12. Coral Bell's Alliance Politics: Practitioner and Pundit

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Coral Bell was Australia's premier expert on alliance politics during and after the Cold War. Former US Secretary of State Dean Acheson's famous book title, *Present at the Creation*, applies equally to this remarkable Australian figure who was both a practitioner in and pundit on this subject.[1] She was 'in the room' as an officer with Australia's Department of External Affairs when the ANZUS (Australia New Zealand United States) Treaty was signed in San Francisco on 1 September 1951.

One of her most avid interests pursued during a subsequent and distinguished career as an academic and think-tank adviser was assessing American leadership of its global alliance system and continually evaluating how Australia fared in and should respond to Washington's strategic policies. Her book *Dependent Ally: A Study in Australian Foreign Policy* (three editions were published) remains a seminal work on how Australia—one of the United States' smaller allies—was able to calibrate its security relationship with an American superpower in ways that facilitated its maturity as an independent security actor.[2] During her later years, she became increasingly preoccupied with how the Australian–American alliance would function in a world undergoing rapid structural change and where global multipolarity and great power concerts would prevail. To what extent her viewpoints will be proven to be correct or misplaced is far less important than her success in initiating the debate about international order-building which had to take place within official policy circles, think-tanks, and academe. In commemorating her life and work soon after her passing, Owen Harries observed that 'she always tackled the great central questions of international politics … major topics [such] as the central balance, the management of crises and of great alliances, the temptations and dangers of hegemony'.[3]

Three key dimensions of Bell's work on alliance politics are discussed in this chapter. Initially, an assessment is offered on where her work fits within the evolution of alliance theory. The basic theme of this section is that she ranks among the very best of all those who have written on the subject. The second

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1   Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*, WW Norton, New York, 1969.

2   Coral Bell, *Dependent Ally: A Study in Australian Foreign Policy,* 3rd edn, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, in association with Department of International Relations, Australian National University, 1993.

3   Owen Harries, 'A Tribute to Coral Bell', *The Spectator*, 6 October 2012, www.spectator.co.uk/australia/australia-features/8643341/a-tribute-to-coral-bell/ (accessed 18 August 2013).

part of the chapter focuses on those dimensions of alliance management where her analysis was particularly incisive. Alliance leadership and power balancing were central concerns in this context. The chapter's third section reviews her quest to reconcile traditional alliance postures with the politics of concert in the twenty-first century. She fused her remarkable grasp of diplomatic history with objective thinking about how historic changes in contemporary global security relations were affecting the Western alliance system and its Australian–American component. This discussion reveals the essence of Bell's core intellectual identity and illustrates what may be her most enduring legacy.

Alliance Theory

Overcoming the challenges of managing security alliances has always represented a critical and often frustrating enterprise for policy-makers. Writing soon after the Peloponnesian War was fought over two millennia ago, Thucydides compared the advantages of states pooling their resources to deter or prevail in war against the option of pursuing or sustaining dominance over rival or rising powers.[4] The continued relevance of the analyses of this venerated Greek historian has been underscored by the American political scientist Graham Allison, who warned that China and the United States must avoid the 'Thucydides trap' of succumbing to fears about power transition if they wished to avoid destroying each other.[5] Other 'classical' strategists concerned about modern alliance politics have complemented or built upon the work of Thucydides. China's Sun Tzu, India's Kautilya (also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta), Renaissance Italy's Niccolo Machiavelli, Prussia's Carl von Clausewitz, and Britain's EH Carr are regarded as pantheons in the field. While their individual explanations regarding exercising political power may have differed, all believed that the state was the ultimate arbitrator of how power would be applied and viewed alliances as critical instruments to achieve political objectives.[6]

In modern times, alliance formation and perpetuation have been linked to realist theories about international anarchy and power balancing. Realists have posited that in the absence of a preeminent actor to manage order, states will ally in a self-help world to either neutralise a rising threat or to 'bandwagon'

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4   Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Penguin, Hammondsworth, 1972.

