The cover of *The Howard Paradox* says it all: John Howard and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono chest to chest in an affectionate embrace, gazing earnestly into each other’s eyes. According to the pundits, this should never have happened. Howard’s insensitivity to Asian sensibilities was bound to cause insuperable problems and we would become isolated in the region. Instead, the last decade of Australian-Asian relations have, on the whole, been no less successful than the previous government’s more culturally informed approach.

Michael Wesley sets out to examine how this has happened. He admits that he was one of the critics of the Howard government’s foreign policy, but his research forced him to think again. He is not an apologist for Howard, but he acknowledges that a combination of good luck and political astuteness has allowed Howard’s approach to succeed, amid terrorism, tsunami and Hansonism, where grander multilateral designs might have failed – during this particular period. He concludes that ‘the Howard paradox shows the folly of believing there is only one way of conducting foreign policy.’ In any event, Wesley points out, Asian foreign policy is a highly pragmatic game in which domestic rhetoric is rarely allowed to influence real outcomes.