At the fringes
Reappraising Australia’s foreign policy towards the Asia-Pacific region, 2000-2006
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<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<td>ACCI</td>
<td>Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry</td>
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<td>ALP</td>
<td>Australian Labor Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANZUS</td>
<td>Australia, New Zealand, United States</td>
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<td>APEC</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARF</td>
<td>ASEAN Regional Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN + 3</td>
<td>As above + China, Japan and South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASPI</td>
<td>Australian Strategic Policy Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AusAID</td>
<td>Australian Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFAT</td>
<td>Department of foreign affairs and trade</td>
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<tr>
<td>DoD</td>
<td>Department of defense</td>
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<tr>
<td>ET</td>
<td>East Timor</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAM</td>
<td>Foreign affairs minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fretilin</td>
<td>Frente Revolucionária do Timor Leste Independente</td>
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<tr>
<td>FTA</td>
<td>Foreign trade agreement</td>
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<td>GNR</td>
<td>Guarda Nacional Republicana</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFM</td>
<td>Isatabu Freedom Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICG</td>
<td>International Crisis Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>InterFET</td>
<td>International Force for East Timor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISF</td>
<td>International Stabilization Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>LPA</td>
<td>Liberal Party of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEF</td>
<td>Malaita Eagle Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<td>PIF</td>
<td>Pacific Islands Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Prime minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAMSI</td>
<td>Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSIP</td>
<td>Royal Solomon Islands Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPA</td>
<td>Townsville Peace Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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Introduction

The geography vs. history dilemma has been a stable element in the Australian mindset since the beginning of the federation (1900). It refers to Australia’s origins as a British dominion in an Asian-dominated region of the globe or, as P. Kelly put it, “a museum to a bizarre incident – European shipwrecked on the wrong side of the earth” (2002: 2). Historically, Australia has been both in and out of Asia. On the one hand it is a continent per se, the only continental mass occupied by a single country; yet territory does not necessarily correlate with population and compared with its ‘crowded’ Asian neighbors Australia remains somewhat insignificant. On the other hand its security, indeed its very existence, has always been perceived as contingent on what goes on in ‘the region to the north’ (Gary and Lowe, 2005). Distance, wrote Blainey (1968 apud Parent, 2005: 2) “is as characterisitc of Australia as mountains are of Switzerland”.

For the most part, this has been perceived as a problem for which there is no definitive solution. More recently, however, Australian governments have tried to move beyond this seemingly inescapable binary opposition. Prime minister Paul Keating1, along with foreign affairs minister Gareth Evans, had made engagement with Asia one of the main banners of their terms in office.

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1 For a quick guide into contemporary Australian politics (including names and dates) see attachment 1.
Under Keating-Evans there was an explicit attempt to join the heretofore all-Asian club. Howard himself also tried to move away from what he saw as a simplistic formulation of Australian history or, as he would put it, the ‘black armband’ view of Australia’s history. However, he did not endorse the previous Labor administration strategy: according to Howard, the Labor government may have scored some points in its policy of engaging Asia, but any progress on this front was achieved at the expense of Australia’s own identity and downplaying Australia’s long-standing alliance with the US.

Despite Howard’s explicit attempt to overcome this constraining logic, it has consistently shaped Australia’s defense policy and external relations. Accordingly, it has also informed another dualism which emerged on Howard’s watch – that which crystallized around the establishment of the regional assistance mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Although through the years Australian foreign policy has remained remarkably consistent and bipartisan, the decision to lead and take responsibility for RAMSI represents a revision of the traditional hands off approach towards the Pacific island nations.

To the prime minister, the challenge for Australia was “to ensure that our history as a nation is not written definitively by those who take the view that Australians should apologize for most of it. This ‘black armband’ view of our past reflects a belief that most Australian history since 1788 has been little more than a disgraceful story of imperialism, exploitation, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination” (Howard apud Bonnell and Crotty, 2008: 152). Here Howard presumably refers to Australia’s colonial past (at once colony and colonizer), the practice of blackbirding, past and current treatment of indigenous Australians (aborigines), the white Australia immigration policy, all of which are widely seen as stains in Australia’s record. For more on the government’s revisionist impulses see “Australia’s History under Howard, 1996-2007” by Bonnell and Crotty (2008).
Like in the Pacific, Howard also gradually introduced some changes in Australia’s foreign policy towards Asia, mainly by reprioritizing the U.S. alliance and rethinking Australia’s relations with her Asian counterparts. As a result, two opposing trends emerged on Howard’s watch: first, a clear attempt at integrating with its nearest region, the Pacific, by actively trying to shape these countries’ political and economic systems. Second, relations with its north and East Asian counterparts suggest a pattern of selective cooperation along traditional realist lines.

This dissertation asks how was this dualism worked on the ground and how can it be understood theoretically. It posits that the new approach resulted from a different perception of threat and of the risks associated with it. Canberra’s new interventionism in the South Pacific reflected changes in the regional security environment first and foremost: it followed the emergence of new intra- and non-state threats. But it was also influenced by changes in the global security discourse. Two case studies – East Timor and Solomon Islands – illustrate these trends. Changes in Canberra’s relations with its neighbors are best understood in the framework of the security-development nexus. No such change occurred in Australia’s relations with its Northeast Asian neighbors because the nature of the threat remained the same – conventional and inter-state. Accordingly, Canberra’s approach towards this region was consistent with a hard line view of international politics,
suggesting that Australian foreign policy under Howard-Downer was by and large informed by realist beliefs. To establish this, I review Australia’s relationships with a number of key countries - US, China, and Japan.

What changes then, and what elicits a different policy reaction, is the perceived nature of the threat to Australia’s security. The independent variables are the two kinds of threats abovementioned, while Australia’s policy responses differ according to each of them.

The text proceeds as follows: Part 1 lays down the theoretical framework which informs the subsequent sections. Part 2 provides an overview of Australia’s relations with the Pacific, focusing on two particular countries – Solomon Islands and East Timor. For each of the case studies it asks why and how: on what grounds did Australia develop a new approach towards its neighboring states (justification) and which shape did it take (implementation). To set up the case studies, Part 2 first considers commonalities: which common themes run through the discourse of the relevant Australian authorities? Why did direct foreign intervention become acceptable when previously it was not? Part 3 zooms in on North Asia, exploring Australia’s relations with the US, China, and to a lesser extent Japan. Finally, Part 4 ties everything together.
Part 1: Looking for theory in Australian foreign policy

This chapter lays down the theoretical basis for the ensuing sections. It starts by reviewing the two contemporary mainstream approaches in international relations theory – neorealism and neoliberalism. Next, particular emphasis is accorded to how current statebuilding efforts link with the latter. Finally, it considers an alternative, critical view by referring to Mark Duffield’s ideas on the merging of development and security.

Neorealism differs from its predecessor – realism – in that it places anarchy, as opposed to human nature, at the centre of the international system. For classical realists, human nature is inexorably flawed and it cannot change or be changed. Defined as such, human nature is what determines state behavior in the international realm and so internationally states behave as individuals would. For neorealists, however, it is anarchy that determines state behavior. Domestically, individuals may choose to give up on some freedoms in exchange for protection and order – the essence of the social contract. Internationally, though, there is no higher authority to regulate state behavior and no state is able to control the international monopoly over the use of force - the very essence of anarchy. As a result, states are left with no other choice than to try to survive and prosper in a competitive, self-
help system which inescapably places them against each other. Thus, the international anarchic system is independent from the units which it is composed of – states. State behavior is determined by the system’s anarchic condition (not by some innate human penchant for evil) while the opposite does not hold true (Cravinho, 2002: 199-206).

But neorealism differs from realism in three other ways, all of which follow from the overarching concept of anarchy. First, it changes causal relations. For realists, international outcomes can be explained with reference to unit-level attributes, i.e. qualities or characteristics ascribed to states. For neorealists, states’ attributes are relatively unimportant against the comprehensive effects of anarchy on relations among states. Whereas realism is largely inductive (unit-level causation), neorealism is primarily deductive (structure-level causation) (Waltz, 1990: 32-34). Second, for realists power is both a means and an end. But neorealists argue that states strive for security more than power. (This introduces an element of ‘defensiveness’ which would be absent otherwise). More importantly, for neorealists power is the defining characteristic of structure: “rather than viewing power as an end in itself, [neorealists] see power as a possibly useful means, with states running risks if they have either too little or too much of it” (ibid.: 36). Thus, the “distribution [of power] across states, and changes in that distribution, help[s] to define structures and changes in them” (ibid.: 36). Lastly, neorealists do not deny that states with different
internal organizations also behave differently in their relations with other states, but in an anarchic system states are made functionally similar, that is, they are expected to react similarly to the constraints of structure regardless of domestic attributes. As Waltz puts it, “[t]he logic of anarchy obtains whether the system is composed of tribes, nations, oligopolistic firms, or street gangs” (ibid.: 37).

After establishing the major differences between realism and neorealism, I take a closer look at the core of Waltz’s theory. *Theory of International Politics* (1979) has become the central reference for neorealism and indeed for contemporary IR theory, so much so that “[a]lmost everyone in [the IR] world has been responding to Waltz in one way or another” (Mearsheimer, 2006: 109). Waltz’s starting assumptions are twofold: (1) the basic ‘ordering’ principle of the international system is anarchy and (2) survival is states’ ultimate national interest. These two conditions will by themselves produce a particular kind of behavior - security competition (ibid.: 240). But this competition does not have to wind up in war because states are able, in fact they are often compelled, to engage in reciprocal power balancing. For structural realists the system is naturally able to balance itself out, since revisionist states will be kept in check by *status quo* powers. According to Waltz, states will try to achieve an *appropriate* amount of power. For this reason it is agreed that structural realism is inherently biased towards the *status quo* and is therefore essentially defensive (ibid.: 110-111). This places
a caveat on the theory’s breadth since it cannot account for expansionist or hegemonic courses of action. Waltz’s theory cannot explain the pursuit of imperialist or expansionist ambitions by great powers because it assumes that states will only seek a reasonable amount of power (‘more is not better if less is enough’). This entails holding back from excessive or extreme foreign policy goals. Cases which are not consistent with Waltz’s predictions – for example, imperial Germany, imperial Japan, nazi Germany - tend to be seen as anomalies (ibid.).

Furthermore, Waltz argues that structural theory does not claim or aim to explain individual state behavior; instead it looks at the recurrent patterns of international outcomes (ibid: 112). It is one thing to explain foreign policy and another to develop a theory of international politics (Waltz, 1990: 26). To account for the exceptions another theory - a theory of foreign policy – is needed.

This is where offensive realism comes in. Unlike structural realism, offensive realism does not assume that expansionist or imperialist approaches are necessarily unreasonable or folly. This is not to suggest that offensive realism promotes aggressive behaviour or that it legitimizes all sorts of militaristic incursions. But by extending the starting assumptions – particularly by assuming that states are rational actors - offensive realism is
actually able to account for them without turning to any other theory, foreign policy or otherwise.

While this particular point of contention is certainly important as it sets the two theories apart, the overall discussion clearly makes more sense in the context of great power politics. As mentioned, Waltz perspective does not “account for major variations at state level interactions (...) caused by local or specific factors” because these are “irreducible to the systems level” (Chatterjee, 2003: 129). Still, it is important to understand how, despite its limitations, neorealism can still shed some light on a country’s foreign policy actions or more generally interactions in a given region. Indeed, these theories, and the assumptions that go with them, have long shaped policymakers’ views of the world and how it works. This much is clear, for example, in Alexander Downer’s belief that

Australian foreign policy must be based not on dreamy idealism, but on a clear-headed understanding of the power structures of the Asia-Pacific region. It is insufficient for Australian foreign policy makers simply to assert our priority lies in our own region. We need to understand the weight of various regional powers and how the interrelationships between those powers affect the underlying security of the region. (Downer, 2000a; emphasis added)

For this and other reasons it is questionable whether Waltz’s theory can indeed remain absolutely detached from the system’s units, as it is meant to

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4 This is clear in the selection of case studies: Japan (1868-defeat in world war II), Germany (1862-Hitler’s defeat in 1945), Soviet Union (1917-1991), United Kingdom (1792-1945) and the US (1800-1990).
be. Moreover, it is now common to find scholarship providing neorealist readings of particular events or particular foreign policy conducts (for example, Rice, 2008; Smith and Lowe, 2005; Karle, 2003; Dalrymple, 2003). What this paper does, then, is to use unit-level foreign policy behavior in association with structural factors, much like others have done (Chatterjee, 2003: 142), for better results. Closeness of fit will not be perfect at all times, but then as Waltz would argue no theory can explain everything.

While structural realism is useful in explaining some of the regional dynamics of which Australia is part, particularly in ‘the region to the north’, this view should be supplemented with some unit-level elements, which can be found in neorealism’s companion - neoliberalism. But before exploring this any further, it is important to sum up neorealism’s basic tenets. These are the elements from which it is possible to extract some cues on expected state behavior.

