



**WMRC Article**

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Prime Minister of Australia  
Makes National Security  
Cornerstone of Re-Election  
Campaign

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## Australia: Prime Minister of Australia Makes National Security Cornerstone of Re-Election Campaign

*In advance of federal elections in Australia, due to take place in late 2004, Prime Minister John Howard's re-election bid will be focused on national defence against terrorism and regional threats.*

<b>WMRC Perspective</b>	
<b>Significance</b>	Prime Minister John Howard laid out his policy agenda amid anticipation that he will call new federal elections before the end of next year.
<b>Implications</b>	Howard is focusing on national security, hoping to define himself as the candidate who can keep Australia safe from the new terrorist threat facing it, in the wake of the Bali terrorist attacks in October 2002 that took the lives of 88 Australians.
<b>Outlook</b>	The emergence of Mark Latham as the new leader of the opposition Labor party has moderately concerned the Howard government, as the popularity of the PM's coalition government has waned over the last six months and Latham's is steadily improving. However, barring any major political catastrophe, Howard will lead his coalition to its third consecutive victory since 1996.

### The Howard Legacy: Part I

John Howard has been Prime Minister since March 1996 - the longest serving PM in Australia's history - as leader of the Liberal Party within the ruling Liberal/National party coalition government. His election ended 13 consecutive years of Australian Labor Party (ALP) government. The first half of his tenure as PM was involuntarily dominated by social issues such as restrictions on gun ownership, following the Port Arthur massacre shortly after he became PM, in which over 30 people were randomly shot. He also had to deal with the fallout from the Supreme Court's decision regarding the rights of Aborigines, after which Howard refused to make further concessions over land ownership rights and compensation. He was also forced into a tough decision regarding the flood of asylum seekers wanting to emigrate to Australia from poor Asian and Pacific countries. Howard's conservative coalition also reduced Australia's government deficit and the influence of organised labour, placing more emphasis on workplace-based collective bargaining for wages. His government also accelerated the pace of privatisation, beginning with the government-owned telecommunications corporation Telstra.

### The Howard Legacy: Part II

The second half of John Howard's tenure has been - and will continue to be - defined by foreign policy, again in response to external forces. The Howard government has continued the foreign policy of its predecessors, based on relations with four key countries: the United States, Japan, China, and Indonesia. However, the advent of global terrorism and direct attacks against Australians has forced the Howard government to take a more aggressive posture with respect to international affairs and national security. Howard was one of the first heads-of-state to sign up his country to fight alongside the US in the war on terrorism following the 11 September 2001 attacks against the US, agreeing to send troops to depose the Taliban leadership of Afghanistan, where Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaida terrorist organisation were being allowed to operate its training camps unimpeded. The threat of terrorism was driven home in October 2002, when 88 Australian tourists were killed in a terrorist bomb attack on the resort island of Bali. In response, Howard has championed the enhancement of laws to pursue and prosecute suspected terrorists by giving law enforcement agencies new, broad powers.

Another key element of the new Howard doctrine is to employ what his government has deemed to be a policy of 'unimpeachable pre-emption', based on the model they used to intervene in the embattled Solomon Islands. Howard built a regional coalition of military personnel and police that was dispatched to the Solomons to restore law and order, after the country suffered four years of deterioration, driven primarily by escalating ethnic clashes. The Solomon Islands' government requested the armed intervention, and now that stability is well on its way to be restored, they have signed up to a 10-year multi-million dollar plan that places Australian public servants in key positions in the Solomon Islands government to help restructure the bureaucracy (see **Asia Regional: 23 July**

**2003: Multinational Intervention Force to Arrive in Embattled Solomon Islands Tomorrow**. The Howard government intends to take similar steps with respect to more of its Pacific neighbours, in order to prevent poor and somewhat fragile countries from deteriorating to such a state that terrorists and criminal elements can essentially take them over and pose a threat to the entire region.

### **Australia as 'Deputy Sheriff'**

Prime Minister Howard has been accused of being a lapdog to close ally US President George W Bush, largely as a result of Howard's extremely unpopular decision to support the US-led war in Iraq. Leading up to the war, Australians conducted massive protests, and opposition leaders consistently accused his government of not giving the international community the opportunity to find a diplomatic solution. In his defence, Howard referred to intelligence assessments that deemed then-Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein to pose an imminent an immediate threat to the world because of his possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) - a claim that was later found to have been, at the very least, an exaggeration. Howard also invited criticism last year by stating that Australia was the US's 'deputy sheriff', helping to ensure security and stability in the region. Criticisms were renewed recently when the Howard government announced that it was signing on to the US missile defence shield project, shortly after it was revealed that the US may also be permitted to build a massive military base on the north-east coast of the country.

