

# “DOES AUSTRALIA HAVE THE COURAGE TO ESTABLISH A DEGREE OF STRATEGIC INDEPENDENCE”

DEFENDING AUSTRALIA SYMPOSIUM  
THE US MILITARY PRESENCE IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA  
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Thank you for asking me to participate in this discussion. You might think that Australia is a strategic independent nation, but in fact, we never have been.

From our foundation in 1901 to the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, we relied on Britain for defence. We thought the Empire, the British Navy, would always be able to save us. After the war, the United States was coerced into agreeing to the ANZUS Treaty. Percy Spender, as Foreign Minister, had made it plain that we would not sign the Japanese Peace Treaty without some assurance from the United States.

ANZUS is a commitment to consult, any real support being dependent upon a future congressional resolution. It refers to Australian and American territory or forces in the Pacific. It was tested once by Barwick, when our troops were fighting in Borneo, against Indonesia battalions in confrontation. For our troops, it was a real war. Indonesia was attacking our forces, the United States made it plain, ANZUS did not apply in this instance.

Nevertheless, there was a rationale for our close relationship with the United States, during the Cold War and until the break-up of the Soviet Union. The international context of the time made strategic dependence on the United States a suitable policy, albeit not ideal. The Soviet Union was regarded as an outward looking, thrusting, aggressive force, whose invasion of Afghanistan, as late as 1979, seemed to confirm that view which was accepted, not only in Australia, but by the United States, by Britain, by Germany, by NATO generally. Thus, the policy of strategic dependence upon the United States made sense during the Cold War.

In 1990, the Soviet Union disintegrated. The threat of Soviet aggression disappeared. The ideological war appeared to be over. America emerged supreme, the absolute power, no challenger. This was an opportunity for Australia to say, well now, we need to exhibit a little more strategic independence. We need to make our own decisions. We live in the Western Pacific, our priority should be to carve out better and secure relationships with countries of our immediate region, East and South East Asia. The strategic need for a protector was no longer present.

Instead of showing some degree of strategic independence in our policies, we chose quite deliberately to ally ourselves, and to tie ourselves, much more closely to America's coattails, than ever. This was a major strategic error, a betrayal of Australia's national interest.

I would like to talk about a four reasons as to why this was an error and why Australia and its leaders need to display courage in order to rectify it.

The first major reason that continuing our policy of strategic dependence on America was an erroneous choice is that substantial changes have occurred within the United States. America's political make-up, attitudes and aspirations have changed in the decades since the Berlin Wall came down. Transition in America's international outlook and political attitudes is not a new thing. Between the World Wars, the United States wanted nothing to do with European powers. Except for the Western Hemisphere that America saw as its strategic realm, the United States went through a period of extreme isolation. This attitude ensured America would only be a late entrant into the First World War and meant it was hesitant about getting involved in the Second World War. Yet such attitudes only in part, explain why America left Britain fighting alone for nearly two and a half years against the horror, the brutality and the attempted genocide of Hitler's Germany. Whilst the loss of life was tragic, I am glad Japan attacked Pearl Harbour. America might not have come into that war if Japan had left America alone. It is notable, that even though Japan was then an ally of Germany, after Pearl Harbour, the United States declared war on Japan, but not on Germany. It was Germany that declared war on America.

The United States emerged from the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War as the wealthiest and the most powerful, single nation. Her power however, was

always held in check by the power of the Soviet Union. The two superpowers balanced each other. It was a bipolar distribution of power.

After 1990, that restraint was removed. There was no counter to American power. The European Union, Japan and the newly formed Russian Federation were no match for the world's last remaining superpower.

As a result, we have witnessed a rise in American exceptionalism – unchecked and unbalanced. This notion has always been present since the birth of the nation. Yet with its power unchecked and a sense of triumphalism brought about by victory in the Cold War, the idea of American exceptionalism, a nation chosen by God, endowed with a manifest destiny to bring democracy, freedom to the world, virtually as a God given mandate, has risen to new heights. The simultaneous political rise of the neo-conservative movement in the post-Cold War era, particularly under Bush Jnr, has made sure these notions have become central to American foreign policy.

The documents that have been published by the Project for the New American Century lay claim to America's future; they are a veritable neo-conservative manifesto. Read their 1997 Statement of Principles, established by the leading neo-conservatives of the day, by people who surrounded, and controlled the Bush Jnr Administration. They believed that America would only be safe, if the whole world was a democracy in America's image. America's duty was to persuade the world to pursue that path, if possible by persuasion, if not, by force of arms.

