



THE GOVERNMENT'S FOREIGN POLICY IS FAILING AUSTRALIANS

IPAN RESPONSE TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT FOREIGN POLICY WHITE PAPER, May 2018. [\(See also IPAN's submission to the White Paper\)](#)

INTRODUCTION

The Foreign Policy White Paper (WP) is a document which comprehensively covers issues related to Australia's foreign policy. IPAN's strong criticism is largely of the values and priorities underpinning the foreign policy described and the failure to act in Australians' long-term interests and realize Australia's potential to foster peace and cooperation in a changing world.

The discussion paper for the WP, inviting submissions stated "*Australia's foreign policy needs to be grounded in a clear-eyed assessment of Australia's interests*", and asked, "*How should we define Australia's national interests in a changing world, how should our values underpin Australia's foreign policy*", and "*what should we do?*" These are all pertinent questions.

We disagree with the government's answers to these questions and the priorities identified. On a number of priority issues, we find that the government's stated objectives are not backed up by practical effective actions and are in a number of instances, clearly counterproductive or hypocritical.

CONTRADICTIONS

In the foreword, the Prime Minister states:

*"We are creating the competitiveness and flexibility **our economy**¹ needs to thrive in an interdependent, fast-changing world. But we must also acknowledge we are facing the most complex and challenging geostrategic environment since the early years of the Cold War. We cannot assume that prosperity and security just happen by themselves.*

*"The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper is grounded in our national foundations of freedom, equality, **the rule of law** and mutual respect. Our commitment to those values and the institutions which uphold them gives us confidence and credibility in the global*

¹ Our emphases in bold throughout the document.

competition for customers, capital and talent. That same commitment serves to strengthen the stability of our region and reduce opportunities for coercion. "This White Paper shows how our economic and security interests are converging.

"More than ever, Australia must be sovereign, not reliant. We must take responsibility for our own security and prosperity while recognising we are stronger when sharing the burden of leadership with trusted partners and friends."

This statement and the thrust of the WP demonstrates that the government equates Australia's interests as primarily economic interests, and considers the global interest only peripherally in the document. It places most emphasis on competitiveness and economic benefits to Australia, 'free' trade, China's increasing power in the world and especially the region, the alliance with the US, and boosting Australia's presence in the Pacific (no doubt in response to China's activities there).

It is therefore a White Paper based on fear and narrow economic self-interest.

We have no issue with Australia aiming to be a prosperous country, but it should be in the context of global needs for prosperity and peace. Further, Australia's prosperity is largely a result of domestic economic management, as well as trade, and while this document should more properly have been called a 'Trade White Paper', it purports to be a foreign policy document so we will address it in that light.

In relation to China, there is no doubt that China's power is growing globally, but the response to that should not be to cling more closely to the US's military coat tails as this document contends. That is a cowardly and counterproductive stance which does not enhance Australia's nor the world's security.

The WP places emphasis on 'soft power', but fails to realize that the most enduring soft power comes with policies and actions that people respect, not just financial enducements.

PRIORITIES

1. Australian Sovereignty

The Prime Minister puts sovereignty front and centre in his foreword –

"More than ever, Australia must be sovereign, not reliant. We must take responsibility for our own security and prosperity while recognising we are stronger when sharing the burden of leadership with trusted partners and friends."

He fails to recognize the contradiction within the statement. Australia cannot be sovereign and self reliant when we have US Marines based in Darwin and US bases which contribute to and through the drone program of extrajudicial executions in many countries, to instability in the world.

US foreign policy since the Second World War has been responsible for coups (against Mossadegh in Iran in 1953 and Allende in Chile in September 11, 1973, just to name two), illegal invasions against sovereign countries (eg, Vietnam, Iraq), propping up of dictators (too many to name) and

widespread misery and poverty in the quest for its own global economic and military dominance.

