Moral Triumphalism in Recent Australian Foreign Policy: Harsh Lessons from Timor-Leste and the Solomon Islands

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Abstract

Following the 1999 intervention to quell the transitional violence in East Timor, the Australian Government began to vociferously promote itself as a defender and spreader of "freedom and democracy" in the Asia-Pacific region. This was followed, in 2003, with the surprising policy reversal that saw the insertion of the Australian-led intervention force in the Solomon Islands to stop civil violence in that country and begin building democratic institutions and a free society. Once again, the case was made that Australia was a force for good in the region and was prepared to take a prominent role in spreading Western values to those that lacked them. Much of this humanitarian rhetoric, however, has been challenged in the light of the chaotic scenes in both Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands in 2006. This paper will argue that the claims of moral triumph and superiority that have accompanied the Australian interventions have had and will continue to have negative consequences for the people of Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands – as has been the case for the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan – and may even generate otherwise avoidable tensions with other regional powers. The case will be made, in this context, for a more careful and conservative approach to regional engagement in order to avoid perpetual repetition of the social breakdown in our neighbourhood and to prevent Australian policy-makers from developing a dangerously over-inflated sense of their position and power in the Asia-Pacific.

Introduction

In an interview on Australian talk-back radio on the 1st of August this year, Prime Minister John Howard argued that the Australian military needed to be expanded due to the fact that "you are going to for years into the future have a lot of Solomon

Islands-type calls on our defence force."[1] Such a statement is troubling for a variety

of reasons, not least of which was the call for the introduction of national service that

were made by former head of the military Admiral Chris Barrie at around the same

time as Howard's comment.[2] If the region is in suh a parlous state and is likely to get

worse in the years ahead, then we need to start asking more serous questions about

what has gone wrong and what an interventionist response might entail. We need to

consider why Australia considers itself "responsible" for carrying out such

interventions, and we need to understand what the potential dangers of an

interventionist foreign policy might be. In making these enquiries, the examples of

intervention in East Timor and Solomon Islands provide a great deal of insight. Both

can be used to illustrate the centrality of moral arguments in the Australian case for

intervention, and both demonstrate the severe difficulties and high costs of

maintaining an interventionist force and (re)building states that are considered to have

"failed."

In the analysis to follow, I will set out the conservative or classical realist

objection to moral universalism, humanitarianism, and the interventionism that

accompanies it. I will particularly focus upon the highly influential works of Carl

Schmitt, E.H. Carr, and Hans Morgenthau in establishing this argument. This will be

followed by discussions of Australian moral triumphalism in the cases of East Timor

is 1999 and Solomon Islands in 2003, illustrating that the Australian Government has

indeed chosen to justify its interventions in region in universal moral terms that can be

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[1] *Interview with Steve Price and Dave Harrison, Radio 4TO Townsville* (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 1 August 2006 [cited 15 August 2006]); available from http://www.pm.gov.au/news/interviews/Interview2053.html.
[2] See Chris Barrie, "Procurement," in *Growth 57* (Canberra: Committee for Economic Development of Australia, 2006). Barrie's call for national service were rejected by the Defence Minister Brendan Nelson, but in the current climate of increases in defence spending and continuing 'war on terror' paranoia, it would not be at all surprising if the Prime Minister begins to bring the idea of national service onto the agenda in the months ahead.

subjected to conservative critique. Finally, I will briefly discuss the outbreaks of violence in both Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands in the first half of 2006, before going on to argue that the ongoing trouble in those countries, combined with a variety of other Australian foreign policy decisions over recent years, indicate the potential dangers that are accruing as Australia continues to pursue an expansionist moral agenda.

The Conservative Critique of Universal Moralism

It was perhaps the German legal theorist, Carl Schmitt, who, writing of the failures of the Weimar Republic, best pinpointed the dangers of an emergent liberal humanitarianism in international politics as a recipe for ongoing wars of intervention. Within the context of his broader reading of (international) politics as the process of demarcating 'Friend' (freund) from 'Enemy' (fiend),[3] Schmitt saw the development of a 'moralistic' doctrine of war, supported by the thin liberal legalism of the League of Nations, as a grave danger.[4] The key indicator of the emergence of this problem lay in the increasing use of the term 'humanity' as the basis of a grievance which could justify war. Thus the problem, according to Schmitt, was that:

> Humanity as such cannot wage a war because it has no enemy, at least not on this planet… When a state fights its political enemy in the name of humanity, it is not a war for the sake of humanity, but a war wherein a particular state seeks to usurp a universal concept against its military opponent. At the expense of its opponent, it tries to identify

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[3] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. Tracy Strong, Translated from Das Begriff der Politischen [2nd Ed. 1934] ed. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1996). For a brief commentary on the significance of this distinction in broader 'identity politics' terms see Iver B. Neumann, "Self and Other in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 2, no. 2 (1996): 147.

[4] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*.

itself with humanity in the same way as one can misuse peace, justice, progress, and civilization in order to claim these as one's own and deny the same to the enemy.[5]

For Schmitt, this characterisation of war as a battle for 'humanity' was indicative of the evaporation of any sense of control or 'formalism' in the conduct of war, leaving the potential to unleash horrific wars of annihilation which had previously been constrained by the European public law notion of war as a "duel between formal states."[6] In contrast to this more conservative and 'balanced' legal tradition, guided by the principles of sovereignty inaugurated in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the new legal moralism of liberal internationalists such as Woodrow Wilson would, according to Schmitt, lead to war without restraint, as:

> To confiscate the word humanity, to invoke and monopolize such a term probably has certain incalculable effects, such as denying the enemy the quality of being human and declaring him to be an *outlaw of humanity*; and war can thereby be driven to the most extreme inhumanity.[7]

Koskenniemi further summarises Schmitt's argument, with particular reference to the idea of a humanitarian war, in explaining that:

> The humanitarian war becomes a war of annihilation (*Vernichtungskrieg*), a global civil war where the enemy does not have the dignity of a State and resistance will appear as "the illegal and immoral resistance of a few delinquents, troublemakers, pirates and gangsters."[8]

Basing his argument on this fundamental question of definition, Schmitt contended that the notion of humanitarian war that he identified pointed to a larger crisis within international law, which he saw as being entirely beholden to political power and,

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[5] Ibid., 54.

[6] Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The rise and fall of international law, 1870-1960* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 432.

[7] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 54. Emphasis added.