5   Graham Allison, 'Thucydides's Trap Has Been Sprung in the Pacific', *Financial Times*, 21 August 2012. Critics of this perspective, however, note that Sparta was criticised by its own allies for being too risk averse! See Daniel Drezner, 'The Limits of Thucydides in the 21st Century', *Foreign Policy*, 29 May 2013, drezner. foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/05/29/the_limits_of_thucydides_in_the_21st_century (accessed 18 August 2013). The classic work on power transition theory remains AFK Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980.

6   See, for example, Roger Boesche, 'Moderate Machiavelli? Contrasting *The Prince* with the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya', *Critical Horizons*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2002, pp. 253–76.

with a benign or inexorable hegemon to avoid conquest or to accrue a share in geopolitical spoils. The writings of Hans Morgenthau, George Liska, Henry Kissinger, Robert Osgood, Glenn Snyder, Kenneth Waltz, Stephen Walt, and John Mearsheimer have been particularly associated, since the Second World War, with the development of thinking about alliances.

Writing prior to and during the 1960s, Morgenthau—the acknowledged don of modern realist thought—focused largely on why alliances form and how well they endure. A 'second wave' of alliance literature emerging in the 1970s, and spearheaded by a landmark study authored by Ole Holsti, Terrence Hopmann, and John Sullivan, was more quantitative in nature and was mainly concerned with how alliances fit within the evolving post-war international system.[7] A third wave of theoretical realist writing about alliances emerged in the 1980s, led by Kenneth Waltz, which again emphasised alliance formation but infused systemic analysis into its investigations.[8] By this time, a clear divide was discernible between those who opted to use diplomatic history as their preferred means for evaluating alliance politics in the hope that policy-makers would listen to them, and those, usually located in academic institutions, who preferred to refine and build upon a growing body of alliance theory, and were less concerned about 'real world' responses to their work. As the notable alliance theorist Walt has since observed, 'academic theory—including my own work—has had relatively little direct or indirect impact on actual state behaviour. Scholars may tell themselves they are 'speaking truth to power', but most of the time the powerful don't listen.'[9]

Bell was the exception to the rule that Walt posited. When addressing alliance politics, she demonstrated a remarkable capacity to assess the very hard problems of strategic choice for the US, Australia, and the West-at-large. She invariably conveyed her insights by elegantly referencing diplomatic history. Both the quintessential Australian Labor Party (ALP) policy practitioner (and later diplomat) Kim Beazley and the revered Australian international relations theorist James L Richardson recognised Bell's exceptional talent for combining 'real-world' analysis with highly sophisticated historical perspectives. Beazley observed that Bell's work transcended the 'mathematically quantifiable interactions' that typified International Relations (IR) theory during her prime (as reflected in the second and third waves of alliance literature cited above). Noting that she 'stood out' as one of the two premier Australian IR scholars (Hedley Bull being the other) that captured the attention of policy practitioners,

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7   Ole R Holsti, P Terrence Hopmann, and John D Sullivan, *Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances: Comparative Studies*, Wiley, New York, 1973.

8   Kajsa Ji Noe Oest, 'The End of Alliance Theory?' Institut for Statskundskab, Copenhagen University, Copenhagen, 2007, p. 27, polsci.ku.dk/arbejdspapirer/2007/ap_2007_03.pdf/ (accessed 18 August 2013).

9   Stephen M. Walt, 'Theory and Policy in International Relations: Some Personal Reflections', *Yale Journal of International Affairs,* vol. 7, no. 2, 2012: pp. 33–43, at 35.

Beazley ventured that 'it is when scholars write in traditional, historically based terms that their influence is most felt outside the academy. I've never heard much game theory discussed by delegates to ALP National Conference but I heard, particularly in the 1980s, the more traditional writing of many here discussed ad nauseum'.[10] Richardson insisted that Bell's form of 'classical realism' stemmed from understanding of the 'fixed beliefs of decision-makers' and the constraints those individuals faced in dealing with perceived domestic political imperatives. Her approach, he concluded, constituted 'a much-needed corrective to the systemic, structural emphases in the prevailing neorealist doctrine'.[11]

