Ok# Conclusion

With the collapse of cold war structures and their strategic imperatives in the late 1980s, policy-makers faced an array of global issues, but could no longer use the perceptual filters of superpower rivalry and ANZUS dependency to simplify the world. The concept of 'globalisation' is an attempt to describe the extensive transnational economic processes that are operating to create a world market. But the term can also refer to the global reach of industrialisation's environmental consequences; to a sense of a 'global village' and of common responsibility for economic welfare and human rights; to the vast expansion of media and communications technologies and industries that bring images of distant events into the home.

Traditional concerns about military security, which seemed so pressing to Australian foreign-policy-makers up until the 1970s, and which returned as fear of nuclear war in the 1980s, have eased. Nevertheless, there remain uncertainties about the continuing violent dimension of international politics — uncertainties created by rivalries among larger powers, by ethnonationalist wars, by military 'modernisation', and by the existence, still, of arsenals of weapons with the capacity for mass destruction.

Australia's belated self-confidence about military defence, based on the image of a defensible Australia in a relatively secure region, contrasts with a general sense of apprehension about a dismal economic future, crystallised by Paul Keating's 'banana republic' remark, made when he was treasurer in the mid-1980s. Anxiety about military security has been displaced by anxiety about economic security, by the fear of being left behind in the new global and regional economic race. The Australian state has sought to 'restructure' the economy by reducing protection and forcing a greater external orientation towards business. It has also pursued an energetic diplomatic campaign, regionally and internationally, for trade liberalisation. The jury may still be out on whether the neo-liberal strategy is a sufficiently purposeful approach for the Australian state to be taking in a world of more economically interventionist states.

The economic agenda has come to dominate Australia's foreign-policy concerns, but other agendas insinuate themselves into government policy in the 'borderless' world of globalisation. Concerns about environmental crisis, political repression, violent conflict, and human rights — both close at hand and far away — are subordinated in the search for trade and investment opportunities. But these concerns can still reformulate and reassert themselves, with pressure groups and, at times, wider public opinion responding to 'overseas' issues — East Timor, Somalia, or nuclear tests, for instance — and expecting the Australian government to work towards a 'better world'.

Which theoretical perspectives provide a framework for understanding the changing global politico-economic system? And which perspectives allow Australia to define its place in the world in a way that reflects the interests and aspirations of its citizens? Can a new 'economic realism' simply replace the power-politics realism of the cold war? And can Australia define itself as a hard-nosed (small-time) opportunist while the private sector chases deals with a degree of government support, and the political debate is focused on the extent of this support?

The neo-liberal argument for more open economies and freer trade makes a more general point about win–win outcomes and the extension of cooperation beyond the economic sphere. It connects economics to the wider vision of cooperation that underpins the rationalist promotion of greater world order and 'global governance' based on 'enlightened' self-interest. But 'world order' as the extension of law- and rule-based behaviour — such as arms-control agreements, environmental codes, and other international 'regimes' — takes considerably more effort than the easy assumptions of economic liberalism, with its international 'hidden hand'.

There are continuing demands that the concept of an emerging global community be incorporated into the Australian foreign-policy outlook, as pressure groups such as Amnesty International, aid and environment organisations, and women's organisations, all operating transnationally, develop an embryonic concept of global citizenship. Former Labor foreign minister Gareth Evans's idea that Australia should aspire to good international citizenship seemed to touch on this orientation towards 'humanity', while remaining primarily focused on rationalist and realist agendas. Business pressure groups campaign against environmental measures that may incur unwanted

costs, maintaining that, in the calculus of national interests, their concerns are more important. This can mean that good international citizenship will develop a rhetoric for international and domestic audiences that simply evaporates at the point of policy implementation. Similarly, concerns about maintaining a residual alliance with the USA are not likely to circumscribe the *rhetoric* of arms control and disarmament policy — such as the pursuit of a 'nuclear free world' — even if on some issues this is in direct conflict with United States views; rather, they will hinder the translation of the rhetoric into a vigorous multilateral diplomacy capable of achieving such ends. When a small number of 'boat people' land on Australia's shores, commitment to universal human rights may be impeded by an older anxiety about 'floods' of unwanted immigrants. The issue becomes deeply contested, particularly since it is at 'home'

Global and regional challenges, and competing theoretical perspectives, have re-created a contemporary Australian 'identity crisis', as Australia has been thrust finally from the intellectual security blanket of its cold war ANZUS framework to face the world on the basis of its own interests, values, and understandings. Treaties are often written as though they must last forever; ANZUS, declared its signatories, was to remain in force 'indefinitely'. However, as Whitlam declared of SEATO in the 1970s, treaties become 'defunct', and ANZUS appears to have gone the same way in the 1990s. The ALP's near silence on ANZUS after the cold war — a silence that the Liberal Opposition of the time did little to fill — contrasts with its prodigious efforts to create a new conceptual discourse and institutional 'architecture' for 'our region', including the development of concepts such as regional military security, regional economic cooperation, and even an emergent regional 'community'; institutions such as the ARF and APEC; and some larger idea of regional 'destiny'. With a dose of extra-regional, middle-power multilateralism — demonstrated by its approach to peacekeeping in the UN, and to agriculture in the GATT — the ALP confronted the post-cold war world with considerable intellectual creativity and diplomatic activism.