The White Paper does not mention the parlous state of the American Presidential-style democracy with its failed voting system, reliance on millionaire candidates and inadequate constraints on the President. The result: the election of the most inept and dangerous American President in its history, with disastrous results for peace and diplomacy worldwide as well as the poor in America.

Relying on the US for our 'security' is a continuing thread throughout the White Paper – “Our alliance with the United States is central to Australia’s approach to the Indo–Pacific. Without strong US political, economic and security engagement, power is likely to shift more quickly in the region and it will be more difficult for Australia to achieve the levels of security and stability we seek. To support our objectives in the region, the Government will broaden and deepen our alliance cooperation, including through the United States Force Posture Initiatives” (p.4).

With the growing influence of China as an economic power, Australia’s long-held fear of the ‘threat from the north’ has reared its head again.

Instead of undertaking a calm analysis of the global situation, the Australian government is cowering behind the ANZUS alliance and abrogating our sovereignty.

Can we be independent without moving into a pro China stance?

Australia has the potential to play an important role in promoting peace in the region. If Australia strongly criticized Trump’s tweets and threats, it would be a message which would be received in Washington.

In relation to trade, the document emphasizes the dangers of protectionist policies and promotes the benefits of free trade agreements. However, it fails to identify the issues of Investor State Dispute Resolution in such agreements which present real dangers to Australia’s sovereignty.

2. Two major threats to life on this planet – climate change and nuclear war

Neither of these existential threats are given priority in the White Paper.

Climate Change

We know severe weather events are happening now and they will become worse as we continue to emit greenhouse gases, and feedbacks such as the melting of the permafrost are adding to the catastrophe. But there is very little focus in the White Paper on climate change. An example:

“In the Pacific, the challenges are weak governance, corruption and vulnerability to economic and environmental shocks...Climate change, environmental degradation and the demand for sustainable sources of food, water and energy will be political, economic and security disrupters **over the longer term**. These challenges could undermine stability in some countries, especially fragile states, and contribute to conflict and irregular migration. They also affect our economic interests...

“Responses to climate change will be an important influence on international affairs and Australia’s economy. Australia has the renewable resources and products, capabilities and services in low-emissions technologies to benefit from the transition of the global economy to a low-emissions growth model. At the same time, **buoyant demand in the Indo-Pacific will support our exports of high-quality coal and LNG, and potentially uranium.**” (p. 33)

These comments show a lack of understanding of the urgency of addressing climate change, and hypocrisy in that Australia has been a drag on global efforts to address climate change and has refused to take effective measures domestically. It has refused to recognize the opportunities in the renewables industries and discouraged their growth – the hypocrisy is indeed hard to believe.

No clearer evidence of the bankruptcy of the Australian government’s failure to address climate change could be found than its intention to continue to export coal.

The Great Barrier Reef gets a mention but there is no associated mention of climate change, only that the Reef is “*under pressure including from warmer sea temperatures and ocean acidification caused by climate change, outbreaks of coral disease and crown-of-thorns starfish, and impacts from land run-off and fishing.*” (p.95)

The White Paper lauds Australian government efforts in relation to the World Heritage Area, and:

“*Drawing on these efforts, Australia is helping drive international action to conserve the world’s coral reefs—through our support for the International Coral Reef Initiative, the work of our leading marine science institutions, and practical support to build capacity in partner countries to manage reefs sustainably.*” (p.95)

Again, hollow words when there is a lack of strong action on climate change.

This is the flavour of the comments on climate change throughout the document.

Nuclear War

America’s current inability to negotiate with North Korea, Trump’s threats to unleash a ‘fury the like of the world has never seen’, refusal to be part of the UN Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons and pre-occupation with tweeting insults incessantly, creates a threat of nuclear war which is almost unprecedented.

There is no discussion in the White Paper of the likely outcomes of a nuclear war. Most references are to the dangers posed by North Korea’s missile program and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. China gives indications that it understands that a nuclear war is not an option any more, given the dangers of it spreading and leading as it then would to a nuclear winter. **There is no discussion in the White Paper of this issue or indication that the Australian government recognizes the catastrophic consequences of a nuclear winter.**

The policy in relation to North Korea relies on apply ever-more economic pressure to them, rather than engaging in negotiations. Australia does not have an embassy in North Korea.

