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Howard's War on Terror: A Conceivable, Communicable and Coercive Foreign Policy Discourse

Abstract

This article explores the relationship between language and political possibility. It is argued that John Howard's language from 11 September 2001 to mid 2003 helped to enable the 'War on Terror' in an Australian context in three principal ways. Firstly, through contingent and contestable constructions of Australia, the world and their relationship, Howard's language made interventionism conceivable. Secondly, emphasising shared values, mateship and mutual sacrifice in war, Howard embedded his foreign policy discourse in the cultural terrain of 'mainstream Australia', specifically framing a foreign policy discourse that was communicable to 'battlers' and disillusioned 'Hansonites'. Thirdly, positioning alternatives as 'un-Australian', Howard's language was particularly coercive, silencing potential oppositional voices.

Introduction and Australia's 9-11

Australia is not the United States of America. And Australian foreign policy discourse in the 'War on Terror' was not a replica of America's. While important areas of discursive convergence existed in the response to 9-11 and (in particular) the translation of the terror threat to Iraq (see Doig et al 2007), Australian foreign policy discourse throughout the period from 11 September 2001 to mid 2003 was frequently distinct and divergent from that of other coalition states. Divergence was strategically pursued by Prime Minister John Howard and was crucial to enabling the 'War on Terror' in an Australian context. In crafting a distinct, strategic and enabling foreign policy discourse, Howard drew on and plugged into the Australian cultural terrain, as he had since coming to power. From the start of his Prime Ministership, Howard drew on fearful mental maps, shared by many Australians, which located difference and danger beyond the Australian border. It was against this contextual backdrop that Australians were encouraged to experience and make sense of 9-11.

The first section of this paper argues that the very possibility of Howard's 'War on Terror' relied upon distinct and strategic foreign policy discourse, which took into account this uniquely selective and informing Australian context. The second section maps this context, tracing the clues to Australia's response to 9-11, which were already evident in the first four and a half years of Howard's prime ministership. In his first two terms of office, 'Howard's Australia' was characterised by an emphasis on the national interest and realignment 'to a position closer to the US' (Kelly 2007, 39). These twin shifts overlapped, were underpinned by a renegotiation of Australian national identity and were framed to appeal to two specific target audiences: battlers and Hansonites. The third section of this paper analyses distinct

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elements of Australian foreign policy discourse in the response to 9-11, noting the *continuity* of Howard's language and strategy. Australian foreign policy discourse was marked by emotional intensity (conflated with practical cooperation) and an emphasis on shared values. In the final section, it is argued that these themes were retained and intensified during the translation of the terror threat to Iraq, albeit increasingly channelled through a narrative of 'mateship'. Forged, for Howard, on the beaches at Gallipoli, 'mateship' was reinforced by linking Australian national identity to mutual sacrifice in war through the ANZAC myth. These distinct elements of Australian foreign policy not only helped to render the 'War on Terror' conceivable in an Australian context, moreover they helped to make policy communicable to key target audiences and coercive of potential opponents. In these three principal ways, Howard's language played a crucial role in making the 'War on Terror' possible in an Australian context.

Language, Framing and the Possibility of the 'War on Terror'

The first and most obvious way in which language operates to enable policy is through the construction of particular meanings and identities. Meaning and identities are constructed in language through simultaneous processes of linking and differentiation (Laclau and Moufe 1985). For instance, Australian foreign policy discourse after 9-11 linked ideas of Afghanistan as barbaric, underdeveloped and irrational, simultaneously reinforcing ideas of Australia as civilised, developed and rational (e.g. Howard 2001a). Where processes of linking and differentiation achieve partial and temporary stability, regularity in connections and juxtapositions becomes evident. Here, discourses are established and maintained, which demonstrate relative (but always incomplete) fixity in the systematic construction of meaning and identity (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 111). This systematicity yet inherent instability and incompleteness 'brings to the fore the importance of political agency and the political production and reproduction of discourses' (Hansen 2006, 21). As impermanent constructions of reality, which are created through and dependent upon human agency, discourses are a medium through which power operates to create knowledge. This power-knowledge nexus serves to demarcate acceptable and unacceptable ways of talking and thinking. By marking not only the limits of what it is possible to say but also what it is possible to do, foreign policy discourse thus helps to make foreign policy conceivable and realisable. However, politicians are rarely free to construct *any* foreign policy discourse. As Hansen notes, clearly it 'would be extremely unlikely and politically unsavvy for politicians to articulate foreign policy without any concern for the representations found within the wider public sphere as they attempt to present their policies as legitimate to their constituencies' (Hansen 2006:7).

Barnett's notion of 'framing' recognises that politicians construct frames to situate events 'in ways that mesh with the cultural terrain' (Barnett 1999, 15). It highlights that 'actors are constantly attempting to guide political mobilisation toward a particular outcome and for a particular goal by using symbols, metaphors and cognitive cues to organise experience and fix meaning to events' (1999, 8-9). The concept of framing enables an understanding of the importance of 'the cultural foundations that make possible and desirable certain actions' and the 'calculations of strategically-minded political elites'. Politicians embed their language in the cultural terrain, based on their reading of the domestic political landscape, employing selectively chosen themes and narratives 'to mobilise sentiment and guide action' for

'strategic reasons' (1999, 15). This process of strategic framing sees politicians draw on 'cultural symbols that are selectively chosen' and 'creatively converted' into the frames deployed in foreign policy discourse. For example, in the United States, President Bush framed foreign policy around Manichean binaries and the concept of 'freedom' within an overarching language of frontier justice. These framings, like their Australian counterparts, were inevitably targeted at key sections of the domestic population.

