RE-EVALUATING "COOPERATIVE SECURITY" AND GOOD INTERNATIONAL CITIZENSHIP: THE CASE OF CAMBODIA

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Abstract

This article challenges the accepted wisdom amongst academics and policy makers that Gareth Evans' post-Cold War Australian foreign policy reflected a 'sea change' in how its interests were pursued on the world stage. This was underpinned by what became termed acting as a 'good international citizen'. Drawing inspiration from previous foreign minister, Herbert Evatt, Evans argued that Australia's relative size and geographic position allowed it to do more in solving issues of international security. Adopting the role of mediator during international crises and an activist role in peacekeeping operations also meant Australia developed a particular type of niche diplomacy to promote strategies for conflict resolution. Yet closer examination of the empirical record reveals a different story. In arguing that 'good international citizenship' has been too uncritically adopted as a canon in Australian foreign policy circles, this article examines Evans' concept of cooperative security and its connection to good international citizenship. In doing so it identifies three themes that one might expect to result from such a normative policy objective. I then evaluate these themes in more detail and apply them to Australia's involvement in the resolution of conflict in Cambodia. By engaging with extensive archival material I demonstrate that Australia's actions were not consistent with the expectations of cooperative security. Instead, as the Cambodian case demonstrates, the story was much more one of continuity rather than transformation.
This article challenges the accepted wisdom amongst academics and policy makers that Gareth Evans’ post-Cold War Australian foreign policy reflected a ‘sea change’ in how its interests were pursued on the world stage. This was underpinned by what became termed acting as a ‘good international citizen.’ Drawing inspiration from previous foreign minister, Herbert Evatt (amongst others), Evans argued that Australia’s relative size and geographic position allowed it to do more in solving issues of international security. A past history of acting as a mediator during times of crisis, coupled to an activist role in peacekeeping operations meant Australia developed a particular type of niche diplomacy in promoting strategies for conflict resolution.

Yet a closer examination of the empirical record reveals a different story. In arguing that ‘good international citizenship’ has been too uncritically adopted as canon in Australian foreign policy circles, this article is divided into two main parts. The first examines Evan’s concept of cooperative security and its connection to good international citizenship. In doing so, it identifies three themes that one might expect to result from such a normative policy objective. The first is a preference for multilateralism as the primary mode for the resolution of disputes. Second, and as a corollary, is the generation and promotion of ideas which make cooperative diplomacy the central purpose of statecraft rather than the exercise of military resources. The third and final theme concerns the reduction of conflict as the likely policy outcome from a policy of cooperative security.

The next section of the paper evaluates whether these expectations were actually borne out. It engages with extensive primary source material to demonstrate that Australia’s actions in Cambodia were not consistent with a cooperative security agenda. In particular, Australia preferred to conduct its diplomacy through government-to-government links that

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316 Gareth Evans has stated that upon coming foreign minister he was ‘acutely conscious of the Labor giants - Evatt, Whitlam and Hayden - who occupied the seat before me, the values they stood for and the distinct traditions I was inheriting.’ According to Evans, this tradition consisted of three distinct themes: nationalism, internationalism and activism,’ which made up Australia’s policy of good international citizenship. See Gareth Evans, ‘The labor tradition: A view from the 1990s,’ in Evatt to Evans: The Labor Tradition in Australian Foreign Policy ed David Lee and Christopher Waters (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1997), p. 11.
made it easier to garner support for implementing the practical elements of the peace plan. This was part of Australia’s new agenda for regional security, and consistent with broader strategic goals articulated in its policy of ‘constructive engagement’ with Southeast Asia. Along with making bilateralism a priority, Australian policymakers actively sought to lobby support for its role as the lead nation in the military operations which would strengthen its diplomatic credentials and bring reciprocal benefits. Lastly, the chance to form closer economic ties with Vietnam can be seen as a key and often overlooked policy objective motivating Australia’s attempts at resolving the crisis in Cambodia.

Cooperative security, middle powers and good international citizenship

Much has been written about Australia’s efforts to negotiate a resolution to the long-running conflict in Cambodia. Some, like Bruce Grant and Ramesh Thakur, have argued that Australia’s push for a peaceful Cambodian settlement can be viewed as a test case for the application of cooperative security and the pursuit of national interests driven by the notion of good international citizenship.317 Others, like Jim George and Desmond Ball, have been critical of this analysis, stressing instead the conscious intent by policymakers to position Australia as an ‘active middle power’ with the ability to shape its broader strategic environment.318 However, there has yet to be a systematic critique of Australia’s policy motivations behind its involvement in Cambodia. Nor has there been much engagement with the assumption of whether this reflected a legitimate shift towards a more normative foreign policy approach following the end of the Cold War.

