

***Fear of Abandonment:  
Australia in the World Since 1942***

Allan Gyngell  
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Reviewer: Chris Farnham

This book is an essential starting point for those who look to a career in foreign and security policy, whether that be as practitioner or academic. The author displays a deep understanding and respect of Australia's history in the world and the ability to communicate complex issues without undue complication. Allan Gyngell walks the reader through the development of Australia's own foreign policy from the Second World War up until early 2017 and does it without self-indulgent prose. And that makes it accessible to anyone who enjoys history or even just a great read.

The book demonstrates that Australia was, in the pre-war 1930s, forced to accept that its national interest could not be served by way of London. However, this realisation was not arrived at whilst bravely looking out over our 'near north'. Australia's development of an independent foreign policy came with the fear that it was leading the Empire toward disintegration. And, according to Gyngell, it is this fear of abandonment that drives Australia to rest its foreign policy on three main pillars: the need to embed with strong allies, the support of a rules-based order and engagement with Asia.

As the book travels through Australia's relationship with the world in chronological order from the end of WWII onward it displays how often these three pillars of policy have worked to achieve Australia's national interest. But these policies also sometimes trapped Australia's leaders in a dilemma of interests and values.

Having strong allies affords a middle-to-small power like Australia flexibility it would not otherwise enjoy. But strong allies can also force smaller powers into making uncomfortable choices. This occurred when US President Nixon bombed the civilian centres of Hanoi and Haiphong to pressure North Vietnam for negotiations. Australian ministers labelled the act as brutal and the American administration as maniacs and murderers. As a result, Australia's diplomatic relations with its great power ally were placed in deep freeze by Washington.

Engaging with Asia allows Australia the chance to shape a more benign environment. But it has also forced Australia to compromise on its values. With Cold War competition playing out between China and Soviet Russia, Vietnam invaded Cambodia under the pretext of the atrocities being carried out by the Khmer Rouge. To help contain Soviet Communism Australia was forced to condemn the Vietnamese invasion, thereby implicitly supporting an abhorrent government in Cambodia. Engaging with Asia allowed Australia to influence the region in support of its interests but sometimes at the cost of its national values.

A rules-based order can provide the lesser powers of the world a level of certainty and protection they would not enjoy in a world ruled by raw power. Yet in 2003 Australia was required to consider which pillar of foreign policy offered the greatest strength to the nation: the protection of a strong ally or the rules-based order. After the 2001 terror attacks the United States would not be deterred from invading Iraq to ostensibly rid it of weapons of mass destruction and terrorists. Without a UN mandate and with some creative legal advice the case was made for invasion and requests were made for Australia to commit to the invading force. Australia was caught between laws that condemn the preventative use of force, and supporting our great power partner in military action.

Coming from a background in policy, diplomacy and intelligence Gyngell offers the reader an insider's view of the drivers of Australia's foreign policy. Gyngell reveals the people behind the policy, together with their visions and beliefs – some based on seeking the betterment of humanity, some based on the responsibility to a constituency.

For former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating, Australia's path ought to have been to become a republic and to "go to Asia as we are, not with the ghost of empire.... Or as a US deputy". He designed the grand vision of how Australia should be in the world but left much of the actual policymaking and diplomacy to his Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans. Evans, Gyngell explains, had a disproportionate impact on Australia's support for and development of a rules-based order. Evans' time in office coincided with a drastic change in the world order, the proliferation (and use) of chemical weapons, and a heavy focus on human rights, human security and environmental protection.

History is studied for many reasons but arguably the most important reason is to save us from repeating mistakes. This book does a wonderful job in doing that, especially so when it looks at Pauline Hanson's first term in parliament. Her background as a (small) business person was cited as an element of her outsider credentials. Her uncomfortable fit with a traditional conservative party, her disregard for political correctness, opposition to immigration from unfamiliar cultures and her representation of Australians

who believed that they had been left behind by economic and social change ring familiar for readers who follow contemporary US politics.

Some patterns can't be avoided. After China's efforts in 1996 to intimidate Taiwan with live fire exercises Gyngell explains how Prime Minister Howard voiced support for Taiwan and the deployment of two US aircraft carrier groups to the area. Not long after, Australia's primary industries minister visited Taiwan, Prime Minister Howard met with the Dalai Lama and the Coalition government repudiated China for its nuclear tests. Come September China banned ministerial visits from Australia and the Australian ambassador in Beijing could not gain access to any Chinese officials. As Australia currently experiences a similar 'diplomatic deep-freeze' this book reminds us that history is not just an exercise in nostalgia, its lessons are often pointed, informative and directly related to contemporary experiences.

Reading the introduction and conclusion, one could feel a little short-changed. While the discussion in these chapters is profound and the arguments are thought-provoking, the 244 pages in between the introduction and conclusion are primarily a log of Australia's post-WWII foreign policy that do not display the author's talent for articulating the 'so what' discussion. But make no mistake, this a fantastic book and will hopefully be required reading for all budding Australian diplomats.

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