“We act with partners to counter North Korea’s proliferation activities. North Korea’s purported withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and defiance of United Nations Security Council resolutions weaken the global restraints on the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, including ballistic missiles. These restraints have greatly protected Australia’s security interests. (p.42-3)

“We will stay focused on nuclear safety and security, which will grow in importance as more countries invest in nuclear power. (p.83-4)

“In an uncertain security environment, including North Korea’s development of a nuclear and missile capability, the Government recognises that only the nuclear and conventional military capabilities of the United States offer effective deterrence against the possibility of nuclear threats against Australia and other allies of the United States such as the Republic of Korea and Japan.” (p.84)

The US could halt its military exercises with South Korea and its military build up on bases such as JeJu Island (opposed by the people there), and try negotiating with North Korea as steps more likely to lessen tensions in the region. **These options are not discussed in the White Paper.**

There is no mention in the White Paper of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Australia played a negative and destructive role in those negotiations, undermining our reputation as a nation which places priority on the destruction of nuclear weapons.

3. International development assistance

Much of the White Paper relies on actions through our overseas aid program. However the hypocrisy of this is evident when it is acknowledged that our overseas aid program, at \$3.9b pa is at the lowest level ever.

Australian aid generosity is a fraction of what it once was. Australia’s share of aid to GNI is projected to decline to 0.22% in 2016-17, its [lowest level ever](#). Generosity under Menzies was twice as high as it is now, even though GNI per capita was less than half of its present level in real terms. ([The Conversation, January 31, 2017](#))

The Paper foreshadows assistance in many areas: health, climate change, migration, education, disaster relief, transnational crime, governance, science, arts – all to come from our aid program. This would be more credible if our aid program was comparable with other developed countries.

Australia, as one of the wealthiest countries in the world, has slipped to 17th place for the aid budget amongst OECD countries. We are below countries like Switzerland and Luxembourg. This is a disgrace and makes our claims of assistance in so many areas extremely hollow. The countries with the highest levels of international assistance as a % of GNI are:

- Sweden – 1.40%
- Norway – 1.05%
- Luxembourg – 0.93%
- Denmark – 0.85%
- Netherlands – 0.76%

- United Kingdom – 0.71%
- Finland – 0.56%
- Switzerland – 0.52%
- Germany – 0.52%

It is clear that our ‘leaders’ who look to America for leadership in so many areas, should instead turn their gaze to Europe, in particular Scandinavia, for positive examples of leadership.

The White Paper focuses quite a bit on PNG, Timor-Leste and the Pacific. But again our aid to PNG has often been to the benefit of Australian consultancies, rather than bringing long-lasting improvements to PNG economy and society. Our assistance to PNG students is paltry – only 128 students in 2014-2018, 449 come from Timor-Leste. We fund 5,336 students from Indonesia which is our highest level for any one country and we agree that Indonesia should be afforded priority. But PNG levels of educational assistance should be raised as a matter of urgency.

The White Paper places a lot of emphasis on ‘Soft Power’. That is as it should be. But again, that emphasis is unlikely to build enduring friendships with neighbouring countries when it is clear that our motives are fundamentally selfish and economically self-serving, with little vision of a more peaceful and equal world which bases relations on mutual benefit and cooperation.

4. Rule of Law

The White Paper mentions Australia’s support for the rule of law continually throughout the document. We support upholding the rule of law internationally, but this again is another instance where the government’s words don’t match their actions.

Australia did not comply with International law when it joined with the US with its invasion of Iraq in 2003. It has refused to hold an inquiry into that decision and refuses to change our legislation to reform our war powers to make it impossible for another Prime Minister to arbitrarily decide to send our troops into a conflict zone without even giving a reason or having a debate in parliament on such a critical decision.

