The United States and Australia: Deepening ties and securitising cyberspace

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Introduction: Strengthening the alliance

Obama's politics of liberal internationalism promoted the rule of law, free trade and democratic values throughout the Asia Pacific. At the same time, his pragmatic realism was designed to secure the United States' position in the region. This approach extended to deepening ties with regional allies and fostering the growth and corporatisation of US cyber capability. On both counts, he found a willing ally in Australia. Obama's specific legacy, then, was to consolidate US–Australia political and economic relations while simultaneously strengthening security ties across all strategic domains, with cyber security, space, and maritime collaboration key features.

In these developments, US regional policy was prominent in Australian concerns. Here, long-standing policy principles drove Obama's two-term approach in Asia. These principles included sustaining stability in Asian markets to provide access and conditions conducive to the US commercial sector, technology, and investment. Obama's backing for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) provided the means by which the United States would underwrite the rules of trade and investment for the new economy and confirm the United States' position as the region's leading trade and investment partner. In the security sector, US policy principles had been to sustain American power and command of the regional commons and advance the position of the dollar, technology, and investment. To do so Obama proposed the "Pivot" strategy, which comprised the focus of sea power and deployments to the region.¹ It also required renewed commitment to US primacy by alliance partners.

For the most part, this strategy was welcomed by Australia. However, Obama was restricted in his reach and effectiveness by the demands of the global financial crisis, the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars, and congressional partisanship. The realisation of the alliance's stated goal of maintaining a regional rules-based order was

also becoming both more important and more difficult because of the uncertainty surrounding the re-emergence of China. US frustrations in forging better relations with Beijing also created significant challenges for Canberra,² particularly given burgeoning Australian economic ties with China. Obama's Pivot also oversaw a less visible but highly consequential reprioritisation of the cyber domain in allied security ties, which was dependent on the integration of US entrepreneurial, innovative, and technological resources to maximise Washington's position.³

If it was clear in the first months of the Trump presidency from January 2017 that Obama's diplomatic legacy was vulnerable to revision, it has become correspondingly evident two years in, that the underlying calculative pragmatism of US foreign policy remains. To date, the US force posture in the Pacific remains largely unaltered, as has Australia's integration into its architecture. So too, the pace of cyber change and the processes of cyberspace securitisation and corporatisation so evident during the Obama administration, are not diminishing under Trump.

This chapter argues that the Obama legacies and the Trump disruptions for Australia are these: first, Australia's diplomatic relations with the United States, which largely flourished during the Obama years, have now become more fraught and unpredictable at the leadership level but remain institutionally strong. Regional uncertainty which was intensifying under Obama and, indeed, which he could not control, has been exacerbated by Trump's unpredictability across his first two years in charge. Second, security ties have been deepened and continue apace despite the change of administration. Third, while a gradual expansion of security ties with Australia characterised the public face of the Obama administration, the alliance's cyber contours, still evolving under Trump, represent a decisive yet publicly under-recognised infusion to the relationship. Nonetheless, the cyberspace remains problematic given the uncertainty surrounding its evolution. Accordingly, the chapter is divided into a three-part analysis of: the US–Australia public diplomacy and internationalism; the traditional security relationship; and the developing processes in securitising the cyberspace.

Obama's cooperative diplomacy; Trump's threat to liberal order

After the stark unilateralism of the Bush administration, Obama's frequent display of liberal internationalism and progressive cosmopolitanism was welcomed in Australia.⁴ His support for liberal norms and international regimes drew marked support. From his understanding of America as a Pacific nation, to his repeated visits to the region, his familial connections with Indonesia, and his cooperative diplomacy, Obama's intent to work with the region was clear. In these respects, Australia was reassured by the presidential interest in its immediate region. Emblematic too of the Obama effect in the relationship was Prime Minister

Julia Gillard's 2011 statement to the US Congress, in which she announced that Australia was '[a]n ally for the sixty years past and Australia is an ally for all the years to come'.⁵ Obama reciprocated in November 2011 in an address to the Australian parliament where he announced his signature regional policy: the wide-ranging Pivot to Asia. The Pivot would also involve incremental moves towards a US federated Pacific security architecture, where its bilateral alliances would be cross-braced through minilateral relationships. For example, Australia would be party to the continued evolution of a trilateral strategic dialogue with the United States and Japan. Notably, Obama's intent to strategically Rebalance US global policy by upgrading US Asia Pacific regional engagement was met with local bipartisan support. Australia's response, to further upgrade US relations, was aided by Obama's popularity, which by now was intersecting with official concern over China's rising power and the attendant regional uncertainty generated.