Despite wider international interest in their foreign policies, the leaders of coalition states first and foremost were required to convince domestic populations of the need for and legitimacy of the 'War on Terror' (e.g. Jackson 2005, 1). Indeed, the act of going to war is so costly as to warrant extraordinary discursive effort to persuade audiences of its necessity, virtue and practicality. Politicians are sensitive to public opinion and public opinion is sensitive to the information and arguments put forward by politicians (Western 2005, 107; Zaller 1992). Aware of this, it is unsurprising that in an Australian context, 'the Prime Minister worked ... to develop a clear and compelling message for intervention, poring over the wording of key speeches and statements' (McDonald and Merefield 2010, 3). However, while the domestic population was the primary target audience as a function of democracy, key sections of the population were 'spoken to' as a function of domestic electoral politics. Thus, in addressing their domestic populations, politicians framed foreign policy discourse to achieve resonance with those sections of society perceived as electorally important in the contemporary domestic political landscape. They attempted to achieve this resonance by framing foreign policy to mesh with the perceived foreign policy culture and underpinning geographical imaginations of these target groups.

Foreign policy culture, comprised primarily of competing foreign policy traditions, is shaped by, and often inseparable from, the geographical imagination. The geographical imagination is a 'vital building block' of foreign policy culture, but 'not quite the same thing' (Toal 2003, 84). '[I]maginative geographies fold distance into difference through a series of spatialisations. They multiply partitions and enclosures that demarcate "the same" from "the other", at once constructing and calibrating a gap between the two by designating in one's mind a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" which is "theirs"' (Gregory 2004, 183). Toal takes this definition and invests it with contemporary geopolitical specificity: 'a geographical imagination can, thus, be defined as the way in which influential groups in the cultural life of a state define that state and nation within the world. It addresses the primary acts of identification and boundary-formation that population groups within a state engages' (Toal 2003, 84). Such a definition brings to the fore 'geographies of the unconscious', which mark the foundations of spatial identification and exclusion. Questions of the Self, Others, friends and enemies, homelands and targets, distance and proximity are resolved through the geographical imagination. Sculpting a foreign policy that draws upon and reinforces those cognitive cartographies held by key target audiences is vital to achieving the resonance and support politicians desire.

Yet it is still possible to ask whether language, resonance and the political legitimacy it infer really matter. This paper argues that there are three principal reasons for the importance of framing foreign policy discourse, which relate to a number of underlying conditions. These three analytical moments reflect the principal ways in which language is politically enabling. Firstly, through foreign policy discourse, politicians attempt to generate meanings and

identities that make policy thinkable. By framing a particular and contingent foreign policy, it is possible to render contestable practices natural, reasonable, logical, necessary, legitimate and even inevitable. In this analytical moment, language helps to make policy conceivable. Secondly, politicians seek to persuade a population of the merits of foreign policy, emphasising, for example, its logic, morality or necessity. Pursuing resonance, politicians attempt to embed foreign policy discourse within the cultural terrain of key target audiences. If these key constituencies are to accept the logic, morality and necessity of policy, it must be framed to mesh with the dominant perceived traditions and imaginations of the group(s). In this analytical moment, language helps to make policy communicable. Thirdly, politicians seek to rhetorically coerce potential opponents, leaving them 'without access to the rhetorical materials needed to craft a socially sustainable rebuttal' (Krebs and Jackson 2007, 21-23). For example, during the first two years of the 'War on Terror' the Australian Labour Party and groups voicing alternatives were marginalised to varying degrees; often, they were either left to contest procedural matters or actively (out)cast as unpatriotic (e.g. Smith 2006). In this analytical moment, language helps to make policy coercive.

This paper deals with the time period from 9-11 through to intervention in Iraq in March 2003, after which coalition state leaders faced increasing difficulties controlling the dominant discourses of the 'War on Terror' (e.g. Struck 2005). For instance, although Iraq was Australia's first intervention that lacked bipartisan support, it was viewed as broadly legitimate for three main reasons. Firstly, effectively framed foreign policy discourse naturalised Australian participation in the coalition and placed intervention as a defensive manoeuvre in a long and foundational history of reluctant but necessary sacrifice overseas. Secondly, 'Howard took enough of the population with him to allow Australia's participation in the intervention as broadly legitimate, even if not popular' (McDonald and Merefield 2010, 2). And thirdly, the Australian Labour Party opposition were unable to argue effectively against dominant Liberal Party foreign policy discourse. These enabling strategies and the key themes of Howard's language were formulated during his time in opposition and from taking office in 1996.

Howard's Australia: 1996-2001

Opposing the 'grand visions' that had driven Keating's foreign policy, Howard campaigned for office by offering a 'commonsensical and pragmatic' alternative (e.g. Goldsworthy 2001, 10). Economics would no longer dwarf security interests in a 'practical, tightly focussed, and above all realistic' foreign policy. However, despite emphasising 'a cool, hard-headed assessment of the "national interest"', Howard's foreign policy discourse represented 'an effort to find a new Australian synthesis between values and realpolitik' (Curran 2006, 350; Kelly 2006, 41). It was not that values would have no place in Howard's foreign policy, but rather that the values informing it would be very different from those of his predecessor. These values were nowhere clearer than in the architectures of amity and enmity that Howard's language constructed.