Cooperative security is a concept underpinned by the assumption that the post-Cold War order was more conducive than bipolarity to the prevention and resolution of international conflict. According to this view, cooperation replaced conflict as the default mode of statecraft, and states were freer to consider issues of global security such as human rights,

the environment, disarmament and transnational crime. Not only were states better able to redirect national resources towards solving these problems; they could do so through diplomacy rather than through the application of military force. Francis Fukuyama and Robert Keohane, from an early stage, pointed towards greater Soviet-US ties, the excise of collective security in resolving the Gulf crisis and the outcomes of the Malta Conference, as evidence of this new multipolar and cooperative international system. Once the USSR collapsed this view was further strengthened by commitments to transition the UN Security Council into a global institution with moral authority, and the strengthening of regional security organizations like the Conference for the Security Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Such structural changes were of significance to Australian foreign policy makers in determining how best to position the nation in a new 'internationalist' environment. Australia had been a key partner in the Western Alliance system and had supported North-Atlantic policy aims during the Cold War. In the new order Australia could focus on building a more distinctive foreign and security policy that would establish it as an influential player in shaping global issues. In this context, former Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans' book Cooperating for Peace (or 'the bluebook') is viewed in academic circles as Australia’s conceptual contribution towards achieving that goal. Evans argued that Australia should be guided by the notion of cooperative security, where states shy away from military solutions, exhibit a preference for multilateralism, and make room for the important role of non-state actors. More specifically, cooperative security stressed 'the value of creating habits of dialogue on a multilateral basis.'

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322 Ibid, p. 16.
Indeed, it has been widely regarded that Australia is a middle power that follows this specific set of policy prescriptions. While the literature approaches the concept with a certain level of ambiguity, a middle power nation is typically defined by its position in the international hierarchy, its geographic location and its ability to exert a certain level of influence on the world stage by acting as a mediator in promoting action on global issues such as nuclear disarmament, climate change and peacekeeping. This means middle powers are usually seen to position themselves as honest brokers that facilitate cooperation towards these common goals, or what has been termed 'middlepowerdom.'

Middle powers notionally preference multilateralism over bilateralism because they accept the relative interdependence of states and their lack of military strength means bilateral modes of statecraft are less effective in resolving disputes between states. Cooper, Higgot and Nossal argue that this allows middle powers to be perceived as more trustworthy than great powers, since they are less likely to resort to the use of force to achieve their policy aims. More recently, this has been disputed by Robert Ayson, who argued that smaller powers seek diplomatic opportunities to threaten the use of force in pursuit of strategic aims. Nonetheless, Michael Wesley and Allan Gyngell state that this was a major advantage for Australia in its ability to exert influence in the negotiations between the great powers at the Paris International Conference (PIC). Australia's diplomacy was viewed as being successful because it demonstrated significant interest in solving the problem of power sharing, but enough disinterest in the outcomes of any proposed strategy to be trusted by all parties.

325 Andrew Cooper, Richard Higgot and Kim Nossal, 'Leadership, fellowship and middle powers,' p. 18.
As a result, nations like Australia and Canada are seen to adopt a distinct style of 'active' or 'creative' diplomacy, with foreign policy behavior guided by the norm of cooperation. Rather than the end goal being the egoist pursuit of power, the outcome of statecraft can be determined by the reduction of conflict. Thus, middle powers find multilateralism via international institutions easier than embarking on a series of bilateral networks where each dyad requires careful negotiation and accommodation of competing interests. Evans and Bruce Grant have argued that Australia’s participation in the resolution of the Cambodian conflict reflected this style of active diplomacy, which demonstrated a shift in how Australia conducted itself on the international stage. This is not in itself divorced from the rhetorical substance of past Australian foreign policy. Before Evans, Australian diplomacy had taken a ‘good offices’ or ‘representative’ role, in its promotion of Indonesian independence during the struggle against Dutch occupation, and in heading the delegation of Suez users during the canal crisis of 1956. Yet, in Cambodia, Australia’s action was ‘neither front nor back seat driving, but the more demanding, although less visible role of mapmaker and persuader.’

