After Covid-19

Volume 2

Australia, the region and multilateralism

STRATEGY

ASPI
AUSTRALIAN STRATEGIC POLICY INSTITUTE

Edited by Michael Shoebridge
and Lisa Sharland

September 2020

After Covid-19

Volume 2

Australia, the region and multilateralism

About ASPI

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute was formed in 2001 as an independent, non-partisan think tank. Its core aim is to provide the Australian Government with fresh ideas on Australia's defence, security and strategic policy choices. ASPI is responsible for informing the public on a range of strategic issues, generating new thinking for government and harnessing strategic thinking internationally. ASPI's sources of funding are identified in our Annual Report, online at www.aspi.org.au and in the acknowledgements section of individual publications. ASPI remains independent in the content of the research and in all editorial judgements. It is incorporated as a company, and is governed by a Council with broad membership. ASPI's core values are collegiality, originality & innovation, quality & excellence and independence.

ASPI's publications—including this paper—are not intended in any way to express or reflect the views of the Australian Government. The opinions and recommendations in this paper are published by ASPI to promote public debate and understanding of strategic and defence issues. They reflect the personal views of the author(s) and should not be seen as representing the formal position of ASPI on any particular issue.

Important disclaimer
This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in relation to the subject matter covered. It is provided with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering any form of professional or other advice or services. No person should rely on the contents of this publication without first obtaining advice from a qualified professional.

© The Australian Strategic Policy Institute Limited 2020

This publication is subject to copyright. Except as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part of it may in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, microcopying, photocopying, recording or otherwise) be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted without prior written permission. Enquiries should be addressed to the publishers. Notwithstanding the above, educational institutions (including schools, independent colleges, universities and TAFEs) are granted permission to make copies of copyrighted works strictly for educational purposes without explicit permission from ASPI and free of charge.

First published September 2020

Published in Australia by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute

ASPI
Level 2
40 Macquarie Street
Barton ACT 2600
Australia

Tel + 61 2 6270 5100
Fax + 61 2 6273 9566
Email enquiries@aspi.org.au
www.aspi.org.au
www.aspistrategist.org.au

Facebook.com/ASPI.org

@ASPI_org

ISBN 978-1-925229-62-2 (online pdf)
ISBN 978-1-925229-61-5 (print)

No specific sponsorship was received to fund production of this report

Contents

Introduction

Lisa Sharland and Michael Shoebridge

The global Covid-19 crisis continues to dominate the international strategic environment, fuelling uncertainty about the future. The only thing that's certain is that this pandemic will be with us for some time yet, meaning that Australia, like other nations, needs to be prepared to manage its response to the pandemic while simultaneously focusing on the future.

Since we approached the contributing authors to write for this second volume in May, there's been a second wave in Victoria, New Zealand has gone back into a temporary lockdown in parts of the country, and the US has experienced a resurgence in different states and a death toll now over 191,000 as it approaches a presidential election. Those developments remind us that the pandemic will continue to be with us for months, if not years, until a vaccine is discovered and globally administered. Covid-19 and the responses to it will also continue to have a disproportionate impact on different segments of the population—such as women, youth, and racial and ethnic minorities—well beyond the crisis phase. This volume of *After Covid-19* has built on volume 1 and continued to take a longer term view by looking at some policy settings and identifying likely challenges and opportunities, particularly as they relate to Australia's role in the region and the multilateral system.

The pandemic has simultaneously highlighted the flaws in and need for multilateralism. While some multilateral institutions, such as the UN Security Council, have been crippled with indecision due to geopolitical rivalries, others, such as the World Health Assembly, managed to adopt a resolution on an investigation into the origins of the pandemic. Indeed, those developments highlight the valuable role that Australia can have in engaging in such processes. As Foreign Minister Marise Payne noted in June, multilateral organisations 'create rules that are vital to Australia's security, interests, values and prosperity'.

At the same time, as this publication has been under development, there's been greater debate about Australia's shifting strategic environment. The release of Australia's Defence Strategic Update 2020 in July underscored how rapidly the global security environment is shifting, particularly within our region. Those developments, coupled with the challenge of Covid-19, mean that Australia will need to invest and work closely with partners in the region to counter those concerns and support responses to build resilient institutions.

In the first volume of *After Covid-19*, John Coyne and Peter Jennings noted that 'This pandemic has created a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our nation to critically review and reset many of our policy assumptions.' While that remains the case, as the contributing authors in this volume note, that will require us to move beyond assumptions about the global strategic environment and Australia's role in the world, to reimagine what the world and Australia's place in it might be as we move beyond the pandemic.

We offer our thanks to the contributing authors, who offered their analysis and reflections, and to Steve Clark and Emily French, who made the delivery of this volume possible.

Australia and the region

South Pacific perils and positives

Graeme Dobell

The coronavirus pandemic is a first-order threat in the hierarchy of risks and challenges confronting the South Pacific.

The perils the islands face mean Australia faces core questions about its interests and influence in the region.

Add to the interests equation the values Australia shares with the South Pacific—the many positives of the islands—vividly expressed in Scott Morrison's embrace of the Pacific 'family' (Morrison 2018).

Here's my ordering of the hierarchy of South Pacific challenges:

1. human security and state security
2. climate change
3. natural disasters
4. natural resources
5. China.

Consider them in reverse order of importance …

5. China

Canberra judges that China wants to become the dominant strategic power in the islands, with military reach and bases to match. This went from a matter of debate to the Canberra consensus about three years ago. Australia today sees its strategic interests in the South Pacific directly challenged by China.

Not since World War II and the Cold War have the islands been so strategically relevant. The region and world are waking to the China challenge. In our near region, it's manageable. That's good, because China offers plenty of upside, as the Australian economy attests.

Canberra worries about China's ability to buy island elites. As the switch of diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China by Solomon Islands shows, Beijing can buy a government, but it's harder to buy a people and a country (Cavanough 2019).

China has economic reach but little soft power. Australia needs to have confidence in our deep shared history with the South Pacific.

The islands know how to bargain; they've been dealing with the arrival of big powers for 250 years. China is being judged on its performance and it's not winning everything. China will have a big role—our aim must be to work with the islands and key institutions to shape that role.

Canberra has dealt itself into China's island game by creating the A$2 billion Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific, to provide telecommunications, energy, transport and water. There's still much room for China, as the region needs infrastructure investment of more than US$3 billion per year to 2030.

Playing to our strengths and the values of Pacific people can write the script for playing with, not against, China. Important institutions can do their bit for this script: the Pacific Islands Forum, the Pacific Community, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.

As the natural regional partner always here to help, Australia's tactic must be more, 'Yes, but…' than, 'No way!'

A winning equation reads: China does lots of infrastructure, plus Australia does lots of infrastructure, plus Australia serves Pacific people and the values that Australia shares with islanders. Take heart from Professor Richard Herr's conclusion that China's influence is more about economic clout than soft power: 'The admiration that Pacific Island states feel for China is genuine. However, on balance, China's current regional soft power lacks breadth and depth, although it's still evolving' (Herr 2019).

In responding to China in the region, Australia needs to know the dragon's limits as well as its capabilities.

The way China talks to the islands is clearly different from Australia's language. Canberra's emphasis on good governance, economic reform and anticorruption policies has no counterpart when Beijing calls.

Pacific politicians contrast the Chinese approach with the demands imposed by Australia—but the values Australia argues for resonate on the streets and in the villages. The values dimension is an important part of putting Pacific people at the centre of our policy. The South Pacific positives lean towards Australia, not China.

4. Natural resources

Natural resources are a set of assets with risks attached.

The islands strive to protect and use their fishery resources. Tuna rates as a relative success story.

Tropical forests are a tragedy. The dwindling, ravaged forests of Melanesia show what happens when extraction becomes exploitation, flavoured by corruption. Logging has been unsustainable and often illegal.

Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Solomon Islands are the biggest sources of tropical logs for China. Log exports from the Solomons are more than 19 times a conservative estimate of the annual sustainable harvest (Global Witness 2018).

Individual nations have done poorly on logging, compared to the collective action of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, which works to manage, monitor and control the distant-water fleets from China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

Logging and fisheries offer lessons and cautions as the islands consider future prospects for exploiting seabed resources.

3. Natural disasters

Islanders are among the most vulnerable in the world to natural disasters.

The 2019 World Risk Index lists four Pacific island countries among the top 10 most at-risk countries: Vanuatu ranked first, Tonga third, Solomon Islands fourth and PNG sixth. In the top 20 of the index, Fiji is at 12, Timor-Leste at 15 and Kiribati at 19 (World Risk 2019).

Disasters involve more than the forces of nature. The risk index assesses the weakness of government and society and the ability to respond to an emergency:

> The more fragile the infrastructure network, the greater the extent of extreme poverty and inequality, and the worse the access to the public health system, the more susceptible a society is to natural events.

2. Climate change

Climate change is a huge threat, but a powerful unifier—something island leaders and their people can agree on.

Australia's *2016 Defence White Paper* described what the challenge will mean for human and state security:

> Climate change will see higher temperatures, increased sea-level rise and will increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. These effects will exacerbate the challenges of population growth and environmental degradation, and will contribute to food shortages and undermine economic development. (DoD 2016: 55)

The South Pacific has nominated climate change as its top security threat. In the words of the Pacific Islands Forum's 2018 Boe Declaration:

> We reaffirm that climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific and our commitment to progress the implementation of the Paris Agreement. (PIF 2018)

The forum's 2019 declaration was even louder on the threat to the survival of the Blue Pacific:

> Right now, climate change and disasters are impacting all our countries. Our seas are rising, oceans are warming, and extreme events such as cyclones and typhoons, flooding, drought and king tides are frequently more intense, inflicting damage and destruction to our communities and ecosystems and putting the health of our peoples at risk. (PIF 2019)

Accepting those statements, how is this ranked second? The answer is to see the hierarchy in terms of power and responsibility. The islands unite and campaign on climate change because they aren't responsible for global warming.

Talking about the danger puts leaders on the diplomatic offensive. Yet it's a way for leaders not to talk about their core responsibility to deal with the greatest challenge facing the islands—the needs of their own people.

The ordering offered by the forum's Boe Declaration has a big 'not responsible' flavour. The first two points of the declaration are about climate change and the dynamic geopolitics of 'an increasingly crowded and complex region'.

The third point in the Boe document is where the leaders step forward to claim 'stewardship' of the Blue Pacific. Not until point 7 of the declaration does an expanded concept of security arrive. Even then, human security is discussed in terms of outside 'humanitarian assistance, to protect the rights, health and prosperity of Pacific people'.

It's an indirect way to discuss the biggest, related issues—human security and state security—which are the major responsibilities of island leaders and the greatest perils confronting island peoples.

1. Human security and state security

The challenges that the islands face—social, health, economic and political—merge new concepts of human security with traditional issues of state security.

South Pacific governments confront their ceaseless capability conundrum: the limited ability of the state and the national economy to deliver for their people.

The islands are strong societies with weak governments.

The societies stretch and strain while the governments get no stronger. The traditional stabilisers of village, clan and religion are shaken. The challenges of modernisation come from outside and inside.

South Pacific cities are as challenged by sewage as they are by sea-level rise. The ocean tide coming in matches the tide of those leaving the villages for towns and cities. The islands grapple with urbanisation.

Health problems abound. Colin Tukuitonga, a doctor from Nuie who was head of the Pacific Community from 2014 until recently, talks of 'dual crises'—the climate crisis is matched by the health crisis:

> Noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes and heart disease cause three out of four deaths in the Pacific. These conditions are fuelled by a pipeline of risk factors such as high levels of smoking, unhealthy diets and reduced levels of physical activity. These conditions cause considerable personal costs such as blindness and kidney and heart failure. (Tukuitonga 2019)

In the South Pacific country most important to Australia, PNG, the threat of Covid-19 adds to the sense of PNG's 'economic, fiscal and social crisis' (Wall 2020).

The islands, especially Melanesia, have the youth bulge that brings revolutions. Strong population growth and weak income growth make a dangerous formula for human security, social harmony and state stability.

The Pacific catch-22 is the 'paradox of relatively high per capita levels of aid and low rates of economic growth'—the Pacific limits to growth (Pollard 2018). In the Pacific, real average income per capita has increased by less than 10% since 1990 compared with about 150% in Asia's emerging market economies (DFAT 2018: 2).

Australia worries quietly about a breakdown of state legitimacy and capacity among its neighbours.

Thinking about likely flashpoints in the manner of the Australian military, John Blaxland (2020) offers a crisis scorecard for the coming decade, with 10 being the highest probability. Bougainville's quest for independence from PNG is an 8. The prospect of a breakdown in law and order in the island arc—as happened in Timor-Leste and Tonga in 2006, and repeatedly in Solomon Islands—is also an 8.

Covid-19 shapes as a diabolical stress-test for the stability of island states as well as their health systems. Vanuatu-based journalist Dan McGarry says 'chronically fragile economies' face massive disruption:

> The nations of the Pacific not only have to fight an unprecedented public health threat; the majority have to retool their entire economies. It will be a difficult transition, fraught with risks. If the Pacific island countries are starved of the resources they need, they may collapse. (McGarry 2020)

To shut out the pandemic, the islands had to shut out the world. Their initial success gives time to plan. Tackling the health challenge will be part of the response to the twin perils of human and state security.

The traditional capability challenges now come with a Covid coda.

Recommendation: Play to the South Pacific positives

Do what Australia is already doing, just lots more of it. More cash. More commitment. More ambition. Build on the strong community within the islands and the strong bonds of the regional community.

The Australian talk of family is a folksy way of understanding the need for a stronger, more capable Pacific community. The non-folksy expression is Australia's offer to the islands of economic and security integration.

Australia can propose integration, but it'll happen gradually, not because Canberra pushes but because New Zealand and the islands decide they want it. The crucial Kiwi will, as ever, have a central role (Dobell 2019).

The Pacific positives offer much for today's community and what we must create.

The peoples of the South Pacific, inhabiting an environment that can be as harsh as it is beautiful, constitute true nations.

The island nations have clear identities of culture, language, ethnicity and history, offering much to admire and learn from.

These strong societies and their weak states made the smoothest transition from colony to independence of any region.

South Pacific states have been able to transplant and grow Western democratic forms—they have a better collective record than anywhere else in the developing world. Fiji proves the power of the Pacific's democratic norm by clawing its way back to elections from its military coups.

Pacific democracy is beset by 'big man' politics and corruption, but democracy reigns across the region, often rough, yet admirably robust. The next challenge is for Pacific women to get their share of political power. The positives are central to Pacific life (and must hearten policymakers in Canberra and Wellington).

The islands are Christian with relatively conservative societies that are English-speaking, pro-Western and pro-capitalist. Apart from English as the *lingua franca*, the French territories of Polynesia, New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands also tick those boxes.

Australia embraces the place the rest of the world wants to visit on holiday. We get to create community in paradise, in vibrant societies with wonderful cultures. More luck for the lucky country.

South Pacific nations, so different from Australia, actually speak our language: not just English, but in their understandings of religion and politics. We share a lot of history, and most of it's good. Just like a family, really. We differ, yet agree on the fundamentals.

For Australia, geography meets community in the South Pacific, so our interests align with our values. Canberra must accentuate those Pacific positives, to work with what's natural in the islands.

The pandemic is one more peril confronting Australia's Pacific community, asking Australia what more it must do for the Pacific family.

References

Blaxland J 2020. 'Potential flashpoints in the 2020s: overlapping contestation, governance and environmental crises', *Defence Connect*, 22 January, online.

Cavanough E 2019. 'When China came calling: inside the Solomon Islands switch', *The Guardian*, 8 December, online.

DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) 2018. *Australian aid budget summary 2018–2019*, Australian Government, Canberra, online.

Dobell G 2019. *Australia's Pacific pivot: destiny, duty, denial and desire*, ASPI, Canberra, April, online.

DoD (Department of Defence) 2016. *2016 Defence White Paper*, Australian Government, online.

Global Witness 2018. *Paradise lost: how China can help the Solomon Islands protect its forests*, Global Witness, October, online.

Herr R 2019. *Chinese influence in the Pacific Islands: the yin and yang of soft power*, ASPI, Canberra, April, online.

McGarry D 2020. 'A re-shaping of development assistance to avert a Pacific collapse', *Devpolicy*, 7 April, online.

Morrison S 2018. 'Australia and the Pacific: a new chapter', address by the Prime Minister, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville, Queensland, 8 November, online.

PIF (Pacific Islands Forum) 2018. *Boe Declaration on regional security*, PIF Secretariat, Suva, online.

PIF (Pacific Islands Forum) 2019. 'Kainaki II declaration for urgent climate change action now', 50th forum communiqué, PIF Secretariat, Suva, online.

Pollard S 2018. 'The Pacific limits to growth', *Devpolicy*, 3 May, online.

Tukuitonga C 2019. 'Who is driving the Pacific agenda?', *Griffith Asia Insights*, Griffith University, 13 December, online.

Wall J 2020. 'PNG already faces an economic, fiscal and social crisis and coronavirus is still to come', *The Strategist*, 25 March, online.

World Risk (2019). *World risk report 2019: focus—water supply*, Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft and Ruhr Universität, Bochum, online.

Pacific travel bubble: led by NZ and Fiji, the Pacific family should start without Australia

Michael Shoebridge

As of 31 August 2020, Fiji and New Zealand were two nations with some of the lowest numbers of Covid-19 cases and have had limited[1]—or, in Fiji's case, no[2]—community transmission. Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga, Tuvalu, Palau (MoH 2020), Solomon Islands and Vanuatu all still have no reported cases. Australia, while managing the pandemic well on almost any international comparison, is still working to contain recent outbreaks[3]—a notably larger one than New Zealand's in Victoria, but also in more limited ways in NSW and Queensland.

There's a big shift here in tone and thinking from back in early May, when Scott Morrison and Jacinda Ardern were in close negotiation about starting an Australia – New Zealand 'travel bubble' as part of reopening our economies and societies (Shoebridge 2020). Ardern has been polite but clear on this, saying on 3 August that 'In terms of repercussions for our wider plans around a trans-Tasman bubble, obviously that will be a long way off given what they're experiencing right now.'

She's right. The idea that Australians and New Zealanders could be moving freely between our two countries as early as September was beguiling but now looks crazy. That's killed the idea that, any time in the next few months, Australia and New Zealand could have a travel bubble that we can then extend to other Pacific nations.

So, looking at the South Pacific, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, PNG and Fiji, New Zealand and Australia are the only ones of the 18 Pacific Island Forum (PIF) members that have reported cases of Covid-19.[4] Of course, it's possible that there are unreported cases in all 18 member states (PIF 2020), but the data is pretty clear—the Pacific family is managing the Covid pandemic well. That could change rapidly, but Australia is the family member that's struggling the most right now, even if we still rate well globally for our pandemic response.

New Zealand's success has been brought about by a clear strategy of eliminating community transmission of the virus, implemented through three types of measures: ongoing border controls to stop Covid-19 entering the country; a lockdown and physical distancing to stop community transmission; and case-based controls using testing, contact tracing and quarantine. Ardern's willingness to maintain restrictions in Auckland and across wider New Zealand to achieve this goal has been well communicated to the New Zealand population (Ardern 2020a).

Fiji's approach has parallels both with New Zealand and with other PIF members that have taken a proactive and strict approach to border controls and quarantining of returned citizens (US Embassy 2020). Fiji has also implemented social distancing practices nationally to reduce the likelihood of outbreaks despite the border closures. If there's a weakness regionally, it's in the capacity of regional nations' health systems, as well as their abilities to do broad public health surveillance and rapid responses, including contact tracing and treatment.

There's a foundation here for New Zealand and Fiji as two big lifters in the Pacific to create a Pacific family club that recognises each others' management strategies for Covid and, where those strategies prove effective in eliminating community transmission, to allow movements of businesspeople and tourists between them.

The club would start small, probably beginning with just those two members, and build slowly as individual small Pacific states establish confidence among their own people that they can open to New Zealand and Fiji. It's not just their own populations' confidence about the opening, of course—each joining state will need to also demonstrate to Wellington and Suva (and the people of Fiji and New Zealand) that the additional risks to them are minimal, while the benefits are large.

The economics behind this initiative are obvious: after Australia, New Zealand is Fiji's second largest source of tourists; some 300,000 Kiwis visited Fiji in each of 2018 and 2019 (Mira 2020). As in much of the Pacific, tourism powers somewhere around 34% of the Fijian economy (MITT 2019). And Australia isn't always the biggest source of tourists—in Samoa, it's New Zealanders who are the biggest single category of tourists (STA 2019). And the psychological benefits to both the travellers and the locals in the receiving countries from this resumption of people movement are probably just as or more compelling—mental health is emerging as one of the gravest issues for societies facing a pandemic that has no clear end in sight (Pierce et al. 2020).

Australia's part in this will need to be a supporting one, continuing to provide medical supplies and keeping transport corridors open for other critical items such as food, fuel and seasonal workers (DFAT 2020). For particular small states to join the Pacific Covid-safe club, they're likely to need more assistance with public health surveillance, testing and tracing capacity and with quarantine measures for cases brought into their jurisdictions. They'll need continuing assistance in maintaining effective border controls and protection for border workers and officials.

Jacinda Ardern is worth listening to, here: she says that rapid and reliable testing opens up new opportunities and she's more than aware that the foundations for managing to zero community transmission include well-equipped and effective broader controls and quarantine arrangements, complemented by effective domestic public health monitoring, surveillance and response (Ardern 2020b).

Scott Morrison knows that Australia's assistance to Pacific neighbours for this entire agenda is essential, as he showed in his recent meeting with PNG's Prime Minister Marape (Morrison 2020a). Australian capacity is being used in the region—and, as an example, has contributed to Fiji's effective response so far (I-P CHS 2020). So Australia can and will help, even as we cope with containing the outbreaks we're experiencing here at home.

In a strange way, Australia not being a founding member of a Pacific Covid-safe travel bubble but providing critical assistance to make it work is no bad thing. It will show our Pacific partners we mean it when we talk about family, and when the Prime Minister takes up Fiji Prime Minister Bainimarama's *vuvale* concept (PM&C 2019).

This might also be the most tangible way to end any lingering concerns our Pacific neighbours might have about Australia's commitment to the Boe Declaration's expanded concept of security, which puts a greater emphasis on human, environmental and resource security (PIF 2018).

If the rest of the PIF does establish a travel bubble, it then becomes something Australia must aspire to be able to join. While Ardern seemed open to this being possible on an individual state or territory basis rather than for Australia as a whole[5], it's hard to see the national cabinet welcoming an international approach that splinters the federation from outside, given the current efforts required to maintain domestic cohesion.

As long as there are credible prospects of outbreaks the size of Victoria's, though, it's hard to see Australia being able to join any Pacific travel bubble. This isn't about whether we need a change in national strategy from suppression to elimination, because, for those who take the time to understand the current strategy, the goal is 'suppression of Covid-19 until a point in time a vaccine or effective treatments are available, with the goal of no local community transmission' (Morrison 2020b). That looks a lot like New Zealand's approach, the difference being that our implementation had gaps that the virus exploited and that we're working to close.

So, while Australia now can't lead the creation of a Pacific travel bubble, we can and should be the key to helping one come into being and succeed. We can also encourage New Zealand's and Fiji's leaders to take the initiative. By early 2021, we might even be in a position to apply for membership of the family club.

References

Ardern J 2020a. '#LIVE Update on the government's COVID-19 response', *Facebook*, 29 August, online.

Ardern J 2020b. 'Next steps in COVID response', speech, 15 July, online.

DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) 2020. 'Australia stepping-up to address COVID-19 in the Pacific', Australian Government, online.

I-P CHS (Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security) 2020, 'Fiji', Australian Government, online.

Mira RR 2020. *Engaging users and investing in statistics*, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 15–19 June, online.

MITT (Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport) 2019. *Fijian tourism 2021*, Fijian Government, online.

Morrison S 2020a. 'Papua New Guinea – Australia Comprehensive Strategic and Economic Partnership', media statement, 5 August, online.

Morrison S 2020b. 'National cabinet', media statement, 24 July, online.

MoH (Ministry of Health) 2020. *Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) situation report*, 31 August, Government of Palau, online.

Pierce M, Hope H, Ford T, Hatch S, Hotopf M, John A, Kontopantelis E, Webb R, Wessely S, McManus S, Abel KM 2020. 'Mental health before and during the COVID-19 pandemic: a longitudinal probability sample survey of the UK population', *The Lancet*, 21 July, online.

PIF (Pacific Islands Forum) 2018. *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, PIF Secretariat, September, online.

PIF (Pacific Islands Forum) 2020. 'The Pacific Islands Forum', PIF Secretariat, online.

PM&C (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet) 2019. 'Stepping up with Fiji', news release, Australian Government, 1 November, online.

Shoebridge M 2020. 'Australia and New Zealand should plan to expand the trans-Tasman bubble to the Pacific islands', *The Strategist*, 7 May, online.

STA (Samoan Tourism Authority) 2019. *Total visitor arrivals by country/year*, Samoan Government, online.

US Embassy (US Embassy in Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga, and Tuvalu) 2020. *COVID-19 information*, online.

Notes

1 Coronavirus Resource Center, 'New Zealand', Johns Hopkins University, 2020, online.
2 Coronavirus Resource Center, 'Fiji', Johns Hopkins University, 2020, online.
3 Coronavirus Resource Center, 'Australia', Johns Hopkins University, 2020, online.
4 Coronavirus Resource Center, 'COVID-19 dashboard', Johns Hopkins University, 2020, online.
5 'Jacinda Ardern says trans-Tasman travel bubble "a long way off" as Covid-19 takes off across the ditch', *1 News*, 3 August 2020, online.

New Zealand's Covid-19 support to the Pacific islands

Anna Powles

New Zealand support to the Pacific

New Zealand's response to the Covid-19 pandemic risk in the Pacific islands region is underpinned by two drivers: the Pacific Reset and New Zealand's Pasifika community. New Zealand's own response to Covid-19 has been aggressive, enabling the country to end community transmission of the virus, and that's reflected in the foregrounding of the Pacific islands across New Zealand's national and global strategies to respond to Covid-19. In the Pacific, this is an opportunity to build back smarter.

The rapid closure of New Zealand's borders to the Pacific islands in March was a critical preventive measure recognising that New Zealand is one of the main gateways to the Pacific islands, and partly informed by the measles outbreak in Samoa in November 2019. Over a period of two months, Samoa recorded 5,634 measles cases and 81 deaths—most of children under five—and a six-week state of emergency was enacted to prevent community transmission. In December 2019, New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) admitted that it was 'highly likely that New Zealand is the main source for the outbreak in Samoa', despite Foreign Minister Winston Peters earlier suggesting that this was speculation (RNZ 2019).

New Zealand's support to the Pacific islands can be grouped into two categories:

- assistance with short-term strategic preparedness and response plans via economic and technical assistance and health support channelled (like Australia does) through bilateral humanitarian corridors or through the WHO and regional pathways
- longer term support to bridge the humanitarian–development nexus.

In mid-March, at the outset of the pandemic, New Zealand established an initial NZ$10 million package (part of a NZ$50 million suite) of rapid financial support targeting 12 Pacific countries to support two objectives:

- Support health preparedness, including the provision of critical medical equipment such as oxygen machines, isolation facilities, ventilators and personal protective equipment.
- Build economic preparedness through financial contributions towards Pacific governments' emerging economic response initiatives (Kings 2020).

Early prioritisation of the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau (the first two of which are in free association with New Zealand and the last of which is a non-self-governing territory of New Zealand) was critical, and New Zealand, in partnership with the WHO, deployed technical teams to assist with Covid-19 preparations. Signalling the importance of the New Zealand – Fiji relationship, New Zealand provided NZ$5.6 million in direct budget support to assist Fiji's health system to prepare for and respond to Covid-19.

Following the border closure, and in recognition of the economic fallout of the pandemic, the approximately 10,000 Pacific islanders who are part of the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme and significant contributors to remittance payments to the Pacific had their visas extended and were made eligible for the government Covid-19 wage subsidy.

In May, the New Zealand Government delivered its 'Rebuilding Together' Budget, which included an additional NZ$55.6 million for official development assistance in the Pacific. Foreign Minister Winston Peters stated: 'New Zealand is supporting our Pacific neighbours in these difficult times and will continue to help them tackle this virus and rebuild their communities and economies which have been badly affected by the global pandemic.'

New Zealand's efforts at the regional level have been centred on providing technical and financial assistance and keeping supply chains open through the Pacific Islands Forum's Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on Covid-19 (PHP-C). In April, the Pacific Islands Forum invoked the Biketawa Declaration to collectively respond to the pandemic. The PHP-C provides a framework to coordinate the distribution of medical supplies and equipment, including by expediting customs clearance requirements and diplomatic approval for chartered flights and commercial shipping. New Zealand sits on the Ministerial Action Group to oversee the PHP-C, along with Australia, Fiji, Nauru, Vanuatu, Marshall Islands and Tuvalu. There's some overlap between the bilateral humanitarian corridors and the regionally focused PHP-C. New Zealand has also contributed via the New Zealand – UN Pacific Partnership.

A central theme of New Zealand's assistance to the Pacific has been amplifying the Pacific as a priority at the global level. New Zealand has allocated NZ$37 million to the Covid-19 vaccine strategy and has stated that it will advocate internationally for the equitable distribution of a Covid-19 vaccine, with a particular focus on ensuring that Pacific island countries can access the vaccine when it's needed.

New Zealand's response to the Covid-19 pandemic risk in the Pacific islands region is linked to its domestic response. The duality, despite closed borders, recognises the deep kinships, social networks and interdependence between New Zealand and the Pacific. For example, the 2020 budget included a NZ$195 million package to support recovery and rebuilding of Pasifika communities from the Covid-19 pandemic, recognising that Pasifika could be disproportionately affected by both Covid-19, due to the high prevalence of non-communicable diseases in Pasifika communities, and the economic fallout. Key Covid-19 messages from New Zealand's Ministry of Health and the WHO have also been translated into nine Pacific languages and disseminated by the Ministry for Pacific Peoples. The 2019 measles epidemic's lessons have clearly been learned. A well-informed Pasifika population in New Zealand is the front line for many Pacific island countries. Moreover, economic support to Pasifika communities supports informal remittances to the Pacific.

The pandemic and the Pacific Reset

New Zealand's Covid-19 response in the region has been anchored firmly in the rhetoric and narrative of the Pacific Reset. Peters stated when the budget was delivered that: 'We will stand with the Pacific during their time of need. We are delivering on the Pacific Reset, and demonstrating that New Zealand will remain a true family member and friend of the Pacific' (Peters 2020). Covid-19 has required a rethink of how to deliver the Reset in both the short and longer terms. MFAT has signalled that the Covid-19 response has led to a pivot in the aid program and a sharpening of focus in three areas:

- greater immediate focus on critical areas such as health systems
- economic recovery and response measures, including supporting partner countries rebuilding more inclusive, more diversified, low-emissions and climate-resilient economies

- greater focus on social protection, social inclusion and underlying issues that lead to fragility and vulnerability within countries, particularly for the most disadvantaged communities (Kings 2020).

Jonathan Kings notes that the pivot isn't a direction change and that long-term strategic objectives and partner country priorities will endure. Modes of delivery will change, though, with greater reliance on digitally enabled aid project delivery and strengthened coordination between governments and other development partners (Kings 2020).

There are echoes of New Zealand's 2019 International Cooperation for Effective Sustainable Development policy, which confirms the primary focus on the Pacific, deeper collaboration and more ambitious engagement. There are also strong similarities with Australia's Covid-19 development response, Partnerships for Recovery, which prioritises health security, stability and economic recovery and emphasises partnership. However, MFAT's linking of aid with national interests is less overt, and what appears to be missing is the game-changer in development. Covid-19 presents an opportunity to actively pursue localisation. This would require a more substantive pivot for the New Zealand Government, New Zealand NGOs and partners towards shifting power and decision-making to locally led humanitarian and development initiatives. This would also pay significant dividends for Pacific communities facing climate insecurity.

Covid-19 hasn't impeded the delivery of a number of Reset aspects. The Public Service Fale, a joint initiative between the State Services Commission and Pacific public service commissioners, was launched. In the battle for the airwaves and the strategic deployment of media, Pasifika TV, which delivers New Zealand-originated content to local audiences, has added the Pacific Media Network's Radio 531pi to its stable. Domestic initiatives—and therefore domestic political and public accountability—that reflect the connections between New Zealand and the Pacific and are therefore integral to the Pacific Reset have also progressed, including the NZ$35 million for the Pacific Fale in Wellington.

The Pacific Reset is measured as vigorously domestically as it is across the region. There's a growing expectation that the Reset needs to prioritise the delivery of assistance to the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau and Samoa, with which New Zealand has a Treaty of Friendship, and opposing criticisms that the Reset is a 'Polynesia Reset' rather than a wider Pacific Reset. New Zealand's general election will be held on 19 September 2020, and the Pasifika constituency is a significant constituency within the voting public.

Like Australia but with fewer resources, New Zealand must balance domestic considerations with meeting the needs of Pacific partners. The risk of three front lines merging—the pandemic coupled with natural disasters and the ongoing effects of climate change—creates a 'perfect storm' type scenario that could potentially place New Zealand's commitments under strain (MOD 2018).

New Zealand's risk aversion to including Pacific island countries in a 'bubble' is grounded in the legacies of the 2019 measles epidemic and the upcoming general election. There's been friction over the exclusion of the Pacific in 'bubble talks'. The Cook Islands (which has had no cases of Covid-19) has called for a resumption of tourist travel from New Zealand to boost its sector-dependent economy (RNZ 2020a). However, Prime Minister Ardern has clearly stated that:

> Once we have established effective travel arrangements across the Tasman, we will also explore opportunities to expand the concept to members of our broader Pacific family, enabling travel between Australia, New Zealand and Pacific island countries. We will work with interested Pacific countries on parameters and arrangements to manage the risks.

However, as has been suggested:

> Leaving the Pacific countries out of the travel bubble would potentially be extremely damaging to New Zealand's relationships to those countries … Allowing the travel bubble to expand to them would be much better than having to increase aid (RNZ 2020b).

Restarting the Pacific's economic engine in already vulnerable economies following the collapse of tourism and the economic impact of Tropical Cyclone Harold, which hit Vanuatu, Tonga, Fiji and Solomon Islands in April, is urgent. Similar approaches to New Zealand's domestic economic recovery targets investment in skills-training and vocational programs in industries in which there's expected to be greater demand after Covid-19 could be adopted.

Covid-19, geopolitics and the Pacific

Covid-19 has accelerated geopolitical competition between the US and China, and that's playing out at the regional level. In the Pacific, China has attempted to reinvent itself as a benefactor and has sought to manage the narrative. The Pacific Islands Forum has made it clear that China is a welcome partner. Notably, the first delivery of medical supplies coordinated through the PHP-C was donated by the Jack Ma Foundation.

New Zealand is attempting to balance the potentially competing demands of accelerated geopolitical competition in the region with the public health and economic concerns of the Pacific. There's been no indication that Beijing has attempted to overtly disrupt New Zealand or Australian Covid-19 responses in the Pacific—despite the incident at Bauerfield International Airport in Vanuatu. If that were to change, New Zealand wouldn't necessarily be able to rely on the trans-Tasman alliance as a buffer. Managing divergent relationships with Beijing and Washington may cause some friction in the relationship with Australia, including, for example, were the US to draw Australia into a tighter alliance relationship that didn't include New Zealand or that New Zealand chose not to be a part of. Increasing 'competing asks' of New Zealand by Australia, and other strategic partners, may cut across New Zealand's relationships in the Pacific.

Significantly, the response led by the Pacific Islands Forum imparts critical lessons for how small states can balance geopolitical imperatives against domestic needs. The New Zealand – Australian response to Covid-19 in the Pacific could potentially be leveraged for action on other issues of critical importance to the region—such as climate change. The response is an example of how to effectively and quickly build coalitions of interest to confront issues of immediate significance. The Covid-19 response in the Pacific will also lend key lessons for future crisis management in the region.

References

Kings J 2020. 'Pivoting New Zealand's aid programme to respond to COVID-19', *Devpolicy*, 8 May, online.

MOD (New Zealand Ministry of Defence) 2018. 'The climate crisis: Defence readiness and responsibilities', November, online.

MOD (New Zealand Ministry of Defence) 2019. 'Advancing Pacific Partnerships', October, online.

New Zealand Government 2020a. 'Prime ministers Jacinda Ardern and Scott Morrison announce plans for trans-Tasman COVID-safe travel zone', 5 May, online.

Peters W 2020. Aid spending boost in Budget 2020Beehive Press Release, 14 May.

RNZ (Radio New Zealand Pacific) 2019. 'MFAT confirms New Zealand as likely source of Samoa's measles epidemic', 13 December, online.

RNZ (Radio New Zealand Pacific) 2020a. 'The Cook Islands eye early welcome back for NZ tourists', 27 May, online.

RNZ (Radio New Zealand Pacific) 2020b. 'Pressure mounts on NZ and Aust to include Pacific in "bubble"', 3 June, online.

Australia and Papua New Guinea

Jeffrey Wall

There must be one certainty when it comes to Australia's post Covid-19 relationship with our closest neighbour, Papua New Guinea (PNG).

The historic relationship, dating back to when PNG gained independence from Australia in 1975, has generally served our national interest and the people of PNG well. It hasn't been perfect, and waste and misdirection of a significant part of our generous aid program—now called 'development assistance'—has been far too entrenched for much of the period since 1975.

The relationship is long overdue for total revision—and frank revision—by our national government and the national government of PNG as neighbours and as nations with many common interests. The 'colonial era' mentality that's been far too influential must surely end.

We need to engage PNG in a substantial discussion in which we need to make it clear that our assistance isn't based on a colonial era mentality but on a mature relationship that reflects both PNG's own priorities and needs *and* genuine 'Australian strategic interest'.

Before I outline what I believe should be the key tenets of a revised, refreshed and better focused relationship that reflects both criteria, there's one factor that we must ensure is an absolute requirement in our future engagement.

Eliminate corruption

We must insist that a condition of our future generous development assistance is transparency and integrity from the PNG Government, including state-owned businesses, when it comes to awarding contracts for major infrastructure and vital services such as health care.

That transparency and integrity simply do not exist today in any area of government in PNG.

The result is that Australian companies that have operated in PNG for many years, and some even before independence, are denied a 'fair go' when it comes to tendering for major government projects, often with PNG partners who are also shut out.

In my view, our generous aid—by far the most of any country or agency supporting PNG—doesn't accord us a privileged position, but it does entitle our businesses and professionals to a fair go.

The manner in which key government contracts have in recent years been awarded to state-owned and state-sponsored companies of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has defied every basic measure of transparency and integrity. This stranglehold has been achieved by a heavy-handed approach from the PRC Embassy in Port Moresby and by 'connections' with state ministers and senior officials that in most countries, including Australia, would be prohibited.

Just about all major infrastructure projects being constructed in PNG today are being undertaken by state-owned and state-connected PRC companies, led by China Railway and Engineering Company—even the new national law courts complex.

I've been told by construction industry leaders that it's now almost not worthwhile for Australian and New Zealand construction companies to tender for government and state-owned business contracts.

As we seek to reset the relationship, the absolute bottom line must be an insistence that, when it comes to contracts, our companies and professional groups must be given a fair go.

Australia must stress that the structure and level of our future development assistance support, and one-off measures such as long-term concessional loans, will be dependent on proper tendering and contracting processes for the funding we provide and for all major project activity, such as road construction, the provision of health care and public sector reform.

Successive Australian governments have put this issue in the 'too hard' basket. Now is the time to change that, and to do so via robust engagement with the PNG Government.

I'm confident that leaders in PNG, with appropriate social media and wider civil society engagement, will welcome that.

An excellent window of opportunity to do so will open in the coming weeks, when the PNG National Parliament is likely to finally approve the long-promised Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) legislation that many hope will mean corruption, abuse of office and misappropriation in the public sector and state agencies are addressed.

Australia should offer to fund the ICAC entity for the first years of its operation and assist with training and secondments. I can't imagine the PRC making a similar offer!

There's no doubt that a significant number of Chinese companies operating in PNG have a corrupt presence through improper relationships with senior political leaders and officials. The only way to address that is for the ICAC, when established, to be independent, fearless and properly resourced from day one.

It faces a herculean task. We need to help it meet the challenge ahead!

Direct our aid to benefit the people of PNG

The most effective way we can use our development assistance to PNG to meet the 'Australian national interest' as well as our strategic interest and at the same time strengthen the bilateral relationship is to give it a more substantial and genuine 'people to people' focus.

Any fair examination of our aid to PNG would have to conclude that the people-to-people connection has diminished in importance. Far too much of our program with PNG has focused on the Waigani bureaucracy and on studies, reports and activities that don't benefit the 8.5 million people of PNG. And 'boomerang aid' remains too high.

The people of PNG hold Australia and Australians in high regard. They follow our rugby league with the same enthusiasm the people of NSW, Queensland and beyond do. They also follow other sporting codes, and our horse racing, especially the Melbourne Cup. And many have continuing close associations with Australia through school and tertiary education and religion.

Let me be frank. The people of PNG, and especially the rural majority, have no such regard for the PRC. Whenever a riot occurs in a city or town in PNG, it's the Chinese-owned trade stores that are targeted by the rioting mob.

The key to our relationship with PNG being more mutually beneficial and far more effective in countering the growing and aggressive PRC presence is to focus on how we can assist the people, and especially the 85% of the people who live in rural and coastal communities.

At present, our $600-million-plus aid program is delivered via a 'scatter gun' approach. It comprises dozens, if not hundreds, of 'projects' across sectors ranging from public sector management to small business support, the advancement of women and youth, law and justice, transport and education.

This year, the program totals $1 billion, including a concessional loan of $440 million added to it in November to save the 2019 PNG budget. This loan effectively replaced one being negotiated at the time with the PRC.

The program is our largest overseas aid commitment, and generally has been since 1975.

The revision and refreshing of our relationship with PNG must inevitably have the aid program at its core. There are other sectors of civil society that are important in enhancing the bilateral relationship, such as business, churches, NGOs and major investors, but the most urgent post-Covid-19 need is to really shake up the development assistance program so that it genuinely supports our own strategic interest.

Reduce the priority areas in our aid to PNG

Given the parlous fiscal position that the Australian Government will face for some years as a result of measures to sustain our economy in response to the Covid-19 virus, it's inevitable that our overseas aid program will come under pressure in budget discussions.

The current government has shown a greater commitment to supporting PNG and the South Pacific as part of the 'Step-up' policy than to our wider development assistance to Southeast Asia, Africa and other regions. Cutbacks as a part of overall budget savings are not new, so far, but the Pacific has largely been excluded from major cutbacks, although development activities have been stopped to allow the redirection of funding towards pandemic-related work.

I believe our assistance to PNG, and other South Pacific nations, enjoys broad support in the Australian community, but in the prevailing and immediate future environment that support can't be taken for granted.

The best way to secure community, and political, support for our engagement with PNG is to focus it almost totally on supporting the people of PNG in key areas of social and economic need, and to have our assistance valued by the people and seen to be valued and effective.

Agriculture

When I first joined the then opposition leader, the late Sir Iambakey Okuk, in 1978, he bemoaned the fact that newly independent PNG had moved too swiftly to 'localise' agricultural extension services. Even though he helped Michael Somare achieve independence, he regretted the end of the Australian *didiman*,

who had played a vital role in supporting the rural majority to grow coffee and cocoa and produce copra and food.

The story of agriculture in PNG since independence is a sad one. Extension services are non-existent in most rural communities, resulting in poor production levels and worrying declines in crop quality. When you add to that inadequate rural roads and highways, as well as the closure of the majority of health centres and aid posts, it's hardly a surprise that living standards for most Papua New Guineans have declined.

The potential for that reality to cause instability, not to mention significant disease outbreaks, increasing rates of infant mortality and declining living standards, is alarming.

Australia can help 'make a difference' by allocating a substantial portion of the aid budget to agricultural restoration and expansion—growing crops for food and export. This will require training programs with producers just as the *didiman* did, and support for the eradication of pests, soil improvement and irrigation.

This isn't a task Australia can undertake on its own, but one we need to engage on with New Zealand and international agencies such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the EU.

National elections are to be held in PNG two years from now, so now is the right time to get a robust ICAC in place and functioning. Now is the right time to focus PNG political leaders on agriculture and its critical part in the nation's stability, economic development and raising living standards.

There needs to be the right mix of agriculture for domestic food consumption and for export income.

PNG has an abundance of fertile soil and water, much of which is wasted through a lack of infrastructure, such as dams and irrigation.

For over 7 million of our closest neighbours, it holds the key to their future.

Health care

As we seek to genuinely strengthen our people-to-people engagement, it needs to become our number one development assistance priority.

Our second priority is no less important—basic health care for the people.

It almost defies comprehension that the worst area of corruption, theft and misuse of resources in PNG today is the supply of vital drugs and medicines for hospitals, health centres and aid posts.

Not only are many aid posts and health centres not functional, but even more have inadequate supplies of essential medicines and equipment. The same position applies in many hospitals.

When the PNG Health Department decided in 2013 to source its medicines and drugs from a business with limited experience in this area, Australia protested, and withdrew from its role.

Since then, key health indicators—such as infant mortality, malaria prevalence, and even more dangerous diseases such as cholera, typhoid and even polio—have all headed in the wrong direction.

PNG was totally unprepared for the Covid-19 virus. Fortunately, the impact so far has been minor, but it could have been a catastrophe on our doorstep.

We must urge the PNG Government to end the corruption in the health system, and we must offer to help it rebuild the system's integrity and reliability as it does so.

Police and defence force

The third priority area is one I've commented on in recent weeks. That's the very worrying decline in discipline, effectiveness and morale in the defence force, the police and the prisons service. And this is where our 'strategic interest' is most critical.

