

陸克文總理時代的澳洲與東協關係

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中文摘要

在過去二十年裡，有些像亞太經濟合作組織(APEC)等區域組織有明顯式微的趨勢，但有些區域組織卻再現活力，東南亞國協(ASEAN，簡稱東協)就是個例子，並正從以政治為主的組織往越來越重視經貿的方向發展。同時，中國經濟成長驚人，其經濟力量正向區域與全球擴散，且正在型塑其主導的區域同盟，如中國-東協自由貿易區(CAFTA)。在此背景下，澳洲出現一位新領導人陸克文(Kevin Rudd)。他似乎較前任的自由黨政府更贊成與亞洲積極交往。本文主旨即在檢視陸克文時代澳洲與東協國家與該組織的關係。

就貿易而言，若將東協視為一體，其和澳洲的雙邊貿易總額與東協與中國或日本的雙邊貿易總額大致相當。因此，雖然分開來看大多數東協國家（除新加坡與泰國外）對澳洲言無足輕重，但合起來東協就是澳洲的重要貿易伙伴。就出

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口來看，澳洲對東協國家的出口大致穩定，但對中印兩國的出口卻是大幅成長。換言之，東協對澳洲出口的重要性正在下滑。而在進口方面，雖然中國是澳洲的主要進口來源，但是從新加坡、泰國與馬來西亞進口成長率非常高，這三國對澳洲的重要性正增加中。

很明顯地，陸克文政府與之前的霍華德政府的外交政策有不同的優先順位，尤其是在澳洲與亞洲接觸方面。不只是因為陸克文本人對亞洲相當熟稔，尤其是中國，而且也因為他深知澳洲亟需在政經上與亞洲積極交往。光是出售原料給在澳洲北方的亞洲國家是不夠的，爲了澳洲長期的和平與繁榮，澳洲必須更瞭解亞洲，陸克文顯然對此一事實心知肚明。澳洲與東協亦不例外。在東協裡，有些國家如新加坡與泰國在貿易上對澳洲的重要性大於其他國家，但其他國家如印尼則在安全上對澳洲至爲重要。總之，在未來幾年，我們可以預期陸克文政府會更積極地融入亞洲，尤其是東協。

Australia-ASEAN Relations under Prime Minister Kevin Rudd

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Introduction

While the past two decades has seen the decline of some regional organisations, such as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, others have been reinvigorated. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is one example of the latter, as it moves from a primarily political association to an increasingly economic one.

At the same time we have seen the spectacular growth of China and the spread of its economic power regionally and globally. It is forming new regional alliances, including the forthcoming China plus ASEAN Free Trade Area (CAFTA).

Within this context Australia has a new leader, Kevin Rudd, who appears to favour engagement with Asia much more than the Liberal government he replaced. This paper examines Australia's relations with ASEAN and some of the directions the new government is taking with respect to this organisation.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations

Founded in the late 1960s, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations was a response to political turmoil in Southeast Asia, especially in Vietnam and Cambodia. Its original members - Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines - felt that international relationships would be better managed through a unified voice and this was particularly the case with respect to the destabilising effect of the war in Vietnam. On 8 August, 1967, the Bangkok declaration created ASEAN. Its aim was to be a cooperative body, in cultural, scientific and economic terms, but its main reason was to stop the spread of communism in Southeast Asia.²

Speaking with One Voice

Even though ASEAN was an organisation composed of very different countries, it was unusual in being the first time that the region had one voice in its international relationships. There was, for the first time, a sense of Southeast Asia being a distinctive region, and an attempt

² Curtis Andressen, "Association of Southeast Asian Nations." In *Encyclopedia of World History*. Edited by William H. McNeill et al., pp. 198-200. Great Barrington, Berkshire Publishing, 2004.

was made to bind the broad interests of member countries together.

