

# **The Most Dangerous Nation in the World: Rethinking the United States – Australia Relationship**

Russia, China, North Korea and Iran. These are the countries that normally, at least in Western nations, spring to mind as being the most dangerous in the world. However there is one nation that trumps all of these nations combined, and by orders of magnitude, when it comes to flaunting international law, invading other countries, participating in the overthrow of legitimate governments and generating instability at a global scale. That country is Australia's long term ally, the United States of America. This paper argues that it is in fact the United States (US) that is the most dangerous nation in the world.

This controversial view is very much counter to the conventional wisdom on the importance of the US to global and Australian stability and security. There is however a large body of evidence which, when viewed objectively and without applying the double standards so common in the Western world, supports the view that it is indeed the US that is the most dangerous nation in the world.

This will be demonstrated by providing examples, from a very long list, of how the US has flouted international norms to create instability around the world. The pursuit of empire, the root cause of many of the US' failings, will place US foreign interventions into context. The potential for future conflict between major nuclear armed powers will then be examined through the prism of US aggression against Russia. Some selected elements of internal dysfunction within the US that are likely to undermine its imperial project will then be described.

Based on the conclusion that the US is the world's most dangerous nation the paper will propose that Australia should move from a strategy of strategic dependence on the US to one of strategic independence. This is assessed as being the approach most likely to ensure Australia's future security in an increasingly unstable world.

## ***The United States: The Corrupted Hegemon***

*To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.<sup>1</sup>*

Judgement of the International Military Tribunal

On what basis can the claim be made that the US is the most dangerous country in the world? After all the US prides itself on being the land of the free, a bastion of democracy and a land of opportunity. Australia's relationship with the United States has been described as being based on 'our shared values, on our mutual respect and our common commitment to make the world a

better place.<sup>ii</sup> This suggests that values such as democracy, freedom and the rule of law are the values we purport to share with the United States.

The evidence suggests however that there is a vast difference between the stated values of the US and its actual values. Indeed there are numerous instances, too many to list, of actions taken by the US, over a prolonged period of time, which are the antithesis of its stated values. This behaviour is so commonplace that it has become normalised; suggestive that acting contrary to its stated values is not an aberration but rather an expression of the actual values of the US. Examples include:

- The invasion of countries such as Iraq in 2003 without a UN Security Council Resolution, an act of aggression in clear violation of the UN Charter.<sup>iii</sup>
- Exceeding the use of force as authorised by UN Security Council Resolutions such as occurred in Libya leading to the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi and the subsequent chaos in that country.
- The repeated use of military force (such as air and drone strikes) over prolonged periods of time that violates national sovereignty in countries including Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen and Syria. Some 3,000 to 4,000 people have been killed by these strikes in Pakistan and Yemen alone, of which only a minority are likely to have been terrorists.<sup>iv</sup> This includes attacks on at least eight wedding parties.<sup>v</sup>
- Torturing detainees through ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’ such as water boarding which is illegal under both US and international law.<sup>vi</sup>
- Sponsoring regime change and/or undermining legitimate governments in many countries including Afghanistan,<sup>vii</sup> Chad, Chile, Georgia, Honduras, Iran,<sup>viii</sup> Nicaragua, Panama and Syria and most recently, it appears, in Brazil.
- Providing weapons and training support to terrorist groups, often relabelled as ‘moderates’ such as in Syria where US supported rebel groups are ‘co-mingling,’ with, declared terrorist organisations such as Islamic State and the Al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat Al Nusra.
- Supporting autocratic, dictatorial regimes such as Saudi Arabia that violate human rights, may be state sponsors of terror and are responsible for committing war crimes.

How is it that a nation that on the surface espouses the best that humanity has to offer can diverge so far from its stated values? This can be answered in one word; empire.