[8] Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The rise and fall of international law, 1870-1960*, 434. For a discussion on the significance of Schmitt's conception of the 'global civil war' see Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 2-3.

consequently, imperialist ambition.[9]   Hence, any attempt to claim authority for international acts through international law was, in effect, a particular *political* claim rather than a universal *moral* or *legal* claim, and should be acknowledged as such, not blurred by the rhetoric of 'humanity'.[10]

This perspective on the practical outcome of a universal liberal politics was later rendered familiar – albeit in slightly different terms - in the critiques of liberal 'utopianism' put forward in the shocking light of World War Two. The classical Realist response to the apparent failure of the 'liberal experiment' in international relations and the universalist legalism that accompanied it, emerging at the onset and flourishing at the end of the World War Two, is well known. In critiquing the emphasis on universal principles that had been developed in European schools of international relations in the interwar years, E. H. Carr made the argument that all new academic disciplines begin with a period of idealism before 'reality' shows it's ugly face and revisions are made by necessity. The embryonic discipline of International Relations, built upon the enthusiastic idealism of Woodrow Wilson in the aftermath of the World War One was, according to Carr, merely following this pattern.[11] As a consequence of the naïve and delusional optimism regarding the

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[9] For a discussion of this approach see Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The rise and fall of international law, 1870-1960*, 432-436.

[10] Ibid., 434. Thus Schmitt advocated an end to the pretence of formality in international law, concluding that the end of the tradition of European international law, based around the protections of sovereignty, should now be set aside, to be replaced by a fluid politics of 'decision' which would openly reflect the friend/enemy distinction that was, for Schmitt, the basis of all political life. Yet while Schmitt may have correctly identified political power, rather than universal values of humanity, as the basis for determining international legal norms, there was still no reason why such a perspective could not be equally adopted by those who still held a profound belief in the spread of liberal democracy as the path to world peace. Indeed, it could be argued that Schmitt's notion of international law-as-power provided an even freer hand to the policy-maker intent on the propagation of universal morality, insofar as it removes the formal constraints of the laws of sovereignty that may previously have helped to shield states against intervention. This is certainly the view taken by Koskenniemi, who argues that: "Schmitt's legacy was to inaugurate a dynamic and deformalized concept of law that would show its usefulness as the symbol of the concrete order that American power was able to produce." See Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The rise and fall of international law, 1870-1960*, 483.

[11] E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), 3-11.

eventual pacification of international relations, Carr argued, liberal internationalists had adopted a fantastical and mistaken notion of 'harmony of interests' in which:

> supposedly absolute and universal principles were not principles at all, but the unconscious reflexions of national policy based on a particular interpretation of national interest at a particular time. There is a sense in which peace and co-operation between nations or classes or individuals is a common and universal end irrespective of conflicting interests and politics. There is a sense in which common interest exists in the maintenance of order, whether it be international order or 'law and order' within the nation. But as soon as the attempt is made to apply these supposedly abstract principles to a concrete political situation, they are revealed as the transparent disguises of selfish vested interests.[12]

Thus the desire for a universal morality, from this perspective, is best understood as "the product of power."[13] Through this lens, the ultimate ends of a utopian liberalism lay not in the promise of perpetual peace, but in the maintenance and expansion of a particular constellation of power. Universal ambitions, in other words, were nothing more than the expressions of a national interest as understood by powerful national leaders and it was dangerous to think otherwise.[14]

In *Politics Among Nations*, Hans Morgenthau, writing after the horror of World War Two, expanded on the initial concerns of Carr, setting out a conservative theory of diplomacy, under the ever-present umbrella of the 'balance of power', in which rational statesmen engage in behaviour which seeks to maintain the status quo, always acting within the limits of their material power.[15] From this perspective, the universal ambitions of liberals and idealists would only cause frequent imbalancing, and hence war, within the delicate anarchical system of international relations, as the

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[12] Ibid., 88-89.
[13] Ibid., 64.
[14] Ibid., 89.
[15] Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among nations: the struggle for power and peace*, 4th ed. (1967), esp. 25-33.

overzealous statesman would attempt to pour "the contents of his national morality into the now almost empty bottle of universal ethics."[16] The poverty of this approach, for Morgenthau, was evident in the fact that in the post-World War Two environment nations "oppose each other… as the standard-bearers of ethical systems…the moral code of one nation flings the challenge of its universal claim with messianic fervour into the face of another, which reciprocates in kind. Compromise, the virtue of the old diplomacy, becomes the treason of the new."[17] The outcome of this failure to recognise and accommodate plurality, and the concomitant failure to act prudently and in a compromising manner, is that:

> the world has room for only one, and the other must yield or be destroyed. Thus, carrying their idols before them, the nationalistic masses of our time meet in the international arena, each group convinced that it executes the mandate of history, that it does for humanity what it seems to do for itself, and that it fulfils a sacred mission ordained by Providence… little do they know that they meet under an empty sky from which the Gods have departed.[18]

In illustrating the kinds of dangers that could arise from the adoption of such a moral posture, Morgenthau argued that the promotion of national self-determination, a prime concern of liberal internationalists then and now, was clearly implicated in the aggressive foreign policies of Nazi Germany, insofar as Hitler used the concept "in order to disguise and justify his policies of territorial expansion."[19]

In the late 1970s, Morgenthau turned this critique of universal moralism directly toward the subject of universal human rights, in an article entitled "Human

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[16] Ibid., 246.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 249.
[19] Ibid., 91-92.

Rights and Foreign Policy."[20]   For a start, he argued, one must consider "the impossibility of enforcing the universal application of human rights." Secondly, the attempt to enforce universal human rights would not be in the national interest, as:

> the United States is incapable of consistently following the path of the defense of human rights without manoeuvring itself into a Quixotic position… In other words, the principle of the defense of human rights cannot be consistently applied in foreign policy because it can and it must come in conflict with other interests that may be more important than the defense of human rights in a particular instance.[21]

Given these limitations, Morgenthau argued that the rhetoric of universal human rights, self-determination, and anti-imperialism, so central to the theory and practice of liberal internationalism, amounted to little more than 'ambiguous ideology': a justification for a variety of new imperial claims cloaked in morally principled language.[22]

Universal moral or political principles under this system could, therefore, never be fully realised, as state actors would always be subject to the difficulties of 'decentralized authority' created by the anarchical basis of the international system. The attempt to create a universal legal system based on moral norms and utopian ends was, therefore, at best an illusion and at worst downright dangerous. Any attempt to claim the universal applicability of international law, particularly on moral grounds, would therefore lead to increased conflict as nations fight for or against the moral principles at stake. As Koskenniemi explains:

> Morgenthau agreed with Schmitt in his critique of US utopianism. It led either into a completely unrealistic expectation that one's political contenders would feel bound by agreements concluded… or it resulted in the understanding of war as a moral struggle by

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[20] The full article is available in Hans Morgenthau, "Human Rights and Foreign Policy," in *Moral Dimensions of American Foreign Policy*, ed. Kenneth W. Thompson (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1984).

