

## Is Bipartisanship on National Security Beneficial? Australia's Politics of Defence and Security

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One of the most widely-endorsed norms in Australian politics is the requirement for bipartisanship in the management of defence and security policy. This norm is assumed to lead to good policy creation, foster political unity, and protect those who implement national policy (particularly the military). The paper argues that evidence for all three of these claims is overstated. In addition, the effects of the norm are often counter-productive and even harmful to the conduct and management of Australian policy. The paper concludes by arguing that the norm of bipartisanship for Australian defence and security policy should be abandoned.

### Introduction

In an age of increased security threats, it is not uncommon to hear politicians state that “keeping our people safe is above politics. The security of our nation runs deeper than our political differences.”<sup>1</sup> Yet the circumstances in which this particular line was uttered are puzzling. It was spoken in the Australian Parliament, a forum designed for democratic debate on issues such as national security. And it was spoken by someone whose official title is “Leader of the Opposition”.

This statement was not an aberration or slip of the tongue. Rather it represents a norm of bipartisanship which shapes how Australian politicians handle defence and security policy. It is common to see members of parliament declare “what has characterised the way in which we have gone about this is a sense of bipartisanship”.<sup>2</sup> Others view the continuation of this norm as vital to the security of the nation, stating “bipartisanship must continue [...] The nature of the new security order today is so critical as to make redundant the all too familiar and orthodox war of words between dissenting factions of our, thankfully, open society.”<sup>3</sup> Similar views about the importance of bipartisanship for managing Australian defence and security policy are regularly found in the media, academia and private industry.

This article examines the role of the norm of bipartisanship in Australia's management of defence and security policy. It begins by discussing what a norm of bipartisanship is and how it has emerged in Australia. The paper then lays out the three

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<sup>1</sup> Sabra Lane, “PM Warns of More Security, Less Freedom, Ahead of Anti-Terror Laws Debate”, *ABC 7.30*, 22 September 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Marles, “Interview with Michael Rowland”, *ABC News 24*, 22 September 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Nikolich, “Statements on indulgence: Terrorist attacks around the world”, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD)*, House, 1 December 2015.

main arguments that are used by supporters of the norm to justify its continuation. Firstly, they argue that the norm creates good policy. Secondly, the norm is believed to offer unity, which helps implement policy. Finally, the norm is seen as helping to protect those who serve the nation in carrying out defence and security policy — particularly military personnel. Borrowing from the methodological approach of Richard Betts,<sup>4</sup> the focus of this article is a critical examination of these three claims. The paper argues that evidence for all three claims is overstated, and that the effects of the norm are often counter-productive to protecting national interests. The paper concludes by arguing that the norm of bipartisanship for Australian defence and security policy should be abandoned.

This paper contributes to an emerging scholarly and policy debate about the efficacy of Australia's institutional settings for dealing with security challenges in the early twenty-first century. Scholars and law-makers have identified a number of institutional impediments which they see as requiring change. Notable examples include calls for parliamentary authorisation for the use of force,<sup>5</sup> national security legislation monitors,<sup>6</sup> and greater judicial authorisation for intelligence operations.<sup>7</sup> Whatever the merits of these changes, as long as a bipartisanship norm is in place they will not be effective. For example, any institutional changes to give parliament a greater say on the use of force is likely to be pointless in an environment dominated by norms of intra-party discipline and inter-party bipartisanship. Similarly, additional judicial oversight is likely to be downplayed or ignored in such circumstances — as many allege already occurs.<sup>8</sup> Instead, if partisanship were more the norm then greater parliamentary debate would automatically follow. As would increased attention to existing judicial reviews. The problem is not that the parliament is unable to examine and discuss these issues, but that it has chosen not to do so. To understand why a norm which reduces debate has taken hold in the Australian parliament, this paper now examines the concept of bipartisanship and its appeal in the contemporary Australian setting.

### **The Emergence of a Norm of Bipartisanship in Australia**

Bipartisanship in democratic societies has been long discussed but it has rarely been examined in depth in the scholarly literature.<sup>9</sup> In one of the few dedicated analyses in the Australian context, Trevor Matthews and John Ravenhill identified that “not only is the concept used impressionistically; it is used as if the meaning were self-evident”.<sup>10</sup> At least two different forms can be identified.<sup>11</sup> Bipartisanship can emerge in a democracy as an *outcome* of political debate, based on agreement as to the existence and nature of policy challenges, and the correct policy prescriptions to address them.

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<sup>4</sup> Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?”, *International Security*, Vol. 25, 2 (2000).

<sup>5</sup> Rick Morton and Rosie Lewis, “Tony Abbott at Risk of Repeating Iraq War Mistake: Andrew Wilkie”, *The Australian*, 25 August 2014.

<sup>6</sup> “Government Appoint Former Supreme Court Judge Roger Gyles as the New National Security Monitor”, *ABC*, 7 December 2014.

<sup>7</sup> John Faulkner, “Surveillance, Intelligence and Accountability: An Australian Story” (2014) <<http://apo.org.au/node/41934>>.

<sup>8</sup> Jessie Blackburn, “Non-Response Reduces Security Monitor’s Role to Window-Dressing”, *The Conversation*, 19 December 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Trubowitz and Nicole Mellow, “‘Going Bipartisan’: Politics by Other Means”, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 120, 3 (2005), p.424.

<sup>10</sup> Trevor Matthews and John Ravenhill, “Bipartisanship in the Australian Foreign Policy Elite”, *Australian Outlook*, Vol. 42, 1 (1988), p.9.

<sup>11</sup> Cecil V. Jr Crabb, *Bipartisan Foreign Policy: Myth or Reality* (Evanston, Ill., 1957), p.5.

This is the common understanding of the term, especially among scholars who seek to identify and measure its occurrence.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, bipartisanship can also operate as a *process* for addressing and resolving political issues, via a norm established as a standard of appropriate behaviour against partisan debate which punishes those who are seen to transgress it.<sup>13</sup> Norms are a common feature of political life, acting as unwritten rules that drive the conventions and culture of societies. The specific norm of bipartisanship identified and critiqued in this article is the “*Practice and identity of cooperation between elected representatives as a condition for the successful creation, implementation and management of national defence and security policy*”. The norm is mainly binding on the behaviour of representatives of the major parties. While minor parties can stand outside the norm, they are often criticised and delegitimised for their unwillingness to be bound by the norm’s conventions for how to approach, discuss and resolve policy concerns.

