

Laboring for Nuclear Disarmament? The Diplomacy of the Hawke-Keating Governments

Written by Kye J. Allen

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KYE J. ALLEN, OCT 1 2019

During the consecutive Labor governments of Prime Ministers Bob Hawke (1983-1991) and Paul Keating (1991-1996), Australia was to emerge as a leading international proponent on matters of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. It was also during this period that New Zealand under the Labor government of Prime Minister David Lange affirmed a similar commitment to nuclear disarmament by controversially declaring New Zealand territorial land, sea, and airspace a nuclear free zone, a decision which would culminate in its *de facto* suspension from the ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, United States) alliance. Yet relative to its New Zealand counterpart, the Australian Labor Party's (ALP) opposition to nuclear weaponry appears blatantly less extreme and absolutist in nature. Australia's position and its diplomatic advocacy as such were accompanied by a seemingly contradictory dimension, namely its continued reliance on, and active assistance in maintaining, the extended nuclear deterrent of the United States. The Hawke-Keating government not only avoided extricating Australia from the United States' 'nuclear umbrella', but continued its role as an integral component in the functioning and perpetuation of a system of mutual assured destruction.

It is this duality or tension in Australia's foreign policy which the following discussion intends to explain. Ultimately, it will be established that Australia's policy on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament can be accounted for by understanding the concepts of middle power diplomacy and good international citizenship, both of which are not merely heuristically valuable descriptors of the Hawke-Keating foreign policy, but were explicit underpinnings. Such concepts were defined not simply by an absolute moral commitment to nuclear disarmament, but rather prescribed a creative form of diplomacy that would further Australia's international reputation, moral concerns, and the domestic agenda of the Labor government, albeit consistently within the confines of Australia's core strategic interests. Thus, rather than evidencing an inconsistency in policy or a desultory and fleeting commitment to nuclear disarmament, this advocacy constituted a relatively 'enlightened' form of *realpolitik* which was predicated on a mutually reinforcing amalgam of strategic, diplomatic, domestic, and moral considerations.

In elaborating on this notion, this essay will proceed in three parts. The first section offers a cursory overview of the strategic considerations which underpinned Australia's reliance on the United States and its extended nuclear deterrent during the Hawke-Keating era. This will provide the foundation for the subsequent discussion by outlining the tension warranting explanation. The second section will consider how the Labor government's advocacy, in accordance with the concept of middle power diplomacy, was used as an instrumental means to further its foreign policy objectives and placate domestic concerns regarding nuclear weapons. Following this, a comparable discussion is to elaborate on the concept of good international citizenship and how it manifested in Australia's foreign policy.

Australia and the 'Nuclear Umbrella'

Despite Australia's anti-nuclear advocacy, the Hawke-Keating government maintained a strategic interest in preserving the United States' 'nuclear umbrella' and its notional coverage therein. By the onset of the Hawke government, Australia had effectively abandoned the previously established doctrine of 'forward defence', reorienting policy towards a capacity to autonomously defend Australia without the assistance of great powers.[1] However, this

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prioritisation of Australia's strategic independence would nonetheless function within the overarching framework of its great power alliance. This seemingly contradictory policy was based on the assertion that the security which the latter provided was a necessary prerequisite for Australia to increase its autonomy in international society.[2] Accordingly, under the ardent pro-Americanism of Prime Minister Hawke, the Labor government continued to actively assist the United States in maintaining its nuclear deterrent as a constituent part of the alliance. This policy was epitomised by the reaffirmation of the Fraser government's (1975-1983) offer, one subsequently retracted *vis-à-vis* domestic outrage, to host MX missile tests in the Tasman Sea.[3] Similarly, Prime Minister Keating's reorientation toward Asia and the benignity of Australia's post-Cold War security environment did not detract from the continued primacy of the United States and its 'nuclear umbrella' in defence and foreign policy.[4] Rather, attachment to the United States' nuclear capability, such as through the continued hosting of the joint military facilities at Pine Gap and Nurrungar, became a symbolic means through which to prevent America's post-Cold War retrenchment and retain Australia's nebulous nuclear assurances for the remote possibility of addressing amorphous challenges yet to materialise.[5]

