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REVIEW

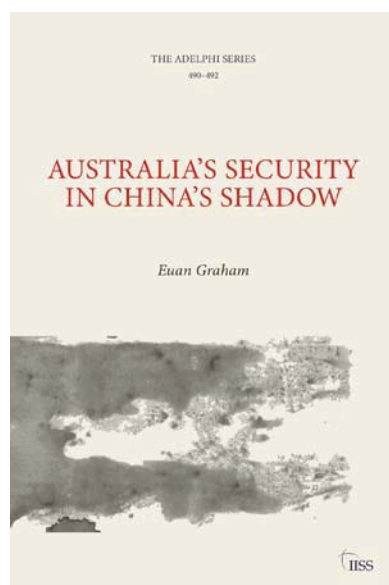
AUSTRALIA'S SECURITY IN CHINA'S SHADOW

Euan Graham (2023)

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On 24 April 2023, the Australian government, led by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, publicly released its Defence Strategic Review (DSR). In the words of Defence Minister Richard Marles, the document represents a radical security shift in Australia's security posture, even though the DSR was last updated in 2020. Echoing other recent strategic initiatives in Indo-Pacific countries such as Japan and South Korea, the Australian DSR plans a more ambitious build-up of its armed forces to make them capable of responding to growing threats in the country's environment.

The DSR advocates a closer alliance with traditional allies such as the US and the UK, justifying this on the grounds that China poses a serious threat to Australian interests. To this end, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) is judged to be currently unfit to deal with such threats without the acquisition of new capabilities, such as nuclear submarines, in order to provide a credible deterrent to the threat posed by China. Such build-up should be done in the shortest time possible, in order to add effective defence measures to possible cooperation with its allies, both in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) framework and in bilateral treaties with third countries. China and its global power projection forms the persistent backdrop. For Australia, how has this Chinese path to hegemon been perceived? Was there always a relationship marked by suspicion? *Australia's security in China's shadow*, published in March 2023 when the DSR had not yet been released, answers these questions.

The book's author, Euan Graham, has a long career as an expert on Indo-Pacific geopolitics. He is a senior fellow of the Shangri-La Dialogue for Indo-Pacific Defence and Strategy at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Singapore. Moreover, in recent years he has turned his expertise to defence policy and Australia's maritime strategy, having lived and worked in Japan, Singapore and Australia, where he was executive director of La Trobe Asia in Melbourne and director of the Lowy Institute's International Security Programme. Prior to that, he worked in the UK government as a research analyst in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, covering both North East and South East Asia.

Graham argues that a paradigm shift in Australia-China relations began in 2020 and which has solidified three years later, with Australia's perception of a Chinese security threat overtaking the traditionally good and fruitful economic and trade relations between the two countries. This relationship continues to this day. Canberra has therefore implemented a new defence policy in response to this perceived risk, both internally, countering Chinese efforts to influence Australia politically in an increasingly direct way and externally, most notably by resisting Chinese expansion in both Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific. Thus, Australia concluded that there was a need to acquire new capabilities and actively participate in strategic initiatives such as QUAD and AUKUS. For Graham, Australia has emerged as the leading example of a regional response to China's multiple security challenges.

The book is divided into seven chapters, each analysing a different aspect of the multiple challenges China poses to Australia's security and assessing the effectiveness of Australia's policy responses on each point. Of course, the author's focus is primarily on Australia and less on China's response or capabilities, as he sees Australia facing

its most significant strategic challenge since World War II, with both domestic and foreign policy ramifications.

The first chapter, symptomatically entitled “The end of the affair”, traces the relationship between Australia and China from the 1960s to the present day, based on the author’s premise that the Chinese giant has always had an interest in influencing Australia and her interests, both in domestic and foreign policy.