An empire can be defined as “an arrangement among nations, backed and usually imposed by military force, which extracts wealth from a periphery of subject nations and concentrates it in the imperial core.”<sup>ix</sup> By this definition the US is unmistakably an empire as demonstrated by its centrality in global institutions, the role of its financial system, its military budget, hundreds of international military bases and willingness to use military force to achieve policy objectives. Empires are a wealth pump, pumping wealth from the extremities to the core. The fact that 5% of the world’s population who live in the US consume a quarter of the world’s energy and a third of its raw

materials and industrial product<sup>x</sup> demonstrates the effectiveness of the USs imperial wealth pump.

With the demise of the USSR in 1989, the US and its imperial system faced no existential threats. However rather than consolidating its power base through diplomacy, the US took another path as encapsulated in the Wolfowitz doctrine. The first objective of this doctrine was to:

“prevent the re-emergence of a new rival .... that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union. This is a dominant consideration .... and requires that we endeavor to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power.”<sup>xi</sup>

The Wolfowitz doctrine is a continuation of a doctrine that has dominated US strategic thinking since the early nineteenth century. Namely that “expansion .... is the path to security.”<sup>xii</sup>. What this doctrine calls for is nothing less than global hegemony with the US as the hegemon. The limitations of this doctrine when applied at the global scale should be obvious. Not all nations benefit from US hegemony; at some point a country, or group of countries, will be both unwilling to submit to US hegemony and have the wherewithal to resist. Russia, Iran, North Korea and China all fit into this category and as such, are viewed as a threat to the US.<sup>xiii</sup>

The pursuit of empire has resulted in the corruption of the very values that the US supposedly stands for. The widespread belief in US exceptionalism amongst that countries political elite has led to a view where the US is not subject to ‘international law and norms’ and is free to conduct ‘anticipatory self defence.’<sup>xiv</sup> These factors explain the long list of actions of dubious legality, if not outright illegality, taken by the US over the decades and why any nation not willing to submit to US hegemony, even when not in that nations interests, is seen as a threat that must be defeated. This will now be examined through a case study of US aggression against Russia.

### ***The United States: Poking the Bear***

*It is not the aim of NATO to create a military barrier against broad-scale Russian aggression, because such aggression is not on the agenda and no intelligence assessment suggests such a thing.*<sup>xv</sup>

NATO General Petr Pavel

Since the collapse of the USSR, Russia has intervened militarily in five countries, four of which, including the Ukraine, were in territory of the former USSR. The fifth country is Syria where Russia has conducted a legal deployment of military forces at the request of the Syrian Government (unlike US involvement which is illegal under international law).

Despite this limited use of military force, particularly when compared to US interventions in the same time period, listening to the near hysterical language

of some senior NATO commanders, many Western politicians and corporate media, you would think that Russia was poised to start World War Three. The mantra of 'Russian aggression' has been repeated so many times that it has become a thought stopper; preventing any logical assessment or discussion on the details of so called 'Russian aggression' and shielding US led aggression against Russia.

The details of so called Russian aggression highlights that this mantra appears to have little substance, requiring the willing suspension of disbelief to be taken seriously. Examples include the buzzing of US military aircraft and naval vessels by Russian aircraft in the Black and Baltic Seas or the Russian military conducting military exercises along, but within, its own borders. This is claimed as being aggressive whereas deployments of US troops, vessels and aircraft thousands of kilometres from the US on Russia's borders are supposedly not!

A rather more complex example is provided in the Ukraine where repeated and widespread accusations of Russian aggression by Western media and politicians have been used to mask US involvement in triggering the civil war that commenced in 2014.

The US has a long history of undermining the Ukraine (including support to Nazi elements) dating back to the 1950s.<sup>xvi</sup> Since the collapse of the USSR, the US has invested some five billion in the Ukraine<sup>xvii</sup>, supposedly for democracy building. Given the endemic corruption in the Ukraine<sup>xviii</sup> it is highly likely however that much of this money was used to lay the groundwork for regime change. This is further evidenced by leaked telephone conversations<sup>xix</sup> between US officials discussing who would replace the sitting Ukrainian President Yanukovich in the 2014 coup, visits by US politicians such as Senator John McCain to Ukraine during the coup and the appointment of a US citizen and former State Department employee to the position of Finance Minister.<sup>xx</sup> There are also indications that 'third parties' were responsible for the massacre in the Maidan (that triggered the ousting of the sitting president) which had 'CIA fingerprints' all over it.<sup>xxi</sup>