ASEAN was created at a time of turmoil. The British government made an announcement in 1967 that it would move its troops to the east of the Suez Canal, which had a real impact on the security of the region and especially in Malaysia and Singapore. The beginning of the next year saw the Tet Offensive, a watershed event that signalled the beginning of the end of US involvement in Vietnam, and in 1969 Richard Nixon was elected in part on his promise to pull the US out of the Vietnam war. In the same year the Guam Doctrine indicated that the US would begin to shift its defence responsibilities away from the region. Three years later saw the visit of President Nixon to the People's Republic of China, which started a chain of events leading to normalisation of relations with China and the latter's open door policy. In short, this was a period of intense geo-political change and the member countries of ASEAN could see the value in having a unified voice.

Lack of Homogeneity

The fundamental flaw of ASEAN, however, is its lack of homogeneity, and this has increased with the addition of new members - Brunei (1984), Vietnam (1995), Laos and Myanmar (1997) and Cambodia (1999). The first problem is differences in ethnicity.³ Singapore, for example, is

³ For a detailed discussion see Curtis Andressen, "A Social Geographic Overview of Ethnic Minorities in Southeast Asia." In *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the Asia Pacific*, pp. 21-40. Edited by D. Myers, Darwin: Northern Territory University Press, 1995.

predominantly Chinese and Malaysia has a substantial Chinese minority. Overseas Chinese are spread throughout the region and hold a disproportionate amount of countries' wealth. There are tremendous variations in ethnicity throughout the countries of the region and this has been one of the major problems of governance and stability.

Second, ethnic differences often mean religious differences. Indonesia and Malaysia are predominantly Muslim; Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar Buddhist; the Philippines Christian; and all of the countries have (often substantial) minorities with different religions from the mainstream.

The third difference is tremendous variation in population. At one end of the spectrum is Singapore with about 4 million people and at the other is Indonesia with 237 million. The Philippines has a population of 91 million and Vietnam is nearly the same at more than 85 million. Malaysia has only 25 million and Laos under 7 million. In short, issues such as political control and stability, provision of basic services, demand for economic growth, production and consumption all vary tremendously across the ASEAN member states.

All of this variation underpins vast differences in wealth around the region. Singapore is again at one end of the scale with a per capita wealth of more than US\$30,000 and the countries of Indochina have only about 10 per cent of that amount. Within each country, too, there are extreme

variations in personal wealth that in turn contributes to political instability. In terms of purchase power parity the variations across countries is reduced, but still substantial. The wealth differences mean significant variations in Southeast Asia with respect to economic priorities, political imperatives, economic and trade structures, debt levels, foreign assistance required and so on, and makes economic interaction a complex affair.

ASEAN – Going Nowhere?

From the mid 1970s, when the Vietnam war ended, through to the early 1990s, ASEAN remained a dormant organisation. In part this was because of the problems of diversity mentioned above. Coupled with the ASEAN principles of consensus in decision-making, and non-interference in one another's affairs, it was very difficult for ASEAN member states to find common ground on issues affecting Southeast Asia. In its regular meetings issues were raised and concerns expressed but little concrete progress was made in terms of developing a common voice.

In part ASEAN was weak because member countries were economically competitive, particularly in agriculture and manufacturing. Most were competing in terms of low labour costs, and in those countries with a more developed manufacturing sector, such as Thailand and Malaysia, there was also competition in middle-level technologies, such as electronics and motor vehicle production. Defence issues were also a sticking point. The US had bases in the

Philippines and was closely aligned with Thailand. The Five-Power Defence Arrangement pulled together the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore. Indonesia supported a policy of non-alignment and ASEAN in general favoured non-interference in the region. Underlying all of this was the fear of many ASEAN countries of each other.

