing party

political divisions it has prompted. Though the government and opposition were united in sending military forces to the Gulf War in 1990–91 and participating in the invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, the Labor opposition opposed any commitment to the Iraq War in the absence of a United Nations mandate. Labor leader at the time, Simon Crean, in farewelling the Australian contingent, stated that he didn't believe the troops should be going, and said he favoured, instead, a deployment of United Nations forces. The Iraq War represents the first time since the Vietnam era that there has been a fundamental division between the major parties over the deployment of troops overseas.

The relentless pace of globalisation and the consequent overlapping of economic and trade considerations with defence and security policies are a third factor increasing the public's increased awareness of defence issues. While the arguments for and against the 2004 Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States were always couched in strictly economic terms, there was speculation that another motivation for supporting the treaty was to reinforce Australia's close strategic ties with the United States. As Capling (2005, p. 75) argues, the trade agreement was 'driven by Howard's desire to strengthen Australia's political and strategic links with the United States, an objective that had assumed even greater importance with the "War on Terror"'. Inevitably, then, who Australia trades with has implications for public opinion on defence and security.

Drawing on data from the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2005 (Wilson et al. 2006)<sup>a</sup>, this chapter examines public opinion towards defence and security. Since the public's views on such issues have evolved over a lengthy period, we also make considerable use of the wealth of public opinion material, allowing us to explore changes in attitudes, in some cases stretching back to the 1960s.<sup>b</sup> The first section examines the public's views of security threats to Australia, and the countries seen as likely to pose a threat. More recent concerns, namely the war on terror and the Iraq War, are the subject of the second section, while the third section analyses views of Australia's ties with the United States. The fourth and final section identifies an emerging split in opinion over Australia's future strategic options.

## PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY THREATS

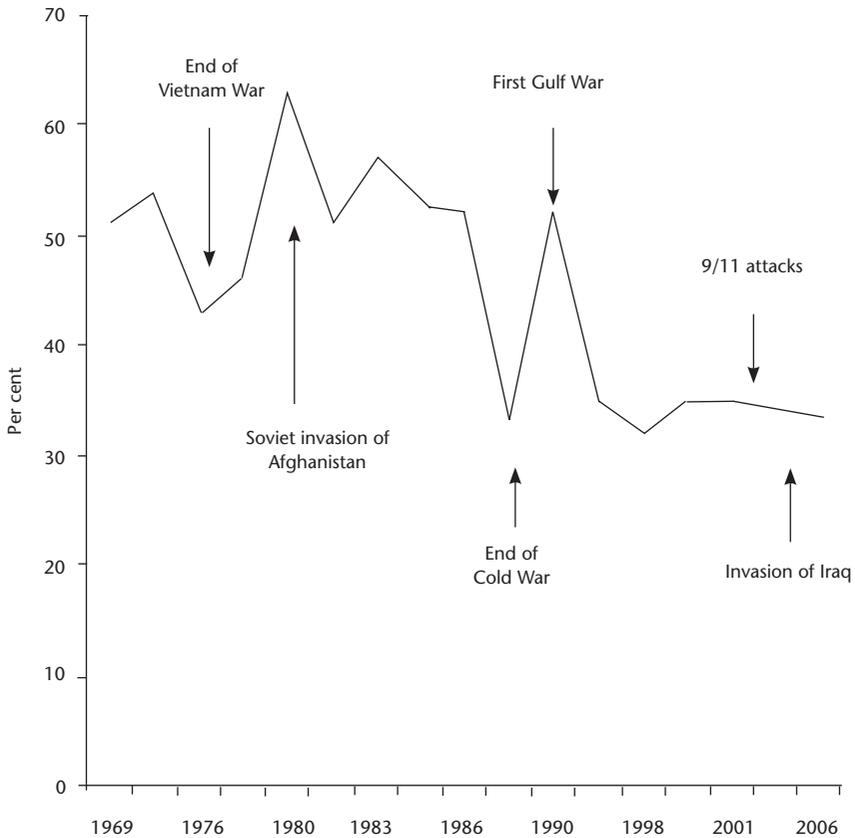
Although Australian military forces have been involved in six operations since the end of the World War II in 1945 – the Korean War (1950–53), the Malaya Emergency (1950–60), the Indonesian Con-

frontation (1963–66), the Vietnam War (1962–72), the Gulf War (1990–91), and the Iraq War (2002–03) – none has represented a direct threat to Australia’s security. Moreover, with the exception of the Vietnam War, relatively small numbers of military personnel were involved. The Australian population, therefore, has not been faced with a direct challenge to the country’s territory since 1945, while relatively few Australians would have any direct experience or memory of the pre-1945 period and the threat posed by Japan’s invasion of most of Southeast Asia. The absence of any direct threat for over half a century undoubtedly has had a major impact on how the public views potential future threats within the region.