We need stable, balanced and disciplined forces in those sectors in our closest neighbour.

Our role should be to train leaders of all three disciplined forces, probably in Australia, and to assist with recruit training as well as upgrading resources such as barracks and police stations and the security of prisons.

If indiscipline continues in the defence force and the police force, in particular, then national stability will be at serious risk. We can't afford the threat of insurrection or even worse on our doorstep.

Our development assistance to PNG forms the integral component of our bilateral relationship.

It needs urgent revision through a mature dialogue at the political level, and the engagement of civil society in the process.

And it needs to ensure the 'Australian strategic interest' is equal to PNG's priorities in the post Covid-19 era.

ASEAN economic and security integration after Covid-19

John Coyne

ASEAN has never had a shortage of critics (Zhang 2020). Its move towards greater economic, cultural and security integration has been glacial in contrast with that of the EU (Coyne 2015). While ASEAN's member states have never aspired to be like the EU, that won't stop the inevitable pile-on following ASEAN's lack of regional unity in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic (Searight 2020). Nevertheless, the EU approach to Covid-19 cooperation hasn't been faultless either.

By focusing on shortfalls in regional unity during the pandemic, many will fail to appreciate how Covid-19 has disrupted ASEAN's accelerating economic integration among member states and with the Chinese economy, especially in the Mekong. That will also prevent many commentators from recognising how the pandemic has foiled Thailand's and Vietnam's efforts to synchronise ASEAN's economic and security integration agendas. This missed opportunity to synchronise will have lasting impacts on ASEAN security.

At the Kuala Lumpur summit in 2015, ASEAN leaders committed to continuing regional integration and adopted Vision 2025 (ASEAN 2015a). The ASEAN Political and Security Community Blueprint, the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint chart the pathway to Vision 2025.

The plan for realising the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025 seeks to attain a highly integrated and cohesive economy with enhanced connectivity and sectoral cooperation (ASEAN 2015b). The blueprint authors wanted the blueprint to support sustained economic growth and resilience through more significant intra-ASEAN trade and external trade. This change was to be generated by reducing or, if possible, eliminating border and behind-the-border trade and regulatory barriers.

Unfortunately for ASEAN, member states' implementation of the Vision 2025 blueprints has been inconsistent, although that's hardly surprising, given the different economic and political status of each member state. The ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint has surged ahead behind the scenes in the far-flung corners of Thailand, Laos and Myanmar.

Upgrading the ground transport links, railways and road networks that make up ASEAN's main economic corridors had been an ongoing priority. Success here has been due in no small part to Chinese Government financing and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Until Covid-19, Chinese investments in regional connectivity—roads, bridges, train lines and ports—was creating all-new levels of regional connectivity, for which many ASEAN member states were ill-prepared. ASEAN states' desperate search for infrastructure investments, again especially in the Mekong, meant a focus on integration with China. The Chinese Government has ensured that such integration has been on its terms, which have certainly affected the sovereignty of some states.

At the same time as this physical connectivity was being built, ASEAN was coming together to push for greater regional economic integration.

Until the outbreak of Covid-19, trade and customs procedures along air, sea and land routes were being progressively harmonised, especially in the Mekong subregion. ASEAN transport development plans included the following:

- Upgrading the ground transport links, railways and road networks that make up the main economic corridors has been an ongoing priority. In 2017, ASEAN transport ministers signed an agreement on the Facilitation of Cross-Border Transport of Passengers by Road Vehicles.
- There has been a focus on increasing maritime trade efficiency through infrastructure development and the creation of the ASEAN Single Shipping Market (PDPA-MA, n.d.).
- The creation of an ASEAN Single Aviation Market is still a work in progress.

As trade barriers at and behind the borders have been eliminated, ASEAN member states expected to increase their intra-ASEAN and external trade by capturing economies of scale, developing regional industrial hubs in specific sectors based on comparative advantage or deepening value chains, and enhancing economic integration with East Asia and the rest of the world. However, many of those benefits are yet to be fully realised. All the same, the volume and velocity of trade and people crossing what were once remote border posts were rapidly changing.

The speed of the implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025 has surpassed that of the ASEAN Political and Security Community Blueprint 2025. In many cases, 'harmonised' was simply a synonym for 'removed'. While the blueprint has guided integration, the speed and scope of implementation have been driven more by a Chinese Government investment program that prioritises economic integration and technological assimilation that preferences China over its partners' management of sovereign risks. On the other side of the equation, some ASEAN member states appear to have been too preoccupied with the BRI vision and the equity it brought to fully appreciate the sovereignty implications and second-order security repercussions of certain decisions.

To date, the scope of Vision 2025 economic integration has affected the way that ASEAN thinks about security. While discussions on regional security have always been at the core of ASEAN cooperation, there's been an increasing requirement to synchronise economic and security integration, especially concerning border management, at the policy and operational levels. The inability to do so has led to security vulnerabilities, especially to transnational serious and organised crime.

ASEAN's economic integration challenges

Until Covid-19, the ASEAN Single Window (ASW) initiative was the centrepiece of ASEAN trade facilitation efforts. It's a regional initiative that connects and integrates the national single windows of ASEAN member states to expedite cargo clearance and enable the electronic exchange of border documents.

The Protocol on the Legal Framework to Implement the ASEAN Single Window, signed in September 2015, provides the legal tools to implement the ASW across the region. The ASW will increase the volume and velocity of border transactions (goods and people). If ASEAN's economic and security agendas aren't synchronised, the ASW will see the region's border security challenges and vulnerabilities rapidly change.

ASEAN member states' traditional approaches to border security have been rapidly overwhelmed by the dual pressure of the ASW and improved cross-border infrastructure. Their conventional approach to security has involved inspections of cargo and physical controls at borders. Growing volumes of imports and exports make it impossible for either border or law enforcement officers to inspect all goods, so some form of selective inspection model is required. The paucity of cross-border cooperation and intelligence sharing is preventing targeting. Furthermore, higher trade and people volumes involve greater

complexity. An increased preference for dispersed production means supply chains are getting longer and more complex, and there's greater reliance on goods from diverse environments and economies.

ASEAN's security approach focuses mostly on strengthening and extending existing cooperation mechanisms. While ASEAN has been planning for traditional security threats (for example, in the multilateral exercises conducted under the auspices of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting), horizon-scanning shows that new crime patterns are likely to appear. These new developments are the unintended consequence of ASEAN's economic growth and integration (UNODC 2013). Anticipating and managing these risks needs to be central to ASEAN's integration agenda.

Synchronising economic and security integration

It became clear to some ASEAN members that, if the region increases connectivity and strengthens trade linkages, threats arising from trafficking and associated criminality will also integrate within the region and beyond.

Over the past two years, the Government of Thailand and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have worked with several partners to advocate for a road map for regional border management arrangements to meet these challenges. In this regard, a short draft of the road map emerged from the May 2018 ASEAN border management conference held by Thailand and UNODC.

In April 2019, The Royal Thai Government and UNODC convened a 'High-Level Conference of ASEAN Member States', which was opened by the Prime Minister. More than 200 officials attended, including from selected ASEAN dialogue partners. The conference focused on border management as a solution to the critical security challenges posed by the region's rapid economic integration. The meeting resulted in further political commitments towards an integrated approach for border security.

At the 34th ASEAN Summit in June 2019 in Thailand, the ASEAN leaders reaffirmed their commitment to:

> strengthen cooperation on border management as reflected in the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, and under respective domestic laws and policies, to better safeguard the increasingly interconnected and integrated ASEAN Community by having the relevant sectoral bodies discuss common concerns such as transnational crimes, illicit drug and precursors chemical trafficking, trafficking in persons, illegal timber and wildlife trafficking, and cross-border challenges including pandemics, while facilitating cross-border trade and movement of people. (ASEAN 2019)

To that end, they agreed to discussions in relevant sectoral bodies to further enhance the effectiveness of appropriate existing ASEAN mechanisms on border management cooperation and explore possible border management cooperation arrangements. Those aspirations, goals and initiatives are reflected in the ASEAN Leaders' Vision Statement on Partnership for Sustainability and the 34th ASEAN Summit Chairman's Statement (ASEAN 2019).

Unfortunately, just as ASEAN, under first Thailand's and now Vietnam's leadership, was to start to address the issue, the Covid-19 pandemic emerged. Regrettably, Covid-19 has meant that almost all sectoral bodies' meetings have been cancelled or indefinitely postponed. While the issues remain on the sectoral bodies' respective agendas, the momentum for ASEAN economic and security synchronisation is broken.

The impact of Covid-19

It seems likely that Covid-19, and its economic effects, will have long-term impacts on the achievement of ASEAN member states' collective and individual economic visions. Without doubt, the pandemic will continue to undercut global, ASEAN and Chinese Government projections for economic growth. For some of the Mekong ASEAN member states, the all-in bet on Chinese economic centrality looks a lot riskier in the current economic outlook. In the past, ASEAN has often delayed making tough economic and security decisions. On this occasion, it seems clear that it will need to revisit its economic blueprint sooner than it expected.

Reversing supply-chain integration and technological assimilation with the Chinese Government will be difficult for some, but the border biosecurity measures implemented by some ASEAN member states in the face of Covid-19 may serve as a precedent for enhancing border security.

Before Covid-19, ASEAN's member states had plans to become a region with even lower internal border controls. Now, even the EU, the world's most successful regional grouping, is reassessing its approaches to integration. The pandemic has revealed that economic integration creates both security vulnerabilities and sovereign risks. ASEAN, and its member states, will need to quickly reassess the further development of intra- and inter-ASEAN border and economic integration.

Where to next

Many ASEAN member states recognise the importance and urgency of working more closely together and in partnership with external and international partners to match greater border facilitation with enhanced cooperation in border management. Unfortunately, Covid-19 has delayed further progress, and those member states that have led the movement to date will have constrained political leverage. With Vietnam's time as the chair of ASEAN quickly progressing, the task of making further progress on synchronising security and economic integration, especially on borders, will fall to Brunei in 2021 and Cambodia in 2022. At this point, it seems unlikely that either will make security a primary focus during its period in the chair. Arguably, Cambodia may even be a champion for enhanced or rejuvenated connectivity with the Chinese economy.

In at least the short term, the Covid-19 pandemic has halted the progress of further ASEAN economic integration—especially the ASW. ASEAN and its member states will need to revisit any economic assumptions that have been underpinned by Chinese economic growth. Indeed, there's a very real possibility that economic and security integration across the region may be stepped back.

The rapid economic integration and increased connectivity that have been achieved to date has reduced border control effectiveness and created security vulnerabilities, and those vulnerabilities need to be addressed.

The Chinese Government's response has been to engage on economic and security integration at the Greater Mekong subregion level through mechanisms such as the Greater Mekong Sub-region Economic Program Strategic Framework and the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on drug control. It appears unlikely that the Chinese Government would promote greater security cooperation for ASEAN. However, disconnecting security from regional economic integration relegates border security to reactive roles.

The Greater Mekong subregion is a source of a range of illicit products smuggled into Australia, including methamphetamine and heroin and, perhaps in time, even synthetic opioids. Rapid improvements in regional connectivity and economic integration have given rise to those threats. As an ASEAN dialogue partner, Australia needs to engage with member states, especially Thailand and Vietnam, to promote further dialogue on regional economic and security synchronisation.

Australia should also consider additional law enforcement and border security capacity development initiatives in the Mekong subregion. Those efforts could include extending Australia's support for the UNODC Border Liaison Officer Program, which was developed to enhance cross-border intelligence sharing (UNODC 2015). In the light of lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic, that assistance could also focus on strengthening biohealth border security integration in ASEAN.

For the time being, Covid-19 has dented ASEAN's ambitions to become the world's fourth-largest single market after the EU, the US and China, but it has also created an opportunity for Australia to work with its ASEAN neighbours on economic and security integration and synchronisation.

References

ASEAN 2015a. *Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together*, online.

ASEAN 2015b. *ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025*, online.

ASEAN 2019. *Chairman's statement of the 34th ASEAN Summit, Bangkok, 23 June: Advancing partnership for sustainability*, online.

Coyne J 2015. 'What might ASEAN leaders learn from the debate surrounding the Schengen Agreement?', *The Diplomat*, 16 December 2015, online.

PDPA-MA (PDP Australia Pty Ltd, Meyrick and Associates), no date. *Promoting efficient and competitive intra-ASEAN shipping services*, online.

Searight A 2020. *Strengths and vulnerabilities in Southeast Asia's response to the Covid-19 pandemic*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 20 April, online.

UNODC (UN Office on Drugs and Crime) 2013. *Transnational organized crime in East Asia and the Pacific: a threat assessment*, online.

UNODC (UN Office on Drugs and Crime) 2015. Supporting regional integration with effective border management: border liaison offices, online.

Zhang R 2020. 'Beating the odds: how ASEAN helped Southeast Asia succeed', *Harvard Political Review*, 15 March 2020, online.

Post-Covid-19 Australia and Southeast Asia: aligning more closely or drifting further apart?

Huong Le Thu

The global Covid-19 crisis has accelerated many, often negative, trends that were already underway before the pandemic. That's the case with the systematic competition between the US and the People's Republic of China. Even before Covid, Washington and Beijing were on a collision course over trade, disputes and influence. Since the outbreak, it's become apparent that the bilateral relationship has further deteriorated, leading many to suggest that we're already in a second Cold War (Dupont 2020). That leaves many smaller and middle-sized countries in an even more challenging space, as opportunities for 'hedging' and maintaining positive relationships with both of the major powers are shrinking.

Australia and Southeast Asia,[1] both as a collective and as individual nations, are significant regional actors. Will the new reality bring a growing sense of solidarity among the regional middle and smaller powers or growing diversity in their strategic priorities? Already, before Covid-19, there were some evident indicators of divergence in how they see the US's role in the region and how they perceive China's expanding position. Those views will be affected by Covid-19, of course, but by and large the pandemic exacerbates already existing tendencies. Southeast Asian nations' emerging preferences, whether deliberately or not, are based on geographical proximity and a historical track record that determines their current positioning. Their perceptions are also likely to further influence their post-Covid alignment preferences.

Attitudes towards China

Despite varying bilateral relations with Beijing and individual approaches to managing the power asymmetry, the Southeast Asian states share acceptance of China's eminence in the region. While many concerns about China's ambitions under Xi Jinping are shared across the region, they're demonstrated in very different policy responses, particularly when compared to Australia's. Even before Covid-19, the diplomatic 'deep freeze' between the US and China reaffirmed Canberra's views about the Chinese Communist Party regime's threat and further cemented Australia's alignment with Washington. Australia's ban on Huawei's participation in the 5G network, new foreign interference laws and Canberra's position on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) stand out among regional responses. Beijing's incremental encroachment in the South Pacific rang Canberra's security alarm bells, prompting it to 'step up' by reaching out to its Pacific neighbours (DFAT 2020). Australia's publicised role in calling for an international independent investigation into the origins of the coronavirus has further strained relations with China (Le Thu 2019a). Beijing has since imposed a trade ban on Australian barley, threatened further economic retaliation in the form of tariffs and bans on Australian products in Chinese markets and engaged in strident and quite undiplomatic language. In the foreseeable future, the relationship is more likely to freeze further, rather than to warm up.

For Southeast Asian leaders, the BRI represents China's grand plan for access and influence and an opportunity to meet their infrastructure demands. Concerns about negative impacts of China's economic presence in the region have been incremental and existed long before the BRI trademark was coined. Most of the Southeast Asian states, despite a level of vigilance, still see the BRI as offering some enticing value,

especially in building much-needed infrastructure. However, China's ability and willingness to complete many BRI projects after the coronavirus remains to be tested.

In the realm of digital infrastructure, the Southeast Asian countries take different approaches to their data safety. Except for Vietnam, where Viettel and MobiFone are developing a 5G network in cooperation with Ericson and Nokia, they either haven't excluded the option of using Chinese telecoms Huawei or ZTE or have already confirmed the partnership. But the Chinese presence in Southeast Asia's booming digital economy (e-commerce, online payments and so on) is already prevalent, if not dominant, which reduces the power of the data-protection argument against using Chinese suppliers. Several Southeast Asian nations are already living with that risk.

Australia has been one of the more vocal critics of Beijing's violation of international law, diplomatic conduct and human rights in the South China Sea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Xinjiang labour camps. The leaders of ASEAN countries, on the other hand, adhering to the 'flagship' norm of 'non-interference' in domestic issues, have avoided open criticism of Beijing's repression in Hong Kong, as well as of China's controversial treatment of its Muslim community in Xinjiang—an issue that should be of concern to Southeast Asian Muslim-majority countries. There are more examples, but it all comes down to the fact that most of the Southeast Asian elites, with the exception of Vietnam's, still believe that they're able to 'normalise' the threat from the giant next door. Notwithstanding China's conduct in what are considered its domestic affairs, Southeast Asians are also deeply worried about Beijing's flexing military appetite, demonstrated, for example, in the South China Sea and island-building, militarisation and active exercises around the disputed area. Even so, there's a level of paradox, or perhaps an ability to compartmentalise the relationship. A recent regional survey of perceptions by the ISEAS – Yusuf Ishak Institute of Singapore (ISEAS 2020), shows that some 38% of Southeast Asian elites see China as a revisionist power, and only 13% believe that their relationship with Beijing might deteriorate in the near future. This indicates that there's a level of confidence among Southeast Asians that they're able to manage their relationships even with a more ambitious and aggressive China, as it's become under Xi Jinping (Le Thu 2019b). It's worth noting that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on many key aspects of those relationships and is likely to affect existing views on both China and the US. For example, Beijing's intensified coercive activities in the neighbourhood, including around the South China Sea, have invited stronger resistance among Southeast Asians (Le Thu & Pascoe 2020).

Since the pandemic outbreak, most countries in Southeast Asia have been focused on their own domestic responses. In their domestic discourse about the pandemic, the issue of 'whose fault it is' hasn't been discussed much, as the region has previously experienced other pandemics and epidemics and didn't question the origins of them either. President Trump's politicising narrative and deliberate provocation of racial connotations haven't been well received in Southeast Asia, where a number of countries are sensitive to their own domestic ethnic tensions. Unfortunately, Australia's effort in the World Health Assembly (WHA) to instigate an international inquiry has been too often conflated with support for that narrative.

Despite the region's economic development, Southeast Asia's perennial vulnerabilities bind it to China's economy, as I've explained in a chapter in volume 1 of *After Covid-19* (Le Thu 2020). Those vulnerabilities, and the worry that the post-Covid US will be even less inclined to pay attention to the world, and Southeast Asia, mean that the region is hesitant to publicly criticise Beijing. Indonesia and Malaysia were

the only countries in Southeast Asia to co-sponsor the WHA resolution (Armstrong & Markson 2020)—which says as much about Southeast Asia's attitude towards China as it says about the region's coherence. In a surprising move, China has agreed to the investigation.

Attitudes towards the US

A significant shift in Southeast Asian views is correlated with changes in US leadership and policies under President Donald Trump. As a presidential candidate, Trump promoted his 'America first' vision which worried many countries in the region and was exacerbated by his withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership—his first decision after taking the office. The ISEAS – Yusuf Ishak Institute survey showed that, over the past few years, the perception of the US's diminishing engagement has been strong. In 2017, very early in Trump's presidency, 56% of surveyed Southeast Asians thought that America's engagement with the region had either decreased or significantly decreased. In 2019, 68% thought so, and that rose to 77% in the newest survey published in January 2020. Even more telling is the region's view on which country will hold the most power in the future: 72.2% of all respondents think that China is the most influential economic power in Southeast Asia, whereas only 7.9% think the same of the US. On the question of which is the most influential strategic political power, 52.2% think it's China, while 27.6% think that it's the US. The disparity is glaring.

Southeast Asian partners have been worried that they don't figure on Trump's trade balance sheet. In fact, the Trump administration's pronouncement of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) strategy has largely been seen as 'all about China', rather than about the region. In July 2019, after much deliberation, ASEAN announced its *Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* at the ASEAN Summit in Bangkok, in another example of differentiating views (ASEAN 2019). While Australia adopted the term 'Indo-Pacific' early on as the most natural way of looking at the region through a rules-based lens favourable to US primacy, the ASEAN members found a rare consensus in rejecting the notion of the Indo-Pacific as a single region, instead seeing it as two connected, yet separate, regions of the Asia–Pacific and the Indian Ocean—which, in fact, is how the US viewed the region until the recent FOIP. ASEAN also pushes back on the framing of 'zero-sum' competition over the region and instead advocates for regional cooperation with old-school ASEAN centrality at its heart.

The ideational component to the 'Indo-Pacific', promoted by both the US and Australia, championing the importance of democratic values against revisionist and authoritarian powers has limited support in the region. While Southeast Asia boasts some of the world's largest democracies, it's also experiencing a resurgence of authoritarian tendencies even within democratic systems, including two US treaty-allies: Thailand and the Philippines. For that reason, authoritarianism isn't seen as an obstacle to good relations with China, but in fact may be a reason for closer ties. Washington's framing of its competition with Beijing as one that pits democracies against autocracies resonates in Australia but less so in Southeast Asia.

The Southeast Asian economies see the repercussions of the US–China tariff war as highly detrimental to the stability of their economies and therefore their security. Not surprisingly, the state most dependent on trade—Singapore—is most concerned about the consequences of Trump's tariff war, but even Vietnam (which is deemed to be the biggest winner thus far) is concerned in the long term about the resulting lasting changes to global economics and financial markets. This may well be the main difference between Australia's and Southeast Asia's reactions to the current Sino-US tension and their different interpretations of security priorities.

While Canberra is also concerned about intensifying great-power competition, its primary narrative is about the challenge posed by China, rather than the challenge posed by *both* the US and China, which is how the ASEAN nations see the problem. The primary reason for the difference is the legacy, in many Southeast Asian countries, of the non-alignment movement during the Cold War. Australia—notwithstanding some internal debate, but still with overall bipartisan consensus—is decisively aligned with the US and increasingly overtly opposed to the Chinese Communist Party's strategic ambitions.

Where to from here?

China challenges liberal democracies in many ways. Canberra's measures to prevent foreign influence reflect anxiety about Australia's domestic political integrity, on top of strategic concerns about Beijing's dominance in the region. While those concerns are also present to varying degrees among Southeast Asian countries, the strategic and economic threats to them are more pronounced. The two outstanding ones, arguably alternating in priority, are China's island-building and militarisation in the South China Sea and the trade war. As the geographies, histories and political backgrounds of Australia and Southeast Asia imply, their individual strategic decisions will differ significantly.

Thus far, both of the great powers have suffered significant image damage from the way they've handled the pandemic, and both have missed the opportunity to display high-quality leadership. The future of regional alignment politics will be different from the way we've known it. It's likely to be much more nuanced and, rather than aligned or non-aligned, somewhere on the spectrum between those positions. We're also likely to see more divergence within the diverse Southeast Asian cohort after Covid-19. However, there's a risk that renewed great-power competition will create uncertainties and that actors will react differently from one another, often by replicating their own previous behaviour, especially if that behaviour has proved effective in the past.

If any pattern can be discerned at this stage, it's that countries in Southeast Asia continue to hedge. Some, such as Vietnam, hedge and diversify even further, while others bet on the great power that they're comfortable with—either China or the US. Australia, amid strategic uncertainty and concern about Beijing, is betting on the things that define it: the alliance with the US and liberal democracies as a path for engagement with others, and a source of prosperity and security.

The Covid-19 crisis is a leadership test that so far neither the US nor China has passed. Alignment politics among smaller nations are a function of many important factors, among which the perception of major powers' leadership capacity is critical. Covid-19 has exposed the limits of both great powers' leadership, and Australia and all individual Southeast Asian nations are taking that into their strategic calculations.

Another opportunity for correction and reassessment is coming up in November 2020, when the US presidential elections are scheduled. That will also be another test for the US's regional leadership—one that we should hope it will pass.

References

Armstrong C and Markson S. '116 nations back Australia's push for Covid-19 inquiry", Daily Telegraph, 18 May, online.

ASEAN 2019. *ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific*, online.

DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) 2020. *Pacific Step-up: stepping up Australia's engagement with our Pacific family*, Australian Government, online.

Dupont A 2020. *Mitigating the new Cold War: Managing the US–China trade, tech and geopolitical conflict*, analysis paper no. 8, Centre for Independent Studies, 22 May, online.

ISEAS 2020. *State of Southeast Asian Survey report 2020*, ISEAS – Yusuf Ishak Institute, Singapore, online.

Le Thu H 2019a. 'A collision of cybersecurity and geopolitics: why Southeast Asia is wary of Huawei ban', *The Strategist*, 5 October, online.

Le Thu H 2019b. 'Southeast Asian narratives about US–China competition (part 1): choice and necessity', *The Strategist*, 13 November, online.

Le Thu H 2020. 'Southeast Asia', in Coyne J, Jennings P (eds), *After Covid: Australia and the world rebuild*, Volume 1, ASPI, Canberra, online.

Le Thu H, Pascoe A 2020. 'This is no time to take eyes off the South China Sea', *The Strategist*, 6 July, online.

Notes

1 Any discussion about the Southeast Asian subregion must take into account the internal diversity of the 10 countries. Their wide differences in size, wealth, culture and political systems are reflected in their respective national interests. Some generalisations are inevitable and are applied consciously in this short chapter.

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Mindanao after Covid-19

John Coyne

While the globe continues to battle the pandemic's first wave of infections, it appears that an increasing number of Australians believe the immediate threat from Covid-19 is receding. Depending on the success of continued measures to suppress the virus in Australia, that's a reasonable assumption, which also means Australian policymakers might be ever more ensconced in thoughts of getting Australia back on track than considering what might yet be.

Rebuilding Australia's economy ought to hold centre place in Australian policy thinking. However, as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to reshape our geopolitical challenges, Australia must be ready to reconsider and, if need be, reprioritise policy based on developments at home and in our near region. This is particularly the case for Australia's policies on the Moro Islamic insurgency in the southern Philippines, given Covid-19's potential impacts on the conflict and the future trajectory of *Salafi-jihadi* terrorism in our region.

Given the complexity of the Moro Islamic insurgency and the diverse motivations of the groups involved, it's all too easy to be pessimistic about the prospects for a peaceful resolution to the 50-year conflict.[1] The Islamic State-affiliated Abu Sayyaf Group (CISAC 2018a), the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (CISAC 2018b), the Maute Group (Reuters 2017) and the New People's Army (CISAC 2018c) have consistently shown that they're more interested in mayhem than peace.

Despite these spoilers' best efforts, peace and indeed cooperation between the Philippines national government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have been flourishing (CISAC 2019). However, Covid-19 is drawing the Philippines Government's and the international community's attention away from supporting continued progress with the peace process. Of more significant concern, if the peace process were to stagnate owing to Covid-19, that could provide groups such as al-Qaeda and Islamic State an opportunity to re-establish themselves in our region.

Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

In July 2018, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte signed the Bangsamoro Organic Law, which allowed for the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) (Gutierrez 2020). The BARMM is composed of municipalities on Mindanao's west coast. It also encompasses the islands of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi in the Sulu and Celebes seas. Its creation was a significant step towards a political solution to the long-running conflict in Mindanao.

Since the autonomous region was established, peace has broken out between the Philippines Government and the MILF. The success to date is causally linked to the multitrack approach being used by the government to manage the security situation.

At the political level, the national government established the BARMM Transition Authority (BTA) to administer the region. The BTA draws its membership from the government and the MILF. The authority, and the approach to its membership, have fostered greater cooperation and coordination between the MILF, the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police (PNP).

At the same time, Duterte has pushed his ministers and the civil service to assist in normalising peace arrangements in the BARMM, including by making progressive changes in the way the security agencies function.

The army has been maintaining a very visible presence but has removed itself from policing the community, and martial law has now ended. It has shifted its efforts to maintaining continuous pressure on the Abu Sayyaf Group, the New People's Army and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters by 'finding, fixing and finishing' them. In the field, the MILF, aided by close air support from the armed forces, is also pursuing these terrorist groups. By relentlessly pursuing them, the army and the MILF have denied them the opportunity to reorganise and plan attacks.

In response to the armed forces' change in strategy, the PNP has taken on a more security-focused role. Through physical presence, the PNP has sought to discourage conflict and restrict the terrorist groups' freedom of movement.

Under the umbrella of the BTA, the MILF, the army and the PNP have established 30-strong joint peace and security teams comprising seven army, eight PNP and 15 MILF officers.

These arrangements have been critical for facilitating the peace process and in dealing with the parallel conflicts present in the BARMM, but, after decades of conflict, policing in the BARMM has remained militarised for so long that there's a persistent law enforcement capacity and social licence shortfall in the community at large. Many people in the BARMM don't view the PNP as a force for delivering peace and security to the community. Rather, the police have long been seen to use coercive powers to force community compliance, with little accountability or oversight.

Security-sector reform

In the wake of the Marawi siege, the international community focused on aiding the Philippines Government to enhance the counterterrorism capabilities of the PNP and the armed forces. These actions should be commended, as they were critical to both organisations' ongoing and successful campaigns against the Abu Sayyaf Group, the New People's Army and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters. But, at this crucial juncture in the peace and normalisation process, new police capacity development requirements are emerging.

While the threat environment still demands that a large portion of the BARMM security sector remains focused on fighting terrorism, success in meeting that challenge was, until the last couple of months, generating new community policing requirements.

For the normalisation process to continue, communities need to have faith that the BTA and the Philippines Government can deliver peace and security. For that to occur, the PNP needs to have both the capacity and community support to deal with the regular conflicts between Moro family clans, the presence of private armed groups and an alarming gun culture present across the BARMM. The Philippines' regulatory approach to private gun ownership does little to reduce the number and types of firearms available to private citizens.

To fully appreciate these requirements, BTA, the PNP and the national government will need to work with Mindanao communities, including women's groups, to identify and resolve law and order issues. The primary focus of this work needs to be on enhancing public confidence in those institutions. The

PNP must build the Moro people's belief that it has the capacity and will to enforce the law and resolve disputes impartially. This needs to be done through demonstrated behaviour as well as building solid relationships in the community.

The development and implementation of community-based policing methodologies that concentrate on conflict resolution and problem solving will be vital in building trust. This community-policing approach will generate a requirement to enhance the negotiation and conflict-resolution skills of PNP officers in the BARMM. Those skills will be critical in resolving the ongoing clan disputes that plague the region.

Even before the outbreak of Covid-19, policy certainty was absent in the BARMM. Despite that, targeted interventions from the Philippines Government and international donors were increasingly focused on contributing to the gradual transition of the security sector from a militarised to a community-based policing model. It was also evident that such developments needed to engage with the communities in the BARMM, the BTA and its various agencies, as well as the government in Manila.

From previous efforts, it had become clear that the peace process's success was predicated on the dual-track approach. But success also required that the people living in the BARMM could see that the peace process had continuous momentum. Until the global Covid-19 pandemic, it did.

During Covid-19

While it remains unclear what impact Covid-19 will have on the southern Philippines, it's evident that the region's limited medical infrastructure isn't likely to be able to manage a significant outbreak.

The Philippines Government and its people are adopting social distancing arrangements, and those arrangements are affecting the peace process in myriad ways. The army's operational tempo in Mindanao has reduced, as have the law enforcement activities of the PNP. Most international agencies, NGOs and foreign aid activities have also ceased operations and withdrawn their staff from the region.

The initial prevailing security challenge in Bangsamoro from Covid-19 isn't likely to be a return to conflict or an increased threat to government forces. Travel restrictions and social isolation are likely also to be inhibiting the activities of the Abu Sayyaf Group, the New People's Army and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters to some degree.

The stagnation of the peace process in Bangsamoro will create vulnerabilities that could be exploited by local and global spoilers. Any growth in community dissatisfaction with the region's peace process as well as the broader economic impacts of Covid-19 will become open to exploitation. Social isolation measures are vital to health security in the age of Covid-19, but malicious actors could well present their implementation as evidence that the people in Mindanao are once again under strict government control. Conversely, an outbreak of Covid-19 in the region could be used to undermine the government's commitment to the people in the region.

Over the past two decades, first al-Qaeda and more recently Islamic State have attempted to fuel the conflict in the southern Philippines. In doing so, they've sought to exploit the local conflict to open a Southeast Asian campaign in their global efforts. To some extent, al-Qaeda had limited success with its ongoing engagement with Jemaah Islamiyah and Islamic State during the Marawi siege. Losing Bangsamoro to the peace process has been a blow to both organisations' global ambitions.

Unsurprisingly, al-Qaeda and Islamic State are both already using Covid-19 in broader propaganda campaigns. Both organisations have made claims that the pandemic is Allah's wrath on the West (Williams 2020). Islamic State has called upon its followers to attack during the pandemic to spread further fear (Asman 2020), but now the virus may provide the two groups with an opportunity to regroup in Mindanao by leveraging the pandemic to undermine the peace process.

Al-Qaeda and Islamic State must be denied the opportunity to re-establish themselves or a sympathetic supporter base in Bangsamoro. If that's not achieved, there's a strong possibility that the decades-long conflict in the southern Philippines will be quickly rekindled as the Covid-19 pandemic moves from its immediate crisis phase. Moreover, increasing insecurity in Bangsamoro could provide the conditions necessary for either Islamic State or al-Qaeda, possibly both, to establish a safe zone from which they could recommence their terrorist activities in the broader region.

Unfortunately, security interventions during Covid-19—especially armed forces operations—are more likely to inflame the issue. In this environment, emphasis needs to be given to information campaigns to prevent violent extremism. Those campaigns should focus on enhancing the local population's understanding of Covid-19 and its impacts on the peace process.

Australia could provide some assistance to the BTA in its Covid-19 response, in the form of PPE and medical supplies, and such offers are likely to be welcomed. Furthermore, Australia could offer to provide expertise on preventing violent extremism to the BTA.

After Covid-19

The Philippines Government and the MILF have agreed upon the broad strategic framework for the Bangsamoro peace and normalisation process. However, much of the implementation detail is still missing. As soon as the Covid-19 pandemic becomes manageable, efforts to restart the peace and transition process should recommence. This momentum will be critical to the future of peace and security in this troubled region. The continuation of a security-sector reform agenda will also remain crucial.

The aim of security-sector reform in cases such as this is a gradual transition, subject to the threat situation, of responsibility for security from a militarised approach to a human-rights-based law enforcement model. In Bangsamoro's case, it seems that parallel conflicts between the Philippines Government and the Abu Sayyaf Group, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and New People's Army will prevent the withdrawal of the armed forces or a cessation of its operations.

After the acute phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, this new chapter of the peace process in the southern Philippines will continue to evolve, so Australia needs to reconsider the nature of its assistance to the BTA and move beyond its current focus on counterterrorism support.

There's an opportunity here for Australia to play an active role in reforming the security sector in the BARMM and in doing so to make a lasting contribution to the normalisation process. Given the pause to community policing and other engagement in the region because of Covid-19, it's likely to be necessary to reinforce assistance to the PNP beyond what was previously planned. In addition, the refocusing of Australia's development program in much of Southeast Asia and the Pacific on public health could also be applied in development assistance to Bangsamoro.

Australia's law enforcement agencies, especially our state and territory police forces, have hard-earned experience in community policing, and an extensive evidence base underpins their current models.

Similarly, the Australian Federal Police International Deployment Group's experience in Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste and Cyprus could be used to develop negotiation and conflict-resolution training for the PNP.

References

Asman NA 2020, '"Divine retribution": The Islamic State's COVID-19 propaganda', *The Diplomat*, 24 March, online.

CISAC (Center for International Security and Cooperation) 2018a. *Abu Sayyaf Group*, CISAC, Stanford University, online.

CISAC (Center for International Security and Cooperation) 2018b. *Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters*, CISAC, Stanford University, online.

CISAC (Center for International Security and Cooperation) 2018c. *Communist Party of the Philippines—New People's Army*, CISAC, Stanford University, online.

CISAC (Center for International Security and Cooperation) 2019. *Moro Islamic Liberation Front*, CISAC, Stanford University, online.

Gutierrez BJ 2020. *Fast facts on the Bangsamoro Organic Law*, Philippine Information Agency, online.

Reuters 2017. '"Articulate, educated, idealistic" Maute brothers who brought Islamic State's brand of terror to southern Philippine city', *South China Morning Post*, 12 June, online.

Williams C 2020. 'Terrorism in the era of Covid-19', *The Strategist*, 15 April, online.

Notes

1 'The Bangsamoro insurgency: an international history', *Small Wars Journal*, 21 September 2011, online.

After Covid, conflict in the South China Sea and over Taiwan?

Malcolm Davis and Charlie Lyons Jones

Australia faces the prospect of a major geopolitical crisis emerging from the coronavirus pandemic if China uses force to resolve territorial disputes in the South China Sea or against Taiwan.

There's a risk that Beijing might see a window of opportunity opening up as the US struggles to manage the impact of the ongoing pandemic on its society and economy, especially if a second wave of the pandemic were to undermine US military readiness over the next 18 months (Begley 2020). The cost of dealing with a prolonged pandemic could also severely disrupt the ability of the US Government to sustain appropriate levels of US defence spending in the longer term (Egel et al. 2020).

A sustained economic downturn brought about by Covid-19, along with sluggish domestic demand, could also weaken the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party in the eyes of the Chinese people (Jennings 2020). Economic weakness, combined with bubbling unrest about the government's initial mishandling of the crisis, could tempt the regime to divert attention though foreign adventurism, and the South China Sea and Taiwan are the most likely flashpoints.

Beijing's greater appetite for risk is clear in Hong Kong. China is poised to impose a new national security law that bypasses the Legislative Council and allows Beijing to directly enforce its will on the streets of Hong Kong,[1] marking an end to the facade of 'one country, two systems'. Hong Kong should serve as a warning that Beijing is now more willing to throw its weight around.

China's moves in the South China Sea

In the South China Sea, the Chinese Government has asserted 'indisputable sovereign rights and jurisdiction of the islands and resources within' the so-called 'nine-dash line' and claims much of the South China Sea as either territorial waters or its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) (Lohschelder 2015, MFA 2015). That claim isn't recognised by other states or by international law, as stated in 2016 under the Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling over the Philippines' arbitral proceedings under Annex VII of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (PCA 2016).

The Chinese Government has militarised the South China Sea by building artificial islands and establishing military facilities on them (Panda 2016). Beijing deployed surface-to-air and anti-ship missile systems in 2018 and in future could deploy aircraft capable of launching long-range anti-ship missiles (Davis 2018).

In recent years, Chinese naval and coastguard vessels have continually harassed regional states' commercial shipping and intruded into their EEZs. In April, Beijing deployed a survey ship, the *Haiyang Dizhi 8*, and Chinese Coast Guard escorts and maritime militia ships to undertake surveying along the Malaysian continental shelf, and has harassed Malaysian commercial ships as they operated near Malaysia's West Capella drilling ship (AMTI 2020a, 2020b). Subsequent activities have included Chinese vessels sinking two Vietnamese fishing boats and locking a fire-control radar onto a Philippines Navy vessel (Panda 2020, Lourdes Viray 2020).[2]

The US responded by deploying the amphibious assault ship USS *America*, the cruiser USS *Bunker Hill*, and the destroyer USS *Barry*, and those ships, alongside the Royal Australian Navy's HMAS *Parramatta*, participated in joint exercises in close proximity to the Chinese flotilla (Ong 2020). The subsequent

deployment in April and May of long-range US Air Force bombers sustained pressure on the Chinese forces. These deployments highlight the continuing ability of the US to respond decisively to Chinese military activities (Herzinger 2020).

The US is reacting strongly over concerns that China's leadership will seek to exploit any perception of reduced readiness in US military forces after the aircraft carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt* was unable to deploy from Guam due to a widespread outbreak of Covid-19 on board (Pawlyk 2020). Subsequent outbreaks on three other US Navy carriers and the destroyer USS *Kidd*, as well as the cancellation of military exercises and the sudden withdrawal of a continuous bomber presence in Guam, have contributed to a perception of faltering US military power in the region, with corresponding uncertainty about the US's ability to sustain its commitments to allies (Johnson 2020, Layton 2020).

The risk is that Beijing may miscalculate the resolve of the US and its allies to mount military operations in the South China Sea. The following scenarios highlight China's potential options in coming months.

Reinforcing China's presence in the Spratly Islands

The PLA could choose to forward-deploy air and naval forces to its bases on Mischief, Fiery Cross and Subi reefs to challenge the US's ability to forward-deploy air and naval forces, as the Pentagon did in April (AMTI 2020c). Forward-deployed Chinese combat aircraft would dramatically increase the potential risks for the US Navy in undertaking freedom of navigation operations and give Beijing greater ability to coerce other claimants to the Spratly Islands. Chinese air and sea control would give Beijing further advantage in South China Sea Code of Conduct negotiations with ASEAN states.

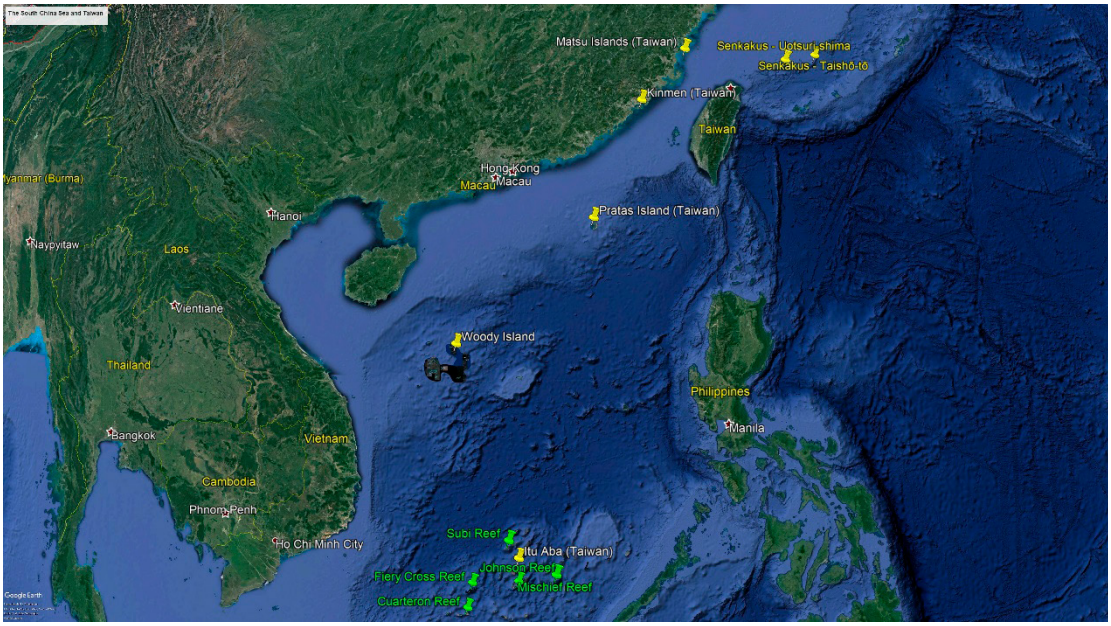
However, sustaining air and naval operations would be highly challenging. The Chinese bases aren't hardened and are affected by serious challenges from the maritime environment, notably saltwater corrosion (Chen 2019). Until these natural challenges can be overcome, this hostile operational environment would reinforce the need for a fast and decisive outcome in China's favour, but that can't be guaranteed.

The harsh operating environment may be one reason why Beijing hasn't followed through with earlier suggestions that it would declare an air defence identification zone (ADIZ) over the South China Sea, as it did over the East China Sea in 2013.[3]

Seizing Taiwan's offshore territories

A greater risk could emerge in August, when the PLA plans to undertake large naval exercises off the coast of Hainan Island, simulating the seizure of Taiwanese held Pratas Island (Figure 1). There are concerns that those exercises may be a cover for a real operation to seize Pratas, to place pressure on the Taiwan Government and position PLA Navy and Marine Corps units ashore, which would strengthen Beijing's ability to coerce Taiwan through an air and naval blockade.

Figure 1: The South China Sea



Source: Google Earth.

Closer to the Chinese mainland, seizing the Taiwanese islands of Kinmen and Matsu would add to China's ability to envelope Taiwan in any blockade. The seizure of Taiwan's offshore islands would require relatively more force than that required for an attack on Itu Aba, which is further south in the Spratly Islands chain in the South China Sea. As Ian Easton from the Project 2049 Institute notes, the seizure of Taiwan's offshore islands could be a prelude to the PLA launching an amphibious assault against Taiwan proper (Easton 2019: 4). The Taiwanese military currently has nearly 200 surface-to-surface missiles on Kinmen and Matsu that could work in tandem with land-based cruise missiles stationed near Taipei to threaten critical PLA facilities in mainland China (Easton 2014: 3–4). Given that Taipei is likely to interpret the seizure of its offshore islands as a prelude to a large-scale invasion, any such movements by the PLA are likely to be met with a strong counterattack by the Taiwanese military. Beijing would have to accept a high level of risk and be willing to deploy large amounts of force before ordering the PLA to seize Taiwan's offshore islands.

Seizing Itu Aba

The seizure of Itu Aba in the Spratly Islands chain would seek to provoke a political crisis within the Taiwan Government, in which one constituency urges the Taiwanese military to launch a counterattack on PLA assets involved in the seizure while another advocates for Taiwan to surrender the island to China. Given China's significant military facilities and high operational tempo in the South China Sea, the PLA would have a strong chance of forcing the Taiwan Government into accepting a *fait accompli* by deploying air and naval assets to seize Itu Aba (US DoD 2019: 85). Without US assistance, the Taiwan Government and armed forces, as well as the US, may have to pay a prohibitively high price to launch a counterattack against PLA forces striving to seize Itu Aba, and increase the risk that, in doing so, they'll be less prepared to defend

Kinmen, Matsu and Pratas. Therefore, a Chinese seizure of Itu Aba seems the likeliest contingency to eventuate in the near-to-medium term.