The propaganda against Russia generally, and President Putin specifically, appear to be but one part of a broader campaign to defeat Russia. This campaign includes many lines of operation including:

- The continued expansion of NATO eastward towards Russia's border despite assurances to President Gorbachev at the end of the Cold War that NATO would not expand 'one inch to the East.'<sup>xxii</sup>
- The destabilisation of countries on Russia's periphery such as Georgia and Ukraine.
- The imposition and continuation of economic sanctions on Russia whilst excluding Russia from international trade treaties.
- Diplomatic snubs such as not attending the Victory in Europe parades.

This campaign has however been less than effective and in many ways counterproductive with the net result being a stronger Russia. This is evidenced by:

- The accession of Crimea, including its strategically important ports, to Russia by an overwhelming majority of Crimean's,<sup>xxiii</sup> whilst the conflict between separatists in the east of Ukraine and the Ukrainian government appears to have reached an uneasy stalemate.
- The enhancement of Russia's relationship with China to the point that it can now be considered 'a comprehensive partnership and strategic collaboration.'
- With Russia seeing the West as unreliable and untrustworthy it is increasing its levels of economic self sufficiency through 'import substitution.' Whilst the Russian economy may not be booming it appears to have stabilised and there are several sectors such as agriculture<sup>xxiv</sup> and arms exports that are experiencing strong growth.
- The rise of alternate institutions such as the Asian Investment Infrastructure Bank, of which Russia is the third largest shareholder, the Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (recently bolstered with India and Pakistan joining as members).
- The strengthening of the Russian financial system through alternate financial arrangements such as international trade denominated in currencies other than the US dollar, the creation of a Russian alternative to the SWIFT system for international currency transfers and Russian government bond sales on international markets.<sup>xxv</sup>
- The consistently high level of popularity for President Putin and the unifying effect of Western aggression on the Russian population.

The frantic language used to describe Russian aggression (aggression which Stephen Cohen, professor emeritus of Russian studies and politics at New York University and Princeton University states "clearly does not exist"<sup>xxvi</sup>) is perhaps a symptom of how successful Russia has been in both resisting US led Western aggression and the success of its own foreign and domestic policies.

So if Russian aggression "clearly does not exist," a view supported by at least one of NATO's leading generals, why does the US and its Western allies continue with this mantra? There are several reasons why this is likely the case. These include:

- The real enemy of the US is independent nationalism, particularly when it threatens to become a "contagious example."<sup>xxvii</sup> Russia (and China's) maintenance of its national sovereignty in policy making and unwillingness to submit to US demands provide a "contagious example" which if not defeated will encourage other nations to exercise their own sovereignty and weaken the US imperial structure.
- Maintaining the relevance of NATO as polls indicate that less than half of Europeans from NATO member countries are supportive of their country using force if another NATO member was to be attacked.<sup>xxviii</sup> Without a clear threat NATO has no reason for its continued existence, and thus a

continued US military presence in Europe. Creating the perception of Russian aggression thus justifies the protection of Europe by the US for many decades to come.

- Despite a markedly smaller defence budget compared to the US, Russia appears to have achieved overmatch against the US in many categories of weapon systems including artillery, tanks, air defence, cruise missiles and electronic warfare.<sup>xxx</sup> Creating the perception of Russia as a threat to the US and Europe thus makes a case for greater defence spending, particularly as military spending in most NATO countries has been declining.<sup>xxx</sup> This also appears self serving in that many of the Think Tanks that help shape political decisions and public opinion are funded by the military industrial complex that profits from increased military spending.

