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Australia's relationship with the United States has been a fundamental element of Australia's foreign posture since WW2. Nevertheless, that relationship can be shaped in different ways. This becomes increasingly important, as the United States under the Trump administration demonstrated very clearly its potential to act in authoritarian and unpredictable ways, that are directly counter to Australia's interests and values as a state. Even when putting aside this significant point, however, Australia's concerns, values and interests will always be distinct from those of the United States, either significantly or subtly. It is fundamentally important that our foreign policy reflects those differences. Two current examples illustrate this need. One concerns our involvement in Afghanistan. After 20 years of war, 41 Australian deaths and countless Afghan deaths, untold trauma and great cost, Australia has pulled all its troops out of Afghanistan. Senior retired generals have noted that we 'lost' this war and questioned the worth of our involvement. It is difficult to talk about 'losing' the war, since we never had any clear strategic objective for a long term involvement against which 'losing' could be judged. For the US, it was an effort to destroy a terrorist base, but the destruction of a base certainly does not guarantee the neutralisation of the terrorists or the form of terrorism at work, which is fed by more powerful underlying causes than the existence of a base. Australia's goal, however, seemed to simply be to support the US, to 'pay our dues' whether or not the logic of the US goals made much sense, or much sense for us. It's perhaps not surprising that this has produced such a heavy weight of trauma in Australian soldiers and raised so many questions about possible war crimes. When it's not clear why you're fighting or why you're even there, it's easy to lose your way. We fell into this war, and into staying in it. Is supporting our powerful friends only achieved by following along with their actions? Being a good ally does not require automatic agreement. This is just to avoid the work of weighing our own concerns, values and interests and arriving at our own judgement for the easier path of following along.

A second example is our relationship with China. China is a rising great power. Navigating Australia's relationship with China was always going to be very challenging; it's easy to make wrong moves. While saying some years ago that Australia didn't have to choose between China and the US, through its rhetoric our government has contributed to creating a highly polarised perspective on China. We have bought into the frame of China versus the US, with us leading some of the charge against China. There are good reasons to be critical of China and wary of its involvement in our own domestic situation, its expansionism in the South China Sea and the scale of its domestic human rights abuse (abuses that ironically China would represent as its own crackdown on Islamic terrorism). Australia has to navigate its relations with China in a more nuanced way, however, than is currently being played out in statements from various government MPs and ministers. The starkly polarised view of China playing out in the Australian press and through statements by members of government is only going to reduce our options for handling this relationship and increase the dangers of conflict. Our relationship with China, as a great power that is in our broader region, is inevitably going to be a fundamental dimension of Australia's foreign policy (which flows directly into our domestic life. The two can't really be separated.) The warlike rhetoric the government has been indulging in intensifies domestic tensions and intensifies racist incidents against Asian Australians. It does not support the wellbeing of our own democracy or the reasonable management of a difficult but significant relationship with China. Previously Australia embraced China intemperately, because of the commercial advantages we saw there. Yet arguably, beyond a small group of specialists, we have not spent the time or resources to really engage with, learn the language of, and understand the history, politics and society of our great power neighbour. Now we equally intemperately cast China as an evil empire - but again don't spend the time to learn much about it. We need to take these relationships seriously and engage with

a respectful caution, based on knowledge of and interest in the other (China in this case) and on deeply valuing our own independence and polity.

While Australia's relationship with the US is clearly very different than that with China, much the same could be said. We need to engage with a respectful caution, that respects and values our own independence and the quality of our own political life, and that keeps a careful eye on the power and interests of our interlocutor, even within the context (in the case of the US) of being a longstanding ally. We have to be able to manage a world with more than one great power and avoid pushing this scenario into another divisive, conflict riddled Cold War. We have the capacity to do this, but it requires deeply valuing and respecting our own independence as a political community, while also putting the required resources into engaging seriously with other states, whether allies, great powers or others. Merely leaning on the US does not solve our problems, only kick them down the road, where they become more polarised and more difficult to resolve.