13. Foreign policy

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In 2007, when Kevin Rudd was sworn in as Prime Minister, he was widely expected to be a strong leader of Australian foreign policy (Manne 2008). While most analysts believed that a strong alliance with the United States would be maintained, it was also anticipated that Rudd would reassert a traditional Labor preference for stronger engagement with Asia. For those concerned that the previous Howard government had drifted too far into the orbit of US influence, Rudd also provided the hope that Australia would return to a more independent middle-power activism with action on issues such as nuclear non-proliferation and climate change. Finally, Rudd's experience in China—first as a student and later as a diplomat—also suggested an opportunity to solidify Australia's relationship with China, its largest non-allied trading partner. Many of these perceptions, however, were not fully realised by the conclusion of Rudd's prime ministership and problematic episodes in foreign policy were, at times, compounded by the Prime Minister's chaotic and overcentralised leadership style. While his personal activism did lead to a number of foreign policy successes, including the elevation of the G-20 as the world's primary economic forum, on balance, Rudd's single term in office did not live up to expectations.

DFAT, defence and new directions in Australian foreign policy

Following the election of the Labor Party, Rudd quickly sought to make his mark in the management of Australia's foreign affairs. While commentators have noted the general centralisation of government in the Prime Minister's office (Kelly 2005:1), Rudd expanded this practice considerably and quickly sought to centralise the flow of information within the government as well as making key appointments. For example, Duncan Lewis—formerly from the Defence Signals Directorate—was appointed as the first National Security Advisor; his duties included the creation of the *National Security Statement* as well as the Counter-Terrorism White Paper and the Defence White Paper. Rudd also appointed personal envoys to report on challenging issues: Richard Woolcott in connection

with the Asia-Pacific Community (APC) proposal and Ross Garnaut in relation to climate change. While this approach enabled him to closely scrutinise government policies, Rudd was criticised for a lack of consultation and the practice also resulted in delayed policy implementation (Stuart 2010:150).

Rudd selected Robert McClelland to be Australia's Foreign Minister, but this appointment did not survive Labor's transition into government. McClelland's primary faux pas occurred three weeks before the election when, in the midst of Indonesian hearings concerning the death penalty for the Bali Bombers, he criticised the use of the death penalty in Indonesia. Consequently, Rudd was forced to replace McClelland with Stephen Smith. As Smith had no prior experience in foreign policy, a major power imbalance emerged and Rudd further exacerbated this through his centralisation of strategic analysis into the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and/or his own office (Stuart 2010:viii). As Graeme Dobell (2009a) subsequently argued, 'Kevin Rudd [was] his own über Foreign Minister'.

Given Rudd's early career work for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)—at one point being groomed as a future department secretary (Macklin 2007:88)—he was relatively well positioned to adopt the *über* role. Despite this, relations between Rudd and DFAT remained awkward, with some DFAT officials complaining that he was an overly demanding taskmaster who interfered in the day-to-day running of the department (Flitton 2009:5). Because of these tendencies, some DFAT officials complained that they had been reduced to little more than a 'visa-processing offshoot of the prime minister's office' (Stuart 2010:130). Consequently, after Rudd was removed from the prime ministership, Stephen Smith, as Foreign Minister, deemed it necessary to declare that DFAT needed to 'return itself entirely to the centre of policy deliberations in the national capital and to make sure that we were contesting advice and contesting views' (Grattan 2010:4). Further—and despite his criticism of the previous Howard government for reducing the budget of DFAT—Rudd similarly reduced the department's budget in 2008 (DFAT 2008) with only small budgetary increases in 2009 and 2010. Problematically, he also increased the department's responsibilities and this led to reduced morale (Weisser 2008). Thus, under the leadership of Australia's first *diplomat-in-chief*, Australia continued to maintain one of the smallest international diplomatic presences of any Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) country (Lowy Institute 2009).

