

HAPPY FAMILIES OR STRAINED RELATIONS? : Trans Tasman responses to Terrorism

Brigid Magner,

School of Political & Social Inquiry, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

Abstract

Throughout its history, the trans-Tasman relationship has been characterised by coalescence and antagonism. However close Australian and New Zealand commercial relations may be becoming, there are still very real barriers to cultural confluence, with each other and the rest of the globe. Certainly, the dynamic between New Zealand and US has been troubled since the New Zealand government decided not to join the 'Coalition of the Willing' in the so-called liberation of Iraq. Australia's unambiguous support for the US on this issue has inevitably affected the relationship with its nearest neighbour, which has taken a more independent stance. A number of commentators have recently remarked on the growing divide between the two countries and their radically different outlooks on the world. While Australians tend to regard the international situation as increasingly hostile, New Zealanders insist that they live in a more benign environment. Through a brief survey of current media material, this paper will examine the positions adopted by Australia and New Zealand in relation to the Iraq war, with particular emphasis on their respective responses to the threat of terrorism.

Select a stream in which you wish to have your paper considered: Media and Cultural Studies

Introduction

Australia and New Zealand often look like neighbours squabbling over the back fence' argues historian Philippa Mein-Smith, yet we are more like a feuding family since we share so much of our past. (2003, p. 305) Although Australia and New Zealand are joined by old ties of loyalty as symbolized by the ANZAC alliance, and are increasingly interconnected commercially, their governments have radically different attitudes, especially towards matters of defence. In a recent speech, Australia's High Commissioner to New Zealand, remarked on this cooling in relations, claiming that the 'ANZAC relationship is finely poised on the fulcrum...it can go one way or the other – in defence, in trade, in every way.' (Dr. Allan Hawke, 2004a)

Newspaper reportage in on both sides of the Tasman reflects Australia and New Zealand's divergent attitudes to tackling the terrorist threat and reveals a relationship characterised by both confluence and ambivalence. Given that items on Australia tend to occur more frequently in the New Zealand press than vice versa is an indication of a certain indifference displayed by the larger country. As is often the case between adjacent countries of differing sizes, the smaller one is more pre-occupied with the relationship

than the larger one. As Dr. Allan Hawke has observed, the slightest criticism by Australia or an Australian runs the risk of being picked up and amplified and magnified on the other side of the Tasman. (Fran O'Sullivan, 2004)

New Zealand is definitely more dependent financially, yet Australia also relies on its support in matters of security, however minimal. Since it leans heavily on Australia, in an economic sense, the New Zealand government is finding it difficult to reconcile its political views with the importance of commercial concerns. At a time when the economic ties between the two nations are becoming more and more compelling, their strategic interests are seemingly incompatible.

Following September 11, when President George W. Bush declared: 'Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists' (President George W. Bush, 2001), Australia and New Zealand chose to respond in radically different ways. While President Bush's statement did not leave any room for compromise, the New Zealand government has consistently avoided committing support to the 'War on Terror', with detrimental effects on its relations with Australia and the U.S.

In September 2001, to show support for America, Australia invoked the Security Treaty between Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America (ANZUS) for the first time since the treaty's ratification in 1952. Before 1985, ANZUS was regularly described as the 'keystone' of defence policy within Australasia. Under the American (nuclear) umbrella, Australia and New Zealand could avoid large defence expenditures and keep their forces small, while still feeling secure. (W. David McIntyre, 2000, pp. 30-32)

The treaty was essentially neutralized in the mid-1980s when the New Zealand Labour government, under the leadership of Prime Minister David Lange, refused permission for nuclear-powered and/or nuclear-equipped ships into New Zealand waters. After a US naval destroyer was denied entry, the US government declared ANZUS 'inoperative' with regard to New Zealand and suspended the defence guarantee. While close relations have now been restored, the 'unfinished business' caused by the nuclear ban has remained a barrier to the restoration of the alliance. (McIntyre, 2000, p. 32.)