Cooperative security in practice

The origins of cooperative security and good international citizenship can be traced to Evatt’s role at the 1945 San Francisco Conference, yet Evans is viewed as having incorporated the notion into rational calculations of Australia’s own national interests. In particular, he stated that Australia’s concern for security, defense and economic growth should be filtered through its capacity to do ‘good’ by others in international relations. In

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329 Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, Australia’s Foreign Relations: In the World of the 1990s 2nd ed, p.234.
331 Evans and Grant, Australia’s Foreign Relations: In the Worlds of the 1990s 2nd ed, p. 234
other words, good international citizenship is a means for Australia to pursue what Hedley Bull described as ‘duties beyond ourselves,’ or enlightened self-interest.332

Pointing towards Australia’s participation in multilateral human rights forums such as the UN Commission on Human Rights; its involvement in peacekeeping missions in Korea, Kashmir, Cyprus and the Middle East; as well as its heavy involvement in discussions relating to non-proliferation through the Canberra Commission and the framing of the Chemical Weapons Convention; Evans argued that Australia had implicitly accepted the principles of good international citizenship.333 These principles followed the framework of cooperative security in that these initiatives were multilateral in nature, defined by the creation of ideas and motivated by the desire to reach peaceful political solutions.334

In fleshing out the policy’s normative prescriptions, Evans stated that ‘Australia was committed to good international citizenship because a moral obligation is its own justification.’335 Evans and Grant took this further and described the motive behind the policy as one of good faith: ‘the policy development process of middle powers, which – certainly in Australia’s case – act[...for reasons primarily stemming from liberal ideologies and support for good international citizenship.’336 From this perspective, good international citizenship can be seen as operationalizing cooperative security, and in doing so converged ‘best’ practice with ‘right’ practice.

But was this really the case? Below I chart Australia’s involvement in the Cambodian conflict to argue that in fact Australia adopted a policy approach that was directly at odds with the expectations of cooperative security and good international citizenship. Specifically, I show that Australia pursued bilateralism over multilateralism as the dominant mode of statecraft.

333 Gareth Evans, ‘Foreign Policy and Good International Citizenship.’ Address by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Gareth Evans, Canberra, 6th March 1990.
336 Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, Australia’s Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s 2nd ed, p. 42.
Policy planners made the use of force implicit in peace proposals. In turn, these were motivated by the desire for material payoffs in prestige rather than a concern for regional cooperation. The main objective driving the success of the peace strategy was the view that Australia would receive significant economic benefits in developing greater trade links with Vietnam. This was a long-term foreign policy goal that had been obstructed by the ongoing conflict in Cambodia, and the end of the Cold War provided Australia with the opportunity to pursue this outcome.

Cambodia: as a sea change in Australia’s approach to conflict resolution? A test case of good international citizenship.

Australia’s position on Cambodia developed in the early 1950s when Assistant Secretary to the Department of External Affairs (DEA) James Plimsoll stated that the most ‘useful role Australia can play is to continue to encourage both sides to come together[...]it seems undesirable, however, that Australia should seek to play the part as a mediator since this might lose us friends on both sides.’ 337 Effectively, Australia acted as a representative for US interests in Indo-China, and expected to be reimbursed its costs by Washington if any Australian personnel were sent to Cambodia. 338 As the situation in Cambodia became more complex and politically charged, the US preferred to communicate with Phnom Penh through intermediaries. The Australian embassy was ideal for this purpose given it was already staffed with US liaison officers who had previously developed friendly relations with both South Vietnamese and Cambodian elites. During the early stages of the Vietnam War Australia was able to act as an interlocutor in the establishment of US-Cambodian intelligence sharing, and related operational activities along the Cambodian/South Vietnamese border. 339 From this time, until Australia’s participation in the War formally ended in 1973, its involvement in Cambodia and wider Indochina were motivated by its commitment to the ANZUS alliance.