A Resurgent ASEAN

Many of ASEAN's member countries enjoyed dramatic economic growth from the late 1970s onwards. A combination of political stability, low cost labour, good education standards and legal systems, and in some cases plentiful natural resources attracted substantial foreign investment, particularly from Japan. As their economies have grown, so too has the urgency for greater economic cooperation. In part this reflects the greater trend towards economic globalisation, and ASEAN members are aware that they must cooperate on a regional basis. Thus, the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) was formed in 1992 and is being progressively implemented through to 2008.⁴ With the rapid growth in China's economy and its search for both natural resources and low labour costs, there has been a move towards a China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) that will take effect in 2010. On an even broader level there are continuing discussions for an ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan and South Korea) agreement. In short, ASEAN has been reborn as an

⁴ See Association of Southeast Asia homepage.
[www.aseansec.org/12025.htm]

economic entity.

ASEAN today is enjoying a resurgent usefulness. It is moving forward in terms of economic cooperation with member countries and with China in particular. It is also a forum for discussing political issues ranging from environmental problems to migration issues to security concerns. These issues link ASEAN to the region, and this brings it into further contact with Australia.

Australia's Engagement with ASEAN

Given that for many years ASEAN was a largely ineffective organisation, it was not particularly important for Australia. However, congruent with ASEAN's rebirth as an organisation with an economic focus it has become increasingly useful for Australia.⁵

In the 1980s and early 1990s in particular Australian governments made efforts to create stronger linkages with ASEAN. The Hawke and Keating Labour governments made engagement with Asia a cornerstone of Australia's international relations, and attempts were made to secure closer cooperation with ASEAN. The most significant of these connections in terms of regional context was APEC, an initiative of the Hawke government. It was an organisation committed to open regionalism, where

⁵ See Pauline Kerr and Shannon Tow. 'Australia's changing alliances and alignments: towards a new diplomatic two-step', in *Australia as an Asia-Pacific Regional Power: Friendships in Flux?* Taylor, Brendan (ed), London, Routledge, 2007, pp. 169-194.

ASEAN member states were welcome to join provided they reduced trade barriers along the lines agreed upon in the APEC charter.

Today the economic and political pressures forcing ASEAN and Australia together are more intense than ever before, and the following section sets out a number of these imperatives.

Australia's Economic Linkages with ASEAN

Making generalisations at the level of the ASEAN grouping provides some indications of the importance of trade with the members of this organisation, but it must be remembered that the diversity within ASEAN means that meaningful analysis must take place at the country level. That said, the following paragraphs set out the broad Australia-ASEAN economic connections.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics sums up Australia's general economic relations with ASEAN as follows:

Australia attaches priority to its relationship with ASEAN, which is a key regional institution comprising Brunei Darussalam, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Australia was the first country to become a dialogue partner of ASEAN, in 1974, and participates in a number of important ASEAN-related meetings, notably the East Asia

Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference.

In 2004, leaders announced the start of negotiations for an ASEAN-Australia New Zealand FTA. These negotiations are ongoing. Australia and ASEAN signed a Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism in 2004 and finalised a work programme to implement the Joint Declaration in June 2007. On 10 December 2005, Foreign Minister Downer signed the instrument of accession to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation.

In August 2007, Australia and ASEAN signed a Joint Declaration on an ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Partnership which provides a framework for the future direction of Australia's engagement with ASEAN.⁶

The summation of this standpoint is that Australia has significant economic relationships with many of the ASEAN member countries and it seeks to reinforce these through dialogue and formal political connections. One of the sticking points for many years was the reluctance of

⁶ Australia's Bilateral Relationships, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Yearbook Australia 2008.
[<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/bb8db737e2af84b8ca2571780015701e/57AF1259CBCDBEE8CA2573D20010A7D2?opendocument>]

ASEAN, led by Malaysia, to keep Australia at a distance.⁷ Hence, it was only after many years of political negotiation that the Treat of Amity and Cooperation was signed, signaling much closer involvement with ASEAN.⁸ This ultimately paved the way for a more significant level of economic cooperation, as indicated in the ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Partnership mentioned above.

In fact, this formal level of economic cooperation reinforces a trend already underway. Trade with the ASEAN countries is significant, as indicated in Table 1. Exports to ASEAN countries from Australia are shrinking, imports are growing modestly and growth in total trade is relatively slow, though the total level of trade is substantial. Compare this trend with Australia's larger trading partners, the figures for which are in Tables 3 and 4.