For Australians, New Zealand's decision to disregard the ANZUS pact could be seen as yet another disappointment in a history of failing to fulfil commitments. Denis McLean argues that Australians have regarded New Zealanders as 'shirkers' and 'defaulters' ever since they declined to join the six Australian colonies in 1901. (Denis McLean, 1985, p. 1) New Zealand's independent decision-making on matters of defence can be read as a betrayal of trans-Tasman co-operation, from an Australian point of view.

Given New Zealand's departure from ANZUS, the current government did not feel obliged to contribute substantially to the George W. Bush's incursions against the so-called 'Axis of Evil'. Australia provided about 1,550 troops to the U.S.-led war effort in Afghanistan, including members of its Special Air Services, who have hunted al Qaeda

and Taliban holdouts. In addition, Australia contributed several aircraft, a naval task group, and other military hardware. Meanwhile, New Zealand offered minimal assistance to the 'War on Terror'. Only seven per cent of the New Zealand population supported the United States going into Iraq alone, without UN approval. Even with UN backing, nearly half the country thought that there was not sufficient justification for war. The Prime Minister Helen Clark made it clear that she was unconvinced by the evidence presented to the UN about the threat of Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction by the US Secretary of State Colin Powell. In the absence of convincing proof of the existence of Iraq's WMD's, Clark chose not to go to war, citing New Zealand's history of commitment to multi-lateralism and to support for the institution of the United Nations.

Inevitably this controversial stance has had repercussions in terms of New Zealand's position in relation to its traditional allies. New Zealand was essentially left out of free-trade negotiations due to its military policy. On April 1st 2002, when asked about these negotiations, Prime Minister Clark, replied that her government didn't intend to 'trade the lives of young New Zealanders for a war it doesn't believe in, in order to secure some material advantage.' (cited by Gerard Henderson, 2003, p. 11)

Nonetheless, New Zealand has offered a number of minor contributions to the campaign against terrorism. In late 2002, the military frigate Te Kaha was sent by New Zealand to monitor shipping in the Arabian Sea, reportedly as part of an effort to capture al-Qaeda and Taliban operatives (although some domestic critics say the ship is supporting the U.S. campaign against Iraq instead). New Zealand has also offered the anti-terror coalition the use of an Orion intelligence reconnaissance aircraft, which has not yet been deployed. (Terrorism: Questions & Answers, 2004)

New Zealand reportedly had about 30 to 40 Special Air Services (SAS) troops serving in Afghanistan. Defence Minister Mark Burton said in December 2002 that all had returned home. Wellington has declined to release details of the SAS operations; Prime Minister Helen Clark confirmed the troops' presence in Afghanistan only after it was revealed on a White House website. A C-130 Hercules aircraft from the Royal New Zealand Airforce was also used to move coalition personnel and supplies in and around Afghanistan.

As The Australian has observed, these gestures are seen as inadequate by both the Australian and U.S governments. Since being elected in 1999, the Clark Government has systematically reduced New Zealand's defence capabilities by closing down the air force's combat wing and reducing the navy to a two-frigate fleet. The fact that Clark refused to join the US-led invasion of Iraq, resulted in some unusually sharp diplomatic comments about New Zealand's attitude from Washington, and a refusal to include New Zealand in talks on the Australia-US free trade deal. (The Australian, March 15, 2004) During an address to a trans-Tasman business lunch PM Clark hit back at suggestions that New Zealand was not sharing the burden of the war against terrorism: 'The assumption always is that New Zealand is some kind of bludger that does not say anything or do anything...I can tell you that our record is second to none.' (Helen Clark cited in The Australian, July 9, 2004)