Integral to the Pivot was the pursuit of a regional economic agenda to which Australia lent support. Obama argued that the vehicle to do so, the TPP, based on shared liberal values and harmonised standards for the new economy, would facilitate deep economic integration and establish the rules of the new order. Washington's initial intent was to align its economic allies in a liberal venture so successful that China would eventually seek to join and, by doing so, participate in the American-authored economic standards and norms. As a middle power, despite a number of bilateral trade disputes with the United States, Australia traditionally has been well served by the generally cooperative, open, rules-based economic system Washington has sponsored. Bilaterally, between 2009 and 2016, two-way goods and services trade with the United States increased from AUS\$49.5 billion to AUS\$68.4 billion, and by 2017 the United States was the largest investor in Australia, with AUS\$896 billion, or 27.5 per cent of the total.⁶ That said, Australia is integrated economically into the region. By far, its largest trade partner is China in both goods and services exports (30 per cent of the total export profile in 2017) and imports (18 per cent) with Japan and South Korea second and third largest export destinations respectively. Despite Obama's resolve, however, the United States struggled to exercise power in shaping the regional and global trading landscape. The World Trade Organization (WTO) had not concluded the Doha Round since negotiations began in 2001, while in the United States itself the Obama administration failed to steer the TPP through Congress. Australian government dismay at the failure to ratify and implement the Partnership was not universally shared however, as some domestic analysts continued to argue the loss of sovereign control in new generation trade agreements in sectors such as health, quarantine, and intellectual property rights.⁷

Early in office too, Obama's vexation with a lack of progress in US–China relations was evident.⁸ The East and South China Sea disputes intensified, as did American accusations that China continued its human rights abuses, perpetrated significant theft of US cyber resources, and failed to allow US technology

companies the freedom to operate in China.⁹ By 2016, Obama's Pivot in its diplomatic and economic manifestations was compromised. The rules of the new economy could not be written in Washington, and the United States could do little to manage instability surrounding the 2014 Thai coup; new Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's hostility; and a seeming fracturing of ASEAN with the continental states increasingly leaning towards China. Ostensibly, then, US command of the regional commons, with Australia in the slipstream, was beginning to appear more tenuous. Beyond the continuity of Washington's new Strategic and Economic Dialogue with Beijing, the United States' ineffective attempts to progress Sino-US relations in a way that suited American interests, which reflected China's strengthening economic position and enhanced capacity to exercise the tools of economic statecraft, concerned Australian policy makers. They were, however, encouraged by Obama's cooperative diplomacy in maintaining relations with many regional states. Relations with Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and Singapore demonstrated the assurance and confidence that underpinned trusting relations.

These efforts can be more starkly appraised and appreciated with the inauguration of Donald Trump as president in January 2017. Trump's posturing business tactics were unsuited to the strategy and sophistication of foreign policy, while his complete disregard for the foundations of the liberal order and international diplomacy provided an immediate disruption to the Obama legacy. So too his failure to comprehend that the functional cooperation, reciprocity, consistency, and relational arrangements on which trust is constructed and maintained underpins the international system.¹⁰ The characteristics of contempt and the influence of domestic political imperatives were evident at the leadership level of analysis in the tense telephone discussion of January 2017 between Trump and Australian PM Malcolm Turnbull surrounding a refugee swap. Nevertheless, the refugee exchange of sorts eventually proceeded and so too Australia negotiated a steel tariff exemption in 2018. Both negotiations exemplify Australia's reliance on trust in the bilateral institutional arrangements and bureaucratic attention to the relationship that have been developed since the Second World War.¹¹

Illustrative of Trump's broader disdain, however, included his critiques of Asia Pacific allies such as Japan and South Korea as free riders on American strength, his decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate negotiations, and the dismantling of the US State Department's diplomatic capacity. Furthermore, the region has become awash with uncertainty and concern. Trump's unpredictability was evident in the variations between the dramatic exchange of nuclear threats with the DPRK's Kim Jong-un in early January 2018 to the fanfare of the Singapore meeting in June where few details were disclosed. For Australia, instability on the Korean Peninsula may adversely affect Australia's Northeast Asian regional friends; jeopardise its extensive trading relations; and raise questions regarding the appropriate duties for Australia as it is a signatory to the

