

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library Anniversary Lecture
Address by the Honourable Kim Beazley AC
Governor of Western Australia
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Keynote Address

I would firstly like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet – the Whadjuk Noongar people – and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

Since 1976 Australia's national strategy has been "self-reliance within the framework of our alliances". That view had been percolating in Australian official circles and to a degree in the academic community and politics since the early 1960s. What cemented it was an announcement in 1969 by President Richard Nixon as he restructured American global policy in the process of dismantling the dominance of the Vietnam War in American military planning and strategic thinking. South East Asia was relegated to a second order priority in the regional context of the U.S. view of the central balance. In areas like that within which Australia was located, American allies were expected to provide for their security in the first instance.

Hosting facilities critical to the American deterrent meant we were not a normal second order security partner whatever our geography. Policy rarely reflects a singular source. But our experience in the Vietnam War, and the acquisition of weapons with a major strike capability like the F1-11 bomber and submarines, produced a level of confidence, we could at least in our approaches handle complex problems. Nixon's proscription was doable and imposed a useful clarity on the task. Forces could be deployed elsewhere as signalled by us in 1971 when we joined the

Five Power Defence Arrangement for the protection of the Malayan Peninsula.

Rather than anxiety creating the Guam doctrine was liberating. The Americans could be surprised by its consequences.

I remember explaining the 1987 Defence White Paper to my counterpart, the late Caspar Weinberger, who was not enamoured of the possibility of a lesser forward deployment in Australia's thinking, that the U.S. had sent us down this path with The Nixon Doctrine. His response was well that Doctrine is not necessarily the one the US has now.

"We would defend you, you know." Yes I knew but it is a good discipline and a good basis for the burden sharing you reasonably seek.

Prior national strategy from Federation to 1976 at the political level was Forward Defence with great and powerful allies sustained through two world wars and conflict in Vietnam, Korea and Malaya. Of those conflicts, the one which in practise for our defence planners and political leadership reflected a closer experience in reality to contemporary national security policy, was the Second World War.

John Curtin was the only Australian Prime Minister to date whose government faced an existential threat. Though he never stated it in contemporary terms. He ran a strategy out of necessity of self-reliance within the framework of our alliances. That he might have to do so he anticipated when he stated in 1936:

“The dependence of Australia upon the competence, let alone the readiness of British statesmen to send forces to our aid is too dangerous a hazard upon which to found Australia’s defence policy.”

It was one thing to understand that. Easy enough when contemplating the military and war policies of the AXIS powers thrusting toward conflict in both Europe and the Pacific. It was another thing to know what to do about it. The U.S. had the capacity to relieve on both fronts. In the 1930s however the U.S. was isolationist. The experience of World War One had soured any desire for a further European venture. Though increasingly hostile to Japanese ambitions in China and maybe further afield, as the American position in the Philippines and Hawaii was considered, any notion of defending the British Empire in Asia was completely rejected.

That left what could we do for ourselves. The impact of the Depression meant in reality very little. We had a large militia but terribly armed. The beginnings of some naval and aircraft production but very small and hardly to be compared with Japanese capabilities. The British and we had two strokes of luck. For the British it was in the late 1930’s the construction of a brilliant air defence, really ahead of its time. Good aircraft production with spitfires and hurricanes able to handle at a pinch, Luftwaffe equivalents and their bombers. Dispersed airfields and advanced radar able to optimise the use of dispersed fighters. British and American radar was dependant on a mineral, tantalum. Produced then only from a mine in WA’s north. Then and throughout the war we supplied both powers by air once the danger of sunk shipping became too high. The amounts needed were light enough to be so supported. Think rare earths and critical minerals today.

