Lost at sea: Australia in the turbulence of world politics

CHRISTIAN REUS-SMIT

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the conceptual foundations of the Howard government’s foreign policy, suggests a more accurate picture of the contours of contemporary world politics, and highlights the practical and ethical challenges entailed in the required shift from ‘foreign’ to ‘transnational’ policy making. It begins with an examination of how the government has understood the structure of the contemporary international system, focusing on the curious amalgam of traditional notions of sovereignty and the balance of power with ‘shock of the new’ ideas about the alluring and unstoppable march of economic globalisation. It then elaborates an alternative understanding of the contemporary global political landscape, one that emphasises six key trends: the ‘liberalising’ of sovereignty; the globalisation of free market economics; the systemic breakdown of the global ecosystem; the ‘domestication’ of war; the socialisation of power; and the ‘unbundling of territoriality’. These trends will, for the foreseeable future, constitute the basic systemic context in which Australia and other states must navigate their way in the world.
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INTRODUCTION
On 15 February 2002 Alexander Downer, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Mark Vaile, Minister for Trade, announced that they were commissioning a new White Paper on foreign and trade policy, to be titled *Advancing the national interest*. They argued that ‘our region and the world have experienced profound change including the East Asian financial crisis; the progressive strengthening of globalisation; the terrible events of September 11 and the resulting war on terrorism; and the launch of a new round of multilateral trade negotiations in the World Trade Organization’.2 *Advancing the national interest* would respond to these changes by reviewing ‘the 1997 White Paper’s key themes and assumptions and undertake some new analysis on which relationships matter most to Australia in terms of our security, our trade and investment interests, our people-to-people links and other issues’.3

The Howard government’s decision to embark on such an ambitious review is to be commended, as the world in which Australia must navigate its way is indeed undergoing profound change. On multiple fronts an array of long-emerging political imperatives have come to the fore which not only challenge the primacy of the ‘high politics’ of state security and economic diplomacy but also problematise the whole notion of ‘foreign’ policy. Refugees and the mass movement of displaced peoples, regional and global environmental crisis, drug trafficking and organised crime,

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1 Senior Fellow and Head, Department of International Relations, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.
3 Downer and Vaile, ‘Advancing the national interest’.
state breakdown and regional instability, and global economic liberalisation are all issues that blur the boundaries between the domestic and the international and force governments, including Australia’s, into the uncharted waters of ‘transnational’ policy making, a form of policy making that throws up profound conceptual, practical, and ethical dilemmas.

The government’s 1997 White Paper, *In the national interest*, showed little appreciation of these changes or their magnitude. Old ideas of regional and global balances of power were combined with limited understandings of economic globalisation in ways that misunderstood the nature of power in the contemporary world—particularly American power—and greatly simplified the character of global political and economic phenomena. These ideas licensed a dangerous deference toward the new Bush administration’s global agenda, a diminution of Australia’s commitment to, and influence upon, multilateral institutional developments, and blinded Australian policy makers to the realities of the world politics and the demands of transnational policy making.

This article critically examines the conceptual foundations of the Howard government’s 1997 White Paper, presents a more accurate picture of the contours of contemporary world politics, and highlights the practical and ethical challenges entailed in the required shift from ‘foreign’ to ‘transnational’ policy making. It begins with an examination of how the government has understood the structure of the contemporary international system, focusing on the curious amalgam of traditional notions of sovereignty and the balance of power with ‘shock of the new’ ideas about the alluring and unstoppable march of economic globalisation. It then elaborates an alternative understanding of the contemporary global political landscape, one that emphasises six key trends: the ‘liberalising’ of sovereignty; the globalisation of free market economics; the systemic breakdown of the global ecosystem; the ‘domestication’ of war; the socialisation of power; and the ‘unbundling of territoriality’. These trends, I shall argue, will for the foreseeable future constitute the basic systemic context in which Australia must navigate its way in the world. They

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cannot be subsumed, however, within the established cognitive or practical framework of ‘foreign’ policy, as they demand, both individually and in their totality, a practical appreciation of the social calibration of sovereignty, the articulation of institutional realms, and arena and issue linkage. Nor can their attendant ethical problems be addressed through the standard, dichotomous frameworks that draw sharp distinctions between the domestic and international as realms of moral deliberation and action.

BLINKERED VISION
How governments formulate foreign policy is deeply conditioned by the way key ministers and their trusted advisors imagine the world, by their understandings of the forces affecting national security and the pursuit of national interests. These understandings are in part shaped by ‘real world’ political developments—such as shifts in regional or global balances of power or economic boom or bust—but these ‘facts’ are always filtered through ideological lenses, through preexisting assumptions about how the world works and about what constitutes an important development or process and what doesn’t. For the Howard government, these lenses are curiously bifocal; they combine traditional conceptions of balance of power politics, deeply rooted in the liberal-conservative foreign policy consciousness, with an unwavering faith in the progressive power of liberal economic globalisation. An old world imagery of state-centric international relations is thus overlaid with a late-modern one of borderless markets, the global ‘hidden hand’ of capitalism, and economic growth for all.

These paired assumptions about the nature of the global order were stated prominently in the government’s first White Paper on Australia’s foreign and trade policy, In the national interest. Two ‘trends’, it claimed, ‘stand out as particularly significant for Australia. One is globalisation, underpinned by a communications revolution that will continue to transform the way in which people work and live. The second is the changing relativities of power and influence which flow from the economic rise of East Asia’. Five years later these assumptions still

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*In the national interest*, pp. 17–18.
oriented the government’s foreign policy. Addressing the Menzies Research Centre in August 2001, John Howard proudly explained that his government had ‘recognised that the end of the cold war fundamentally altered the global strategic environment and that, in the area of national security, regional tensions and uncertainty had replaced the traditional balance between two super powers. Equally’, he went on to claim, ‘we were determined to respond to the trends of globalisation, increasingly fuelled by advanced communication and technology, and the massive and rapid flow of international capital’.6