Howard came to power explicitly rejecting Keating's 'Asian model of Australia' (Darwall 2005, 4). This 'vigorous identification with the West rather than with Asia' constituted a 'fundamental realignment ... away from Asia and toward the US' (Wesley 2007, 28; Papadikis 2001, 174). There are numerous reasons for Howard's unflinching belief in the

need for close US ties. Importantly and unlike Keating, Howard did not foresee a decline in US power as inevitable over the coming decades. In contrast, he feared Asian instability, as 'evidenced' by the succession of 'shocks' in the region. White lists a series of events in Asia that generated, sustained and amplified 'unease about the potential for political instability in Australia's immediate neighbourhood' (2006, 15). Two particular 'shocks' posed important ramifications for Australian foreign policy. First, the financial turmoil of 1998 – and in particular Australia's survival – was read as vindication of closer ties to the 'west' (Howard 2001g). Second, Australian-led intervention in East Timor served to bolster confidence in Australia's armed forces and their ability to operate in the 'new security environment' increasingly characterising the 'arc of instability' that comprised Australia's 'closer neighbourhood' (White 2006; Howard 1999b).

Addressing parliament in the days before intervention in East Timor, Howard listed five 'home truths' that, he believed, events had reaffirmed (Howard 1999b). The first three covered the primacy of the national interest, Australia's positioning at 'a unique intersection' as a 'Western nation next to Asia with strong links to the United States' and the success of the US alliance. The fourth stated the need to retain a strong military and the fifth that the 'national interest cannot be pursued without regard to the values of the Australian community' (Howard 1999b). Howard elaborated that 'the deployment of troops to East Timor meets the tests of national interest in two respects'. Australia's realist interest in a stable region was accompanied by the normative claim that 'in the spirit of Australia's military tradition, our troops are going to defend what this society believes to be right' (Howard 1999b).

The prominence Howard afforded 'Australian values' in his address to parliament was significant but not unusual. He began the speech by outlining the 'characteristic Australian responses' of Australian troops: 'it was so Australian; it was so reassuring; and it was a reminder of the sorts of values that are important to the Australian community'. Stressing the reassuring nature of 'Australian-ness' is not necessarily an obvious starting point for a speech marking arguably the most important deployment of military force in the nation's history. However, Howard was merely making 'certain there is not a serious disconnect between the goals [of foreign policy] and the aspirations of the Australian people' (Milner 2001, 44).

The changing priority of affinities from Asia to America was wedded to the changing construction of Australian identity. Reversing 'twenty-five years of over accommodation to Indonesia' required that Australia(ns) could 'be ourselves in Asia' (Howard 1999a). Howard's foreign policy discourse was thus enabling in three ways. Firstly, it told Australians who 'we' were (westerners, part of the Anglosphere) and who 'they' were (usually Asian, but definitely not western or a part of the Anglosphere). Australian foreign policy discourse constructed the 'Other' as fundamentally different and difference was equated with potential danger. Through constructions of internal sameness and safety juxtaposed with external difference and danger, Howard's foreign policy discourse helped to make an interventionist Australian foreign policy conceivable. Secondly, it was enabling as it tapped into the cultural terrain of 'mainstream Australia' (battlers and Hansonites especially) reinforcing long-held geographical imaginations that viewed the Australian border as a 'dread frontier' to be defended (Strahan 1996). Resonating with these key target audiences helped achieve the support and perceived legitimacy policy required. Thirdly, by

tying intervention to a particular conceptualisation of Australian national identity, Howard limited the space for oppositional voices to contest intervention.

Strategically framing foreign policy was, of course, far from ephemeral. Attempts to target 'Aussie battlers' began in 1995 as Howard shaped his language to resonate with (and construct) 'hardworking Australians'. The 'widespread acceptance' of the term 'Howard battlers', with its emphasis on hard, honest work, 'challenged Labour's core historic identity' and proved highly successful in the polls (Brett 2003, 188). In 1996, Howard's politics was decidedly populist (e.g. Goot and Watson 2007; Clyne 2005; Wear 2008). He argued that the 'bureaucracy of the new class is a world away from … the Australian mainstream', portraying the ALP as a party governing for marginal interest groups, not the majority of 'ordinary Australians' (Howard 1995). In 1998, foreign policy discourse was framed 'with the Hansonite electorate in mind' (Manne 2001, 5-6). One Nation leader and federal MP Pauline Hanson had been elected (in 1996) on a strong anti-immigration platform and her maiden speech expressed fears that Australia was in danger of being 'swamped by Asians' (Hanson 1996). Howard's reaction was informed by his electoral strategy of appealing to sections of the population most alienated by Keating (Garran 2004, 52). Instead of denouncing Hanson's racism, Howard suggested he was pleased she was able to express her views as doing so marked an end to Keating's era of political correctness. By 2001, alongside continued appeals to 'Howard's battlers', a combination of dog whistle politics and the explicit conflation of immigration and national security were helping to garner support from disillusioned One Nation sympathisers. It was clear that 'Howard and Hanson were courting the same constituency' (Markus 2001, 104). To this end, Howard 'exploited the Australian majority's fear of change and the alien. He [wrote] these fears large, and they [became] Australia's defining foreign policy values' (Kevin 2004, 295).