Blockading Taiwan

The key purpose of seizing islands such as Pratas, Kinmen, Matsu and Itu Aba would, in part, be to reinforce China's hold on the South China Sea, but more importantly to increase coercive pressure on Taipei. Control of Itu Aba and Pratas would strengthen China's ability to sustain forward operations (for a short duration) to choke off Taiwan's sea lines of communication in any air and naval blockade of Taiwan.

A naval blockade of Taiwan would seek to deny foreign commercial shipping vessels entry into Taiwanese waters. Done successfully, it would cut off Taiwan's supply of critical resources such as oil, gas and food and force the Taiwan Government to surrender the country's sovereignty to the People's Republic of China (Grubb 2007, Murray 2008: 17–18). One way of orchestrating a blockade would be for the PLA Navy to conduct extended maritime operations around Taiwan while warning inbound merchant vessels not to enter Taiwanese waters (O'Hanlon 2000: 85). Another would be for the Chinese Government to announce a blockade of Taiwan and have that blockade enforced by its fleet of submarines (see Glosney 2004). In either scenario, the enforcement of the blockade would require the PLA Navy either to seize control of or strike a foreign-flagged merchant vessel. Doing so would be an egregious violation of international law and could well lead to military intervention by the US and its allies. At present, the PLA is likely to avoid taking actions that could lead to such a response.

Annexing Taiwan

A naval blockade is a means to an end—to get the Tsai government in Taipei to bend to Beijing's demand to integrate Taiwan into China on its terms, as implied in the 1992 Consensus. It's a demand that President Tsai has explicitly rejected. If Taiwan resists China's current coercive measures, or even the escalated measures discussed above, China will have little option but to launch an invasion to annex Taiwan and force its integration into China against the will of the Taiwanese people. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's most recent work report, recently tabled at the third session of the 13th National Congress, drops any mention of a preference for 'peaceful reunification', implying greater willingness to consider forcibly integrating Taiwan into China (Huang 2020).

An amphibious assault would be needed to annex Taiwan (Sutton 2020). For such an operation to be a success, the PLA would need to achieve three tactical objectives:

- assert air superiority over Taiwanese airspace
- exert sea control over the Taiwan Strait and littoral
- successfully land amphibious forces on beaches suitable for such a landing (Shlapak et al. 2000: 10).

Despite the fact that the military balance may have tipped in China's favour, especially in the air domain (Joe 2019), the plethora of risks associated with an amphibious landing makes such an operation exceedingly unlikely to be a success (US DoD: 85). It seems more likely that China would seek to militarily pressure Taiwan indirectly to compel it to acquiesce, rather than move straight to a military invasion and annexation of Taiwan.

Implications for Australia

There's no indication that the US is set to turn away from a forward presence in the Western Pacific, and China isn't going to back down on its territorial claims there either. With both sides jostling in the South China Sea, a likely international pushback as China cracks down in Hong Kong and growing concern over China's willingness to use force against Taiwan, Australia's defence circumstances are likely to worsen coming out of Covid-19.

Australia needs to contribute more directly to sustaining a US forward presence in the Western Pacific as a deterrent and counterbalance to China and to reinforce the message that, even despite Covid-19, there will be no acceptance of Chinese control of Taiwan or the South China Sea. In a practical sense, that should mean greater willingness to host US forces and enabling them to operate from Australian base facilities across the Indo-Pacific region, as well as increased burden sharing through participation in US-led coalition operations throughout the region. That could include the Australian Government's willingness to allow the forward deployment of ADF units—especially air and naval assets—alongside US forces in the South China Sea and in support of Taiwan's security. Expanding defence cooperation with other partners in Southeast Asia and beyond, such as Japan, would reduce Beijing's incentive to exploit the Covid-19 pandemic to resolve territorial disputes in its favour.

At the diplomatic level, Australia needs to lay out its policy positions to Beijing in a manner that makes clear that the use of force by the Chinese state, either in the South and East China seas or against Taiwan directly, would be unacceptable to Australia, and that Australia would stand firmly with the US in responding to such a challenge under the ANZUS alliance. It should also mean working to ease Taiwan's diplomatic isolation and engaging more directly in dialogue with Taipei on a regular basis. After Hong Kong, building stronger links between Canberra and Taipei is a step long overdue.

It's often said that collective security in Asia doesn't work and that there's no NATO equivalent that could be established in the region. It's time to challenge that argument. Australia should take the lead in building the foundations of an Indo-Pacific security community based on like-minded political and strategic interests. That could send a strong message to Beijing: there is no strategic vacuum to fill.

References

AMTI (Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative) 2020a. *Update: Chinese survey ship escalates three-way standoff*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 30 April, online.

AMTI (Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative) 2020b. *Malaysia picks a three-way fight in the South China Sea*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 21 February, online.

AMTI (Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative) 2020c. *China Island Tracker*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, online.

Begley S 2020. 'Three potential futures for COVID-19: recurring small outbreaks, a monster wave, or a persistent crisis', *Stat*, 1 May, online.

Chen S 2019. 'Can a new graphene coating save the Chinese military from rusting away in the South China Sea?', *South China Morning Post*, 1 July, online.

Davis M 2018. 'China's strategic strait in the South China Sea (part 1)', *The Strategist*, 21 May, online.

Easton I 2014. 'Prepared statement of Ian M Easton', Hearing on China's Relations with Taiwan and North Korea, US–China Economic and Security Review Commission, online.

Easton I 2019. *China's top five war plans*, policy brief 19-001, Project 2049 Institute, online.

Egel D, Shatz HJ, Kumar KB, Harshberger T 2020. 'Defense budget implications of the COVID-19 pandemic', *The RAND Blog*, 7 April, online.

Glosny MA 2004. 'Strangulation from the sea? A PRC submarine blockade of Taiwan', *International Security*, 28(4):125–160.

Grubb MC 2007, 'Merchant shipping in a Chinese blockade of Taiwan', *Naval War College Review*, 60(1):7, online.

Herzinger B 2020. 'Learning in the South China Sea: the US response to the Werst Capella standoff', *War on the Rocks*, 18 May, online.

Huang K 2020. 'Chinese Government drops references to "peaceful" reunification' with Taiwan', *South China Morning Post*, 22 May, online.

Jennings P 2020. 'Coronavirus could tear down dictators and democracies alike', *The Strategist*, 7 March 2020, online.

Joe R 2019. 'Anatomy of a Taiwan invasion: the air domain', *The Diplomat*, 3 April, online.

Johnson J 2020. 'US military faces down two challenges in the Western Pacific: COVID-19 and China', *The Japan Times*, 20 May, online.

Layton P 2020. 'Discontinued: America's continuous bomber presence', *The Interpreter*, 6 May, online.

Lohschelder S 2015. 'Chinese domestic law in the South China Sea', Center for Strategic and International Studies, online.

Lourdes Viray P 2020. 'Carpio suggests joint patrols with Malaysia, Vietnam in South China Sea', *Philstar Global*, 27 April, online.

MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) 2015. 'Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China on the award on jurisdiction and admissibility of the South China Sea arbitration by the Arbitral Tribunal established at the request of the Republic of the Philippines', People's Republic of China, 30 October, online.

Murray WS 2008. 'Revisiting Taiwan's defense strategy', *Naval War College Review*, 61(3):3, online.

O'Hanlon M 2000. *Can China conquer Taiwan?*, Brookings Institution, online.

Ong P 2020. 'USS *America* (LHA-6) sails the South China Sea with some teeth', *Naval News*, 17 May, online.

Panda A 2016. 'It's official. Xi Jinping breaks his non-militarisation pledge in the Spratlys', *The Diplomat*, 16 December, online.

Panda A 2020. 'South China Sea: US State Department criticizes China for reported ramming, sinking of Vietnamese fishing boat', *The Diplomat*, 7 April, online.

Pawlyk O 2020. '*Nimitz* becomes fourth aircraft carrier with COVID-19 case: report', *Military.com*, 7 April, online.

PCA (Permanent Court of Arbitration) 2016. 'The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v. The People's Republic of China)', Section X, online.

Shlapak DA, Orletsky DT, Wilson BA 2000. Dire strait? *Military aspects of the China–Taiwan confrontation and options for US policy*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, online.

Sutton HI 2020. 'If China invades Taiwan, this is what the fleet could look like', *Forbes*, 7 June, online.

US DoD (US Department of Defense) 2019. *Annual report to congress: military and security developments involving the People's Republic of China 2019*, US Government, online.

Notes

1 'NPC: China moves to impose controversial Hong Kong security law', *BBC News*, 22 May 2020, online.

2 'China ships attack Vietnam boat in South China Sea', *NHK World-Japan*, 14 June 2020, online.

3 'No indication China able to establish South China Sea ADIZ', *Focus Taiwan CAN English News*, 18 May 2020, online.

Japan–Australia relations after Covid-19

Tomohiko Satake

Covid-19 and the regional order

How will the spread of Covid-19 change the regional order in the Indo-Pacific? The decline of US leadership, the rise of authoritarian regimes and self-interested states, and the intensifying US–China rivalry emerged well before the spread of this China-originated virus. Covid-19 has highlighted and exacerbated the vulnerability of the liberal international order, which had been already apparent due to the changing power balance in the region.

While the 'America first' President consumes much energy and time blaming China and international organisations, Beijing has suppressed the spread of the virus ahead of other countries with its authoritarian measures and attempted to use the crisis to increase its diplomatic influence in the region. Besides 'mask diplomacy', China has held several international meetings with leaders in both ASEAN and Pacific island countries. The Chinese Government and its agencies have also used enhanced public diplomacy, including the spread of 'fake news', to attempt to change the public discourse in favour of its interests.

China has continued to expand its military activities in the region, including in the area surrounding Japan. Between January and March, Chinese coastguard ships navigated in waters contiguous to the Senkaku Islands 289 times. That was a 57% increase from the same period last year. In April, six PLA Navy ships, including China's first aircraft carrier, *Liaoning*, conducted exercises near Taiwan and the South China Sea after passing between the main island of Okinawa and Miyako Island. Although these activities aren't necessarily new, they demonstrate China's continuing will to change the *status quo* by force while the world is struggling to fight against the pandemic.

Meanwhile, the US military temporarily terminated large-scale military exercises with regional allies and partners due to Covid-19. Sailors from four US aircraft carriers (out of 11) reportedly contracted the coronavirus, including more than a quarter of the 4,000 crew members assigned to the aircraft carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt*. The USS *Kidd*, on board which 63 cases were confirmed while it was operating in the Pacific, was forced to return to a naval base in San Diego.

The impact of the pandemic on the US–China power balance remains unclear. Given that the Chinese economy is hugely dependent on world economic growth, and given that the PLA can't be immune from the negative impact of Covid-19, it's too early to conclude that the regional power balance will significantly change in favour of China. What's clear, however, is that China has seen the pandemic as a rare opportunity to expand its influence to recraft the existing regional order. If such a desire is realised, Covid-19 will be viewed as a critical juncture in the transformation of that order.

Revealed risks and vulnerabilities

This challenge requires both Japan and Australia to step up their previous efforts to maintain the open, inclusive and rules-based regional order. Luckily, both countries seem to have overcome the first tide of the pandemic with minimal damage. Despite criticism over the limited scope of its testing, Japan hasn't seen an increase in overall deaths during the coronavirus outbreak and largely kept infections

under control. This was done without relying on authoritarian measures, such as enforcing lockdowns or monitoring Japanese citizens. Despite high-risk relief operations by the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) in February to address the outbreak on the cruise ship *Diamond Princess*, the JSDF didn't acquire any infections as part of the operation. Likewise, Australia's Morrison government has successfully minimised the number of infections and deaths with strict lockdown measures and travel restrictions, which have succeeded because of high levels of community cooperation.

At the same time, Covid-19 has revealed some inherent problems or risks for both countries. One of them relates to their capabilities and, even more importantly, to their willingness to uphold the rules-based international order. Even before the pandemic, the sustainability of Japan's regional engagement under the banner of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific' was being questioned due to a lack of manpower and funding (Satake & Sahashi 2020). The decline of economic growth and massive financial spending—worth more than ¥39 trillion—is likely to further worsen Japan's budgetary situation. Given that, some media and commentators argue that the Japanese Government should cut defence spending, saying that it's 'neither essential, nor urgent' (see, for example, Yoshinaga 2020).

Likewise, Australia is facing its largest budget deficit in history due to the pandemic, although the figure is smaller than many other nations' debt levels even pre-pandemic. This development has given weight to those who have been sceptical about Australia's Indo-Pacific engagement. 'Although the death rate in Australia has been gratifyingly low,' Professor Mark Beeson argues, 'the damage to the economy and the "Australian way of life" has been profound and its impact will be long-lasting.' According to Beeson, Australia, too, should cut its defence spending and focus more on immediate domestic issues, rather than possible international challenges that Australia has 'little independent capacity to influence' (Beeson 2020).

Covid-19 also revealed the security and economic risks of overdependence on one country. As Yuki Tastumi and Yoshimitsu Sato correctly observe, the pandemic and the resulting limitation on the US military's activities in the Indo-Pacific are 'a reminder that the spread of pandemic within the US military can hamstring the country's ability to sustain its presence and thus exert effective deterrence vis-à-vis the disruptive behaviour of potential adversaries' (Tatsumi & Sato 2020). Even if the US military can maintain its readiness, it isn't certain whether the White House can effectively respond to regional contingencies while preoccupied with dealing with the world's largest number of coronavirus cases.

The pandemic has also highlighted Japan's and Australia's economic vulnerabilities. Due to the disruption of supply chains in China, Japanese and Australian manufacturers are hurting, as they're heavily dependent on Hubei Province. Both countries' tourism and education industries have been damaged by the sudden decline in numbers of Chinese tourists and students. China's use of economic coercion, through the control of its imports, supply chains and foreign students and tourists, to retaliate against any 'anti-China policy' by other countries has increased the risk of economic dependence on China for regional countries. The Japanese Government and media have closely watched the recent trade spat between Australia and China after Australia's call for an independent review of Covid-19.

Many now argue that the US and its allies and partners should reduce their dependence on China and 'push back' against China's neo-mercantilist policies. Enhancing the 'coalition of the willing', such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) between the US, Japan, Australia and India, is deemed to be one of the most effective measures for such a purpose (Dobriansky 2020). The successful Australian-led initiative

to establish an international inquiry into the coronavirus pandemic is now seen as a symbol of the 'global push back against China' (Higgie 2020).

While such a policy may be to some extent effective as well as legitimate, it also runs the risk of inflating Chinese nationalism and helping to consolidate the power of Xi Jinping. Chinese foreign and security policies are strongly linked to domestic control by the authoritarian regime. Xi's consolidation of power may to some extent help China to 'behave' internationally by strengthening Xi's control over the military and the coastguard. At the same time, as a strong leader, Xi would need to demonstrate his power to fight against any 'unfair approach' (according to his understanding) by other countries to respond to domestic nationalism and maintain his authority.

President Trump's strong (and often unnecessary) terms used to blame China, such as 'Chinese virus', further inflate growing nationalism in China and encourage its 'wolf warrior' diplomacy. Such a blame game creates a vicious circle by further weakening the position of people inside the Chinese Government and society who support a more cooperative stance, strengthening authoritarianism and inviting an unyielding stance by Beijing in its foreign and security policies. It's therefore important to recognise that 'push back' against China doesn't always mean running an aggressive policy on China. Instead, it requires a prudent, patient and shrewd approach that aims at a long-term strategic goal rather than a short-term impact.

What should Japan and Australia do?

Amid these challenges, Japan and Australia should boost their bilateral and multilateral cooperation to an unprecedented level. It is welcomed that the Reciprocal Access Agreement, which will improve administrative, policy, and legal procedures to facilitate joint operations and exercises between Japan and Australia, will be reportedly concluded soon. Yet more important is how Japan and Australia can diversify their security and economic partnerships in order to hedge against an increasingly unpredictable strategic environment. Such measures are important not only to disperse their risks and vulnerabilities, but also to enhance middle-power cooperation that can aggregate their capabilities and mutually offset their weakness.

On the security front, the Quad should continue to be pursued, but equally important and often dismissed is cooperation with South Korea, the economy of which ranks fourth in Asia and the military budget of which now ranks ninth in the world. Inside the Japanese Government, there's an atmosphere that can be called 'Korea fatigue'. From the Japanese perspective, no matter how many times Tokyo attempts to improve cooperation, Seoul moves the goalposts and the deal returns to the start. That seems to be the general feeling among Japanese policymakers.

Whether such an analogy is correct or incorrect, the geostrategic importance of South Korea for Japan has always been great, but it's now increased due to intensified US–China rivalry. Like other Asian countries, along with Australia and New Zealand, South Korea has successfully contained the spread of the coronavirus and proposed cooperation with Japan in coping with Covid-19. Tokyo needs to make every effort to use this advantage and restore its strategic cooperation with Seoul. Australia can encourage such cooperation by enhancing its strategic cooperation with both Japan and South Korea bilaterally and, importantly, trilaterally.

In trade and economics, a move away from heavy centralisation in China to a more diversified trading system is inevitable. Japan's Emergency Economic Measures to Cope with Covid-19, approved by the cabinet on 7 April and amended on 20 April, recommend enhancing the resilience of supply chains through such measures as subsidies for relocating production sites of those goods 'depending on a specific country', important for healthy daily lives, or both (Cabinet Office 2020). The Australian Government has also considered 'a systemic, risk based approach to ensuring supply chain integrity, even in the event of market failure due to unforeseen external factors such as pandemic, conflict or natural disaster' (Australian Parliament 2020).

Japan and Australia should also take the initiative to strengthen international cooperation by jointly working for the enhancement of international organisations such as the UN and the World Health Organization (WHO). Discussing Prime Minister Morrison's 'three-point plan' to reform the WHO would be a good starting point for such cooperation (Farr 2020). Japan and Australia could also collaborate to enhance multilateral and multilayered mechanisms to cope with pandemics and bioterrorism through information sharing, multilateral military training and exercises. Both countries may recall that jointly developing contingency planning, including for pandemics, was one of major areas of cooperation specified by the 2007 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation.

Finally, Covid-19 offers a good opportunity for Japan and Australia to review their national security strategies. The two strategies, both of which were published in 2013, were written under the assumption that the US would remain the world's most powerful actor, while acknowledging that its primacy had been increasingly contested. They also shared the assumption that the US would keep its commitment to the region under its 'rebalancing' policy. Risks from vulnerabilities in supply chains or economic coercion from foreign countries didn't feature greatly in the assessments. Japan and Australia could independently or jointly review whether such assumptions remain realistic for the coming decade. It would be good if the pandemic crisis is a wake-up call for Tokyo and Canberra to pursue more autonomous foreign and security policies in the post-coronavirus world.

Views in this chapter do not represent official viewpoints of the National Institute for Defense Studies or Ministry of Defense of Japan.

References

Australian Parliament 2020. 'Australia's foreign affairs, defence and trade policy in a post-pandemic world', 13 May, online.

Beeson M 2020. 'Australia should spend less on defence and more on countering immediate threats', *The Strategist*, 5 May, online.

Cabinet Office 2020. *Emergency economic measures to cope with COVID*, cabinet decision, Japanese Government, 7 April, amended on 20 April (summary), online.

Dobriansky PJ 2020. 'An allied plan to depend less on China', *Wall Street Journal*, 1 May, online.

Farr M 2020. 'Australian PM pushes for WHO overhaul including power to send in investigators', *The Guardian*, 22 April, online.

Higgie M 2020. 'The global pushback against China: Australia leads the way', *RUSI Commentary*, 20 May, online.

Satake T, Sahashi R 2020. The rise of China and Japan's "vision" for free and open Indo-Pacific, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 25 May, doi: 10.1080/10670564.2020.1766907.

Tatsumi Y, Sato Y 2020. 'What COVID-19 means for the US–Japan alliance', *The Diplomat*, 29 May, online.

Yoshinaga H 2020. 'Teigen: "Tai-shingata Korona Sensou" ni Sokushite "Boeikankeihi" wo Katsuyo Seyo' [Recommendation: Japan should use defence-related budget in line with the 'war against Covid-19'], *Foresight*, 1 May, online.

Australia, Korea and Japan: revitalising relationships

Tony McCormack

As Australia emerges from the Covid-19 shutdown and work begins on restarting the economy, growing and strengthening our trade and security relationships with Japan and South Korea will be critical in guaranteeing our future prosperity.

Response to Covid-19

Both Japan and Korea confronted the Covid challenge differently, but so far it appears that the approach taken by each has been overwhelmingly effective. The successful management protocols introduced early on have continued as, like Australia, each has had to deal with numerous outbreaks.

Korea was one of the first countries other than China to be affected. With the 2015 SARS outbreak still fresh in everyone's minds and facing the continuing threat of a swine flu re-emerging, Seoul took decisive action with lockdowns and an extensive program of testing, contact tracing and treatment. The effectiveness of those measures saw South Korea become one of the exemplar nations for Covid control, all without having to close its borders.

The response to an outbreak in the Itaewon nightclub precinct in early May, in which 8,500 police were mobilised to identify the more than 11,000 people contact traced through mobile phone records and credit card transactions, further demonstrated Seoul's resolve in preventing the spread of the virus (Hui 2020). While the government's methods used to trace the potential victims would be unacceptable to civil libertarians in Australia, South Koreans understood the reasons for them and accepted the measures. The proactive and comprehensive approach had the desired outcome, and the cluster was quickly contained.

Japan took a decidedly different path in combating the virus. In part because it's against the law for the government to impose city-wide lockdowns, the government instead respectfully asked citizens to comply. When the threat became apparent in March, the Abe administration initially gave schools an extended holiday. This was followed by a time-limited amendment to legislation allowing for a state of emergency to be declared in at-risk areas. It also provided the governors of those areas with extra powers.

In early April, Prime Minister Abe used the legislation and declared a state of emergency in a limited number of prefectures, and by mid-April that was extended to the entire country (Kelly 2020). The government's actions, coupled with the modified behaviour of the Japanese people, appeared to have worked in controlling the spread of the virus. In late May, the state of emergency was lifted.

As is the case in Australia, South Korea and Japan haven't defeated the virus but have limited its spread and are now looking for ways to reopen and re-energise their economies.

Where were we before Covid?

The two defining aspects of Australia's bilateral relationships with Korea and Japan are trade and security. Japan and Korea are ranked second and fourth, respectively, as two-way trading partners and second and third for export markets. Notably, both markets trail a long way behind Australia's trade volume with China.

Japan

Australia has a long-established relationship with Japan stretching across virtually all sectors of the economy and in the security arena. Exports to Japan are primarily from the minerals, energy and food sectors, and imports encompass manufactured goods such as motor vehicles and electronics and refined products, primarily petroleum (DFAT 2020a). Japan also continues to be a major investor in Australia, as evidenced by projects such as the INPEX liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant in Darwin and acquisitions much like Asahi's proposal to takeover Carlton & United Breweries. Notably, the Foreign Investment Review Board hasn't rejected an application from a Japanese investor in the past 25 years, making Australia a low-risk destination for Japanese funds.

The services sector is another strong area of trade, particularly tourism. Close to half a million Japanese tourists visit Australia each year, and roughly the same number of Australians make the reciprocal journey to Japan.

The security relationship is broad and our most mature in Asia. It covers wide-ranging cooperation in all manner of issues, including counterterrorism, disarmament, humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping and counterproliferation. Australia and Japan hold annual Foreign and Defence Ministers' talks, and our militaries conduct numerous exercises together.

South Korea

Australia's trading relationship with Korea somewhat mirrors ours with China and Japan. Exports primarily come from the minerals, energy and food sectors, and imports are vehicles, petroleum, electronics and manufactured goods (DFAT 2020b). The services sector is focused on travel, and education and investment is growing, albeit from a small base.

Historically, the security relationship has been closely tied to Australia's membership of the UN Command and responding to the threat from North Korea. However, over the past few years, the bilateral relationship has been slowly evolving. Australia is the only nation apart from the US that holds talks at the Foreign and Defence Minister level with South Korea, and there's been an increase in bilateral military exercises and training.

Trade and trust in a post-Covid world

However, successfully managing Covid-19 isn't the only thing that Australia, Japan and South Korea have in common—all three countries have China as their largest trading partner and all have been subjected to pernicious trade sanctions from China at various times.

Japan bore the brunt of China's displeasure in 2010 when it arrested the captain of a Chinese fishing trawler. He was detained after his boat collided with two Japan Coast Guard vessels when attempting to fish in Japanese-controlled waters. In a move designed to coerce Japan into releasing the captain, China blocked the export of rare earth elements to Japan (Bradsher 2010, Huang 2019). While the action hurt Japan for a period, the tactic backfired when Japan developed an alternative rare-earth supply line, bypassing China.

In 2016, Seoul was punished by China for allowing the US to establish a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-ballistic missile system in South Korea to defend itself against the threat from North Korea (Volodsko 2017). China took umbrage at that move, declaring that the THAAD system could be used to spy on China, and imposed unofficial economic and cultural sanctions on South Korea.

Chinese group tours to South Korea were cancelled and imports of Korean food, K-Pop and TV dramas were targeted. Undertakings from the newly elected President Moon that were referred to as the 'three no's' (no additional THAAD deployments; no tripartite military alliance with Japan and the US and no joining US missile defence networks) led to the sanctions being lifted.

Now that it's Australia's turn, Tokyo and Seoul will be reminded of the volatility and fragility of the relationship they have with their largest trading partner and will be seeking to China-proof their economies.

What will Covid do?

As Japan and South Korea emerge from Covid-19, they'll reassess their relationships and look for safe, secure, reliable and trusted partners. They'll be looking to see who managed the initial and subsequent phases of the pandemic well. But, most of all, they'll be looking to see which economies that they can work with are coming out of Covid the fastest and strongest. They'll see all those characteristics in Australia.

This provides Australia with a unique opportunity to reinvigorate our relationships with the two vibrant democracies and put them on a new trajectory. Japan and Australia know each other well, and there exists a broad and solid foundation to further expand the relationship. Korea provides perhaps the greatest opportunity for growth. Despite the depth of our trade links, Koreans and Australians know little about each other, so a 'getting to know you' advertising campaign would be invaluable.

What Australia needs to do

To build our relationships with Japan and South Korea, we need to focus on trade, investment and security.

Trade and investment

For a start, the Australian Government and the business community need to recognise that Korea and Japan are two separate countries with different economies, cultures, systems of government and requirements. While there will be similarities in how we engage, each needs to be treated independently and each deserves its own unique engagement strategy.

The future of the trading relationship with Japan was affirmed when the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment held a videoconference with his Japanese counterpart on 18 May this year. The ministers committed to continuing cooperation and ensuring a smooth flow of trade and investment between the two countries. While that's a good start, it doesn't go far enough.

Our exports of raw materials should increase. As both North Asian economies rely heavily on imports of commodities and energy, Australia is the natural supplier for them. But we shouldn't limit ourselves to traditional exports of LNG, iron ore and coal. Australia should further increase its capacity to supply other

commodities, such as rare earths and lithium for batteries. As renewables and cleaner energy sources become more abundant and cheaper, Australia needs to invest more in their efficiency and storage. We should also lead the world in the R&D of hydrogen as an energy source, creating another major energy export product.

The services sector should also be expanding. A strong, targeted campaign by Tourism Australia showing that Australia is a friendly and healthy destination will resonate when Covid-19 travel restrictions are lifted and people are looking for a safe destination. The number of students studying for graduate and postgraduate degrees at Australian universities needs to increase significantly. In addition, research cooperation between Australian and Korean and Australian and Japanese universities should also be expanded. Biomedical research and clean energy would be mutually beneficial areas of cooperation and collaboration.

Security

The fractured and uncertain global environment provides an opening to strengthen our security cooperation. While Korea and Japan are alliance partners with the US and both host US forces, Australia needs to send a strong message that a security relationship with us doesn't replace or compete with the US alliance; rather, it supplements and supports the alliance.

We should immediately work to develop a formalised security arrangement with Japan. We need to conclude the Japan–Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement as soon as possible and conduct bilateral exercises in both Australia and Japan. As middle powers and strong, stable democracies, Australia and Japan can together provide leadership in regional security. We should also work to make the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue of Australia, Japan, India and the US a reality.

Our security relationship with South Korea needs to move beyond the traditional dimension of the threat from North Korea, and we need to encourage South Korea to look at security issues beyond the peninsula. Despite its experiences with China, Korea is unlikely to want to take steps that would be seen as taking sides in the developing great-power competition. We should explore whether its 'New Southern Policy', which is promoted as a search for new trade and investment markets in ASEAN, has a strategic dimension (Easley 2018). If so, we should use our connections and experience in ASEAN to assist South Korea in promoting security cooperation.

Defence engagement needs to increase, and to enable that to happen we need to negotiate a reciprocal access agreement. The Korean Air Force and Navy operate a number of the same types of aircraft as the RAAF, such as the Joint Strike Fighter, the KC-30 tanker, the Wedgetail and the P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, so it makes sense for our air forces to lead the engagement.

Australia should encourage both Japan and Korea to exercise in Australia and use our world-class military training ranges, such as the Delamere Air Weapons Range and the Bradshaw Field Training Range. In concert with the US Marine Rotational Force deployments to Darwin, trilateral and quadrilateral exercises in Australia's north will enhance the interoperability and skills of all our forces and demonstrate further resolve against an increasingly belligerent China.

Through a policy of renewal, reinvigoration and imagination, Australia can work with both Japan and Korea to boost our respective economic recoveries and further strengthen regional security. We can

together reduce our economic reliance on China and demonstrate to the US that we're taking more responsibility for our own security. With over a year before any of the three democracies faces a general election, there's time for governments to set policies into practice.

References

Bradsher K 2010. 'Amid tensions, China blocks vital exports to Japan', *New York Times*, 22 September, online.

DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) 2020a. *Australia–Japan bilateral relationship*, Australian Government, online.

DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) 2020b. *Republic of Korea (South Korea)*, country brief, Australian Government, online.

Easley L-E 2018. 'South Korea's "New Southern Policy": economic diversification with economic and social dimensions', *Asia Insights*, no. 5, December, IIR-CSEAS-CSSAS, online.

Huang G 2019. 'China's ban on rare earths didn't work on Japan and won't work in the trade war with the US', *South China Morning Post*, 5 June, online.

Hui M 2020. '"If Seoul falls, the country falls": 8,500 Korean police are moving to quash a new Covid-19 cluster', *Quartz,* 12 May, online.

Kelly T 2020. 'Japan approves emergency powers for PM to tackle coronavirus outbreak', *Reuters*, 13 March, online.

Volodsko DJ 2017. 'China wins its war against South Korea's US THAAD missile shield—without firing a shot', *South China Morning Post,* 18 November 2017, online.

North Korea's missile and nuclear options

Malcolm Davis

If the word of the regime in Pyongyang is to be believed, North Korea has dodged the Covid-19 bullet and has no cases within its borders (Park et al. 2020). That's highly unlikely to be true, of course. It's likely that there are significant numbers of cases inside North Korea, despite efforts by the regime to contain the virus's spread. The disappearance of Kim Jong Un for three weeks in April, raising speculation of his demise until he reappeared in early May, may have been prompted by his desire to hide from the virus (Stewart 2020, Klinger 2020).

Even if the regime elite can hide, the North Korean people can't. Authoritative reporting suggests that Covid-19 has spread 'deep inside North Korea', from the Sino-North Korean border into Pyongyang, and beyond to Haeju, 300 kilometres away from the border between North Korea and China (Hui 2020). The potential for person-to-person transmission within North Korea's society must remain a concern (Panda & Kim 2020). With a likely absence of health care outside of Pyongyang, the rural hinterlands of North Korea must remain a likely hotbed for the rapid spread of the virus.

The regime will prioritise the wellbeing and security of the ruling elite and its key supporters in the North Korean military. Yet Kim can't ignore the plight of the North Korean people completely, for fear that a rapid spread could generate popular discontent.

So, Kim needs to at least be seen by the North Korean people to be completely in charge and achieving successes both within North Korea and beyond its borders. It will be important for him to preclude any suggestion that his leadership is wobbly in the face of a likely worsening Covid-19 outbreak. Kim has consistently sought to engage the US using the North's nuclear weapons as leverage, with the objective of gaining concessions. Pushing the US towards granting concessions is more likely to be done through an indirect strategy of provocation and inducement, rather than renewed summitry that has little chance of leading anywhere.

Forcing a dialogue

Conducting another summit, in which the US was seen to make concessions, would be precisely the type of stage-managed event that would be a clear indicator of who's in charge of US–DPRK relations and, of course, in Pyongyang. Yet the summitry process that was the centre of international attention in 2018 and 2019 ground to a halt after the disastrous Hanoi summit of March 2019 (Davis 2019). The North Koreans have suggested that they have no further interest in talking to the US (Kuhn & Newman 2020).

There's little prospect that the Trump administration will offer renewed summitry leading to an agreement before the US presidential election in November (Aum 2020). With this clear to Kim Jong Un, he can choose to wait out the coming months in the hope that Trump will be re-elected, and then be ready while dealing with Covid-19 outbreaks inside North Korea's borders, or he can seek to wage a campaign of calculated provocations to gain the attention of the US, seizing the initiative with the aim of forcing concessions. If Trump isn't re-elected, such a campaign of threats and inducements would place the North Koreans in a strong position to pressure a Biden administration.

The destruction of the North–South Liaison Office recently is provocative but probably only an initial step, with more meaning for South Korea than for the US. Yet it sends a message to Washington, in effect stating 'Don't ignore us or take us for granted.'

Making a provocation

Kim is clearly determined to reinforce North Korea's apparent strength, especially against the US, and one option is additional missile testing. It's the reality that the development and testing of large, liquid-fuelled intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) such as the Hwasong 15, which was last launched in November 2017, sufficiently got Trump's attention the first time around to encourage a willingness to talk (Panda 2017). In contrast, recent tests in 2020 and in 2019 have all been of solid-fuelled short-range ballistic missile systems or tactical rocket systems (Elleman 2019a). Those missiles are designed for high-precision conventional attacks against South Korea (Cotton 2020). The Trump administration hasn't responded to those tests because they don't violate an unofficial moratorium on long-range missile systems, which came into effect on 28 April 2018. In a new year's speech in 2020, Kim announced that he no longer felt bound by such a moratorium (Davenport & Masterson 2020).

Kim *has* threatened to renew long-range missile testing (Masterson 2019), implied the existence of a 'new strategic weapon' and issued a warning of a 'Christmas gift' in a speech (Kim & Denyer 2020). So far, apart from more short-range tactical missile launches, there's been no such 'Christmas gift' in the form of either a long-range ballistic missile test or a nuclear test.

The next step for North Korean missile testing therefore *might* be a new solid-fuel ICBM (Van Diepen 2019, Choi 2020). There's already evidence that North Korea has ground-tested a solid-fuelled rocket engine (Lee 2019, Elleman 2019b), and it would have gained further knowledge from the series of short-range missile tests noted above. Solid-fuelled ICBMs and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) would transform North Korea's deterrent capability. Unlike liquid-fuelled ICBMs such as the Hwasong-15 or the Hwasong-12 IRBM, which take hours to fuel and are vulnerable to pre-emptive attack while on a fixed launch site, a solid-fuelled missile can be launched in minutes and be based on mobile trailer–erector launcher (TEL) vehicles. Possibly, the late 'Christmas gift' could be a long-range, solid-fuelled ballistic missile launched from a TEL. The other possibility would be a test of North Korea's submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM)—the Pukguksong-1—which it's been developing for some time.[1]

The demonstration of either capability would be a very visible display of Kim's strength, both to would-be domestic rivals and as a warning to the US not to take Pyongyang for granted. It would also demonstrate that North Korea is resilient even in the face of the likely spread of Covid-19.

Such an act would clearly break the verbally agreed moratorium on more North Korean long-range missile tests, but Kim may gamble that such a provocation could pay off. A factor for him to consider is the predictability of US responses—and, when it comes to existential threats to the US homeland, concessions and weakness aren't usually the result.

Forcing Trump to choose

Another North Korean long-range missile test, particularly with a new type of solid-fuelled ballistic missile, would leave President Trump in a difficult position. It would take away what he promotes as a clear foreign policy success to his domestic base. He would be left with three basic choices. The first would be to move quickly to another round of summitry that would inevitably see Trump face strong pressure to make concessions to Kim in order to reinstate the missile test moratorium. The second would be to respond with a diplomatic demarche that sees a return to 'fire and fury' rhetoric. That would invite additional North Korean ICBM tests or the prospect of a possible nuclear test, and that would (further) undermine his administration's credibility. The third is a limited military response that would risk rapid escalation into full-scale war on the Korean Peninsula.

Were Trump to agree to a summit, there are clear risks in such a step.

A new summit seems unlikely. Trump—or his advisers—would understand that Kim would demand real concessions simply to return to the testing moratorium, but with no real denuclearisation on the table. The US wouldn't sit down with the North Koreans again simply to see an outcome that replicates Hanoi.

In the Hanoi summit in 2019, Kim demanded an end to sanctions but offered little of substance in return. It's likely that this would be his proposed starting point for any new discussion. It's also likely that Kim would seek the recognition of North Korea as a nuclear weapons state. North Korea would also seek to exploit Trump's desire to withdraw US forces from the peninsula, and, most importantly, Kim would pursue the lifting of sanctions and economic assistance to prop up North Korea's economy. Even a partial easing of sanctions would be a huge win for him.

It seems unlikely that President Trump would give in to the more substantive demands, so any summit—however unlikely it is to occur—wouldn't really ease security concerns on the peninsula. It's more likely that a new summit, especially after a new long-range missile test, would end in failure. Perhaps a more nuanced approach from the US side would seek to alter Kim's calculations in such a manner that he sees nuclear weapons not as a source of strength and prestige but as an impediment to economic reform and prosperity (Jung 2020). The possible impact of Covid-19 on Kim's grip on power may in fact accentuate the requirement for such economic reform. Yet that's a challenging goal, and, so far, after summits in Singapore and Hanoi, the US has been unable to achieve such an outcome.

Outcomes of a missile diplomacy

If Kim does engage in further missile diplomacy, with new missile tests, to try to seize an international diplomatic victory from a weakened President Trump, it's unlikely to work. First, there are no indications that the Trump administration is backing off from its current policy, which requires the comprehensive, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of North Korea as a precondition to the easing of sanctions or the granting of other concessions. Conversely, Kim has invested a great deal of personal political prestige in bringing North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities to their current level. He's not going to throw that away for little in return.

For the US, there's an added complication, as there seems little prospect that Trump will put squabbles with South Korea about transactional costs (real or imagined) associated with the vital US–ROK defence alliance aside.[2] That will weaken any US position against Pyongyang and undermine any chance that a return to summitry would work. Such disputes only play into Kim's hands—and into China's objective to end US strategic primacy in Asia.

A failed summit, perhaps one in which Trump walks out, unwilling to make deep concessions to Kim or to truly sacrifice the vital US–ROK defence relationship, would place immediate pressure back on Kim to carry through with further provocations. More missile tests would be likely, but the key issue is whether Pyongyang would also consider undertaking a nuclear test.

North Korea has already threatened a 'Juche Bird' atmospheric nuclear test over the North Pacific, and such a test could form part of a true end-to-end test for a strategic nuclear weapons capability (Majumdar 2017). Yet that step would weaken Kim's hand, drawing international opprobrium against the regime, even from China, and could force the US to respond militarily. That would certainly risk a new and devastating Korean conflict as 2020 draws to a close.

References

Aum F 2020. 'This is why there probably won't be another Trump–Kim Summit in 2020', *The National Interest*, 14 May, online.

Choi S 2020. 'Solid-fuel ICBM may be Pyongyang's new strategic weapon', *Korea Herald*, 3 January, online.

Cotton S 2020. 'Expect a surge in North Korean missile tests, and of greater range', *Defense News*, 10 April, online.

Davenport K, Masterson J 2020. 'North Korea reiterates end to test moratorium', *Arms Control Now*, 30 January, online.

Davis M 2019. 'Crashing and burning in Hanoi', *The Strategist*, 5 March, online.

Elleman M 2019a. 'North Korea's new short range missiles: a technical evaluation', *38 North*, 9 October, online.

Elleman M 2019b. 'North Korea's rocket engine test: what we know and don't know', *38 North*, 10 December, online.

Hui MD 2020. 'Explaining reports of COVID-19 infections deep inside N Korea', *Daily NK,* 2 March, online.

Jung HP 2020. 'What Kim wants', *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2020, online.

Kim MJ, Denyer S 2020. 'North Korea's Kim threatens to resume nuclear, long-range missile tests', *Washington Post*, 1 January, online.

Klinger B 2020. 'What did we learn from Kim Jong Un's absence?' *The National Interest*, 12 May, online.

Kuhn A, Newman S 2020. '2 years after Singapore summit, US–North Korea relations back to square 1', *NPR*, 12 June, online.

Lee C 2019. 'Experts: N. Korea tested an engine, possibly for a long-range missile', *VOA*, 10 December, online.

Majumdar D 2017. 'Why history proves North Korea just might test a nuclear weapon in the Pacific', *The National Interest*, 23 September, online.

Masterson J 2019. 'North Korea threatens to resume tests', news release, Arms Control Association, November, online.

Panda A 2017. 'The Hwasong-15: The anatomy of North Korea's new ICBM', *The Diplomat*, 6 December, online.

Panda A 2019. 'Kim Jong Un's new ballistic missile submarine: the future of North Korea's undersea nuclear deterrent', *The Diplomat*, 24 July, online.

Panda J, Kim J 2020. 'What does North Korea's zero COVID-19 claim signify', *38 North*, 28 April, online.

Park SN 2019. 'Trump's penny pinching dooms his Korean diplomacy', *Foreign Policy*, 10 December, online.

Park KB, Jong J, Jung Y 2020. 'Do they or do they not have COVID-19 inside North Korea', *38 North*, 23 April, online.

Stewart D 2020. 'Is the rumor of Kim Jong-un's death believable?', *The National Interest*, 26 April, online.

Van Diepen VH 2019. 'Resumed North Korean ICBM testing: possible technical objectives', *38 North*, 9 December, online.

Notes

1 'Pukguksong1 (KN-11)', *Missilethreat*, CSIS Missile Defense Project, online; see also Panda (2019).

2 'Inside Trump's standoff with South Korea over defense costs', *The Japan Times*, 11 April 2020, online; see also Park (2017).

Australia–India relations after Covid-19

Aakriti Bachhawat

The Covid-19 pandemic is accelerating the geopolitical trends of the past few years and intensifying Sino-US rivalry, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. The Australia–India relationship is no exception in this regard. In fact, Covid-19, while reinforcing the positive momentum of Australia–India ties over the past five years, might paradoxically also act as a slate-cleaner in some respects by helping both sides to shed the residual negative baggage of the past. Post-Covid, the Australia–India relationship will play out in the larger context of a more coercive Chinese state and explicit US–China strategic and economic competition, but will, arguably for the first time, see both countries understanding the direct benefit to each from working to build a security and economic relationship, rather than being focused on this as an aspect of China–US relations.

This chapter begins with a brief analysis of recent trends in Australia–India relations and how they're likely to be affected in the wake of Covid-19. I then go on to argue that Australia and India are operating in a unique and unprecedented geopolitical environment framed by the accelerating strategic, economic and technological conflict and competition between the US and China. While the dynamics of this struggle, along with the Chinese state's coercive direction under Xi Jinping, will shape the environment that their relations operate in, the pandemic has the potential to provide some room for Canberra and New Delhi to imagine a solid bilateral relationship in its own right.

This is due to three factors. First, the conduct of the US and China over the past few months has led to a distinct realisation among rising and middle powers in the Indo-Pacific that the US, on its own, can't be relied upon to uphold and maintain the rules-based order and that Beijing doesn't intend to. Second, there's a growing bipartisan consensus and interest within Australia, exacerbated by the pandemic, that it needs to strike a close partnership with India. Finally, and more importantly, India's suspicions about Australia's overreliance on both the US and China are finally taking a back seat in shaping New Delhi's views of Canberra; Australia is increasingly seen as a country able to balance its strategic and economic priorities in the face of coercion and as a nation that understands and asserts its national interests. Conversely, Indian pragmatism in dealing with China during Covid, and, more particularly, India's willingness to stand up to Beijing's aggression on its border might reassure Australia that New Delhi can't pushed be pushed around by Beijing.

As Australian High Commissioner to India Barry O'Farrell puts it, the two countries no longer have 'converging' interests, but their interests are now 'aligned'.[1]

Finally, I delve into an assessment of potential pitfalls in the relationship and the need to keep expectations measured.

Current and future trends

The Australia–India relationship has travelled a significant distance in the past six years, politico-militarily, economically and in multilateral contexts.

Prime ministers Scott Morrison and Narendra Modi held a 'virtual summit' on 4 June this year, during which both countries upgraded bilateral relations to a 'comprehensive strategic partnership' (Morrison

2020). Importantly, the two nations signed a mutual logistics support agreement akin to the arrangements India has with the US and France, and which will pave the way for much greater bilateral military cooperation between Canberra and New Delhi (Roy Chaudhury & Pubby 2020). The two countries have also established a defence and foreign ministerial '2+2' dialogue, elevating the secretary-level discussions in place since 2017.[2]

In 2019, their biennial military exercise, AUSINDEX, included an antisubmarine warfare exercise component, which testifies to the unprecedented levels of trust between the two militaries, given that submarine exercises are usually reserved for close partners. There was speculation that India was considering inviting Australia to join the Malabar exercises scheduled to be held in July–August this year, which may now have to be postponed (Pandit 2020). Nevertheless, it's important to not see the Malabar exercises as a litmus test for the Australia–India relationship, given the significant progress made in defence ties overall.