With the exception of the Liberal government under the prime ministership of John Gorton (1968-1971), during which the proposition of developing an indigenous nuclear capability remained under consideration, Australian foreign policy has maintained a relatively consistent position on nuclear weapons.[6] As Leah and Lyon suggest, there has been a dominant 'Menzian' tradition evident in Australian foreign policy, one underpinned by the assumption that nuclear deterrence, and thus Australia's assistance in maintaining a system of mutually assured destruction, has utility for national security and international stability generally if such weapons are under the 'responsible' control of the great powers.[7] The value of nuclear weapons is neither not in their immediate tactical utility. Instead, nuclear weapons are purported to have a strategic value by stabilising and pacifying superpower relations and maintaining the necessary balance of power on which international order is founded. Since Australia's ratification of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1973, the prevalence of this tradition has not manifested to the extremes which typified the Menzies government (1949-1966), symbolised by its hosting of British nuclear tests at Maralinga. Yet as the continued reliance on the American 'nuclear umbrella' indicates, this 'Menzian' tradition appears somewhat prevalent under the Hawke-Keating government. As Prime Minister Hawke noted, the threat of 'nuclear war [is] remote and improbable, provided effective deterrence is maintained'.[8] The predicament emerges regarding how to explain the duality in its foreign policy and as to whether its anti-nuclear advocacy represented a genuine goal of creating a world devoid of nuclear weapons; a façade for instrumental objectives; a somewhat desultory, fleeting, and superficial commitment; or reflected some complex and nuanced amalgam of factors.

Middle Power Diplomacy

This apparent inconsistency can be, to a considerable extent, explained by a tradition of middle power diplomacy in Australian foreign policy. This concept does not necessarily imply an ethical foreign policy, but rather it describes a form of diplomacy that aims to circumvent military inferiority through providing creative, entrepreneurial, and intellectual leadership, while also utilising technical capabilities, to address 'niche' issues of international concern that are within Australia's interests.[9] Middle power diplomacy has been a relatively constant and explicit premise of Australian foreign policy since the Second World War, exemplified by its introduction in 1945 by Minister for External Affairs H. V. Evatt.[10] However, it was during the Hawke and, in particular, Keating governments that this tradition of middle power diplomacy was to have its apex, with Australia actively applying its 'multilateral, coalition-building method of diplomacy' on a multitude of disparate foreign policy issues, from the Cambodian Peace Plan and the formation of the Cairns Group of agricultural exporting countries, to the international campaign against apartheid and the establishment of the Antarctica Treaty.[11] In accordance with this tradition, Australia's anti-nuclear advocacy reflected, to a degree, a simple strategic use of its diplomatic and technical capabilities to limit the further proliferation of nuclear weapons as a natural strategic objective. As the 1994 Defence White Paper stated, Australia has a 'direct interest' in both mitigating nuclear arms competitions which would be detrimental to Australia's 'defence planning' and 'in ensuring that such weapons are not acquired by countries or terrorist groups which could use them against Australia'.[12] It is in this respect that the Hawke-Keating government had actively participated in a number of inter-governmental regulatory bodies centred on the control of nuclear materials and equipment involved in the nuclear fuel-cycle, such as the informal Zangger Committee and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), through which Australia notably had a pivotal role in the 1992 establishment of comprehensive regulations mandating compliance

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with the standards of the International Atomic Energy Agency.[13]

Besides obvious security interests, this creative advocacy had another instrumental purpose, namely the establishment of a reputation for Australia as an innovative leader in the regulation of weapons of mass destruction.[14] This was particularly evident in its formation and chairmanship of the Australia Group in 1984, an informal inter-governmental organisation intended to standardise export controls related to the development of biological and chemical weapons, as well as its hosting of the Government-Industry Conference against Chemical Weapons in September 1989.[15] In addition to institutional and *ad hoc* initiatives towards the regulation of relevant materials, Australia was to have an indispensable role in the legal prohibition of chemical weapons, both in its efforts to mobilise support for the Chemical Weapons Convention among the nations of Southeast Asia and the South Pacific, and via Foreign Minister Gareth Evan's submission in March 1992 of a complete draft of the proposed Convention, one which 'had the effect of shifting the negotiating climate from an issue-by-issue discussion to a comprehensive approach for the completion of the treaty text'.[16] In addition to diplomatic efforts, Australia also utilised its technical capabilities, with defence personnel and civilians from the Australian Safeguards Office having key roles in the inspection of both Iraq's chemical weapons inventory and nuclear facilities in the aftermath of the Gulf War, as well as participating in the United Nations' investigation into the supposed 'Yellow Rain' affair in Southeast Asia.[17] According to Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal, Australia's earnest commitment to the regulation and prohibition of chemical weapons can be attributed to both a genuine ambition to be a 'good international citizen' and be viewed as such by the international community.[18]