Howard's foreign policy discourse plugged into a geographical imagination formed in the mid nineteenth century with fears and resentment of Chinese immigrants. Concern that a 'comparative handful of colonists could be buried in a countless throng' of Asian immigrants underpinned the early dominant Australian geographical imagination (Burke 2001, 76). These 'racialised strategic fears' were exacerbated during the Second World War; 'Kokoda appeared as evidence of direct Asian threat'. '[B]loody confrontation and then narrow defeat' left 'a residue of vulnerability, and a consequent strategic dependency. The binary structure of (vulnerable) identity versus threatening otherness thus took on great force, enabling it to be emptied out and replaced with new actors and threat scenarios. Insecurity, as much as national pride, would be the event's enduring legacy' (Burke 2001, 68-70,76). This insecurity would flourish during the Cold War, perpetuated by Australian fears of invasion from the north and the resultant policy of Forward Defence (Burke 2001; Dijkink 1996, 190; Strahan 1996, 150).

Despite Keating's attempts in the 1990s to 'reverse the old geographic symbolism', for many, Australia remained an 'isolated vulnerable outpost of the white race perched on the rim of a vast, alien, threatening Asian region' (Strahan 1996, 165-166,170). And from 1996 a Hobbesian geographical imagination was once again brought front and centre. It was fuelled in part by the 'deeply unsettling' 'shocks' in the Asia-Pacific region during the 1990s (Burke 2001, 190). Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer, in particular, was notable in his early statements on Indonesia and the financial crisis (Garran 2004, 53-55).

Emphasising cultural differences, Downer insisted that 'we don't conduct our affairs in Australia in the same way' (Downer 1996 cited in Burke 2001, 176). Whilst, if there were any doubt of the serious threat the region posed, Downer reminded Australians that 'a region in stress is less predictable and less stable. Manageable internal problems can become unmanageable and spill over borders' (Downer 1998 cited in Burke 2001, 189). Under Howard, Australian foreign policy discourse mapped a clear and significant demarcation of the safe inside and the dangerous outside that needed to be kept at bay. This collapsing of ontology (of difference and danger) into geography plugged into and sustained an enduring geographical imagination premised on invasion anxiety (Agnew 2001; Burke 2001).

A Hobbesian cognitive cartography was largely shared by Howard's twin target audiences, underpinning a distinct understanding of Australia's relationship with the outside world. Whereas Keating mined the Spencer-Casey regionalist tradition, Howard embedded his foreign policy discourse in Menzian traditionalism (Harries 2003, 3). Inspired by a fearful geographical imagination, traditionalism makes the central assumption that the international environment is inherently dangerous. In this dangerous world, it is 'vital for a large, sparsely populated and geographically isolated Western country like Australia' to 'have close, friendly relations with … leading democratic powers' (Harries 2003, 3). However, the process of ally selection is not purely driven by the rational pursuit of power as 'traditionalism sees cultural affinity and similarities in political structures and ideology as forging closer and more stable relationships: one can trust those who are similar' (Wesley and Warren 2000, 13).

> 'Traditionalist preferences – for the maximisation of power through alliance and the maintenance of closer links to those countries that are more similar – have coincided in the close security relationships forged with first Britain and then the United States … Over the years, as Britain and later the United States entered wars, so did Australia; and the Australian self-image as the 'junior partner' of a culturally similar, global power took hold' (Harries 2003, 3).

The 'purest representative' of traditionalism since Menzies, Howard successfully targeted mainstream scepticism of 'most international institutions', suspicions 'of the culturally different peoples of Asia to their north' and popular perceptions of cultural proximity to the United States. From 1996 to 2001, 'traditionalism maintain[ed] a steady hegemony over Australian security policy' as Howard sought to frame foreign policy for the twin audiences of battlers and Hansonites (Wesley and Warren 2000, 16). And yet the influence of traditionalism would only peak following the latest and most significant external shock to date. Rather than wholly reconfiguring Australian foreign and security policy, 9-11 would serve as a catalyst to enhance and amplify the themes put in place during Howard's first two terms of office. Far from a temporal rupture, what followed was a continuation and intensification of Howard's pre 9-11 language and strategy.

Responding to 9-11

Arguably the most striking theme of Howard's initial response to 9-11 was the 'sense of emotion and sadness' he conveyed (Gleeson 2008). In the forty-eight hours after 9-11, Howard repeatedly emphasised Australian sorrow through overtly emotional language.

> 'I think it is important that countries like Australia play a role in identifying ourselves with the Americans. I mean, just because you are big and strong doesn't mean that

> you can't feel lonely and you can't feel that your heart has been ripped out. And I think that it's very important, therefore, that Americans know that they have got some really good, reliable friends'. (Howard 2001d).

While the emotional intensity of Howard's language is important to note, particularly significant was its conflation with practical solidarity. Although Howard was already combining 'sympathy and solidarity' – even 'Australia's resolute solidarity' – on 11 September, over the course of the following week the distinction was collapsed as the former was presented to flow naturally into the latter. An overtly emotional response to 9-11 was linked to Australia's need for *military* solidarity in three steps. Firstly, Howard expressed Australian sorrow and sympathy for America's loss. Secondly, through appeals to shared values and a common way of life, Howard stressed that Australia not only sympathised but also empathised. Thirdly, united in sorrow, Howard conflated emotional solidarity with practical solidarity (Gleeson 2008).

