

Australia's foreign relations to 1945

[Parts of the World](#), [Australia](#)



Introduction Australia's presence and participation in global affairs have been commendable over decades now. Australia officially referred to as commonwealth of Australia is in the southern hemisphere. Australia comprises of the mainland of Australian continent, Tasmania Island and other smaller islands in the pacific and Indian oceans. Like other countries, Australia has undergone numerous milestones over the past centuries which have influenced its present developments. Australian foreign relations with other countries including the US, UK and other Asian countries are of great importance are.

Having interacted with these countries at different times of history, Australia has been able to share common policies and interests with these nations. Firstly, the UK which colonized Australia since the 18th century had great influence on its current foreign policy. The trade relations between Australia and America as well as the joint participation in WW II influenced its foreign policy and relations. These interactions are also evident with other Asian countries like New Zealand, Japan and China which have shared common experiences in war as well as trade.

This essay will discuss the importance of Britain, Asia, and the US in shaping Australian foreign policy since the 1788 settlement to WW II (1945). Australia has a rich and appealing foreign policy which makes it a trusted ally to many nations across the globe. The foreign policy of Australia includes various separated but inter-related policies in the fields of trade, security, defence, foreign aid and international commitments. Being a signatory to different treaties in the UN, Australia has been steadfast in attending to issues of global interest.

In regards to trade and foreign aid, Australia is always in the forefront in fostering the spirit of globalisation. It is however notable that the foreign policies and relations of Australia are fast in upholding and promoting the interests of Australia. As far as security and defence is concerned, Australia is always vigilant in addressing any threat to national security. The development of the current and past foreign policies specifically between 1788 and 1945 was greatly influenced by the UK, US and Asia .

The UK which was the first to arrive in Australia in the 18th century greatly influenced Australian foreign policy from settlement (1788) to the WW II. It is worth noting that Australia was a victim of tyranny of distance as well as a colony of Britain. Till 1942, Australia showed little or no independence in foreign policy. This is because it was under Britain influence. Despite that Australia was a dominion of Britain and that it had right to determine its foreign policy, it never showed independence. The issues of culture, military, economics and politics were greatly influenced by Britain.

It is hereby notable that Britain had great importance in forging Australian foreign policy on the issues of politics, security, defence and economics. Since the settlement in 1788 to 1930s, Australia had no international embassies apart from London. The main concern for Australia was on trade and economics. Britain hereby played a key role in modelling Australian foreign policy on trade, culture and economics which helped in meeting the interests of the Australian citizens . US played a key role in building Australian foreign policy since 1788 to 1945.

Based on the strong trade relations, Australian extended these relations from trade to security. The fears of Japan invasion in 1930s was a real problem to

Australia. Despite this problem, Britain was unable to defend Australia thus seeking the support of US. Based on this phenomenon, it is evident that the fear of Japan invasion influenced Australian foreign policy between 1918 and 1945. Australia extended its trade ties with US to security and defence relations. This is one of the foreign policy of Australia whereby it sought to ensure strategic relations with other countries .

The foreign policies adopted by Australia on security and defence before 1945 were influenced by the US. This can be attributed to the continued threat of Japanese threat and hostility to Australia. As a result of the open hostility between Australia and Japan during the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Australia depended on US for defence. During this period, Australian defence planning borrowed from US. In the 1920s, Australia demonstrated an open stereotype and prejudice which was influenced by the US.

There was a growing negative stereotype of Japanese by Australia as a potential threat to national security. In response to this scenario, Australia developed and implemented foreign policies which were aimed at enhancing its security and countering Japanese invasion. The foreign policy on security was also allied to the US as a potential strategic partner. The Japanese invasion in China in 1937 had a significant impact on Australia's attention. In this regard, Australia moved fast to ensure it had strong ties with US, hence strengthening its defence. In light of this phenomenon, it can be established that Australian foreign policy between 1918 and 1945 was influenced by US due to the threat of Japanese invasion hence prompting it to enter into strategic alliance with the US . The stay of British settlers in Australia since 1788 had great influence and importance to Australia's

foreign policy since 1788 to 1945. The models of Australia's legal and political systems as well as policies on trade and security were influenced by Britain. The foreign policy on immigration adopted by Australia till 1945 was influenced by Britain.

It is important noting that Britons dominated the culture, language and the entire make-up of Australian society. Due to the domination of Australia by Britain, its national identity was relatively indistinct from that of Britain. This made the two nations to share same philosophies and practices as far as foreign policy and relations were concerned. The immigration policies adopted by Australia favoured Irish and Britain. This manifests the strong influence of Britain to Australia's foreign policies before 1945.

The establishment of the Immigration Restriction Act was a major manifestation of Britain's influence to Australian foreign policy. In this policy, Australia effectively banned Asia migration into the country for the next 50 years. There was also preceding legislations which prohibited the employment of contract labourers as well as the deportation of those already in the country. These developments had great influence on Australian foreign relations till 1945. Asia has played a critical role in influencing the foreign policies of Australia from 1788 to 1945.

The relationships between Australia and other Asian countries of; Malaysia, Singapore, New-Zealand, Japan, Indonesia, and China was of importance in modelling its foreign policy. The quest for peace and regional stability was a major issue which influenced Australia's foreign policy. This can be evident in the 1944 agreement with New Zealand which dealt with welfare, security and advancement of people in the different independent territories. The

need for peace and security for its people can be viewed as the major concern for Australia which influenced its foreign policy during this time.

Alongside the security concerns, Australia was also focused on boosting its economic prospects. In order to ensure prosperity and sustainability in national development, Australia was keen to ensure regional cooperation with other Asian countries. This was aimed at enhancing the economic prospects of the country. The importance of US in the foreign policy of Australia is very evident through the continued cooperation between the two countries. In the periods before 1945, the US was regarded as Australia's key ally in WW II.

The entire foreign and defence policies of Australia directly depended on US support. The strong ties between US and Australia influenced its foreign policy on the Southeast Asia. Despite that at times Australia acted independently on foreign policies, it always pursued policies which impressed the US. It is important noting that Australia was ever submissive and subservient to US wishes. Nevertheless, at times Australia pursued different foreign policies which contradicted those of US as in the case of Malaya and West New Guinea.

The fear of Australia from foreign invasion had a role in the dependency of Australia's foreign policy on US. Conclusion It is apparent that the foreign policy and relations of Australia to 1945 was influenced by Asia, Britain and America. The interactions of these countries with Australia played a key role in shaping its foreign policy from 1788 to 1945. The key issues of concern were defence, security, trade, and migration. As observed in the discussion,

the US was very influential on the foreign policies of Australia on defence and security.

This was also the case of Asia which influenced Australian foreign policy on regional cooperation and security. These insights demonstrate the significance of Britain, Asia and US in modelling Australian foreign policy between 1788 and 1945. Bibliography Dunn, Michael. Australia and the Empire: From 1788 to the Present (Sydney: Fontana/Collins, 1984), 75-154. Esthus, Raymond. From Enmity to Alliance: US-Australian Relations, 1931-1941 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1964), 83- 132. Grey, Jeffrey. A Military History of Australia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 45-98.