Australian Foreign Policy

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“Competing perceptions of the national interest” don’t really exist in the mainstream. Bipartisanship in foreign policy is the norm (with few exceptions - eg Iraq war) and it is the enemy of policy choice - a product of the ideological convergence of the main political parties.

Foreign policy “debates” in Australia are largely perfunctory and without real content - posturing rather than substance.

Differences between domestic and foreign policy are now illusory - foreign policy has been domesticated by the Howard Government (asylum seekers, counter-terrorism, surveillance, Bali, East Timor, Lebanon), though it rarely determines election results on its own.

Foreign policy is still largely reactive to the unexpected and the unpredictable (2004 Tsunami, drugs trials in Indonesia, East Timor, West Papuan refugees, Solomons) - policy is often made ‘on the run’.
Shakers & Movers

- PM & Foreign Minister (crises, personal interest, personal relationships - George W. Bush, SBY, Tony Blair, Rupert Murdoch)

- Political advisors - party & ministerial staffers, politically-appointed ambassadors

- PM & C, DFAT & Defence (fearlessly independent or politically cowered?)

- Talkback radio and ‘shock jocks’ - public opinion, polls & Op Ed articles

- Embassies & Ambassadors in Canberra - US, UK, Indonesia, Japan

- Intelligence community - ASIO, AFP, ASIS, DSD, DIO, ONA

- Ethnic communities - Jews, Lebanese, Greeks, British
Historical & Cultural Influences

- British colonial settlement, institutions (legal & political) & ties
- US alliance (WW2, ANZUS, post-9/11)
- ‘Western’ identity in East Asia, - odd man out or in?, ambivalence about regional engagement (trade & investment not politics, sport, culture), ASEAN + 3, ASEM
- Liberal-democratic political culture, a secular, tolerant & multicultural society (a foreign policy asset?)
- Commitment to universal values - being a good international citizen (aid, refugees, environment, human rights)
- Insecurity, incapable of self-defence, security fears about the region (refugees, immigrants - real or imagined?)
Political economy of state capitalism - a mixed economy, 12th largest economy in the world - medium-sized advanced industrial society, high standard of living.

Heavily dependent on export trade & foreign investment (free trade, openness, small population) - new markets in East Asia.

Vulnerable to external shocks & policy settings (interest rates, economic growth, stock market downturn - globalisation).

From agriculture & mining to manufacturing & services.

Bipartisan support for neo-liberal, pro-business economic policies.

The world economy may be too complex and too diverse for human understanding & rational management. It is a mistake to ascribe coherence and rationality to it - no one truly seems to understands how capitalism actually operates.
Friends & Enemies

- US - uncritical ally, vicarious foreign policy (Israel-Palestine, Lebanon), reckless leadership (Afghanistan, Iraq, North Korea, Iran?), intelligence sharing, FTA, an independent foreign policy?

- ‘War against terror’ conflates a number of separate, unique & disconnected conflicts - making enemies and becoming a larger target (Bali, anti-Islam), spreading democracy by force?

- US alliance v regional engagement? China v US over Taiwan - could Australia take sides in this nightmare scenario?

- Are there military solutions to political and social challenges in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran & East Timor? Why is Australia involved?
The Region

- Proximity to East Asia, distance from Europe and North America - a crisis of political identity?

- Balance of payments crisis & defence policy change in 1980s a prerequisite for regional economic engagement

- Preference for neighbourhood stability (Fiji, Bougainville, Solomons, East Timor, Indonesia) & immutable political boundaries (Aceh, West Papua)

- Concern about failing states (Solomons, PNG, East Timor) - administrative incompetence & aid dependence

- Transitions to democracy (Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea, Taiwan)

- Economic importance of Japan (whales), China (human rights), India (nukes) & South Korea (North Korea) - ASEAN + 3, ASEM

- Troubled political relations with Indonesia (state terrorism, legal process) & Malaysia (personality clashes)
Foreign policy issues

- Defence of Australia (DOA) v expeditionary policies - is there a “global struggle against terrorism” (Brendan Nelson) which we must be involved in?

- Are we at war? Are governments exploiting our fears & insecurities?

- Coalitions of the willing led by US v multilateralism (the protections of international society, ambivalence towards the UN)

- Middle power or significant player? Should we seek to punch above our weight?

- Neglect of South-West Pacific (coups & failing states)

- Can Australia be more independent within an alliance framework?

- The world is becoming less certain and more dangerous
Further Information
(Available from tomorrow)

http://scottburchill.net/VCE

- A pdf of this slideshow can be downloaded
- A podcast of this lecture can be downloaded (requires iTunes and Quick Time loaded on your Mac or PC)
- Recommended readings
- An email address to submit questions