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337 NAA 420/4/1 Cambodian relations with Vietnam and Thailand 19th April 1956.
338 NAA 1364/2/1 Australian representation of US interests in Cambodia Nov 1965.
339 NAA 3016/10/12 PM brief memo on Cambodian/US relations May 1967.
However, following the end of the conflict in Vietnam, Australia’s actions in the Third Indochina War were largely at odds with the multilateral solutions discussed during the Cambodian peace negotiations that occurred at the PIC. These negotiations had begun in 1981 and by 1989 had reached an indefinite roadblock. Australia had no direct involvement in these negotiations yet had key interests in seeing an end to the conflict. The most important of these was to ‘reset’ previous attempts at building strong relations with Vietnam. Australia immediately set out to achieve this, despite condemnation from both ASEAN and other nations at the PIC - notably China and the US.

In 1983, Labor came to power with a Vietnam policy platform that began with the restoration of direct aid, which Australia had previously been forced to cut in line with ASEAN and US decisions to isolate Hanoi. While under previous governments Australia had continued bilateral aid to Laos as an indirect signal of its interests in Vietnam, the Hawke government determined that the nation should be given alternatives to dependency on the Soviet Union, and since Australia had already established a diplomatic post in Vietnam, it was ideally suited for this role. On a four-day visit to Vietnam in July 1983, foreign minister Bill Hayden announced a series of initiatives that demonstrated Canberra’s commitment to a warming of bilateral relations. These included ministerial exchanges, joint academic and information symposiums, trade promotion assistance and English language training for Vietnamese in Australia. In a show of support for Australia’s efforts, Vietnamese foreign minister Nguyen Co Thach visited Australia in 1984 and Hayden travelled to Vietnam again in 1985.

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340 In July 1981 ASEAN sponsored the UN-convened International Conference on Kampuchea (ICK) which Vietnam boycotted on the assumption that the CGDK was being declared the legitimate government. Instead, the CGDK proposed a quadripartite power sharing agreement where the four Cambodian fractions would share power of Cambodia equally. This was followed by the Grobachev initiative in July 1986 which stated that any settlement to the Cambodia issue would have to first achieve the normalisation of Sino-Vietnamese relations. In July 1988 and early 1989, Indonesia and Vietnam proposed the Joint Informal Meeting (JIM) which brought together the four Cambodian factions, Vietnam, Laos and the six members of ASEAN, to discuss the power sharing issue. For a more nuanced account of these initiatives and the background to 1989 PIC see David Chandler, ‘Cambodia Since 1979,’ *A History of Cambodia*, 3rd ed. (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), pp. 227-246.


342 Peter Howarth, ‘Vietnam and Australia: The Cambodian situation and bilateral relations,’ *Australian Foreign Affairs Record* 56 no. 3 (1985), p.175.

This engagement was immediately condemned by China and the US, who were against any rapprochement with Vietnam while it was continuing to support acts of aggression towards Cambodia. In Beijing, leaders declared that Australia was being used by Hanoi as a ‘cat’s paw,’ and the US looked on Australia’s actions with some concern, having been unsuccessful at blocking Vietnam’s request for multilateral aid through UN agencies. Disapproval of Australian diplomacy was compounded by its refusal to co-sponsor ASEAN’s United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution calling for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Cambodia, and self-determination for the Cambodian people. Hayden argued that Australia could not support a bill that sought to further marginalise Vietnam, and did nothing to halt the influence of the Pol Pot regime.

The issue of bilateral aid to Vietnam continued until 1984 and generated several debates in the Australian House of Representatives. To appease international concerns, Australia changed how its aid policy was described, outlining a distinction between humanitarian and developmental assistance. The aid provided to Vietnam was described as ‘humanitarian,’ and therefore not tied to any conditions of support for the Vietnamese government. This was accepted as a less overt form of bilateral aid delivery, even though it led to the development of joint projects in agriculture, education and health, as well as the awarding of a contract to the government owned Overseas Telecommunications Cooperation (OTC) to build a radio satellite station in Ho Chi Minh City. Australia’s initiatives bore signs of reciprocity when Vietnam signalled out Australia as the only non-fraternal (non-socialist) nation that it would be interested in developing stronger diplomatic relations with. Australia’s commitment to providing humanitarian aid continued through the Cambodian negotiations, to the extent that by 1990 it was providing nearly $20 million annually in assistance.