1953 Korean armistice. In the economic realm, though Obama understood the long-term benefit to the United States of the TPP and sought to realise its benefits institutionally, Trump has so far failed to grasp the bigger picture of its utility beyond the immediacy of the deal and promptly terminated the prospect of a US-led regional trading regime (at least to date). Over and above trade agreements *per se*, disturbingly for Australia, Trump's reticence through to the beginning of 2019 in approving judiciary appointments for the WTO appellate body were commensurate with a broader approach that failed to support the functioning liberal order on which Australia depends.

Continuity in US–Australia alliance strategy

Though Obama's Pivot in its political and economic manifestations was proving increasingly difficult to execute, substantive and enduring changes in the security domain were evident. And as is demonstrated in this section, part of the Obama legacy was the intensification of a hard-headed pragmatism aimed at maintaining US regional primacy through the relocation of US forces and upscaling of assets to the region. Australia, through its part in intensifying relations, further interlinked with US security strategy. In doing so, however, Australia's room to manoeuvre became more limited. As RAAF Air Marshal Leo Davies was later to explain, heightened interoperability fosters a shift in US–Australia ties further along a continuum towards institutional integration.¹²

Obama's plan had been to maintain the regional power balance by dissuading China from seeking regional hegemony. It was a strategy inherited and pursued since 2001, with Washington providing access for regional allies to integrate into key US cyber, space, and electronic warfare technology networks through which it 'would lead a web of more powerful allies and partners with stronger links to one another'.¹³ One of the differences between the Bush and Obama administrations, however, was that the former had sought to avoid disclosure of a strategy to which China would object, and indeed respond to by escalating its military modernisation, presence, and regional relations. In Australia during this period, official government documents, including the Australian Defence White Papers of 2009 and 2016, and the 2017 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade White Paper, acknowledged concerns regarding China's rising power.¹⁴ Australia's continued assertions of the importance of the rules-based order were coupled with statements noting China's rising 'power and influence'¹⁵ and Chinese militarisation of South China Sea islands.¹⁶ Such threat perceptions were critiqued by Beijing.¹⁷ Australia's concerns were manifest because of the complexity of its strategic hand: security connected intimately to the US alliance, with China trade surpluses sustaining Australian prosperity.¹⁸ Although options for Australia are not presented in binary

terms, the rising frequency of specific policies embodying choice highlights the challenge.

The 2011 decision to station up to 2,500 US Marines from the Air-Ground Task Force on a rotational basis in Darwin underscored Australia's importance to Obama's Asia Pacific strategy. The agreement was the expression of the evolving upgrade in Washington–Canberra relations and contextualised by Obama's Pivot to Asia. Located on Australia's northern reaches, Darwin is proximal to Southeast Asian waterways and the strategic Pacific–Indian Ocean transit straits of Malacca, Sunda, Lombok and Ombei-Wetar. The Marine contingent was a key manifestation of enhanced bilateral relations and expected to contribute to the strengthening of a cooperative naval posture, particularly towards a much needed amphibious and ship-to-shore capability for the Asian littoral environment. The Enhanced Air Cooperation Initiative also enabled heightened interoperability, the use of fifth generation air capability, and renovated training and air facilities throughout northern Australia including for US strategic bombers.

Elsewhere, the Space Situational Awareness Partnership announced in 2010 provided oversight on the integrity of the US and allied space system, enabling event information and assessment, including tracking satellite orbits, missile launches, space debris, and foreign and adversary space intelligence, including strategies, tactics, intent, and knowledge.¹⁹ A renewal of space surveillance through the Northwest Cape facilities and a modernised Kojarena Australian Defence Satellite Communication Station permitted a more extensive contribution to the US global interception system.²⁰ The location of these space surveillance and communication assets in Western Australia not only provided better surveillance north to China and through the increasingly contested reaches of maritime East Asia, but also served access to US and Australian operations out to the Middle East. These developments additionally contributed to Obama's aim of securing stability in Iraq and Afghanistan. With the rise of ISIL in Syria and then the fall of Fallujah in 2014, the United States and Australia redeployed defence personnel in the Combined Joint Task Force and, in the process, Australia acquired invaluable interoperable battlefield experience. Australia remained a willing alliance partner in Obama's intent to 'degrade and destroy' ISIL through a light footprint, multilateralised, counter-terrorism approach. Given Australia's promotion of reciprocity in alliance arrangements and the opportunity to institutionalise interoperability, through Operation Okra Australia deployed an Air Task Group, Special Operations Task Group, and the army's Task Group Taji, to respectively conduct airstrikes, and train and assist Iraqi forces. An Australian naval contingent led maritime security.²¹ Similarly, Australia's commitments to Afghanistan were shaped by Obama's strategy of deploying 68,000 additional troops there in 2009. Now, around 300 members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) still remain in Afghanistan as part of Operation HIGHROAD.