[21] Hans Morgenthau, "Human Rights and Foreign Policy," in *International Human Rights in Context: Law, Politics, Morals*, ed. Henry J. Steiner and Philip Alston (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 814.

[22] Morgenthau, *Politics among nations: the struggle for power and peace*, 91-93.

'peace-loving nations' against the forces of evil; the branding of the enemy as a 'war criminal having committed an 'act of aggression'… The only policy directive can then be the extreme one: 'Crush the enemy; force him into unconditional surrender; re-educate him in the ways of democratic, peace-loving nations… a United Nations provides the finishing touch for the brave new world from which war and, in the words of Mr Cordell Hull, power politics itself will have been banished.' Like Schmitt, Morgenthau interpreted this development as an attempt to get away from politics, intrinsic to the liberal world… Such 'legalistic exercises' were outright harmful: 'At best, they have left the political issues where they found them; at worst, they have embittered international relations and thus made peaceful settlement of the great political issues more difficult.'[23]

This perspective, insofar as it views international law as little more than the transient expression of power by hegemonic states, is useful in the context of this thesis as a representation of the dangers inherent in a universal vision of humanitarian intervention for the imposition or upholding of human rights. This is because, as Morgenthau suggests, efforts at producing such an order will be subject to endless repetition, which is obviously an undesirable outcome if military means are being used to enforce humanitarian ideals.

Yet while this critique of universal humanitarianism offered by the conservative side of international relations is a useful starting point for understanding dangers of humanitarian intervention, it is ultimately unsatisfying and insufficient. The main problem with Realism as a tool for a critique of this kind is that it never escapes the epistemology and ontology of modernism, meaning that the attempt to erect a more conservative picture of international politics 'as it is' rather than 'as it ought to be' has a similar function to the appeal to universal morality inherent in of humanitarian idealism, instead positing the nation-state as the highest power in a sea

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[23] Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The rise and fall of international law, 1870-1960*, 439. Quotations taken from Hans Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest: A Critical Examination of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Knopf, 1951), 94,102.

of anarchy and danger.[24] Schmitt's alignment with the Nazis in the lead up to World War Two[25] and Morgenthau's veneration as a 'founding father' of U.S. foreign policy during the 'rational' nuclear stand-off of the Cold War are indicative of the potential dangers of such Realism.[26] So while it may well be the case that humanitarianism and universal moralism do indeed lead to an increase in the number and brutality of wars of intervention, there is a related need to question the relations of power and identity that operate at the very foundation of the nation-states themselves. In this context, therefore, the conservative critique is useful only as a starting point for identifying the dangers of Australian foreign policy. In supplementing this critique and taking it a little further, I will incorporate a measure of discourse analysis, in order to reveal the constitutive presence of an inferior 'other' at the heart of contemporary Australian foreign policy. This, I will argue, intensifies the dangers of current Australian foreign policy insofar as it leads to the institution of disciplinary regimes and the infliction of violence upon the 'lesser humans' in Australia's "backyard,"[27] as well as antagonising neighbours that are unprepared to accept the exceptionalist logic in Australia's foreign policy rhetoric.

East Timor, 1999

It is impossible to understand the emergence of a self-righteous and self-assured Australian foreign policy at the end of the twentieth century without reference to the prevailing economic situation at that time. In the wake of the Asian financial crisis

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[24] For an explanation and assessment of critical approaches toward the divisive discourses of Realism see, for example, Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: a critical (re)introduction to international relations* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994), esp. Chapters 1, 4, 8. R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[25] For an accounts of Schmitt's political life, emphasising his role in Nazi politics, see Joseph W. Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt: Theorist for the Reich* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[26] George, *Discourses of Global Politics: a critical (re)introduction to international relations*, 92-95.

[27] Patrick Walters, "PM takes the helm in region," *The Australian*, 17 May 2006.

which began in 1997 and caused economic, social, and political chaos across south-east Asia, the Australian Government applauded itself for riding out the storm unscathed, whilst connecting this apparent economic success with Australia's 'unique' liberal-democratic traditions.[28]   As 1999 began, it was clear that the Government saw Australia as the exceptional nation of the region and envisaged a more forthright policy approach to relations with neighbouring countries. Importantly, this new approach to Asia was often expressed in didactic terms, with Australia presented as the 'educator' of the Asia-Pacific, willing to help those nations that needed help, but only insofar as they were willing to help themselves.   Such terms are evident in a number of Alexander Downer's speeches in early 1999, an example of which was the statement to the Australia-Asia Institute that "just as we are helping Indonesia jump its economic hurdles, Australia is just as determined to help it successfully get over the high jump bar of electoral credibility."[29]

The developing issue of East Timor fed into this exceptionalist vision of Australia in the Asia-Pacific, with claims that Australia was the natural leader in assisting the East Timorese transition to democratic rule. There was, however, some lingering caution in Alexander Downer's statements on the issue, particularly prior to the independence ballot and the outbreak of civil conflict. In March of 1999, Downer argued that "the responsibility for managing the transition process and maintaining order in East Timor lies with the parties involved, not with Australia or the

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[28] "we have through our own strong performance shown the region - and the world - what commitment to openness and transparency in economic and political affairs can achieve." Alexander Downer, *Australia's Role in a Region in Crisis: Leading by Example* (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1999 [cited 21 August 2006]); available from http://www.dfat.gov.au/media/speeches/foreign/1999/990330_leading_example.html.