Globalisation is a much debated phenomenon, with commentators divided over its nature, scope, and implications. At one extreme there are those who see it as an all-encompassing transformation, one in which the globe is becoming rapidly enmeshed in webs of economics, politics, institutions, culture, environment, fueled by revolutions in information and communications technologies. Time and space, it is thought, are becoming increasingly compressed, boundaries more and more irrelevant, sovereignty less and less meaningful, and the politics of integration and fragmentation the order of the day. Needless to say, this is not the Howard government’s understanding. Globalisation is a code word in the government’s vocabulary for liberal economic interdependence, hastened along by the global web of communications and new technologies. When Howard told the audience at the Menzies Research Centre that it was his ‘firm belief that globalisation is a process that provides major opportunities for this country’, and that ‘[g]overnments must speak out about the reality of globalisation, and carry people with them in meeting its challenges’, he was referring to the development of a global free market economy and the benefits of transnational trade, production, and finance.7 ‘A defining feature of globalisation’, the White Paper contends, ‘is the way in which business operates: firms increasingly organise their activities on a global scale, forming production chains, including services inputs, that cross many countries and greatly increase global flows of


7 Howard, ‘Australia’s international relations’. 
trade and investment. Unstoppable as this process is, the government insists that its does not mean the end of the state or national sovereignty: ‘the nation is far from dead, and sovereignty is still cherished’.

If economic globalisation is the Howard government’s ‘brave new world’, then old style balance of power politics has been its ‘timeless truth’. Foremost in its consciousness has been the shifting regional balance of power in East Asia. In the words of the White Paper, the ‘remarkable economic growth of East Asia has been an overwhelmingly positive development for the region’s peace and prosperity. But rapid growth has also enabled countries to increase their military expenditure’. Of greatest concern is the rise of China and the implications this has for the regional and global balances of power—‘China’s economic growth, with attendant confidence and enhanced influence, will be the most important strategic development of the next fifteen years’. Careful to appear positive about China’s future role in world affairs, the government has nevertheless been adamant that the United States must maintain its regional military presence to ensure continued stability. ‘US strategic engagement in the region’, it has claimed, ‘is widely regarded as a crucial stabilising influence, and an indispensable condition for the continuing strategic stability on which the region’s economic success is ultimately dependent’. The government has explicitly denied that China represents a ‘threat’, but it clearly sees Beijing’s socialisation to the norms of international society through policies of constructive engagement, combined with the simultaneous

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8 In the national interest, p. 18.
9 In the national interest, p. 21.
10 In the national interest, p. 27.
11 In the national interest, p. 27.
13 In the national interest, p. 29.
maintenance of an attentive American diplomatic and military presence, as essential to regional balance and stability.\textsuperscript{14}

This amalgam of new frontierist and old realpolitik assumptions about the nature of contemporary international politics provides the orienting points for the Howard government’s foreign policy, encouraging three broad policy principles. First, its largely economic understanding of globalisation, in tandem with its residual realism, have reinforced a traditional understanding of Australian sovereignty. If we employ Stephen Krasner’s recent typology,\textsuperscript{15} the government has vigorously defended its international legal sovereign rights, actively denied any external authority to qualify its ‘Westphalian’ authority within Australia’s borders, allowed interdependence to penetrate only in the realms of trade and finance, and championed a narrow conception of domestic sovereignty that rejects even the rights of the courts to challenge executive and legislative authority. Second, having identified changes in regional and global balances of power as one of two key structural features of the present international system, the government has given the alliance with the United States pride of place in its foreign policy. Downer argued in June 2001 that ‘one of the Howard government’s major foreign policy achievements has been to revitalise and reinvigorate the Australia–US alliance relationship’.\textsuperscript{16} Finally, the government has favoured bilateral over multilateral diplomacy. The former has been presented as the ‘basic building block’ of Australia’s external relations, and a policy of ‘selective multilateralism’ has replaced the former Labor government’s prioritising of international institutional cooperation. When multilateral cooperation

\textsuperscript{14} Downer, ‘Gaining a place’.

\textsuperscript{15} Krasner argues that sovereignty must be disaggregated into four different forms: international legal sovereignty (the legal rights states possess under international law), Westphalian sovereignty (the ‘exclusion of external actors from authority structures within a given state’), domestic sovereignty (the formal capacity of political authorities to control activities within the state’s borders), and interdependence sovereignty (the ability of political authorities to regulate transborder flows). See Stephen D. Krasner, \textit{Sovereignty: Organized hypocrisy} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

has been needed in areas to do with economic globalisation, or when other issues (such as nuclear weapons proliferation or the International Criminal Court) are not thought to challenge Australia’s narrowly defined domestic sovereignty, the government has been an enthusiastic participant. But when multilateral cooperation is required in non-economic issues areas, and when it involves international legal rules compromising the government’s sovereign rights domestically (as in the areas of human rights, refugee law, and environmental protection), energetic resistance has been the order of the day.

These structural preconceptions and policy principles have produced a simplistic and polarised national foreign policy discourse. The government’s declaratory policy has oscillated between categorical defences of national sovereignty and equally categorical assertions about the unstoppable march of globalisation and the necessity of economic openness and adaptation. Just as sovereignty is said to be ‘cherished’, we are told that pretending ‘that we could turn our backs on change would be more than just futile—it would be a cruel deception of all those people who might think their lot, in the long run, would be a better one’. Simplistic notions of closure and national resistance are thus paired with exhortations to accept the necessity of openness and the folly of opposition. The net result of this discourse has been a pervasive failure on the part of the government to come to terms with the real nature and complexity of contemporary global politics and a concomitant failure to adjust either conceptually, practically, or ethically. The disservice this does Australia is clear: sovereign closure is as ill-suited to solving problems of global refugee movements and environmental breakdown as uncritical openness is to addressing the domestic dislocations and political realignments caused by economic liberalisation.

**CONTEMPORARY WORLD POLITICS**

Traditional, highly categorical notions of sovereignty and simplistic ideas of globalisation are two of the most significant conceptual impediments to

understanding the full complexity of contemporary world politics. Yet the Howard government is not alone in invoking such concepts; much of the debate in international relations is polarised between ‘statists’, who deny interdependence and uphold the persistence and centrality of the system of sovereign states, and ‘globalists’, who see interdependence everywhere and call for the abandonment of the concept of sovereignty. Neither of these positions is especially helpful. Even the most casual observers will see that states are not disappearing and that discourses of sovereignty appear alive and well, even if the meanings attached to such discourses are far from categorical. They will also see that, simultaneously, a series of transnational processes and phenomena are breaking down the boundaries between the international and domestic realms, demanding new institutions of political authority and challenging existing structures of decision making. All of this suggests that we need more nuanced understandings of state sovereignty and a more specific and disaggregated identification of transnational phenomena than the blanket term ‘globalisation’ can provide. In what follows I identify six aspects of contemporary world politics, aspects that are far from exhaustive but which I believe constitute the primary challenges facing governments and societies.

