

A grid of flags including Australia, Japan, and China. The flags are arranged in a pattern that suggests a relationship or comparison between these three nations. The Australian flag is on the left, the Japanese flag is in the middle, and the Chinese flag is on the right. The flags are partially overlapping and set against a dark red background.

CRITICAL STUDIES OF
THE ASIA-PACIFIC

AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN POLICY IN ASIA

MIDDLE POWER OR
AWKWARD PARTNER?

Allan Patience



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Middle Power or Awkward Partner?

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In memoriam
Isabel McDonald Patience (1918–1969)
and
Ian Graham Patience (1916–2000)

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CONTENTS

1	Liminal Australia in Asia	1
2	Middle Powers and Awkward Partners	17
3	Australia's Middle Power Imagining	51
4	To Be or Not to Be in Asia?	89
5	Japan: 'Australia's Best Friend in Asia'?	137
6	'Fear and Greed'? Australia Relations with China	183
7	To Appease or Offend? Australia's Indonesia Dilemma	215
8	Dependent Middle Power or Global Citizen?	233
	Bibliography	257
	Index	317

INTRODUCTION

Australia represents a most likely case for testing the middle power influence of a single actor. This makes it a useful single case to test for falsification of some of the grandiose claims made on behalf of middle powers.

—Andrew Carr (2015)

This book focuses on the middle power concept in International Relations (IR) to demonstrate how an outmoded version of middle power imagining is undermining Australian foreign policy making in Asia. It proposes that there are three possible ways of thinking about middle powers: (i) as dependent middle powers, (ii) as regional middle powers, and (iii) middle powers as global citizens. The book draws on Stephen George’s account of Britain’s ‘awkward partner’ relationship with Europe (George 1998) to demonstrate how Australia’s assumption of a dependent middle power identity negatively affects its foreign policy making. The book concludes that some serious rethinking is necessary about the kind of middle power Australia wants – and needs – to be, in its region and in the world.

Chapter 1 outlines the conceptual and theoretical ideas pursued in this book, proposing that Australia’s particular form of middle power imagining is a major cause of its awkward partnering in Asia. Chapter 2 traces the genealogy of middle power thinking – a genealogy that reaches back at least to the third century BCE in China. It also explores the ‘awkward partner’ concept in IR scholarship. Chapter 3 surveys notable scholarship on Australian foreign policy from 1901 to the present. It identifies two major competing streams of middle power imagining in Australian foreign policy: an imperialist stream; an internationalist stream. It traces these streams back

to their sources focusing on four formative experiences of Australia: first, as a reluctant ‘de-dominioniser’ within the British Empire; secondly, the White Australia policy’s impact on the country’s relations with its region; thirdly, the influence of the ‘tyranny of distance’ on Australian security thinking; and fourthly, Australia’s ‘anxious nation’ status (Walker 1999) in response to what has been widely perceived by many Australians down the years as the country’s fearful geopolitical proximity to Asia. Chapter 4 asks whether Australia can be regarded as an integral partner in Asia. Higgott and Nossal (2008) have questioned the effectiveness of former Prime Minister Bob Hawke’s advocacy of Australia’s ‘enmeshment’ with Asia (Hawke 1994, p. 230). They point to the country’s persistent ‘liminality’ in its region – that is, the manner in which it hovers at the cultural and political margins of Asia: *located geo-politically in* but not *culturally of* Asia. The chapter traces Australia’s nonetheless hesitant, anxious and unexpected ‘relocation’ into the Asia Pacific that is largely due to its security alliance with the United States. It is argued that, paradoxically, the alliance has pushed Australia to develop and deepen its Asian diplomacy, especially since 1989.

The choice for Australia today is whether or not to move towards further integration (to ‘relocate’) into the Asia-Pacific region. This question has become urgent, requiring a carefully considered answer. The almost instinctive reaction to Australia’s long-running sense of insecurity in its region has been for the country to deepen security ties with the United States and like-minded allies. This instinctiveness has not faded over time. As Tony Kevin has noted: ‘In the post-September 11 era, the government decided to seek closer defence integration with the United States. Australia’s defence planners are still grappling with this shift’ (2004, p. 302).