Joint US and Australian threat analysis had also progressively linked the Middle East battlefields to the Asian littorals. The return of foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria to the East Asian region was of profound concern to Australia, and as such converged with the US interest in maintaining regional stability. Given Australia was also apprehensive about resurgent nationalisms, military modernisation, and an attendant decline in trust in East Asia, Obama's support for regional cooperation to address transnational security threats was welcome. For instance, and though modest, the 2015 Southeast Asia Maritime Security Initiative, which provides for maritime domain awareness and capacity building, exemplified Washington's interest in fostering functional regional cooperation around issues such as piracy, disaster management and relief, sea lane security, and surveillance of extremist activities. This initiative, however, also sits within a more extensive US and allied strategic plan progressed through Obama's tenure: the construction of a maritime surveillance system extending from Japan through the East Asian archipelagic waters of the Philippines and Indonesia, to the Andaman Islands at the northwestern reaches of the Malacca Strait.²²

While the Pivot itself was not rolled out in Australia in an entirely smooth fashion (the US Marine rotations were delayed, for example, with a cost sharing agreement for the AUS\$1.5 billion project only finalised in 2016 and the entire complement of Marines was estimated to take up residency only by 2020²³), the theme of Australian territory and assets enhancing US operational reach was consistent. And, what was clearly observable in the Obama era, was the continuity of the realist pragmatic theme in US foreign policy – for example through the military Pivot to Asia, the development of a cyber exploitation strategy, and the increasing use of drone strikes in Western Asia and the Middle East. Similarly, while Obama's overt liberal internationalism may have obscured some of the hard-nosed defence decisions, the publicity around Trump's "America First" policy and its prospects in the demands for increased burden-sharing masked the continuity of US regional defence strategy. Through Trump's first eighteen months in office, continuity remained in the nature of the US and Australian deployments in the Middle East, with 1,100 Australian personnel plus a naval contingent remaining on station there. Undeniably too, the substantive strength of the Pivot was preserved through the first year of the Trump administration, as evident in PACOM's (US Pacific Command) maintenance of its regional strategy.²⁴ PACOM's threat analysis of both China's military modernisation and the asymmetric threat to US primacy in the western Pacific, and the potential regional instability arising from ISIL-inspired groups or returned fighters from the Middle East to littoral states, continued to inform Trump's strategy of engagement. Events such as the five-month siege in the southern Philippines city of Marawi in 2017 by ISIL-affiliated groups were an acute reminder of the dangers for regional security to which the United States needed to remain responsive.²⁵

As such, the Trump administration sustained the pressure on Australia to actively respond to threat analyses. Flights from Australia's RAAF Butterworth base in Malaysia under the Five Powers Defence Arrangements consistently surveilled the regional waterways. However, as of April 2018, and despite US pressure, Australia has refrained from sailing within twelve nautical miles of the new islands created by China's South China Sea terra formation projects in the strategic triangle of the Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands, and Scarborough Shoal. While Australia's decision to lease the port of Darwin to a Chinese commercial entity was criticised stridently by Pentagon officials, more recently Turnbull's conservative government has also progressively reviewed Chinese investment in Australia through a strategic prism. The government, increasingly sensitised to the broader strategic rivalry, has constrained Chinese investment in Australian infrastructure such as power grids, agricultural holdings, and even political parties. Chinese telecommunications firm Huawei continues to be blocked from participation in the new local access broadband network being rolled out across Australia.²⁶

Under the radar, however, another development has been taking place of crucial significance for Australia. While commercial innovations and technological development have been assimilated into the realisation of US geopolitical ambitions since the Second World War,²⁷ recent developments revealed the integration and extant potency of Silicon Valley heavyweights (big Internet and data primes whose commercial substrate is the digital domain) into the fray. Under Obama, these newcomers, with albeit competing and sometimes unruly agendas, began to fly as birds of a feather – flocking together in a fashion to transform and increase American strategic power. As a close US ally with long-standing commitments to technological and institutional interoperability, Australia's strategic comfort is being buffeted by the ongoing effects.