The second reason I believe strategic dependence is a policy not worth maintaining are the wars of no strategic importance to Australia that we have become embroiled in as a dutiful American ally. In the cases of the invasion of Iraq I have no doubt the philosophy I've just discussed was the basic cause of the invasion. As soon as the Bush Jnr Administration was in place, the United States was talking about invading Iraq. Senate reports, under Senator Carl Levin's name, has made this very clear.

It was the Bush Jnr Administration that decided to tell the world that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, which many people in the intelligence world, knew to be a lie. The administration

wasn't getting the intelligence it wanted, so they established a special organisation in the Pentagon to cherry-pick and slant intelligence, to serve a policy, already determined by the White House. The political changes in America seem to make such approaches to policy making acceptable.

We followed blindly in that course, not because of ANZUS, it has no relationship to Iraq, but because we wanted to cuddle up to America. Tie ourselves to America's coattails in a totally mistaken view that smaller countries can buy brownie points with major countries. So we participated in the lie. The British were leading proponents because Prime Minister Blair also wanted to protect his relationship with the United States. The result, an Iraq in chaos.

President Bush Snr understood that America did not have the capacity, the knowledge or the skills to replace Saddam Hussein with a stable, inclusive government in 1990. His wisdom has been demonstrated to be totally correct and key advisors from his administration tried to counsel his son to this affect, but they were totally ignored by Bush Jnr and the neo-conservatives around him. Our government followed and committed Australia to America's folly.

It is not the first time we have done this. I supported the invasion of Afghanistan because it was authorised by the Security Council to hunt Al Qaeda. America changed the mission to establish democracy, American style, in Afghanistan. The mission is an impossibility. Afghanistan has never been a country with a strong, central government. It has always been a federation or confederation of warlords with their own turf, their own power, their own interests. It will revert to that as America withdraws, just as certainly as Iraq has descended into chaos, which is reported almost daily. It is sheer folly to assume that systems of government and society that work in America will work in Iraq or Afghanistan – it ignores the historical, cultural and societal idiosyncrasies of both countries. It overstates the persuasiveness and effectiveness of American-style democracy.

We have been heavily involved in 3 wars, one ongoing, because of our relationship with America. It is a long while ago and carries much sadness, but I want to refer for a moment to Vietnam.

During the course of the war, Prime Minister Holt made a decision to expand our forces in Vietnam to 3 battalions, which I then had the

responsibility to administer, the CIA was already reporting that the war in Vietnam was virtually a busted flush. Their analysts had been remarkably far-sighted and more accurate than the American Army, upon whom President Johnson mostly relied. General Westmoreland was saying, *“give me more troops and we will win”*, that led to an Army of 600,000 Americans in Vietnam. The CIA had been saying, the Viet Minh is more nationalist than communist. They have made a decision to endure any hardship, to make any sacrifice, to win the independence of Vietnam and to shake off the last vestiges of colonialism. They were not going to allow American imperialism to replace the French. They were not going to allow a government, subject to American control.

I am sure Harold Holt did not see these CIA reports. You could hardly imagine President Johnson saying *“well Harold, before you finally commit these additional forces to Vietnam, you had better read a contrary view, from our CIA. They are saying the ship is already sinking. I, the President, say they are wrong, but in fairness, you should see the evidence they have.”* Now, President Johnson was not that kind of President, he would not share that information with Harold Holt, who was one of the most decent people I have ever known.

At the time, we unfortunately believed that communism was monolithic, outward thrusting, aggressive. Vietnam, one more fight on the scale of events. The CIA had a better understanding than the politicians. I make this point, to show that Iraq is not the only war in which we followed America on a lie. Although, in the circumstances of the time, we thought that lie to be the truth, but there were those in America, who knew it was not and did not share it with their surrogate ally.

The third reason for my concerns about strategic dependence is we have become complicit in the immoral behaviour the changes in American politics now accepts as a legitimate means for achieving strategic aims.

For example, the intelligence gathered at Pine Gap is now used to target drone attacks. The facility was always an intelligence gathering operation, but the development of new weapon systems, the advancement of technology has grown so fast, that Pine Gap is now integral to a great variety of American offensive capabilities. It has become integral to the drone killing program which President

Obama has used massively. There are many American experts, including those who know Afghanistan and Pakistan well, who say that the program is totally counter-productive. For every terrorist killed, ten or more are created, vowing revenge because of hatred of America.