To put trade levels into perspective, ASEAN taken as a single entity has about the same total trade level with Australia as does China or Japan. Therefore, the total trade must be seen as important, even though most of the ASEAN countries are not significant separately (with the exception of Singapore and Thailand). In the export area the main point is that Australian exports to ASEAN

⁷ See Michael Richardson. 'Australia-Southeast Asia Relations and the East Asian Summit', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, v.59, no.3, September, 2005: 351-365.

⁸ See Michael Bliss. 'Amity, Cooperation and Understanding: negotiating Australia's entry into the East Asia Summit', *Australian Yearbook of International Law*, v.26, 2007: 63-86.

countries are roughly stable whereas exports to China and India are growing dramatically. Hence, relatively speaking ASEAN is becoming a less important export destination. On the import side the picture is slightly different. While China is the major source of Australia imports, the growth rate for both Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia is very high, so these three ASEAN countries are increasingly significant for Australia.

Table 1: Australia's Merchandise Trade with ASEAN, 2007⁹

	A\$ million	Total Share	Growth
Exports to ASEAN	18,171	10.8%	-3.3%
Imports from ASEAN	37,032	19.7%	5.4%
Total Trade (Exports + Imports)	55,203	15.5%	2.4%

⁹ Australia's trade with the ASEAN-10.
[<http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/fs/asean.pdf>]

Table 2: Merchandise Exports, Major countries of destination - 2006-07¹⁰

	Value	Share of total exports	Average annual change(a)
	\$m	%	%
Japan	32 627	19.4	7.4
China	22 845	13.6	23.9
Korea, Republic of (South)	13 071	7.8	5.9
India	10 099	6.0	32.0
United States of America	9 821	5.8	-3.9
New Zealand	9 453	5.6	4.3
Taiwan	6 192	3.7	5.1
United Kingdom	6 160	3.7	3.4
Singapore	4 625	2.7	-1.3
Thailand	4 260	2.5	13.2
(a) In the 5-year period 2001-02 to 2006-07.			

¹⁰ Source: Yearbook Australia, 2008. [International Trade in Goods and Services, Australia](#), table 31.9.

[<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/bb8db737e2af84b8ca2571780015701e/8AA440FB134D512DCA2573D20010E0C8?opendocument>]

Table 3: Merchandise Imports, Major countries of origin - 2006-07¹¹

	Value	Share of total imports	Average annual change(a)
	\$m	%	%
China	27 138	15.0	19.2
United States of America	24 927	13.8	3.0
Japan	17 409	9.6	2.4
Singapore	10 135	5.6	20.6
Germany	9 274	5.1	6.6
United Kingdom	7 402	4.1	3.5
Thailand	7 210	4.0	20.1
Malaysia	6 625	3.7	11.4
Korea, Republic of (South)	6 010	3.3	4.9
New Zealand	5 605	3.1	3.4
(a) In the 5-year period 2001-02 to 2006-07.			

¹¹ Source: Yearbook Australia, 2008. [International Trade in Goods and Services, Australia](#), table 31.10.

[<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/bb8db737e2af84b8ca2571780015701e/8AA440FB134D512DCA2573D20010E0C8?opendocument>]

Table 4: Services Exports, Major countries of destination - 2005-06¹²

	Value	Share of total exports	Average annual change(a)
	\$m	%	%
United States of America	5 286	12.6	-3.1
United Kingdom	4 356	10.4	2.2
Japan	3 184	7.6	-3.8
China	3 169	7.6	25.2
New Zealand	3 006	7.2	5.9
Singapore	2 684	6.4	4.1
Hong Kong (SAR of China)	1 574	3.8	3.5
Korea	1 451	3.5	9.0
India	1 401	3.3	21.8
Malaysia	1 201	2.9	5.9
(a) In the 5-year period 2000-01 to 2005-06.			