Securitisating cyberspace: Origins of a crisis

The cyber age, to quote Lucas Kello, remains in 'a revolutionary condition'.²⁸ Its inherent uncertainty is generating deeply disruptive strategic and political contours from which even the closest of alliances are not immune. A shift of strategic weight to the cyber domain forced an improvised reappraisal of threats to regional security. Cast from outside the rubric of a post-Bush administration era to which Obama's thinking was initially set in contrast, the ongoing improvisation is marked by uncertainty.²⁹ Incongruous with an alliance whose stated goals for decades have centred on the certainty brought about by a public commitment to rule-making in international relations, the cyber age to which Obama was inducted, and Australia has followed, permitted no such certainty.

Obama's introduction to America's cyberwar began before he was even sworn in as president. The growth and strategic evolution of American cyber power

subsequently advanced more aggressively and rapidly than at any time prior. Shortly after winning the presidential election in November 2008, Obama was briefed by ex-NSA Director and then Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell, one of the United States' most influential figures in the development of cyber warfare. McConnell outlined to the President-elect the contours of the digital battlefield – America's alarming defensive weaknesses, the efforts already underway to strengthen them – and later, in a transition meeting with President George W. Bush, a snapshot of the growing offensive side of cyber operations. Among these were Operation *Olympic Games* – underway since 2007 – the infiltration and exploitation of computer networks in Iran that would later become known as Stuxnet, and the CIA's drone programme. Bush encouraged the President-elect to continue these operations.³⁰ Obama not only agreed, he would pursue an even more aggressive agenda in cyberspace. Obama was entering the White House at an inflection point in the short history of cyber warfare. His tenure oversaw the institutionalisation of cyberspace as a legitimate domain of strategic competition and the demise of the idea that the Internet was an apolitical global space. The expansion and development of cyber capabilities and the increasing involvement of a host of actors challenged the very constitutive elements traditionally associated with international security which, for a middle power reliant on stability and predictability such as Australia, was unsettling.

The fundamental insecurity of the digital medium presented Australia with the typical dilemma facing all advanced industrialised nation states, whose economic competitiveness has become increasingly tied to leveraging the advantages in efficiency and innovation offered by the digital age. As a strategic and military ally of the United States, however, Australia's dilemma runs deeper. The digitisation of warfare offered the ADF an attractive pathway to pursue its long-standing goal of regional superiority based on the technical and operational sophistication of small but highly capable armed forces. This was manifest in the late 1990s in the ADF's embrace of Network-Centric Warfare, which closely tracked the American effort with a few minor caveats. Networked warfare is predicated on robust and seamless information flows, which are in turn reliant on the integrity, assurance, and security of data stored in and transiting the platforms and systems embedded in the digital medium. Cyber security, therefore, sits at the centre of Australia's strategic security in both civilian and military terms. In 2008, Australia was underprepared at a tactical and operational level for the age of cyberwar, despite the maximising of self-reliance being a central theme of its defence community. At the strategic level Australia's security remained deeply intertwined with its senior ally, and cyber insecurity was set to introduce a new level of uncertainty.

2007 was a very big year in cyber security. By 2008 it had reached a point of departure. In April and August 2007 Russia launched cyber-attacks against Estonia and Georgia in what are generally understood as the first such instances of interstate attacks;³¹ in September four Israeli Air Force F-15s destroyed a half-built

nuclear reactor in eastern Syria, evading Syria's Russian-made air-defence systems by hacking its computer network and spoofing the radar systems;³² and April saw the US National Security Agency (NSA) debut its revolutionary Real Time Regional Gateway (RTRG) in Iraq as part of the "surge". For the first time, NSA operatives were on the battlefield coordinating the use of computer network exploitation ("hacking") to find, arrest or kill terrorists and insurgents in real time. At the operational level, Australia's Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) station at Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap underwent a significant expansion. Embedded cross-institutional rivalry in the US intelligence community was wrestled closer to alignment. The nature and structure of digital computing across global networks, and indeed of the various groups the United States found itself in conflict with in cyberspace, meant any clear demarcation between civil, military, state, non-state, individual, networked, and commercial domains were being erased. The non-ergodic implications of cyberwar hit home at the highest level.