Richardson's observation is particularly important in understanding the importance of Bell's interpretation of why and how the ANZUS or tripartite alliance between the United States, Australia, and New Zealand was created. As a junior officer in Australia's Ministry of External Affairs, she was actually 'present at creation' when ANZUS was signed by its three adherents in San Francisco in September 1951.[12] Her explanation of why the event she witnessed came about, and how ANZUS evolved, is offered in her much acclaimed book, *Dependent Ally*. The work remains arguably the preeminent study on Australia's post-war alliance (the other widely acclaimed study of ANZUS creation was written by JG Starke, and, while technically proficient, was written primarily as an international law treatise).[13] What separated Bell's work from that of her contemporaries (and from that of those alliance historians who followed her) was her capacity to weave her narrative in ways that captured the drama and tensions that underlay the process of alliance formation and to relate the story

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10   Kim Beazley, 'Thinking Security: Influencing National Strategy from the Academy; An Australian Experience', Coral Bell Lecture 2008, Lowy Institute for International Policy, Sydney, 19 March 2008, p. 5. www.lowyinstitute.org/files/pubfiles/Beazley,_Thinking_security,_Vote_of_thanks.pdf (accessed 25 August 2013).

11   James L Richardson, 'Coral Bell and the Classical Realist Tradition', *Australian Journal of International Affairs,* vol. 59, no. 3, 2005, pp. 265–8, at 267–8.

12   Brendan Taylor, 'Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region', in Ron Huisken and Meredith Thatcher (eds), *History as Policy: Framing the Debate on The Future of Australia's Defence Policy*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2007, pp. 117–128, at p. 123.

13   JG Starke, *The ANZUS Treaty Alliance*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne,1965. Other widely cited works on ANZUS formation include Percy C Spender, *Exercises in Diplomacy: The ANZUS Treaty and the Colombo Plan*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1969; Glenn St J Barclay and JM Siracusa (eds), *Australian–American Relations Since 1945: A Documentary History*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Sydney, 1976; HC Gelber, *The Australian American Alliance: Costs and Benefits*, Penguin, Hammondsworth, 1968; TR Reese, *Australia, New Zealand and the United States: A Survey of International Relations, 1941–1968*, Royal Institute of International Affairs/Oxford University Press, London and New York, 1969; HS Albinski, *ANZUS, the United States and Pacific Security*, University Press of America, Lanham, 1987; A. Burnett (ed), *The ANZUS Documents,* Department of International Relations, The Australian National University, Canberra, 1991; and Joseph M Siracusa, 'The ANZUS Treaty Revisited', *Security Challenges*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2005, pp. 89–104.

she was telling to historical timeframes. As Beazley noted when delivering the first Lowy Institute lecture named in her honour, 'Coral Bell's work transits through contemporary writing like a permanently open time capsule'.[14]

Indeed, Bell was masterful in linking successive episodes of Western alliance behaviour to frame powerful cross-comparisons that facilitated a holistic understanding of the entire post-war order-building process. When writing about the differences between the relatively successful ANZUS and the ill-fated Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), Bell illustratively pointed to the vital but inadequately understood dissimilarities between the two security arrangements. ANZUS was specifically designed to defend Australian sovereign territory against a direct military attack by a hostile party, initially thought to be a strategically resurgent Japan. SEATO was intended to underwrite a very different kind of policy—Australia's pursuit of a 'forward defence' strategy in Southeast Asia directed against communist insurgency movements that, if successful, might topple pro-Western or neutral governments there and isolate Australia in the process.[15] A US regional strategic presence was what Australia valued most, but Australian policy-makers often felt they were competing with their British counterparts—Britain was also a member of SEATO—for American attention and resources. This sense of competition, Bell presciently observed, may ultimately not have served either Australia or the US well.

ANZUS provided Australia with a relatively exclusive forum (only shared with New Zealand) to convey security concerns to US officials. Australia might have been better off over the long-term 'if US policy-makers had been forced to defend their Asian or Pacific policies in a forum where European voices had also to be heard, urging alternative priorities' to forward defence.[16] That such was not the case meant that the US could easily pressure Australia and New Zealand to make force contributions to an escalating conflict in Vietnam during the 1960s (without formally activating SEATO as a trigger for such involvement) even as Britain and France declined to extend material support to the Lyndon B Johnson administration for that struggle. In this context, Bell's alliance narrative beautifully illustrated the 'alliance security dilemma' and its focus on entrapment and abandonment as it applied to Southeast Asia during the Cold War. Her work in this area, coincidentally, complements Victor Cha's later application of that theoretical approach to understanding the dynamics of US alliance politics with Japan and South Korea in Northeast Asia.[17]

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14   Beazley, 'Thinking Security', p. 1.