Does this mean that Australia’s ‘relocation’ journey into Asia has stalled? One of the core features of Australia’s dependent middle power imagining is what Allan Gyngell has identified as its ‘fear of abandonment’ (Gyngell 2017). At first this fear led to Australia’s abject reliance on Britain for its security and the making and conduct of its foreign policy. But faith in the reliability of Britain’s security arrangements and its foreign policy acumen was shattered in 1942, following the rout of Britain and its allies in Singapore by Japanese forces (Horner 2013). The drift away from Britain hastened after the UK joined the European Union in 1973. Meanwhile, during the Pacific War, America had already emerged as Australia’s second big power ally – a development that gathered momentum after the Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) was signed in 1951. Hugh White sums it up precisely: ‘No

other country in Asia – perhaps none in the world – has relied for so long, and so deeply, and so happily on America. None has benefited more from an alliance with that remarkable country’ (2012, p. 8).

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 focus on Australia’s relations with Japan, China and Indonesia respectively. The aim in these chapters is to illustrate the manner in which Australia’s dependent middle power imagining has led to awkwardness in the country’s relations with each of these three major Asian powers. Each state is of immense significance to Australia’s security and prosperity. How Australian foreign policy towards those states either facilitates or constrains Australia’s relations with each of them will also have ramifications for the security of Australia in the wider Asia-Pacific region. It is noted in the Chap. 8 that the conceptual clarification aimed at in the book points to the awkwardness of the dominant mode of middle power imagining shaping Australia’s relations. This is true not only with regard to Japan, China and Indonesia, but also much of the rest of the Asia-Pacific.

The book’s conclusion is that it’s time for a new imagining of Australia’s middle power identity, navigating away from the prevailing dependent middle power imagining toward a foreign policy that is more astutely and positively attuned to the country’s geopolitical setting. The book proposes that merely asserting that Australia is a middle power (as frequently happens) is to be confused by an oxymoron, because the ‘power’ in the country’s present claim to dependent middle power status is derived overwhelmingly from its alliance with the United States. In short, Australia’s ability to influence regional politics is based on *reflected* power; its power is not substantive. This is the main source of awkwardness in Australia’s relations with states like Japan, China and Indonesia. As it faces up to the challenges of an increasingly ascendant Asia, Australia will need to remove the symptoms and the causes of its awkward partnering in Asia by educating its citizens more deeply about its geopolitical *cultural* location and by cultivating skillful niche diplomacy derived from principles that will make it a middle power global citizen. There can be no ‘Asia-exit’ for Australia, ever.

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Liminal Australia in Asia

One of the pioneers of Australian foreign policy making, Dr. John Burton, identified a foundational flaw in Australia's relations with Asia by noting that from 1947 Australia declined to exercise an independent stand in the United Nations, preferring instead to align itself with other British Commonwealth countries (1954, p. 90). This was, he wrote, 'a severe blow to Australian prestige throughout the world, and in particular in Asia.' By 1949, Burton writes, 'principle, facts and even direct Australian interests were thrown aside and the guiding instruction [to the Department of External Affairs] was to "Follow the United States".'

Deference to America subsequently became habitual among foreign policy makers in Canberra, resulting in Australia becoming what Higgott and Nossal refer to as 'a liminal state, one that is on a threshold, experiencing two worlds, "old" and "new", at the same time' (1997, p. 182). The 'old' world they refer to is Australia's traditional ties with Britain and the United States. And, as they note: 'Prominently featured in its "new" world, and its "new" certainties, is Asia, and Australia's attempted relocation in the region.' They are unsure that Australia will be able to manage this 'relocation.' It is the contention of this book that Australia doesn't have a choice, that a considered and sensitive relocation is essential for the country's security and prosperity. However, relocation is unlikely to succeed while Australia assumes a *dependent* middle power identity, in it region and globally.