There have been loud rumblings about New Zealand's failure to keep up its side of the bargain and some anti-Australian and anti-US sentiments have also been expressed in New Zealand. An Australian navy tanker recently fell victim to a graffiti attack while berthed in New Zealand waters, with the words painted 'John Howard - US boot licker' - painted on it. Responsibility for the graffiti, which echoed al Qaeda criticism of Australian Prime Minister John Howard for his support of the US-led war, was claimed by a group calling itself the 'Movement for Ethical Government'. Evidently the defiant nuclear ships ban is a source of pride for most of the New Zealand population and is unlikely to change, even if a more conservative government comes to power. 'It's a mark of our sovereign independence,' says Trade and Agriculture Minister Jim Sutton. According to Peter Dunne, United Future Party leader who chairs the parliamentary defence and foreign affairs committee: 'The more the US says, "You've got to do this", the more people say "Like bloody hell!"' (cited by Laurie Oakes, 2004)

The terrorist threat is perhaps more compelling for Australia after the Bali bombing which occurred on the 12th October 2002, killing 202 people, 88 of them Australians. The Bali attacks have been traced to Jemaah Islamiyah, a terror group with links to al Qaeda. Imam Samudra, who is accused of planning and carrying out the bombings, has told reporters he targeted the nightclubs in Bali because he was aiming to kill as many Americans as possible, because he meant to 'declare war on the United States'. (Guardian Weekly, 2003) That Australia should suffer so many casualties when the attack was aimed at Americans could be understood as an unfortunate consequence of its close alliance with the U.S.

The Bali bombing confirmed and amplified a judgement made after September 11 2001: the risk to Australia from terrorism has increased sharply, and is likely to remain relatively high at least in the foreseeable future. A government document called Beyond Bali, prepared in 2002, claims that Australia's increased security alert should come as no surprise given that 'circumstances in its immediate neighbourhood make it among the most vulnerable regions in the world to the operations of networks such as al Qaeda.' (Aldo Borgu, 2002, p. 9) This publication goes on to detail the various factors that contribute to Australia's profile as a potential target for militant Islamic terrorists: its geographical proximity to South East Asia, close alliance with America and its relatively active role in the 'War on Terror' and more generally its place as the most obviously 'Western' country in this part of the world. (Aldo Borgu, 2002, p. 11) Presumably New Zealand is not considered as thoroughly 'Western' due to its avowed ambivalence towards the Iraq war and its considerable Polynesian population.

In contrast, New Zealand's worst experience of terrorism came not from al Qaeda but from the French. The bombing of the Rainbow Warrior by French secret agents on July 10, 1985 stands as New Zealand's most significant experience of international terrorism. 'Operation Satanic', a plot by French intelligence and covert action bureau the DGSE was described by then-prime Minister David Lange as a 'sordid act of international state backed terrorism' and involved French politicians at the highest level. Despite the relative scarcity of terrorist events in New Zealand, there has been consistent surveillance of people and groups within the country and abroad by secret agencies. (Dita de Boni,

2002)

Since the Bali attack, questions over whether the bombing could have been predicted, or tourists warned, have repeatedly been asked. Revelations that the Office of National Assessment told Foreign Minister Alexander Downer last year that attacks in Indonesia were likely and that Bali represented an attractive target have led to accusations from Opposition foreign affairs spokesman Kevin Rudd that the Government's failure to warn the public was 'either rank arrogance, rank incompetence, or a very ugly combination of both'. This in turn has led Prime Minister John Howard to declare: 'We didn't have any warning of the Bali attack, please believe that.' An editorial in *The Age* published in mid 2003, argued that this political game of accusation and protestation is an inadequate response to the appalling consequences of terrorism. (*The Age*, 2003, p. 10)

Adding fuel to the debate, *Age* columnist Gerard Henderson claimed that New Zealand was not seen as 'pulling its weight' in the wake of September 11 and the Bali bombing. This was a point of view which was not officially voiced, according to Henderson, yet it was common in private. Shaun Goldfinch recently argued in the *Financial Review* that Henderson's complaint was frequently made by Australian conservatives and that he has overstated the tension that exists between the two countries on the issue of defence. This over-simplification is unfortunate, Goldfinch claims, because it disregards the complex history of this relationship. He points to the 'headlines, polemics and mutual baiting' that the subject usually attracts, as evidence that the dynamic between Australia and New Zealand deserves further attention. (Shaun Goldfinch, 2003, p. 11)