¹² Source: Yearbook Australia, 2008. [International Trade in Goods and Services, Australia](#), table 31.11.

[<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/bb8db737e2af84b8ca2571780015701e/8AA440FB134D512DCA2573D20010E0C8?opendocument>]

Table 5: Services Imports, Major countries of origin - 2005-06¹³

	Value	Share of total imports	Average annual change(a)
	\$m	%	%
United States of America	7 071	17.2	0.9
United Kingdom	4 004	9.7	0.3
Singapore	3 942	9.6	12.1
Japan	2 140	5.2	-0.3
New Zealand	2 111	5.1	2.5
Hong Kong (SAR of China)	1 618	3.9	1.4
Germany	1 282	3.1	2.1
China	1 122	2.7	8.5
Thailand	1 055	2.6	8.6
Switzerland	834	2.0	-2.9
(a) In the 5-year period 2000-01 to 2005-06.			

¹³ Source: Yearbook Australia, 2008. [International Trade in Goods and Services, Australia](#), table 31.12.

[<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/bb8db737e2af84b8ca2571780015701e/8AA440FB134D512DCA2573D20010E0C8?opendocument>]

Services have become increasingly important for Australia's economy given its mature level of economic development. Table 4 highlights a number of patterns in terms of services exports. Similar to merchandise exports, China and India are both showing dramatic rates of growth, though their levels are significantly below the USA and the UK, the two traditional sources of services exports for Australia. Of the ASEAN countries, only Malaysia is found in the top 10. This reflects education exports in particular. Malaysia for many years was the top source for international students in Australia though it has now been eclipsed by China - now the largest source country for international students in Australia at about 70,000. Tourism also figures highly in these figures, as does banking, finance and insurance.

With respect to services imports, Table 5 shows that the USA and the UK are again in the top positions, but Singapore and Thailand of the ASEAN countries are also found in the top 10 positions. Their growth rates are also the highest of these ten, followed closely by China in third place. Banking, finance and insurance are all significant here.

In summation, ASEAN countries are important to Australia in terms of trade though more in merchandise than services. What is also significant is the strong presence of China, and this makes CAFTA of particular interest to Australia as it combines these important economies.

New Directions in Australia – ASEAN Relations

Given the foregoing information, and the level of economic interaction between Australia and ASEAN, what are the new directions taken by the Rudd Labour government that will influence Australia-ASEAN relations?

Perhaps the most important point underpinning new initiatives is that Kevin Rudd has a personal interest in Asia. As is well known he has an honours degree in Asian Studies, speaks Mandarin and has worked in Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as well as private enterprise as a China specialist. Hence, he is aware of both the advantages and disadvantages of economic and political decisions made by Australia with respect to Asia. In this respect it must be said that he is far more informed than those in the government he has replaced.

What are his plans?

First, Mr. Rudd has proposed an economic union of the entire Asia-Pacific region paralleling that of the European Union (EU), and including the US, Japan, China, Indonesia and India.¹⁴ He states that "the purpose is to encourage the development of a genuine and comprehensive sense of community whose habitual operating principle is cooperation".¹⁵

¹⁴ ABC News. 'Rudd keen for Asia-Pacific Alliance'. 5 June, 2008. [<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/06/05/2265460.htm>]

¹⁵ Santow, Simon. "Rudd presents vision for Asia-Pacific". *ABC News*, 5 June, 2008. [<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/06/05/2265460.htm>]

In part this simply recognises existing realities. Australia's economy has been growing strongly in recent years, powered in general by trade with Asia, and in particular by China's purchases of iron ore, natural gas and coal. Moreover, it is projected that by the year 2020 Asia's GDP will account for 43% of the GDP of the world, and more than the GDP of Europe and the US combined.¹⁶

This is not a particularly new idea, however, as it has a very similar flavour to APEC. That organisation has run into problems for the same reasons that the WTO negotiations have slowed to a crawl – there are areas of trade difficult to negotiate, such as agricultural products, very different levels of economic development across the region and different views about the timetable for tariff reduction. Moreover, a monetary union of the region would be especially difficult to achieve for the same reason of diversity, though it is theoretically a positive way forward.¹⁷ On the face of it there is no apparent reason why Mr. Rudd's new vision for economic and political cooperation in the region should succeed, though he should be praised for at least trying to inject new life into regional dialogue.