[29] Alexander Downer, *Australia - Responding to Indonesia's Transformation* (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1999 [cited 21 August 2006]); available from http://www.dfat.gov.au/media/speeches/foreign/1999/990301_indon_trans.html. Even China was discussed as a country being guided by Australia, with Downer claiming that "We have established major governance and capacity building facilities in our aid programs for China, Philippines and Indonesia." Downer, *Australia's Role in a Region in Crisis: Leading by Example*.

international community."[30]   Later in the year, but still prior to the intervention in September, he maintained a respectful and somewhat deferential position on the sovereignty question, while still seeking to underline Australia's credentials as a leader of democratic reform, arguing that "Australia has no role to play in the internal politics of any other country, but we have, at the request of some of our neighbours, acted to encourage the development of democracy and democratic institutions in our region."[31]   At this stage, Australia's role as the only economy unaffected by the Asian financial crisis remained at the forefront of Downer's speeches, exemplified by the bold claim that "Many years hence, when historians come to write the story of the Asian crisis, we can be confident that Australia will rank as one of the heroes of the piece."[32]

This economic heroism was accompanied by an equal commitment to the protection and advancement of human rights throughout the world. In this regard, Australian foreign policy discourse closely reflected the language of Tony Blair, who had vociferously campaigned in favour of the humanitarian intervention in Serbia in the same year.[33]   Following Blair's "Doctrine of the International Community" speech, Downer argued that the pursuit of human rights was in the national interest, as well as being of benefit to non-Australians. This view, according to Downer, was based on the fact that:

> pursuit of appropriate standards of human rights appeals to an even more basic aspiration
> amongst Australians - the belief in a 'fair go'. We all believe that people should be free

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[30] Downer, *Australia - Responding to Indonesia's Transformation*.
[31] Downer, *Australia's Role in a Region in Crisis: Leading by Example*.
[32] Ibid.
[33] See, in particular,Tony Blair, *The Doctrine of the International Community* (Institute of International Affairs, Saint Petersburg, 1999 [cited 27th November 2003]); available from http://data.cirp.info/intervention/blair-chicago.html.

from arbitrary Government action, free from discrimination, free from violence and oppression - these are basic values that we all share.[34]

The idea that human rights are a core 'value' of all Australians provided a segue into the 'Asian values' debate, with Downer reaffirming the fact that "human rights are universal rights - they are not some kind of Western import, with little resonance in other regions."[35] From a policy perspective, this meant that Australia's work on human rights in the region was:

likely to continue for many years into the future. For while human rights continue to be ignored, our own values as Australians are challenged. So our work goes on. We shoulder it in the knowledge that positive results do come, although they may seem to come at a glacial pace. But every now and then, like icebergs falling from the glacier into the sea, they can come in a rush - as they have done in Indonesia, and elsewhere. It is those results that help us keep faith in the inexorable progress of that glacier, and in the ultimate triumph of the cause of human rights.[36]

This speech was made on August 5, 1999, just a few short weeks before Australia's "effective action on human rights" would be sorely tested, as East Timor descended into chaos.

Following the decision by the East Timorese to opt for independence over autonomy at the end of August, 1999, Australian policy-makers were caught flat-footed by the outbreak of violence. Indeed, in May of the same year, Downer had argued against the early deployment of peacekeepers in East Timor to quell any possible violence surrounding the upcoming ballot. In a statement that would find echoes in his subsequent rejection of intervention in the Solomon Islands, Downer attacked those calling for 'pre-emptive' peacekeepers, arguing that:

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[34] Alexander Downer, *Australia - Effective Action on Human Rights* (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1999 [cited 21 August 2006]); available from http://www.dfat.gov.au/media/speeches/foreign/1999/990805_aiia.html.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

> We still hear the call from bunyip Napoleons for Australia to send peacekeeping forces to East Timor immediately... such people seem to confuse 'peacekeeping' with 'gunboat diplomacy' in their enthusiasm for us to 'go and teach the natives a thing or two'. Perhaps they need to be taught the lesson learnt by my children long ago - that talking tough doesn't make you tough, any more than wearing a costume will make you Superman.[37]

Nevertheless, as the violence in East Timor raged in early September, images of death and destruction flooded Australian living rooms and were followed by adamant calls for the insertion of Australian troops. By mid-September, following UN Security Council approval and the acquiescence of Indonesia, Australia had indeed decided to don the Superman costume and fly to the rescue of the beleaguered East Timorese people.

It quickly became clear that the Australian intervention would take on a greater significance for Australian foreign policy than Alexander Downer might have envisaged. Following the arrival of Australian troops in East Timor on the 20th of September, one Australian tabloid declared that this was to be "as much a defining moment of our national identity as Gallipoli." The troops, according to the editorial in the Daily Telegraph, would be "exposed to danger in unfamiliar foreign territory in the interests of peace and democracy," going on to describe an emotional moment between the Prime Minister and a soldier's mother on talkback radio in which the mother "while understandably concerned about her son's safety… was achingly proud of him as a soldier and a sworn defender of justice and human rights."[38] This understanding of Australia's role as a moral leader in East Timor became the definitive understanding of the intervention. Embracing the idea that Australia had brought freedom to East Timor, Downer announced to the Australian parliament that:

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[37] Alexander Downer, *East Timor and Australia: AIIA Contributions to the Policy Debate* (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1999 [cited 21 August 2006]); available from http://www.dfat.gov.au/media/speeches/foreign/1999/990525_aiia.html.
[38] "A Nation Salutes its Brave," *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 September 1999.

"To my dying day, I will be very proud of the fact that we spent an enormous amount of time, more than other country on earth, trying to get freedom for the people of East Timor."[39] It was this interpretation of the Australian role in East Timor that added more fuel to the Howard Government's view that Australia was uniquely suited to taking a leadership role on questions of economic and military security in South-East Asia.

It is perhaps unsurprising, in this context, that the now infamous Bulletin article by Fred Brenchley - spelling out "the Howard defence doctrine" and giving birth to the "deputy sheriff" metaphor – should be published at this time.[40] For Howard, the success of the intervention in East Timor was a final affirmation of the distinctive Australian identity in Asia, such that "we were defending the values we hold as Australians. We were willing to be in dispute with our nearest neighbour, to defend those values."[41] As Brenchley explained:

> This is where East Timor starts to change the perception of Australia in Asia. Australia, says Howard, will draw strength from its distinctive characteristics of a Western civilisation in Asia; an Australia not seeking to fashion itself like the rest of Asia but confident about its own character. He extends his new security doctrine into the moral areas of defending 'right'; a future Australia not prepared to adopt the 'please at all costs' attitude to some Asian leaders of the past.[42]

This approach, as many would have expected, caused outrage in many South-East Asian nations, with an editorial in Malaysia's *New Straits Times* arguing that the doctrine "loudly echoes the arrogant and archaic belief of the Conradian colonial masters who deemed it the august role of the white man to bring enlightenment to lesser mortals," before going on to argue that:

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[39] Geoff Spencer, *Peacekeepers pour into East Timor, Indonesian soldiers jeered* (Associated Press Newswires, 21 September 1999 [cited 22 August 2006]).
[40] Fred Brenchley, "The Howard Defence Doctrine," *The Bulletin with Newsweek* 117, no. 6193 (1999).
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

> No one will fault her people for being proud of Australia's lead role in an international peacekeeping force in strife-torn East Timor but *it would be misplaced patriotism and triumphalism to transform East Timor into political appendage for greater leadership role in Asia.*[43]

Despite these warnings, Howard and Downer have continued to advocate Australian leadership in reforming the economic and political cultures of the region. In his final appraisal of Australian foreign policy at the end of the millennium, Alexander Downer claimed that this expansive Australian role was welcomed in the region, declaring that "leaders around the world have commended Australia for taking the lead on East Timor, and commentators in East Asia praise Australia for showing that countries in our region can act to solve our own problems."[44] It is a theme that has come to be embedded in Australian foreign policy discourse over the years that have followed and, as I will argue below, has failed to bring security to the people of East Timor as well as contributing to an increased sense of *in*security within Australia.