First, it follows from the discussion above that states are the referent of any realist analysis. Despite the myriad of non-state actors working at the international level, it is ultimately the state that ‘calls the shots’. Second, anarchy as the basis of the international system is a given. In the absence of any vertical structure of order, no power mechanism or instance stands
above states and so rules, including international law, cannot be imposed. Third, the idea and ideals of community are relatively unimportant, if not outright dispensable. This is not to say that cooperation does not happen under anarchy, but for realists it is generally weak, irregular and unstable. Ultimately it depends on how much sovereignty a state is willing to relinquish and so it always goes back to the state. A state will engage in cooperative behavior so long as it benefits from it and others do not benefit significantly more (emphasis on relative vs. absolute gains). Similarly, moral standards may be useful and occasionally invoked if they are in line with states’ interests and if they help further its agenda; otherwise, there is no absolute morality in international politics. Fourth, competition in the international realm is further compounded by the security dilemma, itself a direct result of the anarchic condition. If state A chooses to protect itself by accumulating power (defined as capabilities, especially military-wise), state B will react accordingly by trying to keep up with state A. One state’s quest for security renders all others unsafe, thereby putting the entire system at risk. Fifth, despite these potentially dangerous triggers, states tend to achieve a balance of power which can be relatively stable. Changing the distribution of power usually entails periods of distress, possibly war. Finally, states are naturally rational. This assumption was (is) not shared by Waltz, but it is central for offensive realism (Cravinho, 2002: 199-230).
Though neoliberalism/institutionalism is considered neorealism’s opposite, the differences should not be overstated. Indeed, they share a similar set of assumptions: statism, rationality, anarchy. It follows that their security agenda is also roughly the same: security is primarily political and military with both dimensions reinforcing each other. Still, some caveats should be placed on this picture. First, the international state of nature can be mitigated through networks of cooperation at state level. These usually take the form of institutions, regimes and other multilateral arrangements. States may voluntarily forgo some of their inherent sovereign prerogatives in order to maximize relative gains; and they are not necessarily intent on preventing other states from benefiting more than they do. Multilateral fora constrain state behavior, though they cannot by themselves determine it. The result is a softer version of anarchy, where non-state actors may have a say and where the absence of order/an orderer does not have to translate into a permanent state of imminent conflict. Second, while retaining the centrality of security concerns, neoliberalism adds other layers, in particular the economic dimension. This links up with the previous point, in that a lot of the international integration that has taken place in the last decades has been economically motivated. Third, for institutionalists states are not unitary actors; their international conduct is at least partly shaped by domestic factors, such as elites, leaders, parties, lobbies, governmental agencies, and so forth. To some extent, state behavior will also reflect the ideas and preferences of these domestic groupings.
The following table sums up differences and similarities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of the international system</th>
<th>Neorealism</th>
<th>Neoliberalism</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anarchic</td>
<td>Anarchic</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International cooperation</th>
<th>Entirely dependent on states; it will not happen unless states make it happen. It is hard to achieve and difficult to maintain.</th>
<th>It is easy to achieve in areas where states have mutual interests.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of gains (absolute vs. relative)</td>
<td>The fundamental goal of states in cooperative relations is to prevent others from gaining more - relative gains.</td>
<td>Actors with common interests try to maximize absolute gains, i.e. maximize the total amount of gains for all parties involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agenda priorities</td>
<td>Mainly security issues - relative power, security, survival.</td>
<td>Mainly economic issues – economic welfare, international political economy, other non-military issue areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of capabilities</td>
<td>States capabilities (power) are more important than their intentions and interests. That is what will determine their actions.</td>
<td>Intentions and preferences are more important than capabilities defined in term of accumulated power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions and regimes</td>
<td>Relatively unimportant; they do not mitigate the constraining effects of anarchy on cooperation.</td>
<td>Significant forces in international relations; facilitate cooperation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: An overview of neorealism and neoliberalism**

Adapted from Lamy (*apud* Baylis and Smith, 2001: 190)

This last element seems to be the foundation for contemporary statebuilding efforts. As the argument goes, a state’s internal organization (political, economic, social) affects its external performance, making it more or less prone to conflict or cooperation. Therefore, if a state (by itself or in association with other sorts of actors) can influence or even change the
internal dynamics of another state, that will eventually reflect on overall interstate dynamics. These assumptions underpin contemporary neoliberal policies and they are the basis for the current peacebuilding consensus. However, it should be noted that neoliberalism/institutionalism tends to be used differently in the scholarly and in the policy fields (Lamy, 2001: 183-184). Whereas in academia neoliberalism concerns the way in which institutions can mould state behavior, for practitioners neoliberalism is closer to an economic and political ideology.

Economically, as capitalism develops it needs to include more markets so as to reproduce and advance the supply and demand dynamics. It is easier for capitalism to expand to similar markets. The system itself encourages interdependence and discourages any obstacles to it, war being one of them. The promotion of economic interdependence will reverberate in the political arena: states will not usually allow economic flows to be disrupted by political differences amongst them because they realize how that would affect them in an age of interdependence. In other words, war is bad for business. The result, then, is that the more economically integrated states are, the more peaceful their relations will be.
Politically, while democracies can engage in conflictual behavior with authoritarian states, empirical evidence suggests that they tend not to fight other democracies. This is the essence of the democratic peace thesis (Dunne, 2001: 171). It follows that Western-style democracies will be safer if non-conforming states are also democracies. Together, the economic and the political arguments create powerful incentives for changing the status quo within states that fail or refuse to adjust.

This kind of reasoning underlies contemporary Western-led interventions in failed states – the belief that spreading democracy (and capitalism, since one goes with the other) is in the interests of both established democracies and the soon-to-be. This has served as the justification for increasingly intrusive and innovative forms of governing the underdeveloped world. Following the events of 9/11, the deleterious effects of interconnectedness became abundantly clear, which in turn reinforced the state/peacebuilding consensus.

But this consensus has not gone without its critics. In *Global Governance and the New Wars* Mark Duffield (2001) argues that the previously separate spheres of development and security have been merging. Underlying this argument is the assumption that the potential for expansion and inclusiveness of the current capitalist model is gone. The idea that the least
favored regions of the globe will eventually be co-opted into the developed world through the interplay of self-regulatory markets is no longer valid. What we have instead is a world where some regions (North America, Western Europe, and East Asia) prosper to the detriment of all others. This is not just a temporary imbalance, but rather the defining feature of modern-day capitalism.

Earlier, development aid/cooperation went hand in hand with the promotion of economic growth. Free markets, coupled with an ‘appropriate’ system of governance, would eventually do the trick. Thus, change – of the kind which would lift millions out of poverty – was to be effected indirectly, through neoliberal policies which could be traced back to the so-called Washington consensus. For many years this ideology would remain unchallenged. Following decolonization, several countries would opt for or be persuaded to comply with the neoliberal prescriptions of the structural adjustment programs led by the Bretton Woods international financial institutions. In the more technical explanation of former senior vice president and chief economist of the World Bank, Joseph Stiglitz (1998: 6)

For more than four decades, development was seen (at least by those in the "mainstream") as mainly a matter of economics - increasing the capital stock (either through transfers from abroad or through higher savings rates at home) and improving the allocation of resources. These changes would lead to higher incomes and hopefully higher sustained growth rates. Less developed countries were portrayed as identical to more developed countries - except perhaps in the extent of the
inefficiencies in resource allocations (which, in turn, were related to the greater incidence of missing or malfunctioning markets).

The results were disappointing at best, disastrous at worst. While some (few) countries were able to adapt (economically, politically, socially and even culturally) to the neoliberal straitjacket, others (a few) remain trapped in the disruptive effects of the more-market-less-state combination. Indeed, it is now generally agreed that strengthening the state should have been the priority at such an early stage of development. Instead, it was assumed that market liberalization and deregulation by themselves would bring about the desired result.

Development policies were aligned with this mantra. For years it was believed that through the promotion of economic growth societies would eventually come to terms with modernity. Thus, the kind of transformation envisaged in traditional development policies was an indirect one.

During the cold war, the bipolar order ensured a relatively stable system where countries were either pro-USA, pro-USSR or non-aligned. With the cold war cloak gone, a surge of internal conflicts surfaced in the peripheral areas of the globe, though some were already in the making. These wars seemed to have new motivations; although there was usually some
disagreement as to the relative weight of the different sources of conflict, factors such as ethnicity, religion and resources were often invoked. What these conflicts had in common was the widely-held view that the causes were primarily internal (Ayoob, 1996: 67). In the international relations literature, this trend was captured in the concept of new wars and the theory behind it (Kaldor, 1999).

The new wars discourse is not entirely consensual nor is it neutral. Duffield suggests that, although it may not have been intended that way, this concept and what it entails has actually contributed to the delegitimation of the post-nationalist state while also enabling increasingly radical governance experiments in the global borderlands. The new wars discourse has now become conventional wisdom, but its representation of violence in the borderlands has been criticized on the grounds of oversimplification and ahistoricism. New wars have often been portrayed as ethnically-rooted conflicts in which previously compatible ethnic groups now engage in low, occasionally high, level violence. Indeed, the analysis is often framed in extreme and not very useful terms, such as when some scholars questioned whether the South Pacific had gone from an ‘oasis of democracy’ to an ‘arc of instability’ (Reilly: 2000: 262). Needless to say, these labels have limited analytical value; while they may provide graspable simplifications of complex realities, they are also somewhat superficial. Moreover, they add to the
image of irrationality, barbarism and anarchy already associated with conflict-ridden areas. According to Duffield, representing the outlying areas in this way delegitimizes local populations and empowers external actors to intervene. It follows then that these concepts actually make external intervention easier insofar as they make it seem legitimate both at the international level and for the domestic audience; they work in favor of the external actors to the detriment of the populations.

What this mainstream view often fails to acknowledge is that, in many cases, these wars are not just temporary altercations; instead they have evolved into alternative forms of political, economic and social organization. Specifically, in many parts of the world, violence, conflict and war are not the end itself but rather a means to an end. Often the motivation is economic: they provide livelihood opportunities which would be unavailable otherwise. In order to fend for itself, the majority of the population learns to work around the official economy, while other groups learn to turn a profit from the new business opportunities which arise from war (Collier, 2000). Eventually a parallel economy, with its own rules and regulations, is formed.

These ‘zones of alternative regulation’ are often at odds with the prevailing model in the north. Despite attempts to contain their most violent
expressions, the negative effects of that alternative model have become increasingly felt in the north. Security, as a result, has had to broaden its scope to include a whole range of concerns which were not part of the agenda during the cold war. As Duffield (2002: 2) points out:

[t]oday, security concerns are no longer encompassed solely by the danger of conventional interstate war. The threat of an excluded South fomenting international instability through conflict, criminal activity and terrorism is now part of a new security framework.

And he goes on to argue that within this new framework underdevelopment has become dangerous: underdevelopment in the south renders the north unsafe. This may take the shape of concerted attacks on particular symbols, unexpected and uncontrollable migration flows, disruption of vital trade flows/routes, etc. How then has the North responded to the new challenges posed by underdevelopment? According to Duffield, the North responded by radicalizing development. Development leads to security and conversely security fosters development. At government level, development has been increasingly securitized; one of the consequences at the operational level is that whereas previously the aid department was independent from the foreign policy and defense departments, there is now a large overlapping area. Both in principle and in the field, their actions have become aligned in the pursuit of a common goal. But what exactly is that goal?
While paying lip service to the old principles of sovereignty and non-interference, development policies now aim to transform entire societies based on a logic of sameness: the idea that the more they think and behave like us, the safer we will be. In the process, various state and non-state actors converge in the implementation of radical development experiments in the so-called turbulent peripheries. Duffield points out that this is not a task for a single government or a single country. Rather, it results from the interactions of a variety of actors such as “governments, NGOs, military establishments and private companies” (2002: 2) which he calls ‘strategic complexes’.

Although the new development enterprise bears some resemblance to earlier forms of colonialism and imperialism, its aims are different. The point is not so much territorial expansion, resource control, religious conversion, etc. Though it is not always easy to clearly isolate the causes for intervention in its various cases, by and large the new interventionism aims at exporting liberal peace to the so-called borderlands. In this framework, the transformation of societies is made easier by the techniques associated with conflict prevention and conflict resolution. According to this view, contemporary peacebuilding practices assist the ultimate goal of transforming mentalities, thereby contributing to the overall effort of ‘making them more like us’. But it should also be noted that the official rhetoric,
throughout, is to empower these populations for self-reliance, which may comes across as paradoxical. On the one hand, it is important to do a kind of intense coaching, for lack of a better expression, amongst the natives; on the other, the intervention should not be so intense as to compromise the populations’ capacity for autonomous self-reproduction which is assumed to be an intrinsic feature of the third world (what Duffield also calls the uninsured peoples of the world or bare life).

All in all, these actors and their modus operandi constitute a new system of global liberal governance that aims to secure the north by containing the south, so that the consequences of persistent instability in the periphery do not migrate to the developed north. Thus, in this context biopolitics (control over populations) is now as important as geopolitics (control over territory), if not more.

This chapter reviewed the main theories which help explain Australia’s foreign policy during the Howard years. The following chapter looks closer into Australia’s relations with its neighborhood, particularly with East Timor and the Solomon Islands.
Part 2: Australia’s new interventionism in the Pacific

This chapter looks in some detail into Australia’s foreign policy towards the South Pacific during the Howard years. Two particular countries have been chosen to illustrate policy differences and continuities: East Timor and the Solomon Islands. In both cases there was an unequivocal revision of the traditional, bipartisan approach. However, while in East Timor this revision was originally *ad hoc* in nature, in Solomons it was fully intentional. Some see Australia’s leadership of the multinational peacekeeping force InterFET (International Force for East Timor) in 1999 as the turning point in Australian foreign policy towards its neighbors. This may be true to some extent, but because it was essentially a reactive process – despite official claims to the contrary – this argument loses strength against the process that leading up to RAMSI’s deployment. It is RAMSI that represents Australia’s sea change towards the South Pacific because of the grounds on which the mission was justified. Furthermore, RAMSI set the tone for Australia’s approach to the entire region, not just to that particular country (Wainwright, 2003: 7).

What I set out to do in this chapter is to try to understand what changed: why did Australia abandon its traditional hands-off approach in favor of an interventionist stance? What does that tell us about the regional dynamics?
And how does it relate to the wider global dynamics? Naturally all of these questions have a lot to do with timing.

In view of that distinction (the pre- and post-RAMSI phases), it could be argued that even though Australia first got engaged in East Timor in 1999, its policy towards the new nation also proceeded somewhat differently after the country’s independence in 2002 (RAMSI was deployed in July 2003). In other words, the ‘RAMSI effect’ can be seen in East Timor too. This is perhaps unsurprising since after May 2002 the UN no longer ruled over the country and East Timor was now supposed to develop regular bilateral relations with other nations. The fact that geographically it is not a South Pacific but Southeast Asian country is also not an obstacle, since in some respects it bears more resemblance with the Pacific than with other Southeast Asian nations, particularly in terms of the problems it had to face since independence. Furthermore, Australia seems to have a common approach to both East Timor and its Pacific counterparts, suggesting a policy of similar answers to similar problems regardless of geographical categories.

The chapter starts with some background information on Australia’s relations with the Pacific. It then reviews the main case studies stressing the reasons for intervention (justification) and the shape it took (implementation).
2.1. Defining the Pacific

What is meant by Pacific or South Pacific? The Pacific is divided into three ethnic subregions: Micronesia, Polynesia, and Melanesia. This relatively marginal region represents ¼ of the globe. It is largely made up of insular micro-states, most of which achieved independence during the cold war following the UN’s push for self-determination. Map no. 1 presents a detailed view of these regional groupings (see attachment 2) while map no. 2 shows a view of the globe from the Australian perspective (see attachment 3). The following table provides a quick guide to the region.