Second, Mr. Rudd is very familiar with China and it

¹⁶ Rudd, Keven. 'Sighting the Future: Australia in 2020'. Australian Labour Party official website, 17 April, 2008.
[www.alp.org.au/media/0408/mspm170.php]

¹⁷ Metlikovec, Jane. 'Unified currency chance with Asian Union, says expert'. *Herald Sun*, 5 June, 2008.
[<http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,23814327-661,00.html>]

may be that this will translate into a more profound political relationship than was previously the case. The question, however, is whether this will indeed occur. Familiarity also means knowledge of problems and this issue became apparent when Mr. Rudd met with China's President Hu Jin Tao and openly discussed human rights and the recent turmoil in Tibet.¹⁸

Third, for the purposes of this paper, further engagement with China, at least in economic terms, also has implications for the ASEAN countries. With CAFTA due to come into effect in less than two years, and with an Australia-China FTA a distinct possibility, this will draw Australia into closer relations with ASEAN countries. In terms of trade this is seen to be a positive outcome though the critics of free trade do have some important points to make, such as the pain of economic adjustment in all countries concerned, and implications of closer political ties with China.

Fourth, the same may be said of India. Mr. Rudd has called for closer economic relations with India, both in terms of regional economic structures (see point number one above) and in terms of bilateral economic involvement. There is also a framework being set in place for an India-ASEAN FTA, and if this comes to pass it will also draw Australia into further economic and political involvement with ASEAN, in the same way as CAFTA will. In this respect an Australia-India FTA feasibility study is

¹⁸ Seth, S.P. "Australian needs to stop focusing on China and look to all of Asia". *Jakarta Post*, 5 June, 2008.

now under consideration.

Fifth, and following this line of reasoning, we see the possibility of ASEAN Plus Three (APT) becoming a reality in the future.¹⁹ Australia already has China, Japan and South Korea as major trading partners, so again, if this regional grouping comes to fruition then we can expect Australia to become more highly involved with the ASEAN countries. However, as with India this presupposes that Australia has a formal FTA with some of the member countries so it does not become isolated (though with strong regional growth the demand for Australia's products should continue in any case).²⁰ It is also important that Australia be involved in these organisations for more nebulous reasons. As the former deputy governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia noted:

The point that is relevant to us in Australia is that, even if some of the economic issues currently under discussion in East Asia do not seem to be primary issues in our narrow national interest, the institutional framework which builds up around those issues will be the forum and structures on which deeper regional integration will be built.²¹

¹⁹ Rudd, Kevin. 'Australia's Engagement with Asia – A New Paradigm?'. Asialink-ANU National Forum, 13 August, 2004, p.6.

²⁰ English, Tony, Curtis Andressen and Geoff Upton. 'An Australia-China Free Trade Agreement: Managing and Elephant. *Taiwanese Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol.6, 2005, pp. 3-15.

²¹ Rudd, Kevin. 'Australia's Engagement with Asia – A New Paradigm?'. Asialink-ANU National Forum, 13 August, 2004, p.7.

Sixth, Australia is making inroads into cooperation with the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). This is not only economically beneficial for Australia but is a venue where Australia can discuss its security and social concerns with its neighbours.