MIDDLE POWER IMAGINING

The book coins the term *middle power imagining* to highlight how citizens of a middle power think about (*imagine*) their country's standing in regional and global politics. Many Australians would agree with Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant that Australia is 'manifestly not a great power or even a major power; nor, however is it small or insignificant' (1995, p. 344). As explained in Chap. 3, middle power imagining is the manner in which foreign policy commentators in Australia have come to identify with what they believe is their country's regional and global standing since World War II.

Despite its persistent preoccupation with the 'old' world, since the 1980s there has been a steady re-awakening to the fundamental importance of Asia in Australia's elite foreign policy making circles. But by and large it is a constrained awakening, prioritizing benefits accruing from three things: (i) a questionable (if at times blind) faith in the capacity of the Chinese economy to grow at high rates for the foreseeable future; (ii) in the belief that there will always be continuing demand for Australian resources from Japan; and (iii) in febrile anticipation of increasing demand for Australian food products and financial, medical and education services from the expanding middle classes in Asia.

While Australia's business and political leaders and media commentators look to Asia almost exclusively through the prism of investment, trade and commerce, there is little public interest in educating young Australians about Asian histories, cultures and languages. Professor David Hill pointed to a 37 percent drop in enrolments in Indonesian studies in schools and universities in the decade to 2010 (2014). The study of Chinese language also languishes (Orton 2016). As Chengxin Pan has noted: 'Rather than ushering in a new era of Australia's China literacy, the highly charged debate exposes a rich seam of Australia's Asia anxiety' (2012a, p. 246).

More recently, a debate has erupted about potential instability in Asia caused by the re-emergence of China as a regional power and American reactions to that re-emergence, particularly in light of Donald Trump's presidency. As former Foreign Affairs Minister Gareth Evans has noted:

... we have reached a point at which that comfortable leadership on the pursuit and institutionalisation of global public goods, which the US did play a leading role in right back at the beginning in 1945– the UN creation, the Bretton Woods institutions – those days do now seem to be over, and others are going to have to fill those very big shoes that the US has now abdicated. (2017)

The contradictory influences of economic utilitarianism and suspicions about China's ambitions in the Asia-Pacific widely influence (and at times seriously distort) attitudes to Asia and Asians generally in contemporary Australia. They reinforce a stubborn devotion in the country to its dependent middle power imagining. There is an orthodox consensus in contemporary Australia that it would be dangerous, even disastrous, for the country to assert its independence from its most powerful ally, the United States of America, on whom it has depended for its security since the 1950s. However, with the advent of the Trump administration in Washington, doubts about America's reliability as a committed alliance partner have begun to creep into the public consciousness. Reporting on a June 2017 Fairfax Ipsos poll, Matt Wade notes: 'The survey revealed just 37 percent of Australians now believe the United States has an "over-all positive" influence on world affairs, a huge 23 percentage points lower than in 2016' (Wade 2017, p. 1). Even before the Trump era became a reality, former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser had warned: 'Australia needs to decide which direction it is to take into the future: are we to continue to follow our policy of strategic dependence or will we, for the first time in our history, move towards a more strategically independent foreign policy?' (2014, p. 259).

AUSTRALIA'S MIDDLE POWER IMAGINING IN ASIA

The central contention of this book is that Australia's dependent middle power imagining is a major factor in the country's 'liminality' in Asia – in confecting its awkward partnering in the region. This is defended through a survey of historical scholarship, media reports, and recent academic analyses and political commentaries about the country's bilateral relations with three Asian states of high strategic and economic importance to Australia: Japan, China and Indonesia.

It is not often acknowledged that issues explored in recent accounts of Australian foreign policy had already been canvassed by earlier scholars. Not a few contemporary accounts of foreign policy are striking for the a-historical approaches they take. Too many assume that Australia's foreign policy making has only quite recently begun to come to grips with the complexities of Australia's geopolitical location on the edge of Asia. As Dan Halvorson argues, it is time to challenge 'the orthodox [Australian] position in the literature that genuine and substantive engagement with East Asia began only in the 1980s' (2016, p. 131). As shown in Chap. 3,

not only are there earlier examples of engagement, but also they have been written about and discussed over several decades, often with a clarity and prescience unmatched in more recent writing.