The ‘liberalising’ of sovereignty

Realists teach us that sovereignty is the bedrock of international relations. If it were not for sovereignty there would be no anarchy, no security dilemmas, no balancing of power, no dysfunctional international institutions, nor for that matter any recognisable states. They also teach us that sovereignty is a claim states make about their power and authority, a claim that is sustainable only so long as states have the military and economic resources to defend their external independence, territorial integrity, and internal constitutional autonomy. Plausible as all of this may sound, the fascinating thing about this view of sovereignty is just how ‘unrealistic’ it is. Sovereignty may well be fundamental to international relations, but it

is important not because it is an attribute of individual states, grounded in
their material capacities to defend their autonomy. In modern international
society sovereignty is an international institution, a complex of norms
about how power and authority ought to be distributed, norms that states
appeal to when upholding their sovereign rights, norms that do more to
maintain the independence of most states than their military or economic
capacities (or incapacities).19 Only by understanding the nature of this
institution can we fully appreciate the dilemmas sovereignty poses for
national governments.

The first thing to understand about sovereignty is that it is not, and has
never been, an autonomous, self-referential, or free-standing norm of
political organisation.20 Rather, it has always been relational, embedded
within broader discourses of legitimate statehood, discourses which bind
sovereignty to other more fundamental existential beliefs about the raison
d’etre of the state.21 This has meant four things historically. First, because
sovereignty has always been tied to ascendant ideas of legitimate state-
hood, it has never been a categorical value, licensing absolute freedom of
action, domestically or internationally. Even in the heyday of European
absolutism the rights of sovereigns were qualified and circumscribed by
the perceived precepts of God’s law and natural law. Second, as dis-
courses of legitimate statehood have changed over time, as one dominant
raison d’etre has given way to another, the meaning of sovereignty has
changed and so too have its behavioural implications. As dynastic
conceptions of legitimate statehood were supplanted in the eighteenth and
nineteenth centuries by liberal conceptions, the scope of sovereign rights
changed, both in relation to national and international societies. Third,
discourses of legitimate statehood have been intimately connected with
the exercise of power in international society. Not only has the community
of recognised sovereign states used these discourses to police the
membership of the club of states, deploying ‘standards of civilisation’ and

19 See Robert H. Jackson, Quasi-states: Sovereignty, international relations and the Third World
20 Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, eds, State sovereignty as a social construct (Cambridge:
the like to deny ‘undesirable’ polities recognition as sovereign entities, but such recognition, when conveyed, has greatly empowered the political elites of new states, providing them with bounded rights of action internationally and domestically.\textsuperscript{22} Finally, all of the above has meant that rulers and governments have always faced the challenge of ‘dual socialisation’, the difficult task of balancing the normative imperatives of international society with personal predilections or domestic political demands as they go about defining national interests and pursuing their national and international policy agendas.

Since the first half of the nineteenth century two developments have occurred in the institution of sovereignty that have greatly complicated the socialisation imperatives faced by national governments. The most important of these has been the ‘liberalising’ of sovereignty, the grafting of sovereignty to liberal ideals about the legitimate role and scope of government authority. While the full implications of this process are still unfolding, John Locke’s precept that the ‘great and \textit{chief end} … of Mens uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government, \textit{is the Preservation of their Property}', understood as ‘their lives, liberties, and estates’, has become the touchstone of legitimate statehood in modern international society.\textsuperscript{23} Whether enshrined in the treaties that together form the International Bill of Human Rights or codified in the World Bank’s principles of ‘good governance’, international norms increasingly prescribe the universalisation of a broadly defined liberal polity. The second development has been the progressive ‘juridification’ of liberal sovereignty. Animated by liberal norms of governance themselves, states began, from the middle of the nineteenth century onward, to see norms as only legitimate if they were negotiated multilaterally and codified in positive international law. Henceforth we see the gradual legal inscription of liberal rules concerning the internal as well as external conduct of sovereign states, with both the Rome Statute of the new International

\textsuperscript{22} Michael Adas, \textit{Machines as the measure of men: Science, technology, and ideologies of Western dominance} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); and Gerrit W. Gong, \textit{The ‘standard of civilization’ in international society} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

Criminal Court and the principles of the World Trade Organization (WTO) constituting recent reflections of this trend.

The liberal juridification of sovereignty has presented two dilemmas for national governments. In tying legitimate statehood to the protection of individual rights, the liberal rationale for sovereignty justified territorial particularism—the division of the world into geographically demarcated, autonomous political units—in terms of universalist political values, thus establishing a profound contradiction at the heart of modern sovereignty discourse. As this rationale has become ever more firmly embedded, national governments have been pulled between lure of sovereign potency and the realities of bounded autonomy. This problem has been compounded by the second dilemma. The liberal juridification of sovereignty has been self-legislated by states, which means that not only is it codified in binding treaties and conventions, but states have self-consciously bound themselves to observe these instruments, in full accordance with their constitutional requirements. Governments thus frequently find themselves in the awkward position of asserting categorical rights of sovereignty against equally categorical qualifications which they themselves legislated. It is no wonder, therefore, that governments often appear to have a schizophrenic attitude toward their own power and authority.

The globalisation of free market economics

As we have seen, the transnationalisation of trade and finance is the aspect of globalisation stressed most prominently by the Howard government. It is also the only aspect of contemporary transnational politics that the government considers ‘futile’ to resist. The global movement of refugees can be obstructed, domestic adjustment to the global environmental crisis can be minimised, and external oversight of Australia’s human rights record can be challenged, but the logic of global capitalism is apparently a structure beyond agency.