Rudd also broke with a century of Labor Party tradition by demanding (and receiving) the right to choose his own cabinet (Donald 2007). His choice for the Defence Minister, Joel Fitzgibbon, however, was never able to develop a sound working relationship with the department. Notably, 16 months into the term, officials from defence were accused of leaking a 'dirt file' detailing a potentially inappropriate relationship between Fitzgibbon and a Chinese

businesswoman with connections to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Baker et al. 2009:1). This development—combined with accusations that Fitzgibbon's brother (the director of the private health insurance company NIB) had been provided inappropriate access to government officials—led to the first and only ministerial resignation from the Rudd government. Fitzgibbon was replaced with John Faulkner (Coorey 2010:1).

Rudd's managerial style also led to delays with the delivery of the Defence White Paper (Walters 2008b:2). Nonetheless, it provided a bold reassessment of Australian military strategy (White 2009) and, in line with the budgetary trends of the Howard government, recommended annual 3 per cent increases to the defence budget. The final report was, however, also notable for simultaneously demonstrating the strengths and weaknesses of Rudd's prime ministership with some sections being highly lucid in their analysis but with inadequate deliberation of the implications of other sections (Hugh White, Interview with authors, Canberra, 2010). For example, the paper openly discussed the implications of both a rising China and a potential decline of US interest in the Asia-Pacific but, as discussed later, its 'muddled' language needlessly strained relations with China (Garnaut et al. 2009). Critics also doubted whether the \$20 billion in budgetary savings proposed by the White Paper were feasible (White 2009).

In the context of public perception, the Rudd government successfully obtained the confidence of the Australian public in its handling of international affairs (Crikey 2010). Such confidence was, in part, aided by disunity and change in the opposition as they experimented with three different shadow foreign ministers—Andrew Robb, Helen Coonan and Julie Bishop—during the Rudd period. These three ministers were relatively ineffective in their attempts to question the Rudd government's foreign policy and, in terms of public opinion, made some serious errors in judgment. Julie Bishop, for example, suggested that Australia should acquiesce to Chinese demands and not grant a visa to Rebiya Kadeer, a Uighur dissident and documentary filmmaker. Bishop also 'blundered badly' (Stuart 2010:159) when she likely abused her privileged access to classified material by publicly asserting that Australian intelligence services forged foreign passports. Meanwhile, some analysts were critical of the lack of attention by the opposition to the formation of credible alternative policies for defence and foreign affairs—at least beyond some strong but shallow rhetoric concerning asylum-seekers (Ungerer 2010).

Middle-power activism: more bark than bite?

Beyond the administration of DFAT and the Department of Defence, Rudd was also determined to return Australia to an activist middle-power role. His middle-power vision for Australia was first outlined in a 2006 article in *The Monthly* magazine entitled 'Faith in politics'. Rudd described his vision as

one which seeks to take Chifley's vision of a 'light on the hill' into an uncertain century. This is an enlarging vision that sees Australia taking the lead on global climate change...on the Millennium Development Goals...This is an Australia that becomes a leader, not a follower, in the redesign of the rules of the international order that we helped craft in 1945, to render future genocides both intolerable under international law and impossible through international resolve. (Rudd 2006)

While in office, Rudd reaffirmed this ambition in his 2008 *National Security Statement*. After reiterating his support for both the ANZUS alliance and multilateral institutions, he declared that his government would 'promote an international environment, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, that is stable, peaceful and prosperous, together with a global rules-based order which enhances Australia's national interests' (Rudd 2008a:2). Rudd envisaged an Australia that would be a leader in the spread of global ideas and the promotion of multilateralism and international law. He also envisioned an Australia that would be at the forefront of tackling climate change and that would lead a charge against both nuclear non-proliferation and whaling.