Our stroke of luck was Essington Lewis. He was the head of BHP. In the 1930s he visited both Germany and Japan, but it was Japan which worried him. They were much more secretive. He began a massive stockpiling of iron and steel way beyond the needs of his company. Can you imagine that in today's reverence for market forces? He laid the basis for a massive expansion of Australia's war industries in charge of which he was placed during the war. In the end those industries and what they did for Australia's and America's armed forces, together with what we did in expanding ours during the conflict, looked remarkably like what we would think of in our days as self-reliance.

Then there was the question of alliances. One quote from Curtin's article in the Herald (Melbourne) on 27 December 1941, "The task ahead" is often quoted as we discuss the origins of The American alliance. "Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom. We know the problems the United Kingdom faces. We know the constant threat of invasion. We know the dangers of dispersal of strength, but we know too that Australia can go and Britain can still hold on..."

Neither Churchill nor FDR was happy with that. Both prioritised defeating Germany. We did not desert them. It also has to be pointed out that the Australian 9th Division played a major role in the second battle of el Alamein in October 1942. Throughout the war many Australian airman fought and lost their lives in all British air commands. However the other Australian divisions were brought home from the

Middle East over Churchill's constant efforts to keep them, then divert them to Burma. Curtin resisted the demands and they, plus the 9th Division after el Alamein, were decisive in the campaigns in New Guinea which made General Douglas MacArthur's name. Curtin never lost his belief in Britain. Towards the end of the war, he fought hard to create an alliance relationship in which Britain resumed its stance in the Far East. Albeit he sought substantial Australian influence over the development of the military policy to be adopted.

That being said in 1942 it was all about America. I think that the spirit of that was best reflected in the best short speech ever made by an Australian Prime Minister (Some might argue that Paul Keating's at the internment of the installation of the tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Australian War Memorial. But Curtin's was when we faced extremity). That speech, completely off the cuff, was made on the adjournment of the House in the middle of the battle of the Coral Sea. You all should read it.

The naval battle was fought in part of what is now Australia's EEZ. It was that close. It blocked a Japanese effort to attack head on into Port Moresby. The allied forces were two American carrier task forces and an Australian cruiser squadron (which included an American cruiser). The cruiser squadron took the first attack. But they had learned from the shock loss of the two British battleships, the Prince of Wales and the Repulse, off Malaya. They placed themselves in a diamond formation and shot the attackers to pieces, sustaining little damage. The carriers finally found each other and engaged. The Americans lost a carrier and had another The Yorktown damaged. The Japanese lost most of their air wing and an escort carrier. An

interesting coda was provided by a Japanese surveillance aircraft who interpreted the Australian Cruisers as three American battleships! The thought of that and confronting American and Australian land based airpower without their own air cover, caused them to call the invasion off.

The reward for the Americans came a month later at the Battle of Midway when the Japanese went from an intended six carriers to four. Up against the three American carriers with the advantage of surprise, they lost three carriers in six minutes. The fourth, no longer surprised, destroyed the Coral Sea survivor carrier. The other two destroyed it. For the Australians, our reward was the Japanese had to do Port Moresby by land. Their last attempt at an indirect approach produced the battle of Milne Bay, when at Australian behest they lost their first land battle. Then it was Kokoda. The Japanese believed they saw the lights of Port Moresby. I like to think it was the muzzle flashes of the artillery of the divisions brought home from the Middle East as the Japanese began their bloody retreat.

Curtin was our most literary Prime Minister, devoted to poetry and great prose. In his speech he borrowed a phrase from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. - "As I speak, those who are participating in this engagement are conforming to the sternest discipline and are subjecting themselves with all they have – it maybe for many of them the (then Lincoln) the last full measure of their devotion – to accomplish the increased safety and security of this Territory?"

He realistically assessed the possibility we might not win. Then the fight would be harder. He finished with a clarion call. - "I put it to any man whom my words may

reach...That he owes it to those men, and to the future of the country, not to be stinting in what he will do now for Australia. Men are fighting for Australia today. Those who are not fighting for Australia have no excuse for not working.”