The broad contours of economic globalisation are well known and need only summarising here. In the last 50 years the volume of trade has greatly increased, paralleled by the progressive transnationalisation of production. This has been matched since the late 1970s by the accelerating complexity of global financial flows, stimulated by the trend from fixed to floating exchange rate regimes. While there is some debate about whether
or not current levels of economic interdependence outstrip those of late-nineteenth century, the current situation has several distinctive features. First, the transnationalisation of economic relations has thrown up new and important actors, some of them the multinational corporations who have marketed their products in multiple locales and established global divisions of labour, some of them the international banking, finance, and investment houses, and some of them the international economic institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Second, economic interdependence, as the Howard government rightly observes, has been intensified by revolutions in communications and technology, which have together greatly increased the speed of global economic relations. Third, whether or not economic interdependence has surpassed nineteenth century levels, social and political sensitivity has. Even after two decades of economic rationalism in industrialised states, high public expectations remain that governments must manage national economies to ensure continued economic growth and high levels of social welfare. The level and consequences of economic transnationalism have thus become political issues of central importance.

If these ‘facts’ of economic globalisation are now conventional wisdom, what is often ignored, if not denied outright, is the role of political agency in facilitating, even driving, the process. Economic transnationalism certainly has structural qualities; the global market it engenders provides incentives and constraints for economic and political actors; its networks of trade, production, and financial interaction rest on routinised, normatively sanctioned practices that confront individual actors as systemic realities, and the ideology of free market capitalism has so colonised the imagination that alternatives are seldom imagined, let alone deemed credible. Yet conscious political agency is as central to the story of late-modern economic globalisation as these structural ‘realities’, in fact it is the agency of states which has created the conditions for such transnationalism and which is crucial to both its persistence and expansion.24 In a deliberate effort to prevent a return to economic

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nationalism, worldwide depression, and major war, states embraced a policy of global free market economics, establishing an ambitious international institutional environment, at first termed the ‘Bretton Woods system’, to encourage the very interdependence that now exists. Furthermore, the globalisation of free market economics has required continued institutional innovation by states at the international level and energetic policies of adjustment domestically. These policies have not just been deregulatory, but also regulatory, in the sense that governments have had to play a major role in maintaining the health of the capitalist economy through competition policies and anti-monopoly legislation. The importance of political agency is clearly apparent in the failure of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. Not only was international agreement between states needed to further facilitate a ‘free market’ in global investment, but it was the political agency of key states and non-state actors which scuppered the agreement.

The globalisation of free market economics thus places national governments in a curious position, one not unlike that of political elites in the early days of European state formation. As Charles Tilly famously observed, the origins of modern states lie in a protection racket, in which local warlords, whose violent struggle for power created pervasive social insecurity and instability, offered to mitigate such violence in return for taxes. This bargain involved state makers denying their agency in creating the structural conditions of insecurity while simultaneously emphasising their role in facilitating social and political adjustment. Elite responsibility was thus denied at one level and championed at another. The politics of contemporary economic transnationalism echoes much of this. Animated by a set of beliefs about the free market, economic growth, and a global harmony of interests, states have established themselves as political entrepreneurs of global economic change, whilst at the same time presenting such change as largely autogenous, with government’s role being confined to the structural adjustment of domestic societies. The fact that they are playing a two-level game can never be entirely masked.

though. And one of the principal challenges of contemporary public policy is to maintain the visage of an autonomous global market, with its own non-political logic, while encouraging often painful social and political adjustments. The wide spectrum of political opposition to economic globalisation, from the far right politics of Pauline Hanson to the Green Party and periodic anti-globalisation protests, shows just how tenuous this two-level game is.

**The systemic breakdown of the global ecosystem**

The phenomenal growth in the capitalist world economy that has occurred over the past two centuries has been based on three things: the industrial and information revolutions, the rise of the economic-managerial state, and the failure to internalise the environmental costs of large scale industrialisation and development. This potent cocktail of rapid economic change, governmental interventionism, and the assumption that the economy operates in a physical environment of infinite resources and limitless adaptive capacity has brought the Earth to the verge of a systemic ecological breakdown.

Like the contours of economic globalisation, the symptoms of this breakdown are only too familiar. The United Nations Environment Program’s latest report, *Global environment outlook 2000: Overview*, paints a grim picture of widespread environmental degradation and equally pervasive political inaction. ‘Full-scale emergencies’ now exist in the following areas, to name but a few: the world’s water cycle is now in such a condition that it will soon be unable to cope with human needs; land degradation and desertification is outpacing advances in agricultural technologies and techniques; the destruction of tropical forests ‘has gone too far to prevent irreversible damage’; a quarter of all mammalian species and over ten per cent of bird species are at serious risk of extinction; air pollution has reached ‘crisis dimensions’ in many urban areas, with major public health implications; and it ‘is probably too late to prevent global warming as a result of increased greenhouse gas emissions’.

Despite the fact that it is now almost 30 years since the

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agenda setting 1972 Stockholm Conference and nearly ten years since the Rio Summit, the report concludes that ‘the global system of environmental management is moving in the right direction but much too slowly.

... If the new millennium is not to be marred by major environmental disasters, alternative policies will have to be swiftly implemented’.27

Whether states are capable of adopting such policies is the subject of considerable debate.28 For some there is a fundamental contradiction between a world organised into sovereign states, each claiming supreme authority over a given stretch of territory, and the global nature of the ecological crisis. The narcissism of sovereignty is thought to be incompatible with the type of self-sacrifice, collective will, and concerted effort required to address effectively issues such as global warming, the depletion of the world’s fisheries, and the preservation of biodiversity. In the words of Joseph Camilleri and Jim Falk, it has become ‘steadily clearer that the “sovereign state” as an institution is not adequately equipped to embody ecological principles’.29 Others argue, to the contrary, that international cooperation among sovereign states has real potential to deal with ecological crisis. Robert Keohane, Peter Haas and Marc Levy have argued that ‘interstate cooperation has achieved major successes with problems that earlier seemed as daunting as UNCED’s agenda does today’.30

Vigorous as this debate is, it ignores the key obstacle to effective state responses to the ecological crisis. A world divided into territorial political units certainly poses significant coordination problems for global environmental protection, but these problems would diminish if governments

27 UNEP, *Global environment outlook*, p. 5.
were imbued with heightened ecological consciousness, if protecting the
global ecosystem ranked high among their national interests. But this is
not the world we live in. The modern discourse of legitimate statehood,
which undergirds the sovereign rights of states, is not just concerned with
the protection of individual rights, but also with economic develop-
mentalism. In addition to defence, the state’s two crucial functions,
according to Adam Smith, were the protection of property rights and the
maintenance of the conditions necessary for commercial society to
flourish. Since the nineteenth century this role has greatly increased,
with governments assuming responsibility for basic infrastructure,
minimal standards of living consistent with the maintenance of a
functioning workforce and adequate levels of consumption, open
international markets, interest rate levels, anti-monopoly laws, labour
market regulation, and more. To cap all of this off, a clear norm has been
established, both internationally and domestically, that governments will
ensure that national economies experience perpetual growth, a norm
unprecedented in world history.