Perhaps the most straightforward way to gauge changes in Australians’ attitudes toward national security is to plot the percentage of those who feel at least one country represents a risk to Australia. Figure 2.1 shows that, overall, there has been a gradual, if uneven, decline in the percentage of Australians who perceive a national security threat. The period for which survey data are available begins only in 1969, so we know little about how the Korean War, the Malaya emergency or the Indonesian confrontation affected public opinion about Australia’s security. The trend in figure 2.1 also begins with the winding down of the Vietnam War, and Australia’s eventual withdrawal in 1972, so the public’s perception of a threat shows a decline, from 54 per cent in 1970, to 43 per cent in 1976, just after the end of the Vietnam War. However, the immediate post-Vietnam War period represents a temporary decline. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980 produces a peak of 63 per cent who see a threat to Australia, and for most of the remainder of the 1980s over half of the population see a security threat existing to Australia.

After 1990, the proportion of Australians seeing a potential security threat has remained relatively constant at about one in three of the population, with the major (but short-lived) exception being the Gulf War in 1990–91, when more than half of the population thought there was a potential security threat (see Goot 1992). However, it is notable that the public did not react to the Gulf War in the same way it did to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Even the events in East Timor in 1999 and 2000 caused only a small increase in threat perceptions. In other words, specific events still cause changes in public opinion, but without the backdrop of east-west confrontation embodied in the Cold War, these opinions are likely to dissipate almost as rapidly as they emerge.

**Figure 2.1 Proportion of Australians identifying at least one country as a security threat to Australia, 1967-2005, per cent**



**SOURCES** For 1969-85, McAllister & Makkai (1992); Australian Election Studies 1987-2004; Survey of Defence Issues 2000; The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2005

**NOTE** A security threat is defined as seeing at least one country as 'very likely' to represent a security threat. Definitions vary slightly between surveys

### THREAT PERCEPTION IN 2005

AuSSA 2005 asks respondents whether, in their opinion, any of the following countries are likely to pose a threat to Australia's security: the United States, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. There is little ambiguity about which country the public sees as representing the most likely potential threat: 28 per cent identify Indonesia as the most likely threat to Australia, followed, in a distant second, by China (9 per cent). Of the remaining four countries, the responses vary from 6 per cent (for both Malaysia and the United

States) to 3 per cent for Singapore. It is instructive to interpret current Australian attitudes on security threats in the context of cross-time attitudes of the countries posing a potential threat to Australia. Ian McAllister (2004) has reported these trends from the late 1960s to the turn-of-the-century. He argues that two important trends emerge, one long-term and the other short-term.

The long-term trend is marked by two significant developments. First, there has been a decline in the number of Australians viewing China as a national security threat. In the late 1960s, about three in ten of the population saw China as a threat, declining to less than one in ten in the early 1980s. While concerns rose again with the Tiananmen massacre in May 1989, thereafter this has declined, and again appears to have stabilised at about one in ten voters. This decline of the perception of threat from China is paralleled by a growing recognition of other sources for concern in the region. Perhaps most important is the gradual increase in the proportion of Australians identifying Indonesia as a threat. In the late 1960s, less than one in ten saw Indonesia as a threat, but that proportion has increased consistently, with notable rises following the invasion of East Timor in 1975, the Dili massacre in November 1991 and the East Timor crisis following the referendum in August 1999.

An important short-term trend has been the rise in the proportion of Australians who see the United States as a potential security threat – at first glance a rather surprising finding. Although the proportion taking this view in 2005 is just 6 per cent, this represents a three-fold increase on 1998, and is exactly the same as the 2004 figure, suggesting that it is not the result of random.<sup>c</sup> The timing and the extent of the increase suggest that some of the respondents may well have interpreted the question about security in economic terms, and are reacting against the successful conclusion of the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA), signed in November 2004. Critics of the FTA have argued that it represents ‘a death sentence for Australia as an independent country, able to hold its own in international forums’ (Weiss, Thurbon & Mathews 2004, p. 3) and that the government’s enthusiasm was motivated as much by strategic considerations as economic ones (Capling 2005).

This link between national security and trade relations can be examined more closely, because AuSSA 2005 contains a question about whether the respondents felt that the FTA with the United States is good or bad for Australia, or makes no difference. Of those who feel

that the FTA is good for Australia, two per cent feel that it is ‘very likely’ the United States will be a potential security threat to Australia. By contrast, among those opposed to the FTA, 11 per cent feel that the United States is a potential threat. There is strong evidence, then, that the increasing proportions of those seeing the United States as a threat to Australia interpret the question in an economic sense, and are opposed to the FTA. This represents a potentially important development in how at least some of the public views security threats.

## CONFLICT AND THREAT PERCEPTION

The previous section argued that none of Australia’s six post-World War II military engagements overseas represented a direct physical threat to Australia. We would expect that the experience of a direct threat would have a strong effect on individuals’ views of international security. In particular, we would anticipate that those who grew up during World War II as well as those growing up during the Korean and Vietnam Wars would be more likely to see focus their concerns on security threats in the region compared to those growing up in the (comparatively) more peaceful 1980s and 1990s.