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<tr>
<th>Region</th>
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<th>Strongest influence</th>
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<td>Wallis and Futuna (France)</td>
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<td>Melanesia</td>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
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<tr>
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<td>New Caledonia (France)</td>
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<td>equator</td>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
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<td>Fiji</td>
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Table 2: The Pacific island region

Adapted from Hoadley, 2005: 3-4
Australia is the most important foreign power in Melanesia, nearest to Australian shores. In this paper Pacific/South Pacific/Southwest Pacific are used loosely to refer to the Melanesian subregion. In the last years/decades this region has been afflicted by a variety of internal conflicts. Map no. 3 is an extreme and not very accurate illustration of this trend, yet it represents what the region has come to mean for many Australians (see attachment 4). Although on a closer look these countries face different challenges, they are often lumped together in public discourse, including occasionally in governmental and academic circles. In the last years Australia has intervened in various ways in five of these countries: Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Vanuatu, and Tonga as well as in East Timor.
2.2. Background to Australia’s relations with the Pacific

Australia’s involvement with the Pacific is often described in terms of phases, although timelines and contents do not always match. Below is how Alexander Downer summarized Australia’s relations with the Pacific in 2007:

Our approach to meeting the challenges of the Pacific has evolved over time. Most Pacific countries gained their independence in the 1970s. At that time, Australia saw its role as helping to establish the foundations of independent government and providing development assistance but otherwise leaving these newly independent countries to find their own way. By the 1990s it was becoming clear that this was not working effectively. Economies were stagnating. Living standards were levelling off. Civil tensions were rising in the face of ineffective governments. In 1997 we recognized the need to step up our engagement. We, with New Zealand, took a leading role in settling the Bougainville conflict. We worked hard to encourage a return to democracy after the coup in Fiji in 2000. We took the lead in establishing the Townsville process to end the conflict in the Solomon Islands. From 2003, we took decisive steps to confront the Pacific’s challenges more directly. We established, along with other Pacific Island forum countries, the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and led the mission, which we still do. We began our Enhanced Cooperation Program with Papua New Guinea in 2004. In both cases we committed to long-term engagement to get to the roots of the problems of governance and economic development. (Downer, 2007)

The first phase (absent in Downer’s review) broadly coincides with the first half of the 20th century. As a young nation, geographically isolated from the main power centers of the time and born in a region with which it shared few cultural traits, Australian leaders felt that its security was directly dependent on maintaining good relations with its former colonizer (UK) and with the emerging hegemon (US). This was the beginning of a tradition of maintaining special relationships with 'great and powerful friends' as a guarantee against external threat.
The colonial period

It was against this background that relations with the Pacific were first conceived. Back then the Pacific was seen as a platform from which attacks on the Australian mainland could be carried out. It was relevant for Australia mainly in security terms. As early as 1918, then prime minister William Morris Hughes (1915-1923) called for a Monroe doctrine for Australia:

This brings me to a matter of life and death importance to Australia. America, Australia, and New Zealand have common interests in the Pacific. And Australia looks to you [the US], her elder brother, to stand by her around the peace table as well as on the field of battle. For if we are to continue to be a Commonwealth of free people, we must have guarantees against enemy aggression in the future. And this involves an Australasian Monroe Doctrine in the Southern Pacific.

And he would go on to say:

(...) Australia is a great island. Along its northern and eastern shores, guarding or menacing its coasts, according as they are held by friend or foe, are three belts of islands. (...) [D]ozens of [s]mall islands stretch out [from Papua New Guinea] forming a part of one of these belts which run parallel with the coast of Australia. (...) What would your attitude be toward any predatory power that claimed territory so near to your own shores? (...) [T]he position of Australia is such that it is essential to its territorial integrity that it should either control these islands itself or that they should be in the hands of friendly and civilized nations. (...) To allow another nation to control them would be to allow it to control Australia.

So we come to you, our great ally, seeking your steadfast and whole-hearted cooperation and aid. Hands off the Australian Pacific is the doctrine to which by inexorable circumstances we are committed. (...) And in this we do not desire empire, but only security. (The New York Times, 1918)

Australia was both a colony and a colonizer at the same time. It colonized Papua New Guinea from 1883 to 1975 and shared responsibility for Nauru with New Zealand and the UK until 1968 (Peebles, 2005: 47).
These comments sound all too similar to contemporary views on the region, which suggests a basic continuity in Australian foreign policy with regard to its Pacific neighboring states. This view would be validated during world war II when Japan attacked Australia through the northern city of Darwin and established *points d'appui* in nearby islands (Peebles, 2005: 46), including East Timor.

**Strategic denial**

The second phase begins with Pacific island states independence, when bilateral relations were no longer conducted with the metropole but with the new nations themselves. The policy of strategic denial aimed at *denying* any kind of communist presence in the region. Such a presence would disturb the balance of power in the region and would again represent a threat for Australia. During this time the USSR made its way into the Pacific through fishing arrangements with Kiribati and Vanuatu and the establishment of diplomatic ties with Papua New Guinea. To ensure that the region remained communist-free, more aid was disbursed and economic cooperation attempted (in the form of the South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement) (Schultz, 2007: 2).

**Constructive commitment**
The third phase was initiated by Gareth Evans, foreign minister (1988-1996) during the Keating administrations (1991-1996). During this time economic issues became as important as security concerns. Evans notably said that Australia would now “approach the region within a framework of regional partnership, not dominance” (Evans and Grant 1995 *apud* Peebles, 2005: 48). The Labor government appointed a minister for Pacific Island affairs for the first time, but this post would be discontinued under John Howard. However, the policy of constructive engagement would be followed by Alexander Downer until the current phase of cooperative intervention. But as Peebles points out (2005: 48) “[t]he policy of constructive commitment was sufficiently broad and flexible enough to be somewhat schizophrenic as well” due to the vast and different positions under that label. For example, during the first two Howard-Downer terms constructive engagement equated with a markedly hands off approach, which would stand in contrast with the new interventionism that followed. As usual, it is not easy to draw the line between the official discourse of non-interference and respect for a country’s independence and a more indifferent kind of posture (ibid.: 49). This much is clear in the following statement by Downer (2000b):

Commonly over the years, we have heard, throughout the countries of the South Pacific, references to Australia as the “big brother”, throwing its weight around the region and dominating the affairs of its smaller neighbours. Imagine our confusion when, more recently, Australia has been criticized for not meddling in the affairs of its neighbours and not intervening militarily to address the security problems that have emerged in countries like Solomon Islands.
New interventionism

The current phase coincides with the initial deployment of RAMSI in July 2003. It is explored in detail in the subsequent sections.
2.3. What changed? Global and regional dynamics intersect

What was it specifically that set off the 2003 reexamination of Australia’s priorities? There is no single cause for this but there is some consensus among scholars as to the most likely explanations. This section undertakes a review of Howard and Downer’s pronouncements on this issue in order to understand the official motivations. Starting with the ‘pre-Solomon Islands’ period helps illustrate the extent of Australia’s foreign policy transformation.

Canberra’s initial position was one of detachment. While Australia had been involved in earlier efforts to bring an end to the conflict, it remained reluctant to take its engagement to the next level. The Australian government twice rejected direct assistance requests by prime minister Allan Kemakeza. The official policy was clearly laid out in the 2003 foreign and trade policy white paper *Advancing the National Interest*:

>Australia cannot presume to fix the problems of the South Pacific countries. Australia is not a neo-colonial power. The island countries are independent sovereign states. They want and need to tackle their problems in their own way, developing systems of government which the governed accept as fair, equitable, effective and true to themselves, and which deliver basic services. When problems are so tightly bound to complex cultural traditions and ethnic loyalties, only local communities can find workable solutions. (DFAT, 2003: 93)

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6 Australia had brokered the Townsville peace agreement in 15 October 2000 and subsequently helped form (along with New Zealand) a peacekeeping mission tasked with supervising disarmament efforts.
The same view was expressed in no uncertain terms by Downer himself on 8 January 2003 in an opinion piece entitled *Neighbors cannot be recolonized*:

> Australia is not about to recolonize the South Pacific, nor should it. (...) Sending in Australian troops to occupy the Solomon Islands would be folly in the extreme. It would be widely resented in the Pacific region. It would be very difficult to justify to Australian taxpayers. And for how many years would such an occupation have to continue? And what would be the exit strategy? The real show-stopper, however, is that it would not work – no matter how it was dressed up, whether as an Australian or a Commonwealth or a Pacific Island Forum initiative. The fundamental problem is that foreigners do not have answers for the deep-seated problems afflicting Solomon Islands. (Downer, 2003)

However, less than six months later Canberra would retract from this initial position. Following another request for intervention by Solomon’s prime minister, Australia decided to lead a regional mission of assistance. How did Howard-Downer account for this abrupt reversal? In June 2003 Downer explained:

> [W]e will not sit back and watch while a country slips inexorably into decay and disorder. I say this not just for altruistic reasons. Already the region is troubled by business scams, illegal exploitation of natural resources, crimes such as gun running, and the selling of passports and bank licenses to dubious foreign interests. (Downer, 2003 *apud* Wainwright, 2003)

At the same time a new framework for intervention was adopted: RAMSI would operate under the principle of cooperative intervention. Downer was joined by prime minister John Howard, who justified the intervention on these grounds:
The Solomons is our patch (...). If the Solomons becomes a failed state, it's a haven potentially for terrorists, drug runners and money launderers (...). We don't want that on our doorstep.

The terrorist attacks in the US and Bali, and the arrests in Singapore, Indonesia, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, demonstrate the reach of terrorism and show that our region is no longer immune. (Howard, 2003 apud Kabutaulaka, 2004)

And on another occasion he added that

If we do nothing now and the Solomons becomes a failed state (...) potential exploitation of that situation by international drug dealers, money launderers, international terrorism (...) will make the inevitable dealing with the problem in the future more costly, more difficult. (Howard, 2003 apud Kabutaulaka, 2004: 5)

Similarly, with a few months hindsight (December 2003 interview) Downer reviewed Australia’s position as follows:

If [Australia ends] up with failed states in [her] vicinity then those failed states can be exploited by any manner of people; by drug traffickers, money launderers, people smugglers, even, God forbid, terrorists. Nobody took any notice of Afghanistan as a failed state or quasi-failed state under the Taliban, yet hell was brewing there. We, the world, lost interest in Afghanistan and for that matter lost interest in Pakistan - the West particularly - and any manner of bad things were happening in those countries which led to 9/11... The unpredictability of allowing states just to fail and become completely lawless is something to worry about, quite apart from the humanity of it.

How would Australians feel if they just allowed neighboring countries, with really no other major source of support from other parts of the world to go to rack and ruin? You can't do that. There was far too little focus for a long time on the Pacific; after PNG's independence we gradually lost interest in it. You just can't turn your back on the South Pacific. It's a very important area and I think the world looks to Australia to take a lead. The intervention in the Solomon Islands is part of us having a more robust approach to the region; that's how we came to think about what more we
could do in PNG. I couldn't feel that continuing with the status quo was giving us good enough results.

So, instead of a lot of the traditional type of aid programs we have in the Pacific - what I sometimes call, metaphorically speaking, digging water wells... fine, humanitarian kind of work, providing stationery for primary schools or whatever - we have been much more proactive in trying to build better policing, better public administration. In the past we were very sensitive about being neo-colonialist, and we've decided that we weren't getting sufficiently good outcomes that way. If we don't achieve good outcomes in the Pacific, who else is going to? (The Age, 2003)

This is but a sample of the arguments put forth to justify the intervention. Yet a few common themes run through these official pronouncements. Following Kabutaulaka (2005), I isolate four major causes for the intervention, all of which are present to different degrees in the statements above:

- Australia’s role in the war on terror,
- The failing Solomon Islands state,
- Australia’s negative perception of island countries,
- Australia’s self-perception as leader and superior arbiter of regional affairs.

As we will see further on, Australia’s policy reversal reflects not only changes at the regional level but also changes in the global security discourse (ibid.: 302). The next sections deal with each of these causes separately.
2.3.1. Australia and the war on terror

Australia was involved in the so-called war on terror from the very start. John Howard happened to be visiting his American counterpart (on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the ANZUS alliance) at the exact moment the US was attacked. Reportedly that left an impression on him and soon after Howard would declare Australia’s full support for the American retaliation plans by invoking the ANZUS treaty for the first time, an important symbolic gesture (Dobell, 2009). As a result, Australia joined the ‘coalition of the willing’ and committed troops and other resources to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Australia’s drive to assist the US-led war on terror was later strengthened by the attacks on the Indonesian island of Bali, Southeast Asia’s tourist hub. These attacks further legitimized what critics could otherwise describe as just another instance of Australia fighting ‘other people’s wars’ (Koo, 2005). On 12 October 2002 bombs went off in two Balinese bars in one of the island’s most renowned and tourist-heavy area. 88 Australians died in the attacks (out of 202 victims) which were claimed by Jemaah Islamyah, a Southeast Asian-based terrorist organization with links to Al Qaida.
The fact that the target of the attacks was this particular Indonesian island carries a lot of symbolism. Indonesia is a predominantly Muslim country (around 90% of the population professes Islam), but for historical reasons most Balinese people adhere to Hinduism. For this and other reasons the island has evolved somewhat differently from the rest of the country. Through the years the large influx of tourists has westernized Balinese society while also defining its cultural idiosyncrasies. Therefore, the attacks on Bali – which incidentally would happen again in 2005 – were not just attacks on Bali and its effects were acutely felt in Australia.

Although it is obviously not a part of Australian territory, Bali is part of what Lewis (2006: 223) called “Australia’s cultural imagining”:

For Australians (...) Bali has come to represent a propinquity of ‘Oriental’ pleasure and self-reflection, a place in which the exotic ‘other’ can be experienced through various gradients of immersion. Clearly, Paddy’s Bar and the Sari Club were bombed not merely because they were ‘soft’ targets, but because they symbolized the globalizing effect of commodified imagining. The global capital and cosmopolitan lifestyle, which are symbolized in the twenty-two nationalities of the dead, have become the ensigns of moral and ideological decadence for the terrorist attackers. There is a dramatic dissonance between the imagining of the victims and that of the perpetrators. These mostly first world citizens, trapped in the throes of their pleasure, become ideal targets for organizations like Jamaah Islamiyah [sic] (...) because they are so entirely oblivious to the violence upon which their privilege is formed. (Lewis, 2006)

This is how the attacks were perceived in Australia: as an attack on Australia and her values. A renowned member of Howard’s government notably said in a December 2008 interview (ABC, 2008a) that “[the attacks on Bali] was
Australia as a terrorist target, unambiguously for the first time. (...)[U]p until the Bali [b]ombing people thought the Americans were the terrorist targets. After Bali they knew Australians were the targets of terrorists”. A similar view – that “terrorism threatens Australia at home and overseas” - was also expressed in the 2003 DFAT white paper (2003: 36). In short, if Australia was already a potential target due to its close association with the US, Bali in effect brought terrorism home to Australia.

At the same time, the terrorist threat in Southeast Asia was likened to the one in the Middle East: “The Bali bombings showed that Islamic extremists in South-East Asia are now prepared to take up the anti-Western campaign of Middle Eastern terrorists and to follow their example by inflicting mass casualties. The bombings highlighted the links that have developed between entrenched regional extremist groups and global Islamic terrorism” (ibid.: 17). In this respect Bali confirmed Southeast Asia’s rank as the second front of the war on terror.

Thus, an important side effect of the Bali bombings was the vindication of the government’s strategy of unconditional support for the US-led war on terror. This option would be further legitimized when in 9 September 2004 the Australian embassy in Jakarta was attacked also by Jemaah Islamiyah (Bordonaro, 2006: 2).
2.3.2. State failure in the Solomon Islands

Even though Canberra was quick to support the American cause, it did not embrace the failed state discourse so swiftly. Unlike 9/11 in the US, the turning point for Australia seemed to come with RAMSI. Prior to that, the link between terrorism and failed states was never clearly assumed (Lambach, 2004: 13). RAMSI, however, changed all that.

With RAMSI underway, the release of Our Failing Neighbour: Australia and the Future of Solomon Islands in June 2003 was a fortunate coincidence\(^7\). What is striking in retrospect is how much of what this policy report recommends actually translated into the mission. That and the fact that the report was produced by the government-funded conservative think-tank Australian Strategic Policy Institute suggests that the timing was not accidental (Wainwright, 2003). The report fulfilled two main functions: it built on a number of arguments to make the case for intervention and it went into detail about the practicalities associated with implementation. It met the needs of a specific audience – governmental decision-makers – and as such became the blueprint for intervention.