Yet from the litany of initiatives implemented by the Hawke-Keating government, it was undoubtedly the Keating government's establishment of the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons in 1995 which represented the apotheosis of its advocacy. Convening a panel of seventeen independent experts, including such noted figures as former Secretary of Defence, Robert McNamara, and former commander in chief of the United States Strategic Command, George Lee Butler; the Commission outlined a sober and unequivocal defence for the 'phased, monitored, and verifiable reduction' of nuclear weapons towards global zero.[19] While prior reports had been composed by epistemic communities and non-governmental organisations such as the Pugwash Group, it was the official imprimatur of the Australia government that rendered the initiative a qualitatively novel form of advocacy.[20] As Hanson suggests, the formation of such a novel initiative was intended to solidify, at least in part, Australia's reputation as a leading 'advocacy state'.[21] While tangential to the present discussion, it ought to be noted that the release of the Commission's report coincided with election of the Liberal-National Coalition government (1996-2007), 'one that was not especially sympathetic to its predecessor's initiatives', and thus its message received a comparatively lacklustre promotion.[22] Despite what ensued, it is apparent that under the Hawke-Keating government, Australia managed to 'establish... a reputation as a competent, creative and above all, active member of the international community'.[23]

Shifting from the external, Australia's initiatives also reflected the domestic considerations of the Hawke-Keating government. During the mid-1980s, Prime Minister Hawke was confronted with the predicament of reconciling both the discontent at Australia's uranium mining industry espoused by those on the Left of the ALP with the concurrent economic incentives for the continuation of uranium exports.[24] In response, Hawke managed to shift the foci of political debate, positing that Australia's continued participation in the nuclear fuel-cycle was integral to the international non-proliferation regime. It was reasoned that Australia could, by remaining involved in the uranium export industry, limit the sale of nuclear materials exclusively to members of the NPT or, as in the case of France, prohibit exports to those nuclear-weapons states which persisted in their testing of such weapons.[25] Evidently, the nuclear safeguards that Australia would establish via the NSG had a domestic purpose in addition to its strategic rationality, namely to mitigate objections to the uranium industry and to placate internal factions within the ALP.[26]

Nuclear disarmament was not, however, simply a concern relegated to the ALP. Rather, the issue had acquired a considerable degree of electoral attention, resulting in the formation of an extensive disarmament movement, exemplified not least by the Palm Sunday rallies and the 1983 protests at the joint military facility at Pine Gap.[27] Similarly, the election of the single-issue Nuclear Disarmament Party in 1984 was not inconsequential for a government which lacked a majority in the Senate.[28] Such developments would have a degree of influence on the Hawke-Keating government, whereby its initiatives were to commonly reflect, in part, an extension of domestic

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considerations. As an extension of such concerns, the Hawke government notably established a Peace Research Centre at the Australian National University in 1984, while also appointing a permanent Ambassador for Disarmament, Richard Butler, to Geneva in 1983.[29] Similarly, as Hanson and Ungerer suggest, the novelty of the Canberra Commission partially represented a means to exemplify Australia's disarmament credentials before a domestic audience.[30] It is, however, the ALP's response to the 1995 resumption of French nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean which renders apparent the correlation between Australia's advocacy and domestic politics, whereby the relatively moderate reaction of the Keating government was to radically alter into a systematic campaign of condemnation *vis-à-vis* unexpected and fervent public opposition.[31] As this suggests, these creative middle power initiatives were not solely foreign policy instruments, but also based on a concern for furthering the domestic agenda of the Hawke-Keating government or otherwise placating public concerns. While this discussion has emphasised the rational underpinnings of Australia's advocacy, it is key not to reduce such initiatives exclusively to instrumental, rather than moral, considerations. Accordingly, it is pivotal to consider the concept of good international citizenship.