It is tempting to assume that defence and security issues are always conducted in ways that are different from usual democratic practice. The role of classified intelligence and foreign adversaries are legitimate reasons for reducing the flow of information to the public. Some of the academic literature has adopted this assumption, with securitization theorists arguing that the designation of issues as “security” issues takes them out of the sphere of normal political deliberation. However this monolithic understanding of the politics of security — of what the label “security” does — fails to capture the ways different political communities conceive and practice security over time. As Matt McDonald has noted, “while security and action carried out in its name are often presented as natural or inevitable, this meaning of security is based on a series of (often obscured) choices and assumptions”.<sup>14</sup> How communities think about and handle security issues and the powers and privileges they give to authority to handle these issues are all subject to change and evolution. Australia may be similar to most democracies in having less debate about defence policy than, say, education policy, but the specific way Australians approach these issues is due to the impact of local norms. In particular, a norm of bipartisanship on defence and security policy applies, which is the focus of this paper.

In 1984 Coral Bell identified the “prospective emergence in Australian foreign policy of a considerable measure of bipartisanship”.<sup>15</sup> Over the next thirty years the key pillars of this policy, including a focus on defending the Australian continent, an alliance with the United States, and the capability to contribute to regional and global coalition efforts have become “pillars” of Australia’s policy settings. While there are regular efforts at party differentiation — particularly around elections — a number of authoritative studies have shown that there has been much more agreement than

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<sup>12</sup> James M. McCormack and Eugene R. Wittkopf, “Bipartisanship, Partisanship, and Ideology in Congressional-Executive Foreign Policy Relations, 1947-1988”, *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 52, 4 (1990).

<sup>13</sup> Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change”, *International Organisation*, Vol. 52, 4 (1998), p.891.

<sup>14</sup> Matt McDonald, “Constructing Insecurity: Australian Security Discourse and Policy Post-2001”, *International Relations*, Vol. 19, 3 (2005), pp.297-320, p.300.

<sup>15</sup> Coral Bell, “Hawke in Office: Towards Bipartisanship in Australian Foreign Policy?”, *The World Today*, Vol. 40, 2 (1984), p.65.

disagreement on external affairs in recent decades.<sup>16</sup> The Labor Party's much heralded "Defence of Australia" policy in 1987 was largely the fleshing out of ideas that emerged under the Fraser government, while the Liberal Party's 2000 Defence White Paper kept Defence of Australia at the heart of its defence planning. As Rod Lyon has noted, "the history of Defence White Papers since 1976 shows the major parties think about the strategic environment, Australia's role, and defence procurement in largely similar ways".<sup>17</sup>

Matthews and Ravenhill have argued that while agreement about the key structural elements of national policy explains some of this behaviour "it would however be a mistake to overlook the intentional aspect of bipartisanship" an exhortation for cooperation they identify as emerging from at least 1976 onwards.<sup>18</sup> As such, over the decades since the 1980s, Australian politicians have moved to embrace the idea that cooperation and public agreement is the desired standard of behaviour and a requirement for successful policy creation and implementation. As Stephen Conroy, the ALP Shadow Minister for Defence stated in early 2016, "Labor is committed to a bipartisan approach to national security and defence matters".<sup>19</sup>

In the years since Bell wrote, a range of scholars such as Allan Gyngell and Michael Wesley, David Lee, Christopher Waters, Matt McDonald and Nicola Pijovic have all joined her in identifying a dominant bipartisan process operating in Australia's approach to international affairs, and defence and security issues in particular.<sup>20</sup> As Mark Beeson has described, "perhaps the most remarkable feature of the defence debate is that there isn't one. Despite the eye-watering sums involved [...] there's been next to no discussion of their actual necessity or the circumstances in which the planes, subs and other assets might actually be used."<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Peter Jennings, head of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, has written that there is "a reassuringly high level of bipartisanship on defence, which is no bad thing for policy continuity", though he added the important caveat that "being deep in the comfort zone doesn't push the envelope for critical thinking".<sup>22</sup> The national approach is also obvious to outsiders, with a Canadian journalist recently noting that "Australians figured out decades ago that national defence was too important to be left to the whims of competing political

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<sup>16</sup> Matthews and Ravenhill, "Bipartisanship in the Australian Foreign Policy Elite", p.11; George Megalogenis, *The Longest Decade* (Melbourne, 2009); Paul Kelly, *The March of Patriots: The Struggle for Modern Australia* (Melbourne, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Rod Lyon, "Is Defending Ourselves Worthwhile?" in Patrick Walters, ed., *The Strategist* (Canberra, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Matthews and Ravenhill, "Bipartisanship in the Australian Foreign Policy Elite", p.11.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Conroy, "Speech to the ASPI Conference", Thursday 7 April 2016, Canberra, Australia.

<sup>20</sup> Allan Gyngell and Michael Wesley, *Making Australian Foreign Policy*, second ed. (Melbourne, 2007); David Lee and Christopher Waters, *Evatt to Evans : The Labor Tradition in Australian Foreign Policy* (Sydney, 1997); Matt McDonald, "Australian Foreign Policy under the Abbott Government: Foreign Policy as Domestic Politics?", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 69, 6 (2015); Nikola Pijovic, "The Liberal National Coalition, Australian Labor Party and Africa: Two Decades of Partisanship in Australia's Foreign Policy", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 70, 5 (2016).