AUSTRALIA, JAPAN, CHINA AND INDONESIA

By the middle of the 1960s Japan had emerged as a major market for Australian resources (especially coal, iron ore, and bauxite, and wool, meat and dairy products). In July 2014 the two countries signed a Free Trade Agreement. Increased cooperation on defence matters is mounting, largely as a response to perceptions about China's 'rise.' Increased defence cooperation is now firmly on the agendas of both countries, especially in light of Donald Trump's 'America First' mantra that apparently influences his foreign policy (Flitton 2017).

Following Deng Xiao Peng's 1978 economic reforms, China embarked on its re-emergence as growing economy and formidable power in the Asia-Pacific. Early in the twenty-first century it surpassed Japan as Australia's biggest trading partner. In November 2014 Australia and China signed a Free Trade Agreement and plans were approved for joint military exercises. However China's construction of military bases on its man-made islands in the South China Sea has raised security concerns for Australia and its western allies. Donald Trump's seemingly inchoate approach to security issues in the Asia Pacific has intensified concerns among nearly all states in the western Pacific. Gareth Evans' description of Trump as 'manifestly the most ill-informed, under-prepared, ethically-challenged and psychologically ill-equipped president in history' is not without substance (quoted by Hunter 2017). How Australia handles the diplomacy (or lack of it) arising from the Trump era will be absolutely critical for the country's regional future.

Indonesia is Australia's closest Asian neighbour. Its attitude to, and cooperation with Australia is vital on a wide range of important security issues including terrorism, international crime syndicates (especially drug smugglers), people smuggling, asylum seekers, trade, and climate change. Of all its Asian neighbours, Australia has most to lose by partnering awkwardly with Indonesia. Yet all too often that has been the character of its Indonesian diplomacy. It seems that too few Australians properly appreciate that their country's need for a positive relationship with Indonesia outweighs Indonesia's need to be concerned about Australia.

The importance of Asia to Australia's security and prosperity came into sharper foreign and defence policy focus in 1989 when the Hawke Government commissioned a report entitled *Australia and the Northeast Asian Ascendancy*. This Report (known as the Garnaut Report) is a milestone in the making of Australian foreign policy in Asia. In drawing attention to the economic, political and social transformations taking place in Northeast Asia, it announced:

This is a time of great opportunity for Australia. It is a time when Australians have a chance to grasp the prosperity, self-confidence and independence in an interdependent world that earlier Australians in expansive times had hoped for their country [...] Australians, in a favourable international environment, will choose whether they step out in new, more hopeful directions throughout the twenty-first century. (Garnaut 1989, p. 1)

This report was the prelude to a flurry of books, articles, reports, conference papers and commentaries on how Australia could (and should) be better integrated into its region (see for example, Broinowski 1992; Carr 2015; Cotton 2004; Dalrymple 2003; Evans and Grant 1995; FitzGerald 1997; Griffiths and Wesley 2010; Keating 2000; Taylor 2007a; Walker 1999; Wesley 2007a, 2011a; White 2010, 2012b). Much of this insufficiently acknowledged literature pointed to the region's historical and ongoing rivalries and mutual suspicions while coping with mounting pressures of 'predatory globalization' (Falk 1999). It identified transnational threats in the region including climate change, food, water and energy security issues, a growing refugee crisis, international crime syndicates, terrorist threats, and disease pandemics (Burke 2006; Dupont 2001). More recently it has been focusing on how the region – including Australia – may come to grips with a re-emerging China while dealing with the other big powers, established and emerging, in the region, including the United States, Indonesia, India and Japan (Beeson 2004; Beeson and Li 2014, ch. 8; Gill and Jakobson 2017; Pan 2012a; Tow 2017; White 2012a, b).

