

Australian Prime Ministers and the Australian – American Alliance 1951-2001: Crisis Points and Political Decision Making

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Cam Hawker

Presentation Overview

- Thesis title, key questions and contentions.
- Origins of the topic
- The research
- Thesis Outline
- Snap shot: Prime Ministers and Presidents: Studies in Personal Diplomacy
- Supervisor: Professor David Lovell, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, UNSW Canberra at ADFA.

Topic, questions and contention



Thesis title and era of research:

- *Australian Prime Ministers and the Australian – American Alliance 1951-2001: Crisis Points and Political Decision Making*
- 1951 – 2001
 - Access to both official documents and personal collections of papers and correspondence is relatively good for the 1950s – 1970s but is more retracted beyond that.
- Key question, assumption and contention:
- **Primary Question:** How has the Prime Minister's decision making, in relation to key crisis points, impacted the Australian – American alliance?
- **Working assumption:** Prime Ministers play the key decision making role both broadly in foreign policy, and more specifically in ANZUS relations. However, Prime Ministers relations with relevant Ministers and senior advisers, and their ability to balance between delegation and personal leadership is crucial.
- **Contention:** Each Prime Minister has committed to and prioritised ANZUS, but has come to the role with different pre-conceptions, biases and skills. These attributes and qualities have shaped both professional and public expectations on the role and management of the alliance.

Origins of the project :

- An interest in Australian foreign and defence policy and general and the alliance in particular
- A background as a staffer working on foreign and defence policy and an interest in the cross over between politics and policy and the question on political leadership.

Coral Bell's quotes on Australia's alliances

“Looking back over these more than 40 years in the evolution of Australia's two closest relationships (*US and UK*) the point that seems immediately to emerge from the experience as whole is how important have been the personality and assumptions of Australia's chief decision-maker.”

“The chief policy maker has usually and increasingly been the Prime Minister”

“One might see the history as that of a succession of chefs with the same basic raw material to work on.... The flavour and palatability of what is achieved will vary chiefly in accordance with their respective skills and techniques, because there are not many other factors of variation.”

- *Dependant Ally: A study of Australia's relations with the United States and the United Kingdom since the fall of Singapore*

The Research

- Primarily archival (some interviews)
- Issue of the 30 year rule and de-classification
 - Slightly different restrictions from Australia to the US. Both countries have excellent collections though the dedication with which the US honours its presidents is outstanding
- Canberra based archives: The National Archives and National Library, Museum of Australian Democracy (Australian Prime Ministers Centre)
- Libraries: UNSW ADFA (with some superb support staff), ANU, Library of the AIIA and the personal Library of the late Professor Des Ball AO
- US based archives: The LBJ, Eisenhower and JFK Presidential Libraries. The National Archives, College Park MD.
- Possible further research trip to Nixon and Reagan Libraries in California in late 2017/early 2018

Thesis: Key Points

- 90,000 words (approx.)
- 9 Chapters (approx.)
- 2 sections: Section 1 Conceptual, Section 2 Case Studies

Section 1:

- Literature Review: A review of multiple literatures including, alliance, decision making and bureaucratic and how my work contributes to it
- Australia's strategic circumstances and alliance history
- Concepts and theories of political leadership and decision making
- The office of prime minister and the workings of cabinet government
- The role of key players: Cabinet, parliament, the public service ect

Thesis: Key Points

Section 2: Case Studies

- Menzies: First Taiwan Straits Crisis and Suez Crisis.
- Holt: Escalation in Vietnam and the LBJ connection
- Whitlam: A new approach to alliances and the Nixon connection
- Hawke: ANZUS in Crisis, the suspension on NZ and the birth of alliance bi-partisanship
- Howard: ANZUS invoked, the post 9/11 world and the Bush connection

Conclusions:

- Australian prime ministers in strategic policy making
- Can we categorise prime ministers by the way they have managed the alliance?

Snap Shot: Prime Ministers and Presidents – Studies in Personal Diplomacy

Coral's other quote

“Relations with Britain had been his (*Prime Minister's*) province by definition, through the institution of the Prime Ministers' Conference, which was so long the forum in which Australia's attitude to the world was initially defined. The relationship with the United States seemed to pose a natural and inevitable demand for the Prime Minister's personal attention by analogy, and because of the importance assumed to lie in the highest level personal acquaintance with each successive President.”

Questions

- How important is the leader to leader relationship to the alliance?
- How do we measure the success or failures of these relationships? Is it in policy outcomes or is it less tangible?
- It is often said that the alliance is bigger than the leaders. How true is this? What does the history tell us?

Snap Shot: Prime Ministers and Presidents – Studies in Personal Diplomacy

- Working contention:
 - Yes, the leader to leader relationship does matter. The documents suggest the direct diplomacy between prime ministers and presidents has been influential in shaping the alliance.
 - Although the alliance is indeed bigger than the respective leaders, it is the leaders who are its custodians – therefore the dynamic between them is a determinant for good or for ill.
 - For example, the one crisis in which there was a real question mark over the alliance's continuation was largely driven by personal animosity between two leaders – Whitlam & Nixon. Whitlam's private criticism (and some minister's public criticism) of the 1972 'Christmas Bombing' of North Vietnam so enraged Nixon that the leader to leader relationship was ruptured and the future of the alliance itself put under a cloud.
 - On the other hand, the strengthening of the alliance in 1966-67 and again in the early – mid 2000s was at least partly driven by the friendship between Holt & LBJ, Howard & Bush. In the case of Holt a rapport was achieved that seems to be the envy of his successors. In the case Howard, tangible policy outcomes are evident with the example of heightened access to US intelligence product.



Snap Shot: Prime Ministers and Presidents – Studies in Personal Diplomacy

Personal Diplomacy

- “The forging of close leader-to-leader relationships that usually include face-to-face meetings and extended one on one dialogue, often complimented by personal correspondence. Although often still subject to government institutions, Personal diplomacy is characterised by its ability to bypass bureaucratic machinery”.
- Often associated with figures such as Ronald Reagan and Winston Churchill – used less in the Australian context.
- Case Studies :
 - Holt – LBJ (rapport)
 - Whitlam – Nixon (Crisis)
 - Howard – Bush (new heights)
- Common themes?
- Possible spin out paper.
- Questions?

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