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344 Ian Davis, ‘China calls Hayden a ‘cat’s paw’ for Hanoi,’ The Age, March 14th 1985, p.1
345 See in particular HOR Hansard no. 34, 13th February 1986, p. 152.
Alongside pursuing bilateral ties with Vietnam, Hayden developed Australia’s own proposals for achieving a peaceful resolution of the Cambodian conflict. Hayden explained that Australia had a specific interest in the Cambodian problem as ‘the greatest unresolved source of tension in the Southeast Asian region’, which affected its ties with Vietnam and contributed to security concerns in refugee flows. In individual talks between Hayden, Thach and Cambodian Prime Minister Hu Sen, a six-point peace plan was developed that focused on negotiating a ceasefire; the removal of the Pol Pot regime; an international observer role for the UN; and the phased withdrawal of Vietnamese forces. These discussions resulted in another instance of public condemnation, this time by ASEAN who were suspicious of Australia’s close diplomatic relationship with Vietnam. By the end of 1986, Hayden had failed to gather support for the plan and ceased his activism on Cambodia. However, these government-to-government links did lay the groundwork for the ‘shuttle diplomacy’ that followed in gaining approval for the Evans peace proposal.

What sea change? The steady currents of Australia’s foreign policy

By 1989 the PIC had reached an impasse over the delicate issue of power sharing between the four Cambodian parties: the Vietnamese-installed Peoples Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) and the three remaining factions that formed the Coalition Government of a Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). From 1989 Australia’s contribution towards international attempts to resolve the crisis was to gather support for its own proposal to break the impasse. In this regard, its approach remained consistent with its earlier efforts. Evans, as Australia’s new foreign minister, proposed a peace initiative largely modelled on the previous six-point plan, except he made an important inclusion: a new role for the UN as a transitional administration that would have the ultimate authority over Cambodia’s internal affairs during its transition to democracy. To achieve widespread support for the proposal Michael Costello endured an intense period of nation-to-nation shuttle diplomacy between

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350 HOR Hansard, 19th March 1985, p. 469.
352 The CGDK consisted of the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCHINPEC); the Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK) or the Khmer Rouge; and the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front (KPNLF).
353 Gareth Evans, Senate Hansard no. 142, 6th December 1989, pp.51656-75.
1989 and 1991 where he met with representatives from 13 different key nations over 21 days.\(^{354}\) In a similar style to Hayden, Costello met with heads of governments on a bilateral basis and the end result was widespread international acceptance of the Australian proposal. This was expanded into a 154-page working paper series Cambodia: An Australian Proposal (also known as the ‘Red Book’), and presented to the Cambodia parties, ASEAN members, Vietnam and Laos in Jakarta in February 1990.\(^{355}\)

The working papers outlined the establishment of a symbolic national council embodying Cambodian sovereignty. The UN would supervise the withdrawal of foreign forces and have direct control of the civil and political administration during the transition to self-government, following free and fair elections.\(^{356}\) By the end of 1991, the UNSC P5, as well as Indonesia, France, the UN Secretariat, and the four Cambodian parties had agreed to establish a Supreme National Council (SNC) to oversee the restoration of Cambodian sovereignty.\(^{357}\) The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 717 that formed the United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC).\(^{358}\) As expressed in the Paris Agreements, this peacekeeping mission facilitated the creation of UNTAC. The mandate provided the UN the power necessary to implement the agreement, and adopted the original Australian proposal.\(^{359}\)

The overall cost of Australia’s contribution to the UN administrative operation was $28.7 million, in addition to $49 million via a supplement to the defence budget. When UNAMIC was established in early November 1991, Australia provided 40 Army signallers,

\(^{356}\) The Australian proposal stated that these must be the essential objectives to which all the work of a comprehensive settlement must be directed.
\(^{357}\) ‘Cambodia agrees to UN controlled election.’ Special to *The New York Times*, Thursday 14\(^{th}\) December 1989, p. 17.
supplemented by a further 25 personnel in February 1992. When UNTAC replaced UNAMIC in 1992 Australia provided the first contingent of 495 personnel through the Force Communications Unit. The second contingent included the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), and the New Zealand Army. Australia also provided 14 personnel to serve on the UNTAC headquarters staff, and 10 police offers were dispatched for the UNTAC’s civilian component. In May 1992 Australia provided a movement control unit of 30 personnel to assist with the deployment of UTAC’s forces.