\(^7\) RAMSI was deployed on 24 July 2003.
The report describes Solomon Islands as a state heading towards collapse: a *failing* state whose inexorable descent into chaos could only be arrested through direct outside intervention, since traditional approaches (aid mostly) had proven ineffective (Wainwright, 2003: 7). It goes to great lengths to supply a comprehensive yet consensual policy option. It conceives of RAMSI as a “middle ground between [Australia’s] present detachment and an attempt to reassert colonial rule” (Wainwright, 2003: 9) because “statebuilding need not be neocolonialism” (ibid.: 30).

It traces the origins of the crisis to the colonial period and explicitly equates the current situation in Sub-Saharan Africa with that of the South Pacific in view of these states’ “extremely short history” (ibid.: 28): the Western legal-rational model of statehood has not held because the state was conceived but never born (ibid.: 20). The result is that the country is now caught in a “classic vicious circle”, a “trap from which there appears no escape” (ibid.: 27).

The report draws frequent, sometimes dubious, analogies with former and current cases of foreign intervention in failing or failed states within the doctrine of humanitarian intervention: “The challenge for Australia is to see whether there is a way of applying the state failure and statebuilding models developed elsewhere over the past decade to our problems in Solomon
Islands” (ibid.: 31). While these cases provide a useful starting point for the regional assistance mission, the report puts great emphasis on avoiding the pitfalls which were then associated with the UN-led missions in Bosnia and Kosovo, Somalia, Rwanda, East Timor and so on, and here lies its original contribution.

At the same time, the report complements and reinforces a trend already underway: the move to securitize failing and failed states in the Australian periphery. The link between security abroad and security at home is explicitly made: securing mainland Australia per se may not be enough, it is now also necessary to safeguard its northern and eastern approaches. And if these countries cannot by themselves ensure such protection, as is typically the case with failed states, then Canberra accords itself the right to step in and do that for them. Neighboring states are expected to step up to the new challenges and exert full control over their territory and population. Inability to do so may now entail foreign intervention (preferably) with or (ultimately) without consent. In this new security setting, security at home hinges on security abroad. This of course is not exactly a new theme in Australian foreign policy, as we have seen earlier, but it acquired different contours following 9/11 and in particular RAMSI.
How was this link established? The underlying assumption is that in the new security environment the failure of the Solomons state will not naturally entail a return to “the Pacific Island idyll of subsistence prosperity among the palm trees” (ibid.: 13). Instead, if left unchecked, state failure in the Solomons [will] likely lead to the country becoming “a Petri dish for transnational threats” (ibid.) or a “post-modern badlands, ruled by criminals and governed by violence” (ibid.). Clearly it was not in Australia’s interests to have such a state in its vicinity as that would increase Australia’s vulnerability to “transnational criminal operations based in or operating out of Solomon Islands – drug smuggling, gun-running, identity fraud and people smuggling (…) perhaps even terrorism” (ibid.: 14). Moreover, problems in SI could very well spread to neighbouring countries, exacerbating Australia’s plight: “Collapse in Solomon Islands would make it all the harder for other weak states to hold the line” (ibid., emphasis added).

And so the causal link between failed states and terrorism is made: because failed states cannot ensure control over their territory they become the ideal location for terrorists who may operate unconstrained from there. This line of reasoning is not new or specific to this particular region; in fact it bears striking resemblance to the Bush administration’s rhetoric in the run up to the war in Afghanistan and later Iraq. However, it was only around RAMSI that Australia definitely adopted the new security discourse and effectively securitized state failure. Whereas previously the problems afflicting these
states were dealt with as humanitarian issues, they were now considered matters of national security and therefore had to be tackled within a security framework (Kabutaulaka, 2005: 296).

As we have seen earlier, these views were not expressed only or primarily in this report. Before it was even published, Australian authorities had already taken on this discourse to account for the unexpected change of plans. After that they also stayed in message, as evidenced in Nick Warner's (RAMSI special coordinator) retrospective assessment of the need for intervention:

From Australia’s perspective, intervening to ensure Solomon Islands did not descend into chaos was (...) an imperative. Plainly, a dysfunctional Solomon Islands held long term dangers for Australia and the region. A country beholden to armed thugs is a recipe for chronic instability. Such instability is an invitation to transnational crime. Experience elsewhere shows that weak states are also attractive as havens for money laundering, people smuggling, drug smuggling and terrorism. And while there is no evidence that transnational criminals were targeting Solomon Islands, there was no point in waiting for this to happen. (Warner, 2004 apud Kabutaulaka, 2005: 295)

The concept of state failure, and the doomsday scenario that goes with it, emerges here not so much as an accurate and neutral description of the situation in the country, but rather as an ‘enhancement technique’ that overstates the threat in order to legitimize courses of action which would be unlikely under normal circumstances. As such, it can be thought of as a theoretical tool that bridges the gap between the desire to intervene (for
whatever reasons) and the long-established international constraints on infringements of sovereignty.
2.3.3. Australia’s negative perception of island countries

Along with the failed states discourse, the problems facing the region also inspired a new and timely stream of scholarship which was particularly well-received amongst policy circles. Two particular concepts or ideas emerged around this time. The first linked the troubles in the Pacific to the kind of protracted violence usually taken as endemic to the African continent. The Pacific had, in effect, become ‘Africanized’ in that its floundering economies, failing states, and ethnically polarized populations all converged to create a situation reminiscent of the ‘hopeless continent’. The argument was first exposed by Ben Reilly in the article *The Africanisation of the South Pacific*. Reilly (2000: 262-263) contends that the Africanization of the South Pacific can be ascertained from “four inter-related phenomena that have long been associated with violent conflict and the failure of democratic government in Africa:

- the growing tensions in the relationship between civil regimes and military forces;
- the intermixture between ethnic identity and the competition for control of natural resources as factors driving conflicts;

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8 The practice of drawing of analogies and homologies between different regions of the globe is not exactly new. Other examples include: Caribbeanization, Balkanization, Indigenization.
• the weakness of basic institutions of governance such as prime ministers, parliaments and, especially, political parties; and
• the increasing centrality of the state as a means of gaining wealth and of accessing and exploiting resources”.

Together these factors suggest “a growing weakness of democracy and an increasing likelihood of further troubles in the region in the future”. Specifically, “they indicate that some of the problems that have plagued states in Sub-Saharan Africa may well be emerging in the South Pacific” (ibid.: 263).

Of course the Africanization thesis did not go without its critics. Some authors lambasted Reilly’s argument as “analytically weak, internally inconsistent and empirically flawed” because while some of those countries do face serious problems “political crises tend to be localized, episodic and obedient to very specific historical causes which are not adequately explained by the loose and rather ill-informed analogy with Africa” (Fraenkel, 2004: 2; Chappell, 2005; Teaiwa, 2006). Nevertheless, given its parsimonious logic the Africanisation thesis caught on amongst academics, bureaucrats, the media, and even aid donors. A clear example of this is the likening of the South Pacific with Sub-Saharan Africa in the ASPI report (2003: 28) or how easily this line of thought both informed and emerged from the Australian media (Chappell, 2005: 297).
Fraenkel notes (2004: 1) that the Africanisation thesis resulted from and enabled a larger trend of explanation-by-analogy. Not only was instability in the Pacific similar to that in Africa but the timing of consecutive destabilizing events often resulted in ‘copy-cat’ interpretations of the patterns of violence. In other words, the idea that troubles in one island-country were spreading (by example) into others became conventional wisdom. For example, writing in 2000, the foreign editor of a leading Australian newspaper argued that the coup in the Solomons was a “direct progeny of the coup in Fiji” and that the South Pacific was “sliding towards ‘an abyss of African dimensions’” (Sheridan, 2000 *apud* Fraenkel, 2004: 1).

Another concept that also caught on around this time was the ‘arc of instability’. This time its scientific basis was perhaps a bit more solid (see for example Rumley, 2006), but it still advanced the idea that the region was plagued by numerous sources of (mostly non-state) threats which could spill over to Australia in multiple ways (e.g. refugees, terrorist attacks, disruption of critical trade routes, etc.). The concept originally applied to Australia’s immediate north but following Indonesia’s transition to democracy it was stretched to encompass the eastern front. Current prime minister Kevin Rudd (n/a) also endorsed this idea:

> Within our more immediate region, the Arc of Instability to our North and North-East has gone from being a strategic concept a decade ago to becoming an
unsettling strategic reality today – with Jema’ah Islamiyah’s continued operations in the Indonesian archipelago; police and military crises in East Timor; continuing challenges to political stability in Papua New Guinea; ethnic violence in Vanuatu; the implosion of law and order in the Solomon Islands; a series of unprecedented street violence in Tonga; and Nauru the region’s first properly defined failed state having also become a centre for international money laundering. In short, the report card across the Arc of Instability over the last decade is not a good one.

The concept of an arc of instability to Australia’s north is geographically grounded and thus perhaps less ideologically-charged than that of Africanisation. Still, it is hard to escape the conclusion that, together with the failed state discourse, the parallel emergence of these conceptual ‘innovations’ that cut across academic and practitioner fields do not merely describe but are actually constitutive of the reality they try to portray. Not only is it not clear what came first – did the concept originate in academic or governmental circles? who borrowed from whom? - but the ‘fuzzy sequence problem’ also raises questions about the side effects of such scholarship – could the end result be the creation of an environment conducive to ‘extraordinary’ measures? Indeed, many seem to arrive at this conclusion. According to Chappell (2005: 290) the Africanisation thesis is “ultimately an orientalist discourse, whose negative, timeless imaging of ‘others’ is still being used to justify metropolitan hegemonies”. As flawed as it may be, it illustrates that the way in which violence is coded, categorized and sometimes caricatured is an important political act in that “representations have political implications” (Demmers, 2006: 100).
2.3.4. Australia’s self-perception as leader and arbiter of regional affairs

A further theme that runs through the official discourse for intervention is the assumption that either Australia does it or no one else will. Australian authorities believe that Canberra has primary responsibility over the region. Alexander Downer said that “(...) the problem here is that for Australia we are (...) by far the richest country in the region and therefore there isn’t really any alternative but for Australia to take a leadership role” (Kabutaulaka, 2005: 297). The prime minister also echoed this view when he declared that “the Solomons is [Australia’s] patch” (Kabutaulaka, 2004). In a similar vein, the ASPI report (2003: 17) advances the idea of Australia’s unique stake: ‘[Australia has] security interests in many parts of the globe, but only in the Southwest Pacific are they our interests alone. Only in the Southwest Pacific [does Australia] have to take the lead (...). If we do not, others might move in to exploit the situation, to our detriment9’.

9 Obviously if others might move in then it is not only Australia that exerts influence in the region (although presumably this refers to both state and non-state actors). Clearly the image of the region as no more than a ‘hole in the Asia-Pacific doughnut’ (Chappell, 2005: 294) is undeniable. But as we have seen earlier other powers (USSR, China vs. Taiwan, France) also vied for influence in this part of the world during and after the cold war, thereby lifting its position in the global geopolitical ranking and in the global knowledge market.
What transpires from the official rhetoric is both a sense of enlightenment and the idea of a manifest destiny – not only is Australia the only country able to and interested in keeping its neighbors from failing but it is also the best country to do so. Downer himself said so: ‘if we don't achieve good outcomes in the Pacific, who else is going to?’ (The Age, 2003).

This sense of ‘responsibility’ may stem in part from the fact that to this day Australia’s constitution (1900) still includes a clause granting legislative powers to the parliament to regulate ‘the relations of the Commonwealth with the islands of the Pacific’ (Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, 1900: 22) as well as from the more prosaic acknowledgment that Australia is indeed the most powerful country in the region.

However, not only does this line of thinking reinforce and sustain pre-existing hierarchies amongst the countries in the region but it also implies both a sense of inevitability and an absence of alternatives. Indeed, for Kabutaulaka (2005: 297) Australia essentially maintains a “paternalistic and patronizing relationship with the Pacific Islands, reflected in often-unacknowledged thinking and practice that the region needs a stronger, wealthier, and democratically advanced country as its leader”. Thus, the idea that Australia must go it alone because no one else will effectively belittles the region and misrepresents its history.
2.4. Australia and the Solomon Islands

2.4.1. Violence in Solomon Islands – a background

The Solomon Islands comprise over 1000 islands and approximately 500,000 inhabitants unequally distributed through its territory: more than half live in the two main islands, Guadalcanal and Malaita (see attachment 5). From 1893 to 1978 the archipelago was a British protectorate and after independence in 1978 it became part of the British Commonwealth to which Australia also belongs.

Though the conflict opposing Guadalcanalese and Malaitans is usually characterized as ethnic, the case could be made that economic factors weighed heavier than ethnic tensions. Prior to 1998 Malaitans had been moving to Guadalcanal for better economic opportunities. This trend can be traced back to the end of world war II when the establishment of Honiara (in Guadalcanal island) as the national capital initiated internal migration flows from all the islands but particularly from Malaita (Fullilove, 2006: 5). As a result, “Malaitans came to dominate Honiara and its circles of political and economic influence” (ibid.). The violence of 1998 was triggered by disagreements over resource distribution, particularly land issues, hence the
view that economic grievances eventually erupted into ethnic conflict. Through the years land was increasingly owned by Malaitans through a process of interethnic marriages and inheritances which favoured Malaitans over Guadalcanalese (Magalhães, 2008: 689). From 1998 to 2002 growing resentment evolved into organized violence. Some Guadalcanalese formed the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) which claimed to represent the native people of Guadalcanal. The IFM then started evicting Malaitans from their lands while accusing them of taking their jobs and lands (BBC, 2009). Malaitans eventually (1999) created the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF), a militia group, as a response to IMF’s harassment (Fullilove, 2006: 5).

As violence intensified, the Royal Solomon Islands Police (RSIP, where Malaitans were the majority) became a third party to the fighting (2000). In April 2000, as violence peaked in Honiara, the government issued a “desperate plea for armed assistance from Australia and New Zealand” (Dinnen, 2002 apud Lambach, 2005: 13). Both countries declined the request and supported instead a Commonwealth monitoring and mediation effort (ibid.: 13). In June 2000 the MEF (with support from the RSIP) staged a coup and took the prime-minister, Bartholomew Ulufa’alu10, hostage (BBC, 2009) while demanding that he resigns. Following a few months of low-level violence, Australia and New Zealand brokered the Townsville Peace Agreement in October 2000 and in December 2000 Mannasseh Sogavare was

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10 Bartholomew Ulufa’alu, a Malaitan, had been elected for office in 1997.
voted as the new prime-minister. However, the peace agreement was short-lived (coming to an end in October 2002) and, despite some immediate impact, implementation lagged behind stated intentions. According to Fullilove (2006: 6), “[e]thnic violence soon mutated into criminality and thuggery, including arson, rape, kidnap, looting, assault, shootings, torture, rape and extrajudicial executions; 150 or 200 weapons-related deaths are thought to have occurred”.