The strategic substance of the ANZUS alliance lies in signals intelligence under the UKUSA agreement,³³ colloquially known as the Five Eyes. Yet SIGINT, the interception of information in transit via the electromagnetic spectrum, was challenged fundamentally by the onset of the digital age. SIGINT was evolving. Unlike an analogue signal, digital information transits a heterogeneous global communications network in packets via the most efficient route and reconfigures at its destination. Since the continental United States hosted some 80 per cent of the network's physical infrastructure and bandwidth, most digital packets at some point travel through the United States on route to their destinations. Yet, they were legally off limits to the foreign intelligence collection activities of the NSA and CIA. The impact of 9/11 was pivotal. If another homeland attack was to be averted, the NSA argued that it required quick access to the phone calls and emails of suspects who may be US citizens and whose data packets may be stored on servers or travelling through networks in the United States; that is, there was no time for warrants. The NSA argued it only required the meta-data to establish "contact chains" that would enable it to identify threats for further attention. President Bush signed the order to give the NSA these powers on 4 October 2001. The NSA's mass meta-data collection programme, known as Stellar Wind, began immediately and grew exponentially. Though contact chaining using meta-data had its limitations, the new laws represented an opening to the goldmine of global digital communications.

Turbulence and the Pine Gap expansion

US Army General Keith Alexander's arrival as NSA Director in 2005 catalysed the NSA's leap into the cyber age. A new system, Turbulence, consisted of a subset of nine systems that penetrated the network from multiple entry points.³⁴ This

approach provided redundancy regarding potential intelligence gaps, granularity by overlaying vectors of analysis, and speed. It gathered and combined SIGINT from satellites, microwave transmissions, mobile phone networks, and packets of data traversing the Internet either via undersea and overland fibre optic cables or at the gateway of Internet service providers. Turbulence spawned numerous specialised programmes, many of which were revealed to the public by Edward Snowden in 2013. One of them, RTRG, focused these tools on a specific region and undertaking. It was commanded from early 2007 by General David Petraeus and used in the Iraq War in unprecedented coordination with the military, to target and remove terrorists and insurgents from the battlefield. NSA equipment and analysts were deployed inside Iraq to enable genuine “real time” operations. Hand-in-glove intelligence–military operations alongside US Special Forces developed, exploiting the digital communications networks of insurgents with lethal efficiency. RTRG heralded a new operational art of warfare with cyber at its core. It also had significant implications for Australia’s operational involvement.

Pine Gap among other joint facilities is the primary locale for the US–Australia SIGINT relationship over five decades.³⁵ The facility underwent significant expansion between 2006 and 2008 with regard to its operational remit, number and depth of multi-agency involvement, and customer base for the ‘actionable intelligence’ it produced.³⁶ In sum, this period saw Pine Gap expand its remit beyond ground control of orbital systems (since 1967) and relay station for ballistic missile-defence data (since 1999) into support for real time military operations worldwide.³⁷ Expansion paralleled significant organisational changes at the US National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), with the above mentioned shifts in operational focus at NSA. The NRO established a Ground Enterprise Directorate with the explicit mandate of transforming Pine Gap and similar Mission Ground Stations into premier providers of integrated real time intelligence tailored for war-fighting, as manifest in the NSA’s RTRG.³⁸ This put Pine Gap’s 2006–8 expansion at the fulcrum of developments in cyber warfare, its integration into military and intelligence operations, and their battlefield debut in 2007. It gave Australia, via the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) co-located with US agencies at Pine Gap, ‘access to the heart of frontier advances in information operations’.³⁹