Understanding the problem in this way sheds new light on the
dilemmas facing national governments. On the one hand, we have a
profound crisis in the global ecosystem, a system ruled by the first law of
ecology, ‘everything is connected to everything else’. On the other hand,
we have a fragmented international political order in which the inter-
national and domestic authority of national governments rests in large
measure on their capacity to deliver perpetual economic growth. In such a
world, governments are faced with two challenges: somehow they must
institute domestic environmental adjustment strategies that harmonise
with effective international programs to protect the global ecosystem; and
simultaneously reconcile these adjustment programs with their promotion
of growth economies. These challenges are made ever more difficult by
the current emphasis on free market, small government paths to growth,
paths which reject the very proactive strategies that researchers now

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31  Adam Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations* (Chicago: University of

32  Christian Reus-Smit, ‘The normative structure of international society’, in Fen Osler Hampson and
believe might enable the pursuit of sustainable growth. The paradox is, of course, that growth will ultimately be brought unstuck by degradation unless economic strategies are changed. Yet the incremental nature of environment breakdown, which makes it such an un-crisis like crisis, forestalls awareness of this paradox and encourages governments to pursue ‘business as usual’ strategies.

The ‘domestication’ of war

Eight months after the coordinated terrorist attacks on New York’s World Trade Center and the Pentagon the United States and its coalition partners are prosecuting an ambitious ‘war against terrorism’. The collective security provisions of NATO have been activated, the Howard government enthusiastically invoked the ANZUS treaty, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has been deposed through a combination of US air-power and local ground forces, surveillance and policing regimes have been tightened across the world, and the Bush administration has moved to ‘conventionalise’ the war by shifting the focus away from Osama Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network toward ‘axis of evil’ states, particularly Iraq. These developments draw our attention toward a deeper transition that is occurring in the nature of ‘war’ globally, a transition of paramount importance to the formulation of Australian foreign policy.

In the history of the modern international system three forms of organised violence have predominated: the inter-state violence of territorial competition; the intra-state violence of state construction; and the revisionist violence of anti-systemic movements. The first of these has long been considered the principal threat to international order, with the devastation of the Napoleonic Wars, World War I, and World War II
stamped on human consciousness.\textsuperscript{35} This inter-state violence has been paralleled, however, by a second, equally devastating form—the violence committed by political elites against their own populations as they have sought to bolster their legitimacy through the construction of ethnically homogenous states. Here our consciousness is shaped by the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and the ethnic cleansing of the former Yugoslavia.\textsuperscript{36} If the horrors of these two forms of violence were not enough, the modern international system has also witnessed a third form, that employed by revisionist groups seeking to fragment existing states, challenge particular regimes, and oppose structures of formal or informal imperialism. Generally animated by long-standing grievances against the established domestic and international order, groups ranging from local secessionists to transnational religious fundamentalists exercise violence to destabilise existing governments and institutions which they consider illegitimate.

In the past 50 years an important shift has occurred in the balance between these different forms of organised violence. For a series of reasons—including the transformation of the principal great powers into trading states, the advent of nuclear deterrence, the codification of norms of weapons non-use, and the laws of war—the incidence and scale of traditional inter-state warfare has declined.\textsuperscript{37} While the possibility of such conflict in the future cannot be ruled out, its probability is now considerably lower than at any other point in the history of the modern international system. This has not meant, however, that organised violence has disappeared from world politics; rather, the balance has shifted toward the intra-state violence of state construction and revisionist, anti-systemic violence. There has been some progress in the codification of international


\textsuperscript{36} Heather Rae, \textit{State identities and the homogenisation of peoples} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

norms proscribing the former, particularly when it involves crimes against humanity and genocide, and there now exist fledgling international judicial institutions to uphold these norms, most notably the new International Criminal Court. It is clear, however, that the institutional capacity to enforce these norms lags well behind the development of the norms themselves, with the international community’s failure to intervene in Rwanda, and its haphazard involvement in the former Yugoslavia, testimony to this lag. Yet it is in respect to revisionist, anti-systemic violence that the creation of international constraints has been most limited and least effective. When the international community formulates rules of appropriate conduct, states are both the principal agents of norm creation and the targets of normative constraint. States thus bind themselves, and while this may be an effective means of impeding inter-state war and the violence of state construction, it has severe limitations when it comes to constraining anti-systemic groups, who by their very nature reject the norms of the international system.

This shift in the nature of organised violence presents a number of problems for national governments. The first is that the standard techniques used by international society to maintain order are now increasingly anachronistic. The balancing of power among states may impede inter-state violence, but it is unlikely to have much impact on the violence that attends state formation or that employed by revisionist movements. Similarly, codifying new rules of international law may help to restrict the first two forms of violence, but will be less effective when it comes to the third. And despite current prosecution of a ‘war’ against terrorism, the established techniques and technologies of warfare are likely to be blunt instruments in combating the violence of anti-systemic movements. Second, even if there has been a move away from major inter-state war, organised violence still has profound consequences for the international system as a whole. When political elites engage in genocide, ethnic cleansing, or the simple terrorising of sectors of their populations, and when secessionist, nationalist, or terrorist groups use violence to destabilise states, they cause people to flee their homes in fear for their lives, producing massive movements of peoples across national borders. Herein lies the source of the world’s current ‘refugee problem’, in which some 22 million people are now displaced worldwide. We thus have a situation in which the human consequences of organised violence are
affecting societies well beyond the locales of the conflicts themselves, yet the international community lacks the institutional techniques necessary to prevent such violence.