In chapter two, “China policy begins at home”, Graham develops the Australian government’s initiatives since the early 2020s to combat Chinese influence at home (an apparent priority even above the external risk posed by China’s presence in the Southwest Pacific) which has used tools such as espionage and disinformation, sometimes using fraudulent methods, other times loopholes in Australian laws or lack of cyber capabilities. In this sense, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is seen as the main dominant threat in Australia, and although the Australian government has always avoided pointing the finger directly at it, Canberra has nonetheless fought against a certain degree of coercion from the Chinese side, including the acquiescence of a significant section of the population with pro-Beijing sympathies.

Chapter three, “The political economy of Australia-China Relations”, describes the implementation, also from 2020, of a new economic policy in Australia as another response to perceived risks from China. Australia has managed to withstand the punitive trade restrictions that came from Beijing in retaliation that year without suffering major economic damage. The chapter analyses the main features of the economic relations between Australia and China, scaling them up in trade, investment and security. In addition, Graham highlights how Australia has been a pioneer among Western countries in enacting early measures to mitigate the risk of dependence on



Map: Australia and its surrounding region. Source: Adelphi Series, 61:490-492, pp. 10-12, DOI: [10.1080/19445571.2021.2187583](https://doi.org/10.1080/19445571.2021.2187583).

China, for example with the decision in 2018 to ban Chinese telecoms companies from participating in the country's 5G network.

Chapter four, "The China factor in Australia's defence strategy and alliance posture", looks at Australia's security and defence with this paradigm shift away from China starting in 2020. In the author's view, there have been considerable improvements in capabilities over the years, existing alliances have been strengthened or new ones have been forged, with the result that Australia now appears as a regional actor with the power to deter China's intentions, whatever they may be and in whatever sphere they may take place. More specifically, and in the context of Australia's alliance with the United States, Graham examines Australia's growing role in the United States' own military strategy towards China and the wider Pacific region. There is one final question that is difficult to answer, which confronts us with a hypothetical yet what could be a catastrophic scenario: can Australia deter Beijing without having nuclear weapons of its own? The debate on the acquisition and production of nuclear submarines in the framework of AUKUS can be seen as a response to this.

In chapter five, "Australia's Indo-Pacific statecraft and Southeast Asia, Graham explains how China influences Australian policy towards the Indo-Pacific and more specifically towards Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific, immediately adjacent to Australia itself. Thus, security and defence have emerged as Australia's main objectives for these regions, even more so than trade and economics. The author analyses this policy by framing it at the multilateral level, with membership of organisations such as QUAD, AUKUS and relations with ASEAN, and at the bilateral level, especially with leading countries in the region such as India, Japan, Indonesia, South Korea and Taiwan, without forgetting the absolutely key actor, the US. The common denominator in all these relations is the challenge that China represents at each of these two levels, where some of the responses offered by the Canberra government have not been correct, from Graham's point of view.

Within this analysis of Australian foreign and security policy towards the Indo-Pacific, Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific, chapter six focuses on the latter region, which is Australia's primary sphere of influence. In "Competing with China in the Southwest Pacific", Graham explains how the scattered island group of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia comprises mainly open waters and Australia's main trade and communication routes with North Asia, New Zealand and the United States. It is also the closest sub-region to major population centres such as Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Once again, the threat of China's projection makes Australia's desire to guarantee maritime security in this area an imperative also shared by the island states involved, which can recognise Australia as the major actor protecting their security interests.

The seventh and final chapter is Graham's final reflection based on the analyses contained in the previous sections and on the idea of the significant change in bilateral relations between China and Australia since the early 2020s, although in most of the previous decade a clear cooling had already been perceived. The author places the blame for Australia's new stance towards China, made public in the April 2023

DSR, on China's perceived openly hostile behaviour in economic, diplomatic and security matters. Although relations between the two countries are not set in stone, an improvement between Canberra and Beijing is unlikely in the coming years. In fact, since May 2022 the new Labour government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has not only maintained but increased Australia's anti-China security strategy with new measures, as its April 2023 review demonstrates.

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