<sup>21</sup> Mark Beeson, "Australia's defence: should we go down the Kiwi road?", in Walters, ed., *The Strategist*.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Jennings, "The Great Defence Debate: Come on Down!", in Walters, ed., *The Strategist*.

parties and their leaders [...] There is a strong public expectation political parties and their leaders will set aside their differences and work together.”<sup>23</sup>

The bipartisan norm on defence and security policy operates throughout the life cycle of a policy. Hours after the 2016 Defence White Paper was released, and before they had fully read the document, the Opposition Party held a press conference to state that “Labor is committed to a bipartisan approach to national security and defence matters” and that they would approach the document “in the spirit of bipartisanship”.<sup>24</sup> When legislation appears before the parliament, the norm ensures that there is generally speedy passage and a minimum level of debate. In a study of anti-terrorism legislation in Australia, George Williams identified that: “On average, a new anti-terror statute was passed every 6.7 weeks during the post-9/11 life of the Howard government [1996-2007]. In the main, these laws attracted bipartisan agreement and were enacted with the support of the Labor opposition.”<sup>25</sup> Former Senator Russell Trood has described Australian politics in these areas as exhibiting “a high degree of bipartisan and bureaucratic consensus [...] the parameters of the policy debate are often quite narrow”.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, a 2004 study of the role of parliamentary committees on national security issues concluded that “consensus, rather than dissent and rigorous questioning, is the normal modus operandi. As a result, difficult questions about the rights and wrongs of certain foreign policy decisions are not always asked, or are not asked of people in a position to know.”<sup>27</sup> Once a policy becomes law, the norm of bipartisanship requires representatives to maintain support for existing laws, as well as protect and defend the key institutions involved. The effect of the norm is thus to change the behaviour of Australia’s elected representatives and push them to operate within the boundaries of “bipartisan” conduct.

Compliance with the bipartisanship norm is closely monitored and reinforced by a number of outside actors including the press, academics and defence industry. Paul Kelly, the doyen of the Press Gallery, has argued in relation to the threat of terrorism that “Western nations require a degree of consensus to meet the Islamist threat”, adding: “Fortunately Australia’s response is still guided by a high degree of bipartisanship between Liberal and Labor”.<sup>28</sup> When Bill Shorten failed to support Tony Abbott’s response to allegations of spying against Indonesia in late 2013, he was criticised by senior journalists for having undermined “Australia’s long-term unquestioned bipartisanship on intelligence”.<sup>29</sup> Likewise in 2015 when the ALP showed caution about measures to strip citizenship from foreign fighters in Syria, Sydney’s most popular newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph*, ran the headline: “The first

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew Fisher, “Lessons on National Defence from Down Under”, *National Post*, 17 February 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Conroy, David Feeney, and Gai Brodtmann, “David Feeney – Transcript – Doorstop – Defence White Paper”, 25 February 2016.

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.gaibrodtmann.com.au/transcript\\_doorstop\\_defence\\_white\\_paper\\_release](http://www.gaibrodtmann.com.au/transcript_doorstop_defence_white_paper_release).

<sup>26</sup> George Williams, “A Decade of Australian Anti-Terror Laws”, *Melbourne University Law Review*, Vol. 35, 3 (2011).

<sup>27</sup> Trood, “Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy”, p.147.

<sup>28</sup> Kate Burton, *Scrutiny or Secrecy? Committee Oversight of Foreign and National Security Policy in the Australian Parliament* (Canberra, 2004), p.xi.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Kelly, “Judge Tony Abbott’s Security Response on Merit, Not Politics”, *The Australian*, 11 March 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Dennis Shanahan and Sid Maher, “Bipartisan or Playing Politics? Labor’s Mixed Messages on Crisis”, *The Australian*, 22 November 2013.

cracks in Australia's bipartisan approach to terrorism could doom Bill Shorten".<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile Malcolm Turnbull and his government were criticised by the national security journalist Greg Sheridan for being seen to fall short of the "bipartisan bedrock policy and values the Liberal Party claims to hold dear".<sup>31</sup>

Academics and industry figures have also tended to champion and re-enforce bipartisanship. In a major speech on future security challenges for Australia, the head of the National Security College Rory Medcalf argued: "We need a maximum of political consensus on these issues. The good news is that a large measure of consensus and bipartisanship has long existed."<sup>32</sup> Peter Jennings has similarly argued that for the Department of Defence to "manage itself better" would require politicians to maintain "a large measure of political bipartisanship".<sup>33</sup> Such views are also common in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and current defence industry. As one former ADF submarine commander told the media: "Playing politics with a major part of Australia's Strategic Defence should not occur. Have an informed debate, by all means, but keep the politics out of it."<sup>34</sup>

The strength of the bipartisanship norm can also be seen in the way politicians who breach the norm are punished. In a notable case in September 2015, Andrew Hastie, a decorated former SAS officer, sought office as a Liberal Party candidate in a by-election. During the campaign, Hastie criticised the defence policy of the former Labor government and, drawing on his experience in Afghanistan, said: "I didn't think that Labor had our backs [...]". It was that [experience], Hastie explained, that convinced him of the need to go to Canberra to help get the 'policy settings' right."<sup>35</sup> Over the next few days Hastie was widely criticised by the media for an "extraordinary attack" that was "abandoning the usual bipartisan political approach to defence".<sup>36</sup> The leader of the Labor Party said he was "offended" by the claims, describing them as "very unwise" and going on to say "when it comes to backing up our men and women in uniform, both parties have always maintained bipartisanship".<sup>37</sup> Despite Hastie's status as a former member of the Australian Defence Force who was speaking about his experience serving overseas, and as a registered candidate for office, he still faced heavy criticism for having contravened the bipartisanship norm. Such was the strength of the response, Hastie said that he felt that it had been "an attempt to try to gag me".<sup>38</sup>

### **Examining the Impact of the Norm of Bipartisanship**

The arguments made on behalf of the norm of bipartisanship in Australia can be grouped under three major claims. Firstly, that the norm is required to create good

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<sup>30</sup> Simon Benson, "The First Cracks in Australia's Bipartisan Approach to Terrorism Could Doom Bill Shorten", *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 May 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Greg Sheridan, "Federal Election 2016: Faustian deal will damage Lib Brand", *The Australian*, 18 May 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Rory Medcalf, "Towards a New Australian Security", Speech at the Australian National University, Canberra, 17 March 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Jennings, "One Defence: Leave It to Peever", in Walters, ed., *The Strategist*.

<sup>34</sup> Brendan Nicholson, "A Class Act under the Sea", *The Australian*, 02 April 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Calla Wahlquist, "Canning Byelection: Military Service Remains Go-to Answer for Andrew Hastie", *The Guardian* (Australian Edition), 17 September 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Andrew Burrell, "Labor MPs Put Diggers at Risk: Andrew Hastie", *The Australian*, 18 September 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Jared Owens, "Andrew Hastie Using Military as Political Football, Shorten Says", *The Australian*, 18 September 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Burrell, "Labor MPs Put Diggers at Risk: Andrew Hastie".