Although Australia failed to convince India to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in November 2019, there are reasons to believe that New Delhi would be more amenable to deeper bilateral economic ties with Canberra (PTI 2020). However, given India's protectionist proclivities, the Modi government's penchant for economic nationalism and the economic fallout from Covid-19, a free trade agreement might still be a few years away. Nonetheless, it's worth keeping sight of the advances made in the past few years, which have included a doubling of Australian exports to India, from $11 billion in 2013 to $22 billion in 2018, growing at a rate of around 15% per year (Roy Chaudhury 2019). India was Australia's fifth largest export market and eighth largest trading partner overall in 2018–19 (DFAT n.d.).

Australia–India ties have progressed along mini- and multilateral channels, most prominently with the elevation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue to ministerial level in October 2019 (Fowler 2019a). Given that Australia–India relations were often seen as the shaky leg of the revived Quad, its elevation and regular meetings in recent years speak to a maturing understanding of national interests in each capital and a resulting improvement in bilateral ties.

Moreover, the Quad has been active as a consultative forum during the pandemic, which highlights the potentially pivotal role it can play in regional cooperation on non-traditional security issues, including collaboration on vaccine development, PPE and other medical supplies (Bagchi 2020). Furthermore, the India–Australia–Indonesia partnership in the Indian Ocean (Peri & Haidar 2020), and the India–Australia–Japan trilateral (Roy Chaudhury 2018) are other forums of minilateral cooperation that have blossomed in the past few years.

Towards a more consolidated bilateral partnership

Covid-19 has brought the world's leadership crisis into sharp focus. Nowhere is it more apparent than in the Indo-Pacific region, which is dealing with the actions of a revisionist China looking to distract attention away from its culpability in causing the pandemic through misinformation and 'mask diplomacy' while at the same time maximising its gains on several fronts, such as the South China Sea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and even its border dispute with India (Singh 2020). It's also engaging in economic coercion, as we've seen with Australia and as Beijing has threatened should the UK change its direction on 5G digital infrastructure.

The Trump administration's bungled response to the crisis at home and claims about the pandemic haven't put the US in a position of global leadership in the response to the virus (Doherty 2020). Moreover, Trump's decision to terminate US funding of the World Health Organization has gone in the opposite direction to the Australian Government's recognition of the need to reinvest and raise participation in vital international agencies and institutions (Coote 2020).

In some ways, this has led to nations reassessing their national priorities to give greater precedence to their primary national interests over regional or global imperatives. It's in this respect that Australia and India have come to see each other in direct bilateral terms as they realise that the US alone shouldn't be left to maintain security and rules-based behaviour in the region.[3]

This pandemic has also brought Australian and Indian perceptions of China into much greater convergence than at any previous time. While India has been inherently suspicious of China owing to historical and structural issues, Australia has slowly woken up to the threat of Chinese revisionism in recent years because of the Chinese Communist Party's interference in Australia's domestic politics, cyber intrusions, emerging Chinese influence in the South Pacific, Beijing's actions in the South China Sea and, more recently, economic coercion against Australia (Bachhawat 2019).

Covid-19 has made the conversation on the vulnerability of supply chains that involve China a common topic of concern for most countries, and there's hence a push to find alternative sources of digital technologies, medical supplies and critical inputs, such as rare-earth elements. It's here that Australia and India may find complementary interests, particularly in advanced manufacturing. While India desires to be the manufacturing hub of choice for industries moving out of China, Australian businesses would be keen to explore options of manufacturing in a democratic and rule-abiding India, which has a large supply of cheap labour and advanced technical skills (Jha Bhaskar 2020).

Furthermore, India, which is dependent on China for 90% of its rare-earth requirements, has now signed a memorandum of understanding with Australia to cooperate on the mining and processing of such elements. Australia, on the other hand, is the world's sixth largest producer of rare earths and is keen on finding an alternative market to China—and to move further up the rare-earth production chain (Laskar 2020).

Last year, Scott Morrison, in his address to the Lowy Institute, called India 'a natural partner' to Australia (Fowler 2019b), which was subsequently backed by shadow foreign minister Penny Wong.[4] While such odes to the relationship and its underachieved potential aren't new, there's never before been this amount of bipartisan consensus on investing in the India relationship down under, and that's only been reinforced in the wake of China's economic coercion of Australia during Covid-19.[5]

Finally, India has come to appreciate Australia's tenacity in not caving in to Chinese pressure in recent times, particularly through such decisions as excluding high-risk vendors, such as Chinese digital providers, from its 5G network and passing foreign interference laws (Tillett 2019). More importantly, Canberra's decision to close its borders to travellers from China in early February (Packham 2020), its successful call for an independent investigation to trace the origins of the pandemic and holding its ground against Beijing's economic bullying have strengthened India's perceptions of Australia as a resilient and strong country that's able to find innovative ways of advancing its strategic and economic priorities. Moreover, Australia has also shown an ability and inclination to oppose Washington where its

national interests differ, as it did by not endorsing US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's claim that the coronavirus was created in a Chinese lab, as that claim wasn't sustainable on the basis of the available evidence and is better left to the inquiry to assess (Sheridan 2020). Australia has been quietly assertive about its interests and held its own.

Interestingly, the same could be said about India, with caveats.[6] India was also one of the first nations to ban flights from China in early February, despite Chinese pressure (Wire staff 2020). It passed an important foreign direct investment law in April, effectively making all Chinese investment into the country dependent on New Delhi's approval (Dasgupta 2020).[7] Australia has since moved in that same direction (Clarke 2020). India's approximately 3,500-kilometre land-boundary dispute and large power disparity with China, plus Beijing's seemingly all-weather ties with Pakistan, limit New Delhi's ability to adopt a more forthright stance against the PRC, unless Beijing forces that to happen by increasingly assertive military action on the India–China border, for example. Nonetheless, India has shown an inclination to pursue much closer relationships with like-minded Western countries in recent years, which stands in contrast to the intransigent non-aligned stance that it took during the Cold War.

The road ahead

Australia and India (and indeed all other nations) will find themselves in uncharted territory in the post-Covid world, where one could reasonably expect the more aggressive and adventurist China we already see under Xi Jinping continuing and perhaps worsening, and a US that, if it keeps to current directions, will be an increasingly unilateral power. Much, of course, depends on the outcome of the US election in November this year, but suffice to say that US credibility has taken a major hit because of the pandemic.

Australia and India will be faced with the choice of accommodating a revisionist China and compromising their national interests in the face of Beijing's coercion or looking for ways to collaborate with each other bilaterally, minilaterally and multilaterally to preserve an international order centred on liberal values. If they choose the latter course, there are a few steps that will go a long way in strengthening bilateral ties.

Australia shouldn't fixate upon securing a free trade agreement as a marker of success or failure in the relationship and instead adopt a gradualist approach to trade, keeping in mind the rapid advances made in the past five years or so. India's protectionist tendencies are likely to be exacerbated due to the pandemic, so banking on a free trade arrangement might be counterproductive. The fact that India, too, has commissioned an Australia Economic Strategy to match the Australian Government's India Economic Strategy report is a silver lining.

Instead, both nations need to work on picking the low-hanging fruit, and the logistics support agreement is a starting point. The use of strategic islands, such as the Andaman, Nicobar and Cocos islands, to collaborate on increasing maritime domain awareness is also a key step towards a more beneficial relationship (Baruah 2020). There are also calls for the two nations to cooperate in the aerospace domain, given New Delhi's recent advances in aerospace technology (Matheswaran 2020). Next, critical technology cooperation, as fleshed out in the latest agreement signed in June 2020, will be a key common ground for both countries to expand ties (Sadler 2020).

Australia will need to be cautious of Indian sensitivities vis-à-vis China. In the absence of continued and expanded direct coercion of India by Beijing, India won't sign up to anything that would overtly offend Beijing unless the benefits are obvious and there's broader international support. Its initial refusal to back Australia's push for a Covid-19 investigation, followed by co-sponsorship once the groundswell of international support began to grow, was a case in point. India will be focused on its core interests and continue to be reticent about engaging multilaterally on issues that would draw China's ire.

Finally, Australia needs to keep its expectations of India measured. India isn't going to be the next China (in many ways a fundamentally good piece of news, while perhaps also frustrating) and on its own is unlikely to be the country that underwrites our prosperity in the future, if we're foolish enough to seek any country to do that, with the lessons of the pandemic so fresh in our minds. But there are good chances that India will remain a democracy with free citizens, a burgeoning middle class, independent media, strong scientific, research and technological capabilities, respect for human rights and a commitment to living up to the international agreements it makes. If trust is to be the new currency for the formation of a future world order, then the Australia–India relationship has a bright future.

References

Bachhawat A 2019. 'No longer in a cleft-stick: India and Australia in the Indo-Pacific', *The Strategist*, 25 June, online.

Bagchi I 2020. 'Focus on Covid in Quad Plus meet', *The Times of India*, 13 May, online.

Baruah D 2020. 'Islands of opportunity: where India and Australia can work together', *The Interpreter*, 22 May, online.

Clarke M 2020. 'Foreign Investment Review Board to be given greater approval powers amid increasing national security risk', *ABC News*, 5 June, online.

Coote G 2020. 'Australia rules out changes to WHO contributions following US funding freeze', *ABC Radio*, 15 April, online.

Dasgupta S 2020. 'New FDI policy: Can India manage to stem Chinese predatory trade practices?', *The Economic Times*, 25 April, online.

DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), no date. *India country brief*, Australian Government, online.

Doherty B 2020. 'The indispensable nation? Covid-19 tests the US–Australian alliance', *The Guardian*, 5 May, online.

Fowler E 2019a. 'India ramps up involvement in "Quad" talks'', *Australian Financial Review*, 27 September, online.

Fowler E 2019b. 'Morrison's high praise for India is a "hedge against China"', *Australian Financial Review*, 6 October, online.

Jha Bhaskar N 2020. *Can 'advance manufacturing' change the game in India–Australia relationship*, Observer Research Foundation, 2 May, online.

Laskar RH 2020. 'At virtual bilateral meet, India and Australia sign seven agreement', *The Hindustan Times*, 4 June, online.

Matheswaran M 2020. 'India–Australia strategic partnership: leveraging aerospace capacity', *The Interpreter*, 2 June, online.

Morrison S 2020. 'Joint statement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Republic of India and Australia', media statement, 4 June, online.

Packham B 2020. 'Coronavirus: China travel ban "won't be turned off"', *The Australian*, 4 February, online.

Pandit R 2020. 'India may invite Australia for Malabar naval exercise with US & Japan', *The Times of India*, 29 January, online.

Peri D, Haidar S 2020. 'Australia pitches for trilateral cooperation with India, Indonesia', *The Hindu*, 23 April, online.

PTI 2020. 'India, Australia agree to consider reviving talks for FTA', *The Deccan Herald*, 26 February, online.

Roy Chaudhury D 2018. 'Australia, Japan and India trilateral in Delhi on December 12', *The Economic Times*, 12 July, online.

Roy Chaudhury D 2019. 'Australia moots logistics support agreement with India to widen defence partnership in Indo-Pacific region', *The Economic Times*, 12 June, online.

Roy Chaudhury D, Pubby M 2020. 'India, Australia step up partnership, military relations to zoom after logistics pact', *The Economic Times*, 5 June, online.

Sadler D 2020. 'India trade deal on tech, cyber and SMEs', *InnovationAus*, 8 June, online.

Sheridan G 2020. 'Coronavirus: Scott Morrison is right to hold the line on China lab "conspiracy"', *The Australian*, 6 May, online.

Singh AG 2020. 'What is China saying about the China–India border stand-off?', *The Diplomat*, 2 June, online.

Tillett A 2019. 'India seeks Australian input as it weighs Huawei ban', *The Australian Financial Review*, 10 September, online.

Wire staff 2020. 'Coronavirus: China calls on India to lift restrictions, normalise movement of trade and people', *The Wire*, 18 February, online.

Wong P 2020. 'While Morrison hit snooze on India, Australia became more exposed to international shocks', media release, 4 June, online.

Notes

1 He said this during a webinar on Australia–India relations organised by the Observer Research Foundation on 16 May 2020, online.

2 The only other nations India has '2+2' defence and foreign ministerial meetings with are the US and Japan.

3 This is arguably truer for Australia than for India, which sees itself as strategically autonomous. However, it can be argued that New Delhi, especially over the past decade, has welcomed the US presence in the region, particularly in the maritime realm.

4 'Turning future focus to India', *The Australian*, 9 December 2019, online.

5 In fact, the Labor Party is critical of what it sees as the Morrison government's failure to consolidate ties with India in the two years since the release of Peter Varghese's report on Australia's India Economic Strategy (Wong 2020).

6 India's ability to take a more active stance vis-à-vis China is limited by the power and economic disparity between the two Asian giants and the 3,500-kilometre land boundary between them.

7 However, India, staying true to its policy of maintaining its strategic autonomy, refused to support Australia's call for an investigation into the pandemic and withheld all criticism of China to avoid provoking Beijing.

Competence in a crisis: the new marker of soft power in a chaotic world

Caitlin Byrne

Aside from its devasting human impact, Covid-19 has revealed deep social, economic and political fault lines in and across the global system. How states and other global actors engage in this system and the extent to which they mine, obscure or seek to bridge emerging fault lines for advantage will reflect on their soft power.

The soft-power balance sheet

China and the US, already locked into a contest for narrative and influence, will play hard to win the international soft-power game. Yet, using tactics that speak to an era past, both look set to stumble.

The US experience offers critical lessons. Last year's *Soft power 30* report marked the third consecutive decline in America's annual global soft-power ranking (McClory 2019). In overall rankings, that's not necessarily all that remarkable a drop (after all, the US still maintains a top 5 spot in the index), but it's nonetheless a striking trend for the global superpower, which under President Trump has demonstrated extraordinary consistency in its ability to disappoint, both at home and on the global stage.

Jonathan McClory argues that the Trump administration doesn't care for soft power. And yet Trump's narcissistic preoccupation with the spotlight, his penchant for spectacle and his reliance on the hype of the crowd—whether real or virtual—which all point to a desire for admiration and influence, suggest otherwise. However, as the embodiment of 'America first', Trump's profoundly self-interested approach, accompanied by his disdain for diplomacy and disinterest in multilateralism and global leadership, indicate that he and his team have utterly misread the 21st-century soft-power equation—an outcome that can only be to the detriment of America's global influence.

Most damaging of all, though, has been Trump's reckless, ill-informed leadership on full display this year through the Covid-19 crisis, now amplified in the wake of George Floyd's death as social unrest and violent protest rage across the deeply divided country.

With the prospect of a domestic election dominating the American political agenda for the remainder of this year and depleted diplomatic and institutional resources to draw on around the globe, it will be difficult for the US to recover the soft-power ground it has already ceded. A Biden win in November's election may go some way, at least initially, towards repairing the damage done, but, even so, America's longer term soft-power standing remains uncertain (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Divided, diminished, distracted and dangerous

China, too, seeking to gain strategic advantage as it emerges from the coronavirus crisis, has misread the 21st-century soft-power brief.[1] At pains to control and reinvent the narrative of the coronavirus outbreak, the nation's diplomats have taken a sharp turn towards propagandist and aggressive means of international reputation management (Callick 2020). It's a strategy that's yet to win favour with audiences around the world, partly because the portrayal of unalloyed Chinese Government success in combating the pandemic jars with the facts, and partly because aggressive and coercive tactics do little to build confidence or trust in diplomacy.

And, just as Covid-19 has reaffirmed the US's turn away from multilateralism, so too has it revealed China's efforts to leverage influence in international organisations, including the World Health Organization, to advance its own position at the expense of wider shared interests (Associated Press 2020). That's not unusual as far as diplomatic tactics go, but as revelations emerge that such influence may have delayed global responses to Covid-19, it will further undermine the rising power's reputation.

It's easy to be cynical about the place of soft power in today's global landscape when reviewing the recent examples set by China and the US. And yet, as the world moves into various stages of post-Covid recovery, the ability of states to generate influence, including through engagement, setting agendas, building coalitions and convening experts—that is, by wielding soft power—will only become more important.

So, what lessons can be drawn from the Covid-19 experience that might position soft power as a dimension of effective statecraft fit for the challenging post-Covid world ahead? Four key lessons stand out.

Be competent

First, competence delivers credibility. There's no getting around it. While the 'performance of the superpowers has been unimpressive; … smaller, more agile countries, with rational politicians and effective bureaucracies, have done better' (Fullilove 2020).

Nations that can competently respond to crises, maintain calm and cohesion and protect the lives and livelihoods of their people at home and abroad stand out. Through demonstrated competence they gain the necessary credibility and legitimacy that builds influence on the global stage.

While the US, China and many European nations have struggled in the face of Covid-19, others, including Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, Germany, New Zealand and Australia, although far from perfect, are the exemplars.

For Australia, a strong Covid-19 response has delivered a much-needed boost in international credibility. Coming on the heels of a devastating bushfire season—during which images of the nation on fire were accompanied by global criticisms of lagging climate change policies—the Covid-19 crisis has allowed Australia to recover lost ground in the international perception stakes. But Australia's experience also demonstrates that soft-power strength requires ongoing investment. Complacency now would be a problem.

And the challenge is far from over. Competency in managing crises at home must translate into competency in managing crises in the regional and global arenas.

Middle powers, especially, as they emerge from crisis, should prioritise and invest in international policy resources and skills to support effective, agile and coherent diplomacy in any arena. It's an investment required not only within designated foreign policy portfolios, but increasingly across the spectrum of public portfolio agencies that now have international responsibilities and, importantly, at all tiers of government.

Be expert

The second and related lesson underscores the importance of experts and expertise. Covid-19 brought medical and health experts into the spotlight alongside political leaders and politicians to deliver important messages to public audiences.

They've provided an important reminder that, in times of crisis, experts can and should play a key role in reinforcing credibility, demonstrating competency and gaining the trust of public audiences in ways that political and bureaucratic counterparts are simply unable to. It's a lesson that bodes well for the role of experts on other significant issues, such as climate change, into the future.[2]

Again, expertise should not be constrained to the domestic environment but bring important international reach and opportunities for cooperation. Australian expertise on a range of significant issues—from nuclear safeguards to innovation, from sport to global health—is valued. Australians already occupy a number of key leadership and expert positions at the international level, and more should be encouraged. Visibility and an ability to contribute technical expertise to multilateral agencies, boards and federations is a significant strength that brings influence, standing and voice and allows Australia to shape global policy and decision-making processes.[3]

There's no escaping the fact that most international expert bodies can be notoriously political. Sometimes representation comes at a price, and participation can give rise to new obligations. These are the familiar concerns of 'negative globalism' in play (Morrison 2019). But when it comes to advocacy and influence, it's far more important to be in the room and at the table, rather than absent or uninvited. The pandemic offers a timely wake-up call for states to reinvest in the capacity of multilateral organisations through active participation, or risk losing capacity and influence when it's needed most.

As a side note, in the recovery years ahead, Australian technical expertise, especially in health, science and technology, will not only be in greater demand but may also offer new opportunities for international cooperation—a soft-power moment that shouldn't be missed. Yet ensuring sufficient talent to contribute to global problem-solving demands a national commitment to and investment in the nation's education and research institutions and agencies.

While research and education have played a prominent role in Australia's economic success and soft-power profile to date, Covid-19 has exposed major vulnerabilities in the nation's higher education system. The drop in international student enrolments has hit hard on university bottom lines in the immediate term and is set to wipe out future research investment over the longer term (Grant 2020).

Universities around the nation face the prospect of irreparable damage, with major implications for Australia's engagement and influence in the region and globally for some time to come. From a soft-power perspective, there's good reason to be concerned about the short-sighted and patchy political response to the longer term future of Australia's education system. To be fair, universities aren't blameless in this scenario either, having failed, despite many warnings, to mitigate the risks of an inherently flawed international education business model (Kelly 2020).

Be authentic

The third lesson is a simple one. In her article about surviving Covid-19, Aisha Ahmad makes the point that 'Now more than ever, we must abandon the performative and embrace the authentic' (Ahmad 2020). And so it is with soft power. The time for governments to lay out the 'fields of cloth of gold' has well and truly passed. Today's audiences crave and respond to the kind of authenticity that speaks to meaningful connection and cooperation, over indulgence and enthralment.

Former Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Secretary Peter Varghese makes this point, referring to the centrality of the connections generated by people 'through networks in the arts, in business, in education and in all the other nooks and crannies of community life which underpin people-to-people relationships' (Varghese 2013). Authenticity comes through organic and two-way forms of dialogue and engagement in which ideas are contested, experiences are shared and trust is gained over time.

And so, against this backdrop, the Australian Government's recent launch of the $17.1 million PacificAus initiative, making Australian television content available to broadcasters throughout the Pacific, appears somewhat incongruous.

As part of a multipronged strategy to rebuild Australian influence while countering Chinese interest in the region, PacificAus smacks of the performative, with little bearing on Pacific island communities' interests, needs or indeed their own stories. As Jemima Garrett (2020) points out, 'watching rich white people renovate their homes won't deepen the connection to the Pacific or overcome a perception that Australia is paternalistic.'

The danger from such soft-power missteps is that, at best, they have limited or no impact. At worst, they demonstrate tone deafness that can do real damage to important regional relationships. Investing in Pacific stories and voices would produce a far more authentic soft-power outcome.

Start at home

The fourth and final point is the simplest of all: soft power starts at home. It holds true that the perceptions outsiders generally hold of a place are often informed by the visible interactions that occur—between people, cultures, institutions—within that place.

As borders closed and cities around the world moved into lockdown, the everyday interactions between citizens in their own communities have come sharply into view. Heightened levels of fear and distrust, especially prevalent during times of crisis, have played into xenophobic tendencies, affecting interactions among people everywhere.

States that demonstrate a willingness to acknowledge and respond to issues of inequality, disadvantage and intolerance within their own borders build their soft-power profile from within. Those that support or are complicit in systemic or structural forms of inequality, especially in the post-Covid world, are likely to detract from their soft-power capacities over the long term.

Australia is well placed to develop its soft power capacities as it approaches a post-Covid world. As a key dimension of 21st-century statecraft, soft power offers an essential counterweight and complement to hard-power strategies. But further investments in contemporary soft power assets fit for the complex landscape ahead are required now. This includes investment in better and more coordinated international policy and engagement capacity, in the development of expertise in critical policy domains, and in building authentic partnerships in our region for the long term. It's low cost and generally low risk. Getting soft power right offers the most concrete grounding from which to build Australia's standing and influence in a difficult and uncertain world.

References

Ahmad AS 2020. 'Why you should ignore all that coronavirus-inspired productivity pressure', *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 27 March.

Associated Press 2020. 'China delayed coronavirus info, frustrating WHO', *AP News*, 2 June.

Callick R 2020. 'Behind China's newly aggressive diplomacy: wolf warriors ready to fight back', *The Conversation*, 22 May.

Fullilove M 2020. 'Global giants stumble while agile nations fail', *The Australian*, 6 April.

Garrett J 2020. 'Pacific broadcasting: "Neighbours" for neighbours', *Late night live*, ABC TV, 28 May.

Grant D 2020. 'Why aren't we saving our national asset', *The Australian*, 26 May.

Kelly P 2020. 'Top priority must be education of Australian students', *The Weekend Australian*, 13–14 June.

McClory J 2019. *The soft power 30: a global ranking of soft power 2019*, Portland, London.

Morrison S 2019. *The 2019 Lowy Lecture*, Lowy Institute, Sydney, 4 October.

Varghese P 2013. *Bruce Allen Memorial Lecture: Building Australia's soft power*, Macquarie University, Sydney, 17 October.

Notes

1 Notably, China, too, has declined in the *Soft power 30* rankings, moving from 25th to the 27th spot in the index over the past three years.

2 'Scientific approach to COVID-19 must be applied to climate change', editorial, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 May 2020.

3 A point also highlighted recently by Marise Payne, 'Australia and the world in the time of Covid-19', speech delivered to National Security College, Australian National University, 16 June 2020.

Antarctica: Australia's forgotten flank

Dr Elizabeth Buchanan

Covid-19 has security scholars, practitioners and pundits alike housebound, pondering the world around us and musing on Australia's future. Some profound strategic literary works might yet come out of this pandemic, and flash new concepts may be tabled. I have neither a *magnum opus* nor an alluring acronym to offer here. Instead, I argue that Canberra must simply look south—at least for some of its time.

Canberra has paused future Antarctic activities because of the pandemic. The Australian Antarctic Division announced that the 'coronavirus pandemic is having a significant impact on all aspects of the Australian Antarctic Program' and outlined substantial changes in our Antarctic and Southern Ocean operations (DAWE 2020).

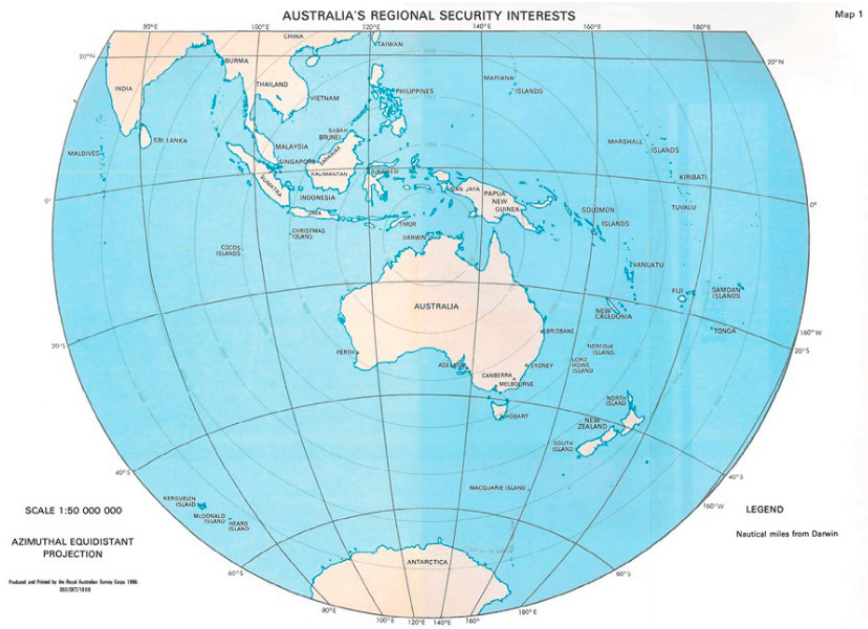
This 'pause' is of long-term strategic consequence. We're all familiar with the idea of Antarctica, the world's last unclaimed continent: one rich in energy resources, fisheries and freshwater; ideal real estate for satellite stations; a pristine environment melting due to climate change and warming of tensions between states; and with the potential to host a *new* Cold War. It's a strategic theatre in which great-power politics were overcome during the Cold War, and the Antarctic Treaty is still heralded as an artefact of international cooperation.

Australia claims sovereignty over the largest chunk (42%) of the Antarctic 'prize'. Whether a result of limited capacity or lack of foresight, it's the case that Australia couldn't defend its stake should push come to shove. In this sense, it's in our national interest to maintain the continent's governance architecture—the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS)—to secure a peaceful southern flank.

Defining boundaries and decoding white papers

Clear definitions and boundaries, as well as an articulated national interest, are the central components in crafting strategy. We used to do it well. The 1986 Dibb Report included a fine map of our regional security interests (Figure 3, next page).

Figure 3: Australia's regional security outlook



Source: Dibb (1986).

While still recognising the strategic significance of the Antarctic, Canberra omits Antarctica (and the Southern Ocean) from our 21st century Indo-Pacific theatre concept, even though the Southern Ocean and Antarctica literally link the Indo-Pacific region.

The government remains attracted to the Indo-Pacific concept, which is now the fundamental framing for Canberra's strategic outlook, but we don't have an agreed definition across our strategic policy documents; nor are our definitions consistent with our strategic partners'.

Our *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* aimed to achieve a 'secure, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific' (Australian Government 2017). However, navigating a 'complex and contested Indo-Pacific' region apparently doesn't include the Southern Ocean or Antarctica. This text seems to imply that Australian national interests aren't to be found in Antarctica, and that's aptly illustrated by the absence of the continent on the front page of the White Paper (Figure 4).

Figure 4: The cover of the *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*

Washington defines the Indo-Pacific as per the operational theatre of its Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM). As Figure 5 illustrates, the Indo-Pacific region spans from the west coast of the US to the India–Pakistan border; the region is also delineated by the Arctic and the Antarctic.

Figure 5: INDOPACOM area of responsibility

Our *2016 Defence White Paper* notes that 'a secure, resilient Australia extends into our northern approaches, our Exclusive Economic Zone, and our offshore territories, including our Southern Ocean and Antarctic territories'. While Defence appears to recognise the significance of Antarctica, it appears to

be losing some focus on the region. The 2013 iteration of the Defence White Paper carved out an entirely separate section for Antarctica (DoD 2013). The 2013 version also raised concerns as to the future security of Antarctica, stating 'to date, the Antarctic Treaty System has been well respected, but in coming decades it may come under pressure as resources become more scarce elsewhere.' Our most recent Defence White Paper opts to sidestep any cause for alarm on our southern flank by merely noting that Australia is a 'strong supporter of the Antarctic Treaty System' (DoD 2016).

Defence touts its 'enduring interest' in maintaining Australia's presence in the Antarctic. This is achieved via the ADF's Operation Southern Discovery, which focuses on logistical (heavy lift) support for our Antarctic program. Although, looking at the Defence home page, the optics for that enduring interest aren't great: the operation isn't even included, and the Antarctic continent is missing (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Defence.gov.au interactive map of global operations

The ADF is part of a whole-of-government approach to uphold the principles of the Antarctic Treaty and secure Australia's national interests in maintaining the Australian Antarctic Territory (AAT). Somewhat ironically, this requires the ADF to ensure that the continent doesn't become militarised (a central component of the Antarctic Treaty). Yet, militarisation is not as it was perceived in the 1950s, when the treaty was crafted. Dual-use technologies and subversive behaviour below the threshold of warfare (grey-zone tactics) aren't accounted for in the ATS. This means efforts to change the *status quo* and blindside stakeholders in the Antarctic are unable to be countered, either because we don't recognise that they're occurring or because we see ourselves as powerless to deter competitive or malicious activities.

While we appear to have trouble including the Antarctic on maps, we do a better job at articulating Australia's national interests in Antarctica, which are summarised as follows:

1. Maintain Antarctica's freedom from strategic and/or political confrontation.
2. Preserve our sovereignty over the AAT, including our sovereign rights over adjacent offshore areas.
3. Support a strong and effective ATS.
4. Conduct world-class scientific research consistent with national priorities.
5. Protect the Antarctic environment, having regard to its special qualities and effects on our region.
6. Be informed about and able to influence developments in a region geographically proximate to Australia.
7. Foster economic opportunities arising from Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, consistent with our ATS obligations, including the ban on mining and oil drilling (AAP 2016).

Crafting policies to achieve our interests is challenging, but this challenge stems from the fact that our national interests in the Antarctic are at odds with each other. Beyond the need to reconsider what we see to be 'strategic or political confrontation', the task of 'preserving our sovereignty' is at odds with the very principle of the ATS, which removes the question altogether, and any acts in support of strengthening perceived sovereignty are in breach of the treaty.

Not since the 1987 Defence White Paper has the Antarctic been *listed* as a national security interest. A further example: our interest in conducting world-class research is at odds with our interests in maintaining freedom and sovereignty, given the extent to which the Chinese Government and affiliated research organisations fund our Antarctic research (Bergin & Press 2020a).

The sixth national interest—our ability to influence developments—is perhaps the sole rationale for pushing the 42% claim narrative. In the Cold War, Canberra was concerned that the Soviets might place missiles in Antarctica and develop submarine ports there.[1] While Canberra can be 'informed' of developments in our southern flank, one does question how long Australia's 'influence' can and will last.

White lies and the white continent

The *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* perpetrates the sovereignty white lie, that 'we have sovereignty over 42 per cent of the continent' (Australian Government 2017). Of course, that claim isn't recognised by even our closest of mates—the US—and the question of sovereignty is all but 'frozen'. The White Paper further notes that the Antarctic Treaty 'reduce[s] the potential for strategic competition to Australia's south' (Australian Government 2017). This relies on the assumption that we know what Antarctic strategic competition *looks* like. While the treaty removes nuclear weapons and military force from the equation (unless uniformed military personnel are in support of activity deemed scientific), the nature of strategic competition has changed since the origins of the treaty.

For example, dual-use technologies have advanced in such a way that it's increasingly difficult to monitor whether state X is using hydrographic exploration of minerals for 'scientific research' or is looking ahead to exploit Antarctic resource bounties for its domestic market. While the Madrid Protocol—an environmental agreement within the ATS—allows for the former, the latter is of concern. But the ATS has

no teeth and doesn't even consider the potential for signatories of the treaty to simply opt out. If states exit the ATS, how do remaining members deter the exploitation of minerals? The assumption here is that other stakeholders are committed forever to the cooperative management agreement enshrined by the ATS. What's our Plan B?

Geostrategic competition is already underway in Antarctica, and well within the AAT, in the form of scientific leadership, economic investment and projections of global polar power identities. Canberra is even engaging via enhancements to our strategic infrastructure. Australia's Davis aerodrome project will deliver a year-round paved runway to boost capability and enhance our 'long-term interests in the region' (DAWE, n.d.). To be delivered by 2040, the runway will be the first of its kind in East Antarctica. It will cost us, as will the assumption that Australia could 'own' the runway. Arguably, the runway is infrastructure, not a building (which international property law would cover). Theoretically, Canberra couldn't block another state from using the infrastructure if it were safe to do so. Nearby Chinese, Russian and Indian Antarctic bases could therefore use the year-round runway—thus bolstering their own Antarctic activities on the Australian dollar.

Will Covid-19 fuel a new 'great game'?

It's evident that our Antarctic challenge didn't manifest overnight and is certainly no result of Covid-19. But the existing fragility will be exploited by states that have the capacity and capability to chase strategic opportunity—as presented by Covid-19. While also battling domestic Covid-19 challenges, some states are agile in that they view security as a holistic commodity. Therefore, they've developed a hybrid approach to continue to realise their national interests and to allow them to operate in various theatres—despite domestic constraints. Australia is no such state.

Every aspect of Australian Antarctic activity is affected—from logistics, to the recruitment and training of the next generation of scientists, to decreased operational capacity, disrupted supply chains and (further) delays for our one active icebreaker (*Nuyina*). Significantly, the summer 2020–2021 Antarctic program will also be heavily scaled back. Australia will be quite literally missing in action in the AAT this season.

The US has noted substantial impacts on its Antarctic program. Despite that, the US Antarctic Program has ensured that it will undertake 'required monitoring' of adherence to Antarctic resource agreements and nuclear testing prohibitions (NSF 2020). Russia is pushing ahead with plans to redevelop its Vostok Station (Nilsen 2020). China is set to continue development works on its fifth station—located on Inexpressible Island in the Ross Sea. New Delhi has been hit hard and is questioning 'the feasibility of India's next Antarctica expedition' (Tomar 2020). The international challenge appears to be to keep the continent free from Covid-19 while also maintaining personnel turnover via expeditions in order to train the next generation of polar scientists.

Key Antarctic conferences have been cancelled for 2020, including the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting—a central planning and policy summit for the ATS—which was slated to be held in Finland. These forums are significant for networks and linkages within the ATS and are important aspects of the international collaboration that underwrites much of the ATS's success. The economic implications of Covid-19 for domestic science and research programs are set to be devastating for the future of the field.

Realists would of course point to the valuable opportunity some states have to exploit distracted Antarctic stakeholders such as Australia and the US by fortifying their activities and bolstering their

military presence in preparation for a post-ATS scenario. We need to consider how long the ATS can remain a bulwark against great-power politics and can keep rising powers such as China at bay. Given Beijing's behaviour in resource exploitation ventures elsewhere, we can see clear parallels in how the Chinese Communist Party manoeuvres around and changes international institutions to align with its interests.

Looking ahead

As a stickler for history and strategic lessons from the past, I tend to believe that our security outlook will be fundamentally as it was—elements of power competition scaled along a conflict–cooperation continuum. Without a national security strategy, Australia's challenge of navigating the coming months and years post-Covid-19 will undoubtably be much more difficult. Australia's strategic focus, indeed, our national interest, in Antarctica shouldn't be diminished just because our physical presence is.

I offer the following recommendations:

- Move the Australian Antarctic Division from the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment to the Department of Defence. This signals the national security priority of the AAT.
- Purchase the *Aurora* from P&O, refurbish it and use it as a secondary vessel to support Antarctic missions.
- The Australian Government should reconsider the frameworks it uses to view strategic competition in the Antarctic. They're no longer fit for purpose.
- Conduct annual inspections of all international facilities (coastal and inland) in the AAT.
- Establish a Special Representative for the Antarctic position at the ministry level. Modelled on ministerial roles in the Pacific, this representative position would elevate Antarctic affairs within Australia and, crucially, illustrate Canberra's national interest to the international community.
- Anthony Bergin and Tony Press, in a recent ASPI report, argue that Canberra needs to manage its relationship with Beijing in the Antarctic with 'eyes wide open' (Bergin & Press 2020b). They list a number of policy recommendations, of which the following merit further examination:
  - Future cooperation with China in relation to Antarctica should proceed after careful national assessment of Australian interests and impacts on wider multilateral interests.
  - Australia should engage allies and friends in a discussion on China's activities and assess its interests, goals and intentions in Antarctica.
- On cooperation with China, it's imperative that Canberra starts diversifying its Antarctic partners to reduce reliance on Chinese finance, technology and personnel to execute scientific research. A review of Australian-funded research programs should be undertaken to determine just how much training, research findings and data are remaining in Australia. We appear to be training the next generation of Chinese experts.

Canberra should tread carefully when 'engaging allies' on Chinese activity in Antarctica. It's a dangerous assumption that Australian allies are indeed allies *within* the Antarctic context. Australia's national interests don't factor into the goals and intentions of the US on the continent. This embedded tension will remain until the question of sovereignty is resolved.

References

AAP (Australian Antarctic Program) 2016. *Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan*, Australian Government, online.

Australian Government 2017. *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*, online.

Bergin A, Press T 2020a. *We can't just go with the floe in Antarctica*, ASPI, Canberra, 27 April, online.

Bergin A, Press T 2020b. Eyes wide open: managing the Australia–China Antarctic relationship, ASPI, Canberra, 27 April, online.

DAWE (Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment) 2020. 'Impacts of COVID-19 on the Australian Antarctic Program', media release, Australian Government, 6 April, online.

DAWE (Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment), no date. 'About the Davis aerodrome project', Australian Government, online.

Dibb P 1986. *Review of Australia's defence capabilities*, report to the Minister for Defence, Australian Government Publishing Service.

DoD (Department of Defence) 2013. *Defence White Paper 2013*, Australian Government, online.

DoD (Department of Defence) 2016. *2016 Defence White Paper*, Australian Government, online.

MoD (Ministry of Defence) 2019. *France's defence strategy in the Indo-Pacific*, French Government, online.

Nilsen T 2020, 'Nuclear-powered *Sevmorput* gears up for Antarctica voyage', *The Barents Observer*, 15 February, online.

NSF (National Science Foundation) 2020. 'UPDATE: USAP plans for the upcoming Antarctic season', news release, NSF, Alexandria, Virginia, 11 June, online.

Tomar P 2020. 'Indian scientists in Antarctica are under their own version of a lockdown', *Quartz India*, 13 May, online.

Notes

1 US President Donald Trump's 2020 memorandum on polar national interests notes a potential intention to develop an Antarctic naval base for its planned increase in icebreaker capability.

Multilateralism, Australia and the world

China, the United States and the future of the UN system

Richard Gowan

Covid-19 has highlighted and exacerbated tensions between China and the US in the UN system. The two powers were at loggerheads in multilateral forums before the virus emerged, as Beijing pushed for more influence and positions of power in UN bodies while Washington tried simultaneously to abandon its traditional leadership role and to prevent China from assuming that role. As the pandemic hit the US, President Trump latched onto allegations that the World Health Organization (a UN specialised agency) had covered up the disease's origins in Wuhan, eventually announcing in late May that the US would cut ties to the WHO. China reciprocated by suggesting that the US Army might have introduced the virus to Wuhan. This dispute, which spilled over into arguments between Chinese and US diplomats at the Security Council, is a symptom of a longer term decline in the powers' willingness to work together through the UN system, damaging the organisation as a whole.

While some diplomats and journalists have speculated about a 'new Cold War' at the UN, that's premature. Despite Sino-American tensions, we have yet to see a return to the superpower stand-offs and bloc politics that suffocated elements of the UN from the 1940s to the 1980s. The Security Council, which could go for a month or more at a time without meeting during the Cold War, has kept up a busy schedule of virtual sessions during the pandemic. A coalition of states, including Australia and the European Union, was able to pass a resolution at May's World Health Assembly (WHA), the WHO's governing body, calling for an 'impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation' of the response to Covid-19, despite continued sniping between the Chinese and US delegations.

Nonetheless, it seems probable that Sino-American tensions will increase further across the UN system. This will have troubling side-effects for other states. When Australia proposed an international investigation of Covid-19 prior to the WHA, Chinese diplomats and official media accused Canberra of working on Washington's behalf, and Beijing took economic measures against the Australian barley and meat sectors that analysts saw as acts of retribution.

Middle powers such as Australia and the EU's members now face a dilemma. There's an obvious case for collective international action in the era of Covid-19, not only on health issues but also to manage the economic and political fallout from the pandemic. Yet China and the US are liable to undermine or block such cooperation as they compete for power in the international system. If Joe Biden replaces Donald Trump in the White House in 2021, the US is likely to become much more favourable to multilateralism, but Beijing and Washington will still see each other as rivals in global forums. Can other states build coalitions to bolster international coordination on policies to help the world recover from Covid-19, even as China and the US treat international institutions as one of their many spheres of competition?

The makings of a multilateral crisis

Although the precise factors that led to tensions over Covid-19 couldn't have been predicted before 2020, the deterioration of China's relations with the US at the UN was already obvious. That decline is of fairly recent vintage. The Obama administration worked with Beijing on the Paris climate change agreement

and steps to strengthen UN peacekeeping, and both the Obama and the Trump administrations successfully negotiated UN sanctions on North Korea at the Security Council. The US and its allies have generally tried to avoid escalating confrontations with China in the Security Council on issues such as Myanmar, in contrast to regular public battles with Russia.

Tensions between the two great powers have grown, however, as China has become more powerful in the UN system and the US's role and influence have declined. During his first years in office, President Trump unintentionally gave China room to increase its multilateral influence by pulling out of arrangements, including the Paris climate deal, and forums such as UNESCO and the Human Rights Council. China has frequently become more active in those areas of UN business the US has quit. The US belatedly began to mobilise against this trend in 2018, when US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo cast China as one of a number of 'bad actors' (alongside Russia and Iran) in the international system in a speech in Brussels. Since then, the two powers have tussled both over symbolic issues such as Chinese attempts to secure UN rhetorical support for its Belt and Road Initiative and more concrete items, including Beijing's efforts to gain control of top UN posts. Chinese nationals now lead four of the 15 UN specialised agencies. By contrast, an American leads only one, the World Bank, although US candidates continue to fill far more senior jobs in the UN secretariat and field operations.

While US allies lament the Trump administration's broader disregard for multilateralism, they share its concerns about Beijing's rising influence in the UN. EU officials, for example, argue that it's essential to work with China on climate change issues, but worry that Beijing is gaining ground in organisations such as the Human Rights Council in the absence of the US and will weaken liberal norms. Non-Western diplomats also complain that, as China gains influence, it's growing less sensitive to their own concerns, taking their support for granted.

China's internal affairs have also become a point of contention at the UN, as the US and other Western powers have raised concerns in the Security Council, Human Rights Council and General Assembly about Beijing's treatment of the Uyghurs. China has responded furiously to this challenge, pressing non-Western states to sign letters praising its policies in Xinjiang.

In early 2020, the US moved to push back harder against China across the UN, appointing a new envoy for 'multilateral integrity' to coordinate with allies over elections to international positions. In March, the US and its allies blocked a Chinese candidate from leading the World Intellectual Property Organization in Geneva. Even without the eruption of Covid-19, the two powers were on course for further friction in the UN. 'Without some sort of course correction,' Anthony Dworkin and I argued in September 2019, 'a new bipolarity in multilateral forums, with the potential to halt or weaken their work, is likely to emerge' (Gowan & Dworkin 2019: 5).

The impact of Covid-19

The Covid-19 crisis seems almost to have been designed to make Sino-American frictions worse. Reports that WHO officials appeared to defer to Chinese officials over information sharing and travel restrictions early in the outbreak fuelled US suspicions that Beijing has gained an unhealthy degree of influence over UN agencies. Facing criticism for his own handling of the virus, President Trump seized on that narrative, accusing the WHO of having 'pushed Chinese misinformation about the virus' and suspending its funding in April.

That manoeuvre backfired badly. US allies criticised the move, and Chinese President Xi Jinping offered $2 billion in funding to fight Covid-19 (equivalent to more than 8 times the annual US contribution to the WHO) at the WHA in mid-May. In late May, the US President, having lost the political initiative to Beijing—and having briefly made some rather vague demands for WHO reform—announced that he would terminate US relations with the WHO.

The argument over the WHO bled into debates at the UN Security Council, which spent much of April and early May trying to negotiate a resolution on the security implications of Covid-19. The substantive focus of this resolution was a call for a global ceasefire during the pandemic (a goal that all council members broadly agreed to, with caveats), but talks foundered on whether to include some largely symbolic references to the WHO. While the US refused such language, the Chinese threatened to block any text that didn't contain at least an oblique mention of the organisation. The two powers seemed close to a tortuous compromise in early May—with China accepting a reference to UN 'entities' working on global health rather than a direct reference to the WHO—but Washington refused even that.