Forging closer ties to the US has not come without a political price, but Howard is also trying to capitalise on the relationship. The two governments have been engaged in intense negotiations for a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) that would be the envy of other countries in the region, providing a significant economic boost to Australia. The good state of relations has also given Australia greater stature in world affairs; the Howard government has led many traditional US allies in Europe with its support of a tougher stand against the nuclear ambitions of North Korea, by joining the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative (see **Asia Regional: 12 September 2003: Multinational WMD Interdiction Exercises to Begin off Australian Coast**).

#### **Key Dates in Howard's Tenure as Prime Minister**

<b>March 1996</b>	First elected as Prime Minister
<b>April 1996</b>	Port Arthur Massacre results in controversial limitations on gun ownership
<b>December 1996</b>	Wik court decision regarding the 'stolen generation' and the rights of Aborigines
<b>February 1998</b>	Elimination of compulsory trade union membership
<b>May 1998</b>	Australian troops dispatched to monitor peace talk in Papua New Guinea's breakaway province of Bougainville
<b>October 1998</b>	Howard leads coalition government to another election victory
<b>June 1999</b>	Privatisation of national telecommunications provider Telstra
<b>June 1999</b>	Implementation of a national 10% Goods and Services Tax (GST)
<b>September 1999</b>	Australian troops land on embattled island of East Timor to restore order
<b>November 1999</b>	Helped defeat a proposal to create a republic in place of the constitutional monarchy
<b>July 2000</b>	Howard hints he may soon retire from politics
<b>September 2000</b>	Australia hosts most well-attended Olympic games in history
<b>May 2001</b>	Australia's churches rebuke Howard for failing to address Aboriginal issues
<b>August 2001</b>	Ship filled with 400 refugees seeking asylum is turned back
<b>October 2001</b>	Australian troops dispatched to Afghanistan as part of the US-led war on terrorism
<b>November 2001</b>	Howard leads coalition government to another election victory
<b>July 2002</b>	United Nations report highly critical of anti-immigration policies amid hunger strikes and riots in detention camps
<b>October 2002</b>	Terrorist attack in Bali kills 88 Australians
<b>January 2003</b>	Australian troops dispatched to Iraq in advance of imminent US-led war
<b>January 2003</b>	Bushfires ravage the capital Canberra and several surrounding provinces

<b>February 2003</b>	Senate passes a non-confidence motion against Howard, over his support for the US-led war in Iraq
<b>June 2003</b>	Howard announces intention to shun retirement and continue as Prime Minister
<b>July 2003</b>	Australian troops are dispatched to the Solomon Islands to restore law and order
<b>September 2003</b>	Howard reshuffles cabinet in preparation for elections in 2004

## The 'Teflon PM'

Throughout his career, Howard has been known for his skills as a political tactician. A prime example is the election in 2001, which he was expected to lose to the ALP. His government's enforcement of the controversial Goods and Services Tax (GST) was met with anger by voters and the business community, as they struggled to understand its complexity. Luckily for Howard, the ALP was also not viewed very favourably, while middle-of-the-road voters were becoming increasingly concerned about the influx of immigration. This concern brought about the creation of the ultra-conservative and nationalist One Nation party, which capitalised on voters' fears, but left moderate voters concerned over its extreme positions. With the extreme One Nation on the right and the ALP's 'soft' stance on immigration on the left, Howard captured the middle by vocally criticising what he called the 'xenophobia' of the One Nation party, while co-opting many of their positions in the adoption of a tough immigration policy, built around the creation of an immigration zone and a holding area on the neighbouring island nation of Nauru. This manoeuvring saved his government, and ensured its re-election later that year.

A more recent example is his ability to dodge criticism following the absence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq, the threat of which he used as his justification for joining the US-led war without a mandate from the United Nations (see **Australia: 6 October 2003: Bush Visit and Ongoing WMD Controversy Provide Headache for Australian PM Howard**). Howard's popularity clearly suffered when no WMDs turned up following the end of open hostilities, but in the absence of a strong and compelling candidate from the ALP, Howard continues to remain fairly popular. Even though two-thirds of Australians believe they have been misled over the case for sending troops to fight in Iraq, John Howard still holds a commanding lead in the opinion polls.