*policy*. Secondly, that the norm creates a *unity* which is required for good policy implementation. Third and finally, that the norm offers *protection* for those who carry out policy in this area — i.e. it “supports the troops”. While concerns over policy, unity and protection represent important goals, this paper argues that the normative approach to bipartisanship does not achieve its intended purposes. The argument of this paper is grounded in Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino’s eight dimensions for a “quality democracy”, which are “the rule of law, participation, competition, accountability [...] respect for civil and political freedoms and the progressive implementation of greater political [...] equality”.<sup>39</sup> The norm of bipartisanship as it operates in Australia today constrains at least three of those factors, namely restricting participation, competition and accountability in the construction of national policy. In addition, it imposes significant costs to the development and management of Australia’s defence and security policy. As such, this paper argues that the norm of bipartisanship should be abandoned. The implications of this for Australian policy settings are taken up in the conclusion.

### **Argument 1: Create Good Policy**

The *policy argument* for a norm of bipartisanship is based on a concern that in an environment of partisanship the interests of the political parties and key political actors will be put ahead of national concerns. The merits of policy as a means to resolve a situation will thus matter less than the advantage that can be gained from supporting or criticising it. Advocates of bipartisanship also worry that a sense of focus and proportion is lost. The policy argument is often based on a concern about levels of public knowledge and engagement.<sup>40</sup> The American writer Walter Lippmann, perhaps the foremost advocate of bipartisanship during the early Cold War era, famously charged public opinion with having been “destructively wrong at the critical junctures [...] too late with too little, or too long with too much, too pacifist in peace and too bellicose in war”.<sup>41</sup> Good policy creation, in this view, therefore requires listening to the public, but leaving the final judgement to the bureaucracy and political institutions to carefully negotiate. While bipartisanship may be beneficial for policy creation, as a binding norm it hinders the process in three ways. Firstly, it impedes the central mechanism of democratic societies to produce policy: open, competitive debate, and replaces it with a much more centralised method. Secondly, it reduces public engagement and exacerbates public ignorance of international affairs. Finally it reduces accountability and thereby restricts the learning process.

The traditional claim made on behalf of democracy as a superior form of governance is that it can operate a “marketplace of ideas” which strength-tests policy. Scholars have consistently demonstrated — and celebrated — democracy’s capacity to “weed out unfounded, mendacious, or self-serving foreign policy arguments” due to “wide-ranging debate in which their reasoning and evidence are subject to public scrutiny”.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, according to the widely-held “democratic peace thesis”, the input of citizens and domestic lobbies helps to prevent leaders from launching unnecessary conflicts,

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<sup>39</sup> Larry Diamond, Leonardo Morlino, eds, *Assessing the Quality of Democracy* (Baltimore, 2005).

<sup>40</sup> James Headley, Andreas Reitzig, and Joe Burton, *Public Participation in Foreign Policy* (Houndsmills, 2012), p.vii.

<sup>41</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, 7th ed. (New Jersey, 2009).

<sup>42</sup> Chaim Kaufman, “Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War”, *International Security*, Vol. 29, 1 (2004), p.5.

while also giving greater credibility to the threats of democratic leaders.<sup>43</sup> However, in an environment of normative bipartisanship a very different process occurs.

When politicians say they will “support anything which makes our country safer”, we can hardly believe that rigorous scrutiny will be the order of the day.<sup>44</sup> Since the start of the War on Terror, there have been repeated “cycles” of “rushing anti-terror bills through parliament” in the name of combatting terrorism. As one of Australia’s leading legal scholars has noted, this “has produced legislation that can be unnecessary and even counter-productive [...] Some are so poorly drafted and conceived as to be unworkable.”<sup>45</sup> The inevitable result is poor policy creation. As Leslie Gelb has said in the US context, “bipartisan backing at home has too often been purchased at the price of good policy abroad”.<sup>46</sup> Normative bipartisanship tries to circumvent the marketplace of ideas because it questions public capacity to decide on matters of national security. Yet this assumption should not be treated as a given. Walter Russell Mead has shown that the resounding international success of democratic powers such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cannot be explained without fundamentally accepting the role of public involvement and guidance.<sup>47</sup> One reason is that public opinion operates like a “thermostat” continually fine-tuning policy settings depending on international events and perceptions of the correctness of current policy settings.<sup>48</sup> This variability is often criticised for weakening policy continuity, but the ability of democratic societies to shift quickly to accommodate changed circumstances was recognised as far back as the early sixteenth century when Niccolò Machiavelli argued that republics and democracies would be quicker to adapt to changes in warfare and thus, likely to have “greater vitality and more enduring success” than authoritarian and monarchical regimes.<sup>49</sup> The increased use of polling in Australia has shown that the public has the capacity to offer nuanced views, with clear ideas about national interests.<sup>50</sup> Some research has even suggested the public is more aware of and responsive to defence spending than general social spending.<sup>51</sup>

In place of open debate, the norm of bipartisanship encourages a centralised method of planning and decision-making. While this approach has been steadily discredited and abandoned as a viable way to organise most domestic policy issues, there is still a bastion of support by analysts of strategic affairs. The modern-day longing for a lone Machiavellian statesman — perhaps best embodied in the figure of former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger — clearly represents this image of a “great genius [who] labours, essentially alone, at something like a vast, complex, and multidimensional

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<sup>43</sup> Matthew A. Baum and Philip B. K. Potter, *War and Democratic Constraint: How the Public Influences Foreign Policy* (Princeton, 2015), p.4.

<sup>44</sup> Marles, “Interview with Michael Rowland”.

<sup>45</sup> George Williams, “Anti-Terror Laws Need Proper Scrutiny”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 October 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Leslie H. Gelb, “We Bow to the God Bipartisanship”, *National Interest*, November-December 2011, p.18.

<sup>47</sup> Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> Christopher Wlezien, “The Public as Thermostat: Dynamics of Preferences for Spending”, *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, 4 (1995).

<sup>49</sup> Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London, 2001), p.96.

<sup>50</sup> Rowan Callick, “Australians Fear 10 More Years of Terror, Finds Lowy Poll”, *The Australian*, 16 June 2015.

