

For all the pronouncements of a new independent, more mature foreign policy perspective in Australia in recent years there is little evidence that these questions have penetrated the consciousness of the IR mainstream where, it seems, faith in the redemptive powers of the U.S. cavalry remains a source of solace in a changing world.⁹³ But if they are allowed to penetrate, as I believe they must if Australia is to grow and prosper in the Asia/Pacific region, then a receding U.S. presence in theory and practice might be the catalyst for a more substantial understanding of the peoples, histories, cultures, languages and realities of those who inhabit this region (including ourselves).

For those who would counter such a suggestion with the proposition that this scenario would leave Australia even more vulnerable and defenceless than ever, another heretical suggestion is apposite. It is that there is already an alternative security and defence strategy designed to protect Australia from attack, which does not necessitate US involvement and which, by design, is much more consistent with a 'cooperative' approach to global and regional security than is the current policy format. Developed in the late 1980s by a range of strategic analysts and concerned citizens, the Secure Australia Project (SAP) has led a chequered existence since and it clearly is not without its problems.⁹⁴ But as a basis for reimagining an independent Australian security agenda it has much to commend it, particularly at a moment in the late 1990s with 'forward defence' themes again prominent in Government thinking.

I can only touch on one element of the SAP here to illustrate this reimagining potential. It concerns the innovative extra-dimensions it offers to the current security and defence format. On the defence theme, for example, while it retains a commitment to a conventional military force structure, it questions the validity and viability of the present agenda of 'defence-in-depth' (aka the 'air-sea gap' strategy) which, consistent with old assumptions and fears, still identifies Australia's area of potential threat as an area stretching 1,500 nautical miles from the Australian coastline and encompassing about 10% of the globe.⁹⁵

⁹³As in Defence Minister's Robert Ray's offer in 1995 to the US to extend its use of their strategic bases on Australian soil in order once again to entrench a US military presence in the region. See P. Clarke and D. Lague, "Australia Offers US More Use of Bases" in Sydney Morning Herald, April 21, 1995

⁹⁴See G. Cheeseman and St. John Kettle eds. The New Australian Militarism (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1990) and G. Smith and St. John Kettle, eds. Threats Without Enemies: Rethinking Australia's Security (Sydney: Pluto, 1992) For an interesting commentary on the SAP see S. Dalby "Continent Adrift?: Dissident Security Discourse and the Australian Geographical Imagination" in Australian Journal of International Affairs 50 (1) April 1996: 65-75

⁹⁵See G. Cheeseman, "An Effective and Affordable Defence for Australia" in G. Smith and St. John Kettle, eds. Threats Without Enemies op. cit. 1992, p. 295 The language has changed over the past decade. In the Defence White Paper of 1987 the strategy was articulated in terms of a "direct military