
Malcolm Fraser’s *Dangerous Allies*, is a thoroughly researched and thought provoking critique of the ‘strategic dependence’ he says has underpinned Australia’s foreign policy throughout this nation’s history (1). Fraser entered Parliament in 1955, was a Minister in the Holt, Gorton and McMahon Governments, and was Prime Minister of Australia 1975-83. Since his retirement from politics, Fraser has maintained a prominent international profile. Fraser’s analysis of Australian foreign policy in *Dangerous Allies* reflects his vantage points as a foreign policy maker and observer. He argues that while ‘strategic dependence’ was the only option available to Australian foreign policy makers up until the end of the Cold War, Australia would now best be served by forging an independent foreign policy. Fraser’s most contentious appeal is for Australia to discard its reliance on the ANZUS Treaty with the US which has been a central pillar of Australian foreign policy since its signing in 1951 because it no longer serves Australia’s interests. America’s ‘unchecked power’ since the end of the Cold War has prompted Fraser to ask Australians ‘to consider whether the values of our two nations continue to align and whether the changed American polity is conducive to our ongoing security and foreign policy needs’ (5). Citing Afghanistan and Iraq, Fraser says our uncritical adherence to
the US alliance has ‘lead Australia into wars of no strategic consequence for our nation’ and damaged our international reputation (4). Fraser asks if ‘our strategic dependence on the United States is a paradox?’, stating ‘we need the United States for defence, but we only need defence because of the United States’ (6).

_Dangerous Allies_ is divided into three parts. In part one, Fraser analyses the consequences of Australia’s ‘strategic dependence’ on Britain which encompassed the colonial era, Federation, World War One, the inter war years, and culminated with Britain’s palpable inability to defend Australia in the wake of the Japanese advances in South East Asia in 1941-42. Although critical of the policy of ‘strategic dependence’ throughout this period, Fraser says economic, social, political and strategic factors meant Australia had no option but to rely on Britain.

Isolated and threatened by invasion in 1942, Australia switched its ‘strategic dependence’ from Britain to the US. In part two, Fraser examines the consequences of Australia’s reliance on the US for security. Fraser’s criticism of US policy is tempered by an acknowledgement that the Cold War and the Soviet/Communist threat meant Australia had no alternative to its ‘strategic dependence’ on the US. Fraser applauds the independent thinking of H.V. Evatt and Percy Spender, Australia’s Ministers for External Affairs, 1941-49 and 1949-51, respectively, that underpinned their foreign policy achievements. While Fraser praises Menzies, he is also critical of some of his policy positions, notably regarding Indonesia and the White Australia Policy. Fraser is highly critical of US policy in the Vietnam War, saying it is ‘a warning to Australia’ of the ‘repercussions of intertwining our foreign policy with that of a major power’ (119). Vietnam remains a highly
contentious issue and knowledgeable readers will note Fraser’s evaluation of US policy and the circumstances of Australian participation in the war, is not always consistent with the analysis in key studies of this conflict. Fraser was Minister for the Army and Defence for some of the period of Australia’s involvement in Vietnam and while he is highly critical of US policy in the conflict, he is less rigorous in his assessment of Australia’s involvement in the war.

Fraser provides a succinct account of the Australian origins of ANZUS and Spender’s key role in bringing the Treaty to fruition (94-97). However, the historical record shows the US agreed to ANZUS because it suited its Asia-Pacific security strategy, not because of ‘Spender’s ultimatum’ that Australia would not support a benign peace treaty with Japan without an American security guarantee (95). Indeed, when John Foster Dulles came to Australia in February 1951 as President Truman’s special envoy with the rank of Ambassador – he was not the US Secretary of State, as Fraser claims (95) – ostensibly to secure Australian and New Zealand agreement for the Japanese peace treaty, he also had Truman’s authority to negotiate a security treaty with both nations in exchange for their support for a lenient Japanese peace treaty. Dulles became US Secretary of State under Eisenhower, 1953-59. An analysis of the US origins of ANZUS actually strengthens Fraser’s argument that ‘great powers do what they perceive to be in their own interests. They might consult others, but they will not act contrary to their perception of their own interests because others seek to persuade them to a different course’ (50). The US agreed to ANZUS following the recalibration of its Asia-Pacific strategy in the wake of the Communist Chinese entry into the Korean War in November 1950. ANZUS was part of the ‘hub and spokes’ alliance system, as Dulles labelled it, which saw the US enter into security
treaties with Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the Philippines and South Korea designed to contain Communism in the Asia-Pacific. Whereas ANZUS became a central element in Australian foreign policy, for the US the Treaty was part of a series of security alliances.

In the third part of Dangerous Allies, Fraser is scathing in his criticism of US foreign policy since the end of the Cold War, especially in the wake of 11 September, 2001. Citing Afghanistan and Iraq, Fraser warns of the consequences of Australia’s blind adherence to American wishes in the hope of currying favour with the US. He says the US has become an unreliable and dangerous ally, and hence, Australia’s dependence on the alliance with the US no longer serves our interests. Fraser warns that Australia cannot rely on ANZUS as a guarantee of US support in a crisis. In this context Fraser argues that the rapidly changing international situation, notably the modernising societies and growing economies in the Asia-Pacific, requires Australia to discard its ‘strategic dependence’ on the US and forge an independent foreign policy pursuing our best interests. This aspect of Fraser’s argument is contentious and too rigid. Fraser’s analysis overlooks that Australia makes its own foreign policy choices. It can be argued that the ANZUS alliance which is likely to remain Australia’s most important strategic alliance for the foreseeable future, and the broader relationship with the US, has served Australia well. Surely Australia can maintain the US alliance as a key component of an ‘independent’ Australian foreign policy? The two should not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, Fraser refers to Gough Whitlam who believed that Australia could maintain its alliance with the US and ‘create space within that relationship to pursue its own interests’ (157).
Readers of Fraser’s criticism of American foreign policy ventures and of Australia’s ‘strategic dependence’ on the US need to remember that the terms of the ANZUS Treaty did not compel Australia to join the US in Vietnam, Afghanistan or Iraq. Australia must accept responsibility for willingly participating in those conflicts. Fraser cites the Canadian example that ‘it is possible to exercise a degree of independence in relation to America, and to maintain a good relationship’ (171). Australia, says Fraser, has the ‘capacity if we had the courage, the determination and the vision to enunciate policies clearly, to do likewise’ (171). Fraser says Australia has ‘not yet learnt the lesson that a smaller power never buys the goodwill of a major power by just doing what that major power wants. A degree of independence goes to respect and to a country’s pride’ (171). The validity of Fraser’s criticism of US foreign policy and his argument regarding the consequences of Australia’s ‘strategic dependence’ on the US, should not mask that it is ultimately up to Australia to pursue the foreign policy it wants.

Dangerous Allies is thoroughly referenced and has an extensive bibliography. Fraser has produced a detailed and critical analysis that argues for an end to Australia’s ‘strategic dependence’ on the US and the pursuit of an independent foreign policy. While aspects of Fraser’s analysis do not totally reconcile with the known historical record, this work merits attention because it asks fundamental questions about the direction and purpose of Australia’s foreign policy that governments and foreign policy makers cannot ignore. Dangerous Allies is essential and engaging reading for anyone with an interest in Australian foreign policy and the US-Australian alliance.