<sup>51</sup> Wlezien, “The Public as Thermostat: Dynamics of Preferences for Spending”, p.994.



game of chess”.<sup>52</sup> Yet there is no reason to believe this sole genius will be any more successful in planning strategy than planning the economy. Indeed, given that strategy requires the integration of military, political, economic, geographic, social and other fields, the reverse might well be true. As the literature on strategy has finally, though reluctantly, come to acknowledge, notions of a “master strategist” are a myth that “demanded an impossible omniscience [...] [and] failed to take into account what were the real and immediate demands of strategy-making”.<sup>53</sup>

The norm of bipartisanship also assumes decision-makers can choose to operate independently from political pressures. However, a growing body of research has demonstrated that public opinion is an important shaper in the way leaders in all societies develop and conduct defence and security policy.<sup>54</sup> This scholarship has shown that even on the most consequential of great power decisions, domestic political concerns infuse the choices and decisions of political leaders.<sup>55</sup> This is not just a feature of democratic societies. Bueno De Mesquita *et al.* have shown that autocratic leaders face intense political concerns to engage with and represent their internal coalitions and align policy choices to their supporters’ interests.<sup>56</sup> Natasha Hamilton-Hart has shown that one-party and quasi-democratic states leaders view security policy through the lens of how it will affect their domestic political standing as much as any external “strategic” rationales.<sup>57</sup> For this reason, the calls to “keep the politics out of it” cannot be treated as either achievable or desirable.<sup>58</sup> The norm of bipartisanship is presumed to take the politics out of the conduct of defence and security policy, but all it actually does is hide it from the public.

Yet if low public knowledge was a significant impediment to democratic governance of international affairs as supporters of normative bipartisanship believe, their approach is a counter-productive way to deal with it. In practice, the norm reduces public attention to defence and security policy issues and hence restricts public understanding on these matters. In many cases “the rules appropriate to bipartisanship automatically become ‘gag’ rules as far as all-out discussion of the matters to which they are applied is concerned”.<sup>59</sup> Broad questions of principle, underlying assumptions and competing alternatives are not openly debated. In a normatively bipartisan environment legislation is proposed, negotiated privately between the bureaucracy and executive and then moved quickly through the parliament with little chance for the public to understand what has been passed in their name. Sixty-nine per cent of the Australian public thus feel that the government pays too little attention to their views.<sup>60</sup> Even when there is plenty of goodwill — such as towards the Australian Defence

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<sup>52</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, p.39.

<sup>53</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York, 2013), p.243.

<sup>54</sup> John H. Aldrich *et al.*, “Foreign Policy and the Electoral Connection”, *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 9 (2006).

<sup>55</sup> Michael Barnett and Jack S. Levy, “Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments: The Case of Egypt, 1962-73”, *International Organization*, Vol. 45, 3 (1991), p.378; Steven R. David, “Explaining Third World Alignment”, *World Politics*, Vol. 43, 2 (1991), p.236.

<sup>56</sup> Bruce Bueno De Mesquita *et al.*, *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).

<sup>57</sup> Natasha Hamilton-Hart, *Hard Interests, Soft Illusions: Southeast Asia and American Power* (Ithaca, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> See Nicholson, “A Class Act under the Sea”.

<sup>59</sup> Kendall, “Bipartisanship and Majority-Rule Democracy”, p.206.

<sup>60</sup> Fergus Hanson, “Australia and the World: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy”, The Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2010, p.9.

Force (ADF) — many in the community “did not feel they received enough information or explanation about the ADF and defence policy”<sup>61</sup> One significant implication of this is that divergences between the elites and the public can still emerge, but without established mechanisms to resolve them.<sup>62</sup> This makes it difficult to build and sustain genuine national understanding and unity should a major security crisis arise.

The third and final problem with the norm of bipartisanship for producing good policy is that it reduces accountability by restricting the learning process that informs policy creation. It is inevitable that mistakes will happen and policy settings will prove to be ineffective or unhelpful. Yet where these issues would normally be brought into public scrutiny thanks to the incentives of opposing political organisations, in a system dominated by normative bipartisanship, those incentives do not operate. While the media may still seek such stories, revelations of error are unlikely to gain much purchase in the public mind thanks to a lack of political uptake. Sometimes this lack of accountability is accepted as a way to “support the troops”, but as will be shown later, bipartisanship does not work in their favour either. A lack of debate also restricts the creation of alternatives. Without the opportunity for political advantage, political parties downplay the significance of these issues, do not allocate serious resources to them, and discourage their best and brightest from focusing on the issue. Australia also has an extremely small think tank sector devoted to international affairs (outside the universities the only substantial institutions in this field are the Lowy Institute for International Politics and the government-funded Australian Strategic Policy Institute). This leaves individual figures who are willing to buck national consensus, such as the Australian National University’s Hugh White, to seemingly dominate the debate. The field of Australian defence and security policy public figures is sparse and increasingly empty as the generation who led the big debates in the 1970s and 1980s slip towards retirement. This includes figures such as Paul Dibb, Desmond Ball (recently deceased), Ross Babbage, Nicholas Cheesman, Peter Stanley, and Peter Drysdale.

Without a partisan spark to motivate scholarship and public engagement, bipartisanship becomes an enveloping blanket which smothers the analysis and creation of Australian defence policy. This is well recognised by those trying to improve national policy. Peter Leahy, former Chief of Army in the ADF, has warned that “without an informed public debate we are unlikely to adjust the way we are fighting the [Afghanistan] war. This is bad strategy.”<sup>63</sup> Leahy is in good company. Hew Strachan, one of the foremost strategic thinkers of the contemporary era, has argued: “Differences over the war’s conduct cannot be suspended in the name of bi-partisan politics if it comes at the cost of legitimate criticism and — possibly — at the price of more effective strategy.”<sup>64</sup> However, even if advocates of bipartisanship were to concede that policy *creation* is harmed by their preferred norm, they would counter

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<sup>61</sup> Peter Jennings *et al.*, “Guarding against Uncertainty: Australian Attitudes to Defence: Report on Community Consultations”, ed. Department of Defence (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). p.5.

<sup>62</sup> Linda Jakobson, “Bridging the China Gulf”, *The Australian*, 22 May 2015; John Garnaut, “A Bet Each Way: Our China Policy Is Rational”, *The Age*, 22 May 2015.

<sup>63</sup> Peter Leahy, “Afghan Silence Leaves Soldiers Stranded”, in Sam Roggeveen, ed., *The Interpreter*, (Sydney, 2010).