Good International Citizenship

Due to Australia's limited military capabilities as a middle power, it has naturally been within its interests to provide for its security both through a reliance on great powers and by maintaining an international society based on the international rule of law.[32] In contrast to the instrumental nature of middle power diplomacy, the concept of good international citizenship, as expounded by Foreign Minister Gareth Evans (1988-1996), added an additional moral component to the strategic objective of preserving international order. Specifically, Evans imbued Australia foreign policy with an explicit cosmopolitan or otherwise liberal internationalism that reflected Australia's democratic values, while simultaneously conceiving Australia's national interests as inherently interlinked with the stability of international society as such.[33] However, Evans adamantly asserts that this commitment to what Hedley Bull termed 'purposes beyond ourselves' was not tantamount to a 'disinterested altruism' nor the 'foreign policy equivalent of boy scout deeds'.[34] Rather, the maintenance of Australia's 'physical integrity and sovereignty' remained the core priority of foreign policy.[35] Linklater, in providing a theoretical grounding to Evan's policy-based concept, suggests that good international citizenship is predicated on two core assertions, both of which are inextricably linked and mutually constitutive: the good international citizen remains primarily concerned with its national interests, yet maintains a comparable interest in the preservation of an international society and the defence of cosmopolitan and liberal values therein.[36] As Linklater observes,

[w]hen advocating good international citizenship, Senator Evans does not claim that the pursuit of national interests must be renounced forthwith. Instead, the argument is that foreign policy must also be animated by more elevated concerns such as promoting world order, encouraging global reform and honouring duties to humanity.[37]

By analogy, good international citizenship is the 'international equivalent of civic obligations' within domestic society.[38] The maintenance of international stability, rather than simply being the responsibility of the great powers, was therefore conceived by Evans, particularly in the conducive post-Cold War environment, to be a matter which Australia had a comparable civic and moral responsibility to address where and when it had the means to contribute.[39] Thus, Evans suggests that 'the dichotomy between realism and idealism is a false one'.[40] Good international citizenship is neither a naïve Wilsonian internationalism nor an amoral or immoral realism, but rather an 'enlightened' form of *realpolitik*, 'an expression of idealistic pragmatism' which reflected an amalgam of strategic and moral concerns for preserving international order, emerging cosmopolitan and liberal norms within international society, and Australia's core security interests.[41]

This pragmatic moralism was to manifest as a key premise in Australia's diplomatic advocacy. As Evans stated at the United Nations General Assembly in 1988, '[n]uclear disarmament and arms control are not matters exclusively for those great powers which currently possess nuclear weapons'.[42] In effect, it was understood that the globally destructive and morally abhorrent nature of nuclear weapons rendered middle powers, as with their great power counterparts, responsible in ensuring that their use and further acquisition was regulated by international society. This was exemplified by the Hawke government's leadership in the 1985 NPT review conference, wherein having a key mediatory role that would ensure the continuation of the NPT as the legal basis of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.[43] Similarly, such activism was present in Australia's consistent campaigning since the Whitlam

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government (1972-1975), and particularly under the leadership of Foreign Minister Bill Hayden (1983-1988), to advocate for the great powers to negotiate a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), with the latter notably hosting negotiations between Soviet and American diplomats in 1984.[44] This attempt to situate Australia in the role of mediator was ultimately futile, with both the Reagan administration and the Soviet Union evidencing a lacklustre support for negotiations, not least was the influence of such initiatives incapable of disrupting French nuclear testing at Mururoa Atoll in the South Pacific.[45] While such advocacy under the ministership of Hayden presents relevant questions regarding middle power influence (or lack thereof) *vis-à-vis* the great powers and the structural constraints of bipolarity,[46] it is nevertheless apparent that Australian foreign policy on nuclear weapons was imbued with a sense of moral obligation, regardless of its efficacy.