Once again, the US position backfired, as China cast the US as the main spoiler in this process, in contrast to its own willingness to compromise. While the Chinese rejected a last-minute proposal from other Security Council members for a resolution endorsing the global ceasefire idea without any WHO-related language—demonstrating the limits of their own flexibility—most diplomats placed the blame for this debacle with the US. While France and Tunisia, the sponsors of the resolution, eventually engineered a compromise text on 1 July, that came too late to give the global ceasefire idea any real momentum, and felt tokenistic.

Sino-American relations at the UN deteriorated further in the last week of May, when the US and UK called for a council discussion of Beijing's new security law for Hong Kong. Although the Chinese blocked a public discussion, they couldn't prevent a closed meeting on the issue, which became heated as the Chinese argued that Hong Kong was a solely internal affair.

That spat was off the record, yet both the American and Chinese missions in New York released statements indicating their great mutual frustration. The US declared that China's behaviour over Hong Kong 'coupled with PRC's gross cover-up and mismanagement of the Covid-19 crisis … should make obvious to all that Beijing is not behaving as a responsible UN member state' (US Government 2020). The Chinese retorted with an extensive reckoning of US 'power politics and acts of bullying', including its withdrawal from the Paris agreement, Iranian nuclear deal and Open Skies Treaty, concluding that 'the United States is the trouble maker in the world' (PRC Government 2020).

Assessing the fallout of Covid-19 at the UN

Sino-American relations at the UN haven't collapsed completely. Just one day after the heated Hong Kong debate, the Security Council passed a resolution extending a UN arms embargo on South Sudan, which the US backs and China has long opposed because of its links to leaders in Juba. Beijing refrained from vetoing this text after US officials committed to a review of the arms embargo to get the resolution through, also persuading two of the three African members of the council to support it. The fact that the two powers can juggle public name-calling with routine transactional diplomacy belies claims that they're already in 'Cold War' territory. American and Chinese officials have also been careful in recent years to

avoid major disputes over North Korea as well—reflecting a shared desire for calm in Northeast Asia—showing that they can still cooperate on areas of common interest.

There will be a number of major tests of Sino-American relations at the UN in the coming months. They include the unfolding row over US efforts to renew UN sanctions on Iran under the terms of the 2015 nuclear deal, despite having quit the bargain in 2018, which has sparked a showdown with Beijing and Moscow as well as Washington's European allies. November's US elections will also have far-reaching effects on UN affairs. If Joe Biden defeats President Trump, Sino-American relations almost certainly will remain difficult, but the US is certain to re-engage with many of the elements of the UN that Trump has rejected. If Trump wins re-election, he's liable to continue—or perhaps intensify—his attacks on both multilateralism and China.

Under any circumstances, Beijing and Washington are likely to continue their competition for formal and informal influence over UN entities. Having used its financial muscle in the WHO dispute, Beijing, which to date has donated very little to other elements of the UN humanitarian system such as the World Food Programme, may increasingly use its financial clout to build its influence. The US response will vary depending on who sits in the White House. Following this year's termination of US cooperation with the WHO, a second Trump administration could equally threaten to cut off American relations with other UN agencies in which China is gaining influence. By contrast, a Biden administration would most probably attempt to limit China's role by taking an activist approach to rebuilding alliances with other states at the UN.

In this context, other powers that want to avoid bipolar competition paralysing the UN system have some capacity to help keep multilateralism alive. Even if the Democrats win the US elections, American allies shouldn't leave the task of revitalising international cooperation to Washington alone. Australia and the EU demonstrated how this can be done by pulling together a cross-regional coalition of states to call for the investigation into the WHO's initial handling of Covid-19 at the WHA in May. The EU has also led a drive for international cooperation on a Covid-19 vaccine, without the support of either Washington or Beijing.

As Covid-19 claims more lives and takes its economic toll, policymakers in Canberra, Brussels and like-minded powers can work to build similar coalitions to address issues, including:

- strengthening health systems to handle future waves of Covid-19 and other diseases
- economic measures to stimulate the recovery from the Covid-induced recession
- political and humanitarian action to support fragile states grappling with the virus.

Nonetheless, it will be hard to harness multilateralism to productive ends if the US and China frame global affairs as a zero-sum competition. The two powers' response to the Covid-19 crisis has shown how they can exploit and undermine multilateral organisations in their contest for global influence. The pandemic has at least done other states the service of illustrating how fragile some international institutions will be in a period of major-power competition.

As China and the US contend for power, the UN system is sadly liable to be too much a battleground where the pair jockey for power, and too little a haven of cooperation.

References

Gowan R, Dworkin A 2019. *Three crises and an opportunity: Europe's stake in multilateralism*, European Council on Foreign Relations, September, online.

PRC Government 2020. 'Statement by the Permanent Mission of China to the United Nations', Permanent Mission of the PRC to the UN, 28 May, online.

US Government 2020. 'Call for UN Security Council meeting on Hong Kong', US Mission to the UN, 27 May, online.

Post-Covid-19 multilateralism: opportunities and risks for representation, donors and gender equality

Amy Haddad

Even before Covid-19 was officially named, some predicted it would spur renewed commitment to multilateralism. But when the virus hit hard, countries implemented individual inward-looking responses, shutting borders and hibernating economies. Tensions between China and the US escalated, the WHO stumbled in establishing its early response, and brinkmanship in the Security Council is stalling action to protect the world's most vulnerable people. By March, multilateral naysayers predicted that Covid-19 would sound multilateralism's death knell—both institutionally and as a means of global collaboration.

But, as countries emerge from lockdown, they're turning to various forms of multilateral cooperation to map the longer term response—even the US is eyeing multilateral approaches and proposing an expanded G7. Yes, there are major challenges, especially the US's withdrawal from the WHO and the impact of Covid-19 on migration and trade. The failure of the Security Council to agree on any resolution in support of a ceasefire during the pandemic is damning, but outside those dynamics there is progress. The General Assembly has taken a range of actions, the World Health Assembly agreed on an investigation into the handling of Covid-19, and various multi-country collaborations have emerged.

Ultimately, multilateral engagement and approaches look set to provide exactly what they should: an imperfect place to negotiate, configure and fund shared responses to global challenges. While states may pick and choose which forums they use, and may create new structures, multilateral cooperation remains firmly on the books.

Multilateralism still needs to find its post-Covid-19 feet—there are far-reaching and complex impacts, especially for developing countries and in conflict- and crisis-affected settings. And there are real risks to human rights and sustainable development.

But Covid-19 has shown that it's possible to reset multilateral participation. Navigating post-pandemic resource constraints should prompt recommitment to good multilateral donorship, while the deeply gendered impacts of Covid-19 provide a window to push for greater shared action on gender equality.

New ways of working

Before Covid-19, it was almost inconceivable that major UN meetings would be cancelled, but, almost overnight, the UN shifted its working methods and embraced virtual meetings. This forced move to virtual settings showed that expensive, time-consuming and carbon-intensive travel isn't the only way to collaborate and that it's possible to work around one of the greatest barriers to participation. Even for leaders, cost and distance are disincentives. To make it worthwhile for world leaders to trudge to New York, Geneva, Paris or London, key meetings are padded with side-events, receptions and additional speaking opportunities, at great expense and effort. Moving to online meetings removes the need for extras, allowing closer focus on key issues and outcomes and greater flexibility to participate during the crowded 'summit season'. Virtual events also free up diplomatic and support staff to focus on content rather than logistics. Such meetings also free leaders from the need to justify travel and time out from domestic politics and so may increase their willingness to participate.

Broadening participation

States that support diverse participation in multilateral processes are often deterred by cost, logistics and inaccessible physical spaces. Virtual platforms remove many of those barriers—especially cost—giving states the flexibility to broaden who speaks for and with them.

Virtual meetings also lower the costs and logistical barriers for civil society. Some constraints remain, especially in observer status, but including civil society in country delegations (a well-established practice for Australia) sidesteps resistance to civil society participation by bringing people inside the state 'tent'. Lower costs make this a more attractive option for states. Side-events are another way to work around these objections and are a major site for civil society engagement—embedding virtual platforms into side-events would significantly reduce the cost of participation in these spaces.

Normalising virtual engagement means states can create and share informal spaces to boost non-state participation and lift the bar on diversity, but states supporting civil society will need to be deliberate, including by developing new ways of sharing information with civil society to replace corridor diplomacy and navigating the digital divide. States must also protect the safe participation and, where necessary, the privacy of civil society representatives participating remotely.

Tighter resources and operational constraints

Covid-19 will challenge development flows as domestic budgets contract, conflict is exacerbated and humanitarian demands increase. US pressure on sexual and reproductive health could starve funding for essential sexual and reproductive health services, which is even more concerning, given that crises often divert funding for such services (UNFPA 2020).

Contracting gross national income will reduce aid flows in real terms and involve a likely continued shift to earmarked over core funding as governments justify foreign aid in the context of domestic budget strife. This will place further pressure on multilateral core budgets, curtailing flexibility and responsiveness, and, ironically, given increased pressure to demonstrate value for money, weaken budgets for monitoring; evaluation and audit; fraud detection; and internal reform.

The Pacific is feeling the economic but not yet the health impacts of Covid-19. This may mean the Pacific is considered less in need of support, resulting in the prioritisation of multilateral flows to other regions. It may also mean the Pacific misses out if future multilateral and donor health aid flows target health security at the expense of child and maternal health, nutrition and noncommunicable diseases.

Covid-19 travel restrictions will continue to affect program delivery, highlighting the need for greater investment in localisation, capacity building and trust in local delivery partners. This should force donors to align and consolidate programs and is an opportunity for donors to make greater (shared) use of local development professionals and researchers and invest in local capacity.

Australia (and New Zealand) will need to double down on efforts to promote Pacific needs to donors and multilateral institutions. If other donors direct funds outside the Pacific, multilateral flows to the Pacific become more important. Unfortunately, the Pacific doesn't fare well in the allocation of core resources. Multilateral institutions struggle to reconcile the emerging middle-income status of many Pacific

countries against limited Pacific resources and acute climate and disaster vulnerability. Further, the high costs of doing business in the Pacific don't factor in allocation algorithms.

Seizing the moment on gender equality and human rights

Rapid analysis by UN Women shows that women are disproportionately affected by Covid-19 through reduced access to health services and information, high mental health impacts, increased unpaid care and labour, and high exposure to job loss (UN Women 2020a). Women are also experiencing higher rates of violence and discrimination and reduced access to support services (UN Women 2020b). None of this is a surprise—there were similar impacts from Ebola and Zika—but key actors are missing from responses and, despite positive statements and increasing donor flows for gender equality, there's room to improve multilateral and donor practice (OCED 2020).

UN Women's 2018 assessment of the System Wide Action Plan on gender equality (UN-SWAP 2.0) revealed that only 31% of UN entities met gender financing targets and only 46% tracked resources, while just 17% met gender parity requirements (UN Women 2019). UN-SWAP 2.0 is a direct response to slow action and limited accountability on gender equality across the UN and has the potential to drive better performance, but only if states press for this.

Recent research suggests that member states aren't following through on gender equality either. Country-specific Security Council resolutions, negotiated by states, contain limited references to women, peace and security commitments, while reporting is weak and resource allocations are unclear (Werner & Stravrevska 2020).

Failing to respond to the gendered impacts of Covid-19 will stifle recovery efforts, creating a window in which to mobilise more coherent and accountable action on gender equality in the long term. States' support for UN-SWAP 2.0 type approaches is a good place to start, as that builds accountability into business-as-usual operations. Further, states should push for mandates and missions to include specific and monitorable commitments on diverse leadership; gender-responsive data and reporting; and gender-responsive financing.

Women's rights organisations play a critical role in driving lasting change, providing key services and bolstering community cohesion and resilience. Monash University's Gender Peace and Conflict Centre shows that women peace and security actors, including feminist organisations and those responding to gender-based violence, have pivoted their efforts towards Covid-19 and are providing critical services (MGPS 2020). But these key actors have been ignored; only 1% of OECD – Development Assistance Committee gender equality flows target women's rights organisations, and financing structures are burdensome and inflexible (DAC 2019).

Genuine partnership with women's rights organisations is the key to lasting progress on gender equality and ensuring proactive, gender-inclusive responses in crises. This requires support via core funding, flexible funding mechanisms and capacity support for women's rights organisations, as well as financing targets on the donor and multilateral side. Support through women's funds can help manage risk for both donors and recipients, while there are already multilateral structures, such as the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women and the Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund, that have evolving practice in flexibly supporting women's rights organisations.

Recommendations for government

Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 development response recognises that 'effective global relief and recovery efforts are vital to Australia's long-term interests', while the Foreign Minister's recent speech to the Australian National University's National Security College confirmed that active engagement in global cooperation and fit-for-purpose multilateral organisations is in Australia's national interest (DFAT 2020: 17, Payne 2020).

Australia should work with Pacific countries and partners to sustain virtual working methods to increase participation. Australia should consider expanded delegations to virtual meetings to support gender balance and representation by First Nations peoples, people with disability and civil society.

As always, Australia will need to punch above its weight in promoting the interests of the Pacific. Australia should protect its reputation for pragmatic good donorship, including by maintaining a reasonable balance between core and earmarked flows, multiyear funding commitments, and developing flexible multilateral financing mechanisms to facilitate softly (that is, regional or sector) earmarked flows.

Australia should maintain pressure for accountability and performance on gender equality within multilateral structures, with an emphasis on leadership, data, financing and reporting. Further, Australia should deepen partnerships with women' rights organisations in our region through increased core and flexible financing.

Multilateral cooperation and effective multilateral institutions and processes remain highly relevant in longer term Covid-19 recovery and beyond. Australia can support multilateralism in a post-Covid-19 world by embracing the potential of new collaboration practices, staying the path on effective donorship, and working against any pressure to reduce ambition on gender equality.

References

DAC (Development Assistance Committee) 2019. *Aid in support of gender equality and women's empowerment: donor charts—March 2019*, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, March, online.

DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) 2020. *Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 development response*, Australian Government, 29 May, online.

MGPS (Monash Gender Peace and Security) 2020. *Mapping the impact of COVID-19 on WPS practitioners in the Indo-Pacific Region*, MGPS, 25 May, online.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) 2020. *Women at the core of the fight against COVID-19 crisis,* OECD, 1 April, online.

Payne M 2020. *Australia and the world in the time of COVID-19*, speech to National Security College, Australian National University, 16 June, online.

UN Women 2019. *UN-SWAP 2.0—Summary of 2018 system-wide reporting results*, UN, 23 October, online.

UN Women 2020a. *Surveys show that COVID-19 has gendered effects in Asia and the Pacific*, UN, 29 April, online.

UN Women 2020b. *Impact of COVID-19 on violence against women and girls and service provision: UN Women rapid assessment and findings*, UN, online.

UNFPA (UN Population Fund) 2020. *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) preparedness and response—UNFPA interim technical brief*, UNFPA, 23 March, online.

Werner SK, Stravrevska EB 2020. *Where are the words? The disappearance of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the language of country-specific UN Security Council resolutions,* Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security, online.

Multilateralism in crisis?

Genevieve Feely

In October 2019, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced that a comprehensive audit of Australia's engagement in global institutions and rule-making processes was being undertaken by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). This audit's announcement and commission were made among broader discussion of the notion of 'negative globalism'. As framed by Morrison, negative globalism involves mandates imposed by an 'ill-defined borderless global community' and an 'unaccountable internationalist bureaucracy' (Morrison 2019). He also noted that 'Australia's international engagement will be squarely driven by Australia's national interests'. For those watching Australia's multilateral engagement closely, this indicated that Australia may seek some form of retreat from multilateral institutions.

This audit was recently concluded. While its findings aren't public, Foreign Minister Marise Payne gave a speech in June 2020 in which she noted some of its key conclusions. She instead 'affirmed' the 'vital' role of multilateral organisations for Australia's 'security, interests, values and prosperity' (Payne 2020a). Likewise, she noted that isolationism and stepping back from multilateral institutions wasn't in our interests.

With this recognised, how can Australia move forward and effectively engage in multilateral institutions? This chapter seeks to unpack some of the recent trends in multilateralism and offer suggestions for future engagement.

What is multilateralism?

To start, however, when we use the term 'multilateralism' or 'multilateral institutions', what does that refer to? By its simplest definition, multilateralism focuses on the number of participants involved. More than three parties and you have multilateralism at work. Other definitions focus on the features of the engagement: what rules, norms and principles govern it? There are many theorists who have framed different definitions on this basis (see Fukushima 1999). At its core, however, notions of cooperation and coordination (be it generally or on specific issues) underpin the concept of multilateralism.

However, 'multilateralism' and 'multilateral institutions' have taken on another definition in the parlance of the foreign policy community and commentators, referring specifically to the international architecture of the UN system, less so the regional and subregional organisations and alliances, which still fit multilateralism's simplest definition. Indeed, the UN has become synonymous with the concept of multilateralism and is the pre-eminent multilateral institution in our global order. These days, it's a behemoth organisation comprising many different, composite parts. This is typically what people are referring to when they use the term 'multilateral institutions'.

Since the end of World War II, an abundance of other multilateral organisations and partnerships have arisen, weaving and entrenching themselves into our international political, economic and security architecture. There's a patchwork of overlapping and sometimes competing political alliances, security alliances and regional organisations, typically based on shared values and interests. This patchwork also adds layers and complexity to our international architecture. For clarity, this chapter clearly delineates what 'multilateral' and 'multilateral institutions' are referring to when those terms are used.

Multilateralism under pressure: the United Nations

I turn first to the UN system. In recent years, there's been an increasing sentiment that this is a system in crisis, despite its workload and responsibilities having grown significantly since the end of the Cold War. That perception stems partially from it being a cumbersome and unaccountable bureaucracy, as reflected in Morrison's 2019 speech at the Lowy Institute, as well as issues of representation in the organisation's highest body under the UN Charter, the UN Security Council.

However, in the past few years, much of this sentiment has been rapidly compounded by the uncertain role of the US as a credible leader in this forum. President Donald Trump signalled clear intention of a withdrawal from many aspects of the UN system and has progressively done so throughout his tenure as President of the US. Early in his tenure, he withdrew the US from the 2015 Paris Agreement—a landmark agreement on climate change mitigation. Similarly, funding for other agencies, such as the UN Relief and Works Agency, has collapsed as the US withdrew funding. Even during the Covid-19 crisis, attacks were levelled at the World Health Organization (WHO) by both Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo before 7 July 2020, when the US formally notified the WHO of its intention to withdraw (Ravelo 2020).

Shifting Australian engagement at the UN

The US is one of Australia's closest allies, but our approach to engagement in international multilateral institutions seems to increasingly be a departure point between the two countries. The announcement of the audit results, as well as success driven by Australia and like-minded countries in the World Health Assembly, sets a significantly different tone on this issue from our ally's. When Australia released the *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (DFAT 2017), the paper noted that 'strong and sustained US engagement in the international system, including the United Nations, remains fundamental to international stability and prosperity'. With a dearth of strong and sustained US engagement at the UN, it seems that it's time to rethink our approach.

The Covid-19 crisis, aligning closely with the recent audit announcement, presents an opportunity to do so. There are two scenarios for how Covid-19 will affect multilateralism at the UN level. In the first scenario, this crisis exacerbates and accelerates the pre-existing trend of increasing hostility towards multilateral institutions and among participants in the institutions themselves. In the second, Covid-19 acts as a catalyst for reinvesting in and reinvigorating the multilateral UN system. Covid-19 has reiterated to the world that there are global problems that can cross and transcend national boundaries with alarming speed, enveloping all countries in a global crisis in a matter of months. In this context, there may be greater recognition than before of the value of multilateral institutions as points of coordination and the primary forums for confronting the difficulties posted by crises like this.

Under both scenarios, Australia should actively engage with other like-minded countries in multilateral UN institutions and in doing so redefine successful multilateral engagement in a situation in which the US has a diminished role. The launch of the Alliance of Multilateralism by the foreign ministers of France and Germany last year (MEAE 2019) demonstrates the more active role like-minded countries are playing to promote the benefits of effective multilateral engagement over isolationist behaviour and choices that challenge the principles upon which multilateral institutions were created: cooperation and coordination. The alliance currently has dozens of participating countries from a cross-section of regions. It sends a

strong message of the desires of member states to see the UN as a key forum in the future, despite the challenges seen over the past few years.

Foreign Minister Payne recently made a statement to the alliance's virtual ministerial meeting, highlighting the leading role Australia is currently playing in multilateral forums on addressing terrorist financing (Payne 2020b). Her participation in this event is an excellent sign of further engagement with the Alliance of Multilateralism and an excellent example of how Australia can better engage with a consortium of other countries to further its agenda.

Regional forms of multilateralism

I turn now from the UN multilateral order to regional and subregional alliances and organisations. There's a significantly different trend in multilateral engagement at that level. It's impossible to canvass all alliances and organisations in a chapter of this length, but, looking at key geographical groupings such as the EU, ASEAN and the African Union (AU), we can see a much more cooperative approach being taken. This trend among regional multilateral organisations demonstrates that multilateralism is not necessarily in crisis and, in fact, is a workable model for finding solutions to crises of the present day.

In the past, the EU has faced fractures and crises that seemingly undermined the cooperative nature of the union, such as the eurozone crisis and the shock exit of the UK. However, as other authors in this volume state in their chapter on the EU after Covid-19, proposals for European economic recovery after the pandemic indicate 'greater European solidarity' (Impiombato and Pascoe 2020), such as the extensive economic stimulus measures implemented.

Elsewhere, the AU has also taken a continental approach to mitigating Covid-19. The COVID-19 Response Fund was established by the AU to fund the response, allowing countries across the continent access to precious resources. Additionally, as announced in late June 2020 by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa as the current chair of the AU, an online platform has been created in order to address shortages of test kits, personal protective equipment and vaccines on the continent. In doing so, the AU hopes to minimise costs for African countries while also allowing them greater access to medical necessities in the global marketplace through the power of collective purchasing (du Plessis 2020).

Closer to home, ASEAN, a political alliance formed over half a century ago in Southeast Asia, made a high-level declaration that emphasised unity to combat the Covid-19 crisis (ASEAN 2020a), and we've seen consistent engagement between nations in the alliance to deal with the crisis. They, too, are looking towards creating a Covid-19 recovery fund like other regional organisations have done to assist each country with the fallout from the pandemic.

Action in each of these forums has been so far constructive and cooperative. While each has a whole new set of varied and complex politics, it's a positive sign that in times of crisis there's some desire by countries to use supranational mechanisms to confront issues together. Cooperative efforts at the regional level also offer pathways for Australia to engage in these forums. Indeed, ASEAN released a statement in early June saying that Australia is doing just that (ASEAN 2020b).

What's next?

At the end of the day, multilateral organisations and institutions are the sum of their memberships. Australia can play a role by encouraging an open and cooperative approach to all forums in its bilateral and multilateral relationships. On certain issues, it may even need to take a role as a bridgebuilder with the US where appropriate.

The next five years are a crucial time for Australia to be actively engaged in multilateral institutions of the UN as well as participating in regional organisations, where invited and useful. Not only will the next five years be a tipping point for great-power competition globally but, more specifically, the Australian campaign for a UN Security Council seat in 2029–2030 will also properly commence sometime during the mid-2020s. Australia needs a proven track record of effectively engaging at this level in order to be successful.

Alongside engagement at the UN level, there needs to be active interest and engagement with all regions of the world. Engagement in regional forums offers an excellent and efficient vehicle for doing so, particularly in regions where Australia's physical footprint isn't large, such as Africa and Latin America.

Australia has a long history of being an outstanding and compelling advocate in and for multilateralism, in all its forms. This work must continue as we grapple with the uncertainty that the post-Covid world presents for our security and prosperity.

References

ASEAN 2020a. *Declaration of the Special ASEAN Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)*, 14 April, online.

ASEAN 2020b. 'ASEAN, Australia to strengthen cooperation amid COVID-19 pandemic', ASEAN, 3 June, online.

DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) 2017. 'Our global partnerships', Australian Government, online.

du Plessis C 2020. 'African countries unite to create "one stop shop" to lower cost of Covid-19 tests and PPE', *The Guardian,* 22 June, online.

Fukushima A 1999. 'What is multilateralism?', in *Japanese Foreign Policy*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Impiombato D, Pascoe A 2020. 'A unified approach to China: opportunities for EU–Australia partnership', *After Covid-19: Australia and the world rebuild*, Volume 2, ASPI, Canberra.

MEAE (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Éntrangères) 2019. *Alliance for Multilateralism*, MEAE, online.

Morrison S 2019. 'The 2019 Lowy Lecture: Prime Minister Scott Morrison', Lowy Institute, 3 October, online.

Payne M 2020a. 'Australia and the world in the time of COVID-19', speech at the National Security College, Australian National University, 16 June, online.

Payne M 2020b. 'Statement by Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne at the event "Alliance for Multilateralism: Building the Network and Presenting Results"', Alliance for Multilateralism, 26 June, online.

Ravelo J 2020. 'How could the US withdraw from the WHO?', *Devex*, June 2, online.

Nuclear sharing in a post-Covid world

Rod Lyon

Can a pandemic prompt new patterns of nuclear sharing among allies? Probably not. Nuclear sharing arrangements are a delicate lacework constructed over decades. They reflect deep geopolitical commitments among high-trust allies, not the hasty shuffling of roles and responsibilities during a medical emergency. Even if Covid-19 can accelerate and intensify geopolitical change, nuclear sharing is a much harder target. This is an area where we should be looking for small changes, not a wholesale rewriting of alliance relationships.

Among US alliances, there are a range of different arrangements that might fit under a general heading of 'nuclear sharing'.

The nuclear-sharing arrangements within NATO spring most readily to mind. NATO has been, since its inception, a nuclear alliance. US nuclear weapons have been deployed in Europe since the 1950s, and remain there today. The alliance has evolved a set of arrangements that involve members in nuclear planning, the forward-basing of US nuclear weapons and the delivery of those weapons to agreed targets in wartime.

For US Asian alliances, nuclear sharing typically involves a more indirect form of engagement—reflecting in part the lesser role that nuclear weapons played in the region in Cold War days. Allies here don't contribute directly to nuclear planning, US nuclear weapons aren't routinely forward-based on allies' territories, and there are no provisions for allies to supply delivery vehicles for use in wartime to deliver US nuclear warheads. Still, the alliances do contribute to US nuclear strategy; Australia's hosting of the joint facility at Pine Gap is a case in point. Extended deterrence is part of the return bargain.

A third model of nuclear sharing might be the form of cooperation that occurs between nuclear-armed states. The US–UK nuclear cooperation agreement, for example, involves an especially close level of cooperation, even touching upon warhead design. The UK–French agreement linking the two countries' nuclear forces together in relation to shared submarine patrolling is less close, but operationally and strategically important. US–French nuclear cooperation typically enjoys a lower profile, not least because of France's insistence on the independence of its arsenal from both London and Washington. But there, too, rather more cooperation takes place than most people would expect, and has done so since the days of the Nixon presidency in the US.

That third form of sharing is different from the other cases because it involves—albeit to varying degrees—the sharing of what we might call 'nuclear knowledge'. Only nuclear-weapon states can have such discussions. By comparison, alliance varieties of nuclear sharing involve a sharing of nuclear risks as well as nuclear benefits, but don't involve sharing of nuclear knowledge.

This paper focuses principally upon the first two forms of sharing because they're more directly relevant to Australia's current strategic situation. We aren't a nuclear-weapon state, and therefore the issue of sharing nuclear knowledge doesn't arise. But we might well be interested in different options for strengthening nuclear sharing under the ANZUS alliance if we believe we face a strategically more challenging future. Indeed, some Asian scholars have called for NATO-like nuclear sharing to become more

prevalent in the US's Asian alliances. Their argument is that strategic relativities have shifted at the global level, essentially through the rise of China, and that a more direct form of sharing is overdue in Asia.

Let's have a closer look at NATO. Nuclear-sharing arrangements are detailed. Different forms of 'sharing' occur. At the broadest level, all NATO states (except France, which declines to participate) are members of the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), which sets NATO's policy guidance in relation to nuclear matters. The NPG was first established in late 1966. Like all NATO committees, it works on the basis of consensus—which means that over the years a set of delicate compromises has evolved. Those compromises have been repeatedly tested over the years, including by the alliance's eastward expansion.

Within the NPG, some are more equal than others: the nuclear-weapon states (the US and the UK) exercise the greatest influence; followed by those European members of NATO that contribute directly to basing and the wartime use of the alliance's nuclear weapons. Still, one of the primary benefits of the NPG is that, over time, it has contributed to the growth of a community of nuclear experts within the alliance.

Some alliance members do more than contribute to nuclear planning: they host US nuclear warheads on their soil. During the early 1970s, those warheads numbered roughly 7,500 and related to a wide range of possible delivery systems. Today, that number is approximately 150, and the warheads are bombs suitable for delivery by specially fitted aircraft. Media reports suggest that the warheads are held at six locations in five countries: Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey (Taylor 2019). The warheads are under exclusive US control.

Some European allies (and the list of storage sites gives a clue as to which) currently operate 'dual-capable' aircraft, which are suitable for the delivery of both nuclear and conventional munitions. During wartime, NATO would have the option of using those aircraft, now held at varying stages of readiness, as well as US aircraft, to deliver the warheads to their targets. So, yes, nuclear sharing in NATO does allow for the possible delivery of a US nuclear bomb by, for example, a Dutch or a German aircraft. Given the complex arming requirements for US nuclear weapons, it seems safe to conclude that the US would retain control of the bomb until it's immediately proximate to its target.

A wider range of NATO allies provide support for the nuclear mission through what are called SNOWCAT operations. SNOWCAT stands for 'supporting nuclear operations with conventional air tactics'. It means, as you might imagine, supporting the delivery aircraft along the route to its target, and its return leg—perhaps by refuelling the bomber, providing air cover for it, attacking air defences that might threaten its passage, or allowing an emergency landing (if needed) for a damaged aircraft attempting to recover after its mission.

Commentators within individual NATO countries occasionally canvass the alliance's nuclear mission. Some say it's merely symbolic and intended to assure allies rather than deter adversaries, especially since the alliance has expanded so far eastwards and its nuclear assets are still essentially limited to a small number of original allies. Others point to a thickening air-defence problem for any NATO-affiliated aircraft attempting to drop a gravity-bomb on the territory of a great-power adversary. On the other hand, modernisation programs for both the bombs and the dual-capable aircraft are well underway, and nuclear sharing along the lines of the current model is expected to continue into the 2030s.

US alliances in Asia have none of those forms of direct nuclear sharing. The alliances with Japan, South Korea and Australia don't have nuclear planning groups, although over recent years Washington has

developed a pattern of regular consultation on deterrence issues with both Tokyo and Seoul. A 1.5 Track dialogue on deterrence issues has also commenced between the US and Australia.

All three dialogues suggest a willingness by Washington to be more consultative on the issue of US extended nuclear deterrence in Asia. They also suggest, given the NATO experience, an attempt by Washington to nurture a regional community of nuclear expertise among its Asian allies.

US nuclear weapons haven't been forward-deployed in the Asia–Pacific region since the days of the Cold War. Even the US Navy—except, of course, its strategic ballistic-missile-equipped submarines—hasn't carried nuclear warheads since 1992, although the 2018 US Nuclear Posture Review suggests the deployment of a possible sea-launched cruise missile at some indeterminate point in the future.

Rather, the US runs what it calls a 'reachback' system in the region. The principle is that US nuclear weapons should remain on US soil, while their possible use in-theatre is implied by US B-52, B-2 or F-35 aircraft overflights. (The B-1 aircraft isn't nuclear-capable.) It's possible that ground-launched intermediate-range missiles, of the sort that would have been forbidden by the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, may also enter the list of weapons-systems available under reachback. Allies are hesitant to deploy such systems in peacetime, but opportunities to do so in wartime might not always exist.

There are certainly no provisions for US nuclear weapons to be delivered by allied aircraft in Asia. There might be some elements of SNOWCAT operations that exist with US allies in Northeast Asia—operations at the strictly defensive rather than offensive end of the spectrum—but, if so, they aren't publicly acknowledged by either partner.

How does Australia interpret nuclear sharing? Perhaps the best guide is that offered by Australian defence ministers, who routinely make public statements in relation to the joint facilities. Christopher Pyne, Defence Minister in 2019, spoke approvingly of Prime Minister Bob Hawke's observation back in 1984, that Australia, if it wished to claim the benefits of nuclear deterrence, must be willing to make a contribution to it. Australia's contribution, said Pyne, was the joint facilities.

Enter 2020, bringing with it a global pandemic, a much more assertive China and a flailing US. We should expect nuclear-sharing arrangements to evolve only slowly. Sudden growth is ruled out, both by US caution in this area and by a dawning realisation among US allies that US extended nuclear assurance is only ever as strong as the US President believes it should be. It's that leader who must authorise the use of nuclear weapons.

What should Australia be doing in this area? We should be working actively to grow our nuclear skills, not simply in the technical areas, but in relation to building our expertise in nuclear policy and planning. We should be thinking through those scenarios that might entail new forms of nuclear sharing in Asia. And we should be talking to Washington, Tokyo and Seoul about the future roles of nuclear weapons in the region.

References

Taylor R 2019. 'Secret locations of US nuclear weapons in Europe accidentally included in report from NATO parliament', *Washington Post*, 17 July.

Is there a place for Europe in Australia's post-Covid-19 outlook?

Bart Hogeveen

> Australia and the European Union are natural partners with common interests and values, and long-standing historical and people-to-people links
>
> —Senator Marise Payne, Foreign Minister (EU-ALF 2018)

When Marise Payne brought up the idea of an independent inquiry into the origins of the coronavirus, Beijing responded in outrage. It was clearly perceived as an attempt to hold China responsible and a prelude to criticism of the response by the Chinese authorities. But the genie was out of the bottle. Although Australia's initially proposed terms were considered to be too forceful, more and more countries started to express support for some form of inquiry.

Realising they could use one another, Australia decided to concede the lead to the EU for drafting a resolution to table at the World Health Assembly. Jointly, they wrangled a text that could lean on the necessary support (Galloway 2020, Zwi 2020). On 18 May, Resolution WHA 73.1 was adopted by consensus. Interestingly, China ended up as one of the co-sponsors, alongside 122 other countries (and the European Union); the US was the notable exception. As behoves good diplomats, the EU, Australia and China equally hailed the resolution as *their* success (Worthington 2020, Bagshaw 2020).

Like-minded responses to the Covid-19 crisis

Although the responses to the Covid crisis by European governments and Australia have been remarkedly similar, the toll caused by the virus could hardly be more different. While Australia's total tally of deaths stands at 122 at the time of writing, many European countries would have been pleased with a daily death rate of 100 during the first weeks of the pandemic. As of 20 July, EU member states and the UK together had recorded 180,500 deaths (ECDPC 2020).

Almost simultaneously, between late February and early March, crisis responses in Europe and in Australia kicked in. With hindsight, it's evident that political leaders on both ends grossly and collectively underestimated the severity of this contagious form of coronavirus. Trust in a world-class health system, good public health and hygiene and geographical distance had spared the continents from previous outbreaks of SARS, MERS and Ebola. Health authorities thought that Covid-19 could probably be similarly contained (Aharouay et al. 2020).

In the absence of a well-coordinated approach to deal with Covid-19 from the World Health Organization, it's quite striking that policy measures in Europe and Australia took very similar shapes. Chief medical officers instantly became public figures, often uncomfortably forced into a (political) decision-making role. Internal and external borders were closed; in the EU the open Schengen borders were suspended, and in Australia individual states imposed border restrictions (EP 2020).

When approaches directed to 'flattening the curve' in order to manage available intensive-care capacity were largely successful, governments began to look into ways to responsibly return to normal life. Politicians initially placed their hopes in nationwide contact-tracing apps, such as CovidSafe in Australia, but with no exceptions those initiatives produced lukewarm public reception and concerns over privacy.

While the debate on privacy and the protection of personal data may have stronger roots in Europe, it was encouraging to observe a similar debate taking place in Australia. PM Morrison was quick to embrace Singapore's app and secure access to its source code. It was unfortunate that a pan-European initiative for a cross-jurisdictional proposal based on open standards and decentralised data collection fell through due to distrust among the founding members (Stolton 2020).

At the moment, we see unprecedented economic stimulus packages being deployed in Europe and Australia. Governments, left and right, set aside previous anxiousness to run massive budget deficits.

This like-minded approach to managing the Covid crisis should be considered largely accidental. The Canberra–Brussels[1] connection has never been a natural or self-evident one, but could our common historical experience now change that?

Canberra and Brussels: good partners, despite themselves?

In recent years, some efforts have been made to bring both continents diplomatically closer. One of the latest milestones is the framework agreement that Australia's then Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, and then EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, signed in the margins of the ASEAN Regional Forum in August 2017.

The agreement—which is still subject to ratification by about 10 EU member states (EC 2017)—should form the basis for 'enhanced cooperation' in an effort to move beyond trade. Europe is Australia's second largest trading partner after China, while Australia is Europe's 19th trade partner in goods. The EU as a bloc is Australia's largest source of foreign investment, worth almost $1.2 trillion in 2018. Currently, negotiations are underway to conclude a free trade agreement (DFAT, n.d.).

In policy areas other than trade, it's challenging to find much depth in the current relationship. True partnerships surface when you can see eye to eye on matters of 'high politics', so where does the Europe–Australia relationship sit at the moment?

In defence matters, arrangements were made to allow Australian personnel to serve in EU crisis-response missions. Two Australians have since joined the EU-led operations in the Horn of Africa and in Iraq. As a global partner to NATO, Australia was the largest non-NATO troop contributor to the alliance's mission in Afghanistan, and recently signed up to NATO's Centre of Excellence in Cyber Defence. Naturally, there are several bilateral defence relationships, mostly to do with joint operations and procurements. Altogether, this area of cooperation has a more incidental than structural character.

There's a stronger degree of operational collaboration on the policing and law enforcement front. The Australian Federal Police has a standing arrangement with Europol, and individual European police forces are represented in Canberra. Joint operations are conducted on a regular basis, including the processing of requests for mutual legal assistance, in such areas as countering narcotics, stopping human trafficking and combating cybercrime.

During 2018, after years of failed EU attempts to manage—and presumably dissuade—migrants arriving from Africa and the Middle East, EU and Australian policy discourse on illegal immigration even seemed to converge. Leaders of conservative and rightist political groups in Europe suggested copying Australia's model of offshore processing centres. French President Macron even talked about creating hotspots for

managing asylum requests.[2] But the idea never received a critical mass of political and societal support (Brandt & Higgins 2018, Loewenstein 2018).

Earlier this year, the EU–Australia Leadership Forum, a project entirely funded by the EU to 'broaden and deepen the existing ties and ... help shape the vision for the partnership', wrapped up after four years. In one of the forum's reports on opportunities and common challenges, Peter Jennings rightly notes that 'enhanced cooperation will only be sustained by practical forms of cooperation that deliver real benefits to both Australia and EU countries' (EU-ALF 2018).

A lack of practical, mutually beneficial and enduring initiatives seems to be the Achilles heel of most previous efforts seeking to intensify the Australian–European relationship. Besides the geographical distance, sociocultural, linguistic, time-zone and possibly even political barriers seem to be more embedded than we would like to acknowledge.

Beyond Covid-19: Eurostralian areas of strategic convergence

As the Covid-19 crisis prompts us to reconsider geopolitical agendas and taken-for-granted partnerships, what are areas of strategic convergence for Australia and Europe?

The emerging post-American world order places both Europe and Australia in uncomfortable positions. In the light of increased Russian assertiveness and with security guarantees by the US no longer self-evident, Europe has woken up—in the words of NATO's former Secretary-General De Hoop Scheffer—from a (long) period of geopolitical hibernation (Lindstrom & Tardy 2019).

While a sense of *realpolitik* may not have left Australia's foreign and security policy as it did in Europe, Australia is equally uncomfortable about seriously examining political and security partnerships outside the Anglosphere.

In searching for partners, Australia and Europe have both set their sights on countries and organisations such as Japan, India, South Korea and ASEAN. A recent Lowy Institute report concludes that the quadrilateral security dialogue with India, Japan and the US will deepen, but that 'differences in threat perception, risk tolerance, military capability, and strategic culture' are forming obstacles (Lee 2020).

Given the 'long-standing historical and people-to-people links' that Minister Payne referred to, it is perhaps time to shore up current institutional interactions, such as the EU-Australia security and development dialogues, and initiate a deeper political conversation. In fact, in its resolution endorsing the framework agreement, the European Parliament—normally quite critical[3]—referred to some 30 areas of common interest and cited another 20 examples of successful collaboration and joined-up multilateral initiatives (EP 2018).

Even if our respective transatlantic and transpacific reflexes remain dominant in the short term, the Covid crisis is widely expected to accelerate already shifting power balances. If we accept that Europe's and Australia's socio-economic welfare is vested in a rules-based order that's underpinned by an open, free and democratic international system, leaderships on both continents should no longer remain indifferent bystanders but start to cultivate, marshal and bring to bear a collective influence in safeguarding international rules and norms.

Here's where the shoe pinches, particularly for most European countries. While Australia has just announced a $270 billion defence investment, European defence spending is systemically under par (a source of great frustration for consecutive US administrations); trade interests receive priority over human rights and human security concerns, despite public rhetoric; and domestic support for bold foreign policy objectives has been waning.

Where Europe has to fight a credibility problem, Australia needs to shake off a Calimero complex.[4] Given its role and position in the Asia–Pacific region, it could punch much more above its weight, even globally.

Minister Payne's speech on 'Australia and the world in the time of COVID-19' rightly sets the tone for stronger multilateral engagements, with a focus on exercising norm-setting influence in international standard-setting bodies for civil aviation, maritime transport, intellectual property, telecommunications and agriculture (Payne 2020).

One area in which a growing self-consciousness can be observed in both Europe and Australia is that of information, communication and emerging technologies. The dominance of US tech products and services has triggered a European pushback against the unconstrained collection of personal data and the misuse of weaker jurisdictions in the European single market. The Global Data Protection Regulation, while European in its focus, includes universal aspects that also force Australian businesses to beef up their data protection. It's an example of the EU successfully posturing as a soft-power norm setter.

Subsequently, the idea of building technological autonomy has become the talk of the town. EU Commissioner Margrethe Vestager is promoting a European community that takes greater control of what's happening on its territory and that retains regulatory power to give European enterprises, start-ups as much as larger companies, a fair chance on the global market (CERRE 2020). The shortage of medical supplies during the first weeks of the crisis, due to production shortages and imposed export restrictions, has created a further push in that direction.

Australia's decision to disallow Chinese companies from competing in the development of 5G infrastructure can be seen as a similar act of leadership in setting norms and building strategic autonomy. Canberra's decision, in contrast to that of the White House, was watched with great interest in Europe and inspired many capitals to reconsider their own terms with China. While not all European capitals followed Australia's 5G decision, most notably the UK in the first instance, the future relationship with China is now the subject of a cutting-edge debate.

In a recent op-ed, the EU's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, asserted that Europe's stance towards China has become more realistic and assertive. He used three prisms to consider the relationship: as partners, as competitors and as rivals (CERRE 2020, EC 2019). This language of rivalry and competition, coming from the European Commission, signals a broader European sentiment to reappraise the relationship with Beijing in a similar—but less antagonistic—manner as is currently occurring in Australia.

There's no shortage of areas where the interests of Canberra and Brussels converge. Is that sufficiently acknowledged? And will that result in Europe and Australia considering each other to be 'natural partners' and in concrete, joined-up efforts across the full spectrum of foreign policy?

Bringing Europe into the mix

A chapter on Europe can't go missing in a section on Australia and the world. While the Framework Agreement between the EU and Australia currently covers some 13 active dialogues across many different sectors, it's premature to expect a common European–Australian agenda to deepen in the short term. But there's definitely a window of opportunity.

The current European Commission, with Germany's former Defence Minister, Ursula von der Leyen, as president, is one of the most geopolitical administrations since the early 1990s, when Europe laid the basis for its current economic might (Bayer 2019). Perhaps this could encourage Australian ministers to listen to European diplomats, who have so far struggled to even get access to ministers' offices.

It would help if the 24 individual European missions represented in Canberra, with on average four or five diplomatic staff each, together with the EU delegation could do their bit and bring some greater weight to the table in engagements with the Australian Government through a stronger collective approach.

While Europe, and the EU in particular, is a complicated environment to navigate, that shouldn't be an insurmountable barrier for skilled Australian diplomats. It does require, however, a near-permanent and comprehensive engagement at relevant posts and at headquarters. As a start, Australia could evaluate its European presence and consider a concentration of resources and responsibilities.

The Australian Leadership Forum project concluded earlier this year. The EU and Australia should continue a flagship effort like that together. A next phase could focus on areas of operational collaboration, on common agendas in international standards-setting bodies, as prioritised by the Foreign Minister, and on broader foreign policy and regional security initiatives.

The beauty of being 'natural partners' is that Europeans and Australians can address concerns frankly and come up with pragmatic and innovative solutions. Let the response to the Covid-19 crisis and the subsequent joint effort to establish an inquiry be an encouragement.

References

Aharouay L, Stokmans D, Adriaanse ML 2020. 'Corona: dé reconstructie. Eerst onderschatting, daarna paniek en dáárna controle' [Corona: the reconstruction. First underestimation, then panic and finally control again], *nrc.nl*, 19 June, online.

Bagshaw E 2020. 'No longer a joke: why Australia's COVID-19 inquiry campaign won the day', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 May, online.

Bayer L 2019. 'Meet von der Leyen's "geopolitical Commission"', *Politico*, 12 April, online.

Brandt J, Higgins C 2018. *Europe wants to process asylum seekers offshore—the lessons it should learn from Australia*, Brookings Institution, 31 August, online.

CERRE (Centre on Regulation in Europe) 2020. *Debate with Margrethe Vestager: digital sovereignty in the age of pandemics*, 24 April, online.

DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), no date. *European Union factsheet*, online.

EC (European Commission) 2019. *EU–China: a strategic outlook,* joint communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council, 12 March, online.

EC (European Council) 2017. *Framework Agreement between the European Union and its member states, of the one part, and Australia, of the other part*, 7 August, online.

ECDPC (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control) 2020. *COVID-19 situation update for the EU/EEA and the UK, as of 20 July 2020*, online.

EP (European Parliament) 2018. *Non-legislative resolution of 18 April 2018 on the draft Council decision on the conclusion on behalf of the Union of the Framework Agreement between the European Union and its member states, of the one part, and Australia, of the other part,* 18 April, online.

EP (European Parliament) 2020. *Border controls in Schengen due to coronavirus: what can the EU do?*, 19 May, online.

EU-ALF (EU–Australia Leadership Forum) 2018. *The EU and Australia: towards a new era*, online.

Galloway A 2020. 'Australia's COVID-19 inquiry presents a roadmap for a new world order', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 May, online.

Lee L 2020. *Assessing the Quad: prospects and limitations of quadrilateral cooperation for advancing Australia's interests*, Lowy Institute, 19 May, online.

Lindstrom G, Tardy T (eds) 2019. *The EU and NATO*, EU Institute for Security Studies, online.

Loewenstein A 2018. 'Australia's brutal refugee policy is inspiring the far right in the EU and beyond', *The Nation*, 29 June, online.

Payne M 2020. 'Australia and the world in the time of COVID-19', speech, 16 June, online.

Stolton S 2020. 'Digital brief: PEPP-PT. The inside story', *Euractiv*, 23 April, online.

Worthington B 2020. 'Marise Payne calls for global inquiry into China's handling of the coronavirus outbreak', *ABC News*, 19 April, online.

Zwi A 2020. 'The WHO's coronavirus inquiry will be more diplomatic than decisive. But Australia should step up in the meantime', *The Conversation*, 22 May, online.

Notes

1 When speaking about Europe and Brussels, I'm loosely and interchangeably referring to international organisations such as the EU and NATO, which have their HQs in Brussels, a larger subset of their respective 27 and 29 member states, respectively, or both.

2 'Macron plans asylum "hotspots" for migrants in Libya', *Euronews*, 27 July 2017, online.

3 The European Parliament has no powers in the area of foreign and security policy and hence it tends to take a more critical stance towards policies of individual governments and the EU as represented by the 27 member states.

4 *Calimero complex* refers to people, organisations or countries that feel they are under-appreciated because of their small size. The name Calimero refers to an Italian animation from the 1970s (from *The Incredible Shrinking Man)*, online.

A unified approach to China: opportunities for EU–Australia partnership

Alexandra Pascoe and Daria Impiombato

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, we saw the EU's view of the People's Republic of China (PRC) changing from one of cooperation partner to systemic rival and economic competitor (EC 2019). Covid-19 has accelerated this trend, placing greater urgency on the union's need to confront China's divide-and-rule tactics and its increasing economic, political and technological interference within the bloc. While this has presented several challenges, it also provides the EU with an opportunity for a more cohesive and principled stance towards China. As recent joint EU and Australian efforts at the World Health Assembly suggest, this also opens up the possibility of greater cooperation between Australia and the EU emerging as we seek to address global challenges.

China in the EU before the pandemic

The PRC has largely relied on its economic weight to achieve influence within the EU. As the bloc is China's top trading partner and China is the EU's second largest, many European authorities have been hesitant to antagonise the Chinese Government on sensitive issues and risk jeopardising valuable trade relationships. Investment is a case in point. In the aftermath of the European sovereign debt crisis, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was seen as a welcome source of investment for certain member states and countries in the EU's eastern neighbourhood, bringing in around $300 billion over 10 years.

Italy is the most prominent EU state to have signed on to the BRI, which it joined in April 2019, despite opposition from Germany and France. Hoping to salvage its struggling economy and pay back soaring public debt, the Italian Government saw opportunities in the partnership. Italy is Europe's third largest economy, so its decision to join the BRI was particularly worrying to European policymakers. However, other member states, such as Hungary, have also signed up to the BRI and have benefited greatly from Chinese investments.

That these agreements have political strings attached is no secret. The undeniable influence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, for example, was recently on display in Budapest's opposition to Taiwan joining the World Health Organization (WHO).

If cases like those were not enough to justify EU concerns, the 17+1 initiative is further evidence of Beijing's will to influence. The multilateral dialogue between the PRC and 17 Central and Eastern European countries was first established in 2012. Often referred to as a Chinese 'Trojan horse', the 17+1 is seen as a major challenge to European unity and stability and has played a significant role in polarising the attitudes of European officials towards China.

The divide-and-rule tactics present in the 17+1, the BRI and China's general leveraging of alternative multilateral forums, combined with its increasing influence in other regional and international institutions, including the WHO and the UN, make clear why the European Commission has labelled China a 'systemic rival' (Quirk 2020).

The EU is increasingly wary of China's motivation and its general economic, political and technological push into the bloc. This changing attitude was demonstrated last year when Germany implemented stricter foreign investment screening regulations in the high-technology sector, especially targeting Chinese state-owned enterprises. The escalation of EU–China tensions during the Covid-19 pandemic may well be a turning point for the future of bilateral relations.

Mixed results

The EU has made several missteps. Before the pandemic, the union hesitated to confront the CCP on its human rights practices and to take more concrete steps beyond statements and dialogue to address issues such as the erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy and the treatment of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet.

During the pandemic, the EU also failed to uphold its purported values after an op-ed by the EU's Ambassador to China was censored in the *People's Daily,* when a mention of China as the source of the coronavirus outbreak was removed. This was followed by the European External Action Service watering down its own report on Covid-19 disinformation, which criticised Beijing's early attempts to withhold information from the WHO and the international community (Kumar & Trullols 2020).

However, the exposure of China's aggressive tactics throughout the pandemic has made assessments of diverging interests between the EU and China more influential. China's flawed 'mask diplomacy', disinformation campaigns and 'wolf warrior' diplomacy were on display in March. While China sought to portray its provision of masks and other medical supplies to Italy as a charitable donation from a trusted friend (Fallon 2020), it became clear that the act was little more than a commercial transaction involving sub-par equipment. The CCP's narrative also ignored the fact that the EU provided China with medical equipment when China asked for help early on in the pandemic. Issues like these have revealed how Beijing's pushy behaviour and opportunism during the pandemic eventually helped to unite European countries.

Post-pandemic: towards a unified approach

As member states emerge from their lockdowns, further signs of an EU reassessment of its relations with the Asian superpower are beginning to appear. The EU is weighing up the opportunities versus the increased security and business risks of engaging with Beijing in much the same way as Australia is putting in place a framework to protect its interests while engaging with an assertive and coercive China.

The Franco-German proposal for economic recovery marked a turning point for the EU by signalling greater European solidarity (Stevis-Gridneff 2020). The joint raising of debt and the issuing of funds as grants, not loans, is one such example. The proposal culminated in a €750-billion recovery fund put forward by the European Commission in late May, which encapsulates many of Chancellor Angela Merkel's and President Emmanuel Macron's ideas, but was met with opposition from so-called 'frugal' northern member states. However, consensus was finally achieved after a four-day deadlock in negotiations, on 21 July. The heated disagreements among member states brought about modifications to the Franco-German proposal, including a reduction in the amount of funding going out as grants from an original €500 billion down to €390 billion (FT 2020).

Yet, the final deal represents a crucial milestone for the EU, demonstrating that the union can be counted on to deliver help when necessary. It also stands to limit the effectiveness of China's influence efforts to target economically weakened member states.

The recovery fund is significant not only in its size but also with regards to initiatives linked with the spending. President of the European Council, Charles Michel has said that the EU's economic recovery centres on 'repairing the damage caused by Covid-19, reforming our economies and remodelling our societies' (European Council 2020). This reflects sentiments conveyed in the German-French proposal around the need to enhance 'EU economic and industrial resilience and sovereignty' (MEFA 2020) in the light of the vulnerabilities exposed by the pandemic.

This is being accompanied by greater discussion of and efforts dedicated to diversifying supply chains, strengthening EU and national investment screening in strategic sectors, and adapting EU competition policy to re-energise policy on European industrial champions (Moens & Tamma 2020).

These measures provide a good indication of the direction the EU is seeking to take its China policy in the post-Covid world. Diversifying supply chains and re-shoring production and investments will help to remove some of the union's reliance on China for critical items. It will also minimise the likelihood of economic coercion and provide opportunities to establish supply chains with reliable partners who won't weaponise trade or let political differences affect the provision of goods and services.

Greater promotion of European champions will be particularly valuable in rivalling Chinese companies and bolstering the EU's technological sovereignty. Supporting European firms and assisting them with supply-chain diversification will be very important in providing alternatives to Chinese technology firms in the rollout of 5G technology throughout Europe and in other countries around the world. The EU recommended limiting but not banning Huawei equipment and technology in member states' 5G rollouts. However, it will be interesting to see how the UK's recent 5G decision and new understandings about the coercive nature of Beijing's trade and economic tactics affect this stance.

Further EU initiatives that bolster economic growth for member states could help lessen the dependence of fragile economies on Chinese investments. The BRI would cease to be seen by struggling European economies as the only way out of recession, particularly by countries such as Italy and Greece, which still hold little trust in European institutions. Forging consensus on economic and foreign policies would give the EU a better chance of countering Beijing's looming dominance and create alternatives to Chinese debt traps and coercion for smaller countries.

Despite the sense that China possesses great bargaining power over the union, the biggest trading partner for most member states remains the EU itself. The union's strength will reside in its ability to upgrade these strategic advantages through the single market, showing more effective leadership to remind all member states that they need the EU more than they need China—for both their economic interests and the preservation of their way of life. Indeed, we're seeing a stronger desire from the EU to be more active in advancing its interests and values, especially with regard to action on climate change, upholding rules-based trade, and multilateralism and human rights.

Post-pandemic: greater prospects for EU–Australia partnership

It's clear that the EU faces many of the same issues that Australia is dealing with in its relationship with China. Neither has achieved consensus on its stance, exhibiting the occasional backward step in the face of pressure from Beijing. However, there's an increasing amount of common ground between Australia and the EU with regard to interests and values—whether that be promoting compliance with international human rights standards, diversifying supply chains and reducing economic reliance, or countering CCP interference.

Particularly at a time when US commitment to the rules-based international order is faltering and China is exercising greater influence in multilateral forums and institutions, there's huge potential for multilateral coalitions. Recent events involving the joint Australia–EU call for an independent inquiry into the origins and handling of the coronavirus outbreak highlight what two partners can achieve in multilateral settings, even in the face of China's substantial political and economic influence. It highlights how, by acting together, we can promote mutual positions on global issues much more effectively than we can by ourselves.

A more cohesive EU policy on China in the political, economic and technological domains provides an even bigger opportunity for a unified approach with Australia and other nations in multilateral settings.

As multilateral institutions become a battleground for great-power competition, pressure for both Australia and the EU to choose between the two superpowers may instead have created more space for them to act in the middle. Joint approaches among like-minded actors such as the EU and Australia, and our ability to corral international support, will be very important in protecting and advancing the system that our security and prosperity rests on and addressing global issues and problems that we can't solve alone.

References

EC (European Commission) 2019. *EU–China: a strategic outlook*, 12 March, online.

European Council 2020. *A recovery plan for Europe*, 21 July, online.

Fallon T 2020. 'China, Italy, and coronavirus: geopolitics and propaganda', *The Diplomat*, 20 March, online.

FT (Financial Times) 2020. 'Recovery fund is a huge breakthrough for the EU', 22 July, online.

MEFA (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs) 2020. *European Union—French–German initiative for the European recovery from the coronavirus crisis*, French Government, 18 May, online.

Kumar I, Trullols LR 2020. 'Coronavirus: EU regret after state-run newspaper *China Daily* removes Covid-19 mention from op-ed', *euronews*, 7 May, online.

Moens B, Tamma P 2020. 'Macron and Merkel defy Brussels with push for industrial champions', *Politico*, 18 May, online.

Quirk D 2020. 'Despite a clear EU strategy, significant challenges still lie ahead for China–EU relations', *EUROPP*, 20 February, online.

Stevis-Gridneff M 2020. 'A €750 billion virus recovery plan thrusts Europe into a new frontier', *New York Times*, 27 May, online.

Australia and Africa: building people-to-people links

Santilla Chingaipe

Australia's relationship with the African continent has historically not been a strategic priority for policymakers. Covid-19 has caused upheaval globally and in many ways exacerbated moves towards nationalism and anti-globalisation. But multilateral cooperation will be vital in the long term. As was evidenced in Australia's push for an independent global inquiry into the origins of the pandemic, Australia needs all the friends it can get to support those measures, including in Africa.

The Australian Government's efforts to establish the inquiry were supported by more than 130 countries—54 of them African. Africa's global political influence can't be underestimated, and, as a voting bloc, the continent has the ability to affect international issues.

In its final report, the 2011 Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade stated that Africa is of increasing importance to the world:

> In geopolitical terms, African countries have increasing influence on international organisations; in resource terms, Africa has vast reserves; in trading terms, Africa's underutilised arable lands represent great opportunities to feed the world. Africa also continues to face significant challenges, particularly in health, governance and economic development. (JSCFADT 2011)

According to the World Bank, Africa is home to the world's largest free trade area and a 1.2 billion-person market. Post-Covid-19, Australia can no longer afford to neglect its relationship with Africa.

The opportunity for Australia to strengthen its strategic and economic engagement with the continent is significant. While trade, investment, security and development remain priority areas, developing closer people-to-people ties should also be part of the renewed focus.

Currently, the Australia Awards program is central to people-to-people ties. Since 2011, nearly 5,000 Africans have studied in Australia under the program. While those placements have significantly reduced over the years, developing and expanding on the current level of engagement is vital. While Covid-19 has presented short-term challenges through the temporary closure of international borders, these scholarships are beneficial. As noted in the 2018 Senate inquiry into Australia's trade and investment relationship with the countries of Africa, the Australia Awards:

> bring many benefits for Australia and recipients' home countries including investment, job creation and wealth generation. Through Australia Awards, we contribute to African leadership and human capacity development in the areas of extractives, agricultural and public policy, where Australia has extensive experience and expertise. (JSCFADT 2018)

Another underutilised resource is the growing diaspora communities in Australia and the connections and knowledge that they bring. African migration in recent decades has been through the skilled and family reunion programs and through the humanitarian program. It's estimated that more than 300,000 Australians identify as having African heritage; the largest number originate from South Africa.

One way in which these communities are contributing to the development of their countries of origin is through remittances. The pandemic has caused a sharp decline in remittance flows—the World Bank forecasts a 23.1% decline in sub-Saharan Africa, second to Europe and Central Asia—but remittances

remain an area of high engagement within diaspora communities. According to the World Bank, remittances to Africa in 2019 were valued at US$48 billion (World Bank 2020.

Engagement with diaspora communities is also significant because of values shared between Australia and Africa, such as human rights, the rule of law and gender equality. Those common values are important when communicating strategically to Africans on the continent. Unlike comparable Western nations, Australia doesn't carry imperialist and colonialist baggage. Many Africans in the diaspora maintain strong relations with their countries of origin.

In 2011, in evidence submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade the South African High Commissioner acknowledged the importance of these relationships:

> An important part of the work that we do here is to cultivate relations with the South African diaspora. It's a significant diaspora. We think that as a community they are very much in a position to make a positive influence on our relations, a positive influence on the balance of both trade and investment. Being people who know people and processes both on that side as well as on this side, we think they are in a unique position to assist us in that. (JSCFADT 2011)

International education is worth nearly $40 billion to the Australian economy and is Australia's fourth largest export, but the sector has been damaged by Covid-19. African students have made Australia their preferred choice for further education: about 9,000 students from the African continent from countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and Zambia are currently studying in Australia. Post-Covid-19, there's an opportunity for Australia to diversify its student market on the continent.

Africa is home to the fastest growing middle-class in the world. According to a recent study by the Brookings Institution in the US, in the five largest consumer markets—Nigeria, Egypt, South Africa, Morocco and Algeria—the African Development Bank estimates that there will be 56 million middle-class households with disposable incomes totalling nearly $680 billion by 2025 (BI 2018).

During the pandemic, many African communities have also contributed by offering support in the form of food, housing and basic services to members who are ineligible for federal assistance packages, such as students and working visa holders, but those communities also face a range of issues that, should they be addressed, would strengthen people-to-people links.

African cultures and communities are diverse but are often represented in negative ways through the media and political commentary. Recent incidents, such as the spate of violent crimes in Victoria that led to accusations that young African men are being caught up in gangs are examples.

The fear of African crime—a widespread anxiety that has built over recent years in Victoria—reached its peak in January 2018. Some politicians seized on high-profile incidents to claim that 'African street gangs' were on the rise because certain nationalities—in this instance, South Sudanese—were overrepresented in crime statistics.

This was despite the fact that statistics showed that, overall, crime in the state was declining and South Sudanese people made up a small proportion of the population and of convicted criminals.

Labels such as 'African gangs' implicate all Africans in violent crime and damage the wellbeing and sense of belonging of many in these communities.

And these incidents aren't limited just to Australia. The mistreatment of people of African descent in the Chinese city of Guangzhou amid fears of imported coronavirus cases and a second wave of the pandemic in that country earlier this year prompted diplomatic anger from several African countries. According to a report by the Associated Press in April, African diplomats in Beijing reportedly met with Chinese Foreign Ministry officials and 'stated in very strong terms their concern and condemnation of the disturbing and humiliating experiences our citizens have been subjected to,' according to a statement from Sierra Leone's embassy in Beijing (Cara 2020).

If Australia wants to leverage the skills, ingenuity and resources that these communities possess, it's imperative that governments denounce racialised narratives and hysteria in Australia and overseas and act within their own countries to address problems.

Another untapped resource is the role of community and multicultural broadcasters in exercising soft power. *SBS Radio*, which remains the world's most linguistically diverse public broadcaster, produces content in more than 60 languages. Several programs are African and broadcast to audiences in Australia and, thanks to the internet, overseas—reaching a significant number of people. These cultural exports are another source of global influence.

The Australian Government has emphasised the importance of soft power, including in the *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*. The response to and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic present opportunities for the government to build on already existing mechanisms, such as community radio and multicultural broadcasters, to maximise Australia's soft power.

Another opportunity leveraging the wealth of the diaspora would be to engage with community groups and associations, which are often instrumental in gaining the trust and support of community members. Activities that provide mutual benefits to both African countries and Australia should be officially encouraged and expanded.

Policy incentives are also important in strengthening these links. Australia's response will need to be targeted. Identifying countries and diaspora communities that Australia sees as priority areas would be of benefit. For example, the challenges that African refugee communities face compared to the countries from which economic migrants have emigrated are vastly different. These distinctions are necessary when prioritising people-to-people links.

Community and support groups have reportedly seen an increase in demand for support services from migrants on visas who are unable to access government support during the Covid-19 outbreak. An estimated 2.1 million temporary migrants have been affected, according to submissions made to the ongoing Senate inquiry into Australia's response to Covid-19 (SSCFADT 2020). Although the federal government has relaxed the 40-hour-per-week maximum condition for international students, advocacy groups argue that this doesn't go far enough.

While the economic, health, political and social toll that Covid-19 has inflicted on Australia is significant, in the long term Australia will have to be proactive in its foreign policy. To that end, African diaspora communities can play a vital role in shaping Australia–Africa relationships after Covid-19. While the Senate inquiry looking into the impact that Covid-19 has had on diaspora communities is underway, understanding the structures that already exist across African societies to capitalise on building good relationships should also be a key priority for Australia in enhancing and maintaining links between the two continents.

References

BI (Brookings Institution) 2018. *Africa's consumer market potential*, online.

Cara A 2020. *'African nations, US decry racism against blacks in China'*, Associated Press, 11 April, online.

JSCFADT (Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade) 2011. *Inquiry into Australia's relationship with the countries of Africa*, Australian Parliament, online.

JSCFADT (Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade) 2018. *Australia's trade and investment relationships with the countries of Africa*, Australian Parliament, online.

SSCFADT (Senate Standing Committees on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade) 2020. *Inquiry into Issues facing diaspora communities in Australia,* Australian Parliament, online.

WB (World Bank) 2020. *COVID-19 crisis through a migration lens: Migration and development brief no. 32*, online.

Keeping the peace: disruptions to UN peacekeeping

Lisa Sharland

In early March, after New York City had identified its first case of Covid-19, discussions were already underway at UN headquarters about the possibility of closing the building and directing staff to work from home. It was unclear at that stage what impact such an unprecedented move would have on the ability of the UN to conduct multilateral negotiations.

The pandemic had already resulted in the cancellation of the annual gathering of the Commission on the Status of Women. The General Assembly's Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34), of which Australia is a member, which generally meets at the same time, was meanwhile still attempting to reach consensus on its annual report providing recommendations to the UN Secretariat and field missions on peacekeeping reform initiatives. While the pandemic did push the committee to conclude its report by consensus a day earlier (quite a feat, considering the C-34 didn't agree on a report the year before), the report not surprisingly made no explicit mention of Covid-19, or the risk of pandemics, even though it was an issue that would come to dominate the work of missions around the globe in the months ahead. And it's in the field where the greatest challenges have continued to unfold.

Challenges in the field

With upwards of 95,000 personnel from more than 120 countries deployed to 13 peacekeeping missions around the globe, largely in Africa and the Middle East, it was only a matter of time before Covid-19 disrupted the deployments and ability of UN peacekeeping missions to fulfil their mandates. Most rotations of personnel range anywhere between six months to a year or more, meaning that military and police members are regularly rotating between their home countries and mission environments. That all had to be paused in March, as the UN grappled with plans to make its operations more 'Covid safe', both for the peacekeepers and for the communities that they serve.

Health security consequently remains a major concern for countries deploying personnel to missions. To date, hundreds of peacekeepers have contracted Covid 19 (Andersen & Gowan 2020). Several peacekeepers have died, including two military personnel deployed to Mali (from Cambodia and El Salvador) who lost their lives in May. The pandemic has brought into focus the safety concerns in missions related to disease and illness, which have historically resulted in more cases of death in peacekeeping missions than security incidents or attacks (Harsch et al. 2020).

Safety and security discussions about peacekeeping reform have generally focused on appropriate medical and casualty evacuation procedures in the event of an attack. In some cases, those processes have been hampered by restrictions on freedom of movement and flight plans by host governments in their response to the virus, reflecting the widespread consequences on the operation of peacekeeping missions. This has also highlighted the ongoing importance of ensuring that missions are equipped with effective medical and hospital facilities to respond to a range of crises, and that the supply chains to facilitate those resources remain resilient.

Peacekeeping missions are often deployed into contexts in which government services, including the provision of health services, are inadequate, and many parts of the population rely on international and local aid organisations to deliver basic health services. Early in the Covid-19 crisis, concerns were raised about the limited number of ventilators available in countries such as South Sudan and the Central African Republic, the latter having only three ventilators in the entire country. There are also concerns that, because of the limited number of health workers, absenteeism in the case of the virus infecting health workers will exacerbate an already precarious situation.

In the longer term, the focus on the pandemic may also disrupt services intended to support the health of local populations. For instance, the peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) continues to support efforts to address the Ebola outbreak there. There's also worry that the focus on Covid-19 may disrupt other health intervention programs, as parts of the population become increasingly vulnerable without access to vaccines that would have otherwise been administered (UNSC 2020a).

There's also the concern that peacekeepers might become a vector for spreading Covid-19. Just a decade earlier, Haiti suffered the consequences of a widespread outbreak of cholera, which had been introduced by Nepalese peacekeepers shortly after the 2010 earthquake. The UN has put in place a range of mitigation measures to limit the potential spread of Covid-19 in and by peacekeeping missions under the messaging of 'Protect, Help, Explain'. The measures include changes to troop and police rotations, temperature checks on entry to missions, systematic handwashing, raising awareness in the community, sharing accurate and timely information, working-from-home policies for civilian staff, the establishment of quarantine spaces in missions, and ensuring that missions have the necessary medical and personal protective equipment for potential outbreaks (UN Peacekeeping 2020). However, apprehension remains about the potential spread of Covid-19 from peacekeepers, fuelling some anti-UN backlash in different peacekeeping missions.

Managing the 'infodemic'

The spread of misinformation about Covid-19 in peacekeeping mission contexts is also having an impact on missions' operations, their ability to implement their mandates and the safety and security of personnel. This resulting 'infodemic' (as it's been termed by the UN) within communities about the nature of the virus and how it's spread is resulting in stigmatisation and continues to create further barriers to reducing potential infections by Covid-19.

But it's also driving further insecurity. For instance, in South Sudan following the confirmation of the first UN case of Covid-19 back in April, the UN Mission in South Sudan was accused of spreading the virus, which resulted in anti-UN sentiments and hate speech and harassment directed at the mission (UNSC 2020b). Posts on Facebook were threatening retaliation against the peacekeeping mission, fuelling the insecurity that already existed in the country and making efforts to implement the UN mandate even more complicated. Measures by the South Sudanese Government to restrict the movement of mission personnel and prevent them leaving their bases early on in the crisis would have only served to confirm what many locals were hearing or reading—namely, that the mission was spreading the virus.

Peacekeeping missions have tried to be proactive and disarm these disinformation campaigns. Mission radio programs such as Radio Okapi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Radio Miraya in South Sudan offer important platforms for public information teams to share accurate information about the virus and what activities the mission is undertaking to address it, in cooperation with local authorities and the government. Similarly, social media offer similar opportunities to dispute misinformation. But such measures also require the buy-in and support of government and community leaders to counter any hate speech or misinformation that's being shared. With conspiracy theories rife and distrust among different ethnic communities in some mission contexts, such as South Sudan, this will remain an ongoing challenge to the work by peacekeeping missions to not only address the Covid-19 crisis but also implement their mandates.

Mandate implementation and the protection of civilians

The crisis has also hampered efforts to implement the mandates provided to peacekeeping missions, particularly as they relate to the protection of civilians. Armed groups have generally ignored calls for a global ceasefire, taking advantage of the health crisis and subsequent absence of state and international actors to launch attacks on civilians. Civilians are also bearing the brunt of the secondary impacts of Covid-19. Limited opportunities to flee conflict or migrate due to border closures put civilians at risk (IRC 2020), and delays to mediation or election measures fuel ongoing communal tensions. In some instances, such as in South Sudan, state actors have been perpetrating abuse and implementing heavy-handed lockdown measures (Di Razza 2020). Covid-19 is consequently exacerbating many of the risks that already threaten civilians.

At the same time, the ability of peacekeeping missions to respond to those threats and risks to civilians has been severely limited due to restrictions on their movements and interactions with the local population. For the military components, which are often tasked with conducting patrols, this has reduced their interaction with locals and their ability to project force to deter potential human rights abuses. Similarly, the absence of civilians in many field offices means that there's limited situational awareness and facilitation of intercommunal dialogues (Di Razza 2020).

Efforts to fulfil mandates that support the engagement of women in political dialogues and facilitate their unique protection needs against a range of physical threats are also likely to be affected in the field. As the Secretary-General noted, there's a risk of shifting resources away from initiatives targeting gender equality (UN 2020). Women, as elsewhere across the globe, are likely to be disproportionately affected by the pandemic, including in environments in which peacekeeping missions operate.

The future of UN peacekeeping and Australia's engagement

While the business of UN peacekeeping and the reauthorisation of mandates has continued unabated throughout the global Covid-19 crisis in a virtual format, collective political action by the Security Council on the Covid-19 challenge has been very slow. It took until July for the council to adopt a resolution on the peace and security implications of the pandemic. Resolution 2532, *inter alia*, requested 'the Secretary-General to instruct peace-keeping operations to provide support, within their mandates and capacities, to host country authorities in their efforts to contain the pandemic'. In other words, there's an

ongoing expectation among council members that peacekeepers will be assisting host governments to deliver a health response to the pandemic. Peacekeeping missions have done this before (most recently in relation to Ebola) but not on such a global scale.

But this crisis will continue for many months, if not years. The long-term impact of Covid-19 on UN peacekeeping at this stage remains unclear. Across the globe, countries will face increasing domestic pressure to address the crisis at home first, which is likely to place increasing pressure on the downward trend in peacekeeping budgets as the global economic downturn continues. And the pressures on peacekeeping missions aren't going away, as there are already signs that Covid-19 is exacerbating many drivers of conflict—drivers that peacekeeping missions are attempting to mitigate and address. As recent events with the military coup in Bamako and explosion in Beirut in August have shown, Covid-19 is unlikely to be the only crises that missions will need to be prepared to manage.

Significantly, the expectations of host authorities and civilians for what peacekeeping missions can deliver in support and protection are likely to remain high. Failure to deliver on them will damage the fragile trust that exists within some communities towards the UN and peacekeepers. Efforts by the UN to address misinformation, by both state actors and non-state actors, in mission environments will remain a critical tool in efforts to mitigate this crisis, support the safety and security of personnel and protect civilians.

While peacekeeping stakeholders have remained supportive of a broad agenda of peacekeeping reform through the UN Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative over the past two years, that reform agenda will need to continue to be nimble to address some of the challenges emerging during and after the pandemic.

Next year, the Republic of Korea will host a peacekeeping ministerial, which will offer an important opportunity to consider some of the disruptions to UN peacekeeping, including the demands placed on them and partners supporting peacekeeping, as a result of the pandemic. It will offer peacekeeping troop and police contributors, including Australia, an important opportunity to assess and reflect on the needs of UN peacekeeping as it moves ahead while managing the Covid-19 pandemic.

Australia has a stake in ensuring that UN peacekeeping remains equipped to effectively navigate the disruptions ahead. Though Australia remains a modest contributor to UN peacekeeping, the government has expressed interest in future co-deployments with our regional neighbours Fiji and Indonesia, which are both major contributors. Peacekeeping therefore offers an important vehicle for Australia to enhance defence and security cooperation in the region.

But even more importantly, peacekeeping remains one of the primary international tools to mitigate conflict, protect civilians, and more recently, to support efforts by governments in conflict-affected environments navigate the challenges of the Covid pandemic. Australia, and the international community, has a shared interest in ensuring that UN peacekeeping is up to this task.

References

Andersen LR, Gowan R 2020. 'How the UN can mitigate the coronavirus pandemic's impact on peacekeeping', *WPR: World Politics Review*, 6 July, online.

Di Razza N 2020. *UN peacekeeping and the protection of civilians in the COVID-19 era*, The Global Observatory, 22 May, online.

Harsch MF, Headley TY, Novosseloff A 2020. *Peacekeeping during pandemics: how the UN can be part of the solution*, The Global Observatory, 3 June, online.

IRC (International Rescue Committee) 2020. 'COVID-19 restrictions preventing people from fleeing violence or forcing dangerous routes, warns IRC', media release, 15 July, online.

UN 2020. 'As COVID-19, global fragilities threaten peace, shared well-being, efforts must focus on saving lives, buttressing security, Secretary-General tells Security Council', news release, UN, 2 July, online.

UN Peacekeeping 2020. '"Protect, help, explain": UN Peacekeeping responds to COVID-19', *Medium*, 1 April, online.

UNSC (UN Security Council) 2020a. *United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: report of the Secretary-General*, S/2020/554, 18 June, online.

UNSC (UN Security Council) 2020b. *Situation in South Sudan: report of the Secretary-General*, S/2020/536, online.

Indo-Pakistan rivalry: business as usual, if not worse

Khemta Hannah Jose

Over the past six years, under India's nationalist Modi government, there have been three fatal cross-border terror attacks (Pathankot, Uri and Pulwama) by Pakistan-based terror groups and an uptick in ceasefire violations across the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir.

Cross-border attacks and ceasefire violations at the LoC have been heating up for the past few months, and there were 1,547 instances from January to April 2020 (Majid 2020). Perhaps counterintuitively, the explosion of Covid-19 across the world doesn't appear to have distracted either India or Pakistan from their border dispute or from the new realities arising from India's abrogation of Article 370, which made the state of Indian-occupied Kashmir into a Union territory directly under New Delhi's control.

Kashmir is the central conflict between the nuclear-armed neighbours; three wars have been fought over it—one while both had nuclear weapons. So let's focus on Kashmir to begin with to get an idea of how relations had been progressing before Covid's march across the world.

Kashmir caught in the tug-of-war

There had been an increase in militancy in the erstwhile state since around 2013–14, following a years-long reduction after the surge in violence of the 1990s and early 2000s, according to data from the South Asia Terrorism Portal:[1]

> Although not on the same scale as in the 1990s or early 2000s, militancy-related incidents have been increasing after 2014. From 2014 to March 2017, there have been 795 militancy-related incidents in which 397 militants were killed while 64 civilians and 178 security personnel lost their lives. Compared to 222 incidents in 2014, there were 322 incidents in 2016. In 2014, 28 civilians and 47 security personnel and 110 militants were killed in these incidents. In 2016, these numbers were 15, 82 and 150. (Jacob & Naqshbandi 2017)

In February 2019, the deadliest terror attack in Kashmir since the 1990s was carried out by an Indian Kashmiri member of Jaish-e-Muhammad, killing 40 Central Reserve Police Force personnel. That attack precipitated India's cross-border airstrikes into Pakistan's Balakot district later that month in a clear escalation and a game-changer in the decades-long border conflict between the two countries. In August 2019, the Modi government abrogated the special status of the state of Jammu & Kashmir that granted it a degree of autonomy, and stripped it of its statehood, making it a Union territory directly under the aegis of the central government. That was widely regarded as an inflammatory move, and the government put Kashmir under a six-month lockdown—with curbs on movement, media and the internet—in anticipation of 'increased terror activity'. Despite that, there were large-scale protests in Kashmir that were cracked down on by the Central Reserve Police Force.

That background is important to establish the trajectory that India–Pakistan relations have been on. One may have hoped that the Covid-19 pandemic would put the brakes on this as both countries got busy with containing the virus, and perhaps even result in increased cooperation, but that doesn't seem to be happening.

South Asian outreach?

As the pandemic swept the globe, India and Pakistan, in close proximity to an Iran overrun with cases and deaths, seemed particularly vulnerable. Both countries have high population densities, weak healthcare systems and lacklustre enforcement mechanisms at the best of times.

The consensus, therefore, seemed to be that this was a time for countries to cooperate and come together to defeat the virus. When the scale of the outbreak became known, Indian PM Modi took the initiative to pull countries in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) together for a coordinated response via video conference—a significant step. Until then, SAARC had been considered practically dead in the water. There had been low levels of economic integration between the member countries during the association's three decades, low levels of regional cooperation and an unprecedented boycott by India of the summit in Islamabad in 2016 following the Uri terror attack, in which it was joined by almost all the remaining member states, barring Nepal.

On Modi's initiative, however, all SAARC heads of state attended the conference—except Pakistan's. Pakistan sent its Health Minister, Zafar Mirza, instead. At the conference, Mirza called for a lifting of the government-imposed lockdown in Kashmir so that virus-containment measures could be adopted. Kashmir's lockdown wasn't related to Covid, but to the Indian Government's abrogation of Article 370, which stripped Kashmir of its statehood and made it a Union territory under the central government's control. Calling for Kashmir's political lockdown to be lifted, after Pakistan PM Imran Khan had been vocal against it, was a move calculated to rankle and obviously didn't go down well; India's Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Raveesh Kumar alleged that Pakistan had misused the 'humanitarian' conference to push its political agenda (PTI 2020a).

SAARC as a grouping may have fallen out of favour, but the initiative by India showed a desire to take the regional lead in a global disaster. That the meeting devolved into another political slugging match between the two neighbours—including with Pakistan not sending its head of state—suggests that it will take more than a pandemic to break the bilateral relationship out of the hostile groove that it's locked into.

All signs point to continued acrimony

Far from Covid-19 drawing attention away from the conflict with India, Pakistan has renewed its efforts to turn the screws. Hizbul Mujahideen—a US- and EU-designated terror group comprising mostly indigenous Kashmiris and active in Jammu & Kashmir to seek its integration with Pakistan—endorsed a new outfit, the Resistance Front, on 29 April 2020 (Shah 2020). The Observer Research Foundation argues that Hizbul Mujahideen's endorsement of the new group signals a push to recruit and train indigenous Kashmiris in the conflict against India rather than using foreign fighters, in a move it hopes will sway public opinion more effectively.

In another development that doesn't portend well for the Indo-Pak relationship into the future, Pakistani PM Imran Khan tweeted three times in May 2020 about India planning a false-flag operation against Pakistan (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Tweets by the Pakistani Prime Minister, May 2020

It's not a new claim by Khan, but the frequency of his 'warnings' warrants attention. He has made the claim only twice before—in August 2019, after India abrogated Article 370, and in December 2019, after the passage of the infamous Citizenship Amendment Act provoked months-long nationwide protests within India due to fears that it would disenfranchise Indian Muslims.

In perhaps a smaller yet telling indication of the state of Indo-Pak ties, one of India's largest TV channels, which has been staunchly pro-government in its programming, ran a segment in which its star anchor blamed Pakistan for unleashing locusts in India.[2] On 8 May, India's government-owned media also decided to broadcast weather reports for cities in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir—a move that was decried as 'legally void' by Pakistan soon after (PTI 2020b).

These developments can be seen as broad indications of the direction the relationship may take, but they're largely overshadowed by strategic concerns, such as the border dispute, militancy and the new status of Jammu & Kashmir. And the strategic imperatives that keep Pakistan and India at loggerheads have only been cemented by China conducting incursions on India's eastern flank, the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the northernmost Union territory of Ladakh and at the McMahon Line in the eastern state of Sikkim. The first of the skirmishes is reported to have occurred on the night of 5–6 May.

China: Pakistan's 'all-weather friend'

In the first 10 days of May 2020, there were two reported skirmishes at the Indo-China border in Ladakh, adjacent to Jammu & Kashmir, and one in the northeastern state of Sikkim. The area in which the incursion in Ladakh occurred is reported to be the only place in which 'physical collusion between Chinese and Pakistani forces can occur', wrote a former Indian Lieutenant General in *The Print* (Panag 2020). That the first of Imran Khan's tweets this year about an Indian false-flag operation came late on 6 May—hours after the first skirmishes between Indian and Chinese soldiers were reported in Ladakh—might not have been a coincidence.

India has long anticipated and prepared for a two-front war on its northern borders. When India's Army Chief, Bipin Rawat, took the helm in 2018, he's reported to have said as much: 'The two-front is a real scenario. Much has changed from before in terms of our capabilities … The Army, Navy and [Air Force] are now jointly very much prepared for such an eventuality' (Pandit 2018).

To add fuel to this fire, on 16 June, as reports emerged of fatal clashes between Indian and Chinese soldiers in Ladakh, the Pakistani Army revealed that it held what the *New York Times*' Pakistan correspondent called an 'unprecedented' meeting between all its service chiefs at the Inter-Services Intelligence headquarters in Islamabad, in what could be an 'extraordinary intel briefing' (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Tweets by *New York Times* correspondent, June 2020

Throughout May and June, as China has made moves at the LAC, the LoC has seen intense shelling, keeping the Indian Army tied down.

India isolated?

On top of India's troubles on its borders with China and Pakistan, an unprecedented situation at India's border with Nepal began with a diplomatic spat right around the time of the border skirmishes between Indian and Chinese soldiers.

Nepal and India have had strong historical ties and deep people-to-people links, which is something the Indian Government frequently makes a point of bringing up. The Indo-Nepal border has been peaceful throughout its history and people and goods have moved freely across it, but on 12 June, just as Indian and Chinese soldiers were going head-to-head in Ladakh, Nepali border guards opened fire at a group of Indians who had crossed into Nepal, killing one and injuring two (Kumar 2020). The incident alarmed Indian commentators and analysts, as the Chinese mouthpiece *Global Times* alluded to the possibility of a three-front war.

The firing on Indians came against a backdrop of diplomatic tensions between the two countries. Early in May, Nepal objected strongly to India building a road through territory that Nepal claims. On 15 May, India's Army Chief, Mukund Naravane, said that Nepal was probably acting 'at someone else's behest' in raising objections about the disputed areas—alluding to China. Three days later, Nepal's parliament

decided to release a new national map showing the disputed areas India claims as its own as part of Nepal. The new map was approved by Nepal's lower house of parliament with no votes against, despite India's objections. Not even the Madhesis—on whose behalf India had pressured the Nepalese Oli government in 2015 when it was drafting its new Constitution—protested the publishing of this new map.

Nepal, under communist President Oli in particular, has found it beneficial to diversify away from its traditional reliance on India for goods and hydropower, and China has been eager to make itself available.

What Australia must keep in mind

Australia's engagement with India has assumed greater importance as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) gets new life, Australia and India have upped their bilateral relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership, and China has been increasingly belligerent in the South China Sea, necessitating increased coordination among Quad members.

Reports of Chinese brutality in Ladakh, despite New Delhi's cautious public pronouncements, have alarmed Indian analysts and inflamed its citizenry—providing just the impetus that India might need to go all-in on the Quad.

However, India now finds itself increasingly isolated and under attack in its immediate neighbourhood as China ups the ante. The double whammy of the China–Pakistan bilateral in keeping India tied down in territorial conflicts, even as its population reels from record numbers of Covid cases per day and a severe economic downturn, is something Australia should keep in mind. Indeed, the Sino-Pakistan axis enjoys foolproof strategic logic; it predates and will outlast both the pandemic and the recession.

As long as India and China have antagonistic relations, the India–Pakistan dynamic won't change (Jose 2018). China will find it beneficial to use Indo-Pak hostilities as a pressure point on India, and Pakistan will find it useful to ally with China to contain India's response to its adventurism in Kashmir.

Facing Chinese adventurism in Ladakh and Sikkim in addition to Pakistani adventurism in Kashmir, India will pay special attention to the possibility of military collusion between its northern neighbours, and to Kashmir. Losing territory to Pakistan would be considered an unacceptable hit to the Indian Government's prestige in a way that losing territory to China would not, given India and Pakistan's bitter history since partition in 1947, and given the Modi government's tough-on-terror nationalism.

As the India–China border crisis continues in fits and starts, as can be expected for as long as the LAC remains undemarcated, and as the members of the Quad step up their own cooperation, Australia must keep in mind that any heightened antagonism between India and China will result in increased pressure on India from the Sino-Pakistan axis—and that's something New Delhi will be acutely aware of even as it tries to hedge against its large eastern neighbour.

References

Jacob J, Naqshbandi A 2017. '41,000 deaths in 27 years: the anatomy of Kashmir militancy in numbers', *Hindustan Times*, 25 September, online.

Jose KH 2018. 'If we want to talk Indo-Pak relations, we have to talk about China', *The Quint*, 16 June, online.

Kumar M 2020. '1 Indian killed, 2 injured in firing by Nepal guards near Bihar border', *NDTV*, 12 June, online.

Majid Z 2020. '1547 ceasefire violations by Pakistan reported this year along LoC', *Deccan Herald*, 17 May, online.

Panag HS 2020. ‘China believes India wants Aksai Chin back. PLA has likely secured 40–60 sq km in Ladakh’, *The Print*, 28 May, online.

Pandit R 2018. ‘Two-front war is a real scenario, says General Bipin Rawat’, *Economic Times*, 13 July, online.

PTI (Press Trust of India) 2020a, ‘India slams Pak for raising Kashmir at SAARC video-conference, says it misused platform’, *The Hindu*, 19 March, online.

PTI (Press Trust of India) 2020b. ‘Pakistan rejects India’s move to broadcast weather reports on PoK’, *Business Standard*, 8 May, online.

Shah K 2020. *Pakistan using COVID-19 as a cover for crossborder militancy*, Observer Research Foundation, 29 April, online.

Notes

1 ‘Fatalities in terrorist violence, 1988–2019’, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, 2020 online.

2 ‘Pakistan is making terrorists out of locusts and sending them to India’, *YouTube*, 28 May 2020, online (in Hindi).

Security, technology and diplomacy

Women in national security: seizing the opportunity

Gai Brodtmann

They had just returned from an intelligence-gathering mission beyond the wire.

The two female soldiers were now safe in Poppy's at the Multinational Base in Tarin Kowt.

We spoke about their role. Just the three of us, as a briefing on the issues facing women in Afghanistan, by women, was an optional extra in the 2011 defence subcommittee delegation's program (JSCFADT 2012).

The soldiers shared the stories of the women they had met in Uruzgan Province.

Stories about the women's lives, about their hardship, fears, hopes and dreams.

Stories about how they survived as women, right down to how they managed period cramps and the pain of childbirth—and their addiction to opium.

In rural villages in Afghanistan in the middle of a war zone (MCN 2015), you can't just drop in to the local chemist to get painkillers (JSCFADT 2012: para 4.17). So you resort to a treatment that's cheap, accessible, homegrown and abundant—poppy resin (UNODC 2009: 3).

Nine years ago, the international community knew that most members of poppy-growing families were involved in the farming process. It's a process that involves the cutting of the poppy and the collection of the oozing resin, which is absorbed through the skin. It meant that large doses of morphine were needed to treat wounded Afghans, including children (JSCFADT 2012: para 4.29).

What these soldiers discovered, which was little understood at the time (UNODC 2009: 4–5), was that women were using opium to manage their pain—the pain that comes from being a woman, and the pain of their reality (JSCFADT 2012: para 4.30). And, in some instances, they found, men were using opium to manage women by deliberately addicting their wives (Hadid & Ghani 2019).

These insights gave added impetus to efforts to build women's and maternal health centres in remote parts of Uruzgan Province, to construct decent roads to get produce to market and to diversify Afghanistan's agricultural base to get the nation and its people off its opium dependence.

The stories of those women in Uruzgan Province wouldn't have been told were it not for the two female soldiers. Until their mission, those women were unseen and unheard by men outside Afghanistan.

It was only women who gave them a voice.