In response to trans-Tasman disagreements about defence arrangements, a number of commentators have remarked on the lamentable state of the ANZAC alliance. While the Anzac myth has been perpetuated in both countries, it is rarely celebrated together, aside from the annual Anzac day commemorations. That ANZAC has a special significance for both Australia and New Zealand has created a dilemma, since the term fuses the identities of the two countries which are very different. As John Rickard has remarked:

In spite of Australia and New Zealand sharing much in heritage and experience, the artificial creation of separate national identities in 1901 was a starting point for cultural divergence. Anzac was an uneasy reminder that the two countries could, nevertheless, not escape from being involved in each other's destiny. (John Rickard, 1988, p. 120)

This raises questions about how important the oft-celebrated ANZAC connection actually is to both countries. Gerard Henderson suggests that the rhetoric heard on Anzac days belies the fact that Australia and New Zealand are going their own ways on security and intelligence issues. (2003, p. 11) Though people like John Howard have deep feelings about ANZAC, this may not apply to the next generation of leaders and therefore the relationship should not be taken for granted. As Laurie Oakes explained in a speech delivered to a conference in Wellington:

Given NZ's withdrawal from the ANZUS alliance in the mid-1980s over the issue

of visits by US nuclear-powered or nuclear-armed warships, suspicion about the strength of its defence relationship with Australia is perhaps understandable – especially in light of cutbacks in its military capability and rejection by the government in Wellington of the notion that Australia and NZ are a strategic entity.

(Laurie Oakes, 2004)

New Zealand's withdrawal from ANZUS also has implications in terms of access to high-level security sharing with the US, potentially leaving it more vulnerable to attack. The Australian ambassador to New Zealand tries to put a more positive spin on the situation. He points to the increasing number of young Australians and New Zealanders who make the effort to go to Gallipoli for Anzac Day each year.

We've got to work at it and make sure the new generation of people on both sides of the Tasman see how important it [the Trans-Tasman relationship] is and continue to regard it that way. (Allen Hawke cited by Fran O'Sullivan, 2004)

This sentiment has been echoed by the New Zealand Opposition leader Don Brash, who is especially critical of Helen Clark's tentative stance towards the U.S. He claims that as Australia under John Howard moves ever closer to the US, New Zealand is being left out. Brash is vowing to fix the alliance by increasing defence spending, actively committing to the US-led alliance and ensuring that Australia has no doubt of New Zealand's active and willing support. 'Friendly rivalry is fine, but a distinct chill has come over Australia's closest friendship', warns Brash. (Don Brash cited in *The Australian*, 2004)

Prompted by the Madrid bombing, Mark Latham the leader of the ALP, has indicated that he would rethink Australia's military commitments if he were to become Prime Minister, beginning with the recalling of troops from Iraq by Christmas 2004. As the Australian's editor-at-large Paul Kelly has remarked, Latham is trying to argue a simultaneous position of withdrawing from Iraq and being tough on terrorism. 'It is a tough call' Kelly argues. (Paul Kelly, 2004) For Latham, the Iraq exercise is 'a diversion of resources and time and effort away from the real task in the war against terror.' He calls 'breaking up their networks, catching bin Laden, crushing JI (Jemaah Islamiah) in South East Asia' as the 'real war on terror'. When asked if the recalling of troops could be seen as giving up, he retorted 'Well it's not Australian to go to war for the wrong purpose.' Naturally the US government has responded with concern about Labor's proposition. Senior U.S officials have stated that the unilateral withdrawal of Australian forces would be a serious blow to U.S. interests. Evidently U.S. policy-makers fear that if one of America's oldest and most intimate allies delivers a vote of no confidence, this will have a corrosive effect on the broader international climate.