So how do Australia's leading politicians, foreign policy commentators and scholars believe their country is regarded in the dynamically complex regional setting that is Asia today? How do they imagine the Australian version of liberal representative government is understood among neighbouring states? Is Australia looked up to, or looked down upon? Or is it simply ignored? This book addresses those questions.

WHAT IS 'ASIA'?

David Birch et al. have noted: 'In a sense [...] there is no such thing as 'Asia', any more than there is a physical reality behind the notion of 'the West' (2001, p. 1). In a similar vein, David Kang writes: "'Asia" often refers to a geographic area that takes in Russia and Japan, encompasses the entire Pacific Ocean including Australia, and ranges as far west as India and Pakistan. These countries have different cultures, histories, political institutions, economies, geographic features, and climates' (2003, p. 60). Moreover, as Amitav Acharya reminds us: 'Asia is, of course, not a given. It is constructed, as most regions tend to be. There are powerful forces working against the concept, with diversity (geographic, cultural, and political), rivalries, and the lack of European-style regional integration being chief among them' (Acharya 2010, p. 33; see also Wesley 2015, ch. 2).

Australia is geopolitically located at the southern perimeter of the Asia-Pacific region. However, *culturally* it is almost universally identified as a Western country characterized by Western values, sharply differentiating it from its Asian and South Pacific neighbours. Nonetheless, as Birch et al. have observed, just as the 'West' is an omnibus term that can mean many contradictory things, so 'Asia' is interpreted in a bewildering variety of ways. As the Korean historian Hye Jeong Park points out: 'It was Europeans who called Asia as Asia, not Asians' (2014, p. 892). Park's observation contains an echo of Edward Said's comment: 'It is Europe that articulates the Orient.'

More recently within East Asia (China, Korea and Japan) 'Asia' has been increasingly appropriated to refer to the peoples of those countries, distinguishing them from peoples from other parts of the Asian continent (Acharya 2008, Part I; Schoppa 2007). This excludes, as 'Asians,' peoples from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, many from Southeast Asia, as well as Tibetans, Uighurs, Mongolians, and others in Central Asia. This arrogation of 'Asia' to mean *East Asia* is increasingly employed to draw a distinction between what is posited as an advanced Asia in contrast to a 'lesser' Asia (or maybe regions that are not 'Asia' at all). This 'non-Asia' is made up of poorer or less developed states like Bangladesh or Mongolia. Increasingly 'Asia' is being read to mean affluent China, or of peoples of Chinese origin, in much the same way that 'Western' is often read to mean American. To rewrite Said's observation, we might say that it is China that articulates Asia today.

Some Asian leaders have boldly claimed that there is a uniform 'voice of Asia' (for example, Ishihara 1995; Mahathir 1995; Mahbubani 1998).

They suggest that Asians are more diligent and loyal workers; that they hold to higher moral codes than those in a morally degenerate West; that Asians are more committed to fulfilling their social obligations than Westerners intent on asserting their individualism. Chris Patten has rightly dismissed these kinds of claims as ‘Asian values ballyhoo’ (1999, p. 195). However there is an opposite side to the counterfeit coin of ‘Asian values.’ Writers like Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington have written books redolent with Western triumphalism, implying that in the aftermath of the Cold War, America and its Western allies had proven the pre-eminence of the ‘West’ over the ‘Rest’ and that therefore its achievements are of universal relevance (Fukuyama 1992; Huntington 1996). Huntington warned that the West’s greatest achievements were in danger of being over-shadowed by a ‘clash of civilizations’ in which anti-modern (or anti-Western) forces would be mobilized to clash with the ‘West’ with the intention of destabilizing it, if not destroying it. We may rightly dismiss these claims as Western ballyhoo.