Thanks to the work of the Hawke and Keating governments and, to a lesser extent, the Howard government, Australia is widely seen as a 'global champion of non-proliferation' (Lantis 2008:1). Such perceptions have been reinforced by Australia's hesitancy to fully utilise and profit from the possession of the world's largest uranium deposits. Rudd built on these perceptions by founding the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND) in early 2008. The commission, which was co-chaired by two former foreign ministers—one from Australia (Gareth Evans), the other from Japan (Yoriko Kawaguchi)—was established to provide policy recommendations concerning practical short, medium and long-term steps to control proliferation and, eventually, complete nuclear disarmament. The commission was supported by the United States following the election of President Barack Obama, as nuclear disarmament has been a priority for the President (Davies 2009:10). Obama also recognised Australia's potential middle-power role and invited Rudd to speak at the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit—the largest gathering of world leaders since the founding of the United Nations. The summit could have been one of the highlights of the Prime Minister's term as it would have demonstrated

the importance of Australia in US foreign policy and provided Australia with a unique opportunity to influence international policies about a key global challenge. Because of Rudd's overcentralisation, however, the Prime Minister became distracted with the details of health reform and, following a new wave of criticism caricaturing him as 'Kevin 747', he cancelled his attendance (Stuart 2010:130).

Throughout Rudd's prime ministership, he pressured Japan to agree to a complete prohibition of whaling. His strategy evolved from increasing monitoring and public denunciation in 2008 to seeking recourse from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) by 2010. This activism, however, risked a relationship with a key strategic ally in terms of trade and the promotion of other goals such as nuclear non-proliferation or new forms of regional multilateralism. Nevertheless, Rudd's attempt to influence the standards of appropriate behaviour in Japan was reminiscent of the Keating government and its concept of 'good international citizenship'; however, his diplomacy did not seem to apply the lessons from that period. Gareth Evans, the foreign minister most clearly identified with the concept, set up four criteria for successful middle-power activism: 'careful identification of opportunities for action, sufficient physical capacity to follow issues through, including the energy and stamina to ensure that good ideas did not fall by the wayside, intellectual imagination and creativity, and credibility through independence and consistency' (Scott 1999:234). Australia was unable to influence Japan on the issue, *inter alia*, and the June 2010 negotiations through the International Whaling Commission subsequently collapsed.

The preceding analysis indicates that while Rudd possessed intellectual imagination and creativity, his record demonstrated a limited capacity to follow through with the implementation of ideas and policies. For example, his pre-election pledge that he would seek to prosecute Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, at the ICJ for 'inciting genocide' was later dropped when it received significant criticism (Shanahan 2007:1). Rudd also indicated his strong opposition to the use of the death penalty anywhere in the world, but, following the earlier mentioned statement by Robert McClelland, Rudd dropped the subject.

Rudd's focus on action probably came at the expense of exploring more 'niche' opportunities where Australia's contribution as a so-called middle power would be greater. Thus, foreign policy analysts, such as former DFAT secretary Stuart Harris (Interview with authors, Canberra, 2010), have noted that a feature of prime minister-centred governance has been a focus on short-term initiatives with little preparation or follow through. Further, the chaotic and overly centralised leadership style of the Prime Minister probably impacted on his attempts to utilise multilateral forums to promote Australia's interests and/or influence interstate behaviour.

Source: David Pope, *The Canberra Times*, 8 January 2009

Multilateralism in Australia's international relations: a mixed record?

Rudd was well aware of how difficult it is for middle powers, such as Australia, to effectively contribute to the evolution of international policy concerning international security and economic issues. In order to overcome these disadvantages, Rudd fervently believed in the utility of multilateral organisations (such as the United Nations) as a means for middle powers to exercise a voice. On this issue, he appeared to identify with Herbert 'Doc' Evatt and his significant contributions to that organisation. In 2002, he suggested to Parliament that 'Evatt grasped this single and central fact: for small powers, the multilateral system offers the only chance; for middle powers, it offers the best chance' (Rudd 2002:4329). The similarities between Rudd and Evatt are worth noting. Both were passionate about foreign policy but even after taking over the leadership of their party they remained relative outsiders in their own parties. Both were very demanding taskmasters, and neither was well liked by his colleagues. While Evatt was allowed to contest and lose three elections as ALP opposition leader in the 1950s, Rudd is the only prime minister to have been deposed in his first term. Rudd maintained this perspective through to his election as Prime Minister, adding, in 2008, that there is 'a brittleness in a foreign policy based only on bilateral relations' (Rudd 2008a:5). In this vein,

Rudd promoted the G-20, launched a bid for a seat at the UN Security Council and, more controversially, attempted to create a new multilateral security organisation for the Asia-Pacific. Of these three initiatives, however, the Prime Minister's most successful and important contribution to international order and Australian foreign policy occurred when he helped to secure the G-20 as the premier financial forum for world leaders (Fullilove 2010).