Work and fight they did but not only men. Also women. Single women were civilly conscripted. Married women were put under intense pressure. Women had been prominent in nursing in the First World War. Still important but now in many branches of the armed services, heavily in intelligence but also in flying aircraft to the front line squadrons in the north. We were the most mobilised country in the fight. In war industry women were critical, some 10,000 of them achieving male pay rates. We were so mobilised we ran out of women. In 1944 we demobilised a division to help out. When MacArthur complained the British Imperial General staff intervened and told him that Australia was feeding us and supplying him.

An analysis of the War Memorial points out - “Australia’s war economy provided vast amounts of clothing to hundreds of thousands of American service personnel in the South West Pacific. Huge quantities of basic materials for road and base building, as well as armament, transport and signal equipment were also supplied. In 1943, Australia supplied 95% of the food for a million American servicemen.”

President Harry Truman reporting to Congress in 1946 on the Lend-Lease Act - “On balance, the contribution made by Australia, a country having a population of about seven millions, approximately equalled that of the United States.” Not quite right. We were the only ally of the U.S. who supplied more, a debt we forgave at the end of the conflict.

In terms of employment in important Australian industries from 1939-1946 increases were as follows:

Cement and cement goods	50%
Mineral oils	170%
Smelting and converting of metals	25%
Aeroplanes	250%
Ships and boats	150%
Cutlery and small tools	180%
Dye works and cleaning	110%
Papermaking	90%
Surgical, optical and scientific instruments	260%

In the light of recent submarine discussions another contribution might be mentioned. Fremantle was the largest US submarine base after Pearl Harbour. From there about one third of Japanese shipping was sunk. A smaller base in Brisbane was useful in the Solomon Islands campaign.

I have immense respect for my diplomatic predecessors in the U.S. particularly Sir Owen Dixon taken off the high court to be Ambassador from 1942-1944. I could only dream of his contacts. He joined the Pacific War Council chaired by FDR which met usually weekly. Apart from FDR he met often key figures like Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, and Members of the combined and Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lend Lease Administrator and Special Assistant to President Roosevelt, Edward Stettinius.

He was the go to man because they and their other senior officials, respected him and were happy to give him hard messages. There were lots because our commanding General MacArthur and we were not very popular. It was hard to get through the messages in that fraught and complex environment, that we were making a massive contribution and we should not be judged by the needling they were getting from Evatt and of course the General! We had only just opened our Embassy. He had a direct line to Curtin. In the end, FDR and Churchill came to like and respect Curtin. We were there to the very end. Our landings in Borneo were the last of the Pacific War.

Looking back through the lens of contemporary national strategy how did we look in 1945. With regard to self-reliance in terms of production and mobilisation, really quite extraordinary. Our main ally in our Region depended on us. In terms of our military we had high quality and success in all three branches. We could not have succeeded without American help directly and indirectly through their own struggles near us in Guadalcanal and the Central Pacific. Their extraordinary strategic courage in committing two carriers to blocking a landing at Port Moresby meant we held that pivotal position.

Losing it would have quite possibly knocked us out of the war. However in 1942-3 our soldiers carried the bulk of the New Guinea campaign. Though retreating we were carrying all of the early phase. Triumphant elsewhere the Japanese were slowly getting to comprehend they had a harder fight.

We would not have used terms like self-reliance to discuss this picture though we approached it. What we learned again was the need for great and powerful friends with a crash course in cultivating a new one. Diplomatically we learnt how to engage, who to talk to, how to develop a presentable structure of our needs. Militarily we learned how to collaborate in the domains of battle. Strategically we learned what mattered in our approaches and where we wanted our friends to be. What we did not get was long term commitments.

In moving to contemporary times I would identify four inflection points in our relationship with the Americans. The first was the ANZUS Treaty negotiated in 1951. The second, in the 1960s, was the creation of what I would call the modern American alliance with the negotiation of the Joint Facilities. The third was the 1980s when we put flesh on the bones of self-reliance within our alliances. The fourth has been the negotiation of AUKUS. History does not repeat itself, nor even necessarily rhyme. The strategic structure of our Region however contains within it forces and directions potentially deeply troublesome enough to challenge the verities developed at the time of that third inflection point and with a passing resemblance to the 1930s challenges.