The AuSSA survey data confirm this understanding, with a clear distinction emerging between younger and older Australians in identifying potential security threats from Indonesia and the United States. Those identifying Indonesia as the threat are more likely to be older, and to have grown up during the 1950s and 1960s, broadly equating to the Korean and Vietnam wars. Just under one-third of those aged 50 and above regard Indonesia as a very likely threat to Australian security compared with just over one in five of those aged below 35. By contrast, although the perception of threat from the United States runs at a lower level than that of Indonesia, younger citizens emerge as the most likely to see it as a cause for concern. Almost one in ten of those aged below 35 consider it very likely that the United States will pose a threat to Australia’s security compared with one in 20 of those aged between 50 and 64, and one in 50 of those aged over 65.

These perceptual patterns imply more than attitudes about national security as an abstraction. Indeed, as we will see, the threats that citizens see to their country help to shape their views about many aspects of defence and security. Those who see few threats are likely to be less interested in defence, and to be less supportive of government funding being spent on it. By contrast, those with a heightened threat-awareness are likely to support strong defence capabilities able to counter

any threat, and to favour defence alliances able to secure assistance if it is required. But as we have seen from the results in this section, there have been important changes in how people view security threats. The end of the Cold War has focused attention on the threats that exist within our region — principally Indonesia — while at the same time a small but growing minority have interpreted those threats in economic terms and identified the United States as a significant threat. These are important changes, to which we return later in the chapter.

## TERRORISM AND IRAQ

The events of 9/11 in the United States and the Bali bombing in October 2002 have meant that the spectre of terrorism is increasingly close to the public's consciousness. The November 2001 federal election saw terrorism and security emerge as major political issues for the first time. These concerns, coupled with the asylum seeker crisis, made the border security a major voter priority and served to underpin the Coalition's decisive election victory (McAllister 2003). In both the 2001 and 2004 federal elections, around one in ten voters mentioned defence, security or terrorism as their most important election issue. This was less than the proportion of voters citing the importance of health, education and taxation, but was nevertheless a major shift in public opinion compared to previous federal elections (McAllister & Bean 2007). In the 2005 AuSSA survey, the public's concern about terrorism was ranked eighth out of 18 issues, again substantially behind health and taxation, but on a par with concerns over crime and environmental damage. In short, the rise of terrorism has prompted a new, high profile concern for security in the minds of many Australians.

Popular views about terrorism are closely linked to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which have brought a new kind of military operation into the public's focus: the war against terrorism. Shortly after the 11 September attacks, the US government adopted the 'Bush doctrine' of permitting the United States to pursue terrorists regardless of territorial boundaries. In Bush's words, the United States would 'make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and the countries that harbour them' (quoted in Jervis 2003). While Australia has supported the Bush doctrine, Australian military involvement in the invasion of Afghanistan was small and relatively non-controversial. By contrast, the invasion of Iraq was highly divisive in all three of the highest profile members of the 'Coalition of the Willing' — the United States, Britain and Australia (Goot 2004).

The formal justification for invading Iraq was its manufacture of weapons of mass destruction and failure to co-operate with UN weapons inspectors. However, when the invasion began in March 2003, it took place without UN endorsement. This was less of an issue in the United States, where the public was overwhelmingly in favour of the invasion and associated Iraq with support for the 9/11 attacks. But it was important in Britain and Australia, where public support for the war was weaker and support for UN endorsement of military action significantly greater (McAllister 2006).

Data from the 2001 Australian Election Study reveals that immediately following 9/11, but before the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, over two-thirds of the public agreed that Australia should provide military support to the War against Terror, with one in five strongly agreeing with this option (McAllister 2004, table 2.8). Since then, however, as the final row of table 2.1 shows, the level of support has decreased. Only 8 per cent of respondents registered strong agreement in 2005, although military involvement still holds a narrow majority approval amongst the population. When we examine the structure of that support we can see that there is a clear split in the population along gender, age and educational lines. Overall, men are more likely than women to support Australia providing military

**Table 2.1 Agreement with providing military support for the War on Terror, 2005, percent**

		Strongly agree/ agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree/ strongly disagree
Gender				
	Male (n=872)	64	18	18
	Female (n=914)	52	23	25
Univ Education				
	No degree (n=1365)	61	21	18
	Univ degree (n=419)	47	17	34
Age				
	18-34 (n=309)	47	24	29
	35-49 (n=528)	55	22	23
	50-64 (n=570)	64	17	19
	65 and over (n=370)	65	19	16
Total	58	20	22	
	(n=1802)			

SOURCES The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2005

NOTE Figures exclude those selected 'Can't choose'

assistance in the war on terror. Those with lower levels of education are also more supportive of aiding the war effort than those who are university-educated, and finally older Australians are also more likely to favour offering military help than those aged under 35 years.