Whilst US aggression against Russia has been analysed here, Russia is not the only major power that is a target of US aggression. The US pivot to Asia, 'freedom of navigation operations' in the South China Sea, the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal and attempts to increase US ties with countries such as Vietnam and India all point to a similar, if at this point slightly less aggressive, stance towards China. The deliberate decisions made by the leadership of the US to increase tensions with both Russia and China, two major nuclear armed military powers, as a means of attempting to maintain the US's objective of establishing global hegemonic power could very well result in a miscalculation by any of these powers that could lead to a major conflict and not inconceivably the destruction of humanity. There are several reasons that would however suggest that US aggression against these countries is actually an indication of weakness rather than strength.

### ***The United States: The Centre Cannot Hold***

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, ... The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.*

William Butler Yeats

The underlying assumption both within the US and by many of its allies is that the US will retain its position as the global hegemon for the foreseeable future. For example the 2016 Defence White Paper (DWP) states that the 'United States will remain the pre-eminent global military power over the next two decades.'<sup>xxx</sup> It will be argued that this assumption is flawed; the US cannot hold its current position for much longer. Indeed much of the rhetoric and responses from the US on issues such as Russian aggression or Chinese expansion in the South China Sea seems to indicate a desperate attempt to cement the status quo before the balance of power switches from the US uni-polar moment to a multi-polar world.

Several arguments will be presented, that expand upon those provided in a previous essay,<sup>xxxii</sup> to explain why US global hegemony will collapse within a timeframe that is likely to cause significant disruption to Australia's current

strategic outlook as described in the DWP. These arguments include the continued support for US policies by its client states, dysfunction within the US itself and the unhealthy state of the US (and Western) media echo chamber.

Just as every empire requires a foe, a role for which Islamic terrorism has been supplemented in the last few years by Russia and China, it also requires client states. Client states of the US imperium include most of Western Europe, Israel and Australia. Client states support 'the empire in exchange for a share of the spoils.'<sup>xxxiii</sup> The costs for client states are however rising whilst the share of the spoils is waning – a common trend amongst empires in decline. Examples include the impacts caused by EU sanctions on Russia, at the behest of the US, and Russia's resultant counter sanctions. This has resulted in significant economic hardship to European nations whilst having negligible impact on the US. The terrorist attacks in Paris, and elsewhere in Europe, and the European refugee crisis can be traced back to the US led/Western supported interventions in countries across the Middle East since 2001. Another trend showing that the continued support for US foreign policies will at the very least be questioned in the future is the rise of anti-establishment politicians in many European countries such as Jeremy Corbyn in the UK, Marine Le Pen in France and Grillo Peppe in Italy. Cracks are even starting to appear within the NATO alliance with the German Foreign Minister stating that NATO has a 'bellicose policy towards Russia' and is 'warmongering.'<sup>xxxiv</sup> Given the economic weakness and discontent evident in many European countries it appears only a matter of time until some of these client states will act in their own national interests and sever or change the nature of their relationship with the US (and EU), making it increasingly difficult for the US to maintain its hegemony.

Author and social critic James Howard Kunstler argues that the pervasive racketeering in American life is destroying the country. These rackets include the health care system where a relatively minor injury can financially ruin a family, student loans where students are forced into debt peonage to pay off debts with limited prospects for good jobs, the military industrial complex and the banking and finance sectors. This racketeering has been exacerbated by the 2010 Citizens United decision by the US Supreme Court which endowed 'personhood' on corporations. It appears that the US, whilst retaining the outward appearance of a democracy, is actually a kleptocracy where the ruling class governs to extend their personal wealth and political power. As wealth inequality has risen the net losers are the working and middle classes. Nick Hanauer, a self proclaimed member of the '0.01% club' has warned his fellow members that '*there is no example in human history where wealth [inequality] accumulated like this and the pitchforks didn't eventually come out.*'<sup>xxxv</sup> Whilst President Obama may believe that '*The United States of America ... has the strongest, most durable economy in the world,*'<sup>xxxvi</sup> this is not the lived experience of many, if not a majority of Americans. The disparity in wealth and opportunity between the haves and have nots goes a long way to explain the success of an anti-establishment figure such as Donald Trump in the current Presidential election campaign. Given the increasing levels of political, social and economic dysfunction there appears to be a very real

possibility of a seismic event or series of events occurring within the US that may fatally undermine US imperialism.