This conception of moral responsibility was similarly in evidence during the Keating government. In response to the disillusionment of a number non-nuclear weapons states at the lack of progress by the great powers toward nuclear disarmament in 1995, the Keating Government responded with considerable ardour via two initiatives, both aimed at reinforcing the nuclear non-proliferation agenda. The first involved the government's endorsement of the International Court of Justice's 1996 verdict regarding the illegality of the use of nuclear weapons or the threat thereof.[47] The second initiative pertains to the government-sanctioned Canberra Commission. It is in this respect that the Commission ought not to be considered solely as the product of domestic or reputational considerations, but came to reflect Australia's emergent identity as an activist and independent middle power whilst under the direction of the ALP.[48] Similarly, Australia's vehement, albeit admittedly belated, response to the resumption of French nuclear testing in 1995 was not exclusively a reflection of the government's attempt to placate domestic outrage. While the particular stridence of this campaign was certainly a product of domestic politics, Australia's opposition in general (to both French and Chinese nuclear tests) nevertheless reflected a genuine view that such actions were contrary to the NPT and deleterious to negotiations towards a CTBT.[49] As Hanson and Ungerer note, Australia understood 'the continued testing of nuclear weapons mostly in terms of the damage it could do to multilateral disarmament regimes'.[50] In summation, through a multiplicity of initiatives, the Hawke-Keating government intended to act as a responsible international citizen by preserving a rules-based international society.

Yet the moral responsibility associated with the concept of good international citizenship was also, somewhat paradoxically, a key factor underpinning its continued association with the extended nuclear deterrent of the United States. Participation in maintaining a condition of nuclear deterrence did not simply contribute to Australia's defence by solidifying its alliance with its superpower counterpart, but it also provided, as Foreign Minister Hayden stated, a 'moral standing' on which to base its advocacy, without which Australia's influence on such matters would be quixotic.[51] It was reasoned that by committing to the elimination of nuclear weapons, Australia would be sacrificing its absolute guarantee of its security, thereby providing a degree credibility and moral authority to its position.[52] In addition, as Hayden explained, Australia has inherent 'moral obligations' to contribute to the 'restraint' which a condition of mutually assured destruction is based on if the nation is 'genuinely concerned' with minimising the 'possibility of such [a] conflict'.[53] By offering the capacity to detect a Soviet ballistic missile attack, and ensuring continued means of communication to American naval forces in the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific, the joint facilities were thereby understood as enhancing the credibility of the United States' second-strike capability and thus the efficacy of deterrence.[54] By implication, to act otherwise would be irresponsible and thus negatively impacting on international security. Provided this conception of moral responsibility, Hayden was cautious to specify that, if it was revealed that the joint facilities were 'part of a link in a first strike capacity', then the government would be 'morally required to review' the functioning of such facilities and Australia's commitment thereto.[55]

Similarly, with the onset of the Second Cold War, concern for the maintenance of nuclear deterrence was directed at the destabilising nature of President Ronald Reagan's rhetoric of nuclear warfighting and the Strategic Defence Initiative.[56] As previously noted, Foreign Minister Hayden had attempted to reverse the precarious arms competition that was developing by hosting negotiations between American and Soviet officials in 1984, albeit to no avail.[57] This critique of the United States' foreign policy would, however, remain relatively muted on issues which were viewed as potentially detrimental to the alliance, thus essentially establishing the limits to Australia's advocacy.[58] For example, while having an indispensable role in inaugurating the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone, the Hawke government had ensured that the Treaty of Rarotonga would not prohibit the passage of nuclear vessels, thereby attempting to prevent a repeat of the crisis which followed the Lange government's denial of American

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warships in 1985 (a controversy which notably culminated in the Reagan administration suspending obligations towards New Zealand under the ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, United States Security) Treaty).[59] In fact, Leah suggests that this suspension was not derived primarily from the United States' concern over the immediate consequences of New Zealand's extrication, but its potential implications if Australia and, in particular, Japan were to adopt a similar policy; a signal which Australian officials were cognisant of and cautious to abide by.[60]

While immediately contributing to the stability of deterrence, the Hawke-Keating government also reasoned that such direct participation was vital for the effectiveness of international attempts to regulate such weaponry. As the 1987 Defence White Paper outlined, 'the Government considers it important to maintain a stable strategic balance to support mutual deterrence... as a basis for substantive arms control and disarmament negotiations'.[61] Accordingly,