Solomon Islands, 2003

As 2003 began mixed messages were emerging with regard to Australia foreign policy in the Pacific region. The September 11 attacks and the subsequent declaration of a "War on Terror" had preoccupied the Australian government for the preceding fifteen months, although attention had been drawn back toward Indonesia with the Bali bombings of October 2002. The looming war against Iraq and continued commitments in Afghanistan were of obvious concern in this context, but the ongoing civil violence in the Solomon Islands had also crept back on to the agenda, to the extent that the Foreign Minister felt the need to publish an article in *The Australian*

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[43] *Asian editorial excerpts* (Japan Economic Newswire, 2 October 1999 [cited 21 August 2006]).
[44] Alexander Downer, *Australia at Year's End: Retrospect and Prospect* (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1999 [cited 21 August 2006]); available from http://www.dfat.gov.au/media/speeches/foreign/1999/991201_npc.html.

detailing why Australia *should not* intervene in that country to restore peace and stability. In the article, entitled "Neighbours cannot be recolonised", Downer argued that:

> Sending in Australian troops to occupy 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 Islands Forum initiative. The fundamental problem is that foreigners do not have answers for the deep-seated problems afflicting Solomon Islands.[45]

In the light of what occurred in the following months, it is quite incredible that Downer chose to publish such a strident statement at this time. What is most important here, however, is to understand the way in which moral discourse and the invocation of Australian 'values' came to turn this particular ship around, to the extent that Australian troops were deployed in the Solomon Islands by the end of July in the same year.

The transformation in Australian policy toward the Solomon Islands perhaps makes more sense in the light of the 2003 Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper – *Advancing the National Interest*. While the affirmation of Pacific island sovereignty is reiterated,[46] broadly following the contours of Downer's earlier article, the White Paper contains an introduction claiming that "it is essential that we continue to promote economic and political freedom abroad"[47] and is replete with references to the distinctive Australian ideal of "mateship," and the defence and projection of Australian "values." Most importantly, it states that:

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[45] Alexander Downer, "Neighbours cannot be recolonised," *The Australian*, 8 January 2003.
[46] "Advancing the National Interest," (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2003), 93.
[47] Ibid., viii.

> Within the Pacific rim, Australia has a particular responsibility to help the countries of the South Pacific deal with their deep-seated problems, many of which have been exacerbated by poor governance in some states. We are prepared to help those countries which are prepared to help themselves… Our initiatives will focus on developing self-sufficiency founded on the rock of good governance.[48]

The centrality of this theme of good governance, and its explicit link to principles of human rights and liberal-democracy, establishes a deep sense of Australian superiority over Pacific island nations and correlates strongly with the paternal policies of guidance and tutelage that are offered in response. From this point, it is only a very small step to move from a policy of non-intervention to one of intervention, as the 'uncivilised' masses of the Pacific continue to 'fail' in their attempts to successfully administer modern nation states.

As 2003 progressed this logic gained greater currency. On May 1, six weeks after "Operation Iraqi Freedom" had gotten underway in Iraq, President Bush declared "major combat operations over" and argued, in terms very similar to those found in the Australian White Paper, that:

> The advance of freedom is the surest strategy to undermine the appeal of terror in the world. Where freedom takes hold, hatred gives way to hope. When freedom takes hold, men and women turn to the peaceful pursuit of a better life. American values, and American interests, lead in the same direction: We stand for human liberty.

This sense of victory was shared by John Howard in Australia, who declared to parliament on May 14 that the war in Iraq was over, that the relationship with the United States was stronger than ever, and that the two countries "share a view of the world that values freedom and individual liberty."[49]

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[48] Ibid., xvii.

[49] John Howard, *Ministerial Statement to Parliament on Iraq* (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 14 May 2003 [cited August 20 2006]); available from http://www.pm.gov.au/news/speeches/speech453.html.

In this deeply triumphalist context, the added weight of Elsina Wainwright's Australian Strategic Policy Institute report on the dire political situation in the Solomon Islands provided the final touch to turn Australian policy from non-intervention to intervention. The report, entitled "Our Failing Neighbour," invoked the idea of the 'failed state' as justification for greater Australian involvement, and explicitly linked the potential dangers of the Solomons conflict to the war on terror, with the argument that:

> this kind of legal vacuum so close to our shores would make Australia significantly more vulnerable to transnational criminal operations based in or operating out of Solomon Islands—drug smuggling, gun-running, identity fraud and people smuggling, for example. Perhaps even terrorism: the weakness of security institutions means that Solomon Islands' capacity to monitor people movements is poor.[50]

Australia's "front line in the war on terror"[51] was now stretched from South East Asia to the South Pacific, ensuring that the Solomon Islands would be a high priority issue that would now be subject to corrective intervention.

Hence, as Tony Wright argued in *The Bulletin*, "What was folly in the extreme at the start of the year has been turned on its head."[52] Speculation then surrounded the question as to why such a change had taken place, with many focussing on Australia's perceived role as the leader of the "war on terror" in the region. This was, as many commentators opined, "a world made very different by the scourge of terrorism," and it was incumbent upon Australia – "a Western country located in the Asia-Pacific region"[53] – to resist the spread of terror by repairing 'failed states' in the 'arc of instability'.

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[50] Elsina Wainwright, "Our Failing Neighbour: Australia and the Future of Solomon Islands," (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2003), Chapter 2.
[51] "Advancing the National Interest."
[52] Tony Wright, "High Noon in the Solomons," *The Bulletin with Newsweek* 121, no. 6381 (2003).
[53] "Advancing the National Interest," 3.