The Iraq War has enjoyed much less public support than the War on Terror, in part because of Labor's opposition to the war and the consequent party politicisation of the issue. In the 2004 Australian Election Study, opinion was narrowly divided, with 52 per cent approving of the government's handling of the war, and 48 per cent opposing it. However, the depth of feeling about the issue is notable: respondents who were opposed to the war expressed their views more strongly than those who were in support.<sup>d</sup> In 2005 public opinion in support of the war had further weakened, with a narrow majority disapproving of the government's handling of the war. In 2005, however, the strength of feelings on the issue were weaker than in 2004, with just 22 per cent of those disapproving of the war holding their view strongly.<sup>e</sup>

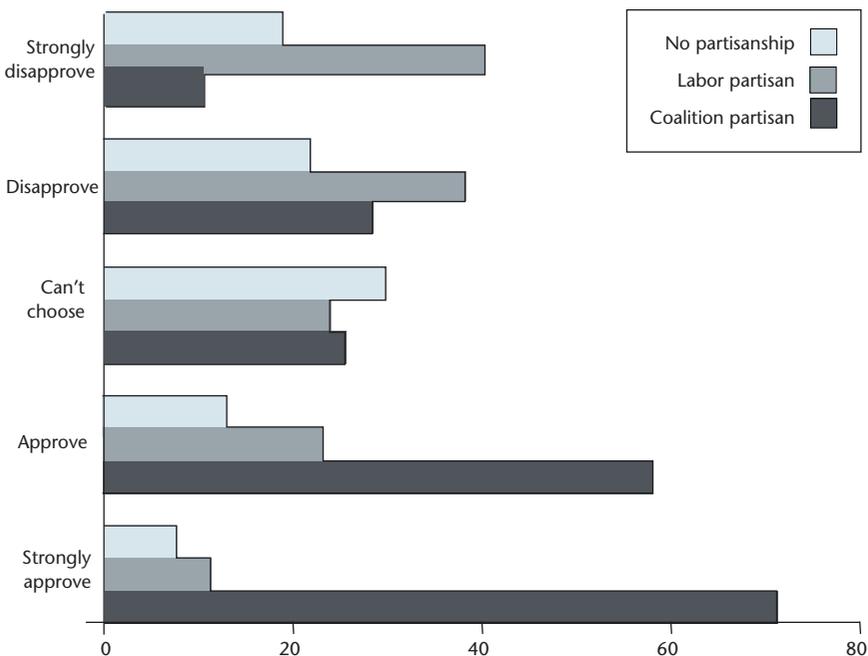
On the question of whether the war had been worth the cost, there is little ambiguity in the public mind three-quarters of those interviewed in 2005 believe that it had not been worth the cost and just one-quarter take the view that the cost had been worth it. This represents a significant change from 2004, when 39 per cent believed that the war had been worth the cost. The change undoubtedly reflects the failure of the coalition allies to find evidence of weapons of mass destruction following the invasion, the well-publicised security failures in the early part of the occupation, and the endemic communal violence and hostage-taking between the warring factions in Iraq.

The third aspect of the Iraq War on which we can examine the public's views is whether or not it has resulted in any change in the terrorist threat to Australia. This question has been a delicate one for the government, since the purpose of invading Iraq was to reduce the threat of terrorism. The question gained media prominence when the federal police commissioner, Mick Keelty, in answer to a question about the March 2004 Madrid bombing, argued that if Islamic extremists were found to be responsible for the bombing in Spain, the violence could be linked to Spain's and other allies' positions on the Iraq war (Nicholson & Berry 2004). The government immediately distanced itself from Keelty's comments, and John Howard rejected the view that the terrorist threat had increased as a result of Australia's participation in the war. Nevertheless, the Australian public broadly rejected the government's position: just over three-quarters believe

that the Iraq war had increased the threat of terrorism, and just one per cent believes that it had reduced it.<sup>f</sup>

Supplementing the findings reported in table 2.1 on the socio-demographic bases of support for the War on Terror, figure 2.2 reveals the extent to which Iraq has become a partisan issue. In 2005, almost three-quarters of Coalition partisans strongly approved of the government's handling of the war, compared to just 12 per cent of Labor partisans. At the other end of the scale, just 12 per cent of Coalition partisans strongly disapproved of the government's handling of the war, compared to 45 per cent of Labor partisans. It is rare for a war in which Australia is involved – where the military expects and almost always receives consensual support – to generate such distinct opinions along party lines. The explanation for this intense partisanship rests in the role of the party leaders in adopting opposing views on the issue. As it happens, relatively few voters rated Iraq as their first or second priority in the 2004 federal election. However, if they did, the issue exercised a disproportionate influence on their vote and on their views of Howard's credibility (McAllister and Bean 2007).

**Figure 2.2 Partisanship and the government's handling of the Iraq War, 2005, per cent.**



SOURCE The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2005

## DEFENCE LINKS WITH THE UNITED STATES

While terrorism and the war in Iraq have provided important points of cleavage in Australians' opinions since 2001, security issues and defence relationships have a much longer term frame of reference. Since the World War II and the erosion of British military power, strategic relations with the United States have been pivotal to Australia's security and to the security of the region. This link was formalised with the signing of the ANZUS alliance between Australia, New Zealand and the United States in 1951. Although public support for the alliance in New Zealand during the 1980s became embroiled in controversy over the unwillingness of the New Zealand Labour government to accept visits by US nuclear vessels (Watts 1991), public opinion in Australia has not diverged from official attitudes that continue to regard ANZUS as by far the most important of Australia's defence relationships (McAllister & Ravenhill 1998).