[t]he facilities at Pine Gap and Nurrungar enhance stability by contributing to verification of arms limitation measures of the United States and the Soviet Union... Were Australia to cease... co-operation in the joint defence facilities there would only be adverse consequences for international security and higher risk of global war. This would neither serve Australia's interests nor those of the international community generally.[62]

This understanding of Australia's dual role as civic advocate for nuclear disarmament and responsible contributor to strategic stability remained in evidence throughout the more vocal advocacy of the Keating government. As Evans expounded, Australia had a 'distinctive contribution to global stability' through the role such facilities had in maintaining deterrence and in the verification of arms control treaties.[63] Simply then, good international citizenship was coupled with a pragmatic dimension, whereby Australia subordinated its genuine commitment to disarmament to the comparable moral and strategic concern for the maintenance of international order and its national security when deemed necessary.

As this discussion suggests, the 'Menzian' tradition and Australia's advocacy were not necessarily incompatible. Juxtaposed against the 'Menzians', Leah and Lyon identify an alternative tradition prevalent in Australian policy debates, its core premise epitomised in the unequivocal statement of the Canberra Commission: '[The] central reality is that nuclear weapons diminish the security of all states. Indeed, states which possess them become... targets of nuclear weapons'.[64] According to this 'disarmer' tradition, nuclear deterrence is immoral and, contra the 'Menzians', inherently fallible, thereby necessitating Australia's extrication from the nuclear dimension of its alliance with the United States and an absolute commitment towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.[65] However, cognisant of the considerable barriers preventing the elimination of nuclear weapons, the Hawke-Keating government did not conform to this idealistic standard.[66] As Hayden stated, the ceding of nuclear weapons to, for example, a global body presupposes 'a measure of cooperation... which is not in fact discernible'.[67] Similarly, the 1994 Defence White Paper did not challenge the rationale of Australia's reliance on the American 'nuclear umbrella', but nonetheless asserted that deterrence is simply 'an interim condition until a total ban on nuclear weapons' is established.[68] It is perhaps Keating's statement to the House of Representative following the establishment of the Canberra Commission in 1995 which most aptly encapsulates this position. Rather than disavowing Australia's position within the American 'nuclear umbrella', Keating balances the explicit objective of the Commission with the necessity of maintaining 'a system of stable deterrence... while the reduction and eventual elimination of nuclear weapons is achieved'.[69]

In this indefinite (albeit supposedly temporary) period, Australia would therefore remain committed to progress on disarmament, but would simultaneously aim to preserve the alliance and act in accordance with its civic responsibility to sustain a nuclear order in a classic 'Menzian' fashion.[70] As Evans and Grant would recommend, Australia ought to contribute to realising a system of 'stable deterrence', while 'progressively' decreasing the number of nuclear armaments, avoiding the 'vertical... and horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons', and achieving 'a comprehensive ban on nuclear testing'.[71] This conundrum between strategic and moral concerns and the nuanced response to it reflects the nature of the 'Menzian' and 'disarmer' traditions as opposing ideal-types on a continuum, with the Hawke-Keating government gravitating toward the latter but nonetheless retaining key aspects of the former. Thus, it would be reductive to characterise Australia's advocacy as either a naïve idealism or a superficial commitment, but rather it represented a genuine ambition to act as a good international citizen, albeit within the confines of Australia's core strategic interests.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay has aimed to explain the apparent inconsistency between Australia's anti-nuclear advocacy and its simultaneous reliance on, and assistance in maintaining, the United States' extended nuclear deterrent. In response, it was suggested that this duality can be accounted for by understanding the primacy of the concept of middle power diplomacy and good international citizenship. It was indicated that such concepts were defined not simply by an absolute moral commitment to disarmament, but rather constituted a relatively 'enlightened' form of *realpolitik* which was predicated on a mutually reinforcing amalgam of security, diplomatic, domestic, and moral consideration.

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Written by: Kye J. Allen
Written at: University of Queensland
Written for: Dr. Jon Piccini
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