The exaggerated claims by supporters of Asian values are contradicted by centuries-old ethnic and cultural pluralisms that make plain that there is no such thing as a monolithic, over-arching, or uniform ‘Asian’ cultural, historical or political discourse. What we have instead is a complex pluralism in which not only are the great civilizational traditions dynamically present (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam) but also a host of localised religio-cultural practices, linguistic turns, and socio-economic institutions, as well as external influences imposed by colonialism. Many of these traditions are re-grouping and reasserting themselves as previous constraints are dissolving. This process has hastened as the Cold War recedes, leading to transformations in cultural alignments, economies, social structures and political systems right across the contemporary Asian continent. A reified understanding of ‘Asia’ is therefore at odds with contemporary developments in the region. As Breslin and Wilson remind us: ‘the search for a once-and-for-all single definition of the Asian region, and a correspondingly regional organisation embodying this definition, is not only misguided, but counterproductive’ (2015, p. 128).

In the Conclusion (Chap. 8) it is proposed that Australia can – and should – make a positive contribution to the emerging cosmopolitanism of Asia through a regular and sophisticated exercise of niche diplomacy characteristic of a middle power seeking recognition and influence as a ‘global citizen.’ This will require a transformed middle power imagining to be achieved by removing the educational and related cultural barriers that contribute to Australia’s awkward partnering in its region. This

awkwardness is becoming more evident as changes take place across parts of Asia, pointing to the fact that the world has embarked on an era of Asian ascendance.

THE ASIAN CENTURY?

Paul Keating once colourfully observed that ‘every galah in every pet shop is now talking about the Asian Century’ (quoted by Evans 2012). According to the breathless prose of former *Economist* editor Bill Emmott, the Asian Century ‘will form the single biggest and most beneficial economic development in this twenty-first century, providing dynamism, trade, technological innovation and growth that will help us all’ (2008, p. 284). In a similar vein Kishore Mahbubani announced the coming of what he termed ‘the new Asian hemisphere’ based on ‘the irresistible shift of global power to the east’ (2008). Pankaj Mishra observed that, ‘As the West retreats into parochial neuroses, Asian countries appear more outward looking, confident and optimistic’ (2012, p. 296). President Xi Jinping’s advocacy for a global economy at the 2017 World Economic Forum in the face of Donald Trump’s threats to impose tariff barriers on imports to the United States underlines Mishra’s point.

Despite the triumphalism characterizing many of the conversations about an Asian Century— or what is better understood as an ascending Asia – there are still millions of people across the continent who are not benefitting from its loudly trumpeted triumphs. Governance failures, corruption, endemic poverty, malnutrition, disease pandemics, famines and floods (increasingly related to climate change), defiant transnational crime syndicates, terrorist attacks, repressively authoritarian regimes – these are everyday realities still dogging many Asian states and societies while devastating human security in the region and the world (Dupont 2001; Heshmati et al. 2015; Camilleri 2012). As Chulalongkorn University’s Thitinan Pongsudhirak points out: ‘In Cambodia, for example, an estimated four million people live on less than \$1.25 per day; 37 percent of Cambodian children under five years old suffer from malnutrition’ (2014, p. 49). In the Philippines policies aimed at reducing poverty have had disappointing results (Asian Development Bank 2009). Meanwhile the Rohingya in Rakhine State in Myanmar (Burma) are daily facing vicious ethnic cleansing campaigns at the hands of fundamentalist Buddhists and the Burmese military (Bhattacharya 2015). Millions of Bangladeshies still live below the poverty line (IMF 2013). In Sri Lanka there is on-going

persecution of Tamils (White 2014). Counterproductive campaigns are being waged against alienated Muslims in southern Thailand and in Mindanao in the Philippines (Liow 2006). Murderous campaigns conducted by the Taliban are continuing relentlessly against Hazaras and other Muslim minorities in Afghanistan (Monsutti 2005). A report to the United Nations by Michael Kirby has documented the unconscionable repression of North Korea's subjects by its brutal government (2014). And despite the growth occurring in contemporary India and China, those countries' economies are still a long way from alleviating the plights of millions of their rural poor (Niño-Zarazúa and Addison 2012). It is difficult to pinpoint precisely what benefits, if any, all of these post-colonial 'wretched of the earth' have to gain from an ascendant Asia. Moreover all the signs suggest that their plight is likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