While Australia's relationship with the U.S. is under debate, the civil liberties landscape in Australia has changed irrevocably with the introduction of draconian 'counter-terrorism' measures. As Jenny Hocking's book *Terror Laws: ASIO, Counter-terrorism and the Threat to Democracy* argues, the 'use of vague, ambiguous descriptions of "terrorism" has generated immediate and obvious problems about the actual reach of those "counter-terrorism" mechanisms in practice, with the attendant issues of

accountability this ambiguity raises.’ (Jenny Hocking, 2004, p. 246) Central to the debate over contemporary counter-terrorism is the question: ‘Where does war end and law enforcement begin? President George W Bush’s suggestion that the ‘war on terrorism’ could extend to as many as 60 countries, raises issues about ensuing breaches of civil liberty, in the search for so-called ‘enemy combatants’. As Hocking notes, the term ‘terrorism’ has served to blur the distinction between exceptional measures, once applicable only during wartime, and peace-time domestic law enforcement. The ultimate impact of terrorism has been to provide a ready legitimization for increased security control, a pervasive security infrastructure and a diminution of established legal protections for average citizens. (Hocking, 2004, pp.246-247) The Federal government’s proposed detention powers for ASIO may be seen as an example of contemporary challenges to the rule of law by the state itself. This might be called the ‘fight fire with fire’ phenomenon. That is, the State responding to lawlessness by acting with characteristics of lawlessness. (R. Heinrich cited by Hocking, 2004, p. 247)

Like their Australian counterparts, New Zealand authorities reacted to 9/11 immediately on the home front, with law enforcement deployment and legislative solutions to try to prevent potential attacks. New Zealand also finalised development of an internal process for designating terrorists, but - unlike Australia, Canada, the European Union, the UK, and the US, among others - it has yet to implement it to designate any notorious terrorist groups not already mandated by the UN. The New Zealand definition of terrorism is narrower than other jurisdictions’, thereby all but eliminating the possibility that protesters, strikers, and others could be unnecessarily brought within its laws. This marks a big difference between the policies of the Clark and Howard governments in relation to terror laws. However, the pending case of Ahmed Zaoui, a refugee who has been accused of being a terrorist, demonstrates that New Zealand’s anti-terrorism measures are still subject to much debate. (See Catherine Field, 2004)

The Madrid bombing and the subsequent election of a new Spanish government created major aftershocks round the world and Australasia was no exception. In response, high-level meetings have been held between New Zealand and Australian police and anti-terrorism chiefs. After the new Spanish government’s decision to pull troops out of Iraq, further attention was drawn to security issues in Australia and New Zealand. New Zealand government spokesman Phil Goff told the media that the security threat to New Zealand was relatively low compared to overseas countries, but it could not afford to be complacent. Goff is adamant that New Zealand’s boundaries have to be secured so that it is not seen as a terrorist ‘hideout’.

As these negotiations have shown, Australia and New Zealand are able to compromise on a number of issues, including the question of Pacific security. It has been suggested that if left to their own devices some troubled Pacific nations will ‘go rogue’ and provide havens for international terrorists, so constant vigilance is necessary on the part of both countries. Prime Minister John Howard wants Australia to take a more ‘interventionist’ role in the Pacific and has threatened to axe aid to blatantly corrupt regimes. As the regional junior partner, New Zealand is under pressure. However, it seems Foreign Affairs Minister Phil Goff is happy to play along, with certain reservations. (Fran

O'Sullivan, 2003)

Over a hundred years since New Zealand decided not to federate with Australia, the subject has been raised again, with proposals for complete amalgamation. In fact, a section of the Australian Constitution even allows for this eventuality, designed so that New Zealand could become the seventh state at any time, if it changed its mind. Certainly the possibility of creating a shared currency and combined market has been repeatedly suggested by both sides. Helen Clark has commented that the establishment of a common currency is not on the immediate agenda but cannot be ruled out in the future. During a visit to Sydney, she observed that Australian perceptions of New Zealand had changed noticeably in recent years: 'I think that's come with the recognition that New Zealand's actually doing rather well and that the relationship is one that is beneficial...collaboration has to be good for us...both countries have success stories which can help each other.' (Helen Clark, *The Age*, July 8, 2004)