An effective mass media is the cornerstone of a functioning democracy. It provides the negative feedback necessary to keep a political system democratic through identifying errors and wrongdoings by those who have power. The majority of corporate mass media in the US (and the West more generally) has however morphed into an echo chamber for a very narrow range of acceptable views and opinions. This is particularly the case in the area of US foreign policy where there are a number of common themes that suggest that media coverage is more focused on shaping perceptions of Western populations than reporting the news and holding political leaders to account. These themes include:

- Repeatedly omitting important details on the historical context, causality, responsibility, and motives behind events. This is known as the '*power of leaving out*<sup>xxxvii</sup> and has enabled the creation of a parallel reality in the West.
- The demonization of national leaders who act contrary to US interests such as Slobodan Milosevic, Saddam Hussein, Muammar Gaddafi, Bashar Al Assad and Vladimir Putin.
- The use of sources of information with dubious credentials or a record for exaggeration/dishonesty as the basis for news reporting. Examples include; reliance on the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and its selective reporting of alleged Syrian government atrocities<sup>xxxviii</sup> or reports from an academic from a US think tank on Russian involvement in Ukraine with a history of providing inaccurate and exaggerated analysis.<sup>xxxix</sup>
- Failing to ask the hard or even obvious questions such as why the US will not co-operate with Russia in Syria to defeat Islamic State and other terrorist groups.

Veteran journalist Robert Perry argues that there has been an 'institutional failure of American journalism to protect the American people, choosing instead to protect the American power structure.'<sup>xl</sup> The net effect of a tame and compliant media is that the US government has been able to continue on its wayward path with limited concerns of being held to account by the media and thus the US population. This perhaps explains the vitriol directed at media organisations such as Russia Today or expert commentators such as Stephen Cohen that provide a narrative counter to that portrayed by the establishment.

To summarise, the US has become corrupted by its self-selected ambition of global hegemony. It has become blinded to the limitations of its own power by its hubristic belief in its own exceptionalism, despite an impressive track record of failed interventions, a view continually reinforced by the institutional failure of its media. As the US imperium passes its zenith it is doubling down by ratcheting up its aggression towards major powers such as China and Russia; countries that can and will defend their sovereignty. Meanwhile the costs to its client states are rising as the benefits of US hegemony wane and its own economy is progressively hollowed out by the pervasive racketeering



that benefits an ever dwindling percentage of its population. This is the basis on which the claim can be made that the US is the most dangerous country in the world. The implications for Australia will now be considered.

### ***Australia and the United States: (Defeated) Ally of a Defeated Superpower?***

*Have we come to the point whereby our strategic dependence on the United States is a paradox? We need the United States for defence, but we only need defence because of the United States.*<sup>xlii</sup>

Malcolm Fraser

Australia's primary Strategic Defence Interest is a "secure, resilient Australia."<sup>xliii</sup> It appears implausible that this can be achieved without stability at the global level. Currently, the primary driver of global instability are foreign interventions led by the US. It is entirely conceivable that if the US continues on its current interventionist trajectory that a major conflict could be triggered amongst the world's major powers. It is also entirely conceivable that if such a conflict was to occur that the US would be defeated (with Australia potentially its defeated ally). Even if a major conflict is averted the fact remains that US interventionism creates instability and this instability is counter to Australia's interests. This implies a requirement to rethink Australia's strategic dependence on the US and subsequently our defence strategy.

