

Newcastle Peace Group - Bevan Ramsden

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Australia is a US Military Base

Good afternoon friends and comrades,

I have been asked to speak on US military bases in Australia but I think this talk would be better titled, "**Australia is a US military base**".

This because US military bases extend from one side of the continent to the other and exert considerable influence on our domestic and foreign policy and the way our neighbours view us.

Further the Force Posture Agreement with the United States signed in 2014, gives the US military **unimpeded access** to a wide range of areas, ports and airways in Australia as well as the right to store on our soil, ammunition, bombs, vehicles and set up fuel stores for vehicle, ships and aircraft.

I will deviate for a minute as I used the phrase "**on our soil**".

I am mindful that other speakers have already acknowledged that we are meeting on land traditionally belonging to the indigenous people of this area and I acknowledge that too. And since that land ownership acknowledgement extends to all parts of Australia, I am in a dilemma when I say US military bases are stationed "on our soil". **Whose soil is it** ? This question raises a major contradiction which has to be resolved between the First Australians and the recent settlers from Europe and other parts of the world; this contradiction must be resolved by treaty, reconciliation, mutual respect and equality and is preventing our country presenting itself as a unified nation to the world.

I would like to think that when I use the phrase "**on our soil**" that I am identifying myself with the time when this reconciliation will have been achieved.

Returning now to the proliferation of US military bases stationed in Australia, I should say that Australian government spokespersons such as defence minister Stephen Smith in 2012, deny there are US bases in Australia: he stated: *We don't have United States military bases in Australia and we are not proposing to. What we have talked about in terms of either increased aerial access or*

naval access is precisely that - **greater access to our facilities**. What we are looking at down the track is the possibility of further or enhanced naval access to HMAS Stirling. (which is the Australian navy base in Western Australia) Mr Smith, like so many of his predecessors, is misleading the public on a matter of vital interest to Australians. There **are** US bases in Australia , many of them– but they are just not called that. In some cases they are called “**joint facilities**”. The Pine Gap and the North West Cape bases are called “Joint Facilities” but as Prof Tanter said, in a speech at the IPAN conference in Alice Springs in 2016:

‘When the United States military and CIA **construct, pay for and substantially occupy and use** a facility such as Pine Gap or the North West Communications base, it **is** a US military Base not a “**joint facility.**”’

But before discussing those more well known US military bases, here is a shortlist of some lessor known ones.

The **Delamere Range facility** and Bradshaw field training area is 330km south of Darwin and 80 nautical miles south of Tindal, the RAAF base and is the principal air weapons practicing range for the RAAF. There are no environmental limitations placed on military activities there, except for an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (2011) which gives title to the land to the indigenous people (including the impact area which is fast becoming contaminated). However, the land is occupied by the military forces, so title is relatively meaningless.

Do you remember the B52 bombers used on Vietnam in the 69-70’s , and subsequently used on Iraq and Afghanistan this century, dropping devastating bombs, well they are being used to bomb Australia at the Delawere range in support of war exercises which are carried out there by US Marines and the ADF.

In 2005 the Australian government made an agreement to allow the US to practise long range bombing raids at Delamere, particularly using the B-52 Stratofortress bomber. In fact the US has been bombing Delamere since 1992. In one case, some years ago, the US airforce accidentally bombed the airforce staff sleeping quarters at Tindal; fortunately there was no one in the building at the time or at least that is what the newspaper report said and it was hushed up and only reported in one SA newspaper and only once.

The **Bradshaw Field Training Area** is located near Timber Creek within the Victoria River region of the Northern Territory, north of the Delamere facility. It is used for live firing and live bombing by Australian and **US troops** and houses 500 troops at the base. Fuel and maintenance operations add to the potential for environmental damage. Bradshaw is used now by US Marines stationed in Darwin as stated by the Minister for Defence in a media release, 14 June 2013).

Mt Bunday Training Area is a 100,000ha site located 115km south east of Darwin between the Mary River and Kakadu National Park. It was acquired by the military in 1988 and used for training since 1992.

In 1998 it was used by the ADF about 36 weeks of the year, but this use will increase substantially now that it has been made available to **the US military stationed in Darwin** .

Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area (SWBTA) is located north of Yeppoon on the east coast of Queensland. It is adjacent to the Byfield National Park, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and RAMSAR listed Shoalwater and Corio Bay wetlands.

The military of other nations including the **US**, Singapore and Japan use this training area. It has been used in bi-annual Talisman Sabre war training exercises

Talisman Saber is a US-led military exercise that takes place every second year: the largest joint and combined war exercise in which Australia engages.

Around 30,000 Australian and American personnel are usually involved in Talisman Saber.

The threat to the environment at Shoalwater Bay is considerable as it includes over 300km of coastline, mangrove fish breeding habitats, wetlands, sea grass meadows and sub-tropical rainforest.

Kojarena

Is located 30km from Geraldton, Kojarena Defence **Satellite ground Station** is used by the Australian Defence Force to intercept (spy) on other nations as part of the ECHELON system. In 2007 it was expanded with a second site for **the use of the US military** (MOU 2007). This expanded function **coordinates US military operations in the Middle East and Asia**, making this the most significant military encroachment into Australia since signing of the Pine Gap Treaty of 1966. Its capabilities include intercepting all phones on the 3G (now 4G) mobile phone network.