Catching up and collective cyber security

In 2008 Australia’s civilian and military capacity for both computer network defence and offensive countermeasures in cyberspace were underdeveloped.⁴⁰ For the ADF, cyber security was a critical enabler inside broader efforts to stand up a fully networked force that sought to take advantage of competitive opportunities for small but technically sophisticated militaries in the digital age.⁴¹ As strategic, economic and political narratives played out, with many quick to question

the forbearance of the alliance under the Trump administration, Australia has been expanding its reach and competency in cyberspace in both the civilian and military spheres. In January 2010 the ASD (then Defence Signals Division) established the Cyber Security Operations Centre, a defence-based centre hosting liaisons with other agencies. In November 2014 it became the Australian Cyber Security Centre housing all contributing agencies⁴² under a one roof, whole-of-government approach. In April 2016 the government released its inaugural Cyber Security Strategy,⁴³ while the 2016 Australian Defence White Paper quietly prioritised cyber security as a key capability area, flagging expansion of the cyber workforce with the intention of establishing a research and development capability to help strengthen the ADF's military information systems.⁴⁴ Parliament passed laws introducing mandatory reporting of data breaches for businesses with responsibilities under the Privacy Act which came into force in February 2018. Standards Australia developed a priority list of standards to support development of blockchain technology, a key element in the effort to build security and provenance into Web 2.0.⁴⁵ For all of these efforts, Australia draws on its partnership with the United States, leveraging its multi-decade membership of the Five Eyes intelligence sharing agreement. In addition, Australia in 2017 looked to bolster partnerships with established cyber-leaders, including Japan, Israel and Estonia.

By the time Obama handed over the presidency to Trump in January 2017, the reality of cyberspace was that the constitutive elements of international security were effectively garbled. Cyberspace emerged as a ubiquitous yet opaque battlefield. Its physical attributes are as tangible as any other, but do not conform to a typical pre-twenty-first-century geopolitical outline. This does not mean that states are not competing to control it. Similarly, the status and functions attributed to cyberwarfare remain very much in their infancy. Obama's legacy to Trump is that the race to secure the US strategic stake in the physical and institutional realities of cyber warfare is very much on. Perhaps no geographical region is more strategically consequential in this race than the Indo-Pacific – a region in which Australia is 'top-centre', no longer 'down-under'.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Obama's progressive and persuasive expression of liberal internationalism found resonance in Australia. The rules-based order Obama promoted overtly was one which Australia necessarily endorsed and has supported both publicly and consistently. As such it marked a departure from the Bush administration that preceded it and the Trump administration that would follow. In its vocal nationalism, the Trump administration's derision for international norms, including a ready failure to support the international trading system, climate change regimes and international organisations more generally, coupled with a diminution of

the State Department's influence, generated concerns in Australia regarding the sustainability of the liberal international order. Regionally, a spiral of distrust,⁴⁷ unable to be moderated by Obama and exacerbated in 2017 by the variations in the DPRK–US relationship, aggravates the discomfort currently experienced in Australia, as indeed elsewhere in the region.

And yet, two years into the Trump presidency in early 2019, these observations of the public divergence between US administrations and the repercussions for Australia belie the continuity of a realist pragmatism in US foreign policy: a pragmatism to which Australia also subscribes.⁴⁸ Arguably, if Trump is inclined to any arm of government, he appears most disposed to the Pentagon's hierarchy and strategy. Though presidential rhetoric in 2017–18 was more dramatic, inconsistent, and risk laden, few substantive changes were made to the US force posture in the Asia Pacific. Cold War-era security agreements have thus far been maintained, and some reweighting of US forces to the region continued, defining the continuity of the US military presence. Divergences between Trump's diplomacy and US military strategy, however, revealed to Australia that as it marks the southern anchor of US presence in East Asia, it must work to reconstitute trust with regional states as they reassess their great power hedging strategies.

As argued in this chapter, Obama rigorously pursued policies to maximise US authority at an inflection point of an emerging and rapidly developing cyberspace commons. Moreover, the United States did so in the full embrace of state power as constituted by the entirety of its public and private resources. The weight of its innovative technological resources was central to its pursuit of cyber exploitation and in maintaining primacy in the Asia Pacific. Thus, US security policy was increasingly cyber and corporatised, and as such more exposed to attendant uncertainty as it was by necessity interlinked with the big Internet and data primes. Australia, as a US ally and middle power with a vital interest in the vanguard of high-tech advancement, is a willing partner but unsupported by indigenous capacity. Yet the more significant implications for Australia at a time of dynamic change in the international system arise from the tapering of Australian choices in and beyond the strategic setting, as it progressively integrates with US technologies and systems. Australia's discomfort, which has also risen with the unpredictability of the Trump policy choices, is now more likely to be accelerated as rapid and far-reaching technological change generates greater uncertainty.

Notes

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