15   Bell, *Dependent Ally*, pp. 47–48, 68.

16   ibid., p. 46.

17   Victor D. Cha, 'Abandonment, Entrapment, and Neoclassical Realism in Asia: The United States, Japan, and Korea', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2000, pp. 261–91. Cha develops a model in which Japan and South Korea are more at odds with each other when either Japan or South Korea fear that US resolve to stay committed to their own national security is weakening. In a similar vein, Bell's characterisation of Australian fears that US strategic interest in Southeast Asia would be compromised by America's apprehensions

Alliance Leadership and Power Balancing

What sets Bell's commentary apart from the aforementioned 'three waves' of international relations literature is her shrewd appreciation of 'elite identity' and policy management as a key factor—perhaps *the* key factor—in alliance politics. In Australia's case, she observed that while its national security interests have remained fairly constant, 'the personality and assumptions of Australia's chief decision-maker of any given time' was absolutely critical.[18] The dominant figure in Australian Cold War politics, Prime Minister Robert G Menzies, clearly exemplified this proposition. Initially reticent about Australia's contribution of ground forces to the Korean War due to the British Labour government's similar reticence, he learned about London's subsequent decision to commit forces (after having been pressured by the US) to that conflict only after reaching New York on one of his long sea voyages to the US and Britain. Bell's description of Menzies' *volte face* was a classic illustration of her beautifully understated representations of historical policy benchmarks:

> [Thus] confronted with a fait accompli … he took the news of this reversal of his original injunction [not to commit Australian ground troops to UN military operations in Korea] in his stride, acquiesced in it without objection, and blandly proceeded to enjoy a considerable personal success (including the raising of a loan for Australia) during his Washington visit on the strength of his involuntary redefinition as the readiest and staunchest of the USA's friends.[19]

Bell noted that, earlier, Menzies' original scepticism about entering into a regional security treaty with the United States *sans* Britain flowed from similar concerns. Excessive dependence on an American security alliance would corner Australia into signing a Japanese peace treaty that would be unpopular with his own electorate and could undermine the Commonwealth's significance as an Asian security actor. The latter was especially true as the Emergency in the Malaya Peninsula was intensifying (a conflict in which Washington did not want its own forces to become involved) and British forces deployed there remained critical to defusing that threat.

In further exposition of Bell's appreciation of 'elite identity', she cited that negotiating ANZUS largely succeeded due to the single-minded quest of Percy Spender (who was appointed ambassador to the US when the Menzies government resumed power in mid-1951). Initial opposition by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff

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that it would be embroiled in defending British interests there conforms to this model. Thinking on the alliance security dilemma was developed by Glenn H Snyder, 'The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics', *World Politics,* vol. 36, no. 4, 1984, pp. 461–495.

18   Bell, *Dependent Ally*, p. 175.

19   ibid., p. 42.

to the accord weakened when Spender 'bluntly' linked Australia's willingness to support a peace treaty with Japan to 'the nature of the security arrangements arrived at for Australia'. By this time, Menzies' own position had softened as he realised that Britain was embarking on a long recessional from previous colonial responsibilities east of the Suez Canal and that Australia would be largely dependent on American power to contain Japanese remilitarisation and help underwrite Australia's 'forward defence' strategy in Southeast Asia. Spender and US Special Envoy John Foster Dulles teamed up to push the Australian agenda through a series of complex negotiations and counter-negotiations orchestrated by Winston Churchill's conservative British government which opposed an ANZUS without British membership.[20]

Bell's conclusion that Australia's security relations with the US have evolved from it being a de facto 'protectorate' involved in a 'one-way' security guarantee from Washington into a more equal arrangement as the Cold War transpired is entirely valid. The United States became increasingly dependent on the US–Australia joint installations for generating credible deterrence policy and gathering critical intelligence. Bell then made the legitimate and important observation that both countries' leaderships must be successful in ensuring that ANZUS was pursuing the 'common interest in a stable balance-of-power in the world' and that this 'outweigh[ed] any prospective divergence between particular national interests'. She noted that original alliance asymmetry had morphed into something more equal as global strategic interdependence and multipolarity intensified:

> It [ANZUS] had become considerably less unequal … in the sense that Australian dependence on the USA for protection had been narrowed to the relatively unlikely catastrophe of general war. … A one-sided dependence had in effect transmuted itself into interdependence of a relatively symmetrical sort.[21]

Historians have most often pointed to Gough Whitlam's government as the catalyst for Australia maturing into a more independent regional actor and for challenging what they viewed as the American predisposition to regard Australia as a reliably subservient ally.[22] It is clear that successive Australian conservative

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20   ibid., pp. 43–45.
21   ibid., p. 183.
22   Among the many in-depth surveys of Australia–US relations which consider this point, two of the best are Glen St J. Barclay, *Friends in High Places: Australian–American Diplomatic Relations Since 1945*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne,1985; and TB Millar, 'From Whitlam to Fraser', *Foreign Affairs* vol. 55, no. 4, 1977, pp. 854–872. Millar observed that 'Labor's view of the world was … very different from that of its predecessors. … It believed there was value in having the United States available for some unforeseeable and remote crisis, but that in the meantime the United States would understandably accept a public kick in the shins from time to time to establish Australia's independent credentials' (p. 859). An interesting dissenting piece was by James Curran, 'Dear Mr President: How Whitlam Rattled the ANZUS Alliance', *The Monthly,* vol. 81, August 2012, www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2012/august/1348618116/james-curran/dear-mr-

governments viewed the US military involvement in Vietnam as fundamental to the defence of the Southeast Asian mainland; Australia contributed a modest Australian force component (up to 7,600 personnel at its peak strength and approximately 60,000 military personnel over the entire duration of that conflict) to support that campaign. By comparison, the US deployed nearly half a million military personnel to Vietnam in 1968 alone and over 2.7 million Americans served in the war.[23] As David McLean has since observed, '[w]ith American power seen as overwhelming, a policy by which the US would bear most of the risks of military intervention had enormous appeal to the Australian government, which sought to commit America to the region's defence at the lowest possible cost to Australia'.[24]

Bell noted that while dissent against the war grew among the 'articulate opinion-makers' (journalists, academics, students, parliamentarians, and intellectuals) during the mid-to-late 1960s, the wider sectors of the Australian electorate were still supportive of forward defence and military intervention in Southeast Asia.[25] This remained the case until the Americans themselves shifted away from confrontation and toward diplomacy following the January 1968 Tet Offensive, President Johnson's March 1968 resignation speech, and the announcement of the Guam Doctrine in August 1969. The growth of greater Australian independence within the alliance proved to be a gradual phenomenon because, Bell argued, Australian involvement in American wars have been largely diplomatic enterprises rather than military ones and have been predicated on the 'conventional wisdom' that American decision-making was naturally synonymous with Australia's national interests.[26] This presumption was, of course, tested during Whitlam's three-year term of office. However, it was the relatively chaotic way such adjustments were introduced—with an emphasis on declaratory style over relatively steady operational foreign policy management—that made the challenge to alliance orthodoxy appear much more radical than it really was.[27] Indeed, as Bell noted, key bilateral arrangements such as Washington's control over operations at intelligence installations in Australia were largely unchanged. Others, such as relations between the Australian and

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president (accessed 2 September 2013). President Richard Nixon and his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, diplomatically isolated Australia for months after receiving a letter from Whitlam threatening to make his government's dissent to the US bombing of North Vietnam public. Also see David Martin Jones and Mike Lawrence Smith, 'Misreading Menzies and Whitlam: Reassessing the Ideological Construction of Australian Foreign Policy', *The Round Table,* vol. 89, no. 355, 2000, pp. 387–406.

23   David McLean, 'From British Colony to American Satellite? Australia and the USA During the Cold War', *Australian Journal of Politics and History,* vol. 52, no. 1, 2006, pp. 64–79, at 77; and David L Anderson, 'Vietnam War (1960–1975): Military and Diplomatic Course', in John Whiteclay Chambers (ed), *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, pp. 759–763.