## Howard vs. Latham

After ousting ALP Prime Minister Paul Keating in 1996, the Howard-led coalition has been re-elected in October 1998 and November 2001, and currently holds 82 seats (69 Liberal/13 National) in the House of Representatives, against 65 for the ALP and 3 independents. In the Senate, the Liberal/National coalition has a total of 35 seats, against 28 for the ALP, 8 Australian Democrats, 2 Greens, 1 One Nation, 1 Country Labor Party, and 1 Independent. The fractured nature of the Senate has resulted in a number of Howard's policy priorities becoming stalled, including the further privatisation of Telstra and reform of media ownership rules. However, the ongoing uncertainty over national security and the global war on terror is working in the administration's favour, as his coalition has successfully positioned itself as the only government that can ensure the safety of Australians (see **Australia: 13 October 2003: One Year After the Bali Bombing, Are Australians Safer?**). Whatever other issues the ALP might like to exploit are all trumped by the overwhelming concerns regarding national security. This has been partially engineered by Howard, as he prepares for next year's elections.

<b>Curriculum Vitae</b>	
<b>Hometown</b>	Sydney, Australia
<b>Personal</b>	Age: 64 Wife: Janette, three children
<b>Education</b>	University of Sydney, Bachelor of Laws, 1961
<b>Professional</b>	Solicitor
<b>Political</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member of Parliament, 1974 - Present</li> <li>• Treasurer of the Commonwealth, 1977 - 1982</li> <li>• Deputy Leader of Liberal Party, 1985-1989</li> <li>• Leader of Liberal Party, 1995 - Present</li> <li>• Prime Minister, 1996 - Present</li> </ul>
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.pm.gov.au">http://www.pm.gov.au</a>

Mark Latham, the newly-elected leader of the ALP, is a controversial figure who was a surprise choice earlier this month (see **Australia: 4 December 2003: New Opposition Leader in Australia Represents Novel Strategy Using Old Tactics**). His confrontational style and brazen behaviour have previously earned him criticism from within his own party. Latham was elected following the resignation of Simon Crean, as it became clear that Crean was just not up to leading the party to challenge Howard's coalition government. The expectations for Latham are low, but his selection as leader may prove to be a gamble that pays off, probably not resulting in the recapturing of

the government, but perhaps providing enough seats in Parliament to frustrate further the efforts of the Howard government.

## Outlook and Implications

Since his days as leader of the then-opposition Liberal party, Howard has made his mark by taking on a mixture of controversial causes, such as tougher laws on gun control, aboriginal land ownership, compulsory trade unionism and welfare spending. As a centre-right politician, he has also been tough on asylum seekers and national security, and initiated a more aggressive stance on foreign policy, which has gained him the support of many middle-of-the-road Australians, who have become increasingly concerned about terrorism and the influx of south Asian and Pacific immigrants. His government has also proven to be an effective steward of the economy, due in part to an aggressive and conservative fiscal policy (see **Australia: 2 October 2003: Prime Minister Makes Tax Relief in Australia More Likely**). However, he will make national security and the continuing threat of terrorism the cornerstones of his campaign for re-election.

Howard has proven adept at reading the public and making populist decisions, in addition to sending the right political signals with respect to how his government is run (see **Australia: 29 September 2003: Major Reshuffle Readies Australian Government for 2004 Election Campaigning**). In the second half of his tenure, Howard has cultivated an image as a seasoned and authoritative statesman. Having spent the last 30 years in parliament, he has proven his political skills and his knowledge of government. However, this very longevity could prove to be his greatest liability, as voters may experience 'Howard fatigue' and look towards new leadership. Latham's style and relative inexperience is not likely to present a formidable challenge to Howard, especially since he also has precious little time to prepare. However, Latham will not go quietly (see **Australia: 16 December 2003: New Opposition Leader in Australia Mounting Challenge to Prime Minister**). He has already taken a page out of the Howard political pre-emption book by expressing his willingness to shift ground on legislation giving the attorney-general executive power to ban terrorist organisations. In the end, he may do well enough to gain a larger proportion of seats in Parliament, and further frustrate the policy priorities of the Howard government.

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