Explaining the shift from Australian *sympathy* to *empathy* – from feeling for to feeling with – in an interview with Neil Mitchell, Howard argued that 9-11 'hit home to Australia because it was upon a city, upon a people with whom we identify with immediately' (Howard 2001g). Australian empathy was naturalised within Howard's renegotiated Australian national identity, in which Australia associated with America 'more readily than ... other parts of the world'. However, while Howard had already stated on 11 September that Australia would 'stand by' America, at this stage 9-11 was still seen as an attack on the United States, not Australia.

> '[W]e feel for our American friends. We will stand by them, we will help them, we will support actions they take to properly retaliate in relation to these acts of bastardry against their citizens and against what they stand for'. (Howard 2001c).

It was only when 9-11 was framed as 'an attack on all of us' – and Australians were encouraged to go from feeling *for* America to feeling attacked *with* Americans – that Australian foreign policy discourse naturalised the conflation of Australian emotional and practical solidarity.

> '[T]his is an occasion where we should stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Americans, because this is not just an assault on America, it's an assault on the way of life that we hold dear in common'. (Howard 2001d).

> '[A]t no stage should any Australian regard this as something that is just confined to the United States. It is an attack upon the way of life we hold dear in common with the Americans' (Howard 2001g).

In contrast to the markers of 'freedom' and 'democracy' that underpinned American and British foreign policy discourse respectively, Australian foreign policy discourse framed 9-11 as an attack on 'shared values'.

> '[T]hat attack of eleventh of September was as much an attack on Australia as it was on America. It not only killed Australians in the World Trade Centre, but it also assaulted the very values on which this nation is built'. (Howard 2001b).

> 'The terrorist attacks on the United States in September were attacks that have not only unsettled the world and struck terror and unease in to the hearts of men and women and children all around the nation but they were, in a very direct sense, an

> attack on Australia and what we value and what we hold dear as much as they were an attack on the United States' (Howard 2001h).

The clues to this framing were already evident on 11 September, and once again drew upon Howard's traditionalist and conservative renegotiation of Australian national identity.

> '[O]f course to an Australian, an attack on New York or Washington is not an attack on a distant, unfamiliar place ... because of the commonality of so many features of our culture, an attack on New York and Washington was bound to be felt more deeply and bound to be linked more immediately to the Australian psyche, than attacks on just about any other cities in the world'. (Howard 2001c).

Located within a traditionalist approach to international affairs, Howard's foreign policy discourse drew on a perceived commonality in culture to construct 9-11 as an attack on shared values. Thus, first and foremost, Australian participation in intervention was framed as 'an expression of Australia's strong commitment and strong desire to share with the American people a common defence of things we treasure together':

> 'Certain values are the same to us as they are to the Americans and it's our desire to share in the defence of those values in a quite significant way militarily'. (Howard 2001e).

Framing 9-11 as an attack on shared values naturalised Australian participation in the Coalition of the Willing. Moreover it equated danger with difference, placing culture as the key factor in the determination of friends and enemies in the international system. According to Howard, not only were those who did not share Australian values difficult to cooperate with, moreover they were potentially threatening. In contrast to values shared 'with the American people', Australian foreign policy throughout the period from 9-11 to mid 2003 relied upon mutually reinforcing appeals to fundamentally different enemy Others. Initially, these constructions focussed on Osama Bin Laden, Al Qaeda and the Taleban. Like Bush, Howard was frequently prepared to speak of 'barbarism', 'evil' and a 'cowardly, despicable, low-life' enemy, 'hiding in dark corners of the world' (Howard 2001c; 2002e). While Howard's descriptions of Saddam Hussein would be less emotive, they were equally important in cementing in the minds of Australians a 'brutal', 'bullying' dictator, the likes of which had not 'been seen since World War II', and who stood in stark juxtaposition to the shared values Australians sought to defend (Howard 2003d). Thus, bolstered by the apparent ease of military victory in Afghanistan and the apparent success of the Australian contribution to it, four months after 9-11 attention turned to Saddam's 'immense burden of terror' (Howard 2003a).

Translating the Terror Threat

In January 2002, President Bush infamously declared the existence of an 'axis of evil' in his State of the Union address. This declaration marked the start of the translation of the terror threat to Iraq, a process that would last until intervention in March 2003. Throughout the translation, Howard continued to draw upon the notion of shared values to naturalise emotional and practical solidarity with the US, concomitantly drawing sharp boundaries between those who were deemed not to share such fundamental values. However, these

themes were frequently and increasingly channelled through an enduring and important narrative of mateship.

The narrative of mateship that Howard employed during the translation deployed a key marker of 'Australian-ness' at the scale of an international coalition. It relied upon the renegotiation of Australian national identity pursued since coming to office in 1996. For Howard, mateship was underpinned by the shared values that had come under attack on 9-11. From this starting point of common culture and parallel pasts, Howard's strategic invocation of 'mateship' (although at times made explicit) was frequently left implicit, relying upon two (less obviously strategic and therefore more resonant) mutually reinforcing narratives. Firstly, Australian foreign policy discourse in the translation was characterised by a traditionalist emphasis on standing shoulder-to-shoulder with culturally similar great and powerful friends. And, secondly, the notion of 'comrades in arms' was once again reinforced through continued historical appeals to Australian history and particularly the ANZAC tradition.