Even more worrying was the return to the "deputy" logic that had followed the intervention in East Timor, with Wright suggesting that "Howard is undoubtedly keen to prove, to both Australia's closest allies and to its own citizens, that his country is willing to act as a power in its own neighbourhood."[54]   In a speech to the Sydney Instiute in early July, Howard made this case himself, with the statement that:

> our friends and neighbors in the Pacific are looking to us for leadership and we will not
> fail them. And the rest of the world, understandably, sees this as an area where Australia
> has particular responsibilities.[55]

This immodest and somewhat unrealistic comment, that "the rest of the world" sees Australia as having "particular responsibilities" in the Pacific region, needs to be considered very closely. The idea of 'responsibility' that it espouses can only be justified by reference to the particular political and ideological background that Australia has. This, of course, is precisely what Howard has argued throughout his Prime Ministerial career: that Australia's "unique intersection of history, geography, and culture"[56] means that Australia has a special place in leading the region toward a better future. It is this attitude, as I will explain further below, that increases hostility toward Australia in the region, generating new insecurities that could otherwise have been avoided.

Despite these dangers, this was a message that Australian journalists and political analysts took up with great enthusiasm when the "cooperative intervention" in the Solomon Islands was announced in early July, 2003. Writing in the Sunday Telegraph, Stephen Loosley celebrated the fact that "the Australian Defence Force is again being deployed to restore human rights," before concluding that "this is a clear

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[54] Wright, "High Noon in the Solomons."
[55] John Howard, *Address to the Sydney Institute* (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2003 [cited 23 August 2006]); available from http://www.pm.gov.au/news/speeches/speech323.html.
[56] Ibid.

message of hope that will resonate well beyond Honiara."[57] Paul Kelly, writing in *The Australian*, claimed that the shift toward interventionism "represents a post-Iraq declaration by Australia to the US of its strategic priorities - it will assume within its own region the responsibility of a metropolitan power."[58] Ian McPhedran put the case more bluntly, arguing that "all those who would seek to hold tiny Pacific states to ransom are on notice: 'Don't mess with your country or the Aussies will arrive in force, armed and ready to act.'"[59]

So it was that by the end of July, 2003, the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) was deployed. Once again, Howard made it clear that he considered the South Pacific to be "our patch," arguing that "we're willing to do our fair share of the heavy lifting in *an area that the rest of the world sees as very much Australia's responsibility.*"[60] Following some early successes in restoring security to Honiara, arresting key rebel leaders, and collecting large numbers of weapons, everything seemed to be progressing according to plan in the Solomon Islands and, indeed, in the broader war on terror. Likewise, East Timor was being presented internationally as a success story for those who have sought to reform the world along liberal-democratic lines.[61] But in the three years since trouble has been brewing. In both Iraq and Afghanistan the United States, assisted by a small contingent of Australian troops, is facing what now look to be unwinnable wars against increasingly menacing opponents. Meanwhile, East Timor and the Solomon Islands, the exemplar cases of Australian 'values' and leadership in the region, have also drifted back

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[57] Stephen Loosley, "The Solomons are a vital link," *The Sunday Telegraph*, 29 June 2003.

[58] Ian McPhedran, "Rotten to the core," *Daily Telegraph*, 26 July 2003.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Craig; Hudson Skehan, Phillip, "Hostages Go Free as Force Closes In," *The Age*, 24 July 2003. Emphasis added.

[61] As Joshua Kurlantzick put it: "Development experts touted East Timor's supposedly peaceful politics, civil society and foundations of a vibrant economy. 'The country has made remarkable progress in laying the foundations for a functioning civil society,' the United Nations reported. And the World Bank enthused: 'The future thus looks fairly optimistic.'" See Joshua Kurlantzick, "The UN success story that wasn't," *The Washington Post*, June 4 2006.

toward chaotic violence in a context of economic stagnation and political dislocation. In the following section, I will argue that the failures of the two missions represent an important wake-up call to the Australian Government, indicating that spreading Australian 'values' in the region will not necessarily work and may indeed cause greater security problems further down the line.

Solomon Islands and Timor Leste, 2006

As recently as March this year, Michael Fullilove of the Lowy Institute was made a cautious but positive assessment of the Australian-led mission in the Solomon Islands, arguing that:

> RAMSI has made good progress. It has arrested the Solomons' perilous decline and placed the country on a new trajectory. Law and order was quickly restored in 2003 and it remains the mission's strong suit. RAMSI is also active in rebuilding the country's institutions and reforming its economy, although we do not yet have enough evidence to be confident about the sustainability of this success if RAMSI were to leave.[62]

Little more than a month after publication of this piece, and immediately following the first elections in the Solomon Islands, Fullilove's prognosis was cast into serious doubt, as the Chinatown district of Honiara was demolished by a rampaging mob, incensed by what they saw as a corrupt election result. Even more worrying for the Australian Government was the fact that 17 Australian Federal Police were injured in the attacks, raising questions over their own popularity amongst the local population.[63] RAMSI, it appeared, did not need to leave in order for a fresh wave of violence to erupt in the Solomon Islands, and indeed extra troops were disptached from Australia

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[62] Michael Fullilove, "Strategy sound so far: now to finish shaping a nation," *The Australian*, 10 March 2006.

[63] These questions had emerged in December 2004 with the killing of Australian Police Officer Adam Dunning. This killing followed reports earlier in 2004 of riots at the prison in Honiara, claimed to be a direct response to maltreatment by the Australian guards. Furthermore, a report was aired in late 2005 on the SBS Dateline program in which gang members claimed to be stockpiling weapons for assaults on RAMSI patrols in the capital.

in order to again supress the angry mob. Alexander Downer visited Honiara the following week, declaring that more change was necessary and that:

> we need to keep pushing on and, as I said to the Prime Minister, it's *a matter of life or death* for Solomon Islands as a country. It needs to continue the process of economic reform, it needs to encourage investment and it needs a higher degree of political stability.

It is interesting to consider what the 'death' of the Solomon Islands would look like, and what implications it would have for the people that live there. This question aside, Downer was compelled to announce that:

> We are putting enormous amounts of money in here - through projects. I mean, Australians would be relieved to hear that we're not paying cheques to people here - we're just running project aid here.[64]

Despite repeated protestations to the contrary, the arrogant touch of an imperial power is all too evident in statements such as this. Once again, the sense of superiority inherent in this statement must be deeply troubling for those who are considered not trustworthy enough to receive Australian cheques, and for those who worry that Australia is simply repeating the failed colonial experiment of the previous century.

The troubles raised by the riots were compounded for the Australian Government only a few days later, as East Timor (now the independent nation-state of Timor Leste) also descended into chaos. Rival groups of police and military clashed openly in Dili and, following a month of tension and attempts at negotiation between the fighting groups, armed gangs took advantage of the situation by looting and burning throughout the capital in late May. As was the case in the Solomon Islands, Australian troops were disptached to quell the violence and allow for the provision of food and medicine to those who required it.