<sup>64</sup> Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 2013), p.86.

that policy *implementation* requires a unity that a divisive democratic debate can not produce.

### **Argument 2: The Need for Unity**

The second argument for a norm of bipartisanship is the polity's need for *unity* in the implementation of policy. To avoid the worst of partisanship, politicians should work together and avoid stoking division, putting aside their views for the "greater good". Reoccurring Cold War fears of a "fifth column" embody this concern with internal disunity. Politicians who are seen to risk the "unquestioned bipartisanship" on matters "in the national interest" have their credentials in these portfolios questioned.<sup>65</sup> While political disagreement over how to deal with health or education policies is not assumed to exacerbate the problems of the day, it is widely believed that the squabbles and policy variability of democracies place them at a disadvantage compared to the monolithic approach of a Soviet Union or modern day People's Republic of China. As the former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has said, "the question arises as to whether bipartisanship in foreign policy remains both desirable and possible. Our view is very simple [...] we can ill-afford, in our circumstances, to chop and change our fundamental policy orientation for dealing with the rest of the world every few years."<sup>66</sup> Yet as real as the need for unity is, normative bipartisanship has proven a poor way to achieve it.

Political scientists have extensively studied what factors drive and sustain public support for military actions. As Chris Gelpi, Peter Feaver and Jason Reifler<sup>67</sup> have demonstrated in the US, and Charles Miller<sup>68</sup> has shown in Australia, it is perceptions about the likelihood of success of military operations, rather than factors such as distance, time or casualties that are most significant for ensuring public support. However, as shown above, norms requiring bipartisanship can reduce the quality of national policy and strategy, thus exposing the societies to greater tension and undermining public unity as conflicts drag on and resources are seen to be ineffectively used.

The next reason bipartisanship is a poor answer to the problem of unity is because it overestimates the capacity of the major political parties to create and sustain public unity. For most of the twentieth century the major parties in Australia were mass movements. This made it easier for them to compel support, but this is no longer the case. Both the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal and National Parties have seen substantial falls in membership levels and the minor parties have not expanded to fill the gap. Today the combined membership of the major parties account for less than one per cent of the Australian public.<sup>69</sup> These members and the general public are also less attached to and identified with these parties. As such, agreements of the major parties bind few Australians.

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<sup>65</sup> Shanahan and Maher, "Bipartisan or Playing Politics?"

<sup>66</sup> Kevin Rudd, "Future Challenges in Australian Foreign Policy: Is Bipartisanship Possible?", speech to the Australian Institute of International Affairs, Melbourne, 2 October 2002  
<<http://www.australianpolitics.com/news/2002/10/02-10-02a.shtml>>.

<sup>67</sup> Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver, and Jason Reifler, "Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq", *International Security*, Vol. 30, 3 (2006).

<sup>68</sup> Charles Miller, "Re-Examining the Australian Public's Attitude to Military Casualties: Post-Heroic or Defeat Phobic?", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 68, 5 (2014).

<sup>69</sup> Andrew Leigh, *Disconnected* (Sydney, 2010), p.61.

Not only are parties less able to compel support, they are less able to sustain it either. Even when there is clear bipartisan support for a conflict such as the Afghanistan war, this cannot prevent the public view changing. While unfortunately there is no public polling about Australians' views of the conflict in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2007,<sup>70</sup> since then polls by the Lowy Institute have consistently shown a clear and rising majority oppose the war.<sup>71</sup> As the poll authors note, this mirrors negative attitudes in the United States where a similar elite bipartisan consensus for the conflict operates.<sup>72</sup> At best, bipartisanship may have slowed the decline, but even the unity of Australia's two main parties cannot ensure majority support.

A related issue is the claim bipartisanship is necessary to create the illusion of unity for overseas audiences. However this view relies on an outdated view of the media and communication. The catch-cry "politics ends at the water's edge" dates at least from the US orator Daniel Webster in 1814, an era when news still took months to cross the oceans.<sup>73</sup> The logic behind this well-known cliché is that leaders "seek bipartisanship [...] to convince foreign leaders that they cannot outlast or undermine presidential policies".<sup>74</sup> Whatever merits this once held, it no longer does in an era of 24/7 news, relentless polling and instant global communication. Thanks to the internet, any potential opponent, from a major state such as Russia or China, through to tiny terrorist cells in Syria or Southeast Asia can have as strong a knowledge of the attitudes of Canberra's political class as any Australian citizen. Yet it is still common to see calls for the "water's edge" principle to be upheld.<sup>75</sup> This is a relic of history at best, and one that has not always been faithfully advocated. As Dean Acheson, US Secretary of State under President Truman, famously complained:

you cannot run this damn country under the Constitution any other way except by fixing the whole organisation so it doesn't work the way it is supposed to work. Now the way to do that is to say politics stops at the seaboard — anyone who denies that postulate is a son of a bitch and a crook and not a true patriot. Now if people will swallow that then you're off to the races.<sup>76</sup>

The problem of unity, however, might not be as significant as it initially seems. One of the best explanations for bipartisanship comes from the philosophy of science literature. In the 1970s Thomas Kuhn noted that while scientific research is assumed to be a field of competitive individuals, seeking to falsify the knowledge of others so as to establish new truths, the actual practice of most scientists is to think, write and act within a defined and widely agreed set of assumptions.<sup>77</sup> Such unifying forces are also at work within defence policy communities which tend to involve a small circle of practitioners, scholars, and politicians, and relatively strong hierarchical organisation. Though there are strong motives for individuals to seek accuracy and "objective" knowledge, policy communities are also epistemic communities with their own

<sup>70</sup> Miller, "Re-Examining the Australian Public's Attitude to Military Casualties", p.522.

<sup>71</sup> Oliver, "The Lowy Institute Poll 2013"; Allan Gyngell, "Australia and the World: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy", Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2007.

<sup>72</sup> Oliver, "The Lowy Institute Poll 2013", p.9.

<sup>73</sup> H.C. Lodge, *Daniel Webster* (New York, 2005), p.53.

<sup>74</sup> Gelb, "We Bow to the God Bipartisanship", p.18.