24   McLean, 'From British Colony to American Satellite?' p. 77.

25   Bell, *Dependent Ally*, pp. 77, 93–94.

26   ibid., p. 182.

27   ibid., p. 113.

American intelligence communities, were finessed at the public service level as first Nixon and later Whitlam became engrossed in their respective domestic political problems.[28]

Another key analysis in Bell's work on post-war alliance systems related to how effective they have been within the regional and global power balances within which they operate. She acknowledged that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was generally useful and effective in containing Soviet power during the Cold War.[29] She argued, however, that 'force goals' of NATO such as credible defence burden-sharing, and the eventual development of a strong and quasi-independent European military component, were never quite realised—this was largely because American power 'more than compensated for the local deficiencies' of NATO Europe. She posited that under the rubric of 'containment strategy', both NATO and the United States' Asia-Pacific alliances were actually an effective balance of power coalition with forward defence lines.[30]

Bell became increasingly critical of NATO once global bipolarity had been relegated to history and a multipolar global power balance was beginning to emerge. US power, she argued, was sufficient to manage Cold War bipolarity (1945–91), but had failed to come to terms with the global redistribution of power that had evolved after the Soviet Union's demise. She began promoting what many would view as radical ideas for alliance reform. Amongst the most prominent of these was to admit Russia as a full member of NATO. By doing so, the West could avoid Russia's marginalisation from the rest of Europe. Such an initiative, Bell insisted, would also infuse a sense of European identity that had been largely abandoned after the Cold War.[31] Indeed, NATO Europe had been exposed to a substantial dose of American nationalism during Ronald Reagan's presidency (1981–88) when Washington's then predominant neoconservative policy-makers regarded Europe as highly susceptible to 'Finlandisation'—overly subservient to intimidation by Soviet military power and too enamoured by the lure of détente.[32]

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28   ibid., pp. 130–131.
29   When writing about European security in the late 1970s, Bell acknowledged that '[t]he survival of a military alliance for almost thirty years undoubtedly indicates that it is felt by the governments concerned to confer benefits. … On the whole the NATO relationship has been a comfortable enough one for the policy-makers concerned'. Coral Bell, *The Diplomacy of Détente: The Kissinger Era,* Martin Robertson, London, 1977, p. 99.
30   Coral Bell, *The Asian Balance of Power: A Comparison with European Precedents,* Adelphi Paper no. 44, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, February 1968, p. 4.
31   Coral Bell, 'Why an Expanded NATO Must Include Russia', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1994, pp. 27–41.
32   Coral Bell, 'The Reagan Administration and the American Alliance-Structure', *Australian Outlook*, vol. 41, no. 3, 1987, pp. 151–5.

Alliances and Concert Politics

The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC, signalled that a global redistribution of power was under way that would render Washington's task of leading its alliances ever more difficult. Acknowledging that the 'Jihadist' challenge had introduced new factors of asymmetrical warfare into the calculations of US policy planners, Bell concluded in a widely acclaimed strategy paper written for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, *Living with Giants,* that Washington's responses to this new type of non state-centric threat 'will put more strain on its alliances, both in the Atlantic and the Pacific, and further reduce US ability to induce "bandwagoning" by other powers'.[33] New forms of alignment would be required in a world increasingly shaped by complex multipolarity as the diffusion of American power intensified, especially following the ineffectual US invasion and occupation of Iraq. As she observed, '[p]ower is being redistributed all the time because of economic, demographic and technological changes beyond the control of even the most Machiavellian policy maker in Washington'.[34]

Bell suggested two new pathways to order-building: the strengthening of regional and international security communities, and the formation of great power concerts. She viewed these two approaches as symbiotic and working in ways that would render other models such as Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations', Mearsheimer's 'hegemonic war', or even more remote variants such as 'Leagues of Democracies' and 'Anglospheres' less relevant in the twenty-first century.[35] Regional and international security communities would provide space for middle and small powers to promote their own interests and to cultivate common norms in something other than the tightly woven asymmetrical framework which intermittently frustrated Australia and other US allies during the Cold War. Bell cited the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) grouping or an expanded Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN; the East Asia Summit emerged after Bell wrote this study although she predicted the forming of such an organisation) in the Asia-Pacific as illustrative typologies of regional community-building and potentially commensurate to the European Community and NATO that still appeared viable at the time of her writing. She theorised that the G8 and the burgeoning G20 economic groupings and other such arrangements could only expand and survive under an overarching framework

33   Coral Bell, *Living with Giants: Finding Australia's Place in a More Complex World,* Strategy Report, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Canberra, April 2005, p. 14.