During the Asian financial crisis in 1998, Australia supported an initiative by US President Bill Clinton to establish the G-20, as it would cover two-thirds of the world's population or 90 per cent of the global economy (Costello and Coleman 2008:183). Despite the 'nurturing and building work' that then Treasurer, Peter Costello, put into the forum (Dobell 2010), the G-7 (later G-8) remained the premier economic summit. In 2008, however, Rudd utilised the global financial crisis to successfully lobby to increase the significance of the G-20. Australia's diplomacy commenced with the United States, where Rudd convinced Obama to support replacing the G-8 with the G-20. According to US Assistant Secretary of State, Kurt Campbell, Rudd 'was relentless in his making of the case, he persuaded key players, made the case with a number of players who were a bit reluctant' (Sheridan 2009:13). Some foreign policy analysts interpreted Rudd's role in the G-20 as his most 'redeeming international achievement' (Medcalf 2010). Other analysts went as far as to suggest that Rudd's contribution to the G-20 would 'alone' ensure a positive appraisal of his foreign policy record (Dobell 2010). For Rudd, the benefits of the G-20 were clear: 'before the G20, global economic decision-making was dominated by the G8—a small group of major economies mostly in Europe and North America. Australia was left out in the cold, cut off from the major economic decisions of our time' (Dobell 2009b:5).

Rudd also sought an influential position for Australia in the world's top security forum—a UN Security Council seat in 2013. This initiative was symbolically important given the previous Howard government's scepticism of the United Nations (Sheridan 2004). While Australia's bid came several years after Finland's and Luxembourg's, Australia quickly gained momentum by dedicating \$13.1 million to the task (Fullilove 2009:2). Nonetheless, the Liberal–National opposition described the bid as a 'quixotic pursuit...[a] wild goose chase' whose real purpose was an 'ego-driven tool to promote [Rudd] internationally' (Dorling 2009:5). They further argued that the bid would more likely cost \$1.5 billion when any associated aid and development funding was included (Milne 2009:10). While the Prime Minister's efforts were successful in the context of the G-20, and the jury is still out concerning Australia's bid for a Security Council seat, Rudd soon found his vision to establish a multilateral security organisation in the Asia-Pacific far more difficult.

Since the late 1960s, rather than being satisfied with merely 'engaging' the Asia-Pacific, successive Australian governments have demonstrated a desire to build

and expand regional institutions to facilitate goals such as trade liberalisation. Bob Hawke was the first to succeed when he created the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) group in 1989 through a combination of good timing and skilful diplomacy (Dobell 2000:18). His successor, Paul Keating, had hoped that it could eventually be developed in a manner that would be closer to the model of the European Union but key regional policy makers believed that such an institutionalised and legally binding approach would be unworkable in the context of East Asia. Further, some of the South-East Asian states were concerned that APEC could threaten the central role of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in regional institutions for dialogue and cooperation. Given this concern, ASEAN lobbied to maintain ASEAN's *modus operandi*, including 'consensus-based decision-making', in APEC (Stubbs 2008:464). Nonetheless, Rudd returned to 'treading a well-worn path' (Heseltine 2009:2) when he announced (without forewarning) his vision to establish an Asia-Pacific Community (APC) by 2020. In a 4 June 2008 speech, he argued:

We need to have a vision for an Asia Pacific Community...A regional institution which spans the entire Asia-Pacific region—including the United States, Japan, China, India, Indonesia and the other states of the region. A regional institution which is able to engage in the full spectrum of dialogue, cooperation and action on economic and political matters and future challenges related to security. The purpose is to encourage the development of a genuine and comprehensive sense of community whose habitual operating principle is cooperation. (Rudd 2008b:6)