The findings of the two Australian soldiers are a concrete demonstration of an area of comparative advantage presented by women in national security, yet women's voices are still not heard in enough of our debates.

As we explore the 'new normal' of a post-Covid-19 world, it's now time to normalise the voices of women in national security. Not writing about women's issues as a bolt-on to the discussion, but embedded in every sinew.

We won't mobilise our nation's entire capacity to defend ourselves and our national interests until we mobilise this advantage. To fully arm ourselves to face the strategic challenges of the future, we have to use 100% of our population.

It isn't good enough that we're still arguing the case for women to be involved in the policy-shaping and decision-making for our nation's security. We're still prosecuting the importance of gender equality to national stability (UN-WB 2018) and better operational outcomes (Reynolds 2020).

Multiple studies over multiple decades show why we need to harness the power of women as part of our strategic arsenal (UN Women 2019).

The time for empty rhetoric is over. Let's make gender equality and women's empowerment normal—a mundane, everyday, unremarkable part of peace and security policymaking and practice (Lee-Koo & Mundkar 2017).

Let's use this crisis to turbocharge the programs already underway and set some targets to hurry things along.

Holistic approach

The Covid-19 crisis has turned many assumptions about our future strategic environment and direction on their heads.

It's exposed the strengths and weaknesses of our polity, systems and people and forced a complete rethink of the strategic, economic and governance 'new normal'.

It's also forced a review of the effectiveness of our current strategies, policies and resources at every level of government.

The novel coronavirus pandemic—and the summer's bushfires—have given every Australian a crash course in the nuances of Federation and brought into sharp relief just who's responsible for delivering, deciding on and communicating what. It's demonstrated the truth about the need to call on the capacity of our whole population to manage the largest challenges we face as a nation (Shoebridge 2020).

Australians now know national security touches every part of our lives. Today, they now appreciate that manufacturing, our health system, our economy, our technology, the safety of our homes, our community resilience and our democracy all have an impact on the security of our nation.

Responsibility for national security has also stretched into every level of government. Constitutionally, it's the preserve of the federal government. However, the multiple layers and components that make for a secure nation now mean that state, territory and local governments all have their parts to play (ALGA 2020).

The eagerly awaited second iteration of the Women Peace and Security National Action Plan (PM&C, n.d.) needs to have the agility to acknowledge and respond to this changed Australia and changed world (PM&C 2018: 3–5).

While the women, peace and security agenda addresses systemic issues that have been around for decades, if not centuries, the strategies to address those issues need to be contemporary and responsive to emerging challenges, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

In the light of the events of this year, the second plan should pay close attention to one of the strategies of the first National Action Plan only partially rolled out—a coordinated and holistic approach to implementing the agenda, both domestically and internationally (DFHCSIA, n.d., 19).

Never has there been a better time to broaden the scope of the agenda beyond the federal sphere and embed it into the crisis, disaster and emergency response and recovery efforts of state, territory, and local governments.

That's already been done on state laws and policies that directly affect women's security in eradicating violence against women and countering terrorism (Allen 2020: 21), and precedents exist overseas at the state, zone, local, county and community levels (UNSC 2019: paras 78–79).

Let's now integrate a gender perspective across every arm of government and into every law and policy that makes for a secure nation, reporting on it through the national cabinet.

Expanding the brief will also allow us to explore new processes for coordinating and monitoring the agenda and new ways to collect, capture and disseminate data through what should be an appropriately resourced National Action Plan secretariat.

To better track performance and drive the urgency, the ministers for Defence, Foreign Affairs and Women should report to the Australian Parliament every year, rather than once every two years, and the relevant ministers to their respective parliaments in each state and territory. Independent reviews of the plan should also be conducted every year.

Importantly, the annual reports and reviews should focus on outcomes, not outputs, and the pathway to meaningful change (PM&C 2018: 25, 43).

Seen and heard

To increase the momentum for more women in national security, how about also introducing some reportable and audited targets? Nothing focuses the mind like targets.

There are still too many national security events with all-male speaker and panellist line-ups, and, when women do make an appearance, it's often in the facilitation or introduction role to 'set up' the keynote by a man. If women get a spot behind the lectern, they're usually one of only a handful to share the platform.

The government has set a target of 50% of women holding government board positions overall, with at least 40% of positions at the individual board level. As of 31 December 2019, women held 48.4% of those positions—the highest overall result since reporting began in 2009 (PM&C 2020).

The same target should apply to national security events organised by government agencies or organisations that receive government support through funding, venues or speakers—domestically and internationally.

No 40% female line up? Then no official attendance, no sponsorship and no facilities.

And no more excuses that the female talent doesn't exist. The talent exists in spades, in every national security field. While the numbers in some fields may still be in the single digits, the women are there. Finding them just requires a bit more lateral and creative thinking, a broadening of networks and an end to the lazy churn of the same male voices.

The 40% rule should also apply to national security and international relations task forces and papers (Cave et al. 2019), and publications and journals produced by government agencies and government-funded organisations.

Reporting on performance on the 40% rule could be done through the National Action Plan secretariat, with audits by the Australian National Audit Office.

And national security parliamentary committees shouldn't be immune from the 40% rule.

Currently, the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security has 30% women (JCIS 2020). The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade has just 26% women (JSCFADT 2020).

Our representatives need to lead by example.

The application of the 40% rule for parliamentary committees inquiring into national security would be a good start, as would a cross-party parliamentary friends group on women, peace and security (UNSC 2019: para. 81).

In addition, a National Action Plan stream should be embedded into the ADF Parliamentary Program (DoD 2020), and all parliamentary delegations to operations should include mandatory formal briefings on the plan and, where possible, tours of the programs (Brodtmann & Reynolds 2018).

If you read the newspaper, watch the television or webinars or listen to the radio or podcasts you would also be under the impression that national security in Australia is a female-free zone.

In the 24–7 news cycle, with ever-diminishing resources, the media are constantly pressed for time and always looking for ready access to experts on speed dial. This invariably defaults to men.

In a post-Covid world, let's get a bit of diversity in national security commentary on the airwaves and in the opinion pages by organising events where women can meet journalists, producers, editors and presenters to discuss their area of expertise and swap numbers.

Let's also be more open and trusting in our discussion with the Australian people on strategic issues.

The community has shown that it can more than deal with confronting and rapid challenges and change and respond collectively in the national interest. It's shown it can be trusted.

So let's repay that trust. Let's continue to include Australians in the conversation about our nation's security.

This isn't just a message to government and security and international relations agencies, but to think tanks, academics and peak associations. Too much of the national security communities' pre-Covid-19 focus has been on influencing our own. So, in the end, we've mainly been talking to a cheer squad or in an echo chamber.

The time's ripe to bring Australians into the fold. They've shown they're up to it, and they're up for it.

When was the last time in recent history so many Australians were so readily discussing supply chains, fuel, food and water security, sovereign capability, critical infrastructure and foreign ownership?

In a post-Covid-19 world, let's share the journey with the Australian people and harness the fierce urgency of now—with the entire population.

References

ALGA (Australian Local Government Association) 2020. *Coronavirus (COVID-19) and local government*, ALGA, 6 March, online.

Allen L 2020. *Australia's implementation of women, peace and security: promoting regional stability*, ASPI, Canberra, February, 21, online.

Brodtmann G, Reynolds L 2018. 'WPS 2018: The view from Capital Hill', *The Strategist*, 15 March, online.

Cave D, Oliver A, Hayward-Jones J, Munro K, Harris E 2019. *Foreign territory: women in international relations*, Lowy Institute, 9 July, online.

DFHCSIA (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs), no date. *Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012–2018*, Australian Government, online.

DoD (Department of Defence) 2020. *Australian Defence Force Parliamentary Program*, Australian Government, online.

Hadid D, Ghani K 2019. 'Women and children are the emerging face of drug addiction in Afghanistan', *Goats and Soda*, 29 October, online.

JCIS (Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security) 2020. 'Committee membership', Australian Parliament, online.

JSCFADT (Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade) 2012. *Defence Sub-Committee visit to the Middle East area of operations: report of the delegation to the MEAO 14 to 18 May 2011*, Australian Parliament, online.

JSCFADT (Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade) 2020. 'Committee membership', Australian Parliament, online.

Lee-Koo K, Mundkar A 2017. 'What's next for Australia's National Action on Women, Peace and Security?', *The Strategist*, 12 May, online.

MCN (Ministry of Counter Narcotics) 2015. *2015 Afghanistan drug report*, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 9 December, 56, online.

PM&C (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet) 2018. *Final Independent Review of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012–2018*, Australian Government, 24 October, online.

PM&C (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet) 2020. *Gender balance on Australian Government boards*, Australian Government, online.

PM&C (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet), no date. *Australia's next National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*, Australian Government, online.

Reynolds L 2020. 'IPAA Women in Leadership International Women's Day Breakfast', Department of Defence, Australian Government, 15 February, online.

Shoebridge M 2020. 'The Australian federation', in Coyne J (ed.), *After Covid-19: Australia and the world rebuild*, Volume 1, ASPI, Canberra, May, 3–7, online.

UN Women 2019. *Facts and figures: peace and security*, UN, October, online.

UNODC (UN Office on Drugs and Crime) 2009. 'Executive summary', *Drug use in Afghanistan: 2009 survey*, UNODC, online.

UNSC (UN Security Council) 2019. *Women and peace and security: report of the Secretary-General*, UNSC, 9 October, online.

UN-WB (United Nations, World Bank) 2018. *Pathways for peace: inclusive approaches to preventing violent conflict*, World Bank, Washington DC, online.

Academic freedom and the future of Australia's university sector

Louisa Bochner and Genevieve Feely

Academic freedom is integral to Australian universities and to our society. Intertwined with all of society's interactions, it's an element of the freedom of speech and expression that underpins our system of democracy. Academic freedom is a hallmark of Australia's high-quality, world-class education and is critical to what makes Australian education attractive in international markets.

However, in recent years, academic freedom has come under threat in the Australian university sector. The economic crisis which has accompanied the health crisis of Covid-19 has accelerated how financial interests can stifle, affect, and direct academic freedom. In this chapter, we outline both *why* academic freedom is important and *how* it has broken down through financial interests and incentives. We argue that this damage can and should be reversed.

Academic freedom is a difficult-to-define and contested concept. The recent Ridd case demonstrates the grey areas of this debate (Smee 2020a). Broadly construed, it's the ability to research, teach and discuss without fear of repercussions. Australia's top universities have policies, charters and references in conduct documents that attempt to define academic freedom. Those documents state that students and academics have the right to speak freely and without fear, limited only by the law and university regulations. While many institutions include these rights in their governance policies and codes of conduct, some, such as the Australian National University, also use public letters or statements to address this issue (ANU 2018). By doing so, they recommit publicly to the ideal of academic freedom and its importance to the institution. Like all complex policy issues, academic freedom has its grey areas: ideas that are difficult to articulate and difficult to include in a charter. And the charters don't properly take into account how money shapes and limits *how* academic freedom is exercised.

Reliance on international funding

In March 2019, Human Rights Watch found that the Chinese Government attempts to restrict academic freedoms beyond China's borders and published a 12-point code of conduct for universities and colleges worldwide as a guide to combat this (HRW 2019). The code of conduct, directed towards universities, students and educators, was developed over three years and aims to help institutions respond to the PRC Government's threat to academic freedom abroad.

As outlined in the Human Rights Watch code of conduct, evidence from the past decade indicates that academics across the world have self-censored to avoid, at best, criticisms from China's international students and, at worst, the departure of those students.

Australia's overreliance on international students, particularly from the PRC, has created the conditions for degraded academic freedom in the past decade, as it allows China's government to exert power and influence in an unacceptable way (including through having individuals and organisations act in accordance with what they perceive Beijing will and won't want). This has enabled China to use its financial and coercive power to attempt to shape Australia's narrative on campus in its image.

Australia's overreliance on international students has left us economically fragile and exposed. It is an understandable fear for companies, organisations and universities that 'offending the Chinese people'

may result in undue pressure from the PRC government, which may result in unfavourable outcomes. For universities, the risk is that any small 'misstep' perceived by China might disrupt the flow of students to their university.

Covid-19 has highlighted just how reliant on those students Australia is. Travel bans and social isolation measures have caused a rapid collapse in the number of international students, particularly those from China, participating in the university sector. In the financial year 2019-2020, visa requests from mainland China have dropped by 25% (Raizik 2020). It's expected that the sharp reduction in the number of international students in Australia will cost the economy from $30 billion to $60 billion over the next three years (Carey et al. 2020).

Fears of the economic consequences of making decisions that conflict with Beijing's interests aren't unfounded. In 2017, South Korea deployed the US-made Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defence system, much to China's chagrin. China's response was to boycott tourism to South Korea, costing the country an estimated US$6.8 billion (Huang 2017). More recently, in response to Australia calling for an international inquiry into the source of Covid-19, China imposed an 80% tariff on imports of Australian barley under the guise of a 'legitimate' reason: an investigation into an anti-dumping complaint (Hurst 2020). Fears about students were finally realised in June, in the form of a warning from China's Education Bureau about 'racist incidents' and strong suggestions that Chinese students should reconsider studying here (Shelton & Feng 2020).

Attempting to avoid precisely this situation, Australian universities have curtailed critiques of Beijing over the past decade in pursuit of short-term financial gains. The reliance has originated from a combination of the withdrawal of government funding over time and greed. The net effect of government policy and institutional decision making is that wealth from higher education and engagement with the Chinese economy have been prioritised over the security risks.

There's mounting and well-documented evidence to suggest that Australian universities' growing reliance on Chinese international students over the past decade has influenced university decision-making in an unacceptable way. In August 2020, the University of New South Wales deleted Twitter posts linking to an article critical of the Hong Kong National Security Law, after Chinese students complained on Twitter, Weibo and WeChat, and reportedly complained to the embassy. (Walden & Dziedzic 2020). The university subsequently deleted the article and reposted it with photos of Hong Kong protesters and a paragraph of text removed. The article has now been reinstated to its original form.

The PRC state-run news outlet, the *Global Times*, responded by stating that the deletion of the tweet 'failed to buy Chinese students' (Zhao 2020).

This responsiveness by the university to criticism from Chinese students, and the fact that even moves to act as Beijing desires were deemed by Chinese state media to be insufficient, demonstrates the problem, and may make academics and university administrators more wary about future statements. Students from the PRC make up nearly one-quarter of the total student cohort of the University of New South Wales and represent 68.8% of all international students at the university (Babones 2020).

A similar case occurred in 2013, when the University of Sydney cancelled a visit from the Dalai Lama. Vice-Chancellor Dr Michael Spence praised the decision as being in the 'best interests of researchers across the university'.[1]

It's never in our interests to stifle open and frank debate on any issue—and, when a university does so, that has a chilling effect on a culture of open enquiry and debate.

There are also many public cases of university lecturers who are wary of discussing sensitive topics (Xu 2017) such as Taiwan, in anything other than Beijing's terms, out of concern that their university may receive pressure from the consulate to discipline them. Recent events at the University of Queensland have raised similar issues (Smee 2020b).

Of most concern are the cases that don't make it into the public eye when academics and students choose to self-censor rather than ruffle Beijing's feathers. International students enrich Australian life, but financial reliance on this single market from China, which brings with it pressure to constrain expression, is a death sentence for academic freedom in Australia.

Reliance on the private sector

Reliance on private-sector funding also has the potential to degrade academic freedom. The Australian university sector once relied mainly on federal government funding to operate. However, the decrease in that funding over the past decade has left a gaping hole. That gap has been incrementally plugged by private-sector funding, along with the income from international students. This poses a significant problem for the freedom of academic work in Australia.

The private sector already invests in universities, and there have been recent calls by Universities Australia, the peak lobby group for the sector, to boost business–university collaborations and partnerships (UA 2019). In the wake of this crisis, with much less income from international student fees, universities may increasingly seek funding from the private sector to sustain themselves. There are obvious benefits to partnering between the private sector and universities. Access to greater financing, if structured correctly, could mean more money for research and better pathways into the business world for students.

However, that can't be done at the expense of institutional autonomy and academic freedom, which could both be reduced in two ways. First, it will exacerbate the problem posed when the flow of money directs the research, leaving those areas of research without significant corporate backing relying on a smaller pool of funding. Second, the extent of control by businesses over the projects or research they fund may call into question the independence and impartiality of research findings, thus further affecting the reputation of Australian universities and the quality of their work.

Perception is important, particularly when it comes to marketing and exporting Australian university education. As universities work more and more with the business sector, those relationships must be managed and structured properly to ensure that the universities' research is seen as independent and not directed by outside influence. The opposite perception would damage Australian education as an export brand. Australian higher education must be seen as world class if it's to remain a competitive export internationally, especially as we aim to diversify where it's marketed. Australian universities need to be strong, resilient and academically free.

A resilient university sector is financially secure and is able to deliver on its objectives of teaching and continuing world-class research output when times are tough. All the more so, a resilient university is one

that's free from the constraints of financial incentives or coercion and can engage in rigorous and robust debate. Resilience and prosperity are intertwined. Failing to uphold the academic freedom underpinning resilient universities won't lead to greater financial gain in the long term.

Securing the future

Last financial year, higher education contributed $37.6 billion to the Australian economy (Tehan 2019) and was one of Australia's largest exports (Department of Education 2019). Delivering high-quality tertiary education, and holding an internationally recognised ranking as a top university, are grounded in research excellence and a commitment to academic freedom. Without those, Australian higher education loses the essence of what makes it a valuable export.

As Australian universities fall into debt and Australia enters a recession, to ensure that our university sector can still be seen as an attractive export internationally, we need to build resilient universities, underpinned by our core values, including freedom of expression through academic freedom. Similarly, without access to programs such as JobKeeper, the future for Australian universities doesn't look bright. The universities will be expected to fill the financial abyss by any means possible, worsening impacts on academic freedom as outlined here.

The pandemic offers an opportunity for the Australian Government and higher education sector to review the breakdown of academic freedom over the past decade and rebuild this sector.

We welcome Education Minister Dan Tehan's review into the implementation of codes regarding free speech on campus. We suggest that the Australian Government must extend this review, and establish a Senate inquiry into academic freedom. Such action has a precedent. In 2008, the Senate conducted an inquiry into academic freedom in Australia, albeit about the markedly different topic: left-wing bias on campus (SSCEE 2008). It's high time the Senate revisits this important topic and closely examines the forces affecting academic freedom in a post-Covid world. A Senate review will accord parliamentary privilege for witnesses, which we believe is a key component when discussing sensitive issues such as self-censorship.

It is essential that any review understands the role academic freedom plays in Australian society, intellectual inquiry and progress. Academic freedom is more than a 'nice to have', but a fundamental component of Australia's wellbeing, prosperity and security.

We recommend the following to start to shift the conversation on this issue:

- We support the recent announcement of a parliamentary inquiry into foreign influence targeted at Australian universities, publicly funded research agencies and competitive research grant agencies. While this inquiry gets underway, the terms of reference should reflect the essentiality of academic freedom on Australian campuses.
- Produce a comprehensive study of self-censorship on campus in Australia and make the results public. This should look at self-censorship at both the institutional and individual levels to indicate how China has shaped academic direction and substance. This study could be undertaken and published in parallel to the public inquiry.

- Private-sector partnerships with universities should be required to be transparent, and their terms should be on the public record. More detailed and mandatory reporting requirements would allow for this. Details of how the money will be spent and who controls its spending should be publicly available and easily accessible.

These recommendations are intended to start a public conversation on this issue. There's likely to be much more that can and should be done to begin the process of restructuring the university sector.

The Australian National University's statement on academic freedom begins with a quote from its inaugural Vice-Chancellor, Sir Douglas Copland: 'The establishment and maintenance of academic freedom is more important than the actual research and teaching done inside the walls of a university.' This rings even truer today. When the process of restructuring funding for the Australian university sector gets underway, academic freedom and institutional integrity need to be the foremost considerations.

References

ANU (Australian National University) 2018. 'The Australian National University Statement of Academic Freedom 2018', online.

Babones S 2020. 'Update on Chinese student numbers at Australia's G8 universities', *Salvatore Babones*, 11 February, online.

Carey A, Hunter F, Heffernan M 2020, 'Loss of international students set to blow $30b–$60b hole in economy', 17 April, *Sydney Morning Herald,* online.

Department of Education 2019. *2018–2019 export income by state and territory*, research snapshot, December, online.

HRW (Human Rights Watch) 2019. *China: Government threats to academic freedom abroad*, 21 March, online.

Huang E 2017. 'China inflicted a world of pain on South Korea in 2017', *Quartz,* 21 December, online.

Hurst D 2020, 'Why has China slapped tariffs on Australian barley and what can Australia do about it?', 20 May, *The Guardian*, online.

Razik N 2020. 'Australian universities in financial trouble as flow of international students dries up', 29 July, *SBS News,* online.

Shelton T, Feng K 2020. 'China says Australia should "face up to its problems" following "racist incidents" during coronavirus pandemic', 12 June, *ABC News*, online.

Smee B 2020a. 'James Cook University wins appeal in Peter Ridd unfair dismissal case', 22 July, *The Guardian*, online.

Smee B 2020b. 'How a 20-year-old student put the spotlight on Australian universities' cosy relationship with China', 24 May, *The Guardian*, online.

SSCEE (Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment) 2008. *Inquiry into academic freedom*, online.

Tehan D 2019. 'International education makes significant economic contribution', media release, 22 November, online.

UA (Universities Australia) 2019. *Clever collaborations: the strong business case for partnering with universities*, online.

Walden M, Dziedzic S 2020. 'UNSW under fire for deleting social media posts critical of China over Hong Kong', ABC News, 3 August, online.

Xu V, 2017. 'Chinese nationalism jostles with academic freedom in Australia', 15 November, *New York Times,* online.

Zhao Yusha 2020. 'Australian university under attack for article "interfering" HK affairs', *Global Times*, 1 August, online.

Notes

1 'Sydney University criticised for blocking Dalai Lama visit', 18 April 2013, *The Guardian*, online.

Chinese soft power

Vicky Xu

Covid-19: a PR disaster for the PRC

Since the Chinese Government's initial mishandling of Covid-19, as the virus spread from Wuhan to other parts of China and subsequently the rest of the world, the regime has been reeling under criticism.

The virus has exposed many shortcomings of the 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' system: the lack of free media or a flow of credible information, the lack of civil society or any meaningful way for people to self-organise, the silencing of medical professionals and whistleblowers who tried to warn the public of the health crisis, and the impossibility of holding the party-state to be accountable to its own people.

For many people, their wariness of China and its political system is confirmed by those shortcomings. Within China, rage and unprecedented calls for freedom of speech emerged following the death of doctor and whistleblower Li Wenliang (Yu 2020). As Chinese citizens watch officials deny responsibility and attempt to portray failures as successes, they also realise that, in a time of need, they may have been failed by a giant, opaque bureaucratic system that ultimately doesn't serve their interests (Li 2020).

Internationally, the CCP's reputation has also suffered. While some criticisms have stemmed from fear and xenophobia, there are also legitimate concerns. China's cover-up and fabricated statistics seem to have not only harmed its own citizens but also endangered the wellbeing of literally everyone on the planet. How can the world trust the Chinese Government when it intentionally concealed the disease that would later become a global pandemic (Wadhams & Jacobs 2020)?

Despite the Chinese Government's vehement opposition to a global inquiry into the origins of Covid-19, pushed initially by Australia, in the end an overwhelming majority of countries backed an inquiry (Hurst 2020)—albeit one carefully managed by China (Tillett 2020). The full impact of the pandemic's damage to China's reputation has probably been delayed, as many countries are still in the grip of the crisis. As Downing Street officials put it to one UK newspaper, 'There has to be a reckoning when this is over' (Cole & Owen 2020).

Turning a disaster into an opportunity

The Chinese word 'crisis', or 危机, consists of two characters: 危 ('danger') and 机 (which can sometimes mean 'opportunity'). For decades, motivational speakers, missionaries and politicians have used this linguistically flawed theory to inspire their audiences.

The party-state has caught up with the trend. In an April visit to Zhejiang Province, President Xi Jinping was quoted by the *People's Daily* as saying, 'Danger and opportunity coexist. Once we have contained the danger, there is opportunity … [We shall] be adept in capturing and creating opportunities from the danger and difficulties in front of us.'[1]

Months into the global health crisis, the Chinese Government is on the offensive, trying to not only repair its image but also to turn the Covid-19 global and reputational disaster into a geopolitical opportunity.

Chinese diplomats pioneered a new, aggressive style of public diplomacy that quickly became known as 'wolf warrior diplomacy' after a patriotic Chinese blockbuster film of the same name (Zhu 2020). Senior diplomats touted Chinese 'aid' to foreign countries (Chen & Molter 2020) and actively pushed disinformation and false claims that the US Army brought the virus to China (Meyers 2020).

China's emergence from lockdown ahead of other countries provided a significant propaganda opportunity. The Chinese Ambassador to Mali told media that, when fighting the coronavirus, the strength of China lies in 'the strong leadership of the Communist Party and the government, and the discipline and sacrifice of the people', according to *Le Monde* (Bobin & Tilouine 2020).

Claiming that it had contained the virus at home, the government began to laud the success of the 'Wuhan model' as the success of the Chinese political system. It was aided in that messaging by the drastic failure of the US Government to contain the virus there. In an article published on 13 April 2020, *Reference News* (参考消息), a state media outlet, said that a pandemic 'reveals the strengths of a government and a socio-economic system'.[2] The article went on to suggest that the Covid-19 crisis had proved that the American model is dramatically inferior to the Chinese model, under which the party-state can act swiftly and mobilise the entire population effectively. It also dismissed the media in the US as being 'unrealistic'. China's international comparisons have focused almost solely on the US, as it's deeply inconvenient for its narrative of authoritarian strength to acknowledge democratic Taiwan's success, or South Korea's, New Zealand's or Australia's.

Meanwhile, Beijing sought to recast its role in the pandemic as saviour rather than source by engaging in 'mask diplomacy', offering foreign governments much-needed medical aid and advice. By the beginning of April, the Chinese Government had reportedly offered aid to some 120 countries and four international organisations.[3]

The aid boxes came with lines from Chinese poems citing friendship and solidarity, and, according to glowing accounts in Chinese media, evoked Chinese nationalism when they arrived.[4] In Serbia, President Aleksandar Vucic reportedly kissed the Chinese national flag (Zhao 2020). In Italy, according to *Xinhua*, the Chinese national anthem was played in a neighbourhood in Rome.[5] Some yelled 'Grazie China,' while others 'applauded'. In Mexico, Foreign Minister Marcelo Abrard tweeted 'Gracias China!' (Stott 2020).

Desperate for help, the Serbian President made an emotional speech when he announced a state of emergency early in the crisis and said that 'European solidarity does not exist' (Doshi 2020). 'That was a fairy tale on paper. I believe in my brother and friend Xi Jinping, and I believe in Chinese help,' he said. Such public praise from recipient governments appears to have been strongly encouraged by the Chinese Government, if it wasn't a condition of assistance.

Through its highly publicised deliveries of medical supplies, the Chinese Government seeks international recognition and leadership in a proposed new world order (Chen & Molter 2020). When reporting on China's coronavirus aid, both state[6] and commercial (Ju 2020) media regularly use the phrase 'community of shared future for mankind' (人类命运共同体)—a concept that's 'hot and frequent'[7] in Xi Jinping's diplomatic appearances during the coronavirus outbreak.

The concept, which is now considered to be Xi Jinping's vision for the world, first appeared in a speech by former Chinese President Hu Jintao during the 18th Congress of the CCP[8] and was included in the

Constitution in 2018 (Cao 2019). In more than four decades, this is the first major amendment to China's foreign policy, which is shifting from being nation-oriented to being focused on 'humankind' (Zhang 2018).

Xi Jinping's call for a 'community of shared future for mankind' signals the Chinese Government's ambitions to challenge the existing order and dominate the international community.

By doing this, the CCP has attempted to turn the pandemic into an opportunity to present itself as a solution to the global disaster—a disaster that its opaque system and cover-ups created in the first place.

The outcomes of Beijing's 'mask diplomacy'

At the time of writing, it's too early to conclude whether Beijing's propaganda strategies and medical supplies efforts will enhance its overall standing in the international community. Results so far have been mixed.

Beijing has won hearts and minds in one of the most severely hit regions—Eastern Europe. In Hungary, officials have played down aid from the EU and praised the Chinese Government's assistance. The Czech President says only China was there during the virus spread. There have been inroads in Latin America, which is a traditional sphere of influence for the US (Stott 2020).

However, the attempts backfired in other regions. It emerged that many 'donations' of medical equipment were in fact commercial sales (Dunst 2020). There have been reports that Spain, Turkey and the Netherlands (Lo 2020) are angry with their Chinese partner over defective masks and other medical equipment (Campbell 2020).

Australia's public calls for an inquiry into the origin of the virus led to blatant economic reprisal threats from China (McCulloch 2020), further cementing an image of China as an untrustworthy partner and bully on the international stage. But instead of ensuring Australian acquiescence, the threats seem to have had the opposite effect (Dalzell 2020) and have helped galvanise other countries to join Australia and stand up to China—at least where interests are aligned, such as on the need for the virus inquiry.

In India, there's growing anger and resentment towards the Chinese Government for its mismanagement of the virus early on. Complaints have been bubbling up on social media and TV for months. In March, Amitabh Bachchan, a popular Bollywood actor, tweeted a meme that showed World Health Organization chief Tedros Ghebreyesus blindfolded with a Chinese flag (Dhume 2020). In April, the International Council of Jurists and All India Bar Association filed a complaint in the UN Human Rights Council seeking compensation from China for the global spread of the coronavirus.[9] Instead of China, countries such as India have turned to the 'Taiwan model' for guidance (Allen-Ebrahimian 2020).

Curiously, as the Chinese state tries to turn Covid-19 into a national victory story, and when so much of the official narrative is centred on nationalism, there have been unpredictable consequences.

In Thailand, despite the boxes of supplies sent by the Chinese Government,[10] it was Chinese nationalist fervour that exposed China's disconnect from the wider world and left an impression on the Thai public (Griffiths 2020). Popular TV star Vachirawit Chiva-aree and his girlfriend were deemed anti-China for expressing opinions on Taiwan and coronavirus and were attacked by an army of Chinese trolls (Griffiths 2020). On 10 April, the star was forced to apologise, and a social media war quickly escalated. The Chinese Embassy in Bangkok released a strongly worded statement warning Thai politicians that involvement with

'separatist' groups in China would be 'detrimental to Chinese-Thai friendship', which only created further support for those pointing to Chinese Government failures (Buchanan 2020).

From a wider perspective, the virus inside China isn't finished, and the international inquiry's progress and results are yet to be seen. In addition, if Beijing approaches the sharing of any vaccine the way it managed 'mask diplomacy', it might turn a medical victory into a large international setback.

Conclusion

Since the outbreak of Covid-19—a viral disease that originated in Wuhan, China—the CCP has presented itself as the solution to problems that are the result of its system's shortcomings. In China, a common retort to calls for democratisation—or even more transparency from CCP officials—is that there would be chaos because there's no alternative civil society that could replace party power. And yet, that lack of a civil society, of an alternative power or opposition, is precisely the product of the party ensuring that no coherent opposition can form within mainland China.

This paper offers the following recommendations for the Australian Government.

1. Policy responses to Chinese state actions and directions must be based on deep knowledge of the CCP's domestic and international objectives and agendas, as domestic political imperatives (such as portraying the party's management of the pandemic as a success) are often its overriding priority.
2. Many problems in engaging with the Chinese Government aren't simply bilateral ones between China and other states, such as Australia, so working in partnership with other states and international bodies becomes key. Trade alliances with liberal democracies would help strengthen Australia's position against economic coercion or retribution from China.
3. The Australian Government should continue its principled approach to publicly calling out Chinese misinformation on the origins and management of the pandemic, and to put its own account of what really happened in Wuhan on the public record.
4. Australia should continue and deepen its work with Pacific and ASEAN countries to provide medical assistance and other forms of support during the pandemic as an alternative to aid from China.

References

Allen-Ebrahimian B 2020. 'Indians look to Taiwan amid China's coronavirus missteps', *Axios*, 8 April, online.

Bobin F, Tilouine J 2020. 'Le Covid-19, vecteur du "soft power" de Pékin en Afrique' [Covid-19, vector of Beijing's 'soft power' in Africa], *Le Monde*, 2 April, online.

Buchanan J 2020. 'How a photo sparked a Twitter war between Chinese nationalist trolls and young Thais', *Vice*, 14 April, online.

Campbell C 2020. 'China's "mask diplomacy" is faltering. But the US isn't doing any better', *Time*, 3 April, online.

Cao D 2019. 'World embraces Xi's vision for development', *China Daily*, 5 March, online.

Chen A, Molter V 2020. 'Mask diplomacy: Chinese narratives in the COVID era', *Stanford*, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, 16 June, online.

Cole H, Owen G 2020. 'Downing Street says China faces a "reckoning" over their handling of coronavirus and risks becoming a "pariah state" as Boris Johnson faces pressure to scrap the Huawei deal', *Daily Mail*, 29 March, online.

Dalzell S 2020. 'Scott Morrison says Australia won't respond to Chinese "coercion" over warning about universities', *ABC News*, 11 June, online.

Dhume S 2020. 'Delhi isn't buying Beijing's coronavirus hero act', *Wall Street Journal*, 2 April, online.

Doshi R 2020, 'Serbian President: "The only country that can help us is China"', *Twitter*, 17 March, online.

Dunst C 2020. 'How China's mask diplomacy backfired', *The American Interest*, 15 April, online.

Griffiths J 2020. 'Nnevvy: Chinese troll campaign on Twitter exposes a potentially dangerous disconnect with the wider world', *CNN*, 15 April, online.

Hurst D 2020. 'Australia hails global support for independent coronavirus investigation', *The Guardian*, 18 May, online.

Ju X, 'Hardcore China aids the world, and Italians sing the Chinese national anthem', *Sina*, 23 March, online.

Li Y 2020. 'Coronavirus crisis shows China's governance failure', *New York Times*, 4 February, online.

Lo A 2020. 'Beijing loses face with "face-mask diplomacy"', *South China Morning Post*, 23 April, online.

McCulloch D 2020. 'China threatens to stop Australian imports', *Canberra Times*, 27 April, online.

Myers SL 2020. 'China spins tale that the US Army started the coronavirus epidemic', *New York Times*, 13 March, online.

Stott M 2020. 'China cleans up in Latin America as US flounders over coronavirus', *Financial Times*, 9 August, online.

Tillett A 2020. 'China calls virus inquiry victory a "joke"', *Australian Financial Review*, 19 May, online.

Wadhams N, Jacobs, J 2020. 'China concealed extent of virus outbreak, US intelligence says', *Bloomberg*, 2 April, online.

Yu V 2020. '"Hero who told the truth": Chinese rage over coronavirus death of whistleblower doctor', *The Guardian*, 7 February, online.

Zhao KDYQ 2020. '总统亲吻五星红旗、民众感谢"铁杆朋友" 塞尔维亚最高礼遇迎接中国专家' [The president kisses the five-star red flag, and the people thank their "hardcore friends": Serbia's highest courtesy welcomes Chinese experts], *Global Times*, 23 March, online.

Zhang D 2018. 'The concept of "community of common destiny" in China's diplomacy: meaning, motives and implications', *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 16 April, online.

Zhu Z 2020. 'Interpreting China's "wolf-warrior diplomacy"', *The Diplomat*, 15 May, online.

Notes

1 '望海楼 : 读懂危与机的辩证法' [Wanghailou: Understanding the dialectics of crisis and opportunity], *People's Daily*, 14 April 2020, online.

2 Reference News, '俄媒对比中美抗疫模式 : 成效迥异' [Russian media compares Sino-US anti-epidemic model: very different results], *ckxx.net*, 13 April 2020, online.

3 '中国援助是"博出位"？请个别人收起政治用心' [Is China's aid "out of position"? People are asked to put aside their politics], *People's Daily*, 1 April 2020, online.

4 'How China is using soft power to rewrite the coronavirus narrative', *Wall Street Journal*, 24 April 2020, online.

5 '"感谢来自中国的专家组"——记中意两国人民守望相助、共抗疫情的动人瞬间' ['Thank you for the expert group from China: remember the moving moment when the people of China and Italy helped each other fight the epidemic together], *Xinhuanet*, 16 March 2020, online.

6 '书写共建人类命运共同体的战"疫"篇章—记习近平主席推动新冠肺炎疫情防控国际合作' [Writing the 'epidemic' chapter of the war to jointly build a community with a shared future for mankind: remember President Xi Jinping's promotion of international cooperation in the prevention and control of the new coronavirus epidemic], *Xinhuanet*, 5 May 2020, online.

7 'Viruses know no borders! China practises the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind like this', *People's Daily*, 3 April 2020, online.

8 'Commentary: China's continued strength is conducive to the realization of a "community with a shared future for mankind"', *Xinhuanet*, 13 November 2012, online.

9 '"Carefully assembled bio weapon": Another petition filed against China over coronavirus', *Business Today*, 4 April 2020, online.

10 '中国政府向泰国援助抗击新冠肺炎疫情物资' [The Chinese Government assists Thailand with supplies to fight the new coronavirus epidemic], *People's Daily*, 24 April 2020, online.

After Covid-19: Propaganda

Nathan Ruser

In February 2020, the unprecedented outbreak of the Covid-19 coronavirus began to take its first turn on the winding road to the hibernation of the global economy and a health crisis unheard of in recent years. Following an onslaught of CCP-friendly journalists visiting the virus's epicentre in Wuhan, and a crackdown on critical media organisations' reporting in the first weeks of February, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping announced the prioritisation of economic recovery and lambasted 'impractical' measures being taken by provincial governments.[1]

That directive transformed both the reaction to the virus and, according to official statistics, the virus itself in the following weeks. Starting on 14 February, all regions of China began to see a sharp decrease in the number of new confirmed cases each day, and Beijing's enormous propaganda drive began to gear up to, as Louisa Lim phrased it in *Foreign Policy*, 'rewrite the present' (Lim 2020). In doing so, official media organisations of the party and, crucially, diplomats, shifted tack, from massaging the truth while manipulating the narrative and offering implausible deniability for their misdeeds to an all-out misinformation campaign propagated from all levels of Beijing's propaganda machine.

In a tweet in mid-March by Zhou Lijian, the spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry, accusing the US of being the origin of Covid-19 (Zheng 2020), Beijing began to propagate a form of disinformation straight from Russia's playbook. As Beijing feels more embattled, and perhaps more aggressive, in the international reckoning that many analysts believe the Chinese Government will face as the world reacts to the pandemic, this more pernicious form of disinformation could become normalised in China as it has in Russia. In the Chinese Government's battle for the information sphere, the role of truth might become permanently and comprehensively disputed, not just distorted by state-backed propaganda. This isn't a surprising turn of events, given its history.

To examine how Beijing's propaganda machine has previously used disinformation to great effect, it's useful to look further west, to China's Xinjiang region, where a crackdown since 2017 has arbitrarily detained over a million ethnic and religious minority people for ordinary acts of faith and identity while eliminating any expression of minority culture. Despite the unimaginable scale of human rights abuses in the region and the state's complicity, Beijing's deliberate use of propaganda had managed, at least for a period, to convince much of the non-Western world that the crackdown was respectful of human rights.

The linchpin of Beijing's disinformation strategy was a campaign of 'implausible deniability', in which the inconvenience of the truth makes it impossible to execute a robust counternarrative. Instead, what's offered is an implausible explanation that excuses any wrongdoing and provides just enough deniability to avoid scrutiny.

It does this by relying on two key factors in the international system that allow such implausible excuses to meld into pre-existing biases and so not be challenged. They are an economic reliance by many countries on China and an ingrained distrust of US-led information operations, of which Xinjiang has rapidly become one, albeit an information operation that simply needs to amplify and broadcast the truth about the Chinese Government's actions there.

Because of their economic reliance on China, many non-aligned countries find the Xinjiang abuses to be inconvenient. The implausible deniability offered by Beijing allows those countries, and the business communities within them with China trade interests, a logical way out of confronting the realities of the situation. Distrust of US-led information also allows people to dismiss both versions and position the truth somewhere in the middle, perhaps even while understanding on one level that this is jarring.

This subtle and nuanced version of disinformation has been extremely powerful in prompting inaction from a number of countries that have no strong affinity with either China or the US and in providing material for pro-Beijing advocates, whether in business communities or elsewhere, to maintain their previous positions. Even a number of Islamic states with strong grassroots opposition to the campaign of cultural genocide being propagated against China's Muslim minorities, such as Turkey and Indonesia, have so far taken no public stance opposing China's human rights abuses in Xinjiang.

This version of propaganda and disinformation stands in stark contrast to the measures that Russia has undertaken to spread its disinformation, especially about atrocities in Syria. Kremlin-friendly media organisations and Russian diplomats have openly flaunted clearly fake information in order to muddy the idea of truth among a broader public, especially individuals who are sceptical of any information coming from mainstream media sources. This has included sharing video game screenshots as evidence of the US assisting ISIS, photoshopping Google Earth images to 'implicate' Ukrainian forces in the shootdown of Malaysia Airlines flight MH-17, and even hiding the Russian bombing of a mosque in Syria by covering the building with a label.[2]

This stream of disinformation can be likened to a distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack, in which websites and servers are deliberately overloaded with requests from compromised devices, making the sites inaccessible to general users. In the disinformation sphere, this can occur when, although no single piece of misinformation is credible and all can be easily proven false, the sheer volume of claims of disinformation and the nature of social media allow the claims to spread like wildfire, faster than they can be disproved. Disinformation in South Asia is spread through similar means, and WhatsApp forwarding allows it to spread far further and faster than any analysis proving the claims to be false.

The Chinese Government's propaganda response to the Covid-19 pandemic has looked much more similar to previous Russian disinformation campaigns than those previously originating in China. Now, claims without any justification in fact are shared widely by official media channels and Chinese diplomats. ASPI has recently published an analysis of disinformation related to Covid-19 that examines many of the specific levers used by Chinese propagandists to propagate disinformation in response to the pandemic.[3]

Likewise, an investigation by the *South China Morning Post* and *Politico* examined in detail the anatomy of a particularly insidious claim of the coronavirus being brought to Wuhan by an American soldier (Boxwell 2020). That investigation revealed how an apparently fictitious reference to Japanese media in Chinese state propaganda was laundered through US-sceptic conspiracy publications and subsequently shared by Chinese embassies and diplomats and propagated as a result.

One unique feature of China's disinformation effort is the number of 'patriotic accounts' willing to actively boost such conspiracies, which is likely to increase the penetration of many unfounded propaganda theories in a way that Russian disinformation operations rarely achieve.

Continuing the DDoS metaphor, the sheer scale of amplifiers that share and propagate disinformation makes the bandwidth of misinformation much more difficult to counter effectively. Likewise, some biases towards China emanating from either economic dependence or a distrust of the US will promote deeper penetration of these theories in much of the wider world than Russian disinformation operations are able to achieve.

However, in recent weeks, an aggressive discourse by diplomats, officials and Chinese netizens has severely dampened the effectiveness of many of these propaganda streams and highlights the many ineptitudes in Beijing's strategy of public diplomacy. A disproportionately aggressive response by Chinese netizens to a post retweeted by a Thai actor has sparked a pan-Asian backlash (Buchanan 2020). The effect of this was exacerbated by attempts at engagement by China's embassy in Thailand, including the deletion of critical comments on the post. Similarly, public diplomacy from Beijing on abhorrent acts of racism against African people living in China that 'offers no apologies and provides air cover for racist officials' has also sparked a pan-African backlash against China.[4]

In a way, this backlash is unavoidable. As domestic propaganda stifles dissent through intense patriotism and racial chauvinism, it produces a culture among many of China's netizens and public officials that embodies much of the aggression that this propaganda encourages. Increasingly, this appears to be leaving a bad taste in the mouths of many diplomatic partners and sparking grassroots backlash. Victims of this ultra-nationalistic treatment in the past year are numerous, and in many cases the aggression has spurred more discontent with China than it has placated opposition.

The debate between a nuanced and subtle propaganda effort and one that leverages hostile nationalism is playing out right now in Beijing and among its diplomats abroad. In a 14 April *Washington Post* article, Gerry Shih examined the growing rift between more traditionally minded diplomats and officials pushing for a subtle and less confrontational approach and diplomats who favour a rambunctious nationalism that rallies support at home (Shih 2020).

Those debates are far from settled. While right now a confrontational propaganda approach is making Beijing more enemies than friends, various systemic and cultural elements of Beijing's bureaucracy seem to be pushing the CCP further away from a conciliatory tone. This has been evidenced in recent months by Beijing's concerted push to discourage international students from patronising Australian universities and the party's broader deterioration of relations with Australia. Even in propaganda, internal dynamics are a key element of Beijing's narrative.

In the future, China's government can steer into the embrace of confrontational, conspiratorial and nationalistic propaganda that has reared its head in response to the novel coronavirus outbreak. Coupling this confrontational diplomatic posture with efforts to increase soft-power goodwill with other nations has also proven an effective, if perhaps short-term, way to win influence. This would challenge the view in parts of the rest of the world that China's rise could lead the way to a more benevolent and non-interventionist global system and instead force other countries to confront the increasingly neo-imperial aspirations of Beijing. Alternatively, a subtle propaganda effort that leverages the Chinese state's international media penetration could shift attention from its government's initial mishandling of the crisis towards continued failures by particular Western governments, notably the US Government, that ignore China's experience and pay a heavy price for doing so.

As the world shifts its attention from fighting Covid-19 to dealing with its aftermath in the coming months and years, the manner in which blame falls will have significant effects on the global system. Beijing's attempts to dictate the terms of that blame will put a finger on the scales, perhaps in ways it doesn't intend, but that will be only one piece of the puzzle.