Mateship

In 1999, Howard had unsuccessfully attempted to place the term 'mateship' in the preamble of the Australian constitution; it was central to his 'mainstream', 'common sense' and anti-elitist framings of Australian national identity. Three years later, this foundational belief in Australian mateship was written large onto the coalition as Howard sought to ensure the protections wrought from a strong bilateral alliance with a great and powerful friend. At three key moments in 2002, Howard outlined the concept of mateship, making clear both who was on Australia's list of mates and which name lay at the top. In the first of these moments, Howard addressed a joint session of the United States Congress, reminding his audience that:

> 'Most of all, we value loyalty given and loyalty gained. The concept of mateship runs deeply through the Australian character. We cherish and where necessary we will fight to defend the liberties we hold dear'. (Howard 2002c).

In an intensely personal account of Australian ties to the United States, Howard argued that the closeness of the bilateral relationship was underpinned by common values. Among the 'values' Howard cited were individualism, strong families, competitive capitalism, decency, hard work, sport, film, liberty, volunteerism, democracy and freedom. A shared history was portrayed to have produced a shared culture:

> 'Our pioneer past, so similar to your own, has produced a spirit that can overcome adversity and pursue great dreams. We've pursued a society of opportunity, fairness and hope, leaving – as you did – the divisions and prejudices of the Old World far behind'.

The second key moment came three months later, on the anniversary of 9-11. Howard again stated that a shared history had generated a shared culture, which was repeatedly reinforced through mutual sacrifice in war; a practice that would inevitably be continued under the banner of 'mateship'.

> '[W]e do share with the United States a rich and deep history. We share with the United States ... common values ... We share with the American people a comradeship in arms in all of the wars of the last 100 years'. (Howard 2002e).

> ‘We resolve to work ever closer together to root out evil, we resolve ever more firmly to extend the hand of Australian friendship and mateship ... We are Australians and Americans and others together in the campaign against evil’. (Howard 2002b).

Of course, only one month after commemorating those lost on 9-11, eighty-eight Australians would be killed in Bali. Following the bombings, Howard’s commitment to a traditionalist security alliance was made clear through his chosen list of world leaders in making the distinction between the ‘indescribable savagery’ of the bombings and ‘the civilised world’. Making the distinction, Howard listed: George W. Bush, Tony Blair, Helen Clark and Her Majesty the Queen (Howard 2002d). For Howard, the dangers that 9-11 confirmed lurked beyond Australian borders were thrown into even starker relief after Bali. However, these enduring dangers and the new threats they posed were to be faced through traditional security alliances. And nothing embodied the spirit and history of these ties more effectively than the ANZAC legend.

ANZAC

For Howard, ‘Australian mateship and national identity [saw] its fiery birth in the ANZAC legend’ (Dyrenfurth 2007:220). To sell the idea of ‘making common cause with our friends’, Howard frequently deployed the ANZAC myth to maximise resonance with Australians and particularly ‘mainstream Australians’. While the reliance on this narrative would reach its apogee with Iraq, it was nonetheless extremely important to naturalising participation in intervention in Afghanistan alongside the US and UK. The legend portrays the birth of the Australian nation through sacrifice in war, suggesting ‘that the Australian national identity was forged through the remarkable courage shown by Australian soldiers in the face of overwhelming odds in a military campaign at Gallipoli in 1915’ (McDonald and Jackson 2008, 16). By presenting intervention in the ‘War on Terror’ as the latest example of the manifestation of ANZAC spirit, Howard embedded his arguments in ‘a powerful narrative of Australian history and identity’ that was ‘particularly resonant in an Australian context’ (McDonald and Jackson 2008, 16).

Howard presented Australian national identity, through the ANZAC myth, as one of reluctant but willing sacrifice. He argued that the new threat of international terrorism had re-awakened the fundamental Australian ‘ethos of selflessness and shared determination, courage and compassion’ (Howard 2002a). Accordingly, Australians would take their place alongside ‘civilised nations’ as ‘comrades in arms’. Invoking this ‘great and long tradition’ helped to naturalise an interventionist policy that stood Australia ‘shoulder-to-shoulder’ with ‘great and powerful friends’ in defence of shared values. Joining US-led intervention in both Afghanistan and Iraq was framed as simply the latest instance of selfless comradeship within a long history of sacrifice in war that was fundamental to Australian national identity. This distinct and strategic framing increased in both intensity and significance as the terror threat was translated to Iraq.

> ‘For a non-belligerent, peace-loving people we have over the years made a very big sacrifice of lives and blood in the defence of values that are important to us and important to the other nations of the world … it’s important for the preservation of the kind of nation that we have been, we are, and we hope always to remain, that occasionally we have to take action in concert with our allies’. (Howard 2002f).

Addressing Australian soldiers at Baghdad Airport on ANZAC Day, Howard's linking of intervention in Iraq to the ANZAC legend was unequivocal:

> 'You are seeking to bring to the people of Iraq, who have suffered so much for so long, the hope of liberty and the hope of freedom, and your example, your behaviour, your values, belong to that great and long tradition that was forged on the beaches of Gallipoli in 1915'. (Howard 2004).