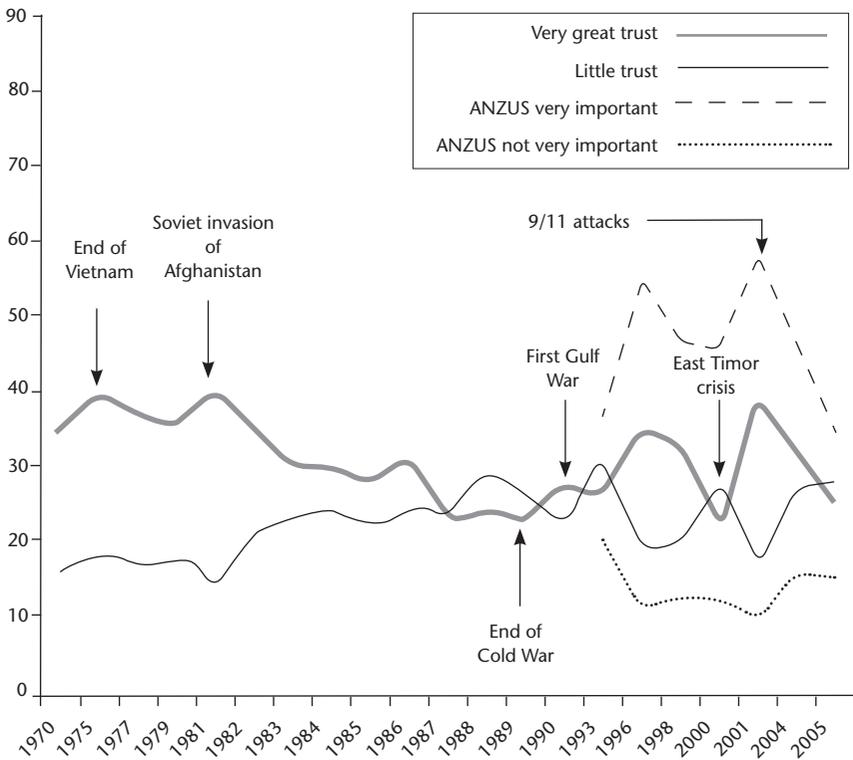
Popular attitudes to the United States' defence relationship with Australia can be placed in context by examining public opinion over an extended period, in this case since 1970, when comparable questions were first asked in opinion surveys. Throughout the 1970s, as figure 2.3 reveals, those expressing 'considerable trust' in the United States to come to Australia's defence fluctuated between 35 and 40 per cent. The end of the Vietnam War in 1975 resulted in a small decline, but support peaked once again at 40 per cent following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Thereafter, the decline of Cold War tension, which culminated in the collapse of communism in 1989–90, saw the proportion with very great trust in the United States decline consistently, reaching a low of 23 per cent in 1989 (Cheeseman & McAllister 1996).

Following the successful liberation of Kuwait in the Gulf War, another peak in trust in Australia's ties to US defence capabilities was reached in 1996, when 35 per cent expressed great trust. In the surveys conducted since 1996, public opinion has fluctuated considerably in response to major international events. By 2000 there was again a significant decline in support — just 22 per cent expressing trust in the United States, one percentage point lower than the figures recorded at the end of the Cold War. One factor contributing to the substantial decline between 1998 and 2000 may have been the reluctance of the United States to commit ground troops in both Kosovo and East Timor. Some respondents may perceive that this reluctance would extend to assistance in Australia's defence if help was required.

Whatever the cause, the proportion of Australians expressing great trust in US defence ties eroded across these years – the ranks of these Australians in 2000 outnumbered by those expressing little trust for the first time since the end of the late 1980s.

By 2001 public opinion about Australian-US defence links had again shifted, this time in the direction of more trust in the United States. The 2001 Australian Election Study, conducted immediately after the November federal election, and two months after 9/11, found that around four out of ten voters said that they trusted the United States to assist Australia – a figure similar to the previous high

**Figure 2.3 Attitudes towards defence links with the United States, 1970–2005, per cent**



**SOURCES** US Information Service 1970–86; Survey of Defence Issues 2000; Australian Election Study 1987–2004; The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2005

**NOTE** Exact question wordings and codings vary between surveys prior to 1987. The trust question from 1987 onwards was: ‘If Australia’s security were threatened by some other country, how much trust do you feel Australia can have in the United States to come to Australia’s defence?’ The ANZUS question was: ‘How important do you think the Australian alliance with the United States under the ANZUS treaty is for protecting Australia’s security?’

point, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan two decades earlier. Indeed, the jump in the figures between 2000 and 2001 shows the deep impact that 9/11 had on Australian public opinion towards the United States. Since then, trust has again declined, to 33 per cent in 2004 and 25 per cent among respondents to AuSSA 2005. The most recent figure is on a par with those recorded at the end of the Cold War, when any direct threats to Australia's security were difficult to identify.