Other attempts at ending the violence were made, but there was a growing sense of lawlessness while the economy also deteriorated significantly. In March 2002 prime-minister Allan Kemakeza (elected in December 2001) issued another request to Australia and New Zealand asking for “overseas police to work alongside Solomon Islands officers” (Dinnen, 2002 *apud* Lambach, 2005: 13), but the request was again turned down. In the face of increasing anarchy, prime-minister Allan Kemakeza again requested Australia’s assistance in April 200311 (Amnesty International, 2004 *apud* Lambach, 2005: 13). This time Australia was receptive to the Solomons request. After Kemakeza visited his counterpart in Canberra, on 5 June John Howard gave him the *Framework for Strengthened Assistance to Solomon Islands* which outlined an Australian-led mission (Fullilove, 2006: 7). A regional assistance mission was then created in the framework of Operation

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11 June 2003 according to BBC’s online timeline of events.
Helpem Fren\textsuperscript{12}: the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (ibid.: 7).

\textsuperscript{12} Helpem Fren is pidgin English for ‘helping friends’.
2.4.2. RAMSI – characteristics and performance

RAMSI was originally lauded as a success not only for its structure but also for its immediate achievements. In fact, RAMSI’s ‘model’ was chosen by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development as a case study for a “pilot study on principles for good international engagement in fragile states” (Powles, 2006: 9). Such was its original success that a renowned Australian minister argued that “a RAMSI-type intervention should form the template for a future United Nations intervention in East Timor” (ibid.).

A number of features make this mission unique. RAMSI was a preventive, rather than reactive, state-building mission. John Howard justified the intervention to the Australian parliament on these grounds: “If we do nothing and the Solomon Islands becomes a failed state (...) potential exploitation of that situation by drug dealers, money launderers, international terrorism (...) will make the inevitable dealing with the problem in the future more costly, more difficult” (Howard, 2003 apud Kabutaulaka, 2004: 5, emphasis added).

In mid-2003, though the Solomons government was weakened and low-level violence pervasive, it had not yet failed according to the Australian authorities.
The intervention was officially taken to avert an imminent state failure scenario. Indeed, according to R. Ponzio (2005 *apud* Fullilove, 2006: 11),

[The mission] arguably broke new ground in lowering the threshold for intervention in the indisputably internal affairs of a sovereign state (...). To a degree not witnessed in international peacekeeping, insidious levels of crime, corruption and poor governance had become a primary impetus for external intervention, rather than a large humanitarian crisis.

In just a few months, direct intervention in other countries became an acceptable and necessary foreign policy tool.

Ensuring the consent of both the government and the population was critical to cast the intervention as legitimate. To that end a number of steps were taken: (1) an endorsement by the Pacific Islands Forum foreign ministers meeting on 30 June; (2) a formal request/explicit invitation for a regional assistance package by Solomons’ governor-general; (3) approval by the Solomons parliament; and (4) a formal agreement between the participating

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13 Schoefield points out that RAMSI fits with the kind of political emergencies envisaged in the Pacific Island Forum’s Nasonini Declaration on Regional Security adopted in 2002 following strong pressure by Canberra. The declaration referred to the possibility of “immediate and sustained regional action in response to the current regional security environment”. Schoefield suggests that given the subsequent course of events the Nasonini declaration was unusually timely (Schoefield, 2005).
countries. The mission was also endorsed by the UN and consistent with chapter VIII of the charter\textsuperscript{14} (Fullilove, 2006: 14).

These steps were also meant to deflect potential accusations of neocolonialism, a charge to which the Australian government was particularly sensitive (Wainwright, 2003). Ensuring the host country’s consent would be one of the conditions attached to Australia’s regional engagement thereafter; in Downer’s own words (2007) “we work with the countries of the Pacific. We do not impose ourselves. We work with countries when they want to work with us”. At that point it was also critical to differentiate Operation Helpem Fren from Operation Iraqi Freedom and to ensure UN support by complying with the principle of non-intervention (article 2(7) of the UN charter) (Fullilove, 2006: 11).

It follows from the last point that this operation had the Pacific Islands Forum blessing. It was framed by the Biketawa Declaration of 2000 and by the Nasonini Declaration of 2002. Furthermore, eleven Pacific states contributed to the mission’s staff which not only ensured legitimacy but also had practical advantages as a result of cultural affinities. Thus, the mission was able to ‘draw on expertise from around the region and lessen concerns

\textsuperscript{14} No attempts were made to bring the issue to the Security Council’s agenda, which underscores the regional nature of the mission.
in the region and beyond about Australian heavy-handedness (Wainwright, 2003: 494). Support also came from Australia’s traditional allies, US and UK.

But some critics pointed out that the PIF was largely dominated by Australia and that of the 2225 workers involved 1745 were Australian (nearly 80 percent) (Kaiser, n/a: 11). Others saw the participation of other countries as no more than an attempt to “give a veneer of legitimacy to the Solomons exercise” (WSWS, 2003).

RAMSI also had a non-sovereign matrix; it was strictly established as an “assistance package” or a “framework for strengthened assistance” - not a transitional administration as in East Timor and Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the missions’ form of authority was direct governance. RAMSI’s publicity material stated that “RAMSI does not control the government or make national decisions on behalf of Solomon Islands. The [p]arliament, [g]overnment, constitutional office holders and the public service all remain responsible for exercising their respective functions, and they remain accountable to the people of the Solomon Islands” (apud Fullilove, 2006: 15). Therefore, because technically RAMSI does not have supervisory powers, it is “all about regime maintenance, not regime change” (ibid.).
However, RAMSI does have significant leverage in managing the country, mainly through the employment of police and officials in line (vs. staff) positions. These are Australian expatriates who hold high-level decision-making posts, such as accountant-general (ibid.). They are often at the top of the chain of command and have de facto responsibility for critical governing choices.

This particular feature also garnered a lot of criticism. There was nothing inevitable in choosing line positions; advisory posts could have been an alternative. Kaiser (n/a: 13) notes that Australia imported around 80 bureaucrats to the Solomons government, particularly to economic ministries. (At one point the minister of finance himself was an employee of the Australian government). An early 2006 article in The Economist concluded that “Australian officials do dominate the Solomons, in effect running the islands’ finance ministry, central bank and police force”. As a result, among Solomon Islanders, RAMSI was increasingly being seen as a shadow government (Powles, 2006: 13).

The intervention proceeded in two phases: the first, more immediate, aimed at restoring law and order and achieving stability in the territory while the second, long-term, was about statebuilding (Wainwright, 2003: 495). It was assumed that a police-led (rather than military-led) mission was more
suitable to address the nature of the violence in the Solomons. This was a reversal of the traditional sequence of interventions in that typically the military stabilize the territory first and once that is achieved police forces take over while the military step back. RAMSI did include a reasonable military force at the time of entry, but its focus was clearly civil which was in keeping with the perceived nature of the problem – an incipient civil war (Fullilove, 2006: 17).

The original idea was to create a regional but nationally-led mission. Still, despite all the formalities, RAMSI and Australia have become increasingly indistinguishable. From the beginning RAMSI was defined by Australia and implemented in its own terms. Australian money also kept the mission running. Supporters of this model have stressed the advantages of the one-country leadership (increased efficiency, simple mandate, quick deployment, shared work ethic, better coordination) as well as Australia’s comparative advantages (ibid.: 12-14). But it has also contributed to ongoing criticism and suspicion over Australia’s real interests in the Solomons and in the Pacific (see for example WSWS, 2003; Skeers, 2006; Kaiser, 2005). For example, Magalhães (2007: 692-693) contests the real motives behind Canberra’s assertiveness in the Solomons, suggesting that economic causes, specifically the search for additional resources, trumped security or even
altruistic ones\textsuperscript{15}. The same author further hints at the possibility that this kind of mission may actually encourage the kind of problems which it is supposed to fix, thereby generating a “vicious cycle of permanent insolvency and inescapable dependency” (ibid.).

The mission has also been criticized for taking too narrow a view of its own mandate. Indeed, critics say that restoring law and order has been accomplished at the expense of achieving peace and security. As a result of the emphasis on stopping violence and criminality – areas in which the mission was largely successful - the underlying causes of the conflict were neglected. The original view was that “[one of RAMSI’s role] is to help create a stable environment in which Solomon Islanders themselves can take forward the task of peace and reconciliation, at their own pace, on accordance with their own customs and traditions” (Batley, 2006 apud Powles, 2006: 10-11). But this approach failed to recognize that “‘order’ is not the same as ‘peace’ and that the absence of overt violence is not the same as the presence of active peace”\textsuperscript{16} (ibid.: 11). The prominence of what one Solomon Islander called “conflict-neutral statebuilding” (ibid.: 13) has led to what is perhaps the main criticism leveled against the mission: that it should have aimed to restore “not only a functional state, but also a

\textsuperscript{15} The Solomons are endowed with gold, timber and large fishing areas. Its gold mines have been operated by an Australian company whose royalties in 1998 were the same as after RAMSI was deployed when the mines reopened (in 2005 the figure was 3 percent).

\textsuperscript{16} Unlike many of its counterparts, RAMSI did not include a peacebuilding unit.
functional society” (Kabataulaka, 2004: 7). In other words, deep-seated issues related to resource and income inequalities have not been properly addressed because of the absolute priority accorded to the creation of a Western-style state. As a result RAMSI may be but an interregnum, albeit a really long one.
2.5. Australia and East Timor

2.5.1. First act: InterFET

With the fall of Indonesia’s New Order, Suharto’s demise opened a window of opportunity for East Timorese emancipation; his successor, B.J. Habibie, proved more receptive to reaching a settlement.

In what is perhaps an attempt to rewrite history, Australian politicians have taken credit for and promoted the idea that, despite its unswerving complicity with the Indonesian occupation, it was Australia that saved East Timor from Indonesia. A particular piece of evidence has been used to support this argument; in 1998 Howard sent a letter to his Indonesian counterpart suggesting a way out of Indonesia’s East Timorese conundrum. While Howard did recommend arranging a self-determination act through which the East Timorese could have a say either for or against integration, he argued that it should be several years before such an act could take place; the point was not to press for independence but rather to buy Indonesia more time (Fernandes, 2004: 38-39) on the assumption that the East Timorese would eventually give in. Howard’s letter backfired when Habibie unexpectedly decided to hold a popular consultation in 1999,
claiming that Australia’s move – which had been perceived by the Jakarta elite and its powerful military as Canberra’s meddling in Indonesia’s internal affairs - weighed heavily in his decision (ABC, 2008b). Australia then had to move into ‘improvisation mode’ as its original plan was now at odds with the events on the ground. Still, thereafter Australia would take credit for prompting the referendum.

When the East Timorese overwhelmingly voted against becoming Indonesia’s 27th province, Jakarta withdrew from the territory though not without warning its other insubordinate provinces about what to expect should they insist on breaking away from the central state. After the independence ballot, pro-integration militias went on a rampage with the tacit support of the Indonesian army, taking hundreds of lives in over a month. International pressure eventually persuaded Habibie to allow for an Australian-led multinational peacekeeping force in the framework of the UN. InterFET – Australia’s first intervention in East Timor - would be largely successful in neutralizing militia violence. It also added credibility to Australia’s claim of holding primary responsibility for liberating East Timor.
2.5.2. Post-independence tensions

Tensions between Canberra and Dili in the post-independence period can be grouped into three categories: resource distribution (oil and gas reserves in the Timor gap), economic priorities (disagreement over the benefits of the demo-liberal model), and foreign policy (diversification of foreign relationships).

After independence East Timorese leaders decided not to take on Indonesia’s obligations under the Timor gap treaty, choosing instead to negotiate a new treaty with Australia. This entailed agreeing on the maritime boundaries, which in turn would have important implications for revenue sharing. In March 2002 Australia formally rejected international arbitration over maritime boundaries by “[excluding them] from compulsory dispute settlements in the International Court of Justice and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea” (King, 2007: 46).

This decision cast a shadow on Australia’s intentions in the negotiations and it raised concerns about Australia’s good faith. Indeed, Canberra was well aware that if the issue was taken to international arbitration East Timor would be in advantage given current maritime law. Downer justified this
option by saying that “Australia’s strong view is that any maritime boundary dispute is best settled by negotiation rather than litigation” but Alkatiri described the act as “unfriendly” (ibid.). This early episode drove a wedge between both leaders and would partly set the tone for the relationship.

As negotiations dragged on (given Canberra’s refusal to meet more than twice a year for lack of funding) and got tougher (with harsh exchanges between Alkatiri and Downer), East Timor was able to turn the emerging failed states security discourse to its own benefit in anticipation of the alarm that this would raise in Canberra. The president was the first to put forward the possibility of East Timor becoming a failed state if Australia was not willing to compromise on the negotiations and allow East Timor a higher and fairer share of the revenues:

“We will end up being just one more failed state, one more country for whom independence proved to be just a dream. (Harding, 2004)

It makes the difference to our future. We would not like to be a failed state. Without all this we will be another Haiti, another Liberia, another Solomon Islands, and we do not want that. (Fickling, 2004 apud Lambach, 2004: 21)

He also added fuel to the fire by equating the negotiations to the Indonesian occupation: “We are only in the fourth year of confrontation with Australia. If you compare that with our previous fight, we would now be 1979...” (Gusmão, 2004) adding that with the revenues from one of the main fields
“[East Timor] would be a donor as well. [It] would be able to help other islands in the Pacific too” (ibid.).

Prime minister and foreign affairs minister also jumped on the bandwagon:

Is Australia governed by the rule of law or not? Their tactics are very clear. Australia knows that these revenues are vital for us. I am very surprised by their attitude. I never thought a democratic country like Australia would play this kind of role with a poor neighbor (Alkatiri *apud* King, 2007: 53).

We will mobilize Nobel peace prize winners around the world to talk about this issue, people in Hollywood, in LA, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, everyone that I have been in touch with already! It will be one of the most intense campaigns the world has seen since the apartheid campaign! (Horta *apud* King, 2007: 61).

In short, East Timorese leaders aimed at getting additional bargaining power by threatening Australia with its own state failure and ‘[using] the new security discourse in the region as a rhetorical tool in the diplomatic back-and-forth’ (Lambach, 2005: 21). This strategy was complemented by a few others:

1. Enhancing comparisons - use of comparisons to local (South Pacific) and external (African) state failure cases; equation between East Timor’s previous struggle with Indonesia and its current struggle with Australia (both viewed as ‘occupiers’, of land and sea respectively).
2. Moral argument – repeated reference to the huge wealth gap separating East Timor and Australia; portrayal of the negotiations as a David vs. Goliath struggle; calls for Australia’s inherent sense of fairness (the Australian fair go) in view of such an unbalanced fight.


Not surprisingly Downer derided this sentimental, public relations campaign:

I don't think that the tactic of strident rhetoric and denunciation of Australia – accusations of greed and ill faith and so on – I don't think that tactic in the end, which is a big surprise for us after all we've done for East Timor, I don't think that is going to prove very successful. (ABC, 2004)

And he would go on to say that East Timor “made a very big mistake thinking the best way to handle this negotiation is by trying to shame Australia, by mounting abuse on our country, accusing us of bullying, when you consider all we’ve done for East Timor” (Lambach, 2005: 21).