I have no problem with drones as such, if they are used against enemy combatants, in a country with whom we are at war, then they are just another rather horrible weapon of war. If they are used against a country with whom we are meant to be at peace, with whom we are meant to have friendly relations, that is a member of the Commonwealth, like Pakistan, against the wishes of successive governments, then that is a complete violation of Pakistan sovereignty.

President Obama, in a major speech earlier this year, says he respects the sovereignty of other states, but quite blatantly his drone program does not. We are complicit in it. Under what law does this operate? We have signed on to the International Criminal Court, are we culpable under that? There is no Australian law that would give cover to people operating out of Pine Gap. American law in relation to the use of drones for these purposes, is innovative, untested and could even end up being challenged in the United States.

The so-called legal basis that the drone attacks rely upon is the War Powers Resolution and it is totally unlike any other which has passed through Congress. In the past, war powers resolutions have related to an enemy, a country, so there have been strict geographic boundaries for the war. There has also been a strict timeline. Perhaps 60 days after the end of formal hostilities. The current power is a power without any restraint, enabling the President to order an attack, anywhere in the world.

That same power has also been used to establish a secret army, the Joint Special Operations Command or JSOC. Whilst JSOC has existed for some time, its purpose was significantly altered and mandate expanded under Bush Jnr. Composed of the best of the most elite forces in the United States, to carry out secret raids and target individuals for the "kill list". It has been given delegated authority to establish its own "kill lists". The organisation established under this authority is not subject to any of the restraints imposed on the CIA. Former Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld wanted a force that

would be under the control of the executive, in other words, of the White House. He did not want to have to suffer the restraints of reporting to Congress, to the Oversight Committees. The President has claimed he keeps Congress informed, but there are others who believe, that many operations are undertaken without any knowledge of anyone in Congress.

Many would have hoped that President Obama would expose and wind back these aspects of President Bush Jnr's Administration. He has not done that, he has ramped them up. Are we to take it, that with Republican and Democratic support, the secret aggressive killing force is now a permanent part of the American political machine?

It has become such an important part of American operations, and Pine Gap is such an integral part of feeding information in, which enables these operations to be undertaken, that at the very least, the Australian Government should be telling the United States, we do not like these operations, we do not want to be a party to them, we do not wish to be complicit in them. You had better establish alternative processes that do not touch Australia. You cannot use information collected at Pine Gap to support drone targeting. I would like to think we could put a timeline on that, in which Pine Gap operations would cease or return to their original purpose.

The fourth and final reason I believe strategic dependence should end is that I do not want Australia to follow America into a fourth war, blindly, unthinkingly, with little regard for Australia's national interest, and little regard for our security. A fourth war would be in the Western Pacific. It would likely involve China.

America has a two-track policy in relation to China. One-track, consultation, an attempt to understand each other better, solve matters diplomatically. The second-track, in case that doesn't work, build a ring of armaments from Japan to the Philippines, to Australia to Singapore. Establish strategic alliances with Thailand and India. We are the southern linchpin of America's policy of containment.

You may believe, that the "rotating through" marines, represent more a training, than an active military force, but if you read the statements of Leon Panetta, former Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel, current Secretary of Defense, the Marine Air-Ground Taskforce

is a fully fledged fighting force, capable of deploying power, anywhere throughout the region. If anyone doubted that, read the news reports this morning and see the pictures of the United States naval units. A strong taskforce attached to the Marine Air-Ground Taskforce. If America wants to use that force, do you think they are going to ask an Australian Government beforehand?

If the next war America is likely to be involved in is in the Pacific, it becomes much more important to Australia's own security, than does anything that happens in Iraq or Afghanistan. It will have implications for our relations with our neighbours, with Japan, with China, with Indonesia, of fundamental and far reaching consequences.

If you believe that a war in the Western Pacific is fanciful, and incapable of occurring, late last year Hugh White, wrote and published that a war of some kind, between China and Japan, is possible, even through this year, with the Senkaku/Diaoyu island dispute being a potential catalyst. I think Hugh was out in his timescale, but probably right in his conclusion.

What are the danger points in the Western Pacific? China's power is growing, certainly. She is expanding her military. She is developing a Blue Water Navy, but America's military expenditure is 41% of the world's total, China's is 8%.

I don't see a problem with the Taiwan Straits, or over Taiwan. Cross-strait movement of people and of investment is great. People most involved, have made a decision that the issues between the two parts of one China, will be resolved peacefully.

