



THE UNITED STATES STUDIES CENTRE

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MEDIA RELEASE

AUSTRALIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES

The United States Studies Centre (USSC) at the University of Sydney today released the first results of a major survey on Australia and the United States – the most comprehensive ever conducted.

The survey canvassed the views of Australians on defence, foreign, economic and trade issues, including: the US as a security partner; the image of the US and that of President George W. Bush; the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; climate change; US trade and investment; and US business and workplace practices.

On several of these issues, respondents were asked similar questions about other countries including the United Kingdom, Japan, China, Indonesia and North Korea.

Professor Murray Goot, Visiting Professor in the USSC at the University of Sydney, led the project. The research employed innovative survey techniques and includes comparisons with surveys going back 25 years. AC Nielsen (Surveys Australia) carried out the USSC survey of 1,213 Australians in July this year.

Almost all respondents (92%) expected the US to continue to be a 'very close' or 'fairly close' security partner and 79% considered the alliance with the US to be 'very important' or 'fairly important', rather than 'not important' or 'not at all important', to protecting Australia.

A similar proportion (74%) expressed a 'great deal' or 'fair amount' of trust that the US would come to Australia's defence, should our security be threatened by another country.

However, almost as many (73%) saw Australia as more of a target because of its decision to join the US in the 'war on terror'. In addition, 48% of respondents endorsed the idea that it would be better for Australia's national interests if we were to act more independently of the US. This contrasts with a 1975 opinion poll showing only 26% wanting a more independent relationship.

The survey also registers a dramatic decline in the confidence Australians have in the ability of the US 'to deal responsibly with world problems'. Only 37% expressed 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' of confidence compared with 66% in a survey conducted in 2001.

While nearly two-thirds of respondents were opposed to the US involvement in Iraq (62%) and the Australian involvement in Iraq (64%), exactly half (50%) were opposed to both the US and Australian military presence in Afghanistan despite bi-partisan political support in Canberra.

Confirming other polling, the USSC survey shows that President Bush has a serious image problem in Australia (more than two-thirds had an unfavourable view of the US President), largely because of his foreign policies. Yet the US was still viewed 'very favourably' or 'fairly favourably' by 59% of those interviewed.

Three-quarters (76%) of respondents saw global warming as an 'equally serious' or 'more serious' international problem than Islamic fundamentalism and more than two-thirds (69%) said that the US and Australia should set emission targets for reducing greenhouse gases.

The vast majority of respondents (88%) expected the US to remain a 'very close' or 'fairly close' economic partner and few (15%) were against US investment in Australia. On the other hand, more than two-thirds (69%) were 'very worried' or 'somewhat worried' about US trade subsidies and almost as many (63%) said the US was likely to do better than Australia out of the Free Trade Agreement.

There was concern, too, about the influence of American business practices and American workplace practices in Australia with 38% and 39%, respectively, saying they were 'not at all pleased' about them.

Releasing the survey today, the Acting Chief Executive Officer of the USSC, Professor Alan Dupont, said the findings revealed a far more complex and nuanced view of the United States than previous polls have suggested because of the methodology employed and the depth and breadth of the questions.

"Australians are clearly able to differentiate between the foreign policy of a particular US administration and the enduring strategic value of the US alliance, which still receives overwhelming support despite widespread opposition to the Iraq conflict", said Professor Dupont.

He also said, "The survey suggests Australian attitudes towards the US are changing in important ways, notably: a desire for greater independence within the alliance; scepticism about the benefits of the Free Trade Agreement; and Washington's capacity to manage global problems such as climate change."

Details of the results and related questions are available on the USSC website:

www.sydney.edu.au/us-studies

The second part of the USSC survey dealing with attitudes of Australians towards American cultural and society will be released in December.

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The aim of the United States Studies Centre is to deepen understanding of the United States by creating new knowledge on American culture, politics, business, government and society. The Centre's goal is to be the prime Australian source of information and commentary on the US, especially with respect to US-Australian relations. Postgraduate courses in US studies will commence in 2008.

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