When we did ANZUS we had before us the emerging example of NATO collective defence. What we had in our zone was participation in the structure of what was called the San Francisco system. A hub and spokes arrangement with US as hub and a series of spokes to Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand and ANZUS. By no means all of equivalent status and none with the military character of NATO. Our spoke was a reward for supporting a Peace Treaty with Japan. Very

deliberately the U.S. military ensured it held nothing of the deep complexities of the commitment to NATO. In the 1950s we were, South Korea excepted, engaged as much with the British as with America even with our support for SEATO.

The U.S. Defense Secretary Robert MacNamara dramatically changed that with his determination to secure the capabilities in the Southern Hemisphere necessary to support his triad of strategic forces. The late, great Des Ball described them as the strategic essence of the American relationship. Essentially North West Cape was vital then for communication with ballistic missile submarines, the U.S. second strike capability. Nurrungar doubled American warning time of a Soviet nuclear attack, now as a redundant capability shifted to Pine Gap. Pine Gap essential for an understanding of Soviet missile capability now much more than that. Should perhaps a mistaken calculation involve an attack on them or the satellites they serve, the globe would either be in a nuclear war or on the verge of it.

The 1980s in the context of the times created genuine self-reliance. We had the ability to handle then identified escalated low level threats ourselves without directly involving the Americans. It also changed the character of Joint Facilities, They then became part of the Australian order of battle as well as that of the Americans. North West Cape was our best means of communication with our own submarines. Less relevant for the Americans so we took over it. In its vicinity however other space related joint facilities have recently been established. For Pine Gap we negotiated a level of Australian involvement, which has made it critical for our read on the Region. This brief reading can go no further except to say the capabilities are vastly greater than when I was Defence Minister and our integration much deeper.

We focussed, for what we then described as our 'force in being' to handle what was around us in capability. Incorporated in our force structure as well were elements capable of dealing with higher level threats. They were described as part of an 'expansion base'. A threat which would require us to augment those capabilities we calculated, would take 15 years to emerge. Calculating those developments closely focussed on the concept of warning time.

The fifteen years is up. Warning time except in the sense of actual movement of forces is over. Our level of dependence on the United States, now as opposed to then, has massively increased.

Our defence planners face a massive conundrum. How much of an effort has to be placed on the here and now. What effort has to be put into the long term?

Right now there is the question of hardening our facilities and establishing war stocks. Our facilities are vulnerable. What do we need to do about hardening? Some of that involves what it suggests, building much more defence into what exists. Just as important is dispersal. Remembering for all of this we will have no time. We are now in the long run up. We will fight with whatever we have at the point of delivery. We can only hope that at that point our diplomacy has meant we can abort that delivery.

How do we hide, protect, and secure the necessary supplies be they fuel, ammunition or spares.

What missile capabilities do we add to our aircraft, ships, submarines and soldiers?

How do we get the numbers that we need in platforms and personnel?

Having an Essington Lewis around is not enough. I can only have the deepest sympathy for those now engaged in sorting this. The price of failure on my part as a Minister or my Department was small. Now it may be existential. And it is not just Defence. What Defence does is establish deterrence. Diplomatically, that is an invaluable tool. For other portfolios, notably DFAT, PM&C, Transport, Home Affairs, Attorney Generals, the task as best they can perform it is to create relationships which build confidence in the region and at home plan and secure mobilisation.

The negotiation of AUKUS is an important part of that diplomatic progress, particularly how it is explained. For immediate military purposes it could also help the processes I have described. Though it is not an alliance it has clearly focussed our main ally on our needs and situation.