Far from representing the cooperative mode of statecraft advocated by Evans, the extent of Australia’s military commitment described above was predicated on the expectation that it would benefit from being seen as the leading nation in an international peacekeeping force. There was a significant concern that Australia would lose the credibility it gained via its participation in the creation of the peace settlement if it did not support this with material resources. As Hugh Smith noted, ‘the proposed Cambodian operation could turn into quagmire or a humiliating failure and in neither instance would Australia stand to gain much international prestige.’ It was not just the gains in reputation that were fueling Australia’s level of military commitment; there were also significant strategic benefits in that Australia was provided with an opportunity to achieve its policy of constructive engagement. Previously, the differences in culture, size and influence between Australia and nations of Southeast Asia (particularly Indonesia) had made defense cooperation difficult to pursue. Assuming leadership in the military operation meant Australia could gain operational experience and inter-operability with nations of Southeast Asia without having to negotiate individual defense cooperation agreements.

The most significant material gain motivating Australia's involvement in Cambodia was the development of closer business and economic ties with Vietnam. This was the determining factor in its initial policy of diplomatic recognition in 1973 and was highlighted later by Evans in pushing for a Cambodian peace settlement:

We have seen it as important to assist as best we can in the commercial and economic recovery of the country, and we are taking steps accordingly to upgrade our presence in Vietnam at a trade representation level to ensure that that occurs. There is a consistency about our position in this respect. We are trying in a number of ways to ensure that enough of an environment is created where there is still pressure to proceed towards a settlement of the unresolved questions in Cambodia.366

After the initial phase of the implementation of the peace agreement, Australia replaced its 1974 trade and investment agreement with the Agreement on Trade and Economic Co-operation in 1991 and the Investment Protection Agreement signed in March 1991.367 By late 1991 Australia was enjoying a two-way trade surplus of $3.23 million with Vietnam and had established several joint project and investment ventures.368 These projects were focused on construction and industry, telecommunications and services, agro-forestry and fisheries, processing, and education and training.369 As a result, Australia became one of the top five investing countries in Vietnam, with two-way trade rising from a low base of $6.1 million in 1984 to over 100 million in 1991. Australia also gained access to Vietnam's emerging market in timber, rubber and fishing resources where previously it had struggled against competition from North and Southeast Asian nations.370

370 'Indo-Chinese Economic Co-operation.' HOR Hansard no. 150, 19th August 1986, p. 58.
The warming of relations with Vietnam also led to specific business opportunities for Australian companies in infrastructure development and mining with BHP Engineering coal mine involved in the development and rehabilitation of Vietnam steel industry and BHP Petroleum having a role in oil exploration. AWA Tripal also established an air navigation and communications deal and CRA Exploration signed a contract to search for mineral resources. Previous work by OTC Australia placed it in a good position to liaise with OTC International’s search for earth satellite stations in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. 371 Infrastructure development opened further market opportunities with Australian exports in ships, specialised machinery, telecommunication and iron and steel reaching $80.9 million by 1994. 372

In comparison, Cambodia’s economic development had been relatively stagnant and Australia’s trade relationship with the nation has remained minimal. It is largely underdeveloped in terms of infrastructure and civil service with not much interest in the way of primary commodities where its main exports are foodstuffs and timber. The structural difficulties and lack of effective political administration meant it had little to offer in being a source for labour or manufactured goods. 373 The process of economic and human development was not a major policy concern for Australia, but the normalization of Vietnamese and Cambodian relations with Southeast Asia following a resolution to the Cambodian conflict meant that by 1999 both nations had been granted ASEAN membership. Greater regional engagement between Indochina and ASEAN was a major foreign policy aim for Australia and was part of Evans’ framework for achieving regional security. 374

373 At present Cambodia’s manufactured exports to Australia mainly consist of textiles (clothing, bed linen and towels), clothing, and footwear. The total amount of Australian imports from Cambodia is only A$58m. As of 2010, there were no recorded values for Australia’s investment relationship with Cambodia or for its exchange in services. Australia ranks 18th in two-way trade with Cambodia.
The addition of Vietnam and Cambodia as members meant ASEAN represented a market of half a billion people and a regional GDP of US$700 billion. By the early 1990s, Australia had developed proficiency in low density, long distance communication systems, as well as skills in biotechnology, agri-industries, agricultural research, medical training, mining technology and mineral processing. Many of these were ideally suited to Asia-Pacific and Indo-Chinese investment. Based on this evidence, the stabilization of Indochina presented sizeable opportunities for economic integration and it was the expectation of material outcomes driving Australia’s resolution of the Cambodian problem.