**The ‘socialisation’ of power**

For a discipline with a strong tradition of realpolitik, international relations scholars are not particularly good at understanding power. The power of states has generally been defined in terms of material capabilities; notably, the number of guns and bombs they possess, and the amount of money they can muster to buy and develop more guns and bombs. As the material capabilities of individual states rises anxiety increases in other states who then seek to balance them, spurring accelerating arms races, even war. Order is only possible in such a world if a dominant state—a hegemon—is willing to use its material power to deter anti-status quo powers and to establish and uphold rules of coexistence. The key strategy for small to medium states in such a world is to bandwagon with the hegemon, to support its continued engagement and willingness to extend and apply its military and economic capacities.38

The main problem with this understanding is that it assumes that material capabilities automatically translate into political power and authority. Much has been written, though, about the ‘non-fungibility’ of military and economic capacities, about their attenuated relationship with political influence.39 The principal argument in most of this literature is that growing interdependence since 1945 has made crude military or economic threats less viable as political strategies, with even the most powerful actors dependent upon the cooperation of others, a dependence accentuated by the potential for issue-linking under conditions of high interdependence.40 Important as this is, it misses arguably the most important fault in the materialist view of power—political authority is, in

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40 Hoffmann, ‘Notes on the elusiveness of modern power’, p. 191.
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essence, a social phenomenon. Even the most well resourced of powers cannot hope to realise its entire spectrum of interests over the medium to long term unless those interests, and the strategies they employ, are deemed legitimate by the wider community of states. Stable, reliable influence flows from authority and legitimacy not threat of force.41

This insight has important implications for how we understand hegemony and, in turn, the challenges facing small to medium states in the contemporary world. Bruce Cronin argues that predominant states, such as the United States, are torn between their roles as hegemons and great powers.42 Hegemony is a social status, a position of leadership, in which authority carries both influence and responsibilities. It is a status granted to the hegemon by other states on the assumption that it will, by and large, act in the common good. Hegemony thus rests on a bargain: the hegemon gets the cooperation of other states to construct institutions that reflect its long term interests, and these states get the hegemon to abide by certain rules of the game:

that legal (sovereign) equality be maintained (hegemonic roles must remain informal); that the hegemon follow the rules and avoid unilateral acts that may violate them; that its freedom to maneuver be limited by its responsibilities; and that it accommodate secondary powers of major importance (in effect co-opting them as junior partners).43

Vital as this bargain may be for international order, Cronin argues that hegemons are torn between these international commitments and domestic pressures to behave like a great power, to engage in the unilateral pursuit of parochial interests. The ‘paradox’ is, though, that such behaviour ultimately erodes both the hegemonic status of the power in question and the international order that it helped create and sustain. ‘When a hegemon fails to act within the boundaries established by its role, the credibility of the institutions and rules it helped establish weakens. ... When these

organizations are undermined, the legitimacy of the international order itself is threatened’.44

In addition to the problems this paradox presents for contemporary American foreign policy, it poses significant dilemmas for small and medium states, including Australia. Such states have a strong interest in encouraging the United States to act as a hegemon, not simply a great power. This is both essential to the maintenance of the multilateral institutional system, which greatly benefits these states by providing a rule-based not capability-based order, and to the maintenance of the hegemon’s power itself, which countries like Australia seem to value as a good in itself. Failure to recognise this strong interest, manifest in support for unilateral, great power behaviour on the part of the United States, threatens the multilateral order and simultaneously encourages other great powers to challenge for supremacy. Paradoxically, therefore, support for both the hegemon and the multilateral order demands a judicious, highly selective, and at times critical approach toward American foreign and defence policy.

The ‘unbundling of territorality’

The final trend affecting the contemporary international political landscape is what John Ruggie has termed ‘the unbundling of territorality’.45 At the heart of the modern system of sovereign states lies a paradox: the closer states move toward exclusive jurisdiction within their territorial borders, and the more they deny any higher authority outside of those borders, the less able they are to deal effectively with issues that are inherently non-territorial, which includes everything from diplomatic communication and ocean governance to managing world trade and protecting the global environment. It is this paradox that has fueled the unbundling of territorality, as it encourages states to transfer authority onto functional international institutions that can govern non-territorial phenomena. While the international system has always produced this paradox, with early laws of the sea being among the first acts of

unbundling, it has been greatly accentuated by the other five trends outlined above. With regard to the liberalising of sovereignty, the moment the extension of sovereign rights was linked to the protection of individual rights, a powerful impetus was established for the development of international institutions to monitor state compliance. Similar stories apply to the globalisation of free market economics, the breakdown of the global ecosystem, and the prevention of organised violence. The net result has been the dramatic proliferation of regional and global institutions, a process even further accelerated by the rise of the United States as a liberal hegemon that has sought to embed its authority through a multilateral institutional order.

FROM ‘FOREIGN’ TO ‘TRANSNATIONAL’ POLICY

While not exhaustive, the six aspects of contemporary world politics outlined above are, for the foreseeable future, likely to define the basic systemic conditions in which national governments have to negotiate their way. They involve the nature of sovereignty, the world economy, the global ecosystem, organised violence, political power, and institutionalisation, and while each presents its own distinctive challenges, they have much in common. They are all systemic in nature and cannot be dismissed as either peripheral or incidental; their origins lie less in the external policies of sovereign states than in the changing relationships between states, societies, economies, and nature; they have each spawned new and important non-state actors, from human rights groups to terrorist organisations; responding to them effectively demands both international cooperation and the reorganisation of domestic state/society relations; and they have emerged as a complex of systemic forces, not in isolation. They confront governments as a series of issue-specific challenges, such as balancing sovereignty with UN human rights monitoring, free trade with domestic adjustment, environmental protection with economic growth, combating terrorism with civil and communal liberties, supporting the senior ally with protecting the multilateral order, and maintaining the visage of autonomy while progressively unbundling territoriality.

The biggest problem for governments, however, is that each aspect of the new world politics challenges the very notion of ‘foreign’ policy. Foreign policy is traditionally understood as that domain of public policy charged with enhancing national security and enabling the external pursuit
of national interests, particularly in the realms of trade and economics. For most of the twentieth century in Australia this has been thought to require the cultivation and maintenance of alliances with great powers, the promotion of global and regional balances of power that favour the interests of these alliances and powers, and, at various moments, support for international institutional developments (regionally and globally) that promote national interests and enhance Australia’s influence as a medium power. Understood in this way, Australian foreign policy has evolved as a relatively discrete quarter of public policy, a quarter in which the main players have been the Prime Minister, the Foreign, Trade, and Defence Ministers, and their respective government departments. The boundaries have never been absolute, as the tensions between alliance commitments and trading interests have frequently highlighted, and Australian governments have never shied away from manipulating external threats for domestic purposes. Yet it remains the case that for much of Australia’s history the formulation and conduct of Australian foreign policy has been isolated, even actively quarantined, from the vicissitudes of domestic public policy.