Just as it had immediately after 9-11, invoking the ANZAC legend served to naturalise interventionism. From the start of the response Howard had stressed the need to 'stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Americans' (2001d). During the translation, he continued to make the point that 'you can't fight something like this without standing together with the Americans' by drawing on the ANZAC myth (Howard 2002a). ANZAC and the comradeship it inspired meshed seamlessly with the notion of standing together under a banner of mateship in defence of shared values:

> We are fighting now for the same values the ANZACs fought for in 1915: courage, valour, mateship, decency (and) a willingness as a nation to do the right thing, whatever the cost. (Howard 2002 cited in McKenna 2007).

Political Possibility

Through the ANZAC legend, Howard invoked a 'tradition of sacrifice in war to preserve key ideals', which defined Australian national identity in a particular way (McDonald and Jackson 2008, 15). This framing was politically enabling in three analytical moments. Firstly, Howard's language positioned his government as having merely inherited the 'Australian way'; it naturalised contingent policy, helping to make intervention conceivable. Secondly, Howard's renegotiated, traditionalist Australian national identity meshed with the cultural terrain of 'mainstream Australia'. Appealing to notions of shared values, employing narratives of mateship and the ANZAC legend sculpted a foreign policy discourse cogent with the beliefs and worldview of many battlers and (former) Hansonites. Dyrenfurth, for example, argues that 'Howard's symbolic ordinariness [was both] politically effective' and politically enabling (2007, 215). 'His conscious capture and repetitive employment of the ... language of nationalist egalitarianism' enabled Howard to achieve the 'appearance of a politician in touch with ordinary experience, but embodying such imagined national character'. The strategic employment of the 'ordinary man mask' appealed to battlers and (by now disillusioned former) Hansonites, sceptical of academic nuances of the perceived 'elite'; it enabled him to garner legitimacy by continuing to be seen to 'speak for' the people (McDonald and Jackson 2008, 1). Howard's deliberate strategic appeals to battlers and Hansonites, beginning in the election campaign of 1996 and continuing in the translation through the language of mateship, 'imparted a hitherto unimaginable political legitimacy' (Dyrenfurth 2007, 215). Moreover, Dyrenfurth argues that critiquing Howard's arguments – questioning mateship – only served to reinforce the image of Howard as 'being its defender' (2007, 221). Thus, thirdly, distinct and strategic elements of Australian foreign policy discourse, such as the narrative of 'mateship', were politically enabling through their ability to acquiesce potentially dissenting voices. These voices risked and feared being branded as unpatriotic, elitist or both.

The accusation that the Howard Government attempted to systematically silence dissent is not new (e.g. Hamilton and Madison 2007). Unlike Hamilton and Madison who list bullying, public denigration and financial threats as silencing tactics (2007, 2-3), the argument here is that Howard's language was often inherently coercive without the need for explicit tactics to mute potential critics. First, comparisons of Saddam's Iraq to Hitler's Germany positioned opponents of intervention as appeasers; a label opposition politicians desperately sought to avoid. Second, potential dissenters ran the risk or appearing not to whole-heartedly 'support our troops'. Third, highly publicised public information campaigns helped to establish a permanent level of anxiety amongst the Australian population regarding the need for vigilance in the face of an ongoing and omnipresent terrorist threat. Similar to the adoption of the colour-coded warning system in the United States, the issue of official anti-terrorism kits in Australia served mainly to heighten and sustain concern, rather than achieve tangible benefits. In this fearful climate, the Howard Government were tilling a fertile soil whereas opponents were seen to be 'out of touch' with the changed new post 9-11 world. This was ultimately evidenced by, then opposition leader, Kim Beazley's assertion that:

> 'September the 11th has changed the way we nations now think about security and what we have to do to defend ourselves. We have to stand shoulder to shoulder with George Bush and Tony Blair to root out and destroy national terrorism'. (Cited in Gleeson 2008; see also Holland and McDonald 2010, 199).

The Howard Government had effectively set the terms of the debate through a conceivable and communicable foreign policy discourse which coerced opponents into accepting the dangerous new era heralded by 9-11 and the need for an interventionist and militaristic response to protect shared values. It was, of course, these values that were most coercive of potential opponents, as opposing interventionism was readily equated with a denial of the ANZAC myth, a demonstrable lack of mateship, and an associated ambivalence towards Australian-ness. In short, opposing intervention was to lack patriotism. However, Howard's language was able to go even further in coercing dissenting voices. Not only were opponents seen to lack patriotism but moreover they were even framed as presenting a threat to Australia and support of Australia's enemies. The clearest example of this came as Howard lamented protesters against impending intervention for the reason that they 'give comfort to Saddam Hussein' (e.g. Howard 2003e). Opposition voices were framed by Howard as merely confirming his role as protector-in-chief of Australian values.

As intervention in Iraq loomed, Howard revisited the distinct themes of Australian foreign policy discourse in an effort to ensure policy was conceivable, communicable and coercive in an Australian context. In the final week before Operation Iraqi Freedom commenced, he reiterated the contingent and distinct themes that had previously underpinned the response to 9-11. These themes were explicitly tied to a renegotiated, traditionalist Australian national identity. Firstly, Howard stressed that intervention in Iraq was justified to secure Australia and protect the western values of Australians as part of the 'War on Terror'. Secondly and subsequently, linking the folding of Iraq into the War on Terror with Australia's (shared western) values, Howard argued that Australia had 'been a terrorist target at least since the 11th of September 2001 [because] Australia is a western country with western values [and] nothing will or should change that' (Howard 2003a). Thirdly, since a 'key motivation is a detestation of western values' and 'Australia is a western nation' – a fact that 'nothing can, will or should alter' – intervention was rendered the only viable option and opposition was marked as a denial of Australian-ness. Therefore, fourthly, intervention in Iraq would not

only ‘make it less likely that a devastating terrorist attack will be carried out against Australia’ but would also represent and reinforce a key (albeit contingent, constructed and contestable) ideal of what *being Australian* was all about.