Re-evaluating cooperative security: the ‘Good’ Evans?

Viewed in this light, good international citizenship was an attempt by Evans to repackage the national interest to suit Australia’s regional and economic foreign policy goals, particularly the quest for new markets resulting from the resolution of conflict in wider Indochina. The uncovering of this economic agenda also lays bare the importance Australia placed on its relationship with Vietnam in shaping its policy towards the ‘Cambodian problem.’ This challenges the assumption put forth by Evans that Australia’s post Cold War decision-making was being guided by a normative cooperative security agenda. One of the central problems of Evans’ sea change was the assumption that Australia’s security environment had undergone a rapid structural shift where cooperation had replaced Realpolitik. Such an understanding of the Asia-Pacific strategic dynamic was disputed by a number of foreign policy observers who, at the time, argued that the change in the global balance of power will have no significant effects on the direction of Australian foreign and security policy. In particular, Coral Bell argued that the nature of Australia’s geopolitical landscape would remain largely consistent where approaches towards issues of global security are determined by perceptions of continued economic prosperity. Taking this argument further, Andrew Mack noted that cooperative security reflected the transformation of


national agendas to prioritize economic wellbeing over defence against perceived military threats.  

Before he was foreign minister, Evans even supported this repositioning of Australian national interests to fit with its geographical location amongst developing nations. It was not enough for Australia to base its calculation of the national interest on its status as a western nation in the North Atlantic alliance system. Instead, for him, Australia needed to pay more attention to developing relationships vital in establishing Cambodia as an influential player in Southeast Asia. This was significant not only for Australia’s long-term security interests as part of the policy of defense self-reliance, but also for its ability to reap the benefits of an emerging export and labour market. From Evan’s perspective, Australia was in a unique position where it could be seen as doing good by contributing to Third World development while still achieve significant long-term strategic and economic interests.  

The desire to do ‘good’ was motivated by the rational interest calculation that Australia was set to benefit in material outcomes from achieving a resolution to the Cambodian conflict. The end goal of statecraft was therefore not the reduction of conflict and reflected a concerted effort by Australian policymakers to maximize the economic return of the nations’ diplomatic and military resources. This push in search of financial prosperity was made alongside changes to the domestic structures involved in Australian foreign policy making. In 1987, the amalgamation of the Department of Trade with the Department of Foreign Affairs cemented the shift towards viewing economic security within the traditional ‘high’ politics of the politico-security agenda. This meant diplomacy expanded to encompass more function roles in human rights, culture, nuclear disarmament, the environment and participation in the UN. Hence, during this time, Australia led such initiatives as the ban on mining in

Antarctica; established the Cairns Group on agriculture; pushed for a resolution on the Chemical Weapons Convention; and spoke out against Apartheid in South Africa. 379

While the ending of the Cold War did not produce a major shift in Australian foreign policy perspectives, it did, however, have to adapt to the end of its forward defence strategy and consider issues of regional security not determined by the bipolar system as intra-state conflict had the potential to threaten the balance of regional stability. 380 Following the release of The Defense of Australia (DOA) and in response to a changing security environment, Evans made a major speech in 1989 redefining Australia regional security and defense strategy. It emphasized the relationship between national defence and Australia’s need to exert a more assertive role in the Asia-Pacific, where the capability of Australia’s armed forces had a relevance for both the defence of Australia and for the defence of the region as a whole, otherwise it would be left to ‘a secondary role in the region.’ 381

Yet the extent to which Australia could legitimately use force in the pursuit of interests outside the defence of national territory was severely limited when it came to Southeast Asia. In Evans’ own words:

In considering this issue [the use of force] we are effectively looking only at the South Pacific, where our military power is disproportionally large: our ability to undertake such initiatives in the countries of Southeast Asia will be very limited. 382

The ability to excise military assets to help resolve the Cambodian conflict represented an opportunity for Australia to achieve this more elusive strategic goal without jeopardising its diplomatic standing in the region. In fact, the effort placed in building a consensus on Australia’s role in implementing the peacekeeping operation strengthened its standing