<sup>75</sup> For instance, Michael Fullilove, "Morrison Should Tread Lightly Overseas", *The Australian Financial Review*, 23 June 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Gordon Martel, *American Foreign Relations Reconsidered: 1890-1993* (London and New York, 2002), p.25.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Chicago, 2012), p.297.

inherent biases drawn from organisation, work process, culture and other forces which create and strengthen group cohesion.<sup>78</sup>

Thus it is relatively automatic that within the small group of elected representatives and senior public servants, a number of common values and ideas will emerge around how the world works and Australia's role in it. This is both why we see bipartisanship occurring naturally, but also why having an additional norm that demands it is unnecessary. It takes what is already a cohesive group and reduces debate and originality when responding to complex issues. It is not that unity is unimportant for the conduct of defence and security policy, it is that this unity cannot be delivered through means that demand loyalty rather than creating it. This is perhaps most important when it comes to considering the risks and costs borne by those tasked with implementing policy.

### **Argument Three: Support the Troops**

Finally, the *protection argument* regards the public servants in the defence portfolio as requiring a higher form of support than other portfolios. While this principle also protects spies, diplomats and others who work overseas on behalf of the state, the most emotionally compelling argument for the principle of bipartisanship is the need to support those who wear the military uniform of the state. As Labor's Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs said during the 2002 debate over the Iraq War, "Labor is committed to the objective of bipartisanship on Iraq. In saying that, Labor is acutely conscious of the interests of our men and women in uniform and the searing, scarring experience of the Vietnam War."<sup>79</sup> Though the Australian Defence Force is one of the institutions most concerned about a lack of bipartisanship, it has also been regularly harmed by the norm.

For many serving today, the conflict in Afghanistan has been a painful experience. Following the 9/11 attacks in the US, there was overwhelming public and political support for action in Afghanistan. Over the decade since there has been a steady decline in public support<sup>80</sup> despite a bipartisan commitment to the mission. Rather than facing public spite as during the Vietnam War, today's ADF veterans have endured public isolation. Aside from the odd ministerial statement, there has been minimal discussion of Australia's war in Afghanistan in the national parliament. As detailed by the Parliamentary Library, it was not until 2009 that the Australian government began providing regular updates to the parliament on the war.<sup>81</sup> In 2010 it was the Greens Party who, standing outside the bipartisan consensus on the war, forced the first major Parliamentary debate of Australia's longest running military conflict.

The Defence Department did not help matters. Its generally restrictive media control — in part based upon a fear of debate and disunity — has served to restrict public knowledge of what ADF personnel have actually achieved.<sup>82</sup> The hold of bipartisanship

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<sup>78</sup> Hamilton-Hart, *Hard Interests, Soft Illusions: Southeast Asia and American Power*, pp.16-47.

<sup>79</sup> Rudd, "Future Challenges in Australian Foreign Policy: Is Bipartisanship Possible?"

<sup>80</sup> Oliver, "The Lowy Institute Poll 2013", p.8.

<sup>81</sup> Nathan Church, "Australia at War in Afghanistan: Updated Facts and Figures", Department of Parliamentary Services, Research Paper Series 2013-14 (Canberra, 2013).

<sup>82</sup> Kevin Foster, "Going Dutch or Candidly Canadian? What the ADF Might Learn from Its Allies' Media Operations Practices in Afghanistan"  
<<https://www.regionalsecurity.org.au/Resources/Documents/11-1%20-%20Foster.pdf>>; Jennings *et al.*, "Guarding against Uncertainty: Australian Attitudes to Defence: Report on Community Consultations", p.5.

has effectively kept supporters quiet while critics outside the mainstream have free reign. Without a focal point of partisan debate to give issues endurance or significance, media coverage of Afghanistan has also been light, with many topics bubbling to the surface then disappearing without adequate resolution. This is inevitably noticed by those serving, with implications for the quality of the nation's strategy. As Andrew Hastie, who served in Afghanistan with the SAS, complained: "The biggest thing that was missing for six years under Labor was serious intellectual engagement with soldiers on the ground about how to best prosecute the war in Afghanistan".<sup>83</sup>

Though the war has dragged on and public support has slowly declined, the norm of bipartisanship meant that there has been little pressure on the government to refine its contribution or engage with those in the field.<sup>84</sup> Questions such as whether it was doing enough, whether it could contribute in a more appropriate way, or whether Australia should even be involved at all were all kept off the public agenda. Without an opposing party to hold the government to account on these issues, there was plenty of good will, but little accountability over the way deployed troops were managed by the Defence Department and their political masters. The lack of debate also kept troops from key resources once back home, with contemporary veteran care under-resourced while vast sums were made available for First World War memorials.<sup>85</sup> About the only time the nation's representatives paid sustained attention to serving personnel in Afghanistan was when there were deaths. Forty Australians have died in Afghanistan overall. Each one received a condolence motion in the parliament and saw the Prime Minister and other senior politicians descend on their funerals. Like kids of old, the ADF experience during the Afghanistan war was of being seen — when criticised for behaviour or as casualties of war — but not heard.

The budget of the Department of Defence tells a similar story. After the shocks of East Timor in 1999 and the 9/11 attacks in 2001, there was widespread recognition of the need for more resources. Since then, however, there has been both growth and cuts, with neither clearly tied to the needs of national security. In 2009 promises of major financial expansion in the new Defence White Paper lasted a mere ten days before being reneged on by the Rudd government.<sup>86</sup> In 2011 and 2012 the Gillard government repeatedly cut the Defence budget to help achieve a budget surplus. The government judged that any criticism from reducing Defence's funding would be lower than they would face with similar sized cuts in other policy areas and that the political ambition of a surplus was more valued by the public than both the size and consistency of funding for Defence. In 2013-14 a bipartisan commitment for funding defence at two per cent of GDP emerged that partly alleviated these cuts. However, it is not clear this target matches the tasks expected of the ADF or represents wise strategy.<sup>87</sup>

For all the politicians' rhetoric about the importance of national security decision-making processes, the churn in the Defence Minister position tells a very different story. With the appointment of Marise Payne in September 2015, Australia has its eleventh Defence Minister since the change of government in 1996, compared to five Foreign Ministers and five Treasurers. Not one Defence Minister since 1990 has gone

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<sup>83</sup> Burrell, "Labor MPs Put Diggers at Risk: Andrew Hastie".