Our ally does not want war, it wants to avoid it. It dearly hopes for a peaceful Region. I know many of their main decision makers. They are not about frustrating reasonable ambitions. They are about creating an environment of respect and sovereignty. They want top global priorities to be focussed on the resolution of climate change and pandemics. They have to in those infamous words; be able to chew gum and walk at the same time.

Much of AUKUS is however focussed on the long term. Not simply the acquisition of nuclear submarines but also about technologies and supply chains important both for military and civilian purposes. Finally I would like to discuss these from a West Australian point of view. Many of them engage our territory, our mining, our industries our research and our people. We are the world's greatest mineral province. With our other attributes we would be the number one target in this country.

We host the Royal Australian Navy's (RAN) main submarine base. Therefore we are deeply engaged in the submarine changes. Our conventional submarines are the world's best.

I remember as Ambassador visiting Groton, the home of Electric Boat, one of the production facilities of the U.S.'s Virginia Class submarines.

I went on board one of them. I entered the control room. The captain said to me "Recognise anything?" I said "Yes, I am standing in the control room of a Collins class submarine"

"Yes" he said "I served on one as an exchange officer, one of the best I have ever been on. You have solved a range of issues of integration of all systems which we have been pleased to adopt."

We also have, I might add, a range of WA companies expert in under-water technologies valuable not only for our miners but also sensing for military purposes and deployment of weapons.

When we built the Collins it was one of few submarines in the Region. As a conventional boat its operations, though capable everywhere, is most lethal in archipelagic water. There are a number of entry points to Australian waters and it can be decisive in those areas. Since then there has been a massive increase in the number of submarines in our region many nuclear powered. We face a threat in the open ocean. Speed counts in defending our approaches and around our coast. The archipelagic issues remain and the value of The Collins remains well into the future. I just wish I had got my proposal for eight of them up. But for the broad ocean areas a nuclear powered submarine is essential and that has been recognised on a bipartisan basis.

But AUKUS is also about joint research and development on a range of technologies – cyber, artificial intelligence, Quantum technologies, hypersonics, wider undersea technologies, stand-off strike, industrial bases and supply chains. I have already mentioned undersea technologies. UWA has a quantum physics lab. We have super computing capabilities which among other things supports the Square Kilometre Array. On artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, our mining companies are the world's most advanced in robotics. NASA believes their capabilities are ahead of their own in key areas. Edith Cowan heads the CRC on cyber security for Australia and has spun off capacities for companies and functions including Sapien Cyber and the WA Police technical crime unit.

On hypersonics we have Hyper Power Technologies and Murdoch University has had an initial engagement with Defence. There are others engaged. Orbital UAV's sell to the U.S. Navy. In AI we also have Chironix.

In industrial bases and supply chains we have critical capacities. Lynas has the world's largest rare earth mine. There are other mines as well, a vital product for weapons systems and where China has a near monopoly. If we think back to Tantalum, an equivalent now is Coogee Titanium, a unique sovereign capability. The only five eyes source of manufactured titanium. An enormous share of world titanium powder production for new technologies.

Similar to rare earths the world's magnesium supply is strategic, critical to additive manufacturing and military applications. So Coogee Titanium's WA operation also offers a vital magnesium powder source for modern technology and military applications.

This has been a summary but there are numbers of other companies and research institutions I haven't been able to mention. Our minerals and our associated capabilities, particularly in battery and magnet technologies are critical in these supply chain issues.

When I was Defence Minister I always found it helpful to talk about capabilities we had to deal with not countries.

Not so easy these days.

In John Curtin's day we mounted as a people a massive defence effort. Despite that, then we understood completely our survival and independence depended on a gigantic allied effort.

There is much we can do for ourselves. Particularly in the area of diplomacy in our Region and further afield. We have to stand for the prosperity and security of our Region. We also need a laser like focus on the issues I have been talking about. We are a democracy so that means not just government but also people. Curtin was confident we were up to the challenge then. We will be now.

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