A second area of friction concerned the prime minister’s economic governance. The widespread view, largely inflated by the Australian media,
was that the Fretilin government was essentially “a clique of retrograde Stalinists left over from the [cold war] era who lived it up in Mozambique for twenty-four years” (Hill, 2003: 1). The prime minister, in particular, was regularly derided as socialist, communist, inept, unreasonable, wary of Australia, unappreciative of its liberating role, etc. (Kelly, 2006a; Kelly, 2006b).

In the economic front Alkatiri’s development priorities often clashed with what Australia and the World Bank thought more appropriate for the country. Whereas the prime minister favored a pro-poor approach, prioritizing initiatives on food security and poverty alleviation, and generally supported the state’s provision of public goods, Australia and the World Bank dismissed this approach arguing that the government should step back and encourage private entrepreneurship and the natural workings of the market. This is most clear in the disagreement over agricultural policy. Australia and the World Bank refused to financially support the rehabilitation of the East Timorese rice industry which would reduce food vulnerability and import-dependence (Anderson, n/a).

Another choice which did not go over too well with Australia was Alkatiri’s determination not to take loans from the international financial institutions as many other post-conflict countries had done, including Mozambique, usually
with disastrous results. Thus, East Timor acquired the singular status of being one of the poorest yet debt-free countries in the world (Parreira, 2004: 227). Alkatiri was also praised, and occasionally criticized, for setting up East Timor’s petroleum fund and for his conservative management of the oil and gas reserves.

At the same time Alkatiri tried to diversify East Timor’s foreign relations presumably to make up for Australia’s dominance. Anderson (2006: 69) points out that “the AusAID and World Bank preference for ‘corporate welfare’ and privatization schemes, often at add [sic] with East Timorese priorities [is partly responsible for the government seeking to] diversify its trade, aid and investment partners”. In addition to consolidating its engagement with the former colonial power, Alkatiri also developed ties with Cuba in the health sector, which did not please Australia or the US for that matter (ibid.). Some went as far as to suggest that the Cuban connection illustrated “a foreign policy overtly confrontational to the West” (Horta, 2006 apud ibid.). In trying to diversify the country’s oil contracts, Alkatiri also developed a Chinese connection relying heavily on China’s technical expertise. (Add to China Norway, Italy and India). Alkatiri’s moves effectively brought new players, particularly China, into a hitherto exclusively Australian sphere of influence (ibid.: 70) which of course did not sit well with Australia’s long-held policy of strategic denial.
2.5.3. Second act: ‘The crisis’ and the ISF

The 2006 crisis in East Timor is hard to tag. Depending on one’s own preferences, the causes can be endogenous or exogenous, cultural or geopolitical, ‘pessimistic’ or ‘ethnographically sensitive’, mainstream or alternative. Either way there is some agreement on how it started.

From 2002 to 2006 sporadic violence became somewhat common in East Timor. Internal security deteriorated during that time, culminating in the April-May 2006 violence in Dili. Never before since independence had the country so seriously been on the brink of what seemed to be a civil war. In January 2006, 159 soldiers sent a petition to the president “complaining of discrimination against westerners in recruitment, promotions and disciplinary measures” (ICG, 2006: 6). The rationale for the discrimination was that lorosaes (easterners) had fought harder against the Indonesians than loromonos (westerners) who allegedly had been more cooperative with the Indonesians. The petitioners were allowed to demonstrate in Dili from 24 to 28 April, but in the last day of protests violence erupted in the capital. The second peak of violence occurred in May 25 when soldiers opened fire over policemen, killing 9 (ICG, 2006: 9-10). This episode illustrated the confrontational logic opposing both forces since their inception. The military
demonstrations then evolved into a large-scale social protest against the government.

Although it seemed to have started out as a military issue, the crisis also brought to the fore underlying institutional problems. Specifically, the constitutional distribution of power between president and prime minister was seen as imbalanced. The semi-presidential system assigned executive power to the prime minister leaving the president with a largely symbolic role. This rather limited job description did not go over well with X. Gusmão – himself widely perceived as “Australia’s man” (Keady, 2006). While there already were resistance-era ideological differences between both leaders, these were further compounded by the Portuguese-inspired semi-presidential system (Shoesmith, 2003 apud Feijó, 2006: 55). Add to this the politicization of the military and the police forces, with the former siding with the president and the latter with the prime minister.

Disagreements within the leadership also led to the high profile circulation of coup theses. According to the softer version, the coup was essentially institutional - the president actively trying to discredit, delegitimize and eventually overthrow the prime minister, possibly with foreign (read: Australian) support. The other version bluntly affirms Canberra’s role in bringing down the Fretilin government.
Yet another view suggests that Fretilin and its leader actually brought failure on themselves by promoting “an authoritarian Mozambique-style suppression of opposition and freedom of speech” (Siapno, n/a). The re-introduction of the defamation law, parliament’s rubber-stamping role, the asphyxiating role of Fretilin and concomitant weakness of the multi-party system, the politicization of the administrative system as well as Alkatiri’s own ‘arrogant and exclusionary’ style are often cited as evidence of “the government’s top-down, non-inclusive way of doing politics” which combined with “limited transparency and little tolerance for criticism [formed] a political culture that [was] not conducive to nationbuilding and the rooting of democratic practices” in the country (Simonsen, 2006: 584).

Last but not least, other authors have emphasized the importance of viewing the 2006 and pre-2006 events from a more people-centered, ethnographically sensitive perspective. Arguing that standard accounts of conflict “privilege globalizing discourses [that] extract [and abstract] the subjective experience of violence”, Devant (2007) sees rumor-activated internal displacement not just as a consequence but as a major cause of the 2006 violence (ibid.: 20). In a similar vein, Seixas points out that regardless of all the unit- and agent-level explanations, on the ground the crisis was primarily understood (and experienced) as cultural: east vs. west, lorosaes
vs. lormonus (Seixas, 2007) and that should be the starting point of any analysis.

Australia’s response to the crisis followed a request from the East Timorese government to the government of Australia. While other countries responded to the government’s plea with civil or paramilitary forces (most notably Portugal), Australia responded militarily, forming the International Stabilization Force (ISF) (along with New Zealand). This generated a somewhat ambiguous situation where the various foreign forces coexist and share essentially the same duties, thought ultimately reporting to their own governments. Australia’s department of defence sums up the ISF mission as follows: “International police from Australia and 20 other nations provide security in Dili as part of the United Nations Police Force. The ISF provides support to these police operations as required.” This is what sets apart the ISF and InterFET.
2.6. Conclusions

By now the parallels between Australia’s intervention in SI and in ET should be clear. Both conflicts were interpreted according to the global frameworks in vogue - as local expressions of larger conflict trends. They signaled that the development malaise commonly associated with Africa had now reached the South Pacific as well. Indeed, in both cases the causes were perceived as primarily ethnic and institutional: in SI native Guadalcanalese fought migrant Malaitans; likewise, in ET lorosaes fought loromonos\(^\text{17}\). In both cases national institutions were not up to the challenge, indeed far from solving the conflict they made it worse: in SI the police force supported one of the factions while the executive branch was largely unresponsive; in ET clashes between police and army were exacerbated by power struggles between prime minister and president who in turn also politicized both forces. Following to the mainstream view, both conflicts can be neatly summarized as follows: in SI ethnic cleavages overflowed into the security sector (police only) going all the way up to the main state institutions; in ET the security sector (police and army) became increasingly polarized according to ethnic divisions which eventually affected the very foundations of the state. Therefore, the conflicts were diagnosed as a combination of three factors: ethnicity, failures in the security sector, and institutional breakdown.

\(^\text{17}\) It might make more sense to think of these distinctions as regional/geographic rather than ethnic.
In view of these apparent similarities, Australia’s response to the violence in ET was also somewhat akin to its intervention in SI. First, it required an explicit and consensual request by the East Timorese leaders; as with SI, this was presumably a formal guarantee against future legitimacy issues. Second, once again Australia responded with force (military and police deployment) to problems which were in fact socially, culturally and politically rooted. Both interventions addressed symptoms rather than underlying causes (ALP, n/a), which is in keeping with the prevalent interpretation of the conflicts. Third, in both cases the operations were conducted outside of the UN framework. As mentioned earlier, this is what sets apart InterFET and the ISF and it is also symbolic of the drift towards an interventionist agenda. While InterFET was UN-sanctioned, this time Australia refused to have its troops placed under UN command, which again is in line with its role in SI.

In the case of ET that has resulted in a peculiar situation where foreign security forces operate without any reference to the UN’s mandate (Feijó, n/a). Instead, they are bilateral assistance missions accountable to their own countries first and foremost, with marginal articulation with the UN. This particular issue – the nature of command – is an ongoing source of tension as the forces’ conduct occasionally reflects their countries competing agendas. Moreover, Australia’s refusal to place its soldiers under international
command has led to suggestions that this was just another instance of Australia mimicking the US, who operates on the same basis (Hill, 2003). To do so in Southeast Asia further brings into question Australia’s motivations because “it is one thing to have command over a body like RAMSI, in a region of micro-states, (...) to do the same (...) in Southeast Asia is quite different” (ibid.).

Another important difference is that whereas in both cases Australia’s response was of the ‘law and order’ kind, in SI it was more law (police-led) but in ET more order (military-led). This is somewhat puzzling given the conflicts alleged similarities and Australia’s earlier argument that ET would be better off with a strong police force rather than an army (Wainwright, 2002).

Both interventions took place in an international environment conducive to foreign interventions. First, as we have seen earlier, a number of emerging concepts engendered largely negative, even stereotyped, representations of the region: Africanization, state failure, arc of instability, war on terror and of course the Petri dish metaphor. Second, in pursuing a more assertive stance in the region Australia was merely ‘leading by example’ as the precedent had already been set by the US. Thus, Australia’s new approach was only possible because of larger changes in the global security discourse.
Chief amongst them were the different perceptions of risk associated with state fragility. As with SI, Canberra’s intervention in ET was also motivated by a new perception of threat in its immediate region. These are what Downer (2005: 7) called ‘contemporary threats’, with failed states on top of the list, seen as “incubators of crime, people, gun and drug smuggling and potentially terrorism” (O'Connor et al., 2006: 177) that could directly affect Australian interests and Australia itself. Australia’s foreign policy reappraisal, and its implementation, was therefore motivated by this new reality.

But this was perhaps not as real as it was purported to be. Indeed, there was scant empirical evidence to support the view that lawlessness, chaos, terrorism and all sorts of transnational illicit activities were about to fall down on ET or SI. Instead, the threat was constructed preventively by external actors, in this case Australia, who saw itself as the only country with a “major and unique stake” in the region (Wainwright, 2003). Therefore determining the nature of the threat, while ignoring the actual conditions on the ground or how the population sees itself, is of course a privilege available to the most powerful. The threat exists in the eyes of the beholder; it is inherently subjective and speculative. However, when events on the ground
seem to conform with the original forecast this is taken as evidence of Australia’s foresightedness.\(^{18}\)

Canberra “did not act to stop a specified security threat, but to contain the potential for unknown risks to proliferate” (Hameiri, 2008: 361). Therefore “intervention (…) emerged out of a perception that it is more effective to contain transnational risks away from Australia” (ibid.), which suggests that standard neo-imperialist or neo-colonial interpretations of Australia’s interventionism may be missing the mark. Indeed, Australian politicians seem to endorse the view of violence as development in reverse or warped development (Devant, 2007: 13) which assumes that development progresses linearly and is inherently good and that violence not only disrupts but reverts the development flow. Therefore violence/conflict – of the kind which affected both SI and ET – represents a relapse into underdevelopment which in turn is dangerous for Australia. Through this circular logic, Australia’s security interests are indefinitely linked to both countries’ development prospects (Hameiri, 2008: 361).

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\(^{18}\) Thus Australia argued that, much like its Pacific counterparts, ET could do without an army but not without a capable gendarmerie because its most pressing security problems were internal rather than external (Wainwright, 2002: 25). The early decision to create both a defence and a police force ran contrary to Australia’s interests. The 2006 crisis confirmed Canberra’s assessment that their creation would generate a ‘legal and political minefield’ with serious overlap and command issues (ibid.) which could overflow into other governmental areas, as indeed it did.
With what seemed to be latent civil wars, SI and ET were seen as on the verge of collapse. Government, media, and academia converged in that assessment. However, while for the SI this was a result of structural problems, for ET it stemmed from ‘bad’ government, ‘bad’ post-independence policy choices. Howard himself said that “The country has not been well governed” (Público, 2006). But Alkatiri’s governance was not bad so much as different. Hill (2006) points out that “Timor [was] much more in control of its own decision-making than any other small countries in the Pacific where Australian consultants [had been] brought in to make those decisions”. The prime minister’s firm stance in the oil negotiations, his resistance to fully comply with neoliberal prescriptions, and the pursuit of friendly relations with other countries were contrary to Australia’s own interests. Thus, Alkatiri represented a political project at odds with Australia’s vision for the region.

Within this framework, the prime minister’s unorthodox choices did not sit well with its mighty neighbor. Indeed, with Alkatiri in charge ET became a pebble in Canberra’s shoe. As a result, Australia favoured – some would say supported – a change of government. At the same time, Australia’s command over the ISF, bypassing the UN, gives it major clout in the country’s economic and political evolution. The same thing applies to SI but on a wider scale.
These cases illustrate a larger trend in contemporary post-conflict scenarios, notably that political authorities often have to prioritize governance over government. In the process they become more accountable to external actors than to the very constituency that elected them in the first place. This generates a democratic deficit in that the agenda that the government ran on is highly conditioned by non-national players. More importantly, it deliberately circumscribes what should be discretionary political choices. The normal political process, indeed politics itself, is thus denied from the top inasmuch as alternatives are not really available and, if they are, they are largely predetermined. It is, by extension, a denial of the self-determination which many of these countries fought for.

Australia’s response to these countries security problems also reveals a strong alignment with the liberal peace project: the belief that “a strong dose of orthodox development policy (good governance, democratization, privatization, and economic deregulation) will cure the problem of violent conflict” as these features “will [naturally] release the (...) peaceable nature of human society” (Constance, n/a). Therefore the goal is not purely economic or colonial-wise; as one author put it, Australia’s interventions in fragile states “[are not] motivated by neo-liberal messianic fervor for extending liberal markets to all” (Hameiri, 2008: 365); such interpretations
may be missing the point. Instead, they suggest that supporting the establishment of the *right* kind of government in its periphery is not only inherently good for those countries but will also contribute to the overall goal of managing the risks of state fragility for Australia. In other words, statebuilding, as practiced by Australia, is an inherently political process presented as no more than a managerial or technocratic enterprise. Accordingly, it amounts to an attempt “to exercise influence over the form and quality of governance in the Pacific without assuming responsibility for the fate of these countries” (Hameiri, 2006: opinion; Pureza, 2008).

Going back to the original question, then, what explains Australia’s new interventionism in the Pacific is a different perception of the risks associated with state fragility. The statebuilding response can be seen as a foreign-induced form of advancing a particular way of governing which in the long run will ensure the inductor’s homeland security. This view, which has now become hegemonic, can be traced back to liberal theory, according to which the combination of economic integration and democratic systems will decrease the incentives for waging war and eventually bring about a more peaceful world.