In 2002 the Daily Telegraph alleged that intercepted conversations between the International Transport Federation, the Maritime Union and the crew of

the Tampa helped former PM John Howard formulate his 'children overboard' campaign.

North West Communications Base is located near Exmouth in WA, transmits communications to the US Navy and the Royal Australian Navy submarines at very low radio frequencies . Only such very low radiofrequencies can penetrate water and so communicate with submerged submarines. The United States can send the signal to its nuclear-armed submarines to launch their missiles using this communications facility. To transmit such very low frequency radio signals requires huge antennas covering many hectares with Tower Zero at the centre, being the biggest and most powerful radio tower in the Southern Hemisphere. The land occupied by the huge antenna was leased to the **United States in 1963 by the Australian Government**. The radio system is operated by Raytheon Australia, a branch of the arms manufacturing corporation.

Pine Gap was established in 1966 near Alice Springs when the CIA came up with the idea of putting satellites 36,000 km above the earth's surface to listen to radio signals from earth and effectively "spy on everyone". While touted to be a "joint facility" it was built, paid for and is now occupied by US military, CIA and US contractors and whilst there are some Australian staff working there (predominantly the cleaning and catering staff), it is clearly a United States Facility. The US decoding room at Pine Gap is closed to Australians so there is no way an Australian Government can truthfully say "we know what goes on at Pine Gap and control it". Prof. Tanter says Pine Gap "hard-wires" Australian into US military operations as it provides real time data on war field conditions and enemy communications and is used by the US military in its strategic decisions. It also feeds positional data into the US world-wide spy system to assist in their notorious drone assassination program. This illegal program involves killing people in countries with whom the US or Australia are not at war because their spy agencies say such people are a threat to the US. One might ask whether Pine Gap is a threat to our security ? There are certainly respected commentators and analysts who contend that Pine Gap **is a missile target** in a war with a super-power as it provides indispensable strategic information to the US military in such war .

There are many locations and facilities where the US military have a presence in Australia but I will now finish by dealing with the most recent one.

The Force Posture Agreement and the US Marines stationed in Darwin

The Force Posture Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the United States of America was signed in Sydney on 12th August, 2014 by Julie Bishop (Minister for Foreign Affairs) and David Johnston (Minister for Defence) on behalf of the Australian Government, and by John F Kerry (Secretary of State) and Chuck Hagel (Secretary of Defence) for the Government of the United States.

However the concept was put to a joint sitting of the Australian Parliament by the President Obama on 16th November, 2011 as part of the US “Pivot to Asia” of its military forces, a strategy designed to “contain” China and maintain U.S. hegemony in the Asia/Pacific area.

President Obama’s concept was enthusiastically received by all politicians of both major parties.

In short, the Agreement enables the United States not only to station its troops in Darwin, up to 2,500, but to store on Australian soil, US war supplies including spare parts, fuel, weapons, ammunition and bombs and opens Australia’s seaports to their navy and airports and runways for the use of their air-force including B1 bombers.

This Agreement makes Australia a base in the Indo-Pacific-South East Asia for the U.S. military from which they can project military power and launch hostile acts against our neighbours. Currently they have in their sights on the islands claimed by China in the South China sea and some commentators have said they have their sights set on blocking the straits of Malacca in order to put pressure on China by blocking its major shipping route.

The US strategy could be summed up as being a policy to contain China in order to maintain U.S. hegemony on the Indo-Pacific-South East Asia area.

The Agreement lasts for 25 years with the possibility of extension. It may be terminated by either party giving one year’s notice.

The initial cost of implementing the Force Posture Agreement according to the Defence Minister Marise Payne is **\$2-3 billion** with the costs shared between the US and Australia.

The proportion borne by the Australian taxpayer has been kept secret for “national security reasons” said Minister Payne in reply to a letter from the

Marrickville Peace Group and in reply to questions raised in parliament by Sharon Claydon, Newcastle MP on behalf of the Hunter Peace Group. Cost wise, there are additionally annual maintenance costs to maintain the activities carried out under this Agreement; these costs are also secret for the same vague “national security” reasons.

What can we do about this ?

We cannot allow this situation to continue. (Otherwise we might as well be the 51st state of America and change our currency to US dollars !)

We keep being drawn into wars like Vietnam, Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and become associated with the terrible crimes against humanity which were and are , being perpetrated by those wars .None of those countries threatened Australia. And here we are being set up as a base from which the US can project its military force and wage yet another war in our region. We are being **USED, yet again**. Isn't it time for us to stand up and say **NO to the U.S.** and their lapdogs in Australia and retrieve some self-respect.

I commend to you IPAN's campaign to “Give ‘em the boot” in short to seek the termination of the Force Posture Agreement and the sending of the US Marines back home ,as a first step to distancing ourselves from the United States military and becoming an independent country charting our own foreign policy to the benefit of the Australian people and seeking peaceful relations with all countries in our region.

Bevan Ramsden

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