What are the main conclusions that can be drawn from the trends over this 35 year period? First, public opinion towards the United States was more stable in the period before the end of the Cold War than in the period after it. Thus, 1990 represents a watershed in attitudes toward defence and security of Australia. Second, the overall trend is towards less trust in the United States; the latter years of the Vietnam war representing the consistent high point. Barring major events such as 9/11, this high level of trust is unlikely to be sustained for long periods of time. The swift decline in trust following 2001 bears out this conclusion. Third, events such as 9/11 can and do have the potential to fundamentally alter public opinion, albeit only temporarily.

To what extent has opinion about the willingness of the United States to assist Australia's defence influenced views about the ANZUS alliance? Trend data about the public's view of the ANZUS alliance exist from 1993 onwards and are reported in figure 2.3. These data suggest that opinions about the ANZUS alliance mirror opinion about trust in ties to US defence capabilities. Opinions about the importance of ANZUS peaked in 1996, and declined in the two subsequent surveys, conducted in 1998 and 2000, respectively. The 9/11 attacks produced a further peak – 58 per cent of Australian respondents feeling the alliance was very important. But these patterns were followed by a decline in 2004 and 2005. In the 2005 AuSSA survey, 35 per cent say the ANZUS alliance is very important, as against 15 per cent who think it is not important. However, a further 40 per cent believe that the alliance is important. In total, then, three-quarters of the population support the alliance, with varying degrees of strength.

Although over-time survey data are available on only two aspects of Australia's defence links with the United States – trust in the United States to come to Australia's defence, and the importance of the ANZUS alliance – they tell a consistent story. Popular trust in the United States to assist in Australian's defence is relatively modest, and is contingent on international events which have demonstrated the level of

commitment of the United States towards military intervention in different parts of the world. When that commitment appears high, then so is trust; and when the commitment is perceived to be low, trust also declines. Whatever caveats the public may have about US support for Australia, however, they do appear to maintain a strong level support for the ANZUS alliance. Any changes in popular attitudes on this question occur only in the intensity of support, rather than the direction of these attitudes. For the majority of Australians, therefore, ANZUS continues to be seen as central to ensuring their physical security.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR DEFENCE AND SECURITY

The previous section has demonstrated strong public support for US defence relations – support that has been a foundation for Australia’s defence strategy for almost half a century. Public opinion evidence, however, also reveals some post-Cold War volatility in support for the United States. Does this change represent an emergent shift in attitudes toward Australia’s future defence and security strategy? And if so, what alternative strategies would the public regard as important? Two main alternatives have dominated policy formulations in recent years. The first is closer links with Asia as an alternative to the United States – an option that was first placed on the political agenda by the Keating Labor government (1991–96). The second is the goal of defence self-reliance, within the context of existing alliance relationships. We deal with each of these in turn.

Until the early 1990s, Australia’s economic and strategic integration with Asia was not a major political issue. That situation changed with the Keating Labor government, which made closer ties with Asia a central plank of its foreign policy agenda and in 1996 even signed a defence treaty with Indonesia (McAllister & Ravenhill 1998). Yet most voters have either been unconcerned about Asian relations, or believe that the present level of engagement is satisfactory. Survey analyses, which identify the socio-economic characteristics of voters most likely to predict support for closer Asian engagement, show that tertiary education is by far the most important. By contrast, support for the link with the United States is related to lower levels of education (McAllister 2004). As far as the public is concerned, closer links with Asia remain an elite issue which they have not yet fully embraced, while the US defence alliance is a long-standing, widely-held commitment.<sup>8</sup>

When respondents to AuSSA 2005 are asked if they believe rela-

tions with China would be more important to Australia over the next 10 years compared to relations with the United States, just over one in three respondents agree with the statement – with one quarter taking the opposite view (table 2.2). However, the largest group — 38 per cent — take no position on the issue, while very few of the respondents take strong positions either for or against the statement. The same pattern emerges when we examine views about defence co-operation with Asia, as against the United States. Once again, the largest group, 35 per cent, are undecided, followed by one in three who agree with the statement, and slightly less who oppose it. Despite rising tensions in the Asia-Pacific region between China and the United States, as China begins to flex its economic and military muscles, defence links with Asia show all the characteristics of a topic on which there has been little debate by elites in public forums, so that voters possess little information about the issue, and as a consequence, hold their views less strongly.