Australia has not complied with the 1951 UN Refugee Convention which governs the treatment of refugees and sets out the rights of individuals who are granted asylum and the responsibilities of nations that grant asylum. Australia has signed this Convention but in recent decades has not complied with it and instead has treated people seeking asylum cruelly and inhumanely, resulting in death, or physical and mental harm to many refugees.

Instead of treating refugees with the care and compassion they need, they continue to parade their illegal treatment and to demonise asylum seekers –

“Illegal maritime arrivals will not be settled in Australia. The Government’s Operation Sovereign Borders has effectively broken the business model of smuggling networks, although they continue periodically to test our resolve. The primary deterrent to any resumption remains robust border policies. Boat turn-backs, regional processing of protection claims and settlement in third countries will remain integral to our response. (p.72)

This is a disgraceful situation of which many Australians are ashamed, and which has harmed

Australia's reputation internationally as a decent and law-abiding country.

Australia follows the US lead on many issues, one of the clearest being our relations with Israel. Australia has on many occasions been one of four or five countries voting with the US against criticisms of **Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian Territories**. This is an abrogation of our sovereignty, as well as a **clear violation of international law**.

"Israel is also an important partner for Australia, with our bilateral ties underpinned by people-to-people links. The security of Israel will remain an abiding concern for Australia. Given major differences between the parties, resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will remain very difficult. Australia will continue to advocate a two-state solution as the only viable path to peace." (p.81)

Israel has made a two-state solution to the situation impossible with continuing growth of settlements and making life unbearable for the Palestinians under military occupation. There are currently more than 700,000 'settlers' in the occupied West Bank, who are unlikely to be evacuated, making a two-state solution impossible. There is no mention of this in the White Paper.

The continuing entourage of Australian politicians enjoying Israeli-paid trips to Israel is also an example of foreign interference in Australian politics and should be immediately banned. The Prime Minister's presence at the Beersheba commemorations and lauding of the Israeli government's values was another clear example of Australia's low priority given to international law.

Australia claims to uphold human rights and aims for a non-permanent member seat on the UN Security Council in 2029-30. But it has **failed to speak out clearly on human rights in many situations – the Israeli military occupation, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, to name a few**.

"Australia will promote human rights through constructive bilateral dialogue. Where appropriate, we will work with countries to advance and protect human rights through development assistance and humanitarian support. At times, and especially in the case of gross human rights violations, we will apply sanctions." (p. 88-89)

Australia's treatment of Timor-Leste since independence has not been in accordance with international law and has been blatantly self-interested to a large extent.

"Our engagement is anchored in common interests. Stability in Papua New Guinea, the wider Pacific and Timor-Leste, for example, is vital to our ability to defend Australia's northern approaches, secure our borders and protect our exclusive economic zone." (p.99)

There is no apology for Australia's spying on Timor-Leste in 2004 during the negotiations regarding the sharing of oil and gas resources in the Timor Sea, which ended in a case in the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague. The dispute was apparently resolved in the Hague in September 2017.

Australia's record in complying with the international rules-based order has not been good, so the Foreign Policy White Paper's calls for other countries to comply with such rules, must lose force.

CONCLUSION

The Foreign Policy White Paper fails to identify values, policy interests and actions which would contribute to a vision of a being a valuable global citizen and acting in the long-term interests of Australians. The words are not backed up by existing performance, policies and honest intention.

What does being a 'valuable global citizen' entail? We believe it means making contributions according to the means of a wealthy country in global terms, to global peace, minimization of poverty and enhancement of the global environment. The values entailed in being a responsible global citizen are those of caring for humanity, generosity in sharing resources and generosity of spirit.

The White Paper fails particularly in dealing with the areas of sovereignty, existential threats of climate change and nuclear weapons, overseas aid, as well as compliance with the rule of law.

The Foreign Policy White Paper fails to outline a positive vision for Australia's governance and future.

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