The ALP's failure to achieve re-election in 1996 has been interpreted, in part, as a failure to link its vision of Australia's role in the region and the world to the interests and concerns of the wider Australian community. It was unable to establish a direct connection in Australian minds between the everyday desire for economic security

and for a less violent world and the government's discourses, institutional architecture, and multilateral initiatives. It has been said that the former Labor prime minister Paul Keating (and his foreign minister, Gareth Evans) possessed a 'fatal abstraction' (Horne 1996). The Liberal-led coalition found it difficult to move the other way, from the concrete populism about jobs, youth unemployment, and 'mainstream values', to a distinctive view of Australia's place in the region and the world. In Opposition, the coalition seemed to regress to a sentiment of 'more ANZUS, more Europe, less region', and the ALP consequently attempted to cast itself as the only party capable of conducting a successful regional foreign policy. In government — stung by the ALP's criticism, and confronted by the reality and inevitability of the region — the Howard Liberal government set about displaying its regional credentials in its first diplomatic gestures, arguing that the coalition's only problem was Keating's attempt to undermine their chances. The Liberals continued the ALP's campaign in East Asia to have Australia accepted as an 'Asian' state in forthcoming Europe–Asia dialogue, as well as pursuing military security dialogues in regional forums. It soon became clear that regional bipartisanship was the aim of the new government, and that the 'continuity, consistency, and consensus' that the ALP proclaimed when it came to office in 1983 would also describe the approach of the Liberal government in 1996, but this time it was applied to regionalism, whereas Hawke's message was largely about the ALP's position on ANZUS.

But can 'the region' become the new cornerstone of foreign policy, rather than its most urgent preoccupation? To change the metaphor, is 'the region' the only idea left on centre stage, as the concepts of 'ANZUS' and 'middle power' move to the wings? A regional priority will focus foreign policy on that part of the world most closely connected to Australia's economic and military security, and maintain Australia as a player in regional forums. The ARF and APEC have been major initiatives, and Australia has made a significant contribution to whatever success they can claim. If Asia–Europe dialogues are to become an element of international diplomacy, leading to patterns of institutionalised cooperation, then it is clearly much better if Australia is 'in' as part of Asia, than excluded by both, which would be the only alternative. But a fundamental ambiguity regarding the boundaries of Australia's 'region' prevents the idea of 'Australia as part of the region' from becoming a coherent concept of international identity

invested with a meaning that is widely shared by Australians and recognised by others. Struggling to invent an artificial single 'community' from an amorphous and diverse Asia — a community that converges with or includes Australia — may inhibit Australia in developing a foreign policy based on its domestic strengths or aspirations, which may include multiculturalism, representative democracy, lack of militarism, respect for civil rights, and institutions of industrial relations. The point is not that any of these features is unique to Australia, or uncontested within it, but rather that those features that define an Australian 'community' are present or absent in the vast East Asian area to such varying degrees that the search for community based on region runs the risk of becoming the search for vague abstractions or lowest common denominators. At the same time, the domestic basis of community is under strain in Australia, as some sectors catch the regional economic wave, while others are unable to gain a share of the benefits. A concept of regional community can only develop when Australians, rather than their government, invest it with meaning, and this is more likely to happen when regional engagement offers something to all Australians, not just those with capital and skills.

The idea of Australia as a 'middle power' has been partly discredited by its having been used in the past as a rationalisation for alliance-based policies (Australia as a 'middle-power ally'), and the more recent use of multilateral diplomacy to resist, as well as to advance, environmental agendas, as seen in the contrast between the responses to global warming and the proposed Antarctic 'world park'. The surge of UN activity after the cold war seemed to have declined by the mid-1990s. But the middle-power idea may prove to play a more significant role in locating Australia's place in the world into the next century. Premised on multilateral coalitions, it allows a regional focus, and even a regional priority, without excluding non-regional states and issues. Region provides a diplomatic focus appropriate to current economic and miliary security concerns; multilateralism provides a diplomatic method. If developed with an explicit commitment to rationalist norms and agendas, accounting for and attentive to regional concerns, the middle-power concept may offer a framework for practical collaboration based on shared interests with 'like-minded' states, wherever they are located. The concept may prove unsatisfying in that it takes the maxim that there are no 'permanent allies' seriously; it may also prove demanding when taken to imply an anti-hegemonic stance — a

fundamental scepticism towards 'big powers', their ambitions, and rivalries. It may allow Australians to 'be themselves', even when their pursuit of Australian interests and ideals involves extensive cooperation with others. This kind of engagement, however, would require a sense of confidence on the part of Australia that it may not achieve until its economic future in the region is more substantially assured.