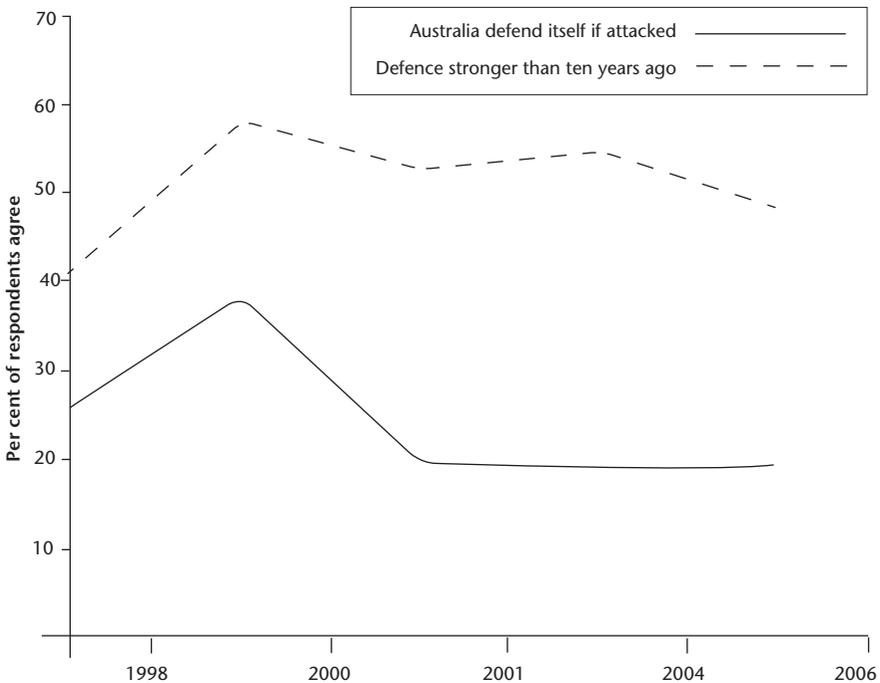
Maintaining a high degree of defence self-reliance represents an alternative for Australia both to its current dependence on the US alliance and to forging new, closer links with Asia. The commitment to self-reliance was first advanced in a 1976 defence white paper, which examined Australia's strategic priorities after the Vietnam War. The goal of self-reliance has been consistently reaffirmed by the Australian Department of Defence — with its first priority being 'capable of defending Australia from any credible attack without relying on help from the combat forces of another country' (Department of Defence 2000). For the public, too, the issue is more straightforward: self-reliance implies maintaining a strong defence capability which would enable Australia to defend itself without recourse to international assistance.

**Table 2.2 Defence links with Asia, 2005, per cent**

	China relations more important than US	Concentrate defence co-op with Asia
Strongly agree	5	5
Agree	31	28
Neither agree nor disagree	38	35
Disagree	22	26
Strongly disagree	4	6
(n)	(1743)	(1746)

Despite the stated commitment by the Department of Defence to self-reliance in the face of an attack, the AuSSA survey reveals that only a minority of the public believes that Australia would be able to defend itself if attacked. Figure 2.4 shows that in 2005 just one in five took this view, down from a peak of 39 per cent in 2000, immediately following Australia's highly successful involvement in the East Timor multinational peacekeeping force. This peak in support for self-reliance was short-lived, however, with the three surveys since 2000 consistently showing only one in five confident that Australia can defend itself. One explanation for this decline may be the unpredictability of terrorism, which makes people less able to identify a tangible threat, which makes them feel more insecure. Nevertheless, figure 2.4 also shows that around half of the public believes that Australia's defence capabilities have been improving, judged against preceding ten years. In 1998, 40 per cent took this view, but it peaked after East Timor at 58 per cent and has stabilised at between 49 and 55 per cent since

**Figure 2.4 Beliefs about Australian defence self-reliance, 1998–2005, per cent**



SOURCES Australian Election Study 1996–2004; Survey of Defence Issues 2000; The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2005

then. Undoubtedly, Australia's many overseas commitments in the past decade – from Iraq and Afghanistan, to East Timor and the Solomon Islands – have promoted the view that Australian defence has been getting stronger.

How are these three views about Australia's future defence strategy related to other views about defence and security? To examine this question, we first created scales out of the responses to the questions about the US alliance, closer links with Asia, and defence self-reliance.<sup>h</sup> Table 2.3 shows the relationship between five aspects of defence policy and the three alternative options, discussed above. As we would expect, there is a strong association between supporting the US alliance and not seeing the United States as a threat and with supporting both the Iraq war and the War on Terror. There is a reverse, though weaker, relationship between these views and support for Asian co-operation. Intriguingly, more defence spending is strongly associated with support for the US alliance, and negatively associated with Asian co-operation. Support for defence self-reliance is associated, if weakly, with all of these views, but more closely linked with a US alliance than Asian co-operation.

To what extent are these opinions about future strategies related to an individual's political party loyalty? The results in table 2.4 suggest these attitudes vary strongly by individuals' party ties. The effects are particularly evident for Coalition supporters, who most strongly support the US alliance, and show least support for Asian co-operation. Indeed, the difference between the means for the two strategies

**Table 2.3 Beliefs about defence and future strategies, 2005, correlations**

	US alliance	Asian co-operation	Defence self-reliance
Indonesia threat	.09	-.13	-.09
US threat	-.36	.18	.00ns
Increase defence spending	.31	-.21	-.11
Approves government handling of Iraq War	.40	-.35	.13
FTA good for Australia	.40	-.21	.14
Supports war on terror	.46	-.28	.13

SOURCE The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2005

NOTE ns, not significant at  $p < .01$ , two-tailed. All other correlations are significant at  $p < .01$  or better

**Table 2.4 Partisanship and future defence strategies, 2005, means**

	US alliance	Asian co-operation	Defence self-reliance	(n)
Coalition	7.7	4.8	5.1	(727)
Labor	6.6	5.3	5.0	(584)
Other	5.6	5.8	4.9	(207)
None	6.4	5.2	4.8	(343)
Total	6.9	5.1	5.0	(1861)

SOURCE The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2005

NOTE Figures are means, based on zero (no support) to 10 (complete support) scales

is almost three points for Coalition loyalists. Labor partisans also support the US alliance, though less enthusiastically than their Coalition counterparts, and are more supportive of Asia co-operation; in contrast to the Coalition, the difference between the two means is just 1.3 points. For Coalition partisans, defence self-reliance is seen as a better option than Asian co-operation, but for Labor partisans self-reliance is the third-ranked option.