<sup>84</sup> Leahy, "Afghan Silence Leaves Soldiers Stranded".

<sup>85</sup> James Brown, *Anzac's Long Shadow: The Cost of Our National Obsession* (Melbourne, 2014).

<sup>86</sup> Mark Thomson, "Defence Funding and Planning: Promises and Secrets", *Security Challenges* 5, 2 (2009), p.93.

<sup>87</sup> Andrew Carr and Peter Dean, "The Funding Illusion: The 2% of GDP Furphy in Australia's Defence Debate", *Security Challenges*, Vol. 9, 4 (2013).

onto another ministry, giving rise to the view it is a “poisoned chalice” portfolio that ends careers.<sup>88</sup> It is therefore no surprise that deputy party leaders, when given their pick of jobs, studiously avoid defence and security portfolios. Paul Keating, Peter Costello and Wayne Swan all served as Treasurer while deputy leader of their parties. Julia Gillard created her own mega portfolio of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and Brian Howe and Anthony Albanese stayed in their existing domestic portfolios.<sup>89</sup> The notable exception is the current Minister for Foreign Affairs Julie Bishop, though her first choice was Shadow Treasurer, before switching to diplomacy. Bipartisanship is meant to be a way to ensure defence policy is treated seriously. As this paper has shown, the actual result is to lock in its irrelevance.

### Conclusion

The Australian norm of bipartisanship may serve some good if it has encouraged political leaders to focus on our common interests instead of their particular ones. But it has also acted to dampen debate, reduce the quality of national policy, excluded the public and often hurt those it claims most to care about protecting. When bipartisanship emerges as an *outcome* of debate and agreement as to the nature of the problem and the right policy solutions, it should be welcomed. Where bipartisanship is a rigid *process* which inhibits the normal working of Australia’s parliamentary democracy, it must be overturned. “The real and consequential problems arise when leaders believe they must have bipartisan help and tailor their positions to facades of unity.”<sup>90</sup>

It is understandable that many have concerns about the direction and standing of Australia’s approach to national security and defence policy issues. Many suggestions have been made offering fundamental changes to national legislation and institutions. Before we try to overhaul the system, we should look at returning to our democratic ethos and letting the system work as designed. Encouraging Australia’s political class to translate their partisan habits in domestic issues and apply them to the defence policy sphere is a simple but potentially effective way to improve the nation’s management of international affairs. Such a move will of course be difficult. Key groups such as the media, academics and the public will have to support the shift for it to take hold.

Recent experience, however, shows that in the rare instances when partisan debate can emerge, it tends to lead to better outcomes. Three examples stand out. In the trade portfolio—which also features confidential information and foreign competitors—there has been a clear partisan divide since at least the early 1990s on whether bilateral or multilateral agreements are preferable. This debate has introduced a flexibility into Australia’s national position. Well before most analysts recognised the Doha WTO round was permanently stalled, Australia had switched to signing bilateral Free Trade Agreements with its region. It’s still not clear whether large deals via the WTO or more FTA’s should be pursued. New strategies might be needed again to grow national trade. However, there has been no intrinsic harm to the nation from the divided attitude of our political parties on this question.

Even where the debate is less about merits but simply partisan advantage, pushing defence policy issues into the public sphere can prove beneficial. In 2012-13 a partisan attack on the Labor Party’s defence budget (complete with hyperbolic comparisons to

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<sup>88</sup> Bernard Keane, “Abbott Reshuffles to ‘Reset and Refocus’”, *Crikey.com.au*, 21 December 2014.

<sup>89</sup> The Coalition agreement between the Liberal Party and The Nationals divides policy portfolios between the two parties. By convention Liberals hold the Foreign Affairs and Defence portfolios.

<sup>90</sup> Gelb, “We Bow to the God Bipartisanship”, p.23.

the pre-Second World War period), led to a brief public discussion over appropriate levels of defence funding and a national target to spend 2 per cent of GDP.<sup>91</sup> In 2014-15 a partisan attack on the Liberal Party's unwillingness to build the future submarine fleet in Australia led to the first real public discussions of what kinds of submarines the country needed and the strategic implications of offshore purchases. It even led to an improved tender process, which switched the leverage from buyer to supplier, potentially saving billions as international bidders competed to offer the greatest value for money.<sup>92</sup> Both debates were criticised at the time, and still hamstrung by bipartisan conventions, but the country is better off for them having occurred.

Support for vigorous party debate does not have to be at odds with a belief that certain forms of bipartisanship carry benefits. As US Republican Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg, himself a great advocate of a "water's edge" curtailment, asserted: "frank co-operation and free debate are indispensable to ultimate unity [...] Every foreign policy must be totally debated [...] and the 'loyal opposition' is under special obligation to see that this occurs."<sup>93</sup> Doing away with a normative demand for bipartisanship may enable more valuable forms to properly flower.

While bipartisanship is the norm today in Australia, it has not always been the case. In the 1970s Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser argued that "some people believe that what is required for Australia's foreign policy is a bipartisan approach. I think it would be fruitless to aim at a sterile bipartisanship in which difference in approach and emphasis are lost by pitching foreign policy at the lowest common denominator".<sup>94</sup> That, however, is precisely what has occurred in Australia ever since. Bipartisanship has become a straitjacket to the conduct of national policy and in turn the country has been far less effective in its policy creation, policy implementation and protecting those on the front line. Managing Australia's position in the "Asian century" with its rising major powers, shifting economic winds and changing forms of warfare requires a willingness to think and act afresh, unbound by tradition or kinship if they do not serve national interests. As T.B. Millar concluded in his classic 1965 work *Australia's Defence*: "Let us not be frightened to have a public discussion on defence. It is the public, after all, which seeks and needs to be defended."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Carr and Dean, "The Funding Illusion".

<sup>92</sup> Andrew Carr, "Australia's Submarines: Bad Politics Can Lead to Good Policy", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 February 2015; Cameron Stewart, "Three-Way Submarine Race", *The Australian*, 21 May 2015.

<sup>93</sup> Fullilove, "Morrison Should Tread Lightly Overseas".

<sup>94</sup> Malcolm Fraser, "Roy Milne Lecture", in *PM Transcripts* (Canberra, 1976), p.14.

<sup>95</sup> T.B. Millar, *Australia's Defence* (Melbourne, 1965), p.167.