Greg Sheridan has been foreign editor of *The Australian* since 1992 and his expertise covers not just the alliance but also Australia’s relations with Asia. His writing for the paper is normally well-informed and forthright. Sheridan is also a member of the Australian-American Leadership Dialogue which brings together leading individuals from both countries in the fields of government, business and academia. He has held visiting fellowships at Georgetown University’s Center for Strategic and International Studies and Canberra’s Land Warfare Studies Centre.

As the sub-title explains, this valuable book seeks to present a comprehensive view of the Australian-American alliance from its beginnings to the present day. While the book treats the early history of the alliance in a generally introductory fashion, the focus is very much on the way in which it has developed under the stresses of the Iraq conflict and under the leadership of John Howard and George W. Bush. Sheridan believes strongly that Australians know little about an alliance that is indispensable to Australia’s security and that the resources for students are seriously deficient.

Sheridan’s familiarity with the leading players in the US and Australia has led many of his sources to be unusually frank in their interviews. This is particularly true for the Australians whose obsessive secrecy is all too familiar. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer is one whose standing in Sheridan’s eyes could hardly be higher. It is worth noting that this is in sharp contrast to the usual political view of Downer as a figure of superficial platitudes or esoteric academic tomes. The book is not just for the professional reader but these are insignificant. More significantly, Sheridan notes in Chapter 2 that when Australia invoked the ANZUS Treaty after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, this was done under the provisions of Article IV which refers to armed attacks in the Pacific Area and he considers this to be wrong. Later in the book, he realises that Article V extends the application of Article IV to the whole metropolitan territory of the parties. In fact, one might wonder why the treaty had to be formally invoked; it makes no provision for invocation in the circumstances of an armed attack which is its sole justification for action.

It is difficult in a short review to do justice to this book. It is an important and valuable work directed towards a general but informed lay readership. That is a proper target because for too long the Australian community has had to be content with superficial platitudes or esoteric academic tomes. The book has a reasonable index but is mercifully free from even a single footnote. It is eminently readable and informative.