Just as the CCP's reactionary and hostile propaganda efforts have begun to backfire, Western states should also avoid needless hostility, conjecture and racially charged language in their efforts to hold Beijing to account for its early failures, which have had such disastrous consequences for the people of China and the world. Early signs suggest that certain offices in Washington are attempting to respond to the baseless claim that the virus originated in the US by propagating theories equally unsupported by evidence, such as that the virus escaped from a biosecurity lab in Wuhan. This doesn't serve those governments well and won't trickle down into a mainstream view held in other parts of the world. Fortunately, efforts in Washington are also not the only ones being made by governments, media and analysts, as the strong international support for an inquiry into the pandemic at the recent World Health Assembly shows.

Instead, it will be seen as an example of equally baseless claims originating from narratives pushed by some Western officials and the US President. This not only hurts efforts to hold China to account for the Covid-19 pandemic but also drastically reduces our credibility when we're trying to call out the numerous abuses of China's foreign and domestic policy, including in Xinjiang and Hong Kong and in its business dealings with other countries.

Countries and groups such as Five-Eye member states, the EU and similarly minded countries such as Japan and South Korea should focus on pushing a non-politicised version of the truth as their most powerful weapon against increasingly unbelievable disinformation campaigns from Beijing. As China's media narrative becomes more transparent about the version of the future that Beijing offers to the world, many countries will realise that they don't want it. It's in the interests of the West to offer a credible and measured alternative.

References

Boxwell R, *South China Morning Post* 2020. 'Opinion: How China's fake news machine is rewriting the history of Covid-19, even as the pandemic unfolds', *Politico*, 4 April, online.

Buchanan J 2020. 'How a photo sparked a Twitter war between Chinese nationalist trolls and young Thais', *Vice*, 14 April, online.

Higgins E 2015. 'Fact checking Russia's claim that it didn't bomb a mosque in Syria', *Bellingcat*, 1 November, online.

Lim L 2020. 'China is trying to rewrite the present', *Foreign Policy*, 23 March, online.

Shih G 2020. 'China's bid to repair its coronavirus-hit image is backfiring in the West', *Washington Post*, 15 April, online.

Zheng S 2020. 'Chinese foreign ministry spokesman tweets claim US military brought coronavirus to Wuhan', *South China Morning Post*, 13 March, online.

Notes

1 'Xi warned officials that efforts to stop virus could hurt economy: sources', *Reuters*, 11 February 2020, online.

2 See, for example, Higgins (2015).

3 See the series of reports listed at *Covid-19 disinformation & social media manipulation*, ASPI, Canberra, 2020, online.

4 Larry Madowo, *Twitter*, 13 April 2020, online.

Covid-19 will accelerate the surveillance state

Kelsey Munro and Danielle Cave

The first global pandemic of the digital age will accelerate the international adoption of mass surveillance and public security technologies. Normalising the use of such technologies could usher in a new surveillance era in which technology-enhanced social control will help to shift power from individuals to the state. Such a shift would exacerbate global trends towards a more illiberal world.

Governments seeking greater social and political control will have an opportunity to use Covid-19 as cloud cover to make capital investments in new and emerging surveillance technologies. Those investments will be made in new and developing technologies that enable, store and process mass collections of location, activity (both physical and digital) and biometric (including DNA and genomics) data. The data will be sourced from data-rich 'internet of things' (IoT) sensors (from surveillance cameras to medical devices), from mobile applications, social media and other personal internet use. The aggregation of this data, particularly when coupled with personally identifiable information and advances in machine learning, will lead to more highly accurate predictive and sentiment analysis, which is likely to be used far beyond public health applications.

Emerging partnerships on strategic and emerging technologies, for example between China and Russia, are likely to deepen, especially as US and EU sanctions against Chinese technology companies steer them towards alternative partnerships (Bendett & Kania 2019, Standish 2020).[1] And the use of spyware technologies in the home to monitor everyday activities, from tracking our working-from-home effectiveness to remote oversight of university exams, will become the norm (Currey 2020).

The proliferation of these technologies risks entrenching international ideological divisions or, worse, tilting the playing field towards authoritarianism. Surveillance and public security technologies hand more effective tools to governments to monitor and manipulate whole populations and further entrench the state's capacity to silence dissent.

There's another, more hopeful, possibility, shown in the response of countries such as Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan and Germany, that the galvanising crisis of the pandemic might work to restore public trust, enhance public debate about and awareness of surveillance technologies, and bed down democratic processes for the handling of citizens' data. But that optimistic future is by no means assured.

The impact of Covid-19 on data and surveillance tech

These technologies will be provided by companies from all around the world, from the US to Israel, but we should expect a growing proportion to come out of China as the Chinese Government makes major investments in high-tech sectors and in the Chinese companies developing the technologies.[2] It's likely that many of these systems will be paid for using China Eximbank loans given to developing countries. Those loans are already supporting large public security and smart city projects across Asia, Europe, South America and Africa. Predominantly implemented by Huawei or China's large state-owned defence or telecommunications companies, the loans have funded a range of public security technologies, including facial and licence recognition systems, data labs, intelligence fusion capabilities and portable rapid deployment systems (Cave et al 2019). E-health applications are explicitly viewed as a global growth

market in a post-pandemic world for state-backed Chinese firms (Askary 2020). Such systems effectively export non-democratic applications of the technology and simultaneously feed the bulk data collection needs of China's national artificial intelligence sector (Hoffman 2019).

The far-reaching consequences of the pandemic have seen public health reframed as a safety and national security issue around the world (Hamilton 2020, Cappe 2020, Beauregard 2020), reflected in Australia in the central role of the National Security Committee of Cabinet in managing the crisis (APL 2020). The pandemic has generated momentum, including in democracies, to cross lines recently thought unacceptable, such as the use of tools that integrate public health and private telecommunications databases, using personal location data to peremptorily trace whole population interactions or enforce voluntary quarantine compliance. Covid-19 could lead to policymaker complacency about trialling and using controversial surveillance tech, and also using surveillance tech unnecessarily. There's also a risk that too sharp a focus on tech 'solutions' could shift focus and resources from proven public health measures, such as mass testing.

The pandemic will normalise the integration of surveillance technologies into people's lives, on top of the pre-existing trend of IoT technologies intruding ever more intimately into their lives. Such devices in residential settings are likely to have a disproportionate impact on women's safety in already abusive contexts. In some states, it will also erode public trust in government and overwhelm people with a sense of doomed resignation about the erosion of freedom and privacy. Such a trajectory serves a range of for-profit and powerful agendas with fundamentally anti-democratic effects.

As evidence mounts that data surveillance applications have been effective in slowing the spread of the virus, the next step is ensuring that public health surveillance tools—rushed into use for an extraordinary crisis and often with some privacy trade-offs—don't become the new norm. Nor should there be a blurring of boundaries where these tools cross over from public health purposes to policing, national security or political applications, as happened in Israel, where the Internet Security Agency was permitted to tap what the *Washington Post* called a 'previously undisclosed database of highly detailed cellphone information' after the government designated coronavirus an issue of 'vital national security' (Power 2020). Where states attempt to extend tools, technologies and the use of data beyond their intended emergency purposes, the public should demand full transparency and a rigorous public debate.

In an accelerated surveillance era, populations of countries that have free and robust media and civil society will be in a stronger position to negotiate. As new intrusive technologies are introduced, democratic publics can demand more information, investigate abuses, publicly argue for a different approach, engage local politicians or stage protests. But the technology itself will play a role in effectively preventing the use of those mechanisms by people in authoritarian countries, while increased use of these technologies in democracies could enhance tolerance of digital modes of authoritarianism.

It isn't just individual privacy at stake: it's the health of democracies and the character of global governance and international relations more broadly. There's some evidence that the world is already on an anti-democratic slide: 22 of the 41 countries ranked 'free' from 1985 to 2005 by Freedom House have experienced net declines in freedom since 2015.[3] While there's some cause for hope, technology doesn't need to come from authoritarian states or from technology companies spruiking their new capabilities. It's a demonstration effect. The crushing economic impacts of the public health measures taken in Australia and across the world are creating heavy pressure from domestic businesses for alternative

solutions that don't require the wholesale lockdown of public life. Technology is being pitched as a way to 'get back to normal' faster (Probyn 2020), and many for-profit outfits are eager to capitalise on this burgeoning market.

The pandemic has boosted a range of existing applications of data and surveillance technology into more widespread use and continues to drive the rapid development of new applications.

Smartphone data

Smartphone applications have been used to combat the spread of Covid-19 in more than 34 countries around the world (Gershgorn 2020).

Apps to record the *Bluetooth interactions* of an infected person's phone with nearby users' phones have been used for automating contact tracing; one example is Singapore's 'Trace Together' app, which was released in March.[4] The Australian Government revealed in mid-April that it was using the source code of Singapore's app to make its own version (Packham & Chambers 2020). Google and Apple also partnered to open up their platforms for governments to create an app to track interactions via Bluetooth without matched location data (Taylor 2020).

*Location dat*a has been a key tool in the pandemic. For example, in South Korea the authorities publish routes taken by infected people using their location data and also send out mass text messages, based on location, to alert users if they're near a confirmed case (Kasulis 2020).

Mobile phone companies have also shared 'anonymised' location data with governments to track the general rate of compliance with shutdown measures. For example, Vodafone provided the location data of several million Australian users 'in an anonymised and aggregated form to the federal and NSW governments' to help monitor the success of social distancing measures (Grubb 2020). Similarly, Google said it would publish 'anonymised' location data for 131 countries to show how people have moved during the pandemic (Elis & Miller 2020). In the EU, where such publication could be a violation of the General Data Protection Regulation, telcos have released 'heat maps' of users' movements, arguing that the information is sufficiently anonymised to prevent the tracking of individuals (Roth et al 2020).

Location data has also been employed in *quarantine enforcement* to notify authorities if people are leaving their residences. For example, Hong Kong provided all new overseas arrivals with electronic bracelets linked to location-tracking apps in smartphones to enforce mandatory two-week quarantine (HKFP 2020).

Health code apps backed by opaque big-data algorithms have become quasi-passports for access to public life. For example, the Ant Financial app in China, an add-on to a commonly used payment app, assigns users a green, yellow or red code based on undisclosed automated assessments of whether or not they pose a public health risk. The *New York Times* found that using the app was 'voluntary', but within days of its release it was in use in hundreds of cities by hundreds of millions of people after citizens couldn't travel or pass through city checkpoints without a green code. Months later a QR-code based health app was still in mass use in the mainland and was set to be rolled out in Hong Kong (Pao 2020). The *Times'* analysis found that the app was sharing users' location data with the police (Mozur et al 2020). Moscow authorities developed a QR code system to enforce a city-wide self-isolation lockdown, in which the city's 12 million residents would be required to get a QR code every time they wanted to leave their home, and show it to the police on demand.[5]

On top of the ubiquitous surveillance cameras in most major global cities these days, the pandemic has driven advances in *facial recognition technology*, including tech that works even when people wear masks. For example, the large Chinese facial recognition company Hanwang claims that its technology now recognises people in masks with 95% accuracy (Pollard 2020). Hanwang began honing the application after hospitals in China requested the function in January.

Surveillance cameras integrating with facial recognition and *thermal imaging* cameras purporting to detect and identify people with fever have been marketed by at least 10 companies to police forces and governments around the world since the pandemic (Glaser 2020). Although their in-field effectiveness was initially considered doubtful, the pandemic has accelerated R&D, and industry voices say there's growing demand for temperature checks at airports and other crowded public areas. 'Fever screening systems' are reportedly being trialled at airports in Australia, the UK and India, using deep-learning algorithms to rapidly detect the body temperatures of up to 2,000 people per hour (Chen 2020).

Drones are being used for surveillance, monitoring or remote public messaging. In China, pedestrians have been harangued by an overhead drone for not wearing masks (Hanrahan 2020). In Belgium, an EU official likened the use of drones broadcasting social distancing warnings to an episode of the dystopian series 'Black Mirror' (Stylianou 2020). Police in West Australia have used drones to monitor social distancing compliance on beaches.[6]

Novel risks are also created where new citizen datasets collected by new state-backed technologies map onto the private data profiles of individual consumers held by private tech companies. In China, the merging of state data on citizens and purportedly private, commercially held data from their smartphones is happening more often, including under the Alipay-backed health code app, but this isn't a risk only in authoritarian environments. In the UK, technology firms are data-mining large volumes of confidential UK patient information under contract from the government to build predictive models for the Covid-19 outbreak and assist with the deployment of critical equipment (Lewis et al 2020). Protecting and securing such new databases—which will be of interest to state actors and cybercriminals—will be an enormous cybersecurity challenge.

Finally, there's a real risk of states refusing to give up 'emergency' powers, enacted during the pandemic, that intrude on individual rights. The US Patriot Act, which granted the government extraordinary powers, including permitting warrantless searches, following the events of 11 September 2001 is still in force two decades later.

Policy prescriptions for the Australian Government

Australia's comparative success in averting the worst-case scenario of the virus gives it standing on the world stage that can be used by policymakers.

Australia has also attracted growing global attention because of major decisions the government has made on critical technologies—specifically, the government's banning of 'high risk vendors' in 5G.

This combination places Australia in a unique position to play a leading and vocal role, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

A new focus on surveillance tech and alternative models

The promotion of policies, standards and norms

Both domestically and globally—and with a particular focus on the Indo-Pacific region—the Australian Government should seek to promote policies, standards and norms for the responsible use of surveillance and public security technologies, while also highlighting alternative models. For example, the cooperative model that the government used to manage the pandemic involved the government working with, and being held publicly accountable by, experts and civil society groups. This has helped to rebuild trust in institutions. This 'good practice' example provides a successful alternative to counterbalance authoritarian models that prioritise social, political and media control and surveillance technologies over transparency and accountability.

This can be pursued by the Australian Parliament and Australian Government departments, including the departments of Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications. These efforts should focus on open dialogue, transparency and ethical use within a human rights and gender framework (for example, these technologies should never be used to target ethnic and minority groups as they're used to target Uyghurs and other minority groups inside and outside of China's Xinjiang region).

DFAT's International Cyber Engagement Strategy

The challenges posed by the proliferation of surveillance and public security technologies, particularly in our region, should feature heavily in DFAT's to-be-updated International Cyber Engagement Strategy (which will soon include 'critical technology').

Broaden out diplomacy

The Australian Government's recent recommitment to a 'coordinated, effective and ambitious pursuit of our priorities in the global system' is important and welcome (Payne 2020). But a variety of approaches are needed because what might be agreed at the UN through hard-fought diplomacy doesn't always eventuate on the ground if states decide not to abide by what they have signed up to in New York or Geneva. Track 1.5 dialogues and public–private partnerships, for example, can be better vehicles to push for change, especially when they include the companies that own, and are selling, the technology. For example, could DFAT's new Pacific Regional–Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific support large ICT and smart city projects that focus on sustainable economic growth and the responsible and transparent use of new technologies?

Encourage new partnerships

The Australian Government should support focused Track 1.5 dialogues that seek to raise broader regional awareness in the Indo-Pacific about data privacy issues, surveillance and emerging technologies. For example, a Track 1.5 dialogue involving Japan, India, Indonesia, Singapore and Australia would help to kickstart regional momentum.

Magnitsky

Australia should introduce Magnitsky-like legislation that sanctions individuals and entities involved in human rights violations. Particular attention and effort should be directed towards ensuring that any new legislation adequately captures individuals and organisations selling technology to states that will use that technology in human rights violations, at home or overseas. Pervasive electronic and visual surveillance and location tracking deployed against whole populations should be recognised for what it is: an excessive and potentially coercive use of state power. Australia should also ensure that the legislation is flexibly constructed to take into account new and unexpected developments that will inevitably occur as new and emerging technologies come into use.

References

Askary H 2020. 'The role of BRI in building a global healthcare system', *Global Times*, 16 May, online.

APL (Australian Parliamentary Library) 2020. *Australian COVID-19 response management arrangements: a quick guide*, Australian Parliamentary Library Research Papers 2019–20, 28 April, online.

Beauregard J 2020. 'Health security is national security', *New Security Beat*, 28 April, online.

Bendett S, Kania E 2019. *A new Sino-Russian high-tech partnership*, ASPI, Canberra, 29 October, online.

Cappe M 2020. 'Public health can't be severed from the security mandate of Canad's security and intelligence services', *Policy Options*, 18 May, online.

Cave D, Hoffman S, Joske A, Ryan F, Thomas E 2019. *Mapping China's tech giants*, ASPI, Canberra, 18 April, online.

Chen Z 2020. 'The next step', *Airport World*, 11 August, online.

Currey E 2020. 'Australian universities should think twice before installing spyware on students' computers', *The Strategist*, 7 May, online.

Elis N, Miller M 2020. 'Enlisting tech to fight coronavirus sparks surveillance fears', *The Hill*, 4 April, online.

Gershgorn D 2020. 'We mapped how the coronavirus is driving new surveillance programs around the world', *OneZero*, 9 April, online.

Glaser A 2020. '"Fever detection" cameras to fight coronavirus? Experts say they don't work', *NBC News*, 28 March, online.

Grubb B 2020. 'Mobile phone location data used to track Australians' movements during coronavirus crisis', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 April, online.

Hamilton R 2020. *COVID-19 and pandemics: the greatest national security threat of 2020 and beyond*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 9 July, online.

Hanrahan M 2024. 'Coronavirus: China deploys drones with cameras, loudhailers to chastise people for unsafe behavior', *ABC News*, 5 February, online.

HKFP (Hong Kong Free Press) 2020. 'Coronavirus and surveillance technology: How far will governments go?', *Advox*, 25 March, online.

Hoffman S 2019. *Engineering global consent: the Chinese Communist Party's data-driven power expansion*, ASPI, Canberra, 14 October, online.

Kasulis K 2020. 'S Korea's smartphone apps tracking coronavirus won't stop buzzing', *al-Jazeera*, 9 April, online.

Lewis P, Conn D, Pegg D 2020. 'UK government using confidential patient data in coronavirus response', *The Guardian*, 13 April, online.

Mozur P, Zhong R, Krolik A 2020. 'In coronavirus fight, China gives citizens a color code, with red flags', *New York Times*, 1 March, online.

Packham B, Chambers G 2020. 'Coronavirus contact-tracing app to help set us free', *The Australian*, 14 April, online.

Pao J 2020. 'HK to launch health code system for travelers', *Asia Times*, 11 June, online.

Payne M 2020. 'Australia and the world in the time of COVID-19', speech at National Security College, Australian National University, 16 June, online.

Pollard M 2020. 'Even mask-wearers can be ID'd, Chinese facial recognition firm says', *Reuters*, 9 March, online.

Power B 2020. 'The coronavirus is expanding the surveillance state. How will this play out?', *Washington Post*, 27 March, online.

Probyn A 2020. 'Coronavirus lockdowns could end in months if Australians are willing to have their movements monitored', *ABC News*, 14 April, online.

Roth A, Kirchgaessner, Boffey D, Holmes O, Davidson H 2020. 'Growth in surveillance may be hard to scale back after pandemic, experts say', *The Guardian*, 14 April, online.

Standish R 2020. 'Pandemic partnership: coronavirus clears path for deeper China–Russia ties in hi-tech', *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, May 2018, online.

Stylianou A-A 2020. Tweet, *Twitter*, 22 March, online.

Taylor J 2020. 'What Australians need to know about Apple and Google's coronavirus tracking app', *The Guardian*, 14 April, online.

Notes

1 'Huawei's courtship of Moscow leaves west in the cold', *Financial Times*, 21 June 2020, online.
2 'China's got a new plan to overtake the US in tech', *Bloomberg*, 21 May 2020, online.
3 *Freedom in the world 2019: democracy in retreat*, Freedom House, 2019, online.
4 *Tracking the global response to COVID-19*, Privacy International, 2020, online.
5 'Moscow to enforce virus quarantine with QR codes, smartphone app', *Moscow Times*, 1 April 2020, online.
6 'Coronavirus crisis: Drone footage shows beachgoers behaving', *The West Australian*, 11 April, online.

Ready, willing and able: national cyber resilience for Australia's small businesses

Max Heinrich CSM, RAAF (Retd) and Alison Howe

On 19 June 2020, Prime Minister Scott Morrison told Australian businesses and organisations that they were being targeted by a sophisticated state-based actor. He said that the activity was:

> targeting Australian organisations across a range of sectors, including all levels of government, industry, political organisations, education, health, essential service providers, and operators of other critical infrastructure. (Morrison 2020)

That warning wasn't the first to the Australian business community. It followed a string of earlier advice from the Australian Cyber Security Centre (ACSC), including the 8 May 2020 advisory titled *Threat advice 2020–009: Advanced persistent* threat (APT) actors targeting Australian health sector organisations and COVID-19 essential services (ASD 2020a). That advisory was the third in a series outlining increasing threat activity leveraging the Covid-19 crisis, identifying the most recent scams, phishing, fraud and attempted intellectual property theft. This surge of activity is confronting enough when we consider our government departments, healthcare institutions and large corporations coming under advanced persistent threat, even with their teams of IT staff and risk mitigation protocols. But what about the organisations that make up one third of the Australian economy and employ 44% of our workforce (ASBFEO 2020: 5)? What does this increased threat mean for small businesses? And what does the threat to small business mean for our overall national cyber resilience?

This paper expands on recent discussion relating to national cyber resilience (Watts & Kenneally 2020). Australia's national cyber security strategy 2020 was released by the Home Affairs Department on 6 August (DHA 2020) and includes welcomed enhancements to the recognition of the vulnerability of the SME sector and a range of new initiatives. In considering whether it goes far enough to address the cyber resilience of the nation's SMEs, we take a closer look at how the Australian small business community might be encouraged to engage in a cybersecurity improvement journey. We consider practical and immediate actions possible in the public policy, technology and security standards domains.

In Australia, a small business is defined as a business with goods and services tax activity of less than $2 million per year, or one that employs fewer than 20 people (ASBFEO 2020: 6). These businesses are tightly staffed to fulfil their primary value proposition, so it's unsurprising that the average small business owner is also responsible for their company IT (ASD 2020b: 5). With typical small business pressures of tight cash flows and time-poor owners, it's also little wonder that, despite surveys showing that Australian small businesses know that cybersecurity is important, most ignore or relegate the information security risks for their businesses because of barriers to implementing good practices. Those barriers include:

- not having dedicated IT staff with an IT security focus
- perceived complexity and confusion over how to address their security risks
- underestimating the risk and consequences of a cyber incident
- poor appreciation of their own understanding of cybersecurity risks (ASD 2020b: 23).

The problem is that over a third of small businesses don't take proactive measures to protect against cyberattacks, and most are happy that their anti-virus software will do the trick (ASBFEO 2020).

It seems that small businesses are worryingly vulnerable. Despite the federal government's 2016 Australia's Cyber Security Strategy demonstrating the government's intent to help Australian businesses enhance their cyber resilience, the outcomes were revealing for the small business sector:

> Perhaps the best example of the disconnect between Australian cyber security policy makers and small business was the $10 million 'Cyber Security Small Business Program', which offered small businesses $2100 to cover half the cost of [an] accredited cybersecurity health check. (Watts & Kenneally 2020)

The scheme allegedly attracted less than 1% of forecast subscribers to the $2,100 subsidy. The free offering attracted fewer than 200 adopters.

Although this result refers to the 2016 strategy, the lesson of the challenges to engage and motivate SMEs to achieve effective cybersecurity standards remains insightful to current and future initiatives, especially as the updated strategy has only been recently released. If a government-subsidised, or even a free, security health check failed to deliver expected engagement levels then, how might the government adjust its approach in this regard?

Ian Bloomfield, who runs Ignite Systems, an IT managed service organisation that specialises in small business customers, relates these frustrations in trying to grow the cybersecurity resilience of the sector:

> The significance of small businesses to the Australian economy is indisputable, which is why I find it so incredibly frustrating to see evidence every day of small businesses with an appallingly poor level of cybersecurity. The poor level of cybersecurity I see mostly results from a lack of money, a lack of knowledge or a lack of incentive to act.[1]

Small business cybersecurity during Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has further complicated the cyber threat environment facing the already low baseline of small business cybersecurity and perfectly illustrates how cyber threats are adaptive to crises. Community anxiety and the flurry of messaging from government authorities attempting to keep the public informed, combined with the rapid growth in Australians working, studying and connecting online, have created an ideal environment for cybercriminals.

The global pandemic has provided cybercriminals with multiple new angles for attack. Between 10 and 26 March 2020 alone, the ACSC received more than 45 pandemic-themed cybercrime and cybersecurity incident reports, while the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's Scamwatch received more than 100 reports of Covid-19 themed scams (DHA 2020).

Additionally, with mass migration to working from home, cybercriminals are also focusing on opportunities to exploit this change in workers' circumstances. Scams that target people working from home often involve malware-ridden content delivered via pseudo websites representing IT companies, banks or any entity of seeming relevance to an employee working from home during the pandemic. Indeed, the World Health Organization (WHO) has, itself, been used as criminal bait:

> Be on alert when you receive an email with any link or attachments containing any reference to WHO. It might be a cyberattack. (WHO 2020)

The pandemic has led to many bricks-and-mortar businesses moving online for the first time. The volume and speed of adoption would ideally be matched by due diligence in the adoption of online retail security practices, but past experience indicates otherwise. For example, a 2018 report states that an analysis of 1,444 retail domains indicated that 90% of them might not be compliant with Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (SS 2018). The standards have six assessed control objectives, including network security, data privacy, access control and information security policy, indicating that online retailers are a highly vulnerable target sector.

Criminals have also taken advantage of anxiety and confusion to target the health sector. According to the ACSC, criminals see this sector as particularly lucrative for ransomware attacks (ASD 2020a). The health sector comprises many small businesses, some of which have access to government data via interfaces to agency systems, working alongside large organisations. Small businesses in the health services sector are subject to the Notifiable Data Breach Scheme, and must report and be accountable accordingly (OAIC, n.d.). This has complex connotations if the medical service provider is accessing government data when a breach occurs. It also raises questions about accountability for government-gathered data when the data is handled by a third-party small business, regardless of its sector of operations.

Small business cybersecurity after Covid-19

The role of government

Underlining the importance of the concept of national cyber resilience, Covid-19 has not only emphasised but exacerbated the reliance of Australian citizens upon internet platforms and online service delivery to manage their lives and businesses. Our national network infrastructure and the businesses that rely on it are essential to the daily running of the country and the economy. This includes the role of small businesses and their part in supply chains.

The 2016 Australia's Cyber Security Strategy acknowledged that 'we must elevate cyber security as an issue of national importance. Leadership will be critical to achieving this goal. The Australian Government will take a lead role and in partnership with others, promote action to protect our online security' (Australian Government 2016: 4).

The 2020 strategy has a slightly altered government emphasis, by highlighting the shared nature of achieving national cybersecurity resilience through the combined efforts of government (federal and state), business and even the community in general.

However, it remains the case that the government has the means of primary influence to drive change to the cybersecurity resilience of the SME sector.

With so little traction in the small business cybersecurity domain to date, we ask what the government can do to provide enhanced leadership to promote the cyber resilience of this specific sector.

In the context of the updated national cybersecurity strategy, we propose three key areas where the government could make a meaningful impact on small business cyber resilience, by developing appropriate policy, supporting standards elevation in the technical environment, and effectively incentivising a lift in small business security standards.

Policy enablers for small business cyber resilience

When discussing the need to create policy to drive the adoption of cybersecurity standards, there's often reference to 'balancing the carrot and the stick'. The government should avoid policy that's perceived to infringe civil liberties or privacy, or to reduce the premise of a 'free and open internet', while providing incentives and support for meaningful improvements. In doing this, policy designers should consider the perspectives of the small business operator in creating levers for positive change.

Such levers could include incentives for technology solution providers and operators to create products and services that are safe and private by design. This involves ensuring that security and privacy protections are incorporated into the design of new products and services from the outset, and would rely on some level of multistakeholder agreement on what 'safety' and 'privacy' mean in specific product and service domains.

The recently-released strategy has gone some way towards this end, calling out that a voluntary code of practice will set out the Australian Government's security expectations for the internet-connected consumer devices Australians use every day. It also states that the Australian Government will work with industry to consider and clarify the cybersecurity obligations of industry in the future, including through regulatory reforms.

Additionally, the government could facilitate the elevation of technical standards that improve online security, particularly in areas such as the domain name system, encrypted certificate standards and secure email protocols. There needs to be clarity on who determines the standards to which the Australian internet should aspire, and this would once again call for multistakeholder oversight.

Finally, the government could support the creation of a 'pull effect' by using its own supply chain of small business providers as a hook for bringing the sector on a cyber-maturity journey. Indeed, the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman (ASBFEO) responded to the 2020 consultation on Australia's cyber strategy with the idea that government 'procurement is a great lever'. Careful design could ensure incentivisation, support and enablement, rather than serve as an overhead. Consider all the small businesses interfaced to welfare- and health-related government agencies embarking on a supported journey of small steps towards a reusable accreditation. Given the access of these supply-chain partners to government-acquired data, the small-business supply chain presents a win–win opportunity:

> Having provided an information sheet about the Notifiable Data Breaches scheme to the co-owner of a small health service provider, I had a discussion explaining how this related to their obligations under the Australian Privacy Principles. His response, 'I don't need to know about all that. It's an IT issue, isn't it?'
>
> —Ian Bloomfield, Ignite Systems

Lifting technology as an enabler of small business national cyber resilience

The 2016 UK National Cyber Security Strategy defined a program to develop active cyber defence (ACD). The ACD program delivers a suite of relatively automated technical capabilities that have proven their worth within the UK public sector. The program was intended to raise the baseline of public-sector cyber defence as a precursor to applying the lessons beyond the public sector. In the words of Ian Levy, the Technical Director of the UK's National Cyber Security Centre, the centre is 'eating our own dog food to

prove the efficacy (or otherwise) of the measures we're asking for, and to prove they scale sensibly before asking anyone else to implement anything' (Russell & Kostyuk 2018).

The principal goal of the ACD program is 'to protect the majority of people in the UK from the majority of the harm, caused by the majority of the attacks, for the majority of the time' (Stevens et al 2019). That's accompanied by the intention to incentivise other sectors to follow its lead.

While, as yet, Australia doesn't have a known equivalent to the ACD initiative, and the updated cybersecurity strategy doesn't refer to such intent, NGO and private-sector initiatives that address elements of the ACD program are in progress. The government should seek to encourage the development of multistakeholder initiatives that drive improvement in secure standards for the Australian internet. Such initiatives include the Internet Society's MANRS (Mutually Agreed Norms for Routing Security) program and ASPI's auCheck platform, which is due for launch in August 2020. The MANRS program is committed to making global internet routing infrastructure more robust and secure. ASPI's auCheck platform (sponsored by auDA) will offer web-check and mail-check testing to help small businesses and individuals understand how their web and mail domains compare to modern internet standards that improve security. There's an opportunity for the government to support and encourage an NGO ecosystem, aligning to the common mission of national cyber resilience.

Lifting small business security standards as an enabler of cyber resilience

Cyber resilience for small businesses in Australia won't fundamentally improve through passive initiatives. Owners are often too cash strapped, time poor and distracted to prioritise cybersecurity, especially after a year of economic shocks.

Offering small businesses a reason to embark on a security improvement journey is the key to raising the baseline across the sector. While there are great resources out there for small business, such as those published by the ACSC (2020) and the ASBFEO (n.d.), those tools, without incentives, are likely to remain well-written resources for researchers of notional and rare small-business cyber best practice. As we've discovered from the low take-up of the Cyber Security Small Business Program, incentives themselves need closer relevance to the day-to-day realities of running a small business.

The UK Government offers a scheme called Cyber Essentials, which has a self-assessment framework that can be scaled to small business and offers an optional enhanced certification that's externally verified. While Australia has the Essential Eight maturity model and the Top Four Mitigation Strategies, they can still present a barrier to adoption for non-technical business owners. Mention 'application whitelisting' and watch eyes glaze over. We recommend the creation of a small-steps, incremental small-business cyber-maturity model and certification. Linking participation in this maturity journey to marketplace incentives would accelerate adoption. Again, the government is uniquely positioned to trial this approach through its small-business supply-chain.

Conclusion

As inherently vulnerable contributors to the Australian economy, small businesses must be seriously considered in any planning for national cyber resilience. This is even more the case in an environment in which we know that sophisticated state cyber actors are actively targeting all levels of business in Australia.

The small business community needs assistance to begin an improvement journey. It needs specific recognition in public policy formation that will drive an improved technical environment and a small-steps approach to cybersecurity maturity in a supported and incentivised manner. The recent Australia's Cyber Security Strategy 2020 includes welcomed steps towards this journey. Whether they represent the correct, necessary targeted solutions and indicate an effective national strategic approach will be closely watched.

References

ACSC (Australian Cyber Security Centre) 2020. *COVID-19: Protecting your small business*, Australian Government, online.

ASBFEO (Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman) 2019. *Small business counts: small business and the Australian economy*, Australian Government, 2019, online.

ASBFEO (Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman) 2020. *Cyber security*, Australian Government, online.

ASBFEO (Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman), no date. *ASBFEO cyber security guide*, PowerPoint presentation, Australian Government, online.

ASD (Australian Signals Directorate) 2020a. *Advisory 2020-009: Recommendations to mitigate APT actors targeting health sector and COVID-19 essential services*, Australian Government, online.

ASD (Australian Signals Directorate) 2020b. *Cyber security and Australian small businesses: results from the Australian Cyber Security Centre Small Business Survey*, Australian Government, online.

ASD (Australian Signals Directorate) 2020c. *Threat update: COVID-19 malicious cyber activity 20 April 2020*, Australian Government, online.

Australian Government 2016. *Australia's Cyber Security Strategy: enabling innovation, growth & prosperity*, online.

DHA (Department of Home Affairs) 2020. *Australia's Cyber Security Strategy 2020*, Australian Government, online.

Morrison S 2020. Joint media statement with Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Defence, 19 June, online.

OAIC (Office of the Australian Information Commissioner), no date. *Notifiable data breaches*, Australian Government, online.

Russell S, Kostyuk N 2018. 'Evaluating the UK's "Active Cyber Defence" Program', *Lawfare*, 14 February, online.

SS (Security Scorecard) 2018. *2018 retail cybersecurity report*, online.

Stevens T, O'Brien K, Overill R, Wilkinson B, Pildegovics T, Hill S 2019. *UK Active Cyber Defence: a public good for the private sector*, Cyber Security Research Group, The Policy Institute, King's College London, January, online.

Watts T, Keneally K 2020. *National cyber resilience: is Australia ready for a computer COVID-19?*, discussion paper, 15 May, online.

WHO (World Health Organization) 2020. *Beware of criminals pretending to be WHO*, online.

Notes

1 Ian Bloomfield, Ignite Systems, Melbourne, interview for this article.

Conclusion

Michael Shoebridge and Lisa Sharland

Australia has enormous opportunities to influence the world for good, in ways that advance our wellbeing, security and prosperity. That's the most striking message from this collection of 'After Covid' articles and policy proposals, whether the writers are looking at multilateralism, the Korean Peninsula, Australia–India or Australia–Japan relations, women in national security, right through to the Bangsamoro peace process in Mindanao.

The other clear message is that Australia needs to think big to take up those opportunities. Simply accelerating or continuing current policies and engagement won't produce the results we want. Waiting for others to define a post-Covid-19 agenda for us, whether that's the UN, Washington, Delhi, Tokyo or Brussels, just won't work, because everyone is groping about in search of solutions.

Notably, in several areas, Australians have done at least as much thinking about this as anyone else on the planet. It turns out that we aren't bad at navigating concurrent crises and making decisions that attract domestic and international support. Australia's policy and influence can help lead debates and decisions, just as we have in China policy and in technology policy, notably with 5G and countering foreign interference.

This volume of articles shows us that Australia is entering a more disorderly, poorer world where there's a real risk of nations and peoples turning inward and hoping that big problems—such as intense China–US struggles over strategic, economic and technological power—will go away without anyone having to make hard choices; that, if we just wait, we can get back to business as usual. That won't work. The risk of military conflict between the world's two big powers, involving US allies such as Australia and Japan, will be greater in coming months and years than at most times since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

The authors of these papers have set out many examples of successful actions and decisions by partnerships of leaders and nations other than the 'big two'. Some, such as the World Health Assembly agreement to have an independent inquiry into the global pandemic and its causes, resulted from successful multilateral diplomacy and engagement by Australia and others, notably the EU, but also African and Asian partners.

This volume sketches an enormous canvas for Australian policymakers.

The ambition required from our Australian leaders and policymakers in politics, business, academia and civil society is equally enormous, but it's essential, given what's at stake. Putting human security and the aspirations of our region in the centre of our Pacific policy is possible and achievable and is the key to the deeper security and social and economic integration of our Pacific family.

It's also possible, with partners, to bend ASEAN's technological and economic integration away from the easy default path of comprehensively buying into Beijing's techno-surveillance model of 'prosperity'. We can help to do that by seizing opportunities to work on much broader political, security, technological and economic levels with Delhi, Tokyo, Seoul, Brussels and London. Those partnerships will also power Australia's influence and engagement in international forums, whether the East Asia Summit, ASEAN or the UN.

Maybe the central agenda in all this is captured best by the idea that success for Australia will come from demonstrating competence in the pandemic, but also in the turbulent world following it. Doing so, as Anna Powles puts it, requires us to be expert, starting at home. Underlying all the new international opportunity for Australia is an urgent need to be as competent, expert and ambitious in domestic policy as we've shown we can be on the global stage. And that means thinking bigger than a newly painted but old agenda for our economy based on deregulation, tax cuts and spending restraint once the peak of the Covid-19 crisis is over. That's because the global economy and international system have been changed by the pandemic.

Our ambitions to create energetic international partnerships with like-minded nations and groups on security, human rights, technology and economics require a national approach that's equally creative and vibrant and necessitate our engagement with multilateral organisations and processes. That means breaking stale old federal–state positioning and politics. We need to use the billions of dollars that are going to be spent trying to kickstart Australia's economy in ways that align with the directions our writers have identified here.

So, the Pacific Step-up will be turbocharged through greater understanding of and investment in human security, which may open the door to more opportunities for Australian investment, business and people-to-people links. Supply-chain vulnerabilities for India, Japan, the EU and Australia can be overcome through combined public–private investments that create new enterprises and new partnerships throughout our economies, as long as our leaders resist siren calls to resurrect protected industries in each of our nations.

And the pandemic has demonstrated even further the potential for state-sponsored and derived technologies (such as high-tech surveillance systems and e-commerce platforms) to change the nature of state–citizen interactions in ways that simultaneously reduce people's freedom and states' sovereignty if those technologies are adopted uncritically. That opens opportunities for partnership with others facing the challenges of building digitally based economies while protecting social and political freedom.

That's a dizzying array of policy directions, but they're all bounded by two ideas.

What we do here in Australia helps set the foundation and direction of our global and bilateral partnerships.

And what we do internationally can change global directions.

About the authors

Aakriti Bachhawat is a Researcher in the Defence and Strategy Program at ASPI.

Louisa Bochner is a Program Coordinator in the International Cyber Policy Centre at ASPI.

Gai Brodtmann is an ASPI Council Member, a Board Member of Old Parliament House and an Advisory Board Member of Sapien Cyber.

Dr Elizabeth Buchanan is a Lecturer of Strategic Studies at Deakin University and Non-Resident Fellow at the Modern War Institute at West Point. @BuchananLiz

Caitlin Byrne is a Professor of International Relations and Director of the Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University.

Danielle Cave is the Deputy Director of the International Cyber Policy Centre at ASPI.

Santilla Chingaipe is a journalist and filmmaker whose work covers Africa and Australia's African communities.

John Coyne is the Head of Strategic Policing and Law Enforcement Program and Head of the North and Australia's Security Program at ASPI.

Malcolm Davis is a Senior Analyst in the Defence and Strategy Program at ASPI.

Graeme Dobell has been a journalist since 1971 and is ASPI's Journalist Fellow.

Genevieve Feely is a Researcher at ASPI.

Richard Gowan is the UN Director for the International Crisis Group. He is based in New York City.

Amy Haddad is a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion specialist and independent consultant.

Max Heinrich is a retired senior Royal Australian Air Force officer with extensive command and aviation experience in ISR and Electronic Warfare operations, and cyber security policy and capability development.

Bart Hogeveen is the Head of Cyber Capacity Building in the International Cyber Policy Centre at ASPI.

Alison Howe is a Cyber Project Manager in the International Cyber Policy Centre at ASPI.

Daria Impiombato is a Research Intern at ASPI.

Charlie Lyons Jones is a Researcher in the Defence and Strategy Program at ASPI.

Khemta Hannah Jose writes on international affairs with a focus on the Indo-Pacific, and is a journalist at the ABC.

Huong Le Thu is a Senior Analyst in the Defence and Strategy Program at ASPI.

Rod Lyon is a Senior Fellow at ASPI.

Tony McCormack is a Fellow with the North and Australia's Security Program at ASPI.

Kelsey Munro is a Senior Analyst working with the International Cyber Policy Centre at ASPI.

Alexandra Pascoe is a Research Intern at ASPI.

Anna Powles is a Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Defence and Security Studies, Massey University.

Nathan Ruser is a Researcher working with the International Cyber Policy Centre at ASPI.

Tomohiko Satake is a Senior Research Fellow in the National Institute for Defense Studies, Japan.

Lisa Sharland is the Head of the International Program at ASPI.

Michael Shoebridge is the Director of the Defence and Strategy Program at ASPI.

Jeffrey Wall has had a 40 year association with PNG, advising a number of Prime Ministers and major companies.

Vicky Xu is an Analyst working with the International Cyber Policy Centre at ASPI.

Acronyms and abbreviations

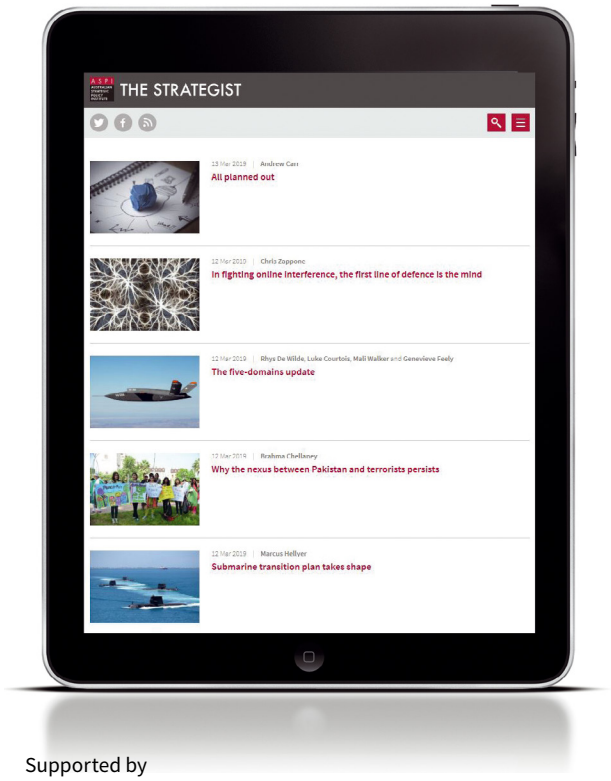
AAT	Australian Antarctic Territory
ACD	active cyber defence
ACD	Active Cyber Defence (UK program)
ACSC	Australian Cyber Security Centre
ADF	Australian Defence Force
ADIZ	air defence identification zone
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASW	ASEAN Single Window
ATS	Antarctic Treaty System
AU	African Union
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BTA	BARMM Transition Authority
C-34	Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations of the UN
DDoS	distributed denial of service
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
EEZ	exclusive economic zone
EU	European Union
FOIP	free and open Indo-Pacific
ICAC	Independent Commission Against Corruption (PNG)
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
IoT	internet of things
IRBM	intermediate-range ballistic missile
JSDF	Japanese Self-Defense Forces
LAC	Line of Actual Control (Sino-Indian border)
LNG	liquefied natural gas
LoC	Line of Control (Kashmir)
MANRS	Mutually Agreed Norms for Routing Security
MERS	Middle East respiratory syndrome
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (NZ)
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	non-government organisation
NGO	non-government organisation
NPG	Nuclear Planning Group
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PHP-C	Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on Covid-19
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PNP	Philippine National Police

PPE	personal protective equipment
PRC	People's Republic of China
Quad	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
R&D	research and development
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
ROK	Republic of Korea
SAARC	South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation
SARS	severe acute respiratory syndrome
SLBM	submarine-launched ballistic missile
SNOWCAT	supporting nuclear operations with conventional air tactics
TEL	trailer–erector launcher
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
UN	United Nations
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime
UN-SWAP	UN System Wide Action Plan
WHA	World Health Assembly
WHO	World Health Organization

WHAT'S YOUR STRATEGY?

Stay informed via the field's leading think tank, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

The Strategist, ASPI's commentary and analysis website, delivers fresh ideas on Australia's defence and strategic policy choices as well as encouraging discussion and debate among interested stakeholders in the online strategy community. Visit and subscribe to an email digest at www.aspistrategist.org.au.



facebook.com/ASPI.org

@ASPI_org

ASPI
AUSTRALIAN STRATEGIC POLICY INSTITUTE

Supported by

LOCKHEED MARTIN THALES

To find out more about ASPI go to www.aspi.org.au or contact us on 02 6270 5100 and enquiries@aspi.org.au.

After Covid-19

Volume 2

Australia, the region and multilateralism

The global Covid-19 crisis continues to dominate the international strategic environment, fuelling uncertainty about the future. The only thing that's certain is that this pandemic will be with us for some time yet, meaning that Australia, like other nations, needs to be prepared to manage its response to the pandemic while simultaneously focusing on the future.

This volume of After Covid-19 builds on volume 1 and identifies some of the future challenges and opportunities as they relate to Australia's role in the region and the multilateral system.