One could expect that since this was the policy followed in its immediate neighborhood, Australia’s policy towards Asia would be at least partly
informed by the same tenets. That is not the case. Indeed, whereas in the South Pacific Australia’s approach is more consistent with a neoliberal framework, in Asia it is downright realist. Both fronts thus seem to be at opposing ends, which suggests a highly pragmatic foreign policy. The next chapter looks into Australia’s relations with three particular countries – US, China, Japan – to ascertain this.
Part 3: The quest for security from Asia

This chapter zooms out of the South Pacific to focus on the North and East Asia region, which forms Australia’s region of secondary strategic interest (Rumley, 2006: 37). It reviews Australia’s relations with three particular countries – US, China, and to a lesser extent Japan – in order to contrast Canberra’s approach to the ‘region to the north’ with that towards its immediate neighborhood. In the process it illustrates how Australia’s foreign policy acquired an increasingly dissimilar form, based on opposing threat perceptions, which nonetheless converged in the overall goal of achieving security despite ‘abnormality’.

We have seen earlier how, following the US lead, Canberra’s policies towards the South Pacific drew inspiration from the post-9/11 security discourse. In particular we have seen how the belief that, then as now, ‘threats are defined more by the fault lines within societies than by the territorial boundaries between states’ (Reiss, 2004) has informed Australia’s response to rising instability in its self-assigned sphere of influence. Given the huge power differentials between both regions, it is unsurprising that Australia took a significantly different approach to its Northeast Asian neighbours. The result, however, was an increasingly dual foreign policy, which skillfully
combined neoliberal/institutional motivations in its South Pacific front with traditional realist tenets with the Northeast Asian region.
3.1. Australia and the US: A match made in heaven?

In order to understand Australia’s choices regarding Asia, one must first look at its links with the US. As the region’s superseding power and Australia’s foremost bilateral relationship, Canberra’s ties with Washington have both assisted and constrained Australia’s performance.

During the Howard years there was an explicit, some would say forceful, attempt to reinvigorate Australia’s alliance with the US which, since the end of world war II, had been framed by the ANZUS\(^\text{19}\) treaty. The alliance may have seen better days (considering Keating-Evans’s emphasis on engagement with Asia) but it was far from waning. Still, Howard believed that Labor’s insistence on joining the (Asian) club had gone too far and was contrary to Australia’s national interest: not only did it compromise the relationship with the US since it placed near exclusive emphasis in Asia (with mixed results at best) but, more importantly, the push for engagement also compromised Australia’s own identity (Kelly, 2006: 27), which had to adjust

\(^{19}\) Originally a trilateral treaty (1951) through which the US extended a security guarantee to Australia and New Zealand. In 1987 New Zealand refused to allow US nuclear ships onto its ports. As a result the US suspended its security ‘obligation’ towards New Zealand pending future reassessment by Wellington. Subsequently the alliance would only bind Australia and the US (plus Australia and New Zealand), though the acronym remained. It should be noted, however, that the American security guarantee is only presumed since the treaty’s concision (11 articles) and vague wording do not unambiguously guarantee much besides ‘consultation in the event of an attack’ (Phillips, 2004: 55; Siracusa, 2006: 40). It does, however, retain important dissuasive power. For more on this and other myths surrounding the alliance see Phillips, 2004.
so that Australia could at last go from ‘odd man out’ to ‘odd man in’ (Huntington, 1996: 152). On Howard’s different approach to Asia, the 2003 foreign policy and defense white paper stated that “Australia goes out to the region not as a supplicant but as a partner” (DFAT, 2003: 85) – such was Howard’s understanding of Labor’s engagement.

As a cultural traditionalist (Kelly, 2006: 23-30), Howard’s faith in the US alliance can be partly understood as a reaction to Keating-Evans’s perceived concessions on Australia’s ‘Australianness’. But it also stems from a fundamental strategic belief in the enduring strength of America’s leadership: “the US will remain the pre-eminent global power for the foreseeable future” (DFAT, 2003: 87, 21). This idea, repeatedly stated, is important as it reinforces Australia’s positioning on the US’s side in the event of open confrontation in North Asia, a critical region “where the interests of key global players intersect” (ibid: 76; DoD, 2000: IX). Not only did Howard-Downer believe in the long-term sustainability of America’s power but they also actively supported US presence in the Asia-Pacific. The official view was that the best way to achieve stability in the region had been and would still be through the presence of the American hegemon: “US strategic engagement and alliances underpin the security of the region and help manage rivalries between its powers” (DFAT, 2003: 22; Downer, 2005: 9). Thus, not only did Australia actively endorse US presence in the region, it also regarded it as inherently benign.
From the start then Howard reprioritized the alliance with the US, capitalizing on the opportunities created by a new administration (Bush II proved more receptive to Howard’s moves than Clinton) and by a favorable strategic environment (brought about by the war on terror). Within this framework Canberra fully supported Washington’s post-9/11 retaliation efforts, first by immediately invoking the ANZUS treaty (before NATO had even done so) and then by pledging Australian troops and military expertise to America’s long-term war efforts. Indeed, such was Canberra and Washington’s like-mindedness that some authors even questioned whether, as with the US, the Howard government had also taken a neoconservative turn (Koo, 2005: n/a).

The ‘special relationship’, as Howard would dub it, also progressed on the economic front. As a middle power with only moderate leverage in major international economic fora, Australian governments realized early on that it had more to win by joining and even heading a “rules-based multilateral system” (Ravenhill, 2001: 256) than by remaining attached to the ‘system of

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20 Based on the principle of collective defense, according to which an attack on any of the members is an attack on all of them, with expectations of reciprocal assistance.

21 The extent of Australia’s commitment is debatable. Some authors argue that, far from misguided ‘pro-American romanticism’ (Kelly, 2006: 49), Howard’s seemingly unconditional support for US endeavors was actually the result of careful decision-making and that its contribution to the ‘coalition of the willing’ was largely tokenistic (Beeson, 2007: 597), thereby maximizing leverage while minimizing casualties – Australia’s alleged ‘way of war’ (Kelly: ?). According to them, Howard-Downer excelled at clever/cost-effective alliance management (Philips, 2004). Still, many more remain critical of what is often described as Australia’s ‘naive loyalty’.
imperial preferences’, essentially remaining an outpost of the UK (ibid.: 249). Accordingly, Australia has consistently supported international trade liberalization, particularly in agriculture where it has competitive advantages. It was therefore somewhat puzzling that in 2004 it initiated negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA) with the US\textsuperscript{22}. The bilateral economic relationship had always been uneven: first, given the obvious differences in size, there were enduring asymmetries in that while for Australia the US was a major (though not the major) trade partner, for the US Australia had only marginal importance; likewise, the relationship was also characterized by a steady trade imbalance, i.e. Australia typically imported more from than exported to; finally, the US consistently imposed import restrictions (through tariff and non-tariff barriers) on goods produced more efficiently by Australia (ibid.: 252-253).

According to most accounts, the FTA did little to improve this situation. Indeed, despite the government’s “[determination] to pursue \textit{pragmatically} the advantages that free trade agreements offer Australia” (DFAT, 2003: 58, emphasis added), in this particular case pragmatism did not seem to take priority (see Manne, 2007). In many crucial segments (including dairy products, beef, sugar, manufactured and traded goods, pharmaceutical industry, intellectual property rights, etc.) the US was able to essentially maintain, and occasionally reinforce, its protectionist policies while Australia

\textsuperscript{22} The FTA (AUSFTA) came into force on January 1, 2005 (Vaughn, 2008: 12).
gained little additional access to the American market (ibid.). Furthermore, the *free* trade agreement was in essence a *preferential* trade agreement; as such it was discriminatory and non-rules based (Beeson, 2007: 600), meaning it favored the US to the detriment of Australia’s other Asian partners (Beeson, 2003: 723). However, the FTA with the US inaugurated a period of intensified bilateral trade diplomacy: Australia would also sign FTAs with Singapore (2003) and Thailand (2004) while pursuing similar deals with Japan, South Korea and even China (DFAT, 2003: 61-62)24.

If the agreement was indeed so disappointing, why did Canberra give in to Washington’s wishes? Some claimed, depreciatively, that this FTA allowed Howard to “complete the process of Australia’s in-depth integration with the US” (Manne, 2007: n/a). But officially the push for a FTA was seen as an opportunity to “[raise] bilateral economic ties to a level commensurate with the security relationship” (DFAT, 2003: 89) which was presented as a major achievement. According to Beeson (2007: 601)

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23 Officially, however, bilateral and multilateralism were mutually reinforcing. In fact, somewhat paradoxically, bilateralism was presented as advancing multilateralism: “The emphasis of the [g]overnment will remain on multilateral trade liberalization. But the [g]overnment’s active pursuit of regional and, in particular, bilateral liberalization will help set a high benchmark for the multilateral system. Liberalisation through these avenues can compete with and stimulate multilateral liberalisation’ (DFAT, 2003: 49).

24 Trade was just one of the areas where the Howard government took an increasingly selective approach. Diplomatically Australia also prioritized bilateral over multilateral relationships, believing this strategy to be more manageable and yield better results. Accordingly, it made careful use of the UN system while also privileging issue-area collaborations and prioritizing functional affinities as the basis for relationships.
after investing so much political capital and direct military assistance in the bilateral relationship, the Howard government had little choice but to sign any agreement or risk the perception that the entire relationship was disadvantageous for Australia.  

Similarly, Capling (*apud* Manne, 2007: n/a) points out that this was the first time since the end of the imperial preferences system that “the trade policy of an Australian government had placed political and strategic considerations ahead of the nation’s commercial interests”.

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25 Particularly since, around this time, US policy failure in Afghanistan and Iraq – therefore also Australia’s, who had thrown all its weight behind the US – was becoming increasingly conspicuous.
3.2. Australia and China: A balancing act

To make sense of Australia’s policies towards China (indeed Australia’s entire foreign policy) one must bear in mind its relations with the US. Australia’s ‘China dilemma’ is actually not specific to Australia and it illustrates larger trends in the contemporary international system. It can be roughly formulated as the need to choose between its geopolitical past (which lies with the US) and its economic future (which to a large extent lies with China) (Beeson, 2007: 603). The lingering question of whether China’s rise will be peaceful is of upmost importance for Australia.

Canberra’s economic integration with Beijing was prompted by China’s growing energy needs. Given its large on- and offshore area, Australia had an important resource base which could in part provide China with the natural resources needed to sustain its unrivaled growth rates. Not only was China eager to buy and Australia keen on selling, but Beijing also badly wanted what Canberra had to offer – coal, iron ore and natural gas. As a result, there was growing talk of natural synergies, win-win relationships, complementary interests, untapped opportunities, strong market matches, and the like (Maxwell, 2006; ACCI, n/a).
While reaping the benefits of the new ‘strategic economic partnership’, Canberra essentially turned a blind eye to Beijing’s internal political developments. In other words, the undemocratic nature of the Chinese regime was largely overlooked for the sake of furthering “short term economic benefits” (Dibb, 2005: 17). Downer notably said that Australia’s approach to China should be “realistic [and not focus] relentlessly, intensively, and disproportionately on those matters where our experience and perspectives differ” (ibid.).

Improved relations with China were therefore largely driven by mutual economic interests. But on the political front the relationship was less symbiotic, if at all. Juggling Australia’s Chinese and American connections proved challenging for the Howard government. Indeed, during the Bush administrations, US policy towards China was somewhat at odds with Australia’s, revealing some cracks in the otherwise near perfect relationship. During the Bush years the US moved towards a more hard-line approach to China and in the process tried to get some of its traditional Asian allies on board, including Australia and Japan (and later India) (Vaughn, 2008: 17).
3.3. Australia and Japan: 'Friend of a friend’

On Howard’s watch Australia also moved towards closer relations with Japan. Despite a history of hostility\textsuperscript{26} as well as many years of “accumulated indifference” (Leaver, 2006: 123), Canberra’s trade relationship with Tokyo thrived and, given Japan’s post-world war II constitutional and political constraints, for decades trade was indeed the cornerstone of the relationship. However, along with its reinforced partnership with Washington, Canberra also sought, and was drawn into, deeper relations with Tokyo. This is perhaps most clear is the institutionalization of the Trilateral Security Dialogue (2002) linking the US, Japan, and Australia. The initiative was originally meant to improve security collaboration among the three parties, especially around the issues of the war on terror, the Korean peninsula, and China’s rise (Vaughn, 2008: 8). Significantly, in 2005 it was upgraded to ministerial level and enlarged its agenda (ibid.). Later, in 2007 Australia and Japan signed a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, which essentially consolidated Canberra security links with Tokyo (Forrest, 2008: 43). Crucially, enhanced relations with Japan, particularly in such a sensitive area, developed in tandem with an “accelerated drift from pacifism to activism in

\textsuperscript{26} During the Pacific war, Japan had attacked and invaded Australia through the northernmost city of Darwin. Australia also fought Japan in neighbouring East Timor during world war II.
Japan’s national defense and security policy” (ibid.: 44), a progress made easier by the US-led global war on terror.

Considering North Asia’s history of conflict as well as recent animosities, these strategic alignments reverberated negatively in the region. In particular they raised suspicion from China, where they were perceived as a form of containment - a group of countries partnering up to covertly check and balance alleged Chinese expansionism. Canberra’s enhanced collaboration with Tokyo also suggested support for Japan’s political ‘normalization’.

Increasingly, then, Australia saw itself between a rock and a hard place: while having to live up to the expectations implicit in the ANZUS treaty and its post-9/11 foreign policy ‘fusion’ with the US, it also did not want to undermine its recent achievements with China. On the one hand, it was officially assumed that “[Australia] would want to avoid the emergence in the Asia-Pacific region of a security environment dominated by any powers whose strategic interests might be inimical to Australia’s and to avoid destabilizing competition between the region’s major powers” (DoD, 2000: X), a guideline where China seems to fit particularly well. On the other, a number of incidents blatantly contradicted this overall policy prescription. Perhaps most significant amongst them is Downer’s (in)famous comments on how Australia would react in the event of open cross-strait confrontation (the
lingering issue opposing China and Taiwan): having consistently supported
the one-China policy, would Canberra side with Washington (who would
support Taiwan), would it side with Beijing, or would it remain neutral (if at
all possible)? And how would the ANZUS alliance come in the equation?
When confronted with this scenario, Downer described the ANZUS treaty as
symbolic, suggesting that no mutual defense obligation would apply in such
circumstances (Malik, 2007: 592). This of course did not go over well with
his American counterparts (ibid.). He also emphasized that neither ANZUS
nor the Trilateral Security Dialogue were in any way directed at China. At the
same time, while Beijing’s mounting and undisclosed military spending came
under Washington’s criticism for “[threatening] the delicate security balance
in Asia” (Rumsfeld dixit), Canberra took the view that China’s militarization
was “a process of modernization, not destabilization” (Dibb, 2005: 16). Thus,
there seemed to be conflicting viewpoints on China’s rise, an issue which had
the potential to “[drive] a wedge between Washington and Canberra”
(Malick, 2007: 587).