You don't need to be a card-carrying post-modernist to discern the ideological grabs for power and the grand narrative-making that cheer leaders of an ascendant Asia on the one hand and doomsayers on the other would have us believe. The days of a Cold War narrative insisting that global order can only be achieved when great powers are locked into a balance of power are now far behind us. The myriad mini-narratives lumped together under nebulous notions like the 'Asian Century' for example constitute anything but a single coherent understanding of the region. The contemporary transformations now occurring in Asia must not be reduced to a rehashed version of the 1990s Asian values debates and/or a fearful anticipation of potential clashes between a declining West and the resurging 'Rest.' However, there should be no doubt that following the collapse of the Soviet Union, there have been shifts occurring in the global distribution of power. And some – *but not all* – of the most auspicious of those shifts are occurring in Asia. Clearly anticipations of an ascendant Asia have to be treated cautiously in seeking to establish their relevance to Australian foreign policy.

THEORIES

International Relations scholars have a wide range of theoretical tools at their disposal to help understand the 'great complexities and variations' in the making of foreign policy (Gyngell and Wesley 2007, p. 17). While realism in its various iterations has been the dominant theoretical paradigm in the discipline, other approaches have emerged to challenge,

refine or redefine its theoretical perspectives (Reus-Smit and Snidal 2008, Part III). Former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans has written in an ironical vein:

You can forget about tenure track unless you can confidently draw out the distinctions between classical, post-classical, neo-, defensive and offensive realists; and on the other side between idealists and liberals, and then between a miscellany of neo-, institutional and other-hyphenated sub-species of the latter [...] Cutting across the Idealist-Realist axis is [...] the division between Constructivists at one end of the scale – who are primarily moved by the notion that norms and ideas really matter – and Rationalists, who are not so persuaded. And then of course, out in a space of their own, are a miscellany of Post-Modernist and related worldviews of varying degrees of impenetrability, which my late and dear friend Tony Judt has sweepingly, but I suspect not entirely unfairly, described as “narcissistic obscurantism” [...] All these, you will appreciate, are just the mainstream labels: you wouldn’t want to know how many other eddies and pools, and whole inland seas, there are in IR theory. (2011, p. 124)

The analysis offered in this book seeks to draw from an ‘analytically eclectic’ range of those tools–‘to follow,’ as Katzenstein and Sil recommend, ‘the road of problem-driven rather than paradigm-driven research’ (2008, p. 110). Steve Yetiv refers to this as the ‘integrated approach’ to political analysis: ‘presenting different perspectives on government behavior, testing them against the record, integrating the resulting insights into better explanations of government behavior, and bridging areas of theory that tend to be treated as separate’ (2004, p. 2). This approach helps us remove the blinkers imposed on political analysis through a form of theoretical over-determination where establishing the coherence of a theory becomes more important than the empirical realities of which it aims to make sense. Theoretical over-determination harms the analysis, rendering it otiose.

However, this is not to question the importance of theory *per se*. Professedly a-theoretical analyses of international politics are equally problematic to over-determining theories. What C. Wright Mills once famously described as ‘abstracted empiricism’ (the fetishizing of empirical fact gathering via narrowly stipulated positivist methodologies) can also be misleading (1959, ch. 2). Accounts based on abstracted empiricism are generally slaves to an unconscious or camouflaged theoretical agenda. On the other hand, theories that are open to regular empirical testing, and

factual inquiry skeptically informed by ‘middle range’ theories, are likely to lead to a sharper focus on relevant facts and clearer understandings of the issues involved (Merton 1968, p. 39). They are infinitely more useful than a simple-minded focus on ‘the facts’ or purblind conformity to a reductive theoretical paradigm. Gertrude Himmelfarb’s sagacity remains eternally apposite: ‘there are such things as truth and reality and [...] there is a connection between them’ (1994, p. xii). Good political theory respects this connection.