Rudd's proposal for the APC was initially well received in Australia, where Paul Kelly (2008:16), for example, declared it 'one of Australia's most ambitious foreign policy initiatives for some years'. Rudd subsequently appointed Richard Woolcott—a former DFAT head who had undertaken a similar role for Hawke vis-a-vis APEC—as a special envoy to travel to and consult with senior policy makers throughout Asia. The ability of Woolcott to promote the Rudd initiative was, however, undermined from the outset because many of his former government contacts had left office. Further, the impetuosity of much of Rudd's foreign policy was also evident in the lack of planning behind the proposal as Woolcott was given only a few hours' notice before his appointment was announced (Thayer 2009:4).

A further problem with the APC concerned confusion about its intended purpose and institutional design. While the Prime Minister stated that he wanted to 'begin the regional debate' (Rudd 2008b:7), his references to the European Union were interpreted by many as evidence of Australia pushing for a specific design (Frost 2009:8). Regardless of whether this was true, both critics and supporters were united in their call for more information (Flitton 2008:6; Heseltine 2009:2). Meanwhile, after visiting 21 countries and meeting more than

300 officials and experts, Woolcott reported that while there was ‘interest’ in the APC proposal, there was a lack of firm support for its implementation in the near future. Further, many policy makers raised concerns that the implementation of a new regional body would result in further strains on regional governments as the members of ASEAN, for example, are already attending close to 700 meetings each year. While the key powers—China and the United States—expressed ‘interest’, they were also not willing to make a firm commitment; their ambivalence was a critical obstacle to the APC as the ability to manage political and economic challenges in the evolving US–China relationship was a key motive behind the proposal (Thayer 2009:4).

While other countries, such as South Korea, Japan, New Zealand and Vietnam, also indicated a ‘polite’ interest, Singapore emerged as the main opponent of the idea. The potency of Singapore’s opposition was such that it gained a voice in the (limited) Australian media coverage (see Koh 2009:14) and was even accused of attempting to publicly embarrass Rudd (Hartcher 2009:11). Given perceptions of Singapore’s ‘Western-friendly’ identity, its opposition was indicative of the level of difficulty the APC faced. Not all commentary in Singapore, however, was negative as Rudd was praised—a likely face-saving gesture—for having forced a regional discussion about future multilateralism including reforms to the current security institutions of the Asia-Pacific. Likewise, there was little trace of hostility towards Rudd for his proposal with Australia’s ‘odd-man-in’ status (Higgott and Nossal 2008:624) historically serving to exempt it from some of the more ‘face’-bound regional norms (Dobell 2000:46–7). Still, the combination of 1) a lack of consultation, 2) a related perception that the proposal would undermine ASEAN centrality, 3) the problem of limited ‘inclusiveness’ in terms of membership, and 4) the inability of Australia to garner strong support from the more powerful members of the proposed organisation, meant that Rudd’s APC proposal was—as Singapore’s Ambassador, Barry Desker, described—‘dead in the water’ from the outset (Walters 2008a).

In view of the reception of the APC, Rudd offered a *mea culpa* during a May 2009 speech at Singapore’s Shangri-la Dialogue, where he ‘lavishly’ praised ASEAN (Thayer 2009:5). Further, he reframed his proposal to be more ASEAN friendly including a suggestion (to the consternation of some) that the APEC leaders meeting should be downgraded in order to support a regional commitment for his APC proposal (Shanahan 2010). Despite these belated attempts to resurrect the proposal, Rudd was forced to publicly acknowledge that the APC was finished a few months later (Callick 2010:9). Rather than being a surprise, this acknowledgment was inevitable as, under the best of circumstances, Rudd’s proposal was unlikely to compete with the growing web of multilateral economic and security organisations throughout the Asia-Pacific. This web included the recent emergence of the East Asia Summit (EAS) in addition to

ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN+3 (APT), APEC, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). A more successful approach could have been to focus on modifying or even merging some of these regional arrangements—a task Australian prime ministers have usually set aside in favour of bold new proposals (Griffiths and Wesley 2010:21).