Seventh, Australia has been moving forward on Free Trade Agreements with a number of ASEAN countries. In 2003 the Singapore-Australia FTA (SAFTA) came into effect. On 1 January, 2010 the Thailand-Australia FTA will begin. Under negotiation is an FTA with Malaysia and an FTA is under consideration with Indonesia. In short, Australia is formally establishing closer economic relationships with a number of ASEAN countries. This is most clearly discernable in the forthcoming free trade agreement between Australia, New Zealand and ASEAN. As set out in the 22nd Australia-ASEAN Forum in May, 2008:

The Forum noted that negotiations on the ASEAN-Australia and New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA) were now in the final phase and acknowledged that the political will to achieve a substantive outcome this year existed on both sides. The Forum hoped that progress in negotiations in Hanoi in June would be sufficient to allow conclusion of the Agreement in August 2008.²²

²² Association of Southeast Asian Nations. 'Co-chairs' statement of the 22nd ASEAN Australia Forum', Canberra, 22 May, 2008.
[<http://www.aseansec.org/21577.htm>]

Indeed, progress has been made. On 28 August the agreement was concluded, and ready for formal signature in December at the ASEAN Leaders' Summit.

It may be noted that the issue of 'political will' above makes oblique reference to the Rudd government's more intensive focus on Asia. The same meeting reported that:

The Forum acknowledged the long-standing partnership between ASEAN and Australia as well as the multi-faceted challenges, including natural disasters, infectious diseases, traditional and non-traditional security threats, facing the region. In this regard, the Forum welcomed the recent adoption of the Plan of Action for the ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Partnership, which, once implemented, will take the ASEAN-Australia relationship to a higher plane.²³

In other words, Australia and ASEAN are becoming much more closely involved, particularly in economic terms, but also with respect to common political and social issues, reflected in organisations such as the ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program II (AADCP).

Furthermore, as noted throughout this paper, these connections are important because of the forthcoming CAFTA. Hence, Australia is also negotiating an FTA with

²³ Association of Southeast Asian Nations. 'Co-chairs' statement of the 22nd ASEAN Australia Forum', Canberra, 22 May, 2008.
[<http://www.aseansec.org/21577.htm>]

China. In the sense that the broader ASEAN Plus Three (APT) agreement is moving ahead, Japan and South Korea are also important for Australia. Therefore, an Australia-Japan FTA is under negotiation and an Australia-South Korea FTA is under consideration. Finally, in the geo-political context of regional trade one cannot overlook the role of the US,²⁴ and in 2005 Australia signed an FTA with America.²⁵

Finally, on a more general note it is clear that the Rudd government is returning to an emphasis on Asia education within Australian schools, and especially a focus on Asian languages. This was begun in 1994 and grew strongly until 2002 when it was abruptly cancelled by the Howard government. As Australians who do not understand Asia cannot effectively engage with Asian countries either politically or economically, it is imperative that the focus on Asia be resurrected in the Australian educational system. An early encouraging sign that the Rudd government understand this point is its recent allocation of US\$59 million to support the teaching of Asian languages in Australian schools.²⁶

²⁴ See Richard Rosecrance. 'Australia, China and the US', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, v.60, no.3, September, 2006: 364-368.

²⁵ Australian government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. 'Free Trade Agreements', Accessed 9 June, 2008.
[<http://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/ftas.html>]

²⁶ Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Radio Australia. 'Australia announces boost to Asian language teaching', Wednesday, 14 May, 2008.
[<http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/programguide/stories/200805/s2244996.htm>]

Conclusion

It is clear that the government under Kevin Rudd will have different priorities than that of John Howard, and this is especially true of Australia's engagement with Asia. Not only is Mr. Rudd personally knowledgeable about Asia, and China in particular, but he understands the profound need for Australia to be politically and economically engaged with Asia. It is not enough to sell raw materials to the countries to our north. For long term peace and prosperity Australians must know more about Asia, and it is this reality that is clearly understood by Mr. Rudd.

For ASEAN countries the same perspective holds true. Some of the countries in this organisation are more important in terms of trade than others, such as Singapore and Thailand, and others are crucial with respect to security, such as Indonesia. Both are important areas and Australia must engage both fields of contact. All indications are that Mr. Rudd understands this very well, and we can expect Australia to reintegrate with Asia in general and ASEAN in particular over the coming years.