

# I stood for US alliance as well as our China partnership

Bob Carr

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Barack Obama was in trouble. The Assad regime had crossed a red line and flung barrel bombs with chemical weapons. Punishment was called for but congress wouldn't back him. Nor would the British parliament. The Pope opposed retaliatory strikes.

It was September 2013 and, representing Australia at the G20 in St Petersburg, I had the honour of getting up and telling the US President he had Australia's support. As I noted in my diary, I was cast in something of a traditional Australian role in backing our ally. This and at least six other examples of cordial support for the US were carefully censored from the account served up by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's right-wing executive director Peter Jennings to reporter Sharri Markson in a report on page 1 of *The Australian* yesterday ("Kurt chat that belled China cat").

These two collaborators also censored from their article those occasions when I disagreed with the Chinese. In Beijing in May 2012, then foreign minister Yang Jiechi criticised the rotation of US marines in Darwin. I told him bluntly the US alliance was in Australia's DNA, part of our history. It's in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade record.

In mid-2012, Julia Gillard was proposing annual dialogues with Chinese leaders. The Chinese seemed to enjoy keeping us waiting for a response. I said we were relaxed. *The Australian's* foreign editor Greg Sheridan wrote on August 23: "This is the right tone for Canberra with Beijing — positive, constructive but ultimately unruffled and

unintimidated.” According to another diary entry, I was even ready to treat the relationship with “benign neglect”.

A balanced account would have quoted my diary entry of August 14, 2012, saying Australia’s pro-China lobby was “over-egging the pudding”. I also challenged a Paul Keating-Hugh White reference about “giving China strategic space”, asking myself, “What would this mean?”

By the way, when Sheridan reviewed my diary he was far more perceptive than Markson-Jennings: “Carr has a dialogue with himself, all the way through the book, about the proper balance of Australian policy between the US and China. He accepts the nearly universal Australian support for the US alliance. He accepts its contribution to Australian security. He believes in the future of the alliance, as well as its past.”

One year after the marines decision, the US had no appetite for another raft of strategic initiatives. It was Defence secretary Dennis Richardson, former DFAT secretary and ambassador to the US, who suggested the 2012 AUSMIN meeting in Perth could be described as “steady as she goes”. The Americans agreed. This was not a Carr frolic. It was the considered Australia-US position.

There was absolutely no occasion when Kurt Campbell, whom Hillary Clinton appointed as US assistant secretary of state, criticised Australia for working at relations with Beijing or anyone remarked on my links as NSW premier with the Chinese community. Those links were unremarkable, probably less intimate than those of more recent premiers. In any case, Chau Chak Wing is closer to John Howard than to me and is not — a big inaccuracy in the Markson-Jennings article — the donor who helped set up the Australia-China Relations Institute at the University of Technology Sydney.

Tony Abbott won a free trade agreement from the Chinese, deeply distressing Jennings. Abbott was asked by Obama to stay out of the new bank for Asia sponsored by China. Instead he joined. The right decision. Both Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull declined to dump diplomacy for patrols in the South China Sea. Right decision. But if I had done it ...?

The Australia-China Relations Institute works at illuminating decisions like these. A voice for Beijing? Well, where does that leave Abbott and Turnbull? As recently as the last election, they listed the China FTA among their proudest achievements. They said controls would add to tensions.

Jennings's ASPI receives whopping funding from US defence companies including Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and Raytheon, and is unhappy with the Coalition's China policy. Why has ASPI under Jennings taken on the job of trashing the relationship with China? He dashed out to blame the Chinese for the collapse of the census website. The Prime Minister said he was wrong.

From Kevin Rudd to Turnbull, governments have ignored his Cold War agenda without sacrificing Australian values. Three other foreign ministers and I have worked at both the US alliance and the partnership with China. It's called diplomacy.