Nonetheless, Rudd's diplomacy did reinvigorate a debate about the future of the EAS and, in June 2010, ASEAN expanded the forum from 16 to 18 members including the United States and Russia. Thus, at the cost of the Prime Minister's time, a little reputation and a \$1.4 million conference in December 2009, Rudd's activism did have some impact (JSCFADT 2010). Other aspects of Australian multilateral relations remained strong. On 27 February 2009, Australia and New Zealand signed a free-trade agreement (FTA) with ASEAN—the Australia–ASEAN–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA)—the 'most comprehensive trade agreement that ASEAN has ever negotiated' (Dobell 2009b:142). Meanwhile, Australia was also invited by ASEAN to join with the Asian block in the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM)—a symbolically important invitation given Australia's longstanding identity as a European outpost.

From bilateral relations to the entry of Julia Gillard as Prime Minister

While Rudd's proposals for an APC and efforts against whaling impacted on Australia's relationship with Singapore and Japan respectively, these policies generated little sustained damage. The same cannot be said in the case of India, where Rudd's multilateral instincts led him to cancel a former Howard government agreement to sell uranium to India that would be outside the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) framework. Despite Rudd's reservations concerning the former bilateral arrangement, some analysts believe that the NPT is unworkable and inappropriate in the context of India and that Australia should, therefore, make an exception (Ungerer 2010). Nonetheless, Australia's termination of the agreement strained India–Australia relations (Mayer and Jain 2010:140), which were further exacerbated by a series of assaults on Indian students in Melbourne during 2009. The frequency of these assaults incited strong condemnation from Indian officials and the adverse media coverage was serious enough to warrant the dispatch to India of Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. Relations with Indonesia, in contrast, proved to be more resilient despite potential strains over the number of asylum-seekers passing through Indonesian waters. For example,

the extent to which Australia–Indonesia relations have improved was evident when, in March 2010, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono became the first Indonesian President to address a joint sitting of Australia’s Parliament.

In the context of US relations, while the Howard government had established a very strong partnership with former President George W. Bush (Sheridan 2006), the Rudd government did not maintain the same level of bilateral affinity due to various ideological differences and the pledge by the Australian Labor Party (ALP) to withdraw Australian troops from Iraq. When Obama became President, however, an ideological reconvergence occurred. In a 2010 interview with the ABC, President Obama praised Rudd as ‘somebody who I probably share as much of a world view as any world leader out there, I find him smart but humble, he works wonderfully well in multilateral settings, he’s always constructive, incisive’ (ABC 2010). While Obama’s election rendered it easier to withdraw Australian troops from Iraq, Obama’s focus on Afghanistan validated Rudd’s argument that Afghanistan should be the cornerstone of the war on terrorism and this, in turn, meant that the Australian government needed to back its words with a tangible military commitment (Dart 2008). Consequently, pressure from Obama, combined with the departure of other countries from Afghanistan, led to a 40 per cent increase in Australia’s military deployment (Pearlman 2009:2). Meanwhile, two postponed trips to Australia and Asia were interpreted by some as a sign of the President’s lack of interest in the region (Noonan 2010:15; Norington 2010:17). Nonetheless, on balance, the US–Australia relationship remained one of Australia’s most robust and easily maintained bilateral relationships.

Positive relations with China, in contrast, were not so easily maintained despite Rudd’s previous in-country experience. For example, a bold lecture on human rights at a Chinese university in 2008 was not well received by the CCP and marked the beginning of a temporary decline in relations. While his statements provided an early indication that the Rudd government would be less willing to compromise its moral authority for material gain, later actions undermined this principled stand. As noted earlier, the release of Australia’s Defence White Paper also contributed to a decline in relations with China. Crucially, the document contained an explicit discussion of defence concerns about Chinese military modernisation (Tubilewicz 2010:152). The White Paper’s strategic concerns were followed by a recommendation that Australia needed to substantially strengthen its military forces, with the strong implication that Australia needed to be operationally ready and prepared for a future conflict with China—a strategy that was immediately criticised by former Prime Minister Keating (2009:8).