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[64] *Doorstop Interview, Honiara, Solomon Islands* (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 22 April 2006 [cited 23 August 2006]); available from
http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/transcripts/2006/060422_honiara.html.

In an interview on the 29ᵗʰ of May, Howard offered a blunt analysis of the situation in East Timor:

> We stayed for a long period of time as part of the United Nations force and then the United Nations decided it was time to let them run their own show. Now sadly they haven't done a very good job of it. They asked us to come back and help them, we've done that immediately and we'll be encouraging them to run their own show again. We'll be giving them help, we'll be giving them advice, but in the end if it is to be an independent country, East Timor has got to run itself.[65]

What is most interesting about this statement is the abdication of responsibility that is so much a part of the interventionist discourse. Rather than seeking to understand the problems inherent in any nation-building program and attempting to rethink the appropriateness of what often appears to be a direct repetition of colonisation and decolonisation experiences, Howard argued that all blame for the violence and destruction lay with the incapable people of both nations. What is evident here is a crude application of neo-liberal self-help principles, in which Australia views itself as providing an equal playing field but then adopts a *laissez-faire* attitude in which responsibility for success or failure resides with the 'freed' individual state.

For Howard, therefore, it was easy to claim that the recurring problems in the Solomons and East Timor were a product of a combination of poor governance and the inherently unstable region in which Australia resides. Hence, rather than being related in any way to the failures of RAMSI or the Australian Government:

> What has happened is a reminder of the instability of the region in which we live. It's a reminder that we live in a part of the world that carries with it the constant threat of failed states, and as a stable united prosperous nation in the region we know it is in our interest as well as the interest of the region that we prevent states from failing because

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[65] *Interview with Madonna King, ABC Radio 612 Brisbane* (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 29 May 2006 [cited 23 August 2006]); available from http://www.pm.gov.au/news/interviews/Interview1954.html.

> failed states become the breeding grounds for all sorts of ideologies and attitudes and developments which can pose a threat to the stability of the whole region.[66]

This externalisation of the problem was coupled (once again) with references to Australia's leading role as an educator of good political and social values in the region.[67] Australia, in other words, represents all that is good in the Asia-Pacific region, while the failing states surrounding it lack the maturity and knowledge - translated as "good governance" – represent all that needs to be corrected. In this context, according to Howard, it would be folly to ignore "the reality that the rest of the world looks to Australia to shoulder the lion's share of the burden of providing support and stability not only for the people of the Solomon Islands but also for other small nations which may find themselves in the same situation."[68] The same message emerged on his tour of the United States and Britain in May. As one newspaper reported:

> In his talks in Washington, Mr. Howard signaled a more active, interventionist path for Australia as the leading regional power in the South Pacific. "I indicated that this was an area where Australia accepted major responsibility, a lead responsibility," he said after the talks. "The Pacific is our backyard and we are the country that has the prime responsibility for looking after the security exigencies as they arise."[69]

In repeating these claims to ownership ("our backyard") and responsibility (or even superiority), Howard not only denigrates the poorer nations like Timor Leste and Solomon Islands, but also opens Australia up to allegations of neo-imperialism,

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[66] John Howard, *Address to the Queensland Division of the Liberal Party of Australia, Sofitel Hotel, Brisbane* (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 19 April 2006 [cited 23 August 2006]); available from http://www.pm.gov.au/news/speeches/speech1889.html.

[67] As Howard explained to Australian troops in East Timor: "that special Australian ability to mix authority with understanding and compassion. That's one of the things that does make us as a people, as a nation different, and it's one of the reasons that we do these kind of operations rather more successfully than many others." John Howard, *Address to Australian Defence Force and Police Personnel, Camp Phoenix, Dili, East Timor* (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 18 July 2006 [cited 23 August 2006]); available from http://www.pm.gov.au/news/speeches/speech2026.html.

[68] Howard, *Address to the Queensland Division of the Liberal Party of Australia, Sofitel Hotel, Brisbane*.

[69] Walters, "PM takes the helm in region."

bullying, and arrogance, particularly from relatively powerful South-East Asian nations like Indonesia and Malaysia.

In the context of a highly volatile international environment, in which the prospect for major disturbances seems remarkably high (Howard himself referred the Pacific as "the stadium of the next century"), it seems incredibly dangerous and counterproductive to be antagonising neighbours in this way. Indeed, in the wake of the violence in Timor Leste and Solomon Islands in 2006, questions began to emerge over Australia's ability to rebuild the two countries and over the potential dangers that were gathering as a result of the interventionist approach. Susan Windybank, for example, argued that "RAMSI has fed into cargo-cult expectations that whenever there is trouble, Australia will charge in and write a blank cheque to put things right" and that "Australia runs a real risk of getting bogged down as a de facto government that fails its job," leading to situation in which "Australia's credibility in the Pacific is on the line."[70] Paul Kelly, writing in *The Australian* prior to the Australian deployment in Timor Leste, argued that Australia's claim to responsibility for the region was "inevitable, regrettable and perhaps undeliverable" and "highlights the activism bordering on hubris that pervades military policy."[71] Others, such as Paul Dibb and Andrew Clark, questioned the ability of the Australian military to meet current and likely future deployment needs in a context of increasing regional instability.[72] John Pilger struck a more conspiratorial note with the revelation that:

> A leaked Australian Defence Force document has since revealed that Australia's 'first objective' in East Timor is to 'seek access' for the Australian military so that it can

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[70] Susan Windybank, "This mission had moral hazard written all over it," Ibid., 20 April.
[71] Paul Kelly, "End of the illusions," Ibid., 17 May.
[72] Andrew Clark, "Forget foreign adventures, the neighbourhood is burning," *The Australian Financial Review*, 20 May 2006; Paul Dibb, "Strategic force for mounting instability," *The Australian*, 16 May 2006.

exercise 'influence over East Timor's decision-making.' A Bushite 'neo-con' could not have put it better.[73]

Amidst all the recriminations and prognostications, some serious questions about the future of Australian foreign policy must be considered: Would Australia be capable of responding to an increasing number of 'state failures' in the region? Would Australian citizens accept the billion dollar costs if such interventions produced no tangible benefits? Would they accept conscription for their family members in order to spread Australian 'values'? Does playing deputy to the United States increase or decrease Australian security? To many of these questions are left out of the picture as simplistic, nationalistic moral triumphalism overshadows careful consideration of costs and consequences. As a result, despite the harsh lessons offered by the recent outbreaks of violence in Solomon Islands and Timor Leste, the Australian Government presses ahead with its foreign policy program.

The dangers to come?