There are also problems in the South China Sea. ASEAN is seeking to establish a Code of Conduct which does not resolve territorial disputes, but which will nevertheless, govern behaviour of participants in the South China Sea, and avoid major conflict. They are seeking to engage China to join such a Code of Conduct. If it is left to ASEAN to do the negotiating with China, without outside interference, I believe over time, there would be success, but it won't happen quickly.

If such a process could be extended to cover the East China Sea, and involve Japan and South Korea, that would be even better. A new



found sense of nationalism is alive and well in Japan. There have been many instances, in which members of Prime Minister Abe's Government, which taken by themselves might mean not much, but which altogether indicate a totally different mood, in Japan. Their military power is already much greater than we understand it to be. Greater than any single country in Europe by a very long way, with the possible exception of nuclear weapons. That is a gap that Japan could fill without much trouble.

The New York Times has written articles suggesting that the islands in dispute between China and Japan, should more properly belong to China. The New York Times is not an anti-American journal, it has a reputation for accuracy, for careful journalism, and it gives pause when one looks at Japanese comments, which assert that there is no dispute, they are just ours. Well, there is a dispute.

One of the things our American friends do not understand, is that China went through a period of extraordinary weakness late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many unequal treaties were forced on China at that time, including one from Japan in 1895, after the military victory over the Chinese. The indignities, then experienced by China, have in large measure, been redressed, but those not redressed, will be. If western strategists want to avoid real problems with China, they should take that as a given in Chinese attitudes. That affects the dispute with Japan.

As presently advised, I would see Japan, less probably the Philippines, both of whom believe they could rely on America for support, as being the most likely source of provocation to China and of conflict with China. There has also been pressure for us to establish a defence treaty with Japan, which would directly involve us, in any such dispute. That is something we should resist, and say it will never happen. Any such conflict is well outside the terms of ANZUS, as Iraq was outside the terms of ANZUS. If the Americans say, we must do our bit, we should tell them that we are not involved. It is not our fight, it is not our problem.

The western press write that China has been provocative and aggressive, and sight their increased military expenditure, not recognising how small it is compared to America's. China has about 220 nuclear missiles and America nearly 8000. The misinformation about China in the western media is massive. It is designed to

condition people to believe that China is the ultimate enemy. If that is what the people accept, then it will happen.

There is no inevitability about any of this. If America is prepared to share power as Hugh White recommends, then there is not going to be a problem, but all the signs since 1990 and everything I have read over the last 20 years, suggest that that is not the American intention. They are number one and intend to stay number one and will fight to do so. We have interest in a peaceful world and it is time we began to cut ourselves off America's coattails. We do not want to be caught between the United States and China. There would be no real winners in such a war. Everyone would lose. A small country allied to the United States would lose most of all. In these circumstances ANZUS would be no use to us.

You might say that is the worst case scenario. Well, in one sense it is, but in another sense it is not. I believe America's actions are short sighted, and incapable of conceiving anything other than American success. The United States does not seem to realise or at least appreciate that her actions are already leading to talks between China and Russia. They could easily force those two into a strategic relationship, which would involve an attack on one, being an attack on both. That would lead to a serious escalation of any hostilities in the Western Pacific. On a worst case scenario, that could also involve NATO.

We should be telling the Americans, we are not going to be part of any of that. We are no longer going to follow you into your wars, especially since we can no longer rely on your intelligence and interpretation of intelligence. We have been misled in relation to Vietnam, as I believe President Johnson misled the American people. We were certainly misled in relation to Iraq, as were the American people. That is not good enough. We have got to rely on our own people, and make our own judgements.

If America is prepared to accept ANZUS under those terms, that is fine, I have got no problem with the Treaty, but I don't want Darwin to be a southern linchpin of a policy of containment, against China, which Darwin has allowed itself to become. Our government, so far, has been just as dishonest about these matters, as has the American government, and that also, is no comfort.

Australia needs to decide where its future lies and how it plans on getting there. The four areas that I have just outlined should inform our political leaders and foreign policy makers. We need to be aware of the domestic changes in America, the folly of engaging in conflicts of no strategic significance, being complicit in unethical tactics and the risk of a major conflict in our region.

Australia needs to decide where we are heading, and we need to make this decision for ourselves. Do we attempt to carve a role for ourselves in the region through an independent, intelligent and consultative foreign policy? Or do we continue to rely on an ally whose strategic interests and domestic political values might not directly align with our own?

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and I am happy to answer any questions.

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