Conclusion

Australia did not experience the void in meaning that Campbell (2001) identifies in American society after 9-11 in equally personal or incomprehensible ways. For many Australians, 9-11 was read as reinforcing what they already knew; the world beyond Australian borders and outside of the Anglosphere west was a dangerous place. This Hobbesian geographical imagination located friends and enemies in Australian mental maps of world affairs and was crucial in shaping the Australian response to 9-11. It was not entirely unexpected. Since winning election in 1996, Howard had helped to re-ignite Australian invasion anxieties.

Emphasising Australian values despite claiming to put the ‘national interest’ at the heart of foreign policy, Howard placed issues of culture and identity at the heart of Australian foreign policy. Who ‘we’ were, who ‘they’ were and the importance of keeping ‘their dangers’ away were all important themes of Australian foreign policy discourse from 1996 to 2001. The regional ‘shocks’ of the 1990s, in particular the financial crisis and intervention in East Timor were read through the prism of value-based Austrian-ness and culturally different, dangerous Otherness. 9-11 was seen as further proof that danger in the international system was located beyond the Australian border. This danger was constructed as a threat to the West and particularly the Anglosphere of which Australia was intimately a part. A renegotiated traditionalist national identity, together with the Hobbesian geographical imagination that mutually reinforced it, set the ground for a distinct Australian response to the events of 11 September 2001 and distinct Australian foreign policy discourse in the subsequent ‘War on Terror’ (see Holland and McDonald 2009; McDonald 2005).

Howard, of course, was in Washington D.C. during the events of 11 September. He had left behind the controversy of the *MV Tampa* debacle. The ‘Tampa Crisis’ occurred when the Norwegian cargo ship (the MV Tampa) picked up four hundred and thirty-eight asylum seekers from their sinking vessel just outside of Australian waters. The incident saw the vessel boarded by Australian Special Forces and the asylum seekers eventually sent to Nauru, as part of the Pacific Solution, for ‘offshore processing’. Howard warned of the potential for ‘the shores of this nation to be thick with asylum seeker boats’ (Burke 2001, 4), while ‘with the Hansonite electorate in mind’, former Defence Minister Philip Ruddock pursued a ‘systematic denigration of refugees’, referring to one six year old Iraqi asylum seeker as ‘it’ (Manne 2001, 5-6). This incident, perhaps like no other, demonstrates both the unique Australian context in which the ‘War on Terror’ would develop and the political continuities that would straddle the supposed temporal divide ushered in by 9-11. This article has demonstrated the significance of the unique Australian context and of Howard’s ability as a talented, strategic politician to frame a conceivable, communicable and coercive foreign policy discourse.

Adopting an approach that takes language and discourse seriously, this article has shown that Australian foreign policy in the ‘War on Terror’ was often distinct and divergent from fellow

coalition states. Australian foreign policy discourse was not entirely 'synchronised' – and cannot be encapsulated as simply 'marching in time' – with fellow coalition states (see Doig et al 2007). By acknowledging the importance of agency and context, the paper has argued that these differences can be understood in relation to the political and cultural domestic landscape of the time. Far from being purely exogenously driven, the policies and interventionism of the 'War on Terror' were deeply embedded in the unique Australian context. Even if Australia's 'alliance with the United States was ... a factor in major national security decisions' such as participation in the Coalition of the Willing, Australian troops were nonetheless seen to act in a 'fashion completely consistent with the values of our great community' (Howard 2003b, 2003c). In short Australian participation in the 'War on Terror' was more than a rational calculation based on power politics. Howard's language and the narratives of Australian identity he deployed were crucial to making the 'War on Terror' possible in an Australian context.

The paper has argued that the distinct elements of Australian foreign policy during the response and translation phases of the 'War on Terror' were both mutually reinforcing and politically enabling. They contributed to the possibility of the 'War on Terror' in three analytical moments. Firstly, constructing an ontologised cartography, in which danger could be read geographically, helped to make interventionist policy conceivable in an Australian context. Secondly, drawing upon and reinforcing the Hobbesian geographical imagination shared by many battlers and Hansonites, Australian foreign policy presented a stark border between culturally similar great and powerful friends and different, dangerous 'Others'. Meshing with the cultural terrain of the domestic political landscape made Australian foreign policy communicable to key target audiences. Thirdly, not only did strategically framed foreign policy discourse help to make policy thinkable and resonant in an Australian context, moreover it made presenting alternatives or delivering criticism extremely problematic. With intervention framed as a natural part of Australian history and identity, arguing against this position was readily equated with being un-Australian or even anti-Australian. Not only were critics failing to stand up for Australian values, they were seen to be failing to defend them through the Australian tradition of mutual sacrifice in war. Thus Australian foreign policy discourse was particularly coercive, acquiescing potential opponents to accept the principal terms of debate. Together these three analytical moments were crucial to the political possibility of the 'War on Terror'. Australian foreign policy discourse in the 'War on Terror' was distinct and strategic, helping to make policy conceivable, communicable and coercive in an Australian context.

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