34   ibid., p. 31.

35   Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1996; John J Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Norton, New York, 2001; Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, 'Democracies of the World, Unite', *The American Interest,* vol. 2, no. 3, 2007, pp. 5–15; and James C. Bennett, *The Anglosphere Challenge: Why the English-Speaking Nations Will Lead the Way in the Twenty-First Century*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2007.

managed by the world's five great powers—China, the European Union, India, Japan, Russia, and the United States—acting in concert to regulate and enforce systemic rules based on their collective interests, curbing defections from this framework, and constantly negotiating adjustments to such an architecture to preserve global stability.

The key precondition for realising this construct would be to prevent the return to classic power balancing and particularly to avoid the emergence of any anti-hegemonic alliance directed toward the United States. A new Sino–Russian arrangement directed toward checking American power would be illustrative of resurgent power balancing undermining global stability. Bell recognised that convincing the United States to enter into such a system would be the greatest barrier to its realisation. However, the logic of her proposed framework was so compelling from her perspective that she readily endorsed its creation. Citing the prospect of nuclear weapons states in the Asia-Pacific miscalculating each others' intentions in future crises and thereby precipitating major wars no one wanted, she insisted that 'every middle or minor power in the region ought to be interested in a security community' nurtured by great power support. While not anticipating the global financial crisis which exploded on the scene five years after *Living with Giants* was published, she nevertheless anticipated US problems in holding the global economic and geopolitical orders together and recommended that Washington willingly relinquish its post-Cold War primacy: '[a]ll that Washington has to do to reconcile its fellow giants of the central balance … is to administer a unipolar world *as if it were* a concert of powers, and it will become one'.[36] In such a world, moreover, she believed that Australia could play a role in adjudicating American reconciliation of its post-war bilateral alliance system with Asia-Pacific institution-building similar to 'that Britain has long played in relations between the US and continental Europe'.[37]

Bell expanded on this thinking in what would be one of her last major pieces of work—a paper written for the Lowy Institute for International Policy entitled *The End of the Vasco da Gama Era*.[38] The voyages of 'that great [Portuguese] navigator' and his success in discovering a maritime trading route from Europe to India at the end of the fifteenth century symbolised the beginning of the West's commercial and strategic dominance which endured over the next five centuries. The beginning of the twenty-first century marks the rise of three great non-Western civilisations: Indian, Chinese, and Islamic. It also signals the

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36 Bell, *Living with Giants*, pp. 27, 41; emphasis in original.

37 ibid., p. 54.

38 Coral Bell, *The End of the Vasco da Gama Era: The Next Landscape of World Politics,* Lowy Institute Paper 21, Lowy Institute for International Policy, Sydney, 2007. Much of the thinking for this work emanated from Bell's earlier work, *A World Out of Balance: American Ascendancy and International Politics in the 21st Century,* Longueville Books, Double Bay, 2003.

beginning of the end of the nation-state's monopoly on power distribution as non-state actors begin to play a more fundamental role in meeting a growing and diverse array of non-traditional security challenges.