The negative consequence of *disconnecting* truth from reality is demonstrated by the controversy in realist International Relations theory following the demise of the Soviet Union. Realism’s focus, as Mark Beeson notes, is ‘on a relatively limited set of structural variables, in this case an inter-state system composed of similar sovereign entities under conditions of anarchy’ (2017, pp. 7–8). However, despite its paradigmatic sway in the discipline, realism under-estimated evidence signaling the collapse of the USSR (Wohlforth 2010). (Although realists were certainly not the only scholars to have experienced this failure of theoretical acumen.) Moreover, realists seem not to have anticipated the alacrity with which many former east European allies of the old Soviet Union sought entry to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and alliances with the West rather than flocking to the Russian Federation to balance the influence of American power in Europe. Realism’s state-centricity and obsessive theoretical focus on the power of superpowers – especially the United States – deflected attention away from the peoples, their identities, ideas and values, and the structures and events that ultimately brought down the Soviet Union and transformed the Cold War (Gaddis 1992–3). Gyngell and Wesley are right to suggest that this oversight should have resulted in ‘much greater discrediting’ of realism in International Relations theory (2007, p. 17). They partly blame the ‘precipitous decline in foreign policy analysis since the 1970s’ on the disparity between realist perspectives and the making of foreign policy and its diplomatic outcomes. Nonetheless, in defending his ‘critical realist’ approach, Professor Beeson makes an important point:

[...] while ideas, norms and culture may be influential, they operate within a constraining array of structures that delimit the policy options and even the thinking of policymakers. Critical realists are consequently right to stress the ontological primacy and real impact of such structures, they are also right to recognise that the future is indeterminate. (2017, p. 8)

In exploring those constraining structures in relation to Australian foreign policy one is immediately conscious of the country's dependent middle power imagining constraining the country's agency in dealing with its region and the world.

Gareth Evans has pointed out that in the real world of diplomacy 'good ideas and values sometimes carry the day but often they don't; realities constantly intrude, and compromises constantly have to be made' (2011, p. 126). Coming to grips with middle power imagining involves an investigation of values, identities, and cultural frameworks. Within these frameworks we can see how ideas and understandings are constructed about how leaders and followers understand their state, and how that state operates in domestic, regional and international contexts. What Hurd criticizes as the 'materialism' of realism and the 'rationalism' of neoliberalism are constraints on the scholarly analysis of middle powers (2010, p. 300). A constructivist approach, on the other hand, begins with an appreciation of 'how people and states think and behave in world politics [...] premised on their understanding of the world around them, which includes their own beliefs about the world, the identities they hold about themselves and others, and the shared understandings and practices in which they participate' (2010, pp. 312–13). This approach is helpful in facilitating an analysis of middle power imagining and how this influences Australian foreign policy by going to the core of ideas and values driving that policy.

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Middle Powers and Awkward Partners

IMAGINING STATES

When citizens identify with their state they engage in a widely shared act of imagining within the political culture of that state. The idea of ‘imagining’ being explored here echoes Benedict Anderson’s thesis that nations are as much *imagined* into being as they are constituted by the state’s political, judicial, economic, and military institutions. Nations, Anderson (2006) concludes, are ‘imagined communities’ and, particularly since the end of World War II, it is from such communities that states are born. The constitutional historian Helen Irving agrees: ‘Before a nation can be formed, a group of separate populations must imagine themselves part of a larger national community. Then they must imagine it as natural and inevitable that such a community should exist’ (1999, p. 25).

Yaron Ezrahi explains that much of the legitimacy of states and the potency (or otherwise) of the power they wield are grounded, in part, in what he describes as ‘necessary political fictions’ (2012, p. 83). These emerge from a cultural miscellany of prevailing norms and values, religious doctrines, cultural symbols, structured actions, belief systems, ideological creeds, and propaganda. Influenced by these factors, citizens are induced, persuaded, socialized, or cajoled into imagining that they belong to a grander, sometimes comforting, and at other times remote, mysterious and sometimes threatening collectivity called the state. Chengxin Pan