

Australia's Logic and Illogic thinking in Foreign Policy

Mainstream and Organic Views

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Abstract

Australia is a large and remote country with little national security threat until the arrival of 'Pivot to Asia'. Compared to many Asian nations' defense forces, Australia Defense Force (ADF) is much smaller. Australia published defense white papers in 1976, 1987, 1994, 2000, 2009, 2013, 2015, 2016 and a Foreign Policy white paper in 2017. The increased frequency of publication signifies Australia's increased concern for her national strategic security. Australia together with New Zealand has a security agreement with the U.S. (ANZUS) but Australia has a mixed concern with the future impact of the 'Pivot' and the apparent waning influence of the U.S. in Asia. This paper makes observation and analysis of such a concern expressed by Australians.

Bloomberg View (February 3, 2018) has published an interview article, entitled, What Happens When China Eclipses the U.S. in Asia, a provoking title triggered by an Australian political essay, Without America: Australia in the New Asia. Through email, Tobin Harshaw and Daniel Moss of Bloomberg View interviewed Hugh White, the author of Without America, a labor party member and professor at the Australian National University in Canberra in Australia. White had worked for Bob Hawke, former Australian prime minister (1983-1991), and Kim Beazley, Hawke's defense minister and later served as Australian ambassador to the U.S. from 2010-2016. Both politicians were among the most pro-American figures in the Australian Labor Party. The interview was triggered by White's essay, Without America, published in the Australian Publication, Quarterly Essay on 11-28-2017 and a concerned 'rebuttal', entitled, China Hasn't Won the Pacific (Unless You Think It Has), published in Bloomberg View on 1-5-2018 by Hal Brands. Brands is the Henry A. Kissinger Distinguished Professor at the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies and a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. Brands' quick response to White's essay and the subsequent email interview of White by Bloomberg View clearly indicate the importance of these essays.

White's view is somewhat persistent based on his earlier Quarterly Essay, Power Shift: Australia's Future Between Washington and Beijing, 2010 and following up in 2012 with another essay, The China Choice: Why America Should Share Power. White's main point in Without America is that 1. The U.S. and China are engaging a classic power politics. 2. The American leadership in the West Pacific held prominently since WW II is eroding. 3. In New Asia, China will be dominating. 4. Australia got into the habit of seeing the world through Washington's eyes that must change or will risk failure in foreign affairs. White argues that Australia can now stop talking about power sharing because, in their contest for regional supremacy, America will lose and China will win. White has few allies but more opposing debaters in Australia. However, the Australian Foreign Policy White Paper just released about the same time as White's essay

acknowledges that China's growing strength will shift the regional power balance and hints that Washington has become a less reliable regional leader, essentially endorsing White's view. Certainly, White's new essay must have caught attentions from many American political analysts. Hal Brands is a representative one.

Brands in his article, *China Hasn't Won the Pacific*, published in *Bloomberg View* on 1-5-2018, expressed concerns with perceptions like Hugh White described; such a view may become self-fulfilling prophecy. Brand citing his new book, *"American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump"*, counters that the U.S. is still too powerful for China to match, the island chain will be effective to curtail China's expansion by encouraging Japan, Taiwan and Philippines to acquire anti-access /area denial capabilities. Brands also holds the view that China will have difficulties as limited by her model. The U.S. and her allies can slap sanctions on China, although Brands does acknowledge that the measures are risky and offering no guarantee. He also admits that White's essay is simultaneously essential and dangerous, meaning that the U.S will be foolish to ignore and dangerous to accept White's thesis.

However, White, in his defense, brushed away the idea that his article was trying to get the U.S. to beef up her strategic position in Asia. In fact, White states that "the U.S. strategic position is eroding so quickly that even sharing the region with China isn't really a valid option any longer, America's allies in Southeast Asia and Australia say they don't want to choose between the U.S. and China, but underneath those platitudes, nobody in the region wants to make an enemy of Beijing. All the more so because officials increasingly doubt the U.S. will be there in the end." In the interview, White further clarifies that Allies must begin to adapt a post-American regional order. Australia's future depends on how well we (Australia) understand China knowing that in the longer trend the U.S. will be edged out by China and the U.S. will become like European countries who will invest in Asia but with no strategic presence.

After reviewing the above two essays and the interview, the author agrees with White's analyses but questions his logic and his thinking of what Australia should do in terms of her national strategic security. First, China's rise or her effort in expanding her influence in the Pacific started at least two decades ago as pointed out by White's earlier essays. The balance of power shift has been gradual. Australia and her Asian Allies should not have been surprised by the current situation whether Obama or Trump ever accelerated the eroding of the U.S. strategic presence in the Pacific. Over the decades, the strategic security in Asia Pacific has not changed for the worse at least for Australia other than the verbal security arguments and showy military exercises which were more like gestures made through the Pivot to Asia policy of the U.S. The North Korea's nuclear threat is entirely another matter to which China, the U.S. and Australia are on the same page. Australia's **legacy concern** for 'security' and continued reliance on the U.S. to provide 'security' had been a debate issue for years before the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. After that Australia has grown accustomed to the presence of the U.S. in the Pacific and developed the habit of seeing the world through Washington's eyes as acknowledged by White.

The fundamental question is what and where is the security threat coming from, in particular, for Australia?! If the U.S. and China would engage in a Collaborative Bi-Polar World Politics rather than a confrontational one, then there would be no strategic threat or any need to pick side between Washington and Beijing for and by Australia or anybody else. White's mentioning of

“for Australia to build her independent military and even go nuclear” is totally illogical and absolutely wrong! Engaging in arms race especially nuclear weapons will for sure raise the danger level of national security for a scarce populated and remote Australia. As Sun Tze said in his world famous book, a diplomatic effort - promoting the U.S. and China to lead a collaborative bi-polar World Order - would be far superior to any military strategy - preparing for war and hope to survive it. Any nuclear threat like the one from North Korea can only be resolved by the U.S. and China acting collaboratively.

In White’s essay, a statement unintentionally revealed a racial tone caught my attention,; White said, “Australia is heading for an unprecedented future, one without an English-speaking Great and Powerful friend to keep us secure and protect our Interest.” Indeed, Australia was a colony of the Great Britain and is a dependent ally of the United States, but there is no reason that Australia cannot get along with a Chinese-speaking nation as former Prime Minister (Labor Party) Kevin Rudd could personally testify. I am not saying that Australians must master Chinese, as Mr. Rudd has, to be friends of China. Australian does have to feel confident to get out of the crib and walk on her own. Diplomacy is by far the better tool than military power to deal with neighbors, great powers and international bodies.