The Chinese Government indicated that it was ‘amazed’ and ‘displeased’ with the White Paper and denied that its military modernisation program posed

any strategic threat to Australia or the Asia-Pacific more broadly (Tubilewicz 2010:153). Further, some former Chinese officials went as far as to characterise the White Paper as little more than a 'crazy', 'stupid' and 'dangerous' document that 'risked inciting an arms race across the region' (Garnaut et al. 2009:2). Meanwhile, tension in Australia–China relations was compounded when the board of the Rio Tinto mining company withdrew from an agreement worth \$19.5 billion that would have enabled Chinalco—a Chinese 'state-owned enterprise' (SOE)—to acquire a majority stake in the company. Soon after, Stern Hu, an Australian employee of Rio Tinto, was arrested on charges of accepting bribes and stealing commercial state secrets and certain analysts interpreted these actions to be retribution for Rio Tinto's withdrawal from negotiations with Chinalco (Sainsbury 2010:26). Despite a domestic outcry, the Rudd government made no significant protest against Hu's imprisonment and merely sought a transparent trial, which, in the end, was not granted.

While Australia's relations with China began to improve by late 2009, Rudd never managed to forge the closeness that many expected. Nonetheless, via the Defence White Paper, Rudd did manage to ensure that Australia thought seriously about the long-term strategic implications of a rising China (White, Interview with authors, Canberra, 2010). Despite this, Rudd also faced criticism that in the pursuit of economic opportunities he was overly acquiescent to a foreign authoritarian government (Middleton 2009). Hugh White (Interview with authors, Canberra, 2010) suggests that, given the difficulties Rudd faced with China, together with some of his multilateral diplomacy, he should have focused on more niche diplomacy for the purpose of elevating Australia's international status by, for example, helping to mediate relations between the United States and a rising China. Such diplomacy, if conducted in a benign and subtle fashion, might be better received internationally and, in turn, would more effectively employ a potential 'middle-power' role.

Conclusion

In the context of foreign affairs, the Rudd government came to office with great potential and its early displays of administrative confidence and vision added to this perception. While maintaining the main pillars of Australian foreign policy—such as the ANZUS Treaty—Rudd envisioned a more activist middle-power role for Australia. This was most clearly evident through activism on nuclear non-proliferation, climate change, whaling and the pursuit of a more binding and institutionalised security organisation in the Asia-Pacific. In the case of the last, the proposal was poorly timed and under-prepared with the result that it received little more than polite interest. The APC proposal was, however, motivated by the need for both local stakeholders and major powers

to come together and constructively address some of the fundamental security issues and disputes that continue to afflict the Asia-Pacific region. The proposal was also motivated by a general recognition by Australia, and several other countries in the Asia-Pacific, of the necessity of ensuring that the United States remains engaged in the region in both the economic and the security spheres. Nonetheless, these goals have begun to take form in the context of the EAS and its expanded membership. History might not provide Rudd with significant credit for this shift but, nonetheless, he did make an important contribution to the debate.

Beyond the APC, Rudd also sought an enhanced role in other multilateral institutions including a UN Security Council seat and a seat for Australia in the upgraded G-20. While his two and a half years in office were not without foreign policy achievements, the abrupt termination of his prime ministership initially left any analysis of his foreign policy with a lingering sense of 'what if?' A second term could have witnessed the development of a more delegated work style and policy flow that could have provided a formidable base to an activist prime minister. A second term could have seen him fully consolidate his extensive experience in the diplomatic corps in a way that could be better utilised at the prime ministerial level. While Rudd's own centralising tendencies and short period in office have ensured that 'a great deal of sound and fury ha[s] ended up signifying nothing' (Stuart 2010:154), his new appointment as foreign minister means that he has an additional opportunity to modify (if not rewrite) his foreign policy record. Thus, history could have recorded the Rudd government's foreign policy as one that over-promised but under-delivered, but the final verdict now has to wait until the current Gillard government concludes its period in office.

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