

Australian and US Military Cooperation: Fighting Common Enemies

Christopher Hubbard

Reviewed by Dr Hugh Smith

Australia's alliance with the US is never far from the news – witness the recent upgrading of intelligence ties and the ongoing parliamentary inquiry into Australia's defence relations with the US, quite apart from current ADF operations in Iraq. Like a marriage, such a close, long-lasting and significant relationship deserves examination from time to time lest it be taken for granted or misunderstandings arise. Christopher Hubbard's book provides just that sort of analysis.

The US and Australia are in many ways an odd couple. Disparate in economic and military terms and distant geographically, the two nations have nonetheless maintained a close and active military relationship that goes back informally to the battlegrounds of the two world wars and formally to the ANZUS Treaty of 1951. The pact, indeed, was not eagerly embraced by the US which was more focused on the Soviet Union and Europe than on the Pacific. Nor did the UK give eager parental approval. It took skilful and persistent diplomacy on Australia's part to inveigle the US into ANZUS as compensation for the 'soft' peace treaty with Japan.

Since 1951 periodic tensions and differences have occurred but by and large the expectations of both parties have been met. This is despite – or perhaps because of – the rather vague obligations set out in the wording of the treaty. So flexible are its terms that the one occasion it has been invoked concerned terrorist attacks on the US's Atlantic seaboard rather than a state attack in the Pacific as originally envisaged. This leads Hubbard to raise several important questions: are the two countries in any sense 'natural allies' or could things have been different? What would have made a difference? (Say, for example, Australia had refused the US over Iraq in 2003) what might make a difference in the future?

Australia and the US share certain fundamental values but there are also significant differences. Both are largely migrant nations with high standards of living that are committed (more or less) to democracy, human rights and free markets. Yet differences exist in the temper of each society. Where the US looks to 'rugged individualism', Australia has generally leaned towards what I would call 'ragged collectivism' – central wage-fixing, compulsory voting, a public health service and universal social security. Australia's view of the world is also marked by modest ambitions and a preference for multilateralism.

Hubbard further asks whether individual leaders made or might have made a difference to the health of the alliance – from Evatt, Spender and John Foster Dulles to Howard and Downer. The answer is that within broader constraints individuals can and do push the relationship along or hold it back. But it now seems doubtful whether any Australian

leader could break off the partnership in the way that David Lange did for New Zealand in 1985 over access by US nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered warships. What would it take to drive Australia out of ANZUS?

One reason for the robustness of the alliance, as Hubbard argues well, is the sheer depth and momentum of co-operation. Strategically, there is a long history of sharing intelligence and operating the nowadays often overlooked 'joint facilities'. Militarily, Australian and US forces not only fight alongside one another regularly (three times since 1991). They also engage in constant interaction through military exercises and planning, training programs and exchange postings, as well as developing inter-operability through common equipment and operating procedures. Hubbard rightly emphasises the importance of psychological bonds between US and Australian personnel, reinforced, for example, by the award of US honours to Australian units and individuals.

It is a pity that several typographical and minor factual errors have survived the editing process. For example, 'principle' for 'principal' appears twice, al-Qaida is variously spelt, Dien Bien Phu and the new Queensland Senator Trood's name are misspelt. The Australian Army, despite recruiting difficulties, numbers about 25,000 rather than 17,000. Esthus' book *From Enmity to Alliance* becomes *From Eternity to Alliance*. The footnoting system is also rather cumbersome and the index somewhat brief.

But these are minor quibbles that can be corrected and should not detract from the principal value of the book – its clear-headed and comprehensive analysis of the US alliance. Though it does not contain a great deal of new material, there are refreshing perspectives on Australia's capacity to influence the US over negotiation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and in the non-proliferation movement generally. It also takes a valuable look at the alliance from the other side of the Pacific.

While designed for undergraduate students (hence occasional incursions into theories of policy-making and international relations), it will be of value to anyone seeking a balanced examination of Australia's most important international relationship. Sympathetic to the alliance, yet critical where warranted, it contains far more than the usual listing of costs and benefits. It goes to the underlying basis of the alliance, the way in which it has been shaped over years of interaction at different levels, and the prospects for change in the future. At a cost of \$124.30 for the hardback edition, however, it will not find many readers; a paperback version at a sensible price is needed. ♦

Christopher Hubbard, *Australian and US Military Cooperation: Fighting Common Enemies*, Ashgate, Aldershot UK, 2005, Casebound, 175pp., RRP \$124.30.