Despite the costs and failures encountered over the past seven years, John Howard's foreign policy agenda has not budged. His defence doctrine, as outlined in the Brenchley article of 1999, remains the same: Greater defence spending, stronger alliance with the United States, values-based leadership in the region, and more interventionist activity. As Howard recently explained:

> I can safely say that expenditure on defence will be going up and the resources needed
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> for defence, largely because of the volatility of our own region, I mean we had to go back
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> into East Timor and we have got commitments in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in the Solomon
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> Islands, in East Timor, and it is just that kind of world. It is going to be like that now for

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[73] John Pilger, "Australia builds its empire," *New Statesman* 135, no. 4798 (2006).

> years into the future because we are seen by the rest of the world as the sort of security guardian of our region.[74]

This general statement was backed up in late August with a commitment of an extra ten billion dollars to the expansion of the Australian military, again with references to the abundance of 'failing states' in the region and the need for Australia to take responsibility for "our own patch."[75] There are, furthermore, many enthusiastic adherents to this vision who are willing to promote the cause of a powerful Australian presence in the region. Greg Sheridan, for example, has argued that:

> It is perhaps time that Australia conceived of itself as the 'US of the South Pacific'… mentoring and tutoring devastated societies into economic and political modernisation and, crucially, providing for their security in the meantime. And like the US in Asia, we should do this in part through a system of military deployments, though naturally we would not call them Australian bases.[76]

Such an approach is highly unlikely to win Australia any friends in the region, and nor will it achieve any kind of serious improvements for the impoverished communities that collectively constitute the 'arc of instability'. Indeed, we would do well to remember that the arrogance of 18th and 19th century colonialism and imperialism *created* the system that has in turn produced current regional instabilities, suggesting that a return to that model will produce nothing but further impoverishment, conflict, and insecurity. Alternatively, one could respond, as the Government of Papua New Guinea did in late August, that the increases in Australian defence spending are more related to Australia's ongoing commitment to the futile wars in Iraq and Afghanistan than they are to any genuine regional concerns.[77]

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[74] *Interview with Steve Price and Dave Harrison, Radio 4TO Townsville*.
[75] See David Humphries, "PM sounds the call for troops," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 August 2006.
[76] Greg Sheridan, "Throw troops at Pacific failures," *The Australian*, 3 June 2006.
[77] Humphries, "PM sounds the call for troops."

I would argue that the causes for concern run even deeper for Australia. The adherence to the 'regional deputy' logic and the concurrent strengthening of ties with the United States adds an even more dangerous, although perhaps longer term, threat to Australian security. With the Adelaide-Darwin railway link operated by Halliburton's Australian arm,[78] a recent agreement to allow more US military testing on Australian soil, the potential for an agreement to build US bases in northern Australia,[79] and the current discussions over Australia's future status as a (nuclear) "energy superpower,"[80] questions must be asked as to whether Australia is gearing up to take an even more prominent role in long-term US strategy in Asia. Most obviously, we need to consider whether the current commitment to 'shared values' with the United States is blinding policy makers to the potentially disastrous consequences of making Australia a key strategic target in any future conflict in the region, perhaps involving North Korea, or even – in the worst possible scenario - China.

From this perspective, Alexander Downer would do well to remember his pre-intervention comments on East Timor, in which he suggested that those arguing in favour of 'pre-emptive' intervention "need to be taught the lesson… that talking tough doesn't make you tough, any more than wearing a costume will make you

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[78] The fact that Halliburton is so closely involved in US defence contracting, has connections with US Vice President Dick Cheney, and has been involved in numerous allegations and investigations over embezzlement of US tax dollars raises serious questions and concerns over their future intentions for the Adelaide-Darwin railway. For a critical account see Richard Tonkin, *Halliburton Down Under: taking over South Australia by stealth* (Fairfax Digital, March 22 2005 [cited August 20 2006]); available from http://webdiary.smh.com.au/archives/000806.html.

[79] Details of the most recent defence cooperation agreement, signed in July of 2004, have remained sketchy and incomplete, but reports in late 2004 suggested that new generation "smart bombs" could be tested at "at Shoalwater Bay in Queensland and at two training areas in the Northern Territory." See Stephanie Kennedy, *US to test smart bombs on Aussie territory* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 5 November 2004 [cited August 27 2006]); available from http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2004/s1235635.htm.

[80] This argument was made by the Prime Minister on 18 July, 2006. He went on to claim that Australian was particularly popular for energy producers because of its "stability and rationality." See John Howard, *Address to the Committee for Economic Development of Australia* (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 18 July 2006 [cited 20 August 2006]); available from http://www.pm.gov.au/news/speeches/speech2024.html.

Superman."[81]   The fact that the Australian Government was rebuked by the Indonesian Government following the acceptance of West Papuan refugees in April throw this issue into even starker relief.   That the Australian Government was compelled to introduce bizarre new immigration laws to parliament in an attempt to appease the Indonesians gives us a much better indication of Australia's relative power in the region.   On another point, the Government should ensure that before talking tough on regional matters that domestic abuses of human rights (particularly the appalling state of Aboriginal health) and corruption (of which the Australian Wheat Board scandal is an excellent example) should be dealt with before any attempt is made to correct the failings of the rest of the world.

Australia is a country that is in a privileged position of not *needing* to stick its neck out on the most fraught international issues and conflicts of our time.   While there may be some need to participate in activities that will assist citizens of poorer states in the region, there is no need to couch this in chest-thumping nationalist terms that implicitly (and occasionally explicitly) denigrate neighbouring countries.   There is no need, nor is there any firm basis, to claim moral leadership of what is a diverse and complex region of the world.   There is no need to deeply involve Australia in the war on terror, or to make Australia into a centre of nuclear supply, or to build US bases on Australian soil, such that it becomes a key strategic target in any future regional conflict.   What is required is some modest reflection on what is best for the security of Australian citizens, now and in to the future.   As the people of Iraq or Lebanon will attest, no-one wants to experience a war in their own country, and national leaders should always gear their foreign policy toward the avoidance of war. Furthermore, they should ensure that domestic society is functioning well before

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[81] Downer, *East Timor and Australia: AIIA Contributions to the Policy Debate*.

charging off to solve the problems of the rest of the world. Too often the claim to moral superiority in international affairs glosses over the internal failings and conflicts that dog Australian society and politics. Conservative thinkers such as Schmitt, Carr, and Morgenthau have offered compelling critiques of humanitarian wars and moral triumphalism in foreign policy, and the Australian Government would do well to revisit those texts and heed those warnings before greater calamities are visited upon the Australian people.

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