Self reflection is the critical first step in formulating a Defence Strategy that will achieve Australia's Strategic Defence Interests. Whilst the DWP rails against other nations contravening international law<sup>xliiii</sup> it fails to recognise widespread violations by the US and in some cases Australia's complicity. Further the DWP argues the importance of responsibility of 'newly powerful' nations to act constructively but omits the destructive nature of US foreign interventions. Indeed the DWP16 appears to support the view of the US as a uniquely virtuous force for good despite all the evidence to the contrary. The same exceptionalist view that a former US ambassador argues 'dooms United States foreign policy.'<sup>xliv</sup>

Recognising the illusionary nature of our shared values is also critical. The values that drive US policy are the maintenance of its hegemony; US (and Western) values have become synonymous with US power.<sup>xlv</sup> Whilst Australia has benefited from US hegemony, if as a nation we truly value democracy, freedom and the rule of law, the nature of our current relationship with the US is not only inimical to Australia's security but also our values.

Australia's ongoing strategic dependence on the US also creates vulnerabilities. We would do well to remember that "Great powers do what is in their best interests and not that of their allies, no matter how close."<sup>xlvi</sup> In the event of a conflict between major powers Australia may well find itself in a similar situation as occurred in World War Two when the British Empire was unable to provide the support Australia required at a most critical juncture in our history. Australia, through hosting US troops and intelligence facilities, is also providing implicit support to US foreign policies, whether the Australian

Government supports those policies or not, in effect curtailing Australia's sovereignty. Hosting US military and intelligence capabilities also makes Australia a potential target in any future conflict. Finally, as the US imperium collapses, we are likely to find ourselves in a very weak negotiating position with countries such as China if we continue unquestioned support to US interventionism.

These factors suggest that to achieve our primary Strategic Defence Interest Australia requires an independent defence strategy. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to propose a detailed independent defence strategy some of its key features could include:

- The withdrawal of Australian Defence Force personnel and units from permanent positions or attachments to the US military and the removal of permanent US military and intelligence gathering capabilities from Australian territories. This would be a critical step in demonstrating Australia's sovereignty to both the US and other nations.
- Limit military interventions to those that are lawful under the UN Charter; namely to support UN Security Council Resolutions or for the purposes of self defence.<sup>xlvii</sup> This requirement should be strictly applied to ensure that Australia does not participate in military interventions that have regime change or claims of 'anticipatory self-defence' as motives. These motives tend to promote destabilisation and chaos as recent history amply demonstrates.

Some will argue that there will be significant costs of an independent defence strategy, such as being denied access to intelligence and military equipment. This misses the primary point of this paper; that the US is responsible for the majority of the instability in the world today and Australia's dependence on the US is thus contributing to the strategic threats that we face. Additionally an independent defence strategy does not imply cutting all ties with the US, rather it enables Australian sovereignty. For example if Australia was to adopt an independent defence strategy there is no reason why the ANZUS treaty could not remain extant. An independent defence strategy would also empower Australian diplomacy regionally and globally through being seen as an independent actor as opposed to the 'deputy sheriff.' The loss of Australia's guaranteed support may also influence the US to back down from its current levels of aggressiveness. Finally the precedent of continued access to US equipment and intelligence by Canada and New Zealand when they those nations have acted in their own interests should allay fears that Australia would lose access to intelligence or military equipment.<sup>xlviii</sup> Whilst there are of course risks and uncertainties associated with decisions of this nature, on balance it appears that an independent defence strategy is more likely to achieve Australia's Strategic Defence Interests than the current strategy of dependence on the US.

## **Conclusion**

That Australia's long and deep relationship with the US has become problematic is something rarely if ever mentioned within Australia. This relationship has become part of our national fabric. To use Simon Longstaff's phrase, the US-Australia relationship has become an 'unthinking custom and practice.'<sup>xlix</sup> As described in the Defence White Paper, Australia views this relationship as fundamental to achieving our Strategic Defence Interests. As a result we have a strategy of strategic dependence on the US. An objective view of US foreign interventions over a prolonged period of time suggests however that the US is actually the major contributor to instability around the world. Instability appears likely to increase, if not result in a major conflict with nuclear armed powers, as a result of US ambitions to maintain global hegemony. This justifies the claim that the US is currently the most dangerous nation in the world. It is thus in Australia's national interest to re-think the US – Australia relationship. An independent defence strategy appears to offer the best chance of achieving long term security for Australia.

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