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## Same, but different, foreign policies and regional strategies of Australia and New Zealand: Implication for Korea's foreign policy

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Australia and New Zealand are longtime partners of South Korea and the three like-minded countries share similar strategic interests. They are also major middle powers in the Indo-Pacific region, working with South Korea to implement Korea's Indo-Pacific strategy for Oceania, which includes South Pacific islands that have gained strategic importance in recent years. However, while Australia and New Zealand may appear similar at first glance, due to their histories and cultural traditions, they have important differences in their foreign policy postures, security perceptions, views on the Indo-Pacific region, and threat perceptions of China. Understanding these differences is vital to tailoring South Korea's foreign policy and strategy towards the two countries.

### Kiwis, Kangaroos, and Identities

As offshoots of the former British Empire, Australia and New Zealand share many cultural, historical, and social values, but they also have their differences. One of the defining differences between Australia and New Zealand is New Zealand's "Pacific identity". New Zealand describes itself as a "Pacific nation" that is rooted in South Pacific Polynesia, where the Māori originated. Its society is based on the "biculture" of New Zealand's indigenous people, the Māori, and the colonial British and Europeans. New Zealand's commitment to embracing indigenous people and the continued influx of Asian and Pacific Islander populations has cemented the country's identity as a South Pacific nation. This Pacific identity has helped New Zealand break away from the Western-centric thinking inherent in policymaking in other Anglo-Saxon countries.

Australia, on the other hand, has not developed the same Pacific identity as New Zealand. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Australia implemented an anti-immigration policy called the White Australia Policy, which excluded Aborigines, the indigenous people of the continent. There are many Aboriginal languages in Australia that reflect the diversity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples, but none of them are in mainstream use. The 2017 Australian Foreign Affairs White Paper defines national identity as one based on "shared values," including liberal democracy, the rule of law, and mutual respect, rather than on ethnic definitions. The "rules-based order" emphasized by these shared values strengthened solidarity with "like-minded countries" sympathetic to the United States.

### Security threat perceptions and foreign policy postures

New Zealand's long process of incorporating indigenous traditions and values into its culture has made it more accepting of other races, including Asians. This, in turn, has made New Zealand's perception of the Chinese threat weaker than that of other Western nations. New Zealand has also maintained a rather neutral foreign policy in the U.S.-China conflict. New Zealand's policy stance has made it the weakest link among the Five Eyes countries, with China describing its relationship with New Zealand as a "model relationship".

Australia, whose small population and open borders made it inherently insecure and dependent on its

alliance with the U.S., became one of the United States' most important security partners after World War II, aligning its foreign policy with that of the U.S. Australia tried to maintain a good relationship with China through the mid-2010s, despite China's rapid economic growth and increasing assertiveness. However, a series of events, including the 2016 controversy over Chinese interference in Australia's internal affairs, the 2018 Australian ban on the use of Chinese 5G equipment, and Australia's 2020 call to investigate the source of the COVID-19 virus, have increased the perceived threat from China. Australia's alliance-dependent diplomatic and security tradition, coupled with a growing threat perception of China, has led Australia to strongly align itself with the U.S. in its competition with China.

### **Embracing the Indo-Pacific Concept and the Indo-Pacific Strategy**

New Zealand's relatively weak threat perception of China and its independent diplomatic path have slowed its acceptance and strategic formulation of the Indo-Pacific concept. Unlike the United States, which released its Indo-Pacific vision in 2017, and Australia, which consistently mentioned the Indo-Pacific region in its 2016 defense white paper, the concept of the Indo-Pacific did not resonate in New Zealand until 2018. New Zealand "finally align[ed] with the United States" Indo-Pacific strategy in a 2021 speech by former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. In August 2023, New Zealand released the country's first National Security Strategy and 2023 Defense Policy and Strategy Statement. The National Security Strategy recognizes that New Zealand's geopolitical and strategic environment is no longer as "benign" as it once was and provides greater clarity on its previously ambiguous strategic position. Nevertheless, New Zealand still emphasizes the Pacific rather than the Indo-Pacific. The Defense Policy and Strategy Statement states that New Zealand's policy objective is to protect and promote its defense interests in the "Pacific region" and emphasizes that New Zealand's policy priority is the Pacific.

Australia, however, remained allied with the United States and was very quick to embrace the concept of Indo-Pacific. It is in Australia's interest to maintain order in the Pacific, including the South China Sea and Australia's Northern Strait, which are key import and export corridors. The country has actively cooperated and aligned itself with the U.S.-led regional order, emphasizing its "shared values". Australia's geographic location in the southern hemisphere also facilitated its acceptance of the Indo-Pacific concept. The most important tasks in Australia's Indo-Pacific strategy are strengthening its alliance with the United States and enhancing its defense capabilities. Australia's 2023 Defence Strategic Review reaffirmed that the alliance with the United States is "central to Australia's security and strategy" and that China "threatens the global rules-based order" in the Indo-Pacific region. It also proposed a Navy and Air Force-focused strategic buildup to enhance maritime combat capabilities and improve long-range strike capabilities. Australia's defense buildup, including the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines through AUKUS, is an indication of Canberra's commitment to deterrence in the region and its willingness to play an active role in shaping the regional order.

### **Implications for South Korea Foreign Policy**

Australia and New Zealand differ in their perceptions of the China threat and views on the Indo-Pacific region due to differences in national identity and national capabilities, which lead to dissimilar foreign policies and strategies. Korea's stance towards these two countries should take full consideration of the differences. The cooperation between Korea and New Zealand has been limited so far. Thus, the first step is to promote exchanges and dialogues between government officials and experts. Policy coordination between South Korea and New Zealand regarding Pacific Islands countries will be a good starting point for bilateral cooperation. Regarding relations with Australia, South Korea is increasingly participating in joint defense exercises with Australia, highlighting that defense cooperation, including in the defense industry, is one of the important items in the bilateral relationship. Because Australia is the largest ODA and maritime security provider in the Pacific, South Korea needs to double down its efforts to coordinate regional strategy with Australia.

Eventually, South Korea-New Zealand and South Korea-Australia bilateral cooperation could be expanded to a trilateral partnership. If Japan is added to this arrangement, it would include all of NATO's four Asia-Pacific partners (AP4). Apart from the AP4's partnership with NATO, close coordination among the four countries would have a significant voice and influence in the region. To this end, the AP4 countries have to fine-tune their action agenda for their mutual benefit and for the whole Indo-Pacific region. This process should begin with South Korea's enhanced cooperation with New Zealand and Australia.

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