Australia’s overall approach towards China drew accusations of complacency
and suggestions that Canberra had gone soft on communist China (ibid.).
But Howard-Downer did not see it that way. Faced with this predicament,
Australia essentially took the ‘great leap forward’. In managing the push-pull
factors of both relationships, the official position revolved around rejection, denial, and arbitration. First, rejecting the assumption that China’s rise would inevitably lead to future confrontation with the US; in Howard’s own words “Australia does not believe that there is anything inevitable about escalating strategic competition between China and the US” (2005: 15). It follows that Australia also rejected any inexorable clash between Washington and Beijing over Taiwan (Malick, 2007: 590). At the same time, Australia’s ‘China dilemma’ had larger implications; it was an instructive case in point for John Howard’s attempt to rise above what he saw as constricting conceptualizations of Australia’s past. In this respect, the US vs. China problem resonated with the history vs. geography dilemma (see Introduction). Howard’s response was essentially to deny the idea that ‘more US’ necessarily means ‘less Asia’ and to frame Australia’s relationship management as a mutually reinforcing achievement which underlined its “strategic maturity as a nation” (ibid.: 13). At the same time, taking advantage of Australia’s ‘in-betweenness’, Howard-Downer chose to position Australia as the natural mediator of that difficult relationship (ibid: 15), with a “major stake and supportive role to play” in its successful management (DFAT, 2003: 22, 79-80).

27 It also did not seem to believe China’s progress to be significant and sustainable enough to “be able to challenge the United State’s overall capacity to shape the global environment” (see DFAT, 2003: 21).

28 He said “Time has only strengthened my conviction that we do not face a choice between our history and our geography” (2005: 3).
All in all, Australia’s ‘China dilemma’ is a classic example of how East Asian middle powers have been struggling to balance their economic and security interests in a context where the “economic and security anchors of the region increasingly divide between Beijing and Washington” (Ikenberry, 2004 *apud* Taylor, 2007: 40). We have seen how Australia tried to escape this predicament: by siding with the US while at the same time claiming “a more independent discretion for [its] China policy” (Kelly, 2006: 69). In this respect the fact that Chinese president Hu Jintao addressed Australia’s parliament only one day after George W. Bush had done so was an accomplishment for which Howard took great pride. Australia’s management of these critical relationships was framed as a result of Howard-Downer’s diplomatic skills and foresight, as Australia was now “enjoying successful ties with the two nations likely to dominate the next century” (ibid.: 68), a feat few could claim. But with what we now know, Howard’s balancing act seems to be no more than an intermission29.

29 China featured prominently in the 2009 defense white paper, under prime minister Kevin Rudd’s leadership, as the main potential threat to Australia’s security (economic and defense-wise).
3.4. Conclusions

What should we make of these moves? A typical appraisal of Australia’s assimilation with the America tends to fall into one of two categories. The first, which I shall call the ‘infatuation’ thesis, draws on unit-level attributes to account for the merger. This argument focuses specifically on the role of political agents – how their personal beliefs contribute to a particular foreign policy outcome. It posits that the special relationship with the US – from where everything else seems to flow - was only marginally strategically-motivated, resulting instead from a particular idealized vision of the US and the unique strengths of its society. Such was Howard’s faith in America’s enduring power that he conceived of Australia’s future relationship with the US in terms of integration: strategic, economic, social and cultural integration with “the most formidable empire the world has ever seen, the new hegemon, the world’s first ‘hyper-power’” (Manne, 2006: n/a). As a result, Australia increasingly embarked on “a kind of foreign policy course of mimicry or, better still, of automaticity” (ibid.), which resulted in strained ties with some of its Asian neighbors, including China. According to this view, the quest for closer ties with the US – and Japan by extension - and the parallel gradual estrangement from China are best understood in the framework of Howard’s “romantic attachment to American civilisation and [his] vision of Australia’s future as ally of the great American [e]mpire” (ibid.).
The infatuation thesis has its merits. A brief review of Howard’s main pronouncements on Canberra-Washington relations does indeed suggest a kind of mythical vision of the US, promoting the idea of deeper integration with the US as a win-win deal. However, we have already seen how the relationship was also in some respects fundamentally unbalanced.

While not rejecting this argument altogether, the prevailing view, which I shall call the ‘downpayment’ thesis, suggests that strategic factors played a much greater role in the decision to move closer with the US. According to this view, Howard’s attempt to reinvigorate the US alliance along with his loyal support for Bush’s policies, even the ill-conceived, were intended as an insurance policy – an advance payment meant to ensure US support (read: protection) in times of need; in essence, a constant and reliable security guarantee. This was an interesting and intriguing option in view of the ample recognition that “the chances of an attack on Australia remain[ed] low” (DoD, 2000: 23).

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30 The 2000 defence white paper envisages three scenarios: a full-scale invasion, a major attack, and minor attacks. The first is considered least likely, the second remotely possible, and the last possible (2000: 23).
Both arguments have different theoretical implications. The first privileges the role of human agency, underlining Cabinet’s takeover of traditional DFAT’s responsibilities and its consequences in terms of foreign policy formulation - to what extent did the latter reflect personal preferences and convictions. The second sees Canberra’s bandwagoning with Washington as a natural consequence of the external setting – the result of strategic variables beyond Australia’s control which induced that particular kind of behavior.

I suggest that the second explanation is more consistent with (a) Australia’s past performance and with (b) the external environment at the time. Australia’s integration with the US during the Howard years should not be reduced (solely) to a matter of transient personal and political soulmateship: two leaders taking a liking for each other. Instead, it was the product of a rational decision grounded on Australia’s history and the larger geopolitical context.

On the one hand, alignment with the US clearly resonates with the tradition of relying on ‘great and powerful friends’ as protectors of last resort: Great Britain up until world war II and the US/ANZUS thereafter. This is why, throughout the twentieth century, Australia’s defence forces have often served in out-of-area operations, in regions/conflicts where Australia’s stake
is not immediately clear: the willingness to fight ‘other peoples’ wars’ is part of the broader insurance policy (Koo, 2005: n/a). Here is how one analyst captured this trend:

Australia’s defence policy consists primarily of sending Australian troops to every American war, in the hope that if one day Australia needs to have the favour returned, Americans will feel grateful enough to come and help. If the United States invaded Mars, Australia would send a battalion along. (Dyner apud Manne, 2006: n/a)

Irony aside, this quote aptly illustrates the general perception of the Australia-US relationship. At the root of the insurance policy lies what one author has called Australia’s congenital ‘invasion anxiety’ (Burke, 2001) or its longstanding ”existential fear of being overwhelmed by Asia” (Vaughn, 2008: 13). This in turn derives from the circumstances of Australia’s inception as a predominantly Anglo-Saxon country surrounded by ‘hordes of aliens’ - a mindset which has evolved and continued in modern times - as well by geographic constraints which have instilled a sense of permanent ‘in-betweenness’.

We have noted earlier how it was exactly this kind of either/or identity problem that John Howard tried to overcome by deriding the ‘black armband discourse’ and reframing traditional weaknesses as strengths. His view was that Australia need not choose: it need not concede either to one side
(Asia/location) or the other (US, UK, Europe/culture); it should just be itself in Asia. It is therefore somewhat ironic that, even as he actively pursued this vision, Australia’s alignment with the US suggested the opposite: a kind of foreign policy increasingly based on cultural affinities. It may well be that while trying to rise above these binary divisions Howard did just the opposite, especially in terms of perception and image-building, providing Australia with its very own culturally-based security dilemma.

But external factors were also important, if not decisive, in determining the course of Australia’s foreign policy towards North Asia, which both reflected and sustained traditional security concerns. Even though Howard saw himself as a practitioner, decried analytical theory and consistently dismissed any of the above mentioned binary conceptualizations of Australia’s place in the world31 (Kelly, 2006), it is possible to draw some parallels between ‘words and actions’ and theoretical insights. After all, ‘no state is an island’.

First, on Howard’s watch we witnessed a full-fledged resurgence of the state as the primary political interface, both at the rhetorical and implementation levels, the ideal model being the state-as-deliverer: strong, delivering states

31 In addition to the history vs. geography or culture vs. location dilemma, Howard also spoke out against any need to choose between Asia and America, past and present, and global and regional strategies, promoting the idea that rather than mutually exclusive these dimensions were mutually reinforcing if managed well (DFAT, 2003; Howard, 2005).
in the ‘region to the north’ and weak, failing states in Australia’s vicinity, unable to get by without its support. In the latter case, the modern version of warfare merely reinforced the state’s centrality; the state was both the problem and the solution.

At the same time, Howard-Downer reconsidered Australia’s approach towards international cooperation. Rather than building on Keating-Evan’s achievements in Asia, Howard-Downer rejected their predecessors brand of engagement which purportedly involved adjusting Australia’s identity to meet Asian standards, thereby positioning Australia as a supplicant rather than an equal partner among its Asian counterparts (Kelly, 2006: 28). On this basis, Howard-Downer’s starting point was that Australia’s foreign policy should not be based on idealistic aspirations (or any Self or Other transformational will) but on a realistic assessment of the Asia-Pacific power structures (Downer, 2000a). In other words, Australia should come to terms with the fact that it was not, and never would be, part of the club and proceed on that basis.

This kind of reasoning underpinned Australia’s interactions with the ‘region to the north’, particularly within the US-Japan-China circle. Because “Australia’s focus was on practical outcomes of relations between countries rather than just forms and processes” (Howard, 2005: 16, emphasis added), on Howard’s watch Australia was less forceful in its attempt to join the evolving
East Asian institutional architecture. This was partly due to a new foreign policy direction (closer ties with the US) but also the result of a tradition of membership denial\(^\text{32}\). Indeed, despite its efforts to integrate the region’s emergent institutional structures, Australia’s contribution had often been rejected. Against this background, it is not surprising that Howard-Downer chose to prioritize pragmatism over principle and results over process, even if officially trying to balance these out (Howard, 2005: 11). Indeed, during the Howard years Australia’s cooperation pattern turned increasingly selective, leading to defection from or indifference towards major international treaties as well as an implicit preference for relative over absolute gains, as evidenced by its dyadic relationship management.

The priority accorded to the US alliance as well as Australia’s participation in the Trilateral Security Dialogue (to the detriment of its relationship with China) seem to follow logically from these external constraints. Despite Australia’s reluctance to admit to it, the enhanced trilateral security cooperation did increasingly conform with a form of balancing or hedging against the possibility of a future China threat (Tow, 2003: 15; Taylor, 2007). Given Howard’s refusal to choose, this was always an uneasy fit for Australia.

\(^{32}\) Most notably its exclusion from the ASEAN and ASEAN+3 regional fora. Another often cited example is Australia’s long running feud with Malaysia’s prime minister Mahathir bin Mohamad, who consistently and admittedly vetoed Australia’s ASEAN membership on cultural grounds. Australia is, however, a founding member of APEC and the ARF.
On the whole, then, Australia’s foreign policy under Howard-Downer broadly reflected traditional realist tenets, thereby confirming the ongoing relevance of its central assumptions. There is, however, an important difference that may feed into the theory: the claim that the root of Australia’s global engagement is to be found in its domestic foundations (Howard, 2005: 6) or, in other words, the erosion of the domestic vs. foreign policy distinction, with the former directly informing the latter. This was indeed a recurring theme for Howard, who seemingly drew on the character of the Australian people and the strength of its institutions for inspiration: “In uncertain times, we should take heart from how democracies can find renewed power and purpose abroad from institutions and instincts at home” (ibid.: 6). Rhetoric aside, there are numerous cases of ‘crossovers’ during the Howard years. Particularly relevant to this thesis was how identity issues were allowed, even encouraged, to influence the foreign policy arena. For realists smart, rational states intent on maximizing gains and minimizing losses, will base decisions on strictly external factors for fear of ‘falling by the wayside’ (Waltz apud Schouten, 2009: 5). However, the Australian example suggests that the interplay between domestic and foreign policy can be both rational and mutually reinforcing.

33 ‘Australians have a reputation for hard work, directness and adaptability’ (Howard: 2005: 4).
34 ‘We have adapted to our distinctive setting the great bulwarks of liberal democracy (...)’ (ibid.).
Part 4: Final remarks

This thesis addressed two traditionally important areas in Australian foreign policy. First, it tried to understand why Australia went from a distinctly hands-off approach to a remarkably interventionist stance in the Pacific in little over six months. It argued that Australia’s sea change resulted from an objective deterioration of the political and economic conditions in its neighbouring countries but was also largely enabled by a new external environment conducive to statebuilding interventions. Because of how global and regional dynamics intersected ‘on the way to Honiara/Dili’, the South Pacific is a microcosmos of the larger trends currently affecting the traditional state system. In fact, despite (or because of) its peripheral status it has been at the forefront of radical, yet discrete, governance experimentations, with RAMSI as a major case in point.

Through an exhaustive confrontation of the official motivations for intervention and its operationalization, this thesis offered a critical analysis of Australia’s interventions in the Solomon Islands and in East Timor. Informed by Duffield’s critique of the security-development nexus, it put forth that Canberra’s interventions are a classic example of the post-9/11 inseparable linkage between homeland security and ‘buitenland’ security. Statebuilding interventions are premised on this argument. Thus, we have seen in some
detail how the primary motivations for intervention in the Solomons and in East Timor related to Australia first and foremost, and to a lesser degree to the populations affected. Specifically I have argued that Australia’s interventionism is a form of risk management; literally a technique to manage the risks for Australia that could arise from any one of those states ‘failing’. Under the umbrella of the security-development nexus, Australia’s interventions can ultimately be traced to a different perception of threat – the idea that in the 21st century threats come primarily from intra- and non-state entities.

Unsurprisingly Australia’s approach to the Asia-Pacific stand in contrast to that towards the Pacific. From the analysis of Canberra’s relationships with Washington, Beijing and Tokyo we can draw a picture of a divided country, struggling to please its last-resort security guarantor and its newfound source of prosperity. While Howard did attempt the ‘ultimate synthesis’, it is questionable whether that same strategy may not have inadvertently backfired; certainly it did not last long. Under Howard’s leadership Australia essentially returned to a defensive pattern of relations with Asia, based on assumptions very dear to the realist tradition in international relations. A combination of subjective factors like the circumstances of its inception and its ambiguous identity and external conditions such as a tradition of exclusion from Asian regional fora and the Northeast Asian power politics dynamics, have consistently determined Australia’s positioning in Asia to the point that,
unless there are significant improvements in the region’s architecture, Australia will in all likelihood remain a congenitally anxious nation.
## Attachment 1 – A quick guide to Australian politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Political party</th>
<th>Political wing</th>
<th>PM</th>
<th>FM</th>
<th>Foreign policy orientation</th>
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<td>Bob Hawke</td>
<td>Bill Hayden</td>
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<td>Kevin Rudd</td>
<td>Stephen Smith</td>
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</table>

PM – Prime minister  
FAM – Foreign affairs minister  
ALP – Australian Labor Party  
LPA – Liberal Party of Australia
Attachment 2 – Map no. 1: The Pacific region
Attachment 3 - Map no. 2: The world from the Australian perspective
Attachment 4 – Map no. 3: The Australian ‘arc of instability’
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