In contemporary world politics this model of ‘foreign’ policy is increasingly dysfunctional. More and more, Australian governments will have to break the seal between the domestic and the international, to move into the realm of ‘transnational’ policy making. In its first White Paper, the Howard government did trumpet its ‘whole of nation’ approach, ‘where policy decisions fully take into account the linkages between domestic and international threads of policy’.46 Yet beyond general statements about the need for linkages across portfolios and connections between strands of external policy, this trumpeting amounted to little more than an advertisement for how its domestic taxation and competition policies make Australia primed to exploit the opportunities of economic globalisation. This should hardly be surprising, as the government’s understanding of the systemic forces bearing on Australia impedes an adequate appreciation of the real challenges facing policy makers in the new world politics. If Australian governments are ever to move beyond this level of superficiality they will need to confront the challenges of

46 In the national interest, p. 73.
transnational policy making head on. At a minimum this involves the development of a practical appreciation of the following four imperatives.

**The social calibration of sovereignty**

As we have seen, governments face the challenge of ‘dual socialisation’, the need to comply both with the standards of legitimate statehood encoded in international norms and political demands emanating from domestic society. In such a world freedom and strength comes not from autarchy and unilateralism, but from the social calibration of sovereignty. Because sovereignty is always tied to deeper norms of legitimate statehood, this calibration necessarily involves the artful construction and harmonising of the social (or international) and corporate (or domestic) identities of the state.47 Strong states are those that manage this construction effectively, with weak states putting all of their eggs either in the international basket, using identification with international norms to bolster their authority against domestic opposition, or in the domestic basket, exploiting parochial cultural politics against international ideals of legitimate statehood. States that have neither international or domestic legitimacy are the weakest of all, with South Africa’s apartheid regime being a case in point.

The successful social calibration of sovereignty requires energetic and creative social agency on the part of governments. It demands responsible citizenship internationally, based on the observance of norms that one has helped to define and codify, and genuine political leadership domestically, leadership that creatively constructs the corporate identity of the state and polity in ways that harmonise international normative developments and national self-understandings. The Hawke and Keating Labor governments were strong on the first of these tasks, but fell short when it came to reconciling national self-understandings with its favoured international norms. The Howard government, however, is weak on both counts. All too frequently it has adopted a ‘take our bat and ball and go home’ approach to many international norms and a ‘leading from behind’

47 On this distinction, see Alexander Wendt, *The social theory of international relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
strategy of national identity and interest construction, ceding the initiative to the recidivist public opinion of talk back radio.\textsuperscript{48}

The articulation of institutional realms

The unbundling of territoriality presents a significant institutional challenge for policy makers. As states transfer authority on to international institutions, they are institutionally empowered and constrained. They are empowered because international institutions often give them new avenues of influence—as did the rules of the WTO in the case of Australia’s quarrel with the United States over lamb subsidies—and because they can help protect the institutions of the state itself—as have international human rights norms in the case of democratising states in Europe.\textsuperscript{49} This empowerment is matched, however, by serious constraints. Just as governments are enabled by the unbundling of territoriality, their authority and freedom of action is circumscribed by the rules of conduct they themselves have enshrined in international institutions: everything from the destruction of World Heritage areas to the violation of the rights of indigenous peoples has been placed beyond the pale. This constraining effect of international institutions is accentuated by the nexus that often develops between international and domestic institutions, particularly between international and domestic legal systems. It is increasingly the case that national courts are drawing on international legal principles in reaching decisions, and in some regions, such as Europe, the chain of appeal leads beyond the state to international judicial institutions.

These developments are particularly challenging for national policy makers, and dealing with them effectively is one of the key tasks of transnational public policy. As the unbundling of territoriality fuels the development of the nexus between international and domestic law, the executive and legislative arms of government are increasingly constrained. We see this in the Howard government’s frustrations over the role of the Federal Court in the \textit{Tampa} refugee crisis. The government’s

\textsuperscript{48} For an excellent critique of this tendency, see Malcolm Fraser, ‘Stumbling on a path of inhumanity’, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 18 September 2001, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{49} Andrew Moravscik, ‘Explaining international human rights regimes’, \textit{European Journal of International Relations} 1(2) 1995, pp. 157–89.
solution to such problems is to dismiss applicable international norms and to present the judiciary as an enemy of sovereignty and democracy. It doesn’t take much to see the corrosive affect this will eventually have on both Australia’s role in the multilateral international order and the integrity of Australia’s system of government, based as it on a justifiable separation of powers. If these undesirable consequences are to be avoided, three broad policy making orientations are necessary: first, an holistic approach to the institutional environment that incorporates both the domestic and international institutional realms; second, a transnational perspective on legislative action, one in which legislative agency is publicly acknowledged to include both parliamentary deliberation and international negotiation; and, third, a constitutionalist view of democratic sovereignty, which celebrates the equal importance of executive, legislative, and judicial agency.

The linkage of arenas and issues

As noted above, the Howard government has seen the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to public policy, one that ‘requires better communication among those working on related issues in different portfolios’, one that ensures ‘that the compartmentalisation which is a feature of most policy-advising structures is flexible enough to identify linkages and coordinate effectively’.50 Undoubtedly, this is essential to any effective transnational policy making, as it points to one of the key imperatives—arena and issue linkage. Yet the government fails to appreciate the full magnitude of this task. Arena linkage refers to the cultivation of internal and external political environments, such that policies that demand domestic adjustment and international cooperation receive the required levels of political support in both arenas. This cultivation requires political persuasion at home and artful multilateralism abroad. Economics is the only area in which the government has even partially demonstrated these qualities, with its domestic attacks on international human rights and refugee law merely reinforcing the Australian public’s worst instincts and its policy of ‘selective multilateralism’ steadily eroding Australia’s international reputation, the

50 In the national interest, p. 73.
preservation of which the government itself defined as ‘a direct national interest’.\textsuperscript{51} Sadly, the record is no better when it comes to issue linkage, which involves the coordination of policy formulation and promotion across issue-specific portfolios. Where systematic linkage has been needed—for instance, in the areas of economics and the environment—it has been superficial at best, and where linkage should have been avoided, for practical or ethical reasons, the government has drawn dubious or false connections, as in the relationship between refugees and the fight against international terrorism.