379 Gareth Evans, Australia’s Role in the New World Order, Opening address by Senator Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, to the Conference on Vietnam’s Economic Renovation, Research School of Pacific Studies, ANU, Canberra, 18 September 1990.
381 Australia’s Regional Security, Ministerial Statement by Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra, December 1989, p 17-20.
382 Ibid, p 21-22
among Southeast Asia, and led to further reciprocal benefits in prestige when Indonesia’s public support for the Australian proposals led to an invitation to participate in the JMC where previously it had been shut out of direct talks on issues affecting stability in Indo-China. The wider acceptance of Australia’s actions in Cambodia also carried weight when it came to presenting its proposals for Asia Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) where Indonesian foreign minister Ali Alatas agreed to represent Australian interests in convincing the other ASEAN states to accept the initiative. 383

The dominance of bilateral modes of statecraft during the Cambodian conflict demonstrates that the emphasis on multilateralism in achieving cooperative security is relevant only insofar as it provided a rhetorical justification for Australian regional security policy. The attention placed on multilateralism in the early 1990s did not lead to any real effects that fundamentally altered Australia’s behavior. The majority of the Asia-Pacific nations remained committed to the bilateral structures that maintained stability during the Cold War and viewed multilateralism as largely incompatible with their own strategic interests. 384 Skepticism about the value of inter-state cooperation - combined with the perception that Australia was seen as unsophisticated and flat-footed when it cam to forays into Southeast Asian security issues - indicated to policymakers that attempts at multilateral diplomacy would largely fail to generate support for any home-grown peace initiatives.

Keeping this in mind, Australia’s own commitment to multilateral frameworks can be viewed primarily as a means of gaining ‘a seat at the table,’ without the expectation that this would produce too many tangible outcomes for Australia’s national interests. 385 Previous attempts to resolve the Cambodian issue by Hayden were not well received by the Indonesians or Thais, who were insulted by Australia’s irreverence towards individual differences of interests between the ASEAN nations. 386 Hence, when it came to garnering support for the

proposals outlined in the Red Book, Evans and Costello preferred to conduct diplomatic negotiations on a bilateral basis where a direct reciprocal outcome could be achieved. The consistency in Australia’s commitment to these relationships meant it was regarded with respect when conducting negotiations and this contact provided grounding for continued good offices in neighbouring Southeast Asian countries. Indeed, Australia’s Costello had singled out a preference for bilateralism as a key factor in its successful diplomacy after 1989. There was a significant level of common ground reached between Australian representatives and the three critical figures involved – Nguyen Co Thach, Hun Sen, and Soviet Vice Foreign Minister Rogachev. This proved successful when both Thailand and Indonesia agreed to support the peace settlement with Thailand, providing the largest military contingent after Australia, and Indonesia putting in the greatest diplomatic effort in guaranteeing ASEAN approval of the peacekeeping mission. Thus, this approach can more accurately be viewed against the governments understanding of the economic benefits that flow from the establishment of over-lapping bilateral networks or ‘mini-lateralism.’

Conclusions

Rather than representing a comprehensive and new normative approach towards constructing foreign policy, this article has demonstrated that the cooperative security agenda - at least in the case of Cambodia evaluated here - inevitably faced the same tensions between purposive and practical action that have occupied critiques of the neoliberal project. A foreign and security policy based on absolute notions of statecraft does not always correspond to how states realistically conduct inter-state relations. In fact, the framework outlined by Evans in achieving cooperative security does not consider both


the contextual or the ideational limitations that can arise for states when dealing with
differences in ethnicity, culture and values.\textsuperscript{391}

Indeed, the end of the Cold War did not lead to the development of cultural homogeneity
based on liberal values, nor did it necessarily make multilateralism the preferred mode of
interaction. As Australia’s actions in dealing with the Cambodian crisis has demonstrated,
states choose to negotiate on a bilateral bases because this led to tangible outcomes in
building mutual trust and acceptance of proposals during future relations. Likewise, the
purpose behind Australia’s involvement was also not to spread ideas in the hope of reaching
a political solution, policymakers were keen to position Australia as the leading nation in
both the peace talks and the military operation to secure Cambodia. This was motivated by
the expectation that it would generate significant international prestige, provide a training
opportunity for Australian troops, as well as open up avenues for continued defense
cooperation in the region. More importantly, the use of national resources during the
implementation of the peace settlement was done under the assumption that this would
lead to greater opportunities for trade with Vietnam. In the final analysis, the ‘sea change’
many have come to accept without criticism is much more appropriately regarded as a story
of continuity rather than transformation.

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