Widespread public support for the US alliance notwithstanding, these results suggest emerging support for a second option for Australia's defence relations, namely co-operation with Asia. This relatively new outlook among the public seems to be fuelled by scepticism about the United States, which in turn is driven by opposition to the Iraq War and to the war on terror, and by opposition to the Australia-US FTA. It remains to be seen whether this emerging belief in greater Asian defence co-operation with Asia will continue to attract support. The increasing politicisation of defence and Labor's opposition to the Iraq war suggest that whether Australians look east or west in their defence relations may soon play a vital role in the nation's political agenda.

## CONCLUSION

Until relatively recently, post-1945 Australian politics have rarely seen defence and security issues in the political limelight. Ironically, that changed with the end of the Cold War in 1990, and the effective victory of capitalism over communism. Rather than ushering in a new era of peace, the old certainties about friends and foes inherent in the bipolar Cold War conflict were undermined. The arrival of terrorism, in the form of the 9/11 attacks and the Bali bombing, meant that po-

tential security threats could be internal as well as external and regional as well as global. Trade issues, once strictly quarantined from defence, are now seen as overlapping considerations. This new security agenda has presented Australian policy makers with a number of dilemmas in their efforts to defend national interests and neutralise security threats.

What are the consequences of this new defence and security environment for public opinion? Not surprisingly, there has been greater volatility in public opinion on defence and security issues than at any time in the recent past. Where, previously, change in public opinion was gradual, even glacial, an event such as 9/11 or the Iraq War can now result in a major short-term change in opinion towards the United States, and particularly it seems among the younger generation. Whether this volatility will remain in the longer term is clearly an important question for future analysis. Certainly, although Iraq and Afghanistan are wars fought at a distance, the partnership forged by the Coalition with the United States in the war on terror have brought the issues of foreign policy and defence issues closer to 'home' for Australians in a more acute way. Fears of regional and even domestic terrorist attacks are something of a new worry for the public. The Vietnam and Korean conflicts did not bring conflict or military reprisal to citizens' doors in the same way. Moreover, concerns about the Iraq war, apprehension about the impact of the FTA on the economy, and a general dislike of US power, have all served to focus attention on defence co-operation with Asia as a counterpoint to the US alliance. As these new security agendas gain more prominence and are politicised by political elites, we can expect public opinion to reflect more sharply drawn attitudes.

## NOTES

- 1 The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA) is Australia's national social survey. The Survey is fielded biennially and includes International Social Survey Program modules for Australia. The Survey is managed by the ACSPRI Centre for Social Research at the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University, and is overseen by a team of Principal Investigators and advisors from the ANU and several other Australian universities. All fieldwork is conducted by the Australian Social Science Data Archive at ANU. The Survey relies on a random sample of registered voters, stratified by Australian states and territories, and uses

uses a mail-out/mail-back methodology. In 2005, the number of respondents to the two AuSSA questionnaires totalled 3 902, and represents a net response rate of 43 per cent. For more information, please refer to the Survey website: <<http://aussa.anu.edu.au>>.

2 These longitudinal results, in particular, draw heavily on Ian McAllister's work for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (see McAllister, 2004, 2005).

3 The figures from the 1996 Australian Election Study, when the United States was first included as an option, are: 1996 (3 per cent), 1998 (2 per cent), 2001 (2 per cent), 2004 (6 per cent), 2005 (6 per cent).

4 The figures for 2004 were: strongly approve, 17 per cent; approve, 35 per cent; disapprove, 18 per cent; strongly disapprove, 30 per cent.

5 The 2004 question differs slightly from the 2005 AuSSA question, with the earlier question asking about 'John Howard's handling of the Iraq War', and the later question asking about the 'government's handling of the Iraq War'.

6 The figures for 2005 were: strongly approve, six percent; approve, 40 per cent; disapprove, 32 per cent; strongly disapprove, 22 per cent.

7 In 2004 the figures were: increased, 68 per cent; the same, 31 per cent; decreased, 1 per cent.

8 This conclusion is based on a series of ordinary least squares regression analyses using age, gender, income, population density, birthplace, education, and religion to predict attitudes towards the United States, Asia, Iraq and globalisation.

9 The scales were created by first coding missing values to the mean of each item, dividing each by its standard deviation, and then combining them. The scales were then rescored onto a scale of zero to 10. The mean for the US alliance scale was 6.9; for Asian co-operation 5.1; and for defence self-reliance 5.0.

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