Looking back to the failure of Australia and New Zealand to federate can help to provide a background to the two countries' tentative, often faltering relations with one another. Arguably, New Zealand's self-identity became positively 'un-Australian' after 1901, while Australia's potential territory shrank considerably. Donald Denoon has observed that New Zealand became an 'insular' nation and Australia became a 'continental' nation. According to Denoon, history has shown that continental races and insular races tend to diverge further and further apart. (Denoon, 2003, p. 299) Whether or not this will continue to happen is yet to be seen.

Economically intertwined but ideologically opposed in many ways - notably over indigenous land rights - the future of the alliance between the two nations remains uncertain. If Federation stimulated New Zealanders to 'imagine' the distinctive and desirable features of their people and their country, (Mein-Smith, 2003, p.310) then how would they conceive of amalgamation with their nearest neighbour? For a reunion like this to happen there would have to be a breakthrough in relations between these sibling nations who 'remain foreign to each other'. (Robin Usher, 2004)

Bibliography

Editorial, (2003). *The Age*, Insight, 21 June, 10.

The Australian, (2004). March 15, online.

Borgu, Aldo. ed. (2002). *Beyond Bali: ASPI's Strategic Assessment 2002*, ACT: ASPI, 9.

Bush, George, W., (2001). Address to Congress, 20 September.

Clark, Helen. (2004) Cited in *Common Tasman Currency 'not yet'*. *The Age*, July 8,

online.

Kiwi PM muscles in on American trade deal. (2004) *The Australian*, July 9, online.

Council on Foreign Relations, (2004). *Terrorism: Questions & Answers*, online.

De Boni, Dita. (2002). The day Operation Satanic came to NZ. *NZ Herald*, 3 December, online.

Denoon, Donald., (2003). Re-Membering Australasia: A Repressed Memory. *Australian Historical Studies*, (122), 290-303.

Field, Catherine. (2004). Journey Into the Shadows Surrounding Zaoui, *The New Zealand Herald*, 10 April, online.

Goldfinch, Shaun. (2003). Taking each other for granted, *Financial Review*, 5 March, 11.

Guardian Weekly, (2003). Imam on trial for Bali bombings, 2 June, online.

Henderson, Gerard. (2003). NZ remains part of Anzac, but the link is fading. *The Age*, 22 April, 11.

Hocking, Jenny. (2004) *Terror Laws: ASIO, Counter-Terrorism and the Threat to Democracy*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 246-7.

Kelly, Paul. (2004). Editorial. *The Australian*, 3 April, online.

McIntyre, W. David. (2000). ANZUS entry. In: *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, Ian McGibbon, ed. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 30-32.

McLean, Denis. (1985). New Zealand's strategic position and defence policies. In: *The Anzac Connection*, Desmond Ball, ed. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1.

Mein-Smith, Philippa. (2003). New Zealand Federation Commissioners in Australia: One Past, Two Historiographies, *Australian Historical Studies*, (122), 304-325.

O'Sullivan, Fran. (2003). 'In the national interest: security promises without a strategy', *NZ Herald*, 30 July, online.

(2004). NZ's plain-speaking ally from Australia, *NZ Herald*, 26th February, online.

Rickard, John. (1988). *Australia: A Cultural History*, Melbourne: Cheshire, 120.

Usher, Robin. (2004). Quest for Tasman fellowship. *The Age*, 24 March, online.

Address for correspondence

Author Name: Brigid Magner

Department: School of Political & Social Inquiry

Institution: Monash University
Street address: Wellington Rd
Location Clayton, Melbourne
Country: Australia
Email address: brigidmagner@optusnet.com.au