How would classical alliance politics fare in such a dynamically shifting environment? Bell was somewhat ambiguous on this point. As was argued in *Living with Giants*, a major precondition for successful concert politics is to preclude the formation of an anti-hegemonic alliance against one of the great powers by ensuring (via negotiation or coercion) that none of them would pursue global hegemony. In developing this pre-condition, Bell largely concurred with Mearsheimer's view that hegemonic competition—complete with the alliance politics that would accompany it—would likely lead to general war. Unlike Mearsheimer, she did not regard such competition to be an inevitable feature of world politics if a viable great power concert materialised. Yet Bell acknowledged that using alliances to balance against threats remained a necessary policy component in certain circumstances, at least over the short-term. Japan's post-Cold War environment, for example, mandated a continued need for the US–Japan bilateral security alliance in the face of Chinese military modernisation and North Korean development of nuclear weapons.[39] British resistance to a truly autonomous European security community operating independently from NATO was equally unlikely to dissipate any time soon, and Bell noted that such a community could only materialise if Russia joined or closely aligned with it. Odds of a stronger and more independent Europe emerging to facilitate a global concert were also undermined by that continent's growing sense of vulnerability to Islamic power and a 'Muslim diaspora' growing within its boundaries.[40] Writing in 2007, Bell could not have anticipated the global financial crisis wreaking such a degree of financial havoc in Europe, but this event seriously undermined the idea of a Europe acting as a unified great power, either autonomously or in concert with other global power centres. Nor could she have anticipated the Barack Obama administration's endorsement of a 'pivot' or 'rebalancing' strategy for the Asia-Pacific in 2011 that is designed to reinforce the US bilateral alliance system in that region. Hence, her speculation that the 'hub and spokes' logic of post-war balancing in Asia may give way to a NATO-like multilateral framework more able to co-exist with a Sino–American deal to share power seems premature.[41] Indeed, Bell could never quite let go her conviction that at the end of the day, Australia remains inextricably and beneficially tied to US power as the best means for ensuring its own national security and for pursuing global stability:

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39   Bell, *The End of the Vasco da Gama Era,* p. 23.

40   ibid., p. 28.

41   ibid., pp. 50–1. For definitive statements on the pivot strategy see Hillary Clinton, 'America's Pacific Century', *Foreign Policy*, vol. 189, November 2011, pp. 56–63; and Barack Obama, 'Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament', Parliament House, Canberra, 17 November 2011, www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament (accessed 3 September 2013).

As middle powers go, Australia is exceptionally well endowed with both economic and strategic assets: remote location, a defensible sea-air gap, good access to intelligence, an alliance with the paramount power and efficient, well trained and well equipped forces. … The United States will remain the paramount power of the society of states, only in a multipolar world instead of a unipolar or bipolar one.[42]

Conclusion

Coral Bell's major and continuing contribution to international security relations is the provision of nuanced and enduring judgements on how power balancing and the alliance politics that emanates from it relate to regional and global order-building. Her application of classical realism and historical analysis to explain why states coalesce to realise acceptable power equilibriums transcends the more abstract analysis represented by the second wave of alliance literature generated during the height of the Cold War. She did not view such behaviour (power balancing and alliance politics) as sufficiently mechanistic or repetitive to justifying surrendering to either the anarchical or systemic schools of thought that dominated academic thinking on alliances during that period. Interpreting history as the delicate art form that it is, and drawing up sophisticated portraits of how events unfolded the way they did, is seminal in understanding the security relations between those states and polities which matter the most to international stability. Bell never lost sight of this prerequisite when constructing her magisterial narratives of modern alliance politics.

As Hugh White has recently reminded us, Bell's willingness to follow where an argument leads and her openness to new ideas were her distinct trademarks. She complemented these traits, however, with a steady and profound sense of optimism about the future of world order.[43] This separates her from most other classical realists who too often limited their analyses to what they saw as the inevitabilities of strategic competition and war and neo-realists who surrendered to the all too easy temptation of viewing global structural changes as nothing more than a state's preordained and mechanistic process of survival through balancing to gain power and wealth at each others' expense.

Near the end of her life, Bell envisioned that the West could shape a complicated but practical hybrid approach to realising global stability, combining community-building and power-sharing in ways that would make the world

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42   Bell, *The End of the Vasco da Gama Era*, p. 53.
43   Hugh White, 'Vote of Thanks to Kim Beazley', Coral Bell Lecture, Lowy Institute for International Policy, 19 March 2008, www.lowyinstitute.org/files/pubfiles/Beazley,_Thinking_security,_Vote_of_thanks.pdf (accessed 3 September 2013).

and those inhabiting it more secure. She sensed that she could contribute to our understanding of how more effective order-building could be realised at a time when the post-Cold War world was undergoing immense structural change. This spurred her on to refine her already formidable arguments about alliances, concerts, and community-building, and to engage with both key policy-makers and with her valued colleagues in academic and think-tank settings. No policy practitioner or independent analyst could aspire to do more.