The globalisation of ethics

Just as the new world politics challenges conventional notions of ‘foreign’ policy, so too does it undermine traditional conceptions of international ethics. It is generally assumed that life within the state and life outside constitute separate moral realms. While it is possible to speak of domestic society as a realm of ethical reason, the rule of law and moral progress, international society is a more necessitous realm, a realm of ethical division, weak law, and competition. At best the latter world is considered one of limited moral consensus, a consensus built around rudimentary humanitarian principles, the philosophy of just war, and the codified laws of war, \textit{jus in bello} and \textit{jus ad bellum}. The idea of foreign policy thus maps neatly onto the concomitant idea that when governments are formulating and executing such policy they are working within a discrete ethical domain, one with its own peculiar modes of moral reasoning and argument.

What happens, however, when the new world politics places liberal constraints on sovereignty, creates one global free market, erodes an ecosystem that defies national boundaries, domesticates warfare, socialises power, and transfers authority onto international institutions? Clearly, the idea of an ethics of foreign policy becomes as untenable as the idea of foreign policy itself. Yet it is imperative that governments find new ways to think about, and act upon, the ethical foundations of national policy, as each of these new political phenomena raise profound moral dilemmas. Is there still a right of intervention, and why? What responsibilities do one

\textsuperscript{51} In the national interest, p. 13.
people have for the economic hardships of another in a world of economic globalisation? What are the ethical foundations of economic adjustment programs, internationally or domestically? Do we have obligations to peoples displaced by the domestication of violence, and what are the nature of these obligations? What constitutes a just war when states fight terrorists? How does one decide a state’s fair share of the burdens of global ecological collapse? What constitutes democracy in a world busily unbundling territoriality?

Unless Australian governments can develop a conceptual framework for thinking about these ethical dilemmas, Australia will be rudderless in contemporary world politics. Furthermore, many of the world’s current problems have their roots in the injustices wrought by systemic processes, and these problems will not be ameliorated unless these injustices are recognised and addressed. The Howard government’s solution has been an old one, the prudent pursuit of ‘the national interest’. ‘In all that it does’, the last White Paper trumpets, ‘the Government will apply this basic test of national interest’. But this is a largely vacuous ethical posture. Rhetorically powerful as it may be, the concept of the national interest is ultimately contentless, a concept of such protean flexibility that any goals can be subsumed within it. References to the national interest simply beg the question of what it constitutes, leaving unanswered all of the very real ethical dilemmas listed above. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the government’s responses to UN human rights monitoring, aid for Kosovar refugees, independence for East Timor, refugees on boats, preventing global warming, and unqualified military support for American actions against terrorists have at best an ad hoc quality.

AN AGENDA FOR RESEARCH
The Howard government’s diagnosis of the systemic forces shaping world politics—shifts in the balance of military power between states, particularly in Northeast Asia, and economic globalisation—provides little guidance in the new world politics that produces both refugees and terrorists. And its standard repertoire of policy responses, such as

52 In the national interest, p. iii.
bandwagoning with the great and powerful friend, bilateral diplomacy, and reinforcing domestic territorial sovereignty against all but global trade and finance, are likely to bring only short term gains or prove entirely counterproductive. As explained above, world politics is now characterised by a series of systemic phenomena that fundamentally alter the environment in which governments must operate. Most importantly, these phenomena problematise the whole notion of foreign policy, demanding instead a new transnational approach to public policy. This approach requires a practical appreciation of the need to socially calibrate sovereignty, articulate institutional realms, link arenas and issues, and develop a global ethics. Ironically, coming to grips with the key dimensions of contemporary world politics and internalising the imperatives of transnational policy making is essential if Australian policy is to become less ‘realist’ but more ‘realistic’ and effective.

If the trends and imperatives outlined above are correct, then not only must the new White Paper on foreign and trade policy have a different, more sophisticated understanding of the systemic forces bearing on Australia, but a new wave of research on Australian ‘foreign’ policy is sorely needed. It is beyond the scope of this article to do more than sketch the broad contours of such a research program. It is clear, though, that three key questions need addressing: what is the precise nature of the systemic forces bearing on Australia? How has the Australian polity—encompassing governments, policy makers, and civil society—understood, and responded to, these forces over time, and why? And, finally, how ought the Australian polity respond, both practically and ethically, and for what reasons? The new wave of research will need to be theoretically informed, otherwise a full appreciation of the systemic forces bearing on Australia will be elusive and adequate explanations of political behaviour unattainable. It will need to be holistic, as bridging international and national levels of analysis will be essential to comprehending both the nature of key systemic forces and the articulation of domestic and international policy. Comparative research will be required to situate Australia’s experience in relation to that of other relevant states, thus ensuring that the distinctiveness of its experience is neither exaggerated nor ignored. And normative enquiry will be necessary to ascertain what constitutes ethical national policy in changing global order.
These modes of inquiry should focus on four ‘sites’ of analysis and their interrelation. First, as the emphasis on holistic enquiry indicates, students of Australian ‘foreign’ policy will need to develop a deep knowledge of the processes and developments that characterise the contemporary global political system. This will mean broadening out from the current focus on the balance of power and, in some cases, the dynamics of the capitalist world economy. Second, the relationship between political culture and Australia’s responses to the changing global system warrants special attention. Here questions of historical experience, constructions of national identity, and the parameters of ideological debate will be pertinent, as will the connection between these issues and political-economic transformations. Third, systematic institutional analysis will be required, research that explores the impact that the structure of Australia’s domestic institutions have had on national responses to global change. And, fourth, attention must be given to the role that social and political agents, from politicians and bureaucrats to academics and activists, operating within the environment of global systemic forces, national political culture, and domestic institutions, have played